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Published version

BENNETT, Luke (2010). Bunkerology - a case study in the meanings, motives and methods of urban exploration. Masters, Sheffield Hallam University.

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Bunkerology – a case study in the meanings, motives and methods of urban exploration

Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of **Sheffield Hallam University's** Master of Research (MRes) degree, *Sociology, Planning & Policy*.

Luke Bennett

May 2010

Student Number: 17037704

Acknowledgements

With many thanks to my family for their forbearance during my bunkerology.

Declaration:

I confirm that, except where indicated through the proper use of citations and references, this is my own original work.

Signed…………………………………………………....Date…………………………..

ABSTRACT *- BUNKEROLOGY – A CASE STUDY IN THE MEANINGS, MOTIVES AND METHODS OF URBAN EXPLORATION*

This dissertation investigates the motives and meaning-making practices of 'urban explorers'. It does so by analysing, as a case study, the motives and actions of a community of urban explorers who systematically trace and visit former Royal Observer Corps nuclear monitoring bunkers, of which there are some 1,600 across the UK.

Through this case study approach I seek to excavate the motivations of practitioners of this branch of urban exploration, something that I style 'bunkerology'. The manner of my analysis is interpretive, hermeneutic and ethnographic in orientation.

The study comprises:

- a review of academic and published participant commentary upon urban exploration and bunkerology and the application of theoretical insight from cultural studies, social theory, tourism studies and aesthetics drawing in particular upon Fish (1980), de Certeau (1988 & 1998), Virilio (1994), Auge (1995), Lennon & Foley (2000), Woodward (2002), Urry (2002); Fantinatto (2005), Edensor (2005), Dodge (2006) and Haakonsen (2009); and

- a thematic analysis of 400 internet pages, including a review of over 200 ROC Post visit accounts (text and images) on the urban exploration forum *28dayslater.co.uk*.

The study examines the following core questions:

- How do childhood, inquisitiveness, adventure, fantasy, transgression, archaeology, research and aesthetics interact to motivate this practice? and

- How, and to what extent, do these urban exploration forums operate as 'interpretive communities' (Fish 1980) by which legitimate forms of signification are created and controlled for such places?

The study shows the operation of relatively stable (and sophisticated) signification processes at work in bunkerology – and the existence of an internet based culture that shapes and supports the circulation of accounts of such urban exploration. The study finds that ROC Post bunkerology, because of the small and generic nature of the places under investigation, has foregrounded the 'survey', serial and taxonomic aspects of urban exploration, de-emphasising tropes of fantasy, adventure, danger and transgression which may have greater significance in the motivation and performance of other areas of this practice.

"For I know some will say, why does he treat us to descriptions of weeds, and make us hobble after him over broken stones, decayed buildings, and old rubbish?"

Preface to *A Journey into Greece* by George Wheeler (1682) (quoted in Woodward 2002)

"I would hunt these grey forms until they would transmit to me a part of their mystery…why would these extraordinary constructions, compared to seaside villas, not be perceived or even recognized?"

Paul Virilio, writing in the 1960s of abandoned coastal defence bunkers on the French Coast, *Bunker Archaeology* (1994)

"Where and in what time I truly was that day at Orfordness I cannot say, even now as I write these words."

W.G. Sebald (2005) writing of his indescribable experience visiting the ruins of the atomic weapons testing ground at Orfordness, Suffolk.

"I started off exploring WW2 bunkers, then gradually got interested in the Cold War relics. That got me in touch with the usual suspects, and since then, I take in all the aspects of Urban Exploration, from the smallest bunker to the largest factory or hospital. I've had some good times with good people, and some adrenalin-fuelled nerve-busting ones as well. It's all good."

An Urban Explorer's (X22) internet testimonial

Previous page:

Second World War coastal pillbox, Northumberland (photograph in the style of Virilio 1994).

CONTENTS

1.   INTRODUCTION

Glimpsed in the darkness, deep inside the disused underground chamber is a man, hanging precariously from a rusty ladder. A sudden flash reveals his rather expensive looking camera…

Entrance hatch to abandoned ROC
Monitoring Post, Northumberland

1.1   INTRODUCING URBAN EXPLORATION

This dissertation has its origins in a chance conversation with an estates manager a few years ago. The manager was complaining about the trouble he was having with incursion into his abandoned subterranean facilities by *"urban explorers"*, whom he dismissed as:

> *"Just a stupid bunch of reckless, thoughtless adults. They should grow up."*[1]

It occurred to me that there was probably a lot more "to it" than that – that urban exploration would have its own (sub) cultural logics. I made some enquiries and found an abundance of lucid and structured accounts of urban exploration (or 'urbex' as it is otherwise known) on the internet. These accounts included literary quality travelogues and photographic essays describing site incursions; elaborate information sharing networks and a sophisticated culture of membership (common language, entrant vetting and the like).

An influential user guide to urban exploration defines the activity as:

> "seeking out, visiting and documenting interesting human-made spaces, most typically abandoned buildings…" (Ninjalicious 2005: 4)

And urban exploration (for those who choose to write about their activities on line) appears to be conducted (i.e. lived) for the purpose of generating these *accounts* and offering them up for scrutiny by the urban exploration community - and/or the world at large (Dodge 2006).

The following is a fairly typical account of an urban exploration foray, in this case an exploration of an abandoned World War 2 deep shelter in 2008:

> *"Drove down here on a quiet Friday night in March with **X1, X2** and **X3**[2] and spent a good 2-3 hours wandering around mapping the tunnels out and taking in the views. It's an interesting (and very large) complex for sure and is luckily still in pretty good shape - a few bits of chalked Motorhead graffiti from '83 were all I spotted..."*

This account was posted to a urban exploration internet forum site *www.28dayslater.co.uk*. Accompanying this short text were twelve photographs cataloguing, in moody high definition, the structure and ephemera of this abandoned subterranean place: corroded light switches; a

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[1] In this dissertation italic text indicates quotes extracted from internet or published first-person participant accounts of urban exploration. Quotes that are not in italics are taken from other (referenced) commentary sources.
[2] The identity of urban explorer forum participants has been rendered anonymous in this Dissertation (see discussion at Section 5.5). Each X reference corresponds to a specific individual.

"1980s coke can near graffiti dated 1983"; a leaking oil drum; and views of the shelter tunnel, showing its shape and form.

Beneath the posted account was opportunity for registered members of the forum to post comments on the account and/or to supplement or correct the account's interpretation of that place. All of this is visible to the general public.

As an academic engaged in teaching and researching the realities of law and property management I wish to better understand the cultural logics of urban exploration, and in particular to explore the ways in which the urban exploration sub-culture is perpetuated by its internet community.

1.2   A CASE STUDY FOCUS: BUNKEROLOGY

This dissertation cannot hope to cover the wide spectrum of incursions and inquiry that appear to fall within "urban exploration". The *28dayslater* forum subdivides the pursuit into (at least) the following sub-disciplines:

Sub-discipline	Elaboration	Originating threads (as at 14 July 2009)
Asylums and hospitals		5,712
High stuff	Cranes, towers, aerials etc	458
Industrial sites	Factories, collieries	1,685
Leisure sites	Cinemas, holiday camps, swimming pools	414
Military sites	Airfields, munitions factories and depots, pillboxes, barracks	639
ROC posts	Cold War observation bunker network	1,575
Underground sites	Caves, mines, bunkers, tunnels, drains, sewers	843

Sub-discipline	Elaboration	Originating threads (as at 14 July 2009)
Other sites	Churches, railways, schools and anything else	735

In this dissertation I shall seek to enquire into the cultural logics of urban exploration by looking, as a case study, at one form of that practice, what I call *'bunkerology'*.

I have coined the phrase to reflect the study and knowledge-making (i.e. the *-ology*) nature of reported bunker exploration practices. Within the term bunkerology I group together activities involving the researching, inspection, exploration and enjoyment of (mostly abandoned) twentieth century defensive structures, in particular Cold War era nuclear bunkers and Second World War pillboxes.

I have selected bunkers as my focus because as a field of urbex, it appears particularly accultured, in two senses:

- First, that bunkerology, as a practice, appears to foreground the 'study' and 'survey' aspects of urban exploration - therefore appearing to lay bare for scrutiny urban exploration's meaning-making, and meaning-sharing cultural processes; and

- Secondly, that the motivations and narrative devices commonly to be found in bunkerology appear particularly influenced by discourses of heritage, militarism, political inquiry and memorialisation.

Also, in my scoping research into urbex, bunkers frequently emerged as a theme lurking deeply embedded within a number of forms of urban exploration practice. The military bunker is a trope that gets applied in the sense making of even non-military places. Here, in the description of images of a power station control room by an interviewee in Fantinato's (2005) documentary on industrial urban exploration:

> *" this control room, its some sort of Russian military, Cold War, kinda feeling…"*

The military theme often appears as a backdrop to even "rural" wandering. Sinclair (2009: 4) writes of the dark military themes emergent in his walk-time reverie:

"…tarmac airstrips of second world war bomber squadrons returned to agricultural disuse. The sinister barn that may conceal racks of battery chickens or a deflated Zeppelin. These sites, come upon by accident, prick our imagination, provoke reverie."

The abandonment of Cold War military structures during the 1990s saw the birth of this new area of urban exploration. Places inviting re-discovery and/or preservation by those drawn to them. An aesthetic lure is found by commentators such as Solznit (2006: 4), who opens her history of walking with an account of a writers-block breaking stroll along one of her favourite haunts. Solznit alludes to a powerful aesthetic attraction for her of the *"odd collection of objects and cement bunkers on the asphalt pad"* that she passes that once served as a radar station for the Nike missile battery down in the valley.

To find beauty, poetry or significance / value in the military infrastructure / architecture of the 20th century is also to open a new chapter in landscape history - for it is a direct counter to the pastoralism of the original proponents, like William Hoskins who decried in his pioneering work, *The Making of the English Landscape* (1985) (originally published in 1954):

> "the obscene shape of the atom-bomber, laying a trail like a filthy slug upon Constable's and Gainsborough's sky. England of the Nissen hut, the 'pre-fab', and the electric fence, of the high barbed wire around some unmentionable devilment…Barbaric England of the scientists, the military men, and the politicians: let us turn away."

For Cocroft et al (2004), their survey of Cold War archaeology - their professional bunkerology - commissioned by English Heritage, is a project to examine what lay behind that fence, the physical remains of that 'unmentionable devilment' and thereby illuminate a new aspect of the complex landscape history of Britain.

1.3   NARROWING THE FOCUS: ROC POSTS

During my literature review it became clear that trying to empirically investigate all forms of bunkerology would also be a task too big for this dissertation. Therefore, my empirical investigation has focused primarily upon the account and meaning making practices exhibited by a handful of urban explorers in the researching, inspection, exploration and enjoyment of one type of abandoned bunker: Royal Observer Corps (ROC) monitoring posts (ROC Posts).

Around 1,600 of these small underground bunkers were constructed from the mid 1950s, distributed evenly across the country to serve a nationwide nuclear monitoring role. These bunkers were often located on countryside hilltops, close to means of ready access for their crews. The bunkers comprised a single underground pre-cast concrete room buried at 10 feet depth, accessed via a hatch and ladder well. The bunker would have been manned by three ROC members in times of international tension. Their job would be to measure nuclear blasts and fall out and to report this information by telephone to larger area (and thereafter regional) bunkers. The network of ROC posts were abruptly abandoned in 1991 when the ROC was suddenly stood down. As we will see, many of these bunkers now remain accessible to bunkerologists, in various degrees of ruin.

In contrast to the more exotic, rarer and relatively difficult still to access regional and national command bunkers, the small, localised, rudimentary and generic ROC Posts offer empirical advantages for my project – for the bunkerologist has to work harder to 'make meaning' in his forays to these site, hopefully making those cultural processes easier to spot and analyse.

## 2.	CONTEXT, METHODOLOGY & RESEARCH DESIGN

### 2.1	MY BACKGROUND & ORIENTATION

I first encountered urban exploration (in its amateur industrial archaeology guise) as a child, raking over a Victorian lead mine's midden pit with my father, searching out antique pop bottles. This, and study of economic history as a teenager gave me a lasting interest in the remains of industria. That interest served me well when I became a lawyer specialising in the evaluation of decommissioned industrial and military sites during the 1990s and early part of this decade. My job took me through factories, into blast furnaces, down coal mines and across military sites. I experienced the thrall of such visits as a job, and can see the appeal of exploring such places for those who undertake urban exploration as a hobby.

My research work since moving into academia has concentrated upon how site owners and their visitors perceive risk and safety at such places. This dissertation project, whilst not concerning itself with law and liability, is a further installment in that enquiring into the cultural formation of readings of place and how those conventions in turn affect how a place is accessed and used.

### 2.2	MY EPISTEMOLOGY & ONTOLOGY

> "It is no longer possible for social analysis to dispense with individuals, nor for an analysis of individuals to ignore the spaces through which they are in transit" (Auge 1995: 120)

I follow Auge on both counts. Mine is an interpretivist perspective. I want to investigate the motives, meanings and methods employed by participants in this variant of urban exploration and I want to understand how individuals, and their ideas about places, influence their behavior towards those places. Specifically, I wish to enquire into the thrall of ROC Posts. Why and how these derelict "non-places" (Auge 1995), invisible to many, become the subject of specific fascination, enquiry and investigation by a few. In doing so I am also drawn by Lennon & Foley's call (2000: 169) for investigation of the motivation and meanings brought by participants to what they call 'dark tourism', for ROC Posts are places of dark purpose, potential refuges for a select few against the apocalyptic threats of the Cold War.

In this enquiry I wish to investigate how participants' accounts of their exploration operate as the basis of a set of practices which form a culture, a set of established meanings and meaning-making conventions for this community, in short to study (following Geertz 1977:448) "[stories] they tell themselves about themselves". I am conscious that making meaning (which I take to be a *signification*[3] process entailing noticing and interpreting) is natural – an everyday activity, but it is not objective. My interpretation of urban exploration will be a narrative construct formed by my own signification, as 'reader' of what I seek out and see during the study. Accordingly I need to be aware of myself within this project.

My study is ethnographic in aim – in that it seeks through immersion to learn and then offer a 'thick description' of ROC Post bunkerology. I note the ambiguous nature of that concept (Ponterotto 2006), and intend by it an analytical and theoretically informed approach to description. This dissertation will present analysis and theoretical development interlaced within the description of the two points of focus: the *why* and *how* urban explorers do what they do.

The subject of my study takes place within the same society and mass-culture as my own. It is also undertaken by people with similar backgrounds and leisure interests to my own. However, I had only a passing awareness of this community before studying it. It was important therefore for me to render this community (and its culture) "anthropologically strange" (Atkinson 1990:165) in order to be able to perceive its assumptions.

My study is, in part, auto-ethnographic, in that it derives from my own journey attempting to come to 'learn' bunkerology and simultaneously to excavate for study its cultural logics. I am conscious of the ability of a researcher to construct the findings that he presents - and that some measure of social construction is unavoidable. I am interested in urbex and bunkerology. My interest brings me to this topic. My interest in studying physical incursion (trespass) and the management of derelict places predisposes me to be drawn to aspects of urbex that foreground issues that appeal to my presumptions.

Through reflection I seek to interrogate my subjectivity through a hermeneutic, reflexive approach (Alvesson & Sköldberg 2000): I must enquire into the motives and meanings of both

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[3] Used here in the semiotic sense of a viewer (or community of viewers) choosing to make an object into a sign through a process of meaning imposition. I acknowledge that this expression (like 'semiosis') is not always used in this *active* sense – more traditional semiotic usage would assume that the viewer's reading of the sign is more *passive* – entailing the decoding of the phenomenon to release a pre-existing (and largely non-negotiable) meaning (Fiske 1990: 46; Thwaites et al 2002: 32). The active sense that I prefer is characteristic of reader-response theory (Fish 1980; Eagleton 1983: 85).

myself, and those who I seek to study. I have sought to immerse myself in this 'culture': although the study has been largely 'desk-bound and has focused upon observation via the study of urbex texts (internet, video, photographic and in book form) rather than physical participation. By using a mixed array of enquiry methods and sources (see Section 2.4.3 below) I have attempted to achieve a triangulation, a cross-checking, of my understanding of the phenomenon under investigation.

As befits an interpretivisit approach, analysis and data gathering were conducted iteratively and inductively. The "write up" and sense-making of bunkerology was carried out in parallel to my on-going reading and internet ethnography. The following diagram, entitled *"My Hermeneutic Journey"* seeks to maps graphically the following intertwined aspects of my investigative journey:

- The influence of my pre-knowledge and pre-experience in shaping the path that my research and analysis took **(follow the brown arrows);**

- The influence and application of theory in the formulation of my evolving understanding of the subject under scrutiny **(follow the black arrows); and**

- The interaction between academic, book, film, photography, internet and personal experience sources in the formation and direction of my 'finding out' **(follow the red arrows).**

My Hermeneutic Journey
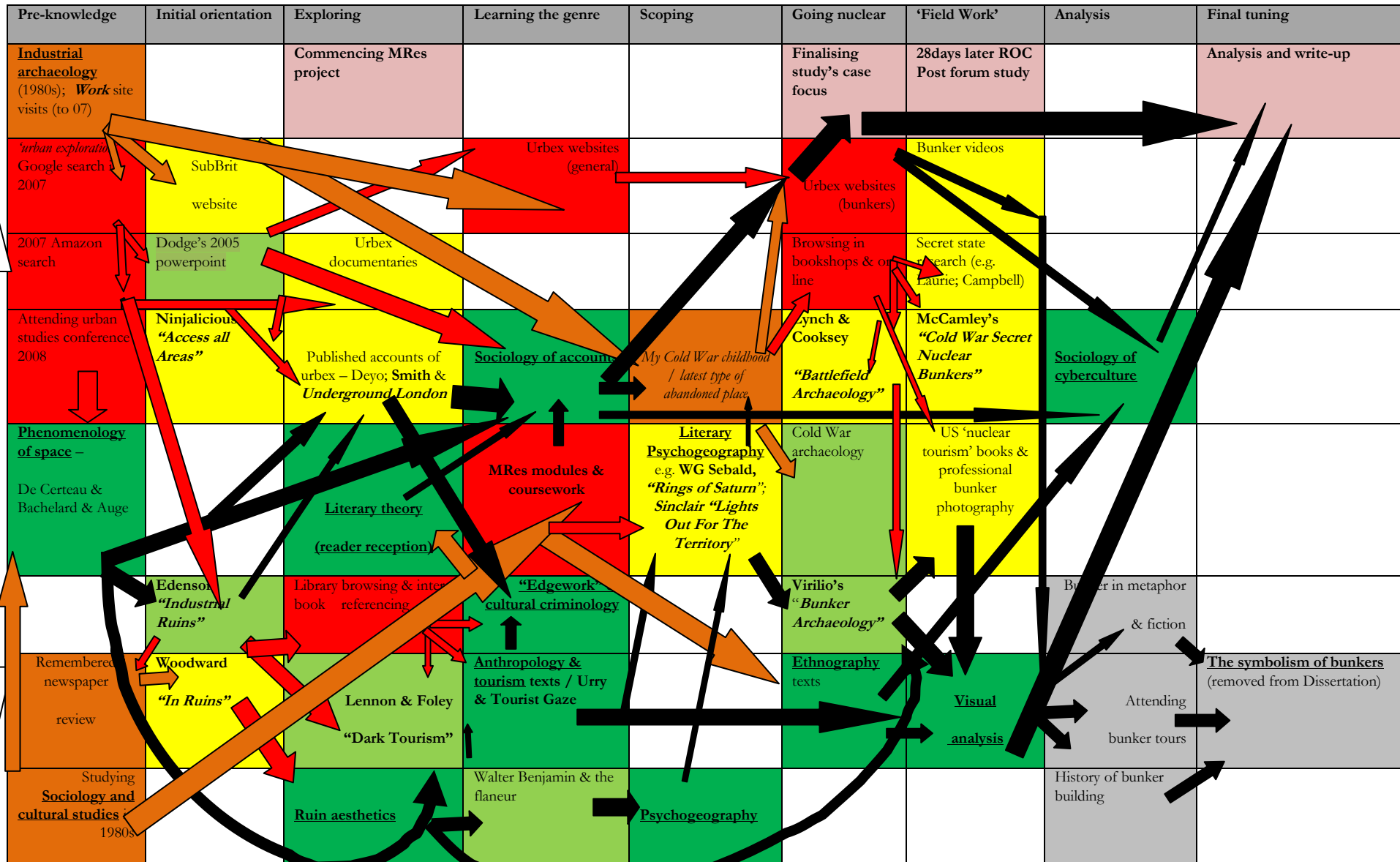
Pre-knowledge	Initial orientation	Exploring	Learning the genre	Scoping	Going nuclear	'Field Work'	Analysis	Final tuning	KEY
Industrial archaeology (1980s); **Work** site visits (to 07)		**Commencing MRes project**			**Finalising study's case focus**	**28days later ROC Post forum study**		**Analysis and write-up**	*Access points to knowledge*
'urban exploration' Google search 2007	SubBrit website		Urbex websites (general)		Urbex websites (bunkers)	Bunker videos			*Pre- knowledge & experience brought to the project*
2007 Amazon search	Dodge's 2005 powerpoint	Urbex documentaries			Browsing in bookshops & on line	Secret state research (e.g. Laurie; Campbell)			*Commercially published sources*
Attending urban studies conference 2008	Ninjalicious **"Access all Areas"**	Published accounts of urbex – Deyo; **Smith & Underground London**	**Sociology of accounts**	*My Cold War childhood / latest type of abandoned place*	Lynch & Cooksey **"Battlefield Archaeology"**	McCamley's **"Cold War Secret Nuclear Bunkers"**	**Sociology of cyberculture**		*Specific academic sources*
Phenomenology of space – De Certeau & Bachelard & Auge			**MRes modules & coursework**	**Literary Psychogeography** e.g. **WG Sebald, "Rings of Saturn"; Sinclair "Lights Out For The Territory"**	Cold War archaeology	US 'nuclear tourism' books & professional bunker photography			*Academic theories / perspectives*
Remembered newspaper review	Woodward **"In Ruins"**	Library browsing & inter-book referencing	**"Edgework" cultural criminology**		Virilio's **"Bunker Archaeology"**		Bunker in metaphor & fiction	**The symbolism of bunkers** (removed from Dissertation)	*Milestone events*
			Anthropology & tourism texts / Urry & Tourist Gaze		**Ethnography** texts		**Visual analysis**	Attending bunker tours	*Excluded items*
Studying **Sociology and cultural studies** 1980s		**Ruin aesthetics**	Lennon & Foley **"Dark Tourism"**						
			Walter Benjamin & the flaneur	**Psychogeography**		History of bunker building			*Theory, Analysis & Interpretation*

New media

Old media

Primarily generation of this 'map' has served as an analytical process for me – whilst I have tried to render my journey intelligible to a reader (and therefore have applied some simplification of my journey) I wish to show the *contingent* (in the sense used by Kendall & Wickham (1999:5) to depict a Foucaultian approach to event analysis) and *subjective* nature of my sense-making. The map makes clear to me how my own biography and the serendipitous nature of my enquiry steps led to the 'sense' being assembled for me in the particular way (and ordering) that it did. This analytical reflection therefore bolsters my understanding of my own epistemological and ontological theoretical orientation: broadly existential phenomenography – a perspective (after Heidegger (Eagleton 1983: 62)) in which dwelling within time and existing cultural codes work to shape (albeit approximately) my subjectivity and my perception of, and engagement with, phenomena.

However my aim in revealing this subjective journey is not to entirely relativise my work. Rather, to present for the reader an adequate account of my presence in this research, so that my (inevitable) shaping influence, can be taken account of in the reader's own hermeneutic journey in reading this dissertation.

2.3 "CULTURE" AND "COMMUNITY"

A brief justification of two ontological concepts should be offered at this stage, in relation to my use in this dissertation of the expressions "culture" and "community", particularly in relation to description of urban exploration as a community replete with its own identifiable culture / subculture.

I appreciate that 'culture' is a disputed concept within contemporary social anthropology, and that post-modern critics oppose the Geertzian faith in the existence of a singular homogenous culture within any community (Eriksen 2001). By the post-modern view members of supposed communities have variant understandings (readings) of that discourse – such that no singular culture can be said to exist external to the event/moment specific interactions and (action-oriented) interpretations of the individual participants (and/or of the individual ethnographer: Clifford & Marcus 1986; 1997; Strain 2003). Alternatively, that because modern social life involves 'membership' of a myriad of status / identity groups, to use the expression for such fleeting and instrumental interactions is to stretch the notion of 'community' (or sub-culture) beyond breaking point, as for Sardar – dismissing the possibility (wrongly – in my view) that the

associations that he denigrates may indeed provide significant meaning, identity and support to their members - (2006: 743):

> "belonging and posting to a Usenet group, or logging on to a bulletin board community, confirms no more an identity than belonging to a stamp collecting club or a Morris dancing society".

I am also aware (after Bell 2001) that talk of on-line communities is contentious, and that some theorists consider that a community can only exist where there is physical interaction (Doheny-Farina 1996) and/or an all-encompassing sub-culture, such that the members can be said to be living their lives differently (perhaps oppositional) to the dominant culture of the host society in which they live (Hebdige 1979). Such critics argue that internet based hobby forums cannot properly be talked of as providing a culture / sub-culture (because the participants remain very much part of the main host culture, only 'dipping-in' to their hobby forums as and when they choose to) and/or that a community cannot be said to exist because it has no totality: no physical embodiment and no permanence. Yet such a view also tolerates the idea that sub-cultures form as a social process: like minded people coming together in order to deviate (from 'mainstream' culture) *together* "and seek the same solutions" (Gelder 2005: 21).

My position is that (as I hope to show in the following chapters) whilst participants do indeed lead 'normal' lives outside of their participation in urban exploration, there is clear evidence that the online forums (and the social performance of urbex) operate in a way that supports (validates) individual practice of this activity, and creates and circulates shared meanings and signification conventions. In this sense I would argue that urbex can be regarded as cultural in the sense that this community has an identifiable body of aggregate meanings in circulation: that it does operate as an 'interpretive community' (in the sense used by Fish 1980). In this position I echo Baum's view (1998: 102) that an internet based 'community' exists where:

> "stable patterns of social meanings, manifested through a group's on-going discourse…enable participants to imagine themselves part of a community."

Here Baum, illustrating her analysis by showing how soap-opera based internet fansites operate as supportive, self identified, 'communities' echoes Anderson's (1983) view that all communities are 'imagined': they are symbolic creations / identifications of their members. Accordingly whilst I agree with the post-modernists that it is not possible to uncover and expose a correct, true and

singular essence of urbex that can have any free-standing meaning or existence independent of the shifting, heterogeneous, meanings that each participant brings to (and takes from) the practice on a daily basis, I do hope, however, to have achieved a depiction of a broadly stable, aggregate, framework set of meanings and practices that testify to the existence of an 'interpretive community' within the studied urbex forums. I accept that what I choose to describe in this dissertation as a community (of practice) might by others be considered more properly to be a 'network' (Castells 1996).

I contend, following Markham (2004:113) that the internet provides a unique opportunity to:

> "…view these processes of social construction as solely discursive, primarily textual analysis"

For in the blow-by-blow exchange and debate of posted site visit accounts on its web forums the process of operation of urbex as an interpretive community is laid bare.

2.3   THE LITERATURE REVIEW

It would be conventional at this point to report the outcome of my 'reading' into the topic as a separate section before launching into an analysis of my field data. However the paucity of academic studies on urbex, and the abundance of available first person accounts of this practice and suitability for depiction alongside discussion of theoretical interpretations led me not to take this approach, accordingly the majority of the description and analysis will be found 'interpenetrated' (Hammersley & Atkinson 1983: 214) within Chapters 3 and 4 of this Dissertation. For now, only brief comment is called for in relation to 'literature review'.

2.3.1   URBEX: THE RESEARCH LITERATURE

Except for a Powerpoint presentation in which Dodge (2006) directed attention towards the parallels between computer hacking and the 'space' hacking inherent in urbex, the only academic study of urbex that I have found is Edensor's (2005) reflection upon his industrial urbex and its cultural roots. In a similar vein Haakonsen (2009) presents a theorized / autobiographical account of the thrall of abandoned Nazi bunkers along the Danish coast. For empirical studies we must look further afield, to reportage and documentary film making (in particular Fantinatto's (2005) interviews with Canadian urban explorers), to tourism studies: Lennon & Fowley's (2000) study of 'dark tourism', Kugelmass' (1994) study of holocaust tourism, or to

cultural criminology (in its interpretation of crime as recreational performance: Presdee 2000) and the sociology of risk (in particular Lyng's (1990) edgework thesis: and its application to skydiving and other high risk adventure pursuits).

A small body of other papers claiming to theorise 'urban exploration' have been largely disregarded in the analysis which follows, because they read other forms of subversive exploration and use of the built environment in a way which doesn't ultimately appear to have much resonance with the core empirical focus of this study: ROC Post bunkerology. Those disregarded strands are, for the record, studies of skateboarding (Borden 2001), Parkour (Mould 2009), urban performance art (Pinder 2005) and guerrilla gardening (Reynolds 2008).

2.3.2   URBEX: ACCOUNTS AND COMMENTARY

There is an abundance of considered, pre-existing, first person depictions of and ruminations upon urbex provides both a resource to study – and also a set of theoretically laden explanations. Many of those who have offered up motivation statements expressly or implicitly allude to aesthetic, philosophical or empirical theories. Accordingly I seek to explore these theories alongside the accounts which appear to be informed by these cultural fragments. The theories will be outlined in turn in Chapter 3. The sources of the first person accounts and commentary are outlined in Section 2.4.3.

2.4   RESEARCH DESIGN

2.4.1   AIM OF THE STUDY

In my study I have sought to understand through literature review and internet ethnography, how ROC Post bunkerology is cultured (i.e. is related to a communal body of knowledge and practice). I looked both at what participants said in and about their account-making activities and how the tropes exhibited by participants (appear to me to) fit into wider intellectual perspectives. However, it became clear at an early stage that I needed to understand the general 'shape' of urbex in order to be able to analyze ROC Post accounts.

The case study focus emerged iteratively during my literature (and internet) review work. I chose the ROC Post sub-type of bunker because of their high frequency and (relatively) easy access. I also chose ROC Bunkers because of their uniformity and the lack of deviation likely to be encountered between each one (they were all built to a standard design, and would have featured the same basic equipment).

The following illustrations show the standard layout and features:

(A)   As depicted in an urban explorer's ROC Post account

Source: Cuckfield ROC Post account by Turkey: *28dayslater.co.uk*

(B)   As depicted by a military archaeology text:

This image was removed for copyright reasons.

(Source: Cocroft et al 2003: 181)

(C)   As depicted by an amateur bunkerology website (www.subbrit.co.uk):

This image was removed for copyright reasons.

(Source: www.subbrit.org.uk/rsg/features/sfs/file_16.htm, based on the cold war monitoring systems research of Steve Fox) (last accessed 30 April 2010))

(D)   Or put more emotively (by the same website), as follows:

This image was removed for copyright
reasons.

Whichever way the information is presented – it is clear that each ROC Post comprised one small rectangular underground room, built to a standard utilitarian design, with minimal furnishing or scope for personalization / local adaptation.

The ways in which bunkerologists address this uniformity in their account making is itself something of interest, in terms of laying bare the efforts required to make each account of each post 'meaningful'.

The study is based around the accounts of ROC Posts whose names begin with A, B or C in the *28dayslater* forum listing. This comprised approximately 200 individual accounts of around 150 individual ROC Posts. Whilst only 10% of the total bunker related accounts on that web forum this number was considered sufficient to provide data saturation sufficient for this study.

A thematic cross check was conducted by reference to accounts on selected sites within the A to C sample frame found on the following websites:

Name	URL	Type
ROC Remembered	www.ROCRemembered.com	**X5**'s personal website recording his ROC Post visits
Subterranea Britannica	www.subbrit.org.uk/rsg/roc/index2.shtml	Nick Catford's survey, prepared with the assistance of the ROC Association
The Time Chamber	http://www.thetimechamber.co.uk/	**X28's** personal website recording two brothers' urbex activity
YouTube	http://youtube.com	Video surveys (and related discussion threads) of ROC Posts
Flickr	http://www.flickr.com/groups/roc_posts/	ROC Post photography and discussion group

Other voices which will be frequently encountered in the analysis that follows (courtesy of the literature review) are:

- **Nick Catford** - Membership Secretary of *Subterranea* Britannica (aka *Subbrit)*. He features prominently in documentaries and reportage reviewed for this study. He conducted the first ROC Post study between 1996 - 2004 and is thus venerated in bunkerology for having visited all 1,563 ROC Posts.

- **Stephen Smith** - Journalist (BBC Newsnight's culture correspondent) who in his two books of urban exploration reportage (*Underground London* (2004) and *Underground England* (2009)) has given incisive first person accounts of the experience of bunker exploration with Subbrit and other bunkerologists.

- **William Foot** - professional military archaeologist whose survey of Second World War pillboxes as part of the Council for British Archaeology / English Heritage 'Defence of Britain' study (Foot 2006) was followed by a book (Foot 2007) offering an idiosyncratic, first person, account of his experience of (and passion for) these remains.

- **Paul Virilio** - French art and social theorist, whose aesthetics and theories of the time/speed relationship in late modernity and war were shaped by his exploration of remnants of the Nazi Atlantic Wall coastal defences in the 1950s and 1960s.

2.4.3   DECISIONS ABOUT DESIGN & DATA SOURCES

My desire was to examine two aspects of bunkerology (as a culture and a community):

- *Why* do people become involved in bunkerology / urbex?; and
- *How* is ROC Post bunkerology constructed as a meaning making practice?

Like any ethnographic study, access to the practices and meanings of the culture under study was needed. For the *'why?'* question I needed participants' accounts of their own journey to ROC Post bunkerology (hereafter called *'Testimonials'*) and for the *'how?'* question I needed access to a set of ROC Post site visit reports. Full transcripts of the web-sourced Testimonials are set out in Appendix One.

Writing in 1983, before the rise of the internet Hammersley & Atkinson conceded that in their era use of first person pre-existing written testimonies of their participations whilst a rich data source, might be illustrative only, for:

> "biographical and autobiographical accounts will rarely, if ever, be those of the people we are researching at first hand" (1983: 130)

However, the self-publishing opportunities of the internet blogging, forums and the like has opened up direct access to a rich mass of participant 'accounts'. In such an environment we can and *should* (if it is meaning making that we wish to study) respect Silverman's call for greater use of "naturally occurring data" (2006: 379).

Whilst physical participation in the culture under study has become the dominant approach in contemporary ethnography, I justify my 'desk-top' based approach on the following bases:

- **Why not interviews?** Because accounts and testimonials are what is in circulation. Such accounts are not just representations of this practice, in significant part they are (they constitute) it. They are what participants see when they participate in these forums, they are the meanings that they share and circulate. These texts *are* bunkerology / urbex in so far as it exists as a communal / cultural 'thing'. Taking an ethnomethodological view, these texts are social phenomenon in their own right (Hammersley & Atkinson 1983: 107).

- **Suitability:** I wanted to study how this sub-culture is constituted – it exists (or at least it is portrayed and lives through) in on-line forums such as *28dayslater*. If I want to understand how accounting conventions operate I need to study the accounts already circulating within that community. If I want to understand how people account for their own journey to urbex I should analyse their own pre-existing testimonials, rather than asking participants, via interview, to give me their justification (and all the risk of distortion through power, suspicion or bias that such interviews as a social construct could entail).

- **Convenience** – yes, it was advantageous that this existing information meant that I could avoid having to gain access to an urbex group in order to obtain that information directly from participants.

- **Ethics** – given the 'grey' legal status of urban exploration (i.e. the trespass dimension) and the constrictions of health & safety risk assessment clearance for this project, actual participation in urban exploration, specifically entry into ROC Posts was ruled out at an early stage. Thus it could never be much more than a desk-study.

- **Classical ethnography** – interviews and participation have not always been the dominant methods in ethnography. Many of the 'founders' of social anthropology and sociology based their studies on accounts of peoples, places and practices written by others and themselves never visited or met the object of study (for example Durkheim and aboriginal culture in Australia: Lindqvist 2007: 49), whilst others in the field – rather than directly participating themselves – relied heavily upon accounts and interpretations from insider 'informants'.

Accordingly my data sources comprised:

A)   **academic studies and theorizing of urbex** (principally Edensor 2005 and Dodge 2006); **urban wandering** (Solznit 2006; Coverley 2006: de Certeau 1988 & 1998; Gilloch 1997; Auge 1995); **tourism** (Urry 2002; Lennon & Folely 2000 and Haakonsen 2009); **and ruin aesthetics** (Woodward 2002; Bachelard 1969);

B)   **(book) published first person urbex and bunkerology literature:** *photography & aesthetics:* (Virilio 1994; Ross 2004; Moore 2008; Creswell 1991); *reportage* (Smith 2004 & 2009; Hodge & Weinberger 2008; Vanderbilt 2002); *memoir* (Harris 1998; Foot 2007; Deyo 2009) and *taxonomy* (McCamley 2005 & 2007; Foot 2006; Osborne 2004; Cocroft & Thomas & Barnwell 2004; Hayes 2005);

C)   **a scoping review of internet forum urbex accounts** (not confined to bunkerology);

D)   **a review of urbex and bunkerology video sources:** Croce 2008a and 2008b; Fantinatto 2005 and *Youtube*; and

E)   **accounts and testimonials sampled from the specific ROC Post forums** (as described above)..

2.4.4   MANAGEMENT OF THE DATA

The sampled ROC Post visit accounts were logged and rendered suitable for theme analysis by using *Delicious.com*, which enabled each web-page to be logged with descriptive theme labels ('tags'). This then generated a text database that could be interrogated in order to display all web-pages (many of which were individual ROC Post site visit reports) for which particular tags had been allocated. This presented 'clusters' of recurrent tags – giving broad shape to the nature of the content and preoccupations of each web-page.

Figure 1 in Appendix Three presents a copy of a theme based search (in this case using the tags "Turkey" combined with "ROC" – to find all of the sampled accounts authored by Turkey about ROC Posts). This software assisted the organization and interrogation of what grew to be some 400 web-pages by the end of the study.

The data was subjected to theme analysis. A verbatim transcript of the sampled Testimonials is set out in Appendix One. For the purpose of this dissertation that transcript has been subjected to a theme analysis: sorting fragments of 'meaning' into themes which can then be analyzed and discussed as narrative within this Dissertation. Appendix Three, Figures 3, 4 and 5 present specimen urbex accounts and forum discussion threads annotated by me by way of analysis.

2.5   APPROACH TO ANALYSIS AND WRITE-UP

Analysis and write-up took place iteratively. The majority (70%) of the field work, including the 200 accounts review, was conducted in Summer 2009. Write up started then, but it became clear that my approach at that stage was too wide ranging and ambitious for this dissertation. Following a break for other projects, write-up recommenced in February 2010. The 'break' helped bring some perspective to the project – and also enabled certain tangential aspects to be removed and developed as separate papers (this was the fate of a large chapter on bunker imagery and metaphor).

In exploring the *"why?"* question, plenty of theories (and issues) emerged – however, I found myself adopting Hammersley & Atkinson's (1983) advocacy of "progressive focusing" (175) and "using data to think with" (178) approaches in order to develop and test out explanations. An early draft of this dissertation, for example, featured a much more extensive discussion of psychogeography (both the Situationist and the English literary branches (a distinction drawn by Coverley 2006)).

However through reflexively switching constantly between:

Theory		Phenomenon (empirical observations and experience)
Macro social (and political) processes that led to the rise and fall of ROC Posts		Micro (scrutiny of individual accounts)
Urbex (generic tropes and practices)		ROC Post bunkerology (ROC Post / bunker specific tropes and practices)
Me (my orientation and subjectivities)		Them (participants' orientation and subjectivities)

it became increasingly clear that (on the accounts at least) playful, fantasy fuelled psychogeographical revere, and or desire to revel in the symbols of bunkers and militarism was of little motivational significance to the study sample members and so, less attention has been paid to these theoretical perspectives in the final write-up.

As the following will show, many theoretical perspectives can help to explain aspects of urbex – and some have greatest relevance for explaining bunkerology, as a sub-genre, than others, for this sub-genre takes selectively from the array of tropes operating in the wider host (urbex) culture.

3.   'WHY?' – INTERPRETING URBAN EXPLORERS' MOTIVES

3.1   SEARCHING FOR MOTIVES

In this first interpretive section I seek to investigate the thrall of urbex, by seeking to interpret the Testimonials: the participant's own explanations of why they do what they do. But searching for a single, collectively shared, meaning is not my aim. I heed Baszanger & Dodier's (2004: 19) warning against the danger of assuming coherent wholes and constancy in how individual participants make and use their culture. Baszanger & Dodier emphasise the active, choosing role of participants, adapting and selecting moment by moment from any body of conventions or culture to shape and understand their own actions. In this flux, this 'sociological pragmatics' (Baszanger & Dodier 2004: 19), declared meanings may be nebulous – true only for the moment of utterance and the context of the act then being performed. However, whilst seeking to avoid totalizing urbex culture and *imposing* a coherence which it may not actually have, I do seek to draw out in the following analysis 'typical' themes in the web of meanings that individual participants appear to either (i) give to (ii) or (choose to) take from these circulating tropes in order to define (and explain) their own chosen participation in this practice. In adopting a 'typification' approach I am seeking to echo Max Weber's use of ideal types (Turner & Factor 1994:85), but to humanise (and individualise) this by anchoring each theory around quotes taken from the Testimonials. As Johnston notes, drawing upon Schutz in order to draw out the link between typification, phenomenology and interpretative sociology:

> "The only social reality that can be comprehended, given the inability to penetrate the mind of others, is that *typically* comprehended." (1986: 69) (emphasis added).

I also note that whilst ethnomethodology criticises conventional social analysis for its desire to impose structure onto discourse and action (Silverman 2006: 101), even ethnomethodologists accept that social action itself involves the creation and invocation of typification by participants. Echoing across social studies, from Levi-Strauss' structuralist studies of binaries and the 'science of the concrete' (Said 1985), Foucault's meditations on the ordering of knowledge (Foucault 2002) and symbolic interactionists' studies of symbolic exchange (Lyng 1990) social organisation is seen to be achieved around predictabilities, pre-assumptions of those who wish to participate and invocation of conventions and symbols. Alignment to such tropes creates 'belongingness' (Baszanger & Dodier 2004: 20) – and reveals operation of an interpretive community at work.

Thus the study of classifying processes within documents (including internet accounts) should, for Prior (2004), focus upon showing how social order is created and sustained through such *ordering* (i.e. classifying) processes. I refer to meaning-making as 'taxonomic' in this Dissertation where the desire to order data and experience appears – as it often does in ROC Post bunkerology – to be to the fore.

Thus the following are typifications, any participant may subscribe to none, any or all of these motivations for their practice from time to time. They are also not mutually exclusive. However their occurrence and concordance (look at the similarity of the Testimonials reproduced in Appendix One) are notable. Also, the 'self-published' nature of these internet posted testimonials suggests that the authors intend something fixed and 'decided' about these chosen self-explanations of what has led them to this practice. Whether this is what they actually 'believe' (at all or all of the time) we cannot say – but we can assume that what they have chosen to say 'fits' with the legitimate tropes that this *interpretive community* (Fish 1980) has created through the circulation of its finite range of motive statements (Silverman 2004:347).

3.2   BUNKEROLOGY AND THE LINK TO CHILDHOOD

Let us first address head-on the estate manager's assertion that urban explorers are:

> *"Just a stupid bunch of reckless, thoughtless adults. They should grow up."*

This comment positions urban explorers as immature, sub-adult, having failed (for some reason) to have progressed beyond a child-like thrall which is something that (real) adults should not, and do not want to do.

Many urban explorers see this link to childhood engagement with space as a virtue rather than a defect:

> *"It's about the challenge, about seeing something that most will never see and overall a child like curiosity."* (**X4**)

This retention (or revival) of a "child-like curiosity" is considered to have perceptual advantages, a place means more if seen and engaged with as a child. For Edensor (2005: 144), the process of urban exploration:

"being dirty, of contorting the body in accordance with the ramshackle environment, of picking up and playing with an object - sensations delimited by adult custom - can catapult the adult back to childhood."

There is also the child-like thrall of confinement. That the seeking out of such confined spaces may hark back to primal, child-like needs. Kirby (1989), in an observational study of infant play behaviours for example, noted the tendency towards den building and refuge taking in small children's play. By this view, bunkerology may be a reverberation of childhood - the bunker substituting for the den. It taps into a primal instinct to seek and know places of shelter. For Bachelard (1969), there is something fundamental embedded within the human psyche creating a deep meaning-making connection to places of shelter and dwelling. Virilio (1994) specifically applied this phenomenological approach to the understanding of enclosed spaces in his visits to and contemplation of abandoned Nazi coastal bunkers along the French coast. Virilio situates the thrall of these places for him in his childhood experience of living under occupation during the Second World War.

The role of being inducted into this pastime appears particularly influential, participants talk of memorable childhood exploration of the Atlantic coast defences in France, or of:

> *"going down World War 2 shelters and tunnels most of my life, starting as a kid with my grandfather."* (**X5**)

In the Testimonials we see much of this linking of childhood experiences, often as a form of induction, to this practice. What is perhaps most striking is the inter-generational nature. Here are children discovering the thrall of ruins through initiation by adults. Entries found in the depths of ROC Posts also testify to locals bringing their grandchildren down to see the Posts. Thus, for many participants the first visit is operating as a rite of passage *into* adulthood (not a postponement of it). For example, as one account proudly declares in language redolent of a tribal initiation ceremony:

> *"Totally proud of my lil guy, we were both scratched to bits and shed more than a drop of blood, and it really is splinter central at home tonight...but his determination to see his first ROC Post got him there in the end - the boy became a man today!* 😬*"*(**X6**)

Some participants write of the revival of their childhood interests in exploration – and how the discovery of a community of adults engaged in this practice helped them to feel comfortable with the lingering desire to carry on these pursuits. The joy (and relief) that such persons express

at the discovery of a community that understands and can support their "perverse pleasure" (Woodward (2002): 32) is palpable:

> *"I discovered that I wasn't alone in this fascination with dereliction and recording the atmosphere through photography, and that there was a significant group of people who liked exploring and photographing what they saw...So recently, I've been giving my growing passion for Urban Exploration more time...What frustrates me though is that I didn't act on my fascination and have the guts to start doing this years ago!"* (**X7**)

3.3   BUNKEROLOGY AS A WAY OF SEEING THINGS DIFFERENTLY

The urge to revive a 'childlike' way of experiencing such exploration is often rooted in a belief that greater insight can be attained by adopting new ways of seeing (new gazes). For one participant:

> *"Exploring gives you the opportunity to see things you'd never normally see, it's like seeing all six sides of the dice instead of just the regular three."* (**X8**)

In this section I will show how in bunkerology we see the deployment of certain epistemic strategies that are commonly found in urban exploration which can be theorized by applying the work of a variety of social and cultural theorists. These strategies are:

- ***The erotics of knowledge -*** The accumulation of knowledge of a place or thing as a means of status. The roots of this strategy lie in empiricism (specifically taxonomy and positivism).

- ***Memorialisation and/or conservation of heritage*** - through study, visitation and reporting. The roots of this strategy lie in a heterogeneous blend of Romantisicm, nostalgia and community activism / resistance.

- ***Communing with the spirit of the place*** - Communing with the essence / spirit / 'ghosts' of a place through deep (and open) experience of it and/or through encounters with artefacts (material culture). The roots of this strategy lie in phenomenology.

These strategies are often found intertwined. Research, tourism and physical recreation may co-exist as a reason for the visit. Accordingly the subdivision presented here is not intended to

depict rigid lines of demarcation. After outlining each strategy in a little more detail I then attempt to theorise them collectively.

3.1.1   THE EROTICS OF KNOWLEDGE

"I explore the places I do, to see things that other's don"t, to experience things that other's don't..." (**X9**)

Frequently embedded in the desire to see things differently is a competitive desire to achieve insight, knowledge and/or experience that few others have attained.

This competitive dimension (to be the first, to climb the highest, to penetrate the deepest) is a fairly conventional driver in mainstream Western society. It motivates many sporting and (conventional) exploration activities. What is perhaps different is that urbex fuses physical achievement with information gathering and account making. The bunker is penetrated in order to see (and then show via accounts) what it looks like. Accounts (and the Testimonials) tend to overlay this competitiveness with a declared empirical, 'pushing back the bounds of knowledge', mission: much as imperial 'scientific' explorers of the nineteenth century did (Merrill 1989). Thus the 'race' to be the first is sublimated within a practice that, on the surface, appears more collaborative in its aims.

3.1.2   MEMORIALISATION AND CONSERVATION

The opportunity to *excel* sits alongside the opportunity to *record* and to *tell*, thus:

> *"For me Urban Exploration means many things, but it's the history and culture that counts most. I am simply astounded at how much history is lost in this country every week, and how little it is recorded for the people who worked there, and more importantly, their children. I always think it's a race against time to go and see and photograph these places before they are gone forever."* (**X4**)

Urban explorers often display a militant nostalgia, as the narrator declares during Fantinatto's documentary on Canadian industrial urbex:

> *"The echoes of the past surround us - we want to ignore our history until it becomes ancient and [only thereby] important. We bury the evidence and build on top of it. But we are losing something valuable. The forgotten places speak to us if we choose to listen. We will, honour our dead."*

It appears that urban explorers wish to cherish and protect the places that they visit. The thrall of abandoned and vulnerable places can, perhaps, be understood in terms of Urry's analysis of the 'tourist gaze' (2002). Urry notes that:

"The [tourist] gaze in any historical period is constructed in relationship to its opposite, to non-tourist forms of social experience and consciousness." (Urry 2002: 1)

The tourist therefore seeks to visit and view 'other'. Therefore an office worker might choose to visit an abandoned industrial facility precisely because it represents something different to his usual places of encounter. It is the decline of industry, the decline of the Cold War, that brings about the thrall of such places as 'the other'. However Carman (2002: 10) reminds us that not all place tourism is based on 'otherness': he points out that the memorialisation of First and Second World War battle sites was originally direct and amateur - i.e. performed/ instigated by those with a direct association to the place/event. Therefore some 'dark tourism' should be viewed as a form of bearing witness to a known experience or place, rather than always a search for 'other'. In this regard it is notable that some of the accounts found in this study were posted by persons who appeared to have had an association with the Royal Observer Corps and who may well have 'manned' these posts when they were operational.

3.1.3   COMMUNING WITH THE SPIRIT OF PLACE

Artefacts and sensations of the ruins form an important part of the urbex experience, thus:

"I love all kinds of places especially heavy industry and military sites and it's great to uncover the small personal things left behind after a once thriving establishment has closed down." (**X10**)

For example in his tour of the Government Cold War nuclear bunker at Corsham, Smith notes, alongside a 1989 telephone directory:

"…all the accoutrements and appurtenances of the 1950s workplace, including glass ashtrays, loo brushes and government-issue tea sets. Hundreds of swivel-chairs…delivered in 1959 but never taken out of their dust sheets." (2009:255)

Generally within urbex there appears to be a reverence for objects - whether as art objects, nostalgic points of connection (with the ghosts of place). There is also the sense of physically connecting with "the past", and the authenticity of "the real". To promote his book on the Cabinet War Rooms, military historian Professor Richard Holmes was interviewed by BBC Radio 4 journalist, James Naughtie (2009) on location in the war rooms' map room. Holmes' comments, made during that brief interview, illuminate the thrall of the bunker. In response to Naughtie's closing question:

"How do you feel when you come in here?"

Holmes responds with evident passion:

> *"I'm always excited. I always get a sense of buzz. I look at the ceiling, look at 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 its real, and I love that sense of touching the past, and I think I feel that here about the Second World War more than in any other single spot."*

Earlier in the interview, Holmes emphasises the *specifics* of place, when he talks of the uniqueness of the war rooms as a place - a uniqueness that derives from the fact that the events happened there:

> *"This room, not a room like this, not a room anywhere else - but <u>this</u> room"*

Abandoned places resonate such ghosts through their ephemera – they may even capture the moment of abandonment: here captured by Lanyado's (2009) description of "the moment" frozen in time, embodied in an abandoned hosiery works:

> *"Inside, in frayed wood-panelled offices, we find paperwork scattered across the floor and fabric samples splayed across the walls. Most of the industrial buildings the explorers find are a frozen snapshot of the day that the final redundancies were announced. Unmade cups of tea remain with ancient teabags dangling from their rims; sales reports lie strewn across tables, sentences half written."*

Urban exploration involves engagement with these ghosts, these traces of former activity. The essence of a place is being sought, and to find it is a moment of reverie, thus during visit to a bunker Smith observes:

> *"The guide from Subterranea Britannica was inhaling contentedly. 'There's still that engine-room smell,' he said in the engine room."* Smith (2004: 335).

3.1.4   MEANING MAKING – THE CONNECTING PRINCIPLE

These strategies can all be viewed as routes to the creation of meaning. The question then becomes, what purpose does this meaning making serve?

For Gilloch (echoing Walter Benjamin's studies of the flâneur and the subjective experience of urban navigation) late modernity has produced an alienation that compels (some) individuals to crave stimulation and re-enchantment with the world around them. Urban exploration may thus be seen as a manifestation of:

"the blasé individual, craving stimulation and simultaneously unresponsive to it, embarks on a spiralling and inevitably fruitless quest for novelty." (Gilloch 1997: 172)

Urban exploration (and its research and account making practices) is therefore a way to excavate and/or create new meaning. Auge (1995) sees this as a response to (or perhaps a manifestation of) the fact that we live in an era of "over abundant information [emphasis added] that threatens to rob [all events] of all meaning" (Auge 1995: 28). Thus the individual seeks to re-construct and defend meaningfulness for his life and place by the:

"religious accumulation of personal accounts, documents, images and all the visible signs of what used to be." (Auge 1995: 25)

Auge describes an essentially atomised culture, in which grand narratives have ceased to operate to homogenise culture, a super-modernity in which each member is left to make his own sense of the myriad information which the modern world makes accessible to him. By this analysis, urban explorers are those who have chosen to make meaning out of abandoned places, whilst others might choose to put their energies into stamp collecting, religion or fashion or any other pass-time, belief or interest to give their world meaning. Auge's thesis thus offers an explanation of the taxonomic urges of urban exploration – yet linking it with modern urban alienation in the spirit of Simmel (2009 – written 1903). Blain and Wallis (2009) echo this theme when pointing to the active contemporary investment of meaning in the past (in their case stone circles) as a form of 'Orientalism', an active celebration of an exotic 'other' in order to rise above the 'drab present' (2009: 99).

Whilst some urban explorers appear to present their project as a positivistic, fact gathering and surveying based pursuit, other prominent published urban explorer figureheads (like Deyo (2009)) boldly name-check phenomenology and/or psychogeography in rationalisation of their practice. For them readings of place are cultural. People experience places differently. For them, unlike the positivistic, fact collecting taxonomists, there is no "objective" truth to a place - but there are readings of place that are culturally dominant, and for them urbex is an opportunity to read places differently, in opposition to dominant readings. Thus urbex can be seen as a phenomenological practice in that it foregrounds the mundane, non-places and presents textual (often textural) and photographic accounts of those "forgotten" places. This taps French social theory of Bachelard (1969), Lefebvre (1996) and de Certeau (1998). For Lefebvre (1996: 159) resistance is specifically to be achieved by multiplying the readings of the city.

For de Certeau the urge to understand and the urge to resist are intertwined. For there is pleasure to be gained by "totalizing", and knowing, the city: something he styles the "erotics of knowledge" (1998: 92). The completist (obsessive?) research of the phenomenon under the scrutiny of some bunkerologists may fall into this intense form of acculturation. de Certeau expands upon this view, in *Ghosts in the city* (de Certeau et al 1998), writing of the power of heritage and "ghosts of place" over the city. He notes that the modernist redevelopment drives have increasingly been compromised, leaving amidst the new:

> "seemingly sleepy, old-fashioned things, defaced houses, closed-down factories, the debris of shipwrecked histories[which] still today raise up the ruins of an unknown, strange city." (133)

In de Certeau's writings on *"Walking in the City"* (1988: 91) we hear echoes of the *derive*. Situationist psychogeography's tactical political urban reconnaissance. However, psychogeography's current influence upon urbex owes more to English contemporary literary psychogeography, an apolitical mystical travel writing typified and popularised by Iain Sinclair (1997; 2003; 2009). The link between urban exploration and this form of urban exploration is made explicit by Sinclair himself. Writing to inspire a popular audience, in a Guardian guide to "Secret Britain" (2009) Sinclair describes his experience of visiting abandoned Victorian and Edwardian asylums during his traverse of the M25 (the theme of his book: *London Orbital* (2003)) and via conversation with a gardener stumbling upon the grave of one of his architectural heroes:

> *"That kind of discovery, zeroing in on the thing that I didn't know I needed, confirms me as a paid up enthusiast for unofficial history: rumours of nuclear bunkers beneath Essex farms, deserted hospitals, ghosts of suburbia."*

Accordingly, by this view, through poetic and open minded drifting walks of exploration, new meanings and understandings about the built environment will be revealed by reverie.

For Edensor walking through abandoned factories is emancipatory and like a *derive* - because you are (very) free to choose your route (Edensor 2005: 87) - drifting, attracted by things that take your eye and which you choose to make connections between: it is a cross-reading of that place, non-linear. In that sense it is not reconstruction / archaeology (in the sense of excavation of a singular, pre-existing meaning). Abandoned places are physical testimony to prior lived / embodied places. They are a counterpoint to formal (and singular) memorialisation and

interpretation offered by museums. Edensor (echoing Bell (1997), Auge, de Certeau, and Walter Benjamin) suggests that urban exploration may have a constitutive function - that it seeks to make (multiple) meaning of such places:

> "one conception of walking around a ruin might be to construe it as a walk through memory, a walk which produces a compulsion to attempt to narrate that which is remembered" (2005: 160).

Urban exploration can, therefore be a territorial process. In this vein Solznit (2006) points to Reclaim the Streets, This Land is Ours, the Kinder Scout mass trespasses of the 1930s as resistance practices aimed at temporarily or permanently occupying and/or energising place. For Dodge (2006) there is an analogy with computer hacking - urban explorers are hacking physical space: appropriating it to a new purpose, subverting it – either symbolically (for example photographing 'no photography' signs) or physically (via occupation, repurposing and/or destruction). Indeed Virilio's bunkerology led him to sleeping in a lecture theatre at the Sorbonne, having breakfast in an Opera box, playing games in a Renault showroom each as a resistance activity, finding:

> ".,..France, its stations, airports, schools, shops, as a space to be occupied, thereby reversing the alienated state of everyday life" (Gane 1999: 91).

More could be written on this line of analysis – and it is likely to offer much for an interpretation of urbex in general, however it is truncated here because there is little evidence that ROC Post bunkerology is actually motivated by such resistance, transgressive or alternative readings of *these* abandoned places. Instead, as will be shown below, the prevailing attitude is more positivistic and reverential in the study of these places.

3.4   BUNKEROLOGY AS RECREATION, TRANSGRESSION, INCURSION AND CONQUEST

The bunkerologist may be using his exploration as a means to an end – a chance for some solitude, a way of justifying a day out in the country via the added frisson of manly 'exploration'. Most participants appear able to situate bunkerology within a wider "good-day out" rationale - here Gillilan (2009) is describing trips to a disused airfield:

> *"Apart from a sniff of military history, I come here for a bit of Cornish peace and quiet and the bleak beauty of the place, with its backdrop of Bodmin Moor hills…I've braved a visit to the control tower's*

atmospheric operations room (not strictly open to the public and not recommended without wellies and a tolerance for sheep pooh). In winter, I've watched squadrons of roosting starlings - up to a million birds - swoop over the airfield at dust."

So here bunkerology (the draw of the military history and the entry into the control tower) sits within a wider wrap-around of themes of Romantic commune with nature birdwatching and rambling, recalling Urry's definition of "Romantic Tourism". Urry characterises two forms of tourist gaze – the *"Romantic"* gaze with its emphasis on "solitude, privacy and a personal semi-spiritual relationship with the object of the gaze" and the *"collective gaze"* which seeks "other people to give atmosphere or a sense of carnival to a place" (Urry 2002: 43). Communing with ruins or other abandoned places is likely to take the Romantic form, and to imply that contemplation at such places will reveal or connect the visitor to the 'otherness' of those locations.

This sentiment is echoed in one poster's tag-line (descriptive epithet at the bottom on his posts):

> *'Abandoned, Quiet, Here I lie, Time stands still, though years roll by, Runways broken, Dispersals gone, The only sound the Skylarks song.'* (**X42**)

For others bunkerology may provide an opportunity for physical endeavour – the clambering, contorting and scheming required in order to penetrate such places. The manner of recreational use of these bunkers will be influenced by the cultural milieu in which the participant is situated. For example, Wilson (2003) detects a link with video games and horror films in motivation and imagery of the urban explorers he interviewed, he quotes one practitioner thus:

> *"It can feel like a computer game, like Resident Evil or Silent Hill. The most exciting time is when you've found that new place, that hole into another world. When you're in, it's a rush. Especially when you're underground, in an old military complex, with just a torch. With the spread of the beam you can only see so far, when you turn every corner it makes your heart beat faster. What could lie beyond?"*

In this regard it is notable that the names of many urbex forums draw on horror-film names or styles: *28dayslater, Urban Sickness, Sick Britain, Dead Malls, Derelicte* and the like.

Wilson (2003) summarises urban exploration as:

> "an odd mix of Doom, Dungeons & Dragons and archaeology."

Even allowing for when Wilson was writing (2003), its notable that the references to *Doom* and *Dungeons & Dragons* are to 1980s and early 1990s cultural motifs. It may be that urban exploration is a later-in-life manifestation of these formative teenage pass times: the labyrinth having been encoded through those armchair games of tunnel exploration. This link may sound fanciful, but the testimony of Sigeru Miyamoto (Sheff 1999), designer of the Nintendo *Super Mario* video game links his subsequent development of the cartoon stylised platform exploration game with his formative experienced straying into a cave as a youth, and the exhilaration he felt in that exploration and discover of interconnections within the cave. Miyamoto's design of the Mario games, set out to incorporate the sensations he felt as a student arriving in a new city without a map, the childhood elation in the cave and the curiosity as an adult about what lay beyond a manhole cover he passed every day on the way to work. Mario (and many other videogame characters) are urban explorers. It is not fanciful to ponder whether some urban explorers may have entered the practice as an extension of on-screen exploration activities.

The theme of infiltration, penetration and 'going where you are not supposed to' permeates urbex:

> *"Postmodern ramblers tired of the rural scene? Or overcurious trespassers? Whatever….This site is about the infiltration of derelict structures in the UK. Enter if curious. We do."* (**X11**)

There can, of course, be enjoyment because an act is transgressive (Presdee 2000). It certainly appears that many urbex practioners enjoy the uncertain legality of their practice, and relish the 'cat and mouse' game of gaining access and evading the attention of site owners or their security guards. As the other perspectives show, however, it would be wrong to read urbex solely from a sociology of deviance / cultural criminology perspective. This is particularly the case for ROC Post bunkerology, as the level of transgression / risk of getting caught is low by comparison to urban exploration of larger, more actively guarded sites. There is also the danger that focus upon the transgressive tendencies in urbex would imply a disrespect for the places visited: bunkerologists, as discussed below, venerate the places they visit – they decry tagging (or any other form of graffiti), theft or damage to property.

In the wider family of recreational trespass, transgression takes a larger role. For the tagger, urban climber, BASE jumper, parkour enthusiast or free swimmer the primary motivation is in the *performance* of the act, and the 'reward' of that act may well be multiplied by attendant risk and/or transgression related to the place or manner of that performance. Cultural criminology perspectives interpret deviance as a performance, a (after Bakhtin 1986) "carnival" – a pressure

release ceremony in which mainstream culture is for a short time, or in a confined place, inverted (for example Bey's notion of a *'Temporary Autonomous Zone'* (1991) or Foucault's *'Heterotopia'*(1986)). However, for urbex (and particularly for ROC Post bunkerology) the experience is less about accomplishing a performance that is presented (at the time of performance) to the world. The physical act of performance is a means to an end – it provides the basis for the opportunity to account (on-line) for what has been done.

However, that being said, urbex is not without its share of physical danger (and transgression). Here, Lyng's edgework thesis can be usefully invoked. For Lyng (1990), in an approach drawing both from symbolic interactionism and Marxism and fusing analysis of the creation of the social self through performance and interaction (after Mead) and viewing risk taking in leisure pursuits as a willed resistance to the alienation of late capitalism, Lyng (1990) postulates that the culture of leisure risk takers such as BASE jumpers (parachuting from buildings and other low level structures) is framed around the conduct of "edgework" – by which individuals test out the boundaries of both their own competence and that of the community of practice of which they form part (creation of the social self). It is thus, through pushing their performance to the absolute limit of survivability (but not further) that these practitioners enhance their sense of self. Reading ROC Post accounts in particular, one is struck how the participants appear to be working something through, either a retained childhood instinct to explore, an obsessive desire to catalogue and/or some form of veneration process at work. These drivers appear far stronger than any adventure seeking or psychogeographical desire to subvert the meaning of these places or to occupy them (to claim them as territory or to commit symbolic acts against them). The legacy influence of secret state research (discussed further below) also appears lesser than might be expected – although the conventions of research (the descriptive styles) appear to retain some influence. In relation to ROC Posts, fantasy is distinctly lacking (the control of forms of representation for these places is considered further below).

In addition to an apparent veneration of ancestors associated with these places, (e.g. individual's ROC Post survey websites dedicated to family members who served in the ROC) there is clear evidence of a veneration, a cherishing, of these places themselves. Many accounts describe how the Posts have been tidied up prior to photographing, how Post owners have been warned to keep pillagable items safe and how Posts have been carefully locked upon exit. This behaviour echoes the creed of the urban explorers interviewed by Fantinatto (2005) for his documentary, who were each keen to emphasise that their practice is about preserving, honouring and not

damaging the place under inspection – following the conservationist's motto: "leave nothing but footprints, take nothing but photographs". A Fantinatto interviewee talks of:

"a pirates code…don't act like jerks. Treat [the place being explored] as if you are in someone's house."

When vandalised ROC Posts are discovered, the accounts feature descriptions of revulsion at those who would do such things, thus:

"It's sad that vandals have ruined so many ROC Posts. It is hard to see what satisfaction they get from destroying these fascinating places. Surely the buzz of finding a post in good condition greatly outweighs that of its destruction." (**X12**)

In such postings the participants are keen to distinguish themselves from the "chav" (as code for vandal, or an unappreciated - perhaps - uncultured visitor to these places) and frequent comment is made in postings about whether any 'pikey' damage is evident (i.e. pillaging for scrap metal – attributed to gypsies).

Conversely when a good condition ROC Post is discovered, the thread discussion is on how nice it is to see such a well preserved site. Some ROC Post explorers are particularly 'house proud' about the sites that they visit. In particular **X13** who is particularly keen in his accounts to emphasize the "left as found" aspect:

"I gave the post a quick tidy before I left, gave the floor a sweep, made the beds, took the chairs off the bed and put them out on the floor around the table. I "re-locked" the hatch the way I found it."

Here are grown men (invariably they appear to be men and in their 30s-50s), re-making beds and realigning furniture in damp, dank underground chambers. In a handful of noted instances the participants have taken steps to renovate a bunker, either with the permission of the owner, or by buying it. These practices suggest that Edensor's belief that it is the dis-ordering aesthetic that is the appeal for urban explorers does not readily apply to ROC Post explorers. These are restorationists, not subverters of place. These are den seekers, and they are protective of the information that might otherwise render access to those who would hurt these places, thus, a point of warning on a ROC themed area of **X14**'s personal blogsite:

"…a short note to the stupid. These places were designed to withstand nuclear blasts and radioactive zombies. They aren't going to be phased by any of your pocket vandal's helpers, or even most things you can hire from HSS. However, most of them can be opened with a universal 'T' bar key. A simple but clever design. Easy to recreate. On this page I used to have a link to a scan of a technical drawing of it

However, there is one aspect that perhaps needs deeper analysis within this reverence. From a Freudian perspective there is perhaps much that could be made of the focus, within this culture, of penetration. Ross' discomfort (2004: 14), described below, as his metaphor takes him towards birthing and uterine symbolism finds further echo in the obsession with hatch access, and the bringing to bear of (invariably masculine) technological guile to assail the locked or seized hatch cover. Videos of the interior of ROC Posts (fairly easy to find on *You Tube* and even for sale on *ebay*) tend to present these places as dank and dark. The portrayal is unedited and erratic, lacking the studied composition (and flash light illumination) found in posted stills images of these places. The effect, whether achieved via hand held camcorder or endoscope (used where human access is unachievable) is of a more lingering, dark, abject experience, one that either intentionally (or though the technical limitations of the medium) foregrounds the visceral, bodily, internal *probing,* and cavity inspecting aspect.

A darker reading of the motivations of urban exploration, and in particular its links to video games and other contemporary Western mores can be found in post-colonial theory. Sardar (2000), Strain (2003) and Fuller & Jenkins (1995) give a darker reading of the exploration motif in video games, noting the parallels between colonial exploration tracts of the conquest of the Americas and the themes and styles of Nintendo exploration games. They point to the link between exploration and conquest: a cultural encoding of the Western fixation with frontier penetration, colonization and material accumulation. By such reading urban exploration is an expression of an irrepressible invasion mentality, manifesting as the joy of being first, having greater knowledge, having conquered a place through naming, measuring and ordering it.

Bunkerology brings to the fore the colonization dimension – and also the positivist, fact gathering and ordering dimension. 'Penetrate and catalogue' might be an apposite mission statement. Resonances spring to mind of the imperial roots (and interconnections) of experiential tourism and taxonomic pursuits such as specimen collecting, the ordering of exotic butterflies in order to order and lay claim to them as part of the Western Enlightenment programme of discovery (and exploitation). For Sardar the internet, and its encouragement of atomistic participants interacting fleetingly and instrumentally in their individual quests for banal accumulation of data in celebration of the obscure and unimportant, sees "isolated, insatiable,

individual desires feeding blindly upon each other's dismal projections" (2000: 745). Sardar's stance is elitist and overly pessimistic about the type of 'culture' and 'communities' that such online forums can create, however his concern about the obsessive focus upon the amassing of data rather than wisdom has some relevance for bunkerology. For all its counter-cultural zombie-ethic stylings, bunkerology appears, in its culture, to actually be deeply conservative, dominated by veneration, nostalgia and a certain thrall of militarism and conflict. Yet it would be too simplistic to regard bunkerologists as 'wannabe' soldiers. The thrall (and signification of) military ruins is more complex than that, and the spirit of survey and research is sincere.

3.5   BUNKEROLOGY AS ARCHAEOLOGY

Bunkerology has roots in amateur archaeology, links that at times have seen aspects of the practice co-opted by professional archaeology. By the mid 1990s, in Britain at least, the physical remnants of Second World War defensive structures had started to be accepted as legitimate subjects for enquiry. Efforts to acknowledge the significance of this physical legacy saw professional archaeology (in the form of the Council of British Archaeology) enlisting the support of hundreds of amateur military archaeologists in its *Defence of Britain* project. The project ran from 1995 to 2001 and saw 600 amateur military archaeologists recruited to record twentieth century defence structures across England. This project created a database[4] of over 20,000 sites, including pillboxes, bunkers and airfields by drawing upon amateur expertise within an array of existing interest groups such as: Subterranea Britannica, the Fortress Study Group, the Airfield Study Group and the UK Fortifications Club.

This publicly funded survey drew upon the amateur, and in particular upon the ground breaking work of Henry Wills, a local newspaper photographer who, in 1985 published the results of his 10 year amateur investigation into the English pillbox (Wills 1985). Wills describes how in 1968 his attention was drawn to the quiet disappearance of pillboxes from the Wiltshire environment in which he had always lived. Wills discovered that there were no national records of where pillboxes had been built in the UK during the Second World War, nor any record of their current state. Over the decade that followed Wills wrote to 200 local newspaper editors asking them to enlist the help of their readers, by sending him postcards with descriptions and map references for pillboxes in their localities. From this pre-internet, kitchen sink, project Wills was able to compile a register of 5,000 pillboxes. Wills' 1985 book reported his findings - both the list

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[4] http://ads.ahds.ac.uk/catalogue/specColl/dob/

of sites, and his portrayal of the evolution of the pillbox, illustrated with photographs and architectural plans of various identifiable types of pillbox design.

This spirit of amateur research into bunkers can also be found in the politically motivated research of anti-nuclear campaigners and investigative journalists such as Laurie (1979) and Campbell (1982). Laurie's study, *Beneath the City Streets* (first published in 1972) was "written to satisfy my own curiosity" (1979: 271), and describes itself as "a private inquiry" to emphasise the non-aligned perspective of his "contemporary political archaeology" (1979: 9). Laurie (and in turn Campbell) were seeking to study civil defence and military bunkers that were yet to be abandoned. This was a different world, but Laurie captured the spirit of contemporary bunkerology by reading in the built environment signifiers of intangible governing practices:

> "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." (1979: 9)

Laurie's book shows bunkerology's characteristic obsessive, completist focus on an aspect of the built environment that many would still - and more did then - regard as prosaic (and unknowable). But the book is anything but conspiracy theory in tone, and his use of fact and figures (including many infrastructural diagrams showing underground complexes and communication maps) presents a "high quality" benchmark which appears to have influenced and encouraged amateur bunkerologists since. Duncan Campbell's *War Plan UK: the truth about civil defence in Britain* (1982) was an expose that followed in Laurie's footsteps. Campbell's 485 page work is an exhaustive account of his investigation. Drawing upon traditional journalistic resources (interviews with sources, archival and "leak" based documentary research) Campbell also undertook some site visits, in particular finding an access to the central London Government tunnels system at Kingsway and armed with a fold-up bicycle spending an evening exploring miles of the tunnel system whilst (in his view) the guards were pre-occupied with their Christmas party. Campbell's book actually gives little attention to this adventuring - and his account privileges the discovered facts over the process of acquisition. However Campbell did give an account of his exploration of the London tunnels in an article in the *New Statesman* in December 1980, under the title: *"A Christmas party for the moles"*.

At one notable point in his book Campbell records an early instance of nuclear tourism, when he writes of family groups found to be visiting a then abandoned regional civil defence bunker in 1979. This was an early example of the demilitarization of many of these bunkers, a process that

only commenced for most after 1991. The end of the Cold War produced a sudden shift in the meaning of these places - they were surplus to requirements. It became possible to look back on the Cold War era, and to interpret it. Physical exploration and/or study of the bunker system formed part of that newly opened up cultural vista, beguiling as a Readers' Digest documentary on Cold War bunkers puts it:

> "discover the secrets you were never supposed to know; travel to the places you were never supposed to go" (Croce 2008b)

The bunkers can now be read as physical manifestations of a previous era's "bunker mentality".

The detail-conscious focus of research and portrayl of bunker sites lives on in the contemporary bunkerology of Helms (2007), McCamley (2005 & 2007) and Subterranea Britannica, and also in (what I call) the *'whitespace'* movement (Dodge 2004 uses the expression "eyeballing"). In the early years of McCamley's research into the UK Government's Cold War secret underground refuge in a mine beneath Corsham in Wiltshire, it was still very much top secret, with research thereby impeded. But archival research became possible as security restrictions were gradually relaxed from the mid-1980s onwards.

The end of the Cold War, and the new underground structures released for investigation during the last 20 years, has seen *Subterranea Britannica,* whilst originally an amateur *industrial* subterranean archaeology enthusiasts group founded in the 1970s, expanding its brief enthusiastically and authoritatively into bunkerology. Its membership Secretary, Nick Catford is to be encountered in many of the publications and documentaries reviewed for this study (and therefore he is featured by name) observes to Smith (2005: 22):

> "*If it's man made and underground we're interested*"

Catford appears proud of the authoritative efforts and status of Subbrit, stating that in his view:

> "*there are no bunkers that we don't know about. Yes, there are some we haven't been able to get into - yet*" (Croce 2008b)

Catford elsewhere uses the language of study, of survey, of "interpretation" - rather than that of exploration per se:

> "*I've been in there [a closed off bunker] a few times…the layout in there is quite clear to interpret*" (Croce 2008b)

But Catford also reveals a poetic attachment, to an aesthetic ordering of the bunkering experience:

"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 2008b)

The rise of internet accessible satellite photography has opened up a new area of 'secret state' research. The existence of Military facilities formally omitted on security grounds from maps is now revealed by the enthusiastic researcher using Google Earth. One such researcher, Alan Turnbull, profiles his findings on www.secret-bases.co.uk (announcing with proud irony that his website's server is located within one of the former Cruise missile bunkers at Greenham Common). Meanwhile in the United States, the cover to Helms' (2007) guide to *Top Secret Tourism* declares itself to be:

"your travel guide to germ warfare laboratories, clandestine aircraft bases and other places in the United States you're not supposed to know about."

Helms' book is less of a tourist guide than a 'whitespace' expose and political critique of the military-nuclear complex. Helms admits that he has not visited all of the facilities that he lists - nor that there would be much to see at the perimeter of many of these. Helms is at pains to warn of the dangers that would arise were the visitor to attempt access to many of the places he lists. Here lies the important distinction between the accepted, normalised touristic pilgrimage to former-sites and the (still) high security of currently active sites.

Vanderbilt (2002: 69) notes the thrall of whitespace tourism – the desire to find out what has been omitted (by the military) from the published map. He describes witnessing a confused French tourist droving up to a nuclear missile test ground's main gate and pointing:

"… repeatedly at a silver-dollar sized chunk of Rand McNally that simply read 'Missile Range'. The map's white space showed no roads, and I was not sure how the traveller had intended to get to his destination, or what he expected to find once he got there - he seemed propelled by the sheer absence of it all."

Vanderbilt, in similar terms also observes the practice of photographing prohibition signs on a nuclear perimeter tour. A no photography sign is ritualistically photographed by the tour group:

"in tacit recognition of the obvious: that in fact there is nothing to photograph here except the sign." (2002: 28).

3.6 BUNKEROLOGY AS AESTHETICS

"I consider the photography a very large part of why I explore, and the love of photography has made me want to explore more and more impressive places." (**X9**)

The websites and accounts reviewed for this study testify to the primacy of the visual in accounts of urban exploration forays. It is clear that for many participants it is the opportunity to take photographs that is the key motivation for their exploration. In examining this motivation statement it is helpful to draw upon Urry's (2002) theorising of the 'tourist gaze'. Drawing on theorists on photography like Berger, Barthes and Sontag, Urry (2002: 127) considers that:

"To photograph is in some way to appropriate the object being photographed. It is a power/knowledge relationship…photography tames the object of the gaze (at least momentarily - at the moment of taking the photo)."

To photograph can therefore be seen as an act of either appropriation or resistance - in the sense of photographing places that are (or were until recently) 'forbidden'. There is a 'trophy' (or scalp-taking) aspect to the way in which photographs are taken 'home' and posted as accounts of places explored.

Photographic depiction is not however 'anything goes' - as we will see below - urban exploration forums enforce standards on what is an acceptable (i.e. post-able) photograph, and conformity to urban exploration visual tropes will accrue acclaim. In this regard it is necessary to learn how to compose urban exploration photographs, just as it is necessary to understand the visual conventions of conventional tourist photography. As Urry notes:

"As everyone becomes a photographer so everyone also becomes an amateur semiotician." (2002: 128)

We will now look at how the signification of Cold War ruins lies within a conventional aesthetic framework.

Over the last 20 years some signs of nostalgia for the Cold War era have emerged - expressed in a number of (primarily U.S.) journalistic book-length reportage, describing (and frequently acting out, 'nuclear tourism'). This is a comparatively new form of the 'dark tourism' analysed by

Lennon & Folely (2000), a tourism that focuses upon the dark, the abject and vilified. Places of calamity, death and crime. The challenge, for Lennon & Folely is to understand, via research of dark tourist practice, what draws participants to such 'negative heritage' (Haakonsen 2009: 1).

Richard Ross' *Waiting for the end of the world* (2004) is a coffee-table type book of photographs of fall-out shelters around the world, published by a US architectural academic press. Ross' motivations are explored in a transcribed interview conducted by Sara Vowell published within his book. The interview gives revealing insight into the motivations of both Ross' and Vowell's bunkerology.

Vowell admits her jealousy at Ross having visited the high class Greenbrier resort, in order to photograph the US Congress' nuclear shelter there. In doing so she reveals her dark tourism practices:

> *"My favorite vacation is to go someplace where something really horrible happened, like the Salem witch trials or Wounded Knee, but to stay in a really nice hotel. So Greenbrier is of course my holy grail - a swank resort with its very own bomb shelter museum."*(11)

Vowell also encapsulates a powerful sense of nostalgia for the nuclear sublime. A by-product of teen years spent waiting for "the wrong sun" to appear in the sky (Coupland 1994). Vowell (Ross 2004:12) grew up in Montana (location of lots of nuclear missile silos) and was

> *"simply obsessed with nuclear war. When I was sixteen, I could have drawn you a map of those missile sites, or as I would have thought of them back then, targets…because I'm from the last real Cold War generation: post-shelter…by the time I was old-enough to start planning a future, I was pretty sure I wouldn't have one. I'm still amazed I got to grow up. Amazed!"*

Vowell (Ross 2004: 16) describes a kind of nostalgia for the Cold War - because that was the certainty that she grew up in (her formative years):

> *"But all that has vanished to the point that looking at your pictures makes me feel saner. That old familiar world is so far gone that sometimes I catch myself thinking that I dreamed it."*

At times in the interview Ross (2004:14) tries to define (and defend?) his photographic project by reference to purely technical-aesthetic considerations:

> *"I'm drawn to sites where benign neglect dominates…the sparse light in these shelters is clean, symmetrical, undisturbed - waiting for my camera."*

But he too is frequently drawn into the need to address the sublime, the terror aesthetic. On photographing air vents from a nuclear bunker, and rendering them art, Ross (2004: 11) indicates that he feels "guilty about the existing beauty in some of the images". There is an ambiguity in his position. He regards these features as having a "chilly…eerie…diabolical beauty" (11) but that his role as photographer is to foreground those items in the landscape as ordinarily they will not be noticed.

Through illustrating the technology of (attempted) apocalypse survival, Ross feels that his photographs require viewers to contemplate the human condition - mortality and the fragility of civilisation. Ross finds the extremities of this line of analysis too epic to discuss:

> *"Many of the shelters are almost womblike, structurally organic with and entrance resembling a reversed birth canal: a mysterious, inviting, convoluted tunnel with light at the end of it, promising security, protection, nutrition, and life-granting safety inside. Think of re-emerging from this sanctuary and being reborn into a world that is fearful and drastically changed from what we had known before and from what we imagined could happen. Sex and death all tied together- it is getting too metaphorical for me."* (Ross 2004:14)

Ross' (2004: 17) closing view tips a nod in the direction of Romantic ruinology:

> *"... everything in this project is counter intuitive. I am optimistic when I find shelters that are unused and abandoned. Conversely, I am depressed when I come across shelters that are gleeming and inviting, such as some of the Swiss shelters where classes in preparedness are [still] taught."*

For Vanderbilt (2002: 110) the image and reality of nuclear bunkers has become distorted: as during the Cold War the only public representations 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."

yet in his search for America's nuclear ruins:

> *"nothing quite prepared me for the strange feeling of pathos and chilling solemnity that came from seeing them in person."* (Vanderbilt 2002: 19)

To understand the ways in which that pathos is encoded into damp bunkers we must turn to acknowledge the influence of ruin aesthetics within urban exploration. In doing so I follow Emmison's view that visual analysis must embrace the whole context, all of the "lived visual data" (2004: 261) – the image itself cannot meaningfully be analysed in isolation from the spatiality and embodiedness of ROC Posts and wider aesthetic conventions in circulation within urbex and Western image-culture.

The theme of the *sublime* – the aesthetic attraction of places and events that remind the viewer of his mortality, was a key aesthetic principle from the eighteenth century, informing notions of the *'picturesque',* and the trope of the evocative ruin.

The impermanence and the revelation potential of the ruin was important also for Walter Benjamin. Inheriting the German Romantic tradition, Benjamin's aesthetics believed that the true nature of a thing was only revealed in the moment of its ruination. For Benjamin:

> "The utopian impulses of the nineteenth century are fleetingly recognized and preserved by the dialectical image as the dreamscape of modernity turns to rubble." (Gilloch 1997: 131)

Benjamin applied this logic to an obsessive (and never finished) attempt to map the lost world of the Parisian arcade and its street-life. For Benjamin (like de Certeau) such ruins and fragments must be studied and preserved as part of a tactical resistance to the non-place effects of the city and capitalism.

Edensor (2005:11) rejects the sublime aesthetic as "wholly unsuitable" as an account of the fascination (for some) of industrial ruins, however his rejection is not clearly argued – and appears questionable, for, as we have seen with Ross (above) ruin aesthetics can be found within bunkerology, and urbex generally, take for example the following description of an urban explorer's reaction to a derelict power station which is quintessentially sublime in its aesthetic, because it equates sadness, profundity and beauty:

> *"this place is truly, the saddest, most profound and beautiful place I have ever explored"* (from Fantiatto 2005).

The significance of the ruin as trope is considered further below in relation to the meaning making practices of ROC Post bunkerologists.

3.7 BUT WHERE IS THE COLD WAR NOSTALGIA IN ROC POST BUNKEROLOGY?

To my surprise I found much less Cold War nostalgia in the studied ROC Post accounts than I was expecting. Other than occasional 'zombie' references there was little meditation on what life in these shelters would have been like if the bomb had gone off.

The reason for this seems to be the fact that most ROC Post bunkerologists appear to have come to this urbex sub-practice via mainstream urban exploration. A minority originate from military archaeology circles (via pillbox and trench and bunker touring on the continent). Whilst there is evidence of practitioners having preferences, suiting individual taste (e.g. a fondness for heights, geographical proximity to industrial sites), there appears little evidence of rigid specialisation within the field of urbex – hardcore enthusiasts will turn their hand to most forms of urbex and, as 'easy wins' are used up practitioners will have to seek out other sub-genres in order to have 'new' places to explore and document. ROC Posts appear in many of the less-frequent participants' accounts to be something sampled – and not necessarily liked – for in contrast to touring asylums or complex derelict factories ROC Posts are too small, generic and rural for many tastes.

In the main, these places are being visited because they are the latest wave of abandoned / ruined places, rather than out of any complex political or nuclear related homage. This may in part be a feature of the way in which the culture has formed in the internet forums (which appear to share core personalities instrumental in administering them) – less 'shaped' forums, like ROC Post inspection videos on *Youtube* appear to attract the extremities of both the youthful, casual, thrill seeking visitor and the elderly exROC member accessing the site to reminisce. These threads appear to show toleration of relaxed inter-generational information sharing, and also, in contrast to their manner of depiction on urbex sites, the permissible flow of meanings (interpretations) of these places is less shaped by the conventions of the forum and its focus upon taxonomic ordering.

4.   *'HOW?'* – UNDERSTANDING URBEX'S MEANING MAKING PRACTICES

How are bunkers made the subject of signification? What rules govern the generation and circulation of participants' accounts? There is nothing to stop individuals visiting modern ruins and making their own sense of the experience – however to participate in the urban exploration community by submitting accounts of visits one has to learn to conform to the ordained 'ways of seeing' (Berger 1972) operating within that sub-culture. This practice has rules, accounts must be 'legitimate'.

In this section I analyse how these conventions are arranged (and the individual's activities thus become accultured) via codes of taste, genre, representation and practice management acting in combination (for Bordieu) as *habitus*, "the durably installed generative principle of regulated innovation" (in Eriksen 2001: 91). In short, how legitimate subjects, places and accounts are constructed and maintained (Foucault 2002) within the urbex discourse.

The analysis draws predominantly upon the study of ROC post bunkerology – but also draws on the reported experiences of other urban explorers, as ROC Post accounts can only be understood within that wider urbex account-making genre.

4.1   THE RULES OF ACCOUNTING

4.4.1   THE SOCIOLOGY OF ACCOUNTS

Dodge (2006) sets out a thematic analysis of 20 urban exploration websites, looking at the role of "accounting" within those sites as a community forming practice. He draws upon Orbuch (1997) and her summary of the study of account making within sociology. For Orbuch, accounts are "verbal and written statements as social explanations of events" (1997:456), and in particular the use of accounts to explain behaviours that might otherwise be seen as unanticipated or deviant. This tradition draws both on Goffman's work on the *Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1971) and Garfinkel's (1967) analysis of the conditions in which status will be denegraded.

The Goffman/Garfinkel tradition focused accounts study upon:

- the content of the account;
- the conditions under which the account will be made; and

- the conditions governing whether the account will be accepted / acceptable.

For Goffman, accounts are a means by which a person who has infracted the community's norms can seek to preserve face/status - and thereby maintain individual and group identities. They can be interpreted as an explanation or a justification of otherwise deviant behaviour. Garfinkel's interest in accounting was wider - to see how accounting forms part of the everyday (i.e. non-conflict situation) construction of social reality.

The contemporary focus of account analysis is more social psychological - looking at how an individual's account, presented as a story, helps form his own sense of identity and worth within his community. In short, how people rationalise their experiences. Some studies also acknowledge, and seek to understand, the accultured way in which accounts operate - i.e. how discourse conditions the sayable

Orbuch sees close similarities between the study of accounts and the study of narratives. The study of narratives has emerged in the postmodern wake - as the shift away from study of reality, to the study of depictions of (a) reality has emerged as point of valid enquiry. For Orbuch "narrative analysis pays special attention to the form, coherence, and structure of …stories."(1997:466)

Orbuch suggests that relatively little attention has been paid to the *context* of accounts - the circumstances in which they are generated, and in particular the relationship to the formation of social memory (here Orbuch is reflecting on studies of accounts of marriage breakdown - but the question is equally pertinent to account making motivations and processes in urbex).

Earlier portions of this Dissertation have examined the circumstances in which urbex accounts appear to be generated (the *'why?'* question) accordingly the following analysis of the role of account making in the practice of ROC Post bunkerology (the *'how?'* question) must examine:

- how the 'rules' of accounting are framed;

- how the self is presented within accounting; and

- how the self is presented in the event of urban exploration itself.

Writing and circulating accounts of exploration to unusual (and/or perilous) places is nothing new. In a subterranean context the Egyptian aesthetic preoccupation of the Victorian era was fed by the autobiographical accounts of grand touring and tomb raiding by proto-archaeologists like Belzoni, Richardson, Wilkinson and thereafter Carter (Romer 2005). Indeed Said (1985: 175) notes how, for Chateaubriand, his travels and urge to publically account for them became intricately interconnected with his performance of self, to the point of obsession.

Urbex participants however regard the rise of internet based forums as a significant development. Deyo (Jinx 2009) echoes many commentators on urbex who see the rise of self-publishing (initially via fanzine, then more latterly with the rise of internet based outlets for account sharing) as the key differentiator between trespass and exploration, for:

> *"Exploration serves no purpose when its results remain obscure...Today, the increased flow of information has uplifted urban exploration, and the discourse that surrounds it. What was once kids breaking into warehouses and smashing windows is now serious research...With Infiltration magazine, then, the urban explorer truly parted company with the mundane trespasser. Ninjalicious became an explorer when he faithfully published his observations and enriched posterity by them. The trespasser, by contrast, always consigned his story to silence."*

The following sections will examine how the internet forums structure an *Interpretive community*, a community (following Fish 1980) that generates and regulates a set of acceptable meanings and depictions of ROC Posts and thereby sustains and evolves bunkerology.

4.4.3   THE ORDERING OF ROC POST ACCOUNTS

> *"Solo visit. The flavour of the trip was to go and see good 91' closures and locked 91' closures. 68's were off the list because I had too many to look at anyway. Having been to Aberlemno before and couldnt work the t-bar, I returned only to find out it was a 68'. Epic readiness fail. Open, 68'. Internally post retains cupboards and full body splint."* (**X9**)

X9 is the moderator of the 28dayslater ROC Post thread. It appears down to his guiding hand (and the conventions and taxonomic structure of the *28dayslater* forum site as a whole) that the ROC Post thread is ordered into a classified ROC Post catalogue, with sites ranked alphabetically and without duplicate threads. Through **X9**'s interventions, reordering posted

accounts, reviewing and querying new postings and exercising quality control over acceptable text and photographic accounts, the site has become the resource that it is.

X9 has a particular aversion to abbreviated, 'textspeak', and chides one contributor:

> *"Please don't text speak mate, makes you sound like a moron* 😊👍*"*

X9 uses animated emoticons: thus 😊👍 to soften his corrective commands. He also shows some acute diplomacy in nudging account posters away from unacceptable behaviour;

> *'Yes, don't go breaking the padlocks off mate. Not saying you would, but that's what your first statement sounded like.'*

The uninitiated are also catered for (in usual web forum manner) via a FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions) entry point – a commandment *'Please read first'* – a file setting out the ordering and content requirements for acceptable accounts and giving contextual information about the ROC and its posts.

Under the steerage of **X9** the *28dayslater* ROC Post forum has evolved a clear reporting format that replicates most features in most accounts

- whether the visit was alone or accompanied;

- brief introduction (1 paragraph) to contextualise the visit and location of the site;

- specific comment on the condition of the hatch, key type and means of entry;

- a verdict on the condition (and sometimes the restorability) of the Post;

- how many sites left to visit; and

- photographs (some of above-ground features, some of sub-surface).

We will consider the conventions for images below. The text component is steered particularly towards factual, descriptive accounting. This is the language of surveying. The valued portion of the account is the factual description of the state and accessibility of the Post. Unless presented pithily the human circumstances of access and viewing are unwanted. The *28dayslater* ROC thread plays out as a collaborative (and competitive) network seeking to build a picture of the state and condition of this physical network of monitoring posts. Accordingly, comment that moves the forum closer towards classification and understanding of these places is privileged.

Threads seek to interpret features thrown up by an account, and a discussion plays itself out by iteration. Within this 'elders' seek to add value by adding concepts from within the sub-genre and/or other fields of technical knowledge, thus in a collective rumination upon the causes of ROC Post flooding:

> *"Yeah, like I've said to a few people on here, its definitely not leaving the hatch open which is the main cause of flooding posts, there was a few 68's in Wales which the hatches were open when we arrived and the posts were dusty dry even in the sump. I have a feeling its more than likely either demolished vent/fsm pipes, or some other underlying issue with the concrete's water resistance (cracks, imperfections). Also the area's water table must have a lot to do with it, perhaps in more (previously industrial) area's such as mining, the water table will have risen."* (**X9**)

In his observation of *Subbrit* forays to bunkers Smith notes bunkerologists' completist and competitive tendencies, he describes listening to two Subbrit members conversing, thus:

> *"Bob was talking animatedly to one of the potholers. I struggled to follow the minutiae of Bob's conversation. Then I realised that to follow it was miss the point of it. Bob and the potholer were both talking more than they were listening…Facts, if that's what they were, were flourished like winning hands of cards."* (2004: 318)

This points to the role of the (sheer) accumulation of knowledge within this practice. Site knowledge (and the number of sites visited) becomes a badge of honour. It is something accumulated, as (for Bourdieu) "cultural capital" (Eriksen 2001: 153), and it can be deployed in accounts and conversations as a way of increasing that capital through a form of contest and circulation. **X9** reports covering 39 ROC Posts in one 4-day visit to Scotland (and announces as a standard motto for each of his accounts how many Posts that he has visited to date). On another occasion another poster appears to apologise (**X43**) to his peers for having only now "getting my backlog cleared" (of account writing up) – using the language of business and work to describe a voluntary, hobby, activity.

Another practitioner (**X44**), indicates that he's going to stop at 100, a nice round number, and a saner stopping point than *"doing a Catford"*: a reference to Nick Catford, the Subbrit membership secretary, who visited all 1,563 ROC Posts in the 1990s as part of *The Defence of Britain* project.

The epistemic dynamic that comes to the fore within ROC Post bunkerology, as it lacks the 'adventure' of more dangerous and variegated ruins, is completism. A focus upon the accumulation of fact for its own sake. This manifests as an ever more obsessive drive to view

and record as many ROC Posts as possible (and in any case even more than your peers). The die-hard ROC Post bunkerologists are aware of this obsessive dimension, and to an extent seek to show that their practice and extent of involvement has not, quite just yet, reached the pathological. In the arena of ROC Post urbex, the natural affinity to train spotting, bird watching and sport fishing becomes clear. The event occurs in order that it can be described – and the metric of success becomes numeric rather than qualitative. The narrative largely disappears, to be replaced by taxonomic accounting, broken only by occasional ironic self-deprecation.

Persons who have not previously posted an account will add an opening disclaimer along the lines of:

> *'my first report so please go easy on me!!'*

They will also tend to write more detailed descriptions than the older members (as though the older members have graduated towards a preference for the power of photography freed of superfluous comment).

It appears that this may be a trend particular to ROC Post accounts - as experienced urban explorers who have dabbled with ROC Post accounts will also tend to be more detailed in their accounts than the 'completists' whose focus is upon the simple act of seeing all of these places (and leaving the necessary practical details to enable others to do so). Interestingly when those completists engage in accounting for places other than ROC Posts they tend to become more discursive (here contrast the ROC Post and asylum visit accounts written by the same explorer which are analysed in Appendix Three Figures 3 and 5). This may simply reflect the fact that after a while, beyond simple photographic survey, there isn't much worth saying (with words) about the umpteenth ROC Post site visited

At essence then, ROC Post bunkerology exhibits a positivistic obsession with the taxonomic surveying of ROC Posts. This form of urbex has skewed away from the more narrative driven, adventuring, event-creating tropes. Instead the signification consists of an intense focus upon small scale differentiation. The meaning is 'made' through such scrutiny – the task becoming something akin to a repetitive 'spot the difference' contest – with he who spots the most gaining the greatest respect in that community.

To understand the 'meaning' that is being created by visitation to these places one also has to appreciate that in ROC Post bunkerology a process of *serial* survey is taken to its extreme. To appraise an abandoned asylum and to write an account of that visit a participant needs to know

something of asylums in general – but to write about ROC Posts that need for cross reference to ROC Posts as an aggregate, as a system become amplified – partly because of the paucity of deviation between each post, and partly because these places were built as, and form, a *network* of installations. Haakonsen (2009: 6) importantly adds to Virilio's bunker theorizing by pointing this out (in relation to her ruminations on the 'meanings' of abandoned Nazi bunkers in Denmark):

> "…bunkers are not perceived as entities but in a seriality, and this is a key factor in their experiential value. The endless repetition constitutes an immense war landscape, only to be fully united on a map and in our own imagination."

Thus, for some participants, it is not so much that each individual bunker is 'of interest' – but rather the bunkers as a system, a network. Indeed it is notable that within Cold War bunkerology there is a sub-genre of web sites dedicated to the emergency communications systems that would have operated between these posts. **X29**, a key participant in that 'scene' explains that experiences as a telecommunications worker in the 1980s, and an occupational acquaintance with these systems, led to his interest in investigating these networks once declassified. For this bunkerologist it is the (telecommunications) system that interconnected these places that is his key interest, yet that system (the aerials, wires and codes) has no physical legacy – thus ROC Posts themselves must serve as a proxy for those less tangible preoccupations.

4.4.5   IMAGE ANALYSIS

Account posters are aware that they are operating within a defined set of representational conventions. Photographs will occasionally be prefixed with a knowing observation, such as (for a photo showing the sky and access ladder viewed from the base of the shaft):

'And the view up, as always'

A comparative analysis shows how images of ROC Bunkers follow the tropes of industrial and asylum urban exploration iconography, and in turn those tropes appear to derive from classical ruin aesthetics (please see analytical matrix presented in Appendix Two) .

These tropes are widespread, in his book on the history of the civil service during the Cold War Hennessey visits the Central Government's secret bunker at Corsham, and momentarily slips into a poetic, imagistic reverie uncharacteristic of a historian of bureaucracy (but very characteristic of urban exploration) and writes of:

"A rusty, red-cross-emblazoned tin helmet [resting] next to two white tea cups - enduring symbols of Britishness." (2003: 189)

and the canteen area strikes him as a setting for *"the last supper"* (2003:190).

Following this poetic meditation on his experience of place Hennessey regains his composure and concludes the chapter with discussion of his archival investigations into roll-call lists of who would have been inhabiting this bunker and how civil servants he interviews consider that the War Plan would have operated in reality. Hennessey's poetic reverie in this place does not appear contrived - instead this change of stylistics suggests that, perhaps, these places can only be written of in imagistic language. Hennessey was accompanied by a photographer and his book includes photos of the visit. These photos follow the usual urbex semiotic conventions: an image of the nondescript surface structure; a rear view of the explorer (Hennessey at turnstile point of entry in helmet and fluorescent jacket); warning and other operational signs; derelict furniture; de-populated areas of activity (in this case the kitchens); remnants of occupation (a photograph of the aforementioned helmet and tea cups); light switches (with adjacent enticingly half open door); a long corridors (here the underground rail siding).

Given the generic design and content of ROC Posts account makers have their work cut out to produce either new (or better) images of the post than previous account writers of that place. It is also difficult to find something new to say between different Posts. The experienced ROC Post visitors do not seem bothered by this - they know what they are looking for as identifiers of a "good" Post, and tell the community when they find it (they also announce in equal detail when they find a *"minger"*). For sites that lie between these two extremes the convention is to focus on subtle variance. For example each Post had an allocation of "*Glitto*" branded powdered bleach and Government issue toilet roll. Accordingly the physical condition of the *Glitto* and/or the variation in toilet roll branding found at the site is a cause for remark and photograph. In one account the crescendo of the report is a photograph of *"naked Glitto!"*: a small tower of solidified powdered bleach left in place despite the decay of its surrounding wrapper.

In a thread discussing accounts of a Post abandoned in the 1968 round of Post closures there was mutually supportive chatter about how the site was one of the best '68 closure sites and the beauty of the surrounding views. Implicity the poster was thanked for bringing this beauty / good news to the forum members' attention. In such thread chatter there will be requests for clarification and general comment, thus:

"Really nice post that, love it. The second shot is great, is that the sea?" (**X15**)

Within this dialogue a clear framing of bunker aesthetics is formed – the extremes of well preserved and seriously degenerated bunkers are rendered noteworthy, clear (factual) descriptions are the subject of praise and stimulation of discussion.

4.2   DANGER AND IRONY IN URBEX

"Urban Exploring is an excellent hobby, as long as you are aware of the dangers and risks that coincide with it..." (**X5**)

Regular account posters exchange detailed information about 'danger' encountered at ROC Posts. But the 'danger' portrayed is often of a comic variety: *"nettle world", "stinging forest of death", "beware of the security ducks - they will chase you"*. It is allusional, black humor,that dwells upon the 'risk' of having narrowly escaped being attacked by a big spider, frisky cows, aggressive geese or vicious vegetation. In such references a jokey, but proud, account of physical accomplishment is being portrayed, an abjection-*lite*. In circumstances where more serious danger has been encountered – stumbling upon an IRA weapons cache, drug den, a former suicide scene, a sado-masochistic playroom, a tramp's lair or a hostile landowner the depiction is concise, and unsure of its narrative. For the repeat ROC Post visitor is not actually expecting such 'excitement'. This narrative constraint can only be understood in the context of the thrill, adventure and a visit-specific 'story' that is expected to be present in mainstream (i.e. non-ROC Post) urban exploration accounts. For example, an account of an asylum visit will be expected to feature an instance of an on-site encounter with the paranormal and or security guard. The jokey exaggeration of the peril posed by natural features in ROC Post accounts appears therefore as an intentionally ironic counterpoint to such standard urbex reporting tropes (for a specimen example of an Asylum urbex account written by a prominent ROC Post account writer see Figure 5 in Appendix Three,). It is as though the ROC Post account writers realise that these places are by comparison: rather uneventful, and have structured their accounting conventions accordingly. This analysis follows Goffman's technique of 'perspective by incongruity' (Hammersley & Atkinson 1983: 133) use of comparison between divergent forms of the same general social phenomenon (in his case total institutions).

In mainstream urbex the space hacking, the incursion / recreational trespass aspect is a key motivation, and a key narrative component. But with ROC Posts that drive recedes and the practice becomes a more technical challenge, as these posts are usually abandoned and in

remote, open countryside, thus often giving opportunity for unhurried attempted entry 'in plain site'. The access challenge becomes one of finding these places and then gaining access through specialist technical knowledge – as special ROC keys (which differ on a regional basis) may be needed. Hardcore participants devote much of their accounts to precise description of these access arrangements.

ROC Posts rarely pose the extremity of subterranean danger that may be sought out in sewer or rail tunnel incursion, Deyo (2009) portrays how such extreme urbex can be transcendental. Suffering a panic attack in a subway tunnel during the passing of a train, Deyo found that the experience:

> *"...heightened his senses, quickened and focused his mind. This narrowed scope, this rapt attention to the immediate threat, transforms the tunnel for [Deyo] as they make their way for the exit. Details that might otherwise have evaded him are sharply prominent: the weave of steam pipes along the damp concrete walls, the smell of axle grease and rat poison, the blazing red of the signal light. Everywhere he sees the approach of doom. This phenomenological shift is harrowing, but essential: it makes ordinary sneaks into urban explorers. The mind is no camera, no passive receptacle for sensory input. It is an active creator of perceived reality. The empiricism of the urban explorer, sharpened by the edge of terror, is a rich, focused record of the forbidden city. Sartre wrote, "For an occurrence to become an adventure, it is necessary and sufficient for one to recount it." Yes, recount the occurrence, but recount it in the vivid light of mortal fear."*

This quote also illustrates the cerebral (and reflexive) dimension of some quarters of the urban explorer culture – but such grand philosophising is unlikely to be encountered in ROC Post accounts. The experience of endangerment and survival certainly echoes Lyng's studies of Edgework, and it is a common trope of subterranean urbex, which, as we have seen earlier with Ross' commentary upon his nuclear shelter photographic shelters, has a 'birthing' aspect to it. As the voiceover to Fantinatto's (2005) documentary states:

> *"There's no better feeling than emerging into the light: it's like being reborn"*

However, not all appear to share Deyo's experience of the perceptual assistance of fear. For Smith, a journalist sampling underground urbex, the trauma of his squeeze into the subterranean complex that he was investigating, and his anxiety about his egress, *restricted* his ability to perceive the place he was in:

"I [could] think of little else, once I finally [entered] the quarry, and then for the hour or more that we spen[t] inside it, other than how the fuck I'm going to get out at the end of it." (2009: 251)

Deyo, elsewhere (Savchuk 2002), makes the point that experienced urban explorers are fully aware that urban exploration is dangerous - and that they freely choose the risks. Deyo counsels however (for the benefit of the uninitiated):

"No one should get involved thinking he or she will be safe. Urban exploration is unsafe."

Indeed, in its dealings with wider publics, urban exploration afficianados such as Ninjalicious (2005) are often at pains to warn off others. Indeed legalistic disclaimers, such as the following which appears at the start of Fantinatto's (2005) film are not uncommon:

"The activities portrayed in this program are presented for entertainment and educational purposes only. The producers urge you not to attempt to engage in any of the activities portrayed in this program."

Such warnings are unlikely to be intended as sincere rejections of all new participants - rather, they reflect an unease amongst publishers upon potential risk of liability should someone exposed to that introductory book or film come to harm. In similar vein disclaimers and warnings can variously be found in Cresswell (1991:21 – a book of watercolours of derelict county houses), Osborne (1994:10 – a military archaeological guide to former UK military structures in the landscape) and Manning (1996: 4 - a children's picture book about exploring a ruined house).

What is common, across urbex accounts, and whether its death defying risk taking or ironic encounters with cows, squeezing through confined spaces or simply getting muddy, urbex practioners find a role for such "suffering" within their accounts, often exhibiting a "pain=gain" equation, thus:

"Soon my [new] shoes were caked in mud, and my trousers soaked. I pressed on regardless, and the sight of the two solid shell-proof Type 24s [pillboxes] at the west end of the bridge, angled towards each other, with more [anti-tank obstacle] concrete blocks on the other side of the river, made the uncomfortable trek very worthwhile." (Foot 2007: 165)

In similar vein, Smith (2004: 358) describes how the lure of opportunity for exploration within everyday life had led him to ruin three suits. This opportunistic and compulsive aspect of bunkerology is reflected in the study group's tales of bunker incursions snatched during trips to weddings, family outings and work itineraries'. Such distraction is facilitated by datasets available

from urbex forums that will trigger a SatNav to announce proximity to a ROC post during any journey.

Discomfort, rather than danger as such, is the main occupational hazard of bunkerology – and the ROC Post accounts show a comradely competitiveness between bunker visitors, with those who will venture into flooded and burnt out Posts claiming a badge of honour over those who had recoiled from entering that particular site.

4.3   PRESENTATION OF THE SELF IN URBEX

Presentation of (and management of) the self becomes an important issue in urbex in two respects: firstly how the self is presented in the context of access to sites and secondly, how the self is presented in on-line accounts.

4.3.1   GAINING ACCESS TO BUNKERS

Urban explorers need to gain access to prohibited places and have evolved techniques for doing so. Care needs to be taken to consider the relative merits of disguise versus 'hiding in plain sight'. Savchuk (2002) quotes an experienced practitioner:

> *"The way to get people not to notice you is to be extremely visible. If you take a shiny yellow worker suit and put cones and a big sign around an area, the police will never question you. If you sneak around, the police will notice."*

Whilst another's preference is:

> *"We wear suits and sunglasses as camouflage."*

Through experience practitioners learn that in many situations attempting to hide will only increase suspicion. Given contemporary anxieties a lurking urbexer may be regarded as something else entirely, thus the following warning of misrepresentation:

> *'Post is located within a scouts adventure camp which is regularly full of children. Due to this it's best to ask permission from the friendly on-site staff before wandering around.'* (**X5**)

Meanwhile, Smith (2004: 355) found that a direct approach, one that offered up the contextualisation and deprecation of a more mild / socially understood pastime would secure him access to an abandoned underground control centre which happened to be located in a

former tram tunnel, by successfully approaching workmen with the following presentation of self:

> *"I'm a bit of a tram nut…mind if I have a walk around?"*

Smith then stretches the envelope (area and time) in order to perform there his more ambiguous aim. Likewise Foot (2007:161) counsels a conciliatory approach for his pillbox surveying forays. He describes taking advantage of pathways even if they are not rights of way, as:

> *"I doubt if anyone would object to you using it. If accosted, always follow the golden rule of apologising first, and pleading your case afterwards." (2007: 161)*

Smith (2009: 249) describes the practice of some bunkerologists of carrying evidence of their research findings, to show that they are cerebral trespassers. Yet , it would appear, such strategies are of mixed fortune. For, whilst Vanderbilt (2002), Hodge & Weinberger (2008) and Smith (2004; 2009) all take advantage of their press status to gain deeper penetration to the facilities they wish to inspect, Moore (2009) notes that he only gained permission to photograph within the Government 's current emergency bunker because his was an art project, rather than a journalistic one.

However access seeking is not always without bodily jeopardy. Whilst a direct request for access to the site owner may often be successful, it will not always be so. Access, in such a situation, may require more dangerous and destructive, physical strategies. Ross (2004:16) describes his inability to get Government permission to explore Russian nuclear shelters as part of his project, so:

> *"Moscow became a breaking and entering event for me…I went around with nameless associates, and we entered shelters with bolt cutters and Allen wrenches. We opened hatches, waited until patrols went past in the darkness, hid in bushes, then lowered ourselves twenty feet with ropes under buildings…[whilst] my poor wife was forced to sit in a hotel and wait and worry."*

4.3.2   IDENTITY MANAGEMENT IN URBEX FORUMS

Posters to urbex forums use aliases, accompanied by logos and, often, a motto line that is reproduced on each posting. Photographs posted within accounts rarely feature people – and if they do, faces will be obscured to prevent identification. On only a handful of images was this convention breached: in each case the visible explorers were noticeably younger looking than the

face obscured (and more experienced / serious sounding) posters. This practice reflects the 'grey area' (semi-clandestine) nature of urbex.

Choice of alias, logo and motto (as with any internet forum) is largely left as the free choice of the participant. Perhaps not surprisingly the chosen symbols reflect a certain cartoon-ish preoccupation – backed by mottos that in the main function either to show how adventurous, accomplished and/or erudite the participant is, as the following examples show:

Alias	Logo image	Motto
X5	Protect and Survive Leaflet	*'607 posts visited. 18 counties completed'*
X9	Man jumping	*'rockin' the estate'*
X16	Cartoon ghost	*'What would Scooby Doo do?'*
X17	A training shoe	*'And those who were seen dancing were though insane by those who could not hear the music' - Nietzsche*
X18	Cartoon Alien	*'I laugh in the face of danger, then hide until it goes away'*
X19	ROC Post Hatch	*'Still researching'*
X20	Kilroy was here picture	*'Walk in silence'*
X21	Cartoon cat	*'We are all part of history - only difference is we are still living our bit.'*

Because of the masking of personal identity within the urbex accounts profiling of the participants is difficult. Wilson (2003) however identifies shop workers, IT managers, accountants, delivery drivers, students and an airline pilot amongst his sample of practioners. A short thread of *28dayslater*, entitled "what do you do?" revealed the following occupational backgrounds of the participants who chose to post a response:

Sales advisor - telecoms	Engineer
Debt collector	Telecoms engineer
Supported living accommodation manger	Junk mail
Student	Photographer

The dozen Canadian urban explorers interviewed by Fantinatto (2005) in his documentary are all over 30 (at least half look over 40 with evidence of middle age spread), articulate and notably dull/normal looking. There is an air of nostalgia and fondness for the past (resistance to change) - yet these appear to be nostalgic modernists. They embrace the industrial, the mechanical, the manufactured as something to celebrate and the film wistfully mourns the passing of the factory-age modernist ethos of progress. Urbex pioneer 'Ninjalicious' (2005), was in real life, Canadian Jeff Chapman - a young white male, clean cut with (according to my Google images search) a fondness for rather bland jumpers.

The point here being that many practitioners (perhaps the majority) look more like nerds and/or railway buffs than teenage cyberpunk zombie-slayers.

4.3.3   REFLEXIVITY AND AWARENESS OF SELF

Even prior to rise of the internet, in its fanzines, Subterranea Brittanica newsletters and secret state research books urban exploration operated as a notably inter-textual sub-culture. It is, and appears always to have been, very self aware. Many blog sites offer up thorough reading lists (complete with ISBN numbers) citing erudite and arcane works of architecture, specialist history and archaeology. Such blogs are often reflective and self aware about how they, and urban exploration in general, are perceived - and keen to add their thoughts in response. Above all there is a defensive self-awareness - a realisation that urban exploration (in its various guises) is an obsessive, largely male and 'anorak' type pastime. There is a self-conscious realisation that this practice leans towards the obsessive:

> *"Now less than a year later I can't stop thinking about exploring, I've got to the stage where everything I do revolves around exploring and my fellow explorers."* (**X8**)

Woodward (2002), an art historian, in his erudite explanation of the cultural roots of the appeal of ruins, awkwardly describes his own ability to find aesthetic appeal within the contemporary ruin as "a perverse pleasure", believing that many may view this attraction as, at best, eccentric.

One urban explorer's blogsite presents a detailed bibliographic resource (**X11**) in order to *explain* (and implicitly justify / validate) his area of interest. Quoting a Guardian article on urban exploration (Wilson 2003) the blogger mildly chides Wilson for his conformity to urban exploration stereotypes:

> *"[Wilson]…did some homework - but the underlying representation of the urban explorer, bolstered by the graphic illustrations, was of an exclusively male group, a touchy geek, and unlikely to go anywhere without some weak lemonade drink."*

but then finds comfort (and validation) in Wilson's comment about the exalted areas of urban exploration, for in response to Wilson's view that:

> "Old military complexes and abandoned lunatic asylums are often considered to be the pinnacle of [Urban Exploration]."

The blogger quotes this approvingly with an effectively clipped closing line:

> *"Well, that's me then."*

This, in his blog's otherwise more deliberative style, appears to acknowledge, with satisfaction, both the accuracy of the statement (in the blogger's view) and pleasure on his part that his practice, and what he chooses to privilege within it, accords to (someone else's) cultural audit of what is the higher echelon of this pastime.

This concern for face saving can lead the urbex participator to complex differentiation of his practice from that of things that may appear very similar to the onlooker. Thus, amateur military archaeologists Lynch & Cooksley (2007: 14) recount with dread a story in which English Heritage's lead archaeologist on the (Government funded) Defence of Britain project was interviewed about his work only to find it featured in what the presenter called "Anorak Hour". They comment, with piqué, splitting sub-cultural hairs that others might well not notice:

> *"There is an assumption that anoraks who like military history are somehow inadequates who are excited by vicarious heroism. By contrast, oddly enough, young men who read any and every book about*

various SAS exploits and play at being soldiers on computer games, are regarded as perfectly normal."
(14)

4.3.4   RELATIONSHIP WITH FAMILY

Dedications to spouses in bunkerology publications often wryly attest to family tensions caused by the distractions of their practice:

> *"Above all I must thank my wife, who married me in 1973 despite her awareness of my subterranean obsession, and who has soldiered on with sterling fortitude ever since."* (McCamley 2005)

and

> *"*[to my wife] *for feigning interest in a variety of empty fields."* (Lynch &   Cooksley 2007)

Foot (2007:161) is wryly conscious of the need to work his fascination with wartime defence architecture around attractions for other family members. He suggests that family visits can target more traditional heritage attractions, so, then:

> *"you can build the Second World War defences onto the visit, without too much extra effort or upsetting any member of your party who is perhaps not as interested in concrete defence works as yourself."*

Yet it is clear that family members will on occasion join in. Accounts were spotted in which the visit was accompanied by the bunkerologists' wife, child and, in one case, mother in law. **X22**'s account of his visit to the Avebury ROC Post shows enthusiastic dog and wife appear to be in tow.

4.3.5   SO, IS URBEX A COMMUNITY / A SUB-CULTURE?

If a community must exist as an all embracing, exclusional, social form then urbex may struggle to be a community – but then no on-line forums or practices could be said to be community forming. However, applying a more limited definition of community as a support network in which a practice is celebrated / shaped and an attendant body of knowledge and approaches to understanding thus created (a culture) then it is. This study found ample evidence of interaction between forum members – an everyday mix of competitiveness and collaboration. Elders guide (and at times chastise or exclude) newer entrants who have yet to master the social conventions of these virtual 'meetings'. Most importantly, the participants believe that they are in a community – and that it supports their practice both in the virtual world (though the circulation

of accounts and testimonials) *and* in the real world – for practitioners arrange to meet and explore sites via the forum.

Sardar's (2000: 745) pessimistic (and dismissive) view that internet forums are all about taking and not giving – that they are "isolated, insatiable, individual desires feeding blindly upon each other's dismal projections" – cannot be sustained if the actions of those elders are examined, for in considering the accounts, and the feedback given upon them, it was clear that the 'elders' have little patience for those who take from the site without giving in equal measure. 'Flame wars' appear rare in the ROC Post forum – but where they arise at all they tend to result from newer members asking questions which the elders see as impertinent – impertinence being measured by a mix of the following:

- Could the new entrant have found the information out by using FAQs?

- Is the new entrant trying to make his life too easy for himself – is he lazily asking about a site rather than taking the trouble to go and visit it?

Unwillingness to help appears inversely proportional to the amount of postings, as oft repeated by **X9** in attempts (as moderator) to conclude a flame war:

> *"You're obviously not here for any reason other than to check up on other peoples posting, you don't have any reports to your name, so it's hardly a two way relationship is it? Either back off, or leave. "*

From this quote we see that the number of reports posted acts as cultural capital in the Bordieu sense (Eriksen 2001: 153) – the moderators will go to the aid of someone (or leave them to 'drown') dependent upon their recorded amount of participation.

Attempts to claim 'rights' over places that have been reported on are resisted by the forum. In one observed instance a junior member (rank is noted in the members' profile – and is controlled by the forum, rather than selected by the participant) objected to a (very lucid) account of an exploration of an operational building. The complainant's suggestion that 'I was here first – so you shouldn't report on or announce this place' was promptly 'flamed' by more senior members.

I contend that urbex does have an online 'community', one based around cultural stable interpretive codes and conventions for forum usage and the posting of 'valid' accounts. The circulation of conforming accounts reinforces the collectively ordained 'way of seeing' via the ability of forum members to denigrate or praise accounts (and to add to them).

Accounts are read, it appears, by members browsing sites (i.e. ROC Post locations) of interest to them and/or cross-searching in order to follow the postings of particular individuals. In that sense it is *writerly* (Smith 1998: 254) – the reader controls what he takes from this vast database. He explores it in a non-linear way, seeking out items of interest, yet the postings made by way of comment on posted accounts are conversational / celebrational: with some information sharing. They are not crudely instrumental. Relationships and face to face acquaintance are alluded to. Above all the act of accounting, for all its talk of surveying and research, gives participants an outlet for their endeavors, a 'place' to exchange and circulate their stories of accomplishment (a post-performance practice akin to 'fisherman's tales' or the '19th hole' in fishing and golf respectively). This forum is one which (with echoes of Lyng (1990) and edgework) give participants an opportunity to present their on-line selves as accomplished, and to accrue cultural capital within this community.

5. METHODOLOGICAL REVIEW

5.1 BUNKEROLOGY: DOES IT REALLY EXIST?

This may seem a strange question to raise at this stage, having spent 73 pages treating this cultural practice as real. Evidently there are people engaging in research about and exploration of bunkers. But how distinct is (what I have chosen to term bunkerology) within the urban exploration culture?

Within the study group there was little evidence of persons who might choose to call themselves bunkerologists and to distinguish themselves as apart from urbex. The majority of participants encountered in the study were clearly engaged in urbex in areas additional to bunkerology. Some had found bunkerology via urbex, others had widened their practice from bunkerology once that had become aware of the other types of places available to explore.

Therefore 'bunkerology' (remember – this was a term coined by me) is a fiction in the sense that I have chosen by that term to give an appeareance of something independent, existent and recognizable to participants. For an ethnomethodologist (Silverman 2006: 101) this would be an example of how imposing analytical categories upon the subject of study distorts the phenomenon by imposing meaning made by the researcher, rather than meaning given by the participants. But there is no deception, for I could only look at part of urbex, and the sub-genre I chose needed a convenient name.

The application of urbex to ROC Posts does appear to involve certain modifications – borne of the physical nature, location and abundance of ROC Posts. In that sense a bundle of meanings (or adjustments to mainstream urbex meanings and practices) appears to exist whether the members intend or are aware of that to be so.

5.2 WHAT CAN BUNKEROLOGY TELL US ABOUT OTHER FORMS OF URBEX?

For the reasons given above ROC Post bunkerology cannot be said to reveal the 'generic' essence of urbex. This was a case study of part or a heterogeneous whole. Motivations and meanings related to asylum urbex (for example) appear to be more aligned to the

psychogeographical, ghosts of place and adventure tropes, with an affinity to ghost hunting and suspense.

However, given that the urbex forums and participants studied are active in other forms of urbex this study can tell us in general terms about the motives, methods and meanings of urbex in general terms.

5.3   WHAT CAN ROC POSTS TELL US ABOUT BUNKEROLOGY?

Bunkerology is a sub-genre of urbex, but it is wider than ROC Post studies. At times my study has strayed into consideration of other aspects of bunkerology: World War Two pillboxes and coastal defences, Cold War regional government bunkers, command bunkers, deep shelters, ammunition stores, silos and test facilities – yet the differences in size, accessibility, frequency and embedded history would all have their subtle effects upon how 'bunkerology' might be practiced upon them (and the precise nature of the thrall in each case).

Focus upon ROC Posts has foregrounded the 'problem' of how to create meaning by successive visitation of small structures that are essentially generic in form and content. Here, micro-differentiation and the joy of the 'day out' (and the views) needs to be called in aid in the signification – much as train spotters must focus on the count (number of observations), the collection of series (of identifier names or numbers) and/or engagement with the minutiae of taxonomy and site-level variance.

5.4   MY RESEARCH AS AUTO-ETHNOGRAPHY

My study was not auto-ethnography – primarily it concerns my perception of 'others' (i.e. participants within urbex / bunkerology) (Reed-Danahay 1997: 2). This dissertation is this not about me, nor does it use my biography within this research as a primary mode of analysis.

However, in that it was necessary for me to immerse myself within this 'culture' and to learn its 'ways of seeing' (Berger 1972) I can (and should) reflect upon how my own limited experience of (sort of) being a bunkerologist for 12 months gives me insight into the orientations and experiences of those who I have been seeking to study.

As noted by Hammersley (1990), the narrative conventions of ethnographic accounting require the ethnographer to persuade the reader that he has attained his understanding through deep immersion, and ideally some adversity, that he has been (in Geertz's words):

"penetrated (or, if you prefer, having been penetrated by) another form of life, of having…truly been there." (1988: 4)

Whilst my study was 'desk-based' and did not involve active participation in bunkerologists' expeditions my attempts to immerse myself within the culture, the meaning framework of the practice, itself led to such penetration (both *of* and *by* me). Smith (2004:255) aptly describes the haunting effect of close and critical concentration upon underground phenomena that would normally remain unremarked:

> *"Discovering subterranean London meant exploring it, penetrating it. In turn, it was penetrating me, I realised, it was filling my thoughts."*

In my case rumination on bunkerology resulted in a heightened alertness to all potentially relevant things: my signification processes were altered. Every building passed, every manhole cover walked over, every family outing sparked thoughts of what places might lie beneath. In the psychogeographical style, occult connections emerged (and needed to be managed). Each odd shaped building was suggestive of a bunker in the basement, family members endured accretion of Daddy's bunker books, bunker films, bunker thoughts and bunker words. Family day trips incorporated surreptitious detours to bunkers. For my birthday my son presented me with a home-made, bunker themed birthday card. Other family members found themselves vicariously sensitised to detection of bunkers in the world they passed through.

Whilst this may score low in the annals of ethnographic adversity, this effect was tangible – necessary for my research, but a cause of friction too in its constant infiltration into 'normal life'. As my wife noted, with exasperation at one pinch point:

> *"Do you have to make <u>everything</u> part of your research project?"*

Though this process I experienced first hand the thrall of 'the bunker', the struggle to balance 'real world' perspectives and responsibilities against the obsessive pull of bunkerology – and the difficulty of balancing first hand immersion (in order to '*know*') and maintaining the 'stranger' perspective for analytical purposes (in order to '*understand*').

I was a lurker, I observed without participating. I gathered data from 'public' sources and then analysed it without reference to those from whom I took this information. I did not need to reveal my existence to those I was studying – but should I have?

One way to answer this question would be from the point of *validity* – to argue that because I did not interfere in what I was observing my study has good 'ecological validity'. I have not distorted the phenomenon under study by becoming part of the phenomenon itself. I could have been a nuisance if I had sought to actively reveal my presence. I believe there are pros and cons – fairly evenly balanced on this point.

A contrary view would argue that 'failure' to engage with the participants means that I have missed the opportunity to have them explain their practices and interpretations to me. I'm not convinced that this is a fatal weakness: I have studied what this community circulates. I have seen and used (only) that which any other curious passer-by might find on the internet and potentially thereby become inducted by it into the urbex community.

I took the decision at the outset that I would confine my lurking to the publically accessible areas only. I did not become a forum member – and therefore did not have access to the 'members' area' (and cannot comment on what content and practices lie there). There were ethical reasons for this. I propose, as follow up, to undertake research on how owners of sites which are targeted by urban explorers perceive this practice. Accordingly I did not want to acquire information from these forums which would render my future research into the 'other side' ethically complex. In short, I did not wish to cross the line between 'lurker' and 'spy'.

In preparing this dissertation I have ebbed and flowed on the question of whether or not to name the sources that I have used. I am aware that the status of on-line information does not fall neatly into the public vs private dichotomy, and I am thus aware that there are different schools of thought on the question of whether undisclosed 'lurking' in 'public' areas of the internet is ethical or not.

However I am influenced by the Association of Internet Researchers' 2002 ethical policy's suggestion that:

> *"the greater the acknowledged publicity of the venue, the less obligation there may be to protect individual privacy, confidentiality, right to informed consent, etc."* (AOIR 2002: 5)

I incline to the view that where information is posted by adults in a context that clearly provides that it will remain present in that forum indefinitely and in a manner open to public viewing by anyone, then such 'data' is public-domain and cannot meaningfully be treated as private or sensitive. The analogy is surely that of letters to newspapers. In such print media such items would unquestionably be regarded as public domain. I accept that chat-room postings may have a more private nature and tone, but collated urbex visitation accounts posted by persons who have joined a forum and who realize that the forums reason for existence is to circulate (and generate debate on) site reports is closer to that 'in print' analogy. I was drawn to the robust defence of this 'the world is now this way' approach of Pollock (2009) – who named the sources and individual posters in his study of white supremacist web forums.

However, on balance I have chosen to give the observed urbex webforum participants reference numbers (**X1 – X44**) thus replacing the aliases they already use for their own postings: thus in AOIR 2002 terms a "double pseudonym" (6) approach. Clearly, by using stable aliases in their postings the participants become trackable (if perhaps still not traceable) by the occurrence of their alias. Inventing alternative aliases was considered (to render the participant descriptions more in keeping with the styles and motifs of urbex) – however I soon realized that in doing so I might inadvertently assign other participants' identities to these 44 participants.

I have chosen to render these individuals anonymous simply because reference to these individuals' names (or chosen aliases) is not necessary for the purposes of this report. Some individuals have remained identifiable however – these are urban explorers (or similar) who are 'in print' and/or appear figurehead 'personalities' on the scene. I suspect, but would have to engage with the participants to prove this, that many of the participants would be ambivalent or pleased to have their words and deeds referenced in my dissertation, for the nature of accounting is that it is about promotion of the social self through promulgation of accomplished performances. To present the words without the names may thus be denying the credence that would attach by 'naming' the performer. However, mention in a Masters Dissertation is little to get excited about.

The AOIR draw an interesting distinction between participants as *subjects* and study of their accounts as authors – I am studying the participants' texts, not them per se. For the AIOR (2002: 7) a greater likelihood of a duty of confidentiality and sensitivity arises in relation to 'subjects' rather than their 'texts' – however given that the accounts here describe activities

undertaken by specific people, activities which have an uncertain legal status, erring on the side of caution is probably best.

I do intend after this dissertation has been submitted to supply a copy to the moderator of the *28dayslater* ROC Post forum, and invite him to upload it as a resource / talking point for the forum members. Any feedback that I then get back will help me reflect upon how my and their interpretations of their practices align and will provide some '*respondent validation*' (Hammersley & Atkinson 1983: 195). However in doing so I would not privilege (or denigrate) the epistemic status of participants own interpretations – just because someone were to disagree with my analysis does not automatically invalidate my interpretation of their accounts and testimonials, but broad acceptance would suggest increased validity.

6. CONCLUSION

6.1 MAKING SENSE OF URBAN EXPLORATION

My aim in the write up of this study has been to show that urban exploration, at least in how it is practised in the field of bunkerology, has its own cultural logics – it is a practice conducted and referenced to a specific matrix of signification practices. It is thus meaningful rather than meaningless.

These signification processes are shaped by a mix of influences: video games, horror and war films, popular archaeology, nostalgia and aesthetic tropes drawing from both 19th century Romanticism and Empiricism. These influence all shape how abandoned bunkers are rendered 'meaningful' within this sub-culture – for the forums to which accounts of visits to such places are posted operate to define and to channel legitimate (and illegitimate) representations. As such, these webs sites enable us to witness the workings of an interpretive community (Fish 1980) – one that is specifically concerned with the "reading" of these abandoned portions of the built environment.

The study has also shown how bunkerology cannot be understood in isolation from wider urban exploration practice, for the participants move freely between the sub-genres of place type and theme and in doing so adjust the emphasis within (what appear to be) fairly stable framework conventions for urbex account-making. ROC Post accounts cannot foreground the variety of form between the places visited or the adversity of exploration, for unlike derelict factories or asylums these are empty, small and uniform places. However these standard urbex accounting conventions are still honored as secondary features in ROC Post accounts. This is achieved by finding significance in minor deviation detected in the systematic inspection of each Post (e.g. the condition of the powdered bleach tubes) and embracing the seriality of these structures. The (relative) absence of danger is addressed via ironic exaggeration of minor dangers (e.g. nettles) and achievement (and its attendant social capital) is defined around the proficiency of the accounting, the number of ROC Posts visited and the locating and physical penetration of these structures, rather than in depiction of 'cat and mouse' adventures within the places themselves.

Perhaps of greatest surprise is the low level of influence that appears to be played by 'nuclear nostalgia' – for whilst this factor is evident in the bunkerology of McCamley (2007), Vanderbilt

(2002), Helms (2007), Hodge & Weinberger (2008), Moore (2008) and Ross (2004) it rarely appears in the studied ROC Post urban exploration accounts.

This dissertation largely draws upon cultural theory perspectives in order to offer an explanation of *"why"* this practice exists. Through outlining the link to ruin aesthetics it has been shown that the recreational engagement with ruins is not a new development. It has cultural pedigree and exerts a powerful shaping force in popular visual culture. Drawing from Auge (1995), de Certeau (1988 & 1998), Simmel (2009), Benjamin (Gilloch 1997), Edensor (2005) and Urry (2002) we have seen how urban exploration can be interpreted as a manifestation of "the erotics of knowledge" (de Certeau 1998: 92), a drive in post-industrial consumer society for the personal accumulation of knowledge and experience of chosen points of focus. Through specialization upon the arcane (or banal depending on your own signification of the phenomenon in question) identity and social capital are formed in the act of meaning making and circulation of accounts. By such a process alienation is resisted: for life is made to seem exciting and/or purposeful at least in leisure hours.

In the diagram *"My Hermeneutic Journey"* (page 17), I attempted to plot the path of my own research – my own route to "making-sense" of the subject of my study. In doing so I sought to render transparent my own subjectivity and to indicate its effect upon the path, and conclusions, of my research. The trajectory shows a complex weaving between different 'layers' and forms of culture. Necessarily I have interrogated books, images, films, video games, academic monographs and physical places. In doing so I have journeyed back and forth between 'high' and 'low' culture and 'old' and 'new' media. I have thereby found that urban exploration exists not solely in the new media world of the internet – but rather it is an assemblage of tropes, influences and conventions spread more widely across the cultural spectrum, its interpretive community draws organically (though not in all cases knowingly) from a broad interpretive repertoire. Accordingly I conclude that the internet has not created urban exploration – but it has helped it to develop as a cohesive interpretive community.

6.2   RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

This study has scratched the surface of a much bigger set of issues, some of which I would like to address in future studies:

1. How do ruin owners' make sense of urban exploration upon their sites?

2. How (specifically) do urban explorers perceive and manage risk within their practice? – whilst danger in ROC Post exploration is largely ironic, real (physical) danger is present in other variants of urbex (for example crane climbing).

3. What influence does English literary psychogeographical writing actually have upon the performance and popularity of urban exploration?

4. Are there signs that urban exploration is being incorporated (i.e. provided for) by more mainstream outlets – like amateur archaeology, theme tours, open-days, fiction and video games?

5. What is the role of formative childhood experiences in shaping adult urbex behavior – specifically how much of an impact do childhood adventure fiction and/or video games actually have?

Finally, I have also come to progressively realise that much of the manner of on-line identity and discourse in urbex web forums is likely to be shaped by generic web-forum etiquette, which in part is pre-structured by the ways in which web forum software arranges and channels this form of communication. For example, the use of aliases on-line is widespread across web forums and forum server software favours a structured ordering of postings and accounts. Thus, neither features are unique to urbex and their significance in bunkerology should therefore not be overstated. The influence of these generic structuring factors in the organization of on-line identity and the ordering of information generation in web-forums is an issue requiring wider investigation in order to determine the extent to which such factors pre-shape the operation of interpretive communities. Such a mechanism recalls Bordieu's definition of *habitus* as: "the durably installed generative principle of regulated innovation" (in Eriksen 2001: 91).

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APPENDIX ONE – URBEX TESTIMONIALS

X4

I have been exploring for over two years, although I've been poking around old buildings for most of my life. For me Urban Exploration means many things, but it's the history and culture that counts most. I am simply astounded at how much history is lost in this country every week, and how little it is recorded for the people who worked there, and more importantly, their children. I always think it's a race against time to go and see and photograph these places before they are gone forever. It's about the challenge, about seeing something that most will never see and overall a child like curiosity.

X5

I've been exploring for a good 2-3 years, although in the last 12 months its become a weekly thing, I've been going down World War 2 shelters and tunnels most of my life, starting as a kid with my grandfather. Although underground and ex-military sites are my favourite, I also enjoy exploring disused asylums and hospitals. The forum's, in particular 28days later have been great to help people push their boundaries more, and meet new people and find new locations. Urban Exploring is an excellent hobby, as long as you are aware of the dangers and risks that coincide with it, I've seen some amazing locations, met top people and made some great friends.

X8

I found out about exploring from a link that was on a car forum, that link led me to the 28dayslater forum. Now less than a year later I can't stop thinking about exploring, I've got to the stage where everything I do revolves around exploring and my fellow explorers. Exploring gives you the opportunity to see things you'd never normally see, it's like seeing all six sides of the dice instead of just the regular three.

X9

I go by the name "[X9]". I explore the places I do, to see things that other's don't, to experience things that other's don't and to witness history and document these places before they are long forgotten. I consider the photography a very large part of why I explore, and the love of photography has made me want to explore more and more impressive places. The UK has so many places to go and see, I'll be busy for a while yet.

This website is a temporary website for me to showcase my photography the long forgotten side of the countries architecture. The galleries shown on this site have pictures taken purely by myself. The explorers were undertaken with the upmost respect for the buildings. I, nor any of the people I have met whilst doing this have ever stolen, or broken their way into a building.

For me, I look for new sites because I want to see, and witness history before its too late, to get to the highest part, to see the views that no-one else see's and the experience what no others experience. Hopefully my photographs show this. My Photographs are both of derelict/abandoned sites, and also of live sites such as construction sites and alike.

X10

I've always been interested in old and hidden places and got into UE through exploring ROC posts and while looking for information on them found the darkplaces forum. I love all kinds of places especially heavy industry and military sites and it's great to uncover the small personal things left behind after a once thriving establishment has closed down. Exploring brings me closer to a rich social history and there is a huge opportunity for photography which is another key part of the experience.

X22

I started off exploring WW2 bunkers, then gradually got interested in the Cold War relics. That got me in touch with the usual suspects, and since then, I take in all the aspects of UE, from the smallest bunker to the largest factory or hospital. I've had some good times with good people, and some adrenalin-fuelled nerve-busting ones as well. It's all good.

X23

I've been exploring for just under 2 years, but that short time has taken me all over the country looking at all sorts away from the public eye. I've met many great people and formed good friendships with a lot of them. Known for crazy antics exploring, or socially, I'm totally hooked!

X24

My first memorable explore was Atlantic coast defences in France with my dad, aged about 14. More recently I started exploring out of interest and curiosity, eventually looking on the web for like-minded people. Nearly a year on and I've met some amazing people, been to awesome places to explore and seen some incredible things. For me it's about exploring the unknown and seeing things I wouldn't otherwise see in daily life. Whether it's a high tower crane or a WW2 deep shelter, I always feel compelled to give things a go.

X25

After stumbling around the web I came across the forum 28dayslater... Just what I had been looking for! A place to express my love for history and my passion of photography. Welcomed into a group of awesome characters and never looked back... The whole experience of UE, ticks all the boxes... from the research, the recce, the infiltration, the buzz... down to the photographic documentation of a site. It all adds to a more interesting life!

X26

My exploring started towards the end of 2003 with an interest in "Park Prewett" my local asylum, I was going to check it out and that was that, none of this running all over the place every weekend "that's just sad". Now almost 4yrs later I have 1000s of extra miles on my car, and have explored everything from caves to tower cranes and have explored in 5 mainland European countries, but best of all have met a great bunch of people.

X27

A couple of years ago I stumbled upon pictures of a Asylum called Manteno in the US and wondered if there were any surviving over here ...... from then on I have been hooked! Been to some amazing places and met some great people along the way .... long may it continue

GROUP 2 – FROM BLOGSITES AND WEBSITES SET UP TO SHOWCASE AN INDIVIDUAL'S UNDERSTANDING OF AND ENGAGEMENT WITH URBEX

X7

For as long as I can remember I've been fascinated by old and derelict buildings. Indeed one of my earliest memories was being intrigued by a fire damaged derelict vicarage when visiting my best friend Alan when he lived near Bolton ... I was four at the time! Similarly throughout my childhood on our annual holidays to the Lake District I spent many a happy hour exploring old mines and the like. The interest has never gone away, and so for example when we stumbled across a derelict residential home called The Malms whilst walking near Shawford about 7/8 years ago I was again fascinated and spent ages researching its history. I kept meaning to go back and have a better look but then, like too many interesting places, the builders moved in.

However, in the last couple of years a few things have changed. Firstly, I've got increasingly into digital photography, and spent many a happy hour photographing English Heritage sites and the like. Secondly, I discovered that I wasn't alone in this fascination with dereliction and recording the atmosphere through

photography, and that there was a significant group of people who liked exploring and photographing what they saw ... the world of Urban Exploration. Old hospitals, factories, military sites and all sorts in between.

So recently, I've been giving my growing passion for Urban Exploration more time. I've many friends who are remarkable explorers and photographers and seem to spend every waking moment (or more often than not the moments in the middle of the night when they really should be sleeping) exploring diverse places. I've not got the time in my busy family life to do that, but I do take the occasional opportunity to take a long lunch, or perhaps come the "long way" to work to do a wee bit of exploring. Also, I've discovered that I'm not alone in this interest since my gorgeous wife...is fascinated too (well, as long as it's not "boring" military stuff), and so there have been occasional family explorations where it's been safe to do so.

What frustrates me though is that I didn't act on my fascination and have the guts to start doing this years ago! The number of unique sites that have now gone, or have been converted into soulless flats, annoys the hell out of me!

Conflicting concerns abound too! Dereliction requires prolonged desertion; prolonged desertion requires a lack of interest from a site's owner; a lack of interest invariably allows vandalism, arson and theft of materials to occur; we abhor this damage, but ultimately it increases the rate of the dereliction that we enjoy! An <u>absolute</u> point of principle for Urban Explorers is that we don't break into sites and <u>always</u> use open access routes (even if they may require some inventive climbing or squeezing through gaps); yet we profit from the vandals who do smash open buildings since they create open access routes for us to use! We'd like to see better care and security shown to important sites; yet the security guard is often our exploring nemesis! We'd like to see sites preserved and reused; but after years of neglect key hospital sites are now being sold off, only to be demolished to make way for more boxy houses.

X11

I was always in-and-out of derelict houses, old bomb shelters, river culverts and tunnels as a child and never really grew out of it. When I discovered various urban exploration sites on the Internet in the late 1990s, I realised it was something I missed and started sneaking in and out of derelict buildings again. I'm driven by mainly by curiosity. What's in that old building? What was it built for? Who worked there? Why was it designed in this form? Why did it close? I turn these transitional sites into temporary museums where the price of admission is guile, agility and courage. Therefore I've experienced being in various locations which I would never have been able to: anything from old lunatic asylums through to top-secret military installations.

Postmodern ramblers tired of the rural scene? Or overcurious trespassers? Whatever….This site is about the infiltration of derelict structures in the UK. Enter if curious. We do.

X28

*[**X28**] is a website dedicated to the interest that two brothers share in the social history that surrounds them, the great outdoors and music that accompanies them on their journeys. At the centre of this site is their interest in the derelict, abandoned, or converted buildings that dot the landscape of Great Britain and are often ignored by the public that pass them by. Where possible history, accounts and stories are written for each location to bring to life the forgotten memories of the institutes and establishments that the modern world has turned its back on and left to decay.*

X29

I became interested in the UK Civil Defence for the Cold War, as a result of working as a engineer for 'Post Office Telephones' later privatised and renamed 'British Telecom'. Between 1978 and 1981 I maintained the early warning equipment and visited ROC posts in part of North Northamptonshire and South Leicestershire.

I was very inquisitive and discovered many things such as government centres that at the time were not common public knowledge. During holidays, I travelled around the local area tracing civil defence radio links, a full account of my exploits is given on this site [top navigation tabs: Detail / Radio / My Hunt for Masts].

At the time I never disclosed this information even to my closest friends. Now Twenty years have passed, the Cold War has ended and with the Internet we have a good medium to disseminate the details. I hope you find this site interesting and would be pleased to receive feedback.

X30

I make my own historical documentaries. Heavily featured are disused railways, but there are also abandoned industrial areas, run-down piers, ruined mental asylums, wartime bunkers, floods, sewers and a host of other obscurities. Basically, anywhere that is awkward for Joe Public to access, that's where you'll find me, making a documentary. I originally went under the wire of all these odd places with my camera purely for my own entertainment, but then decided to share what I found with the world at large and was frankly surprised and delighted at the reception. The idea is to get a snapshot in time of what these curious, sometimes forbidding

places look like. As they change I will probably go back and film them some more. It's really about preserving history. Capturing a view that may soon change and be lost forever if it isn't preserved in some way.

	Common Visual Tropes in Industrial & Asylum Urban Exploration Photography (e.g. after Fantinatto (2005); Edensor (2005) and industrial and asylum accounts on *28dayslater*)	Visual Tropes found in ROC Post accounts on *28dayslater* forum	Visual Tropes found in classical ruin aesthetics (e.g. after Beny & Macaulay 1977; Creswell 1991)
Theme	**Example**	**Present?**	**Present?**
Nature breaking though	Re-vegetation - weeds, animals and birds, snow	Re-vegetation – weeds, nettles, animals and birds.	Re-vegetation – weeds, animals, birds and flooding.
Architectural atmospherics	Contours & textures; sun beams / shadows; building as skeleton or hulk	Hatch apparatus in profile against horizon, views into and out-from hatch ladder shaft.	Contours and textures; sun beams / shadows; pillar as lonely remnant.
Dilapidation	Collapsed elements; debris; cracks	Decay of cement fabric of ROC Post, rusting of metalwork.	Collapsed elements; debris; cracks
Decay	Dripping water, flooded floors	Blockage of hatch shaft; flooded room.	Dripping water, flooded floors
Broken / disordered facilities	Strewn paper / broken dials	Strewn paper; disordered furniture; graffiti; fire damage.	Strewn engraved stone

	Common Visual Tropes in Industrial & Asylum Urban Exploration Photography (e.g. after Fantinatto (2005); Edensor (2005) and industrial and asylum accounts on *28dayslater*)	Visual Tropes found in ROC Post accounts on *28dayslater* forum	Visual Tropes found in classical ruin aesthetics (e.g. after Beny & Macaulay 1977; Creswell 1991)
Traces of human presence	Particularly drinks bottles/ cans	Paperwork, posters, monitoring equipment, powdered bleach tins and government issue toilet roll	Inscriptions, worn flagstones
Height / depth	Roofs, gantries, pits	View up and down access shaft	Vaulted ceilings, pillars, recesses
Dirt	Particularly dirt in wash basins	Particularly dirt in chemical toilet,	Dust, sand, broken tiles
Materiality	Machinery / metal/chains	Hatches, lids, ladders, monitoring devices	Stone, doors, grilles.
Passageways, doors, tunnels, stairways	Particularly if dark of with light at the end	View up and down access shaft	Particularly if dark of with light at the end
Incongruent items	Abandoned cars, toys, chairs in odd places	Yes – noted when found.	Grazing livestock, tourism.

	Common Visual Tropes in Industrial & Asylum Urban Exploration Photography (e.g. after Fantinatto (2005); Edensor (2005) and industrial and asylum accounts on *28dayslater*)	Visual Tropes found in ROC Post accounts on *28dayslater* forum	Visual Tropes found in classical ruin aesthetics (e.g. after Beny & Macaulay 1977; Creswell 1991)
Signs and remnants of ordered space	Particularly if shown ironically or de-powered	Yes – but less likely to be shown as ironically depowered, because bunkerologists tend to venerate the place they photograph	Yes – but likely to be shown as de-powered through physically collapse of columns or statues rather than ironically via the incongruent.
Violence to building	Vandalism, graffiti, war damage	Vandalism is shown – and is decried	Graffiti (ancient in particular); war and pillage damage
Ornamentalism	Statutary; building detail	Equipment is foregrounded, if present.	Statutary, building detail, tilework and inscriptions.
Whole building	Panorama; vista; facade	Yes – often set in panorama of the surrounding countryside	Panorama; vista; facade

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This image was removed for copyright reasons.

FIGURE 3 – SPECIMEN ROC POST ACCOUNT BY A SENIOR ROC POST EXPLORER

Featuring select annotations to show common accounting conventions. Not the relative paucity of textual description in the account compared to the comprehensive photographic depiction.

(NB. Some editing of content to suit confines of a printed page).

28dayslater - The UK UE Urbex Urban Exploration Forums.

UK Urban Exploration Forums > UE Site Reports and Discussions > ROC Posts

Archived Report - Cuckfield ROC Post - Sussex - 27.01.08

User Name | User Name | Remember Me?

Password | | Log in

Register   FAQ   **Donate**   Members List   Calendar   Today's Posts   Search

Thread Tools

#1

January 27th, 2008, 19:48

Alias – usually cryptic – in this case ironically referencing fearfulness

turkey

Est. Oct 2005

Use of emoticon – knowing wink

Join Date: Oct 2005

Location: Nuneaton

Posts: 1,321

Jeopardy, ironic danger of dirt and defilement; declared evidence of commitment / obsessiveness

Cuckfield ROC Post - Sussex - 27.01.08

Visited yesterday on the way to a wedding 😉 So I was in all my wedding clobber, which was fun.

Really nice little post, it looks open but is locked on the t-bar mechanism. Relocked on departure.

I've never seen so many tommy cooker tins ever!

Heading conforming to taxonomic conventions for this site

Logo – usually cartoon like in image or activity

Aesthetic sense of quality in ROC Post evaluation

Concern with access, security and protection of the ROC Post

109

Finding something unusual (noteable) to report; focus upon artifacts/material culture

Explorer shown present – as sign of accomplishment – but with identity obscured by the account poster
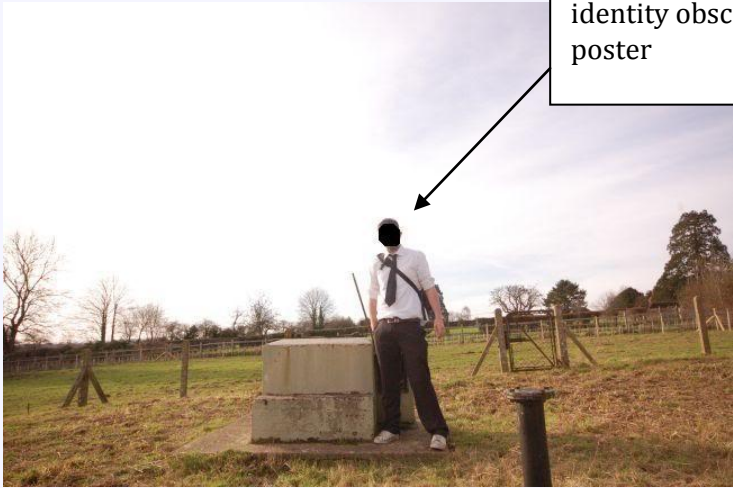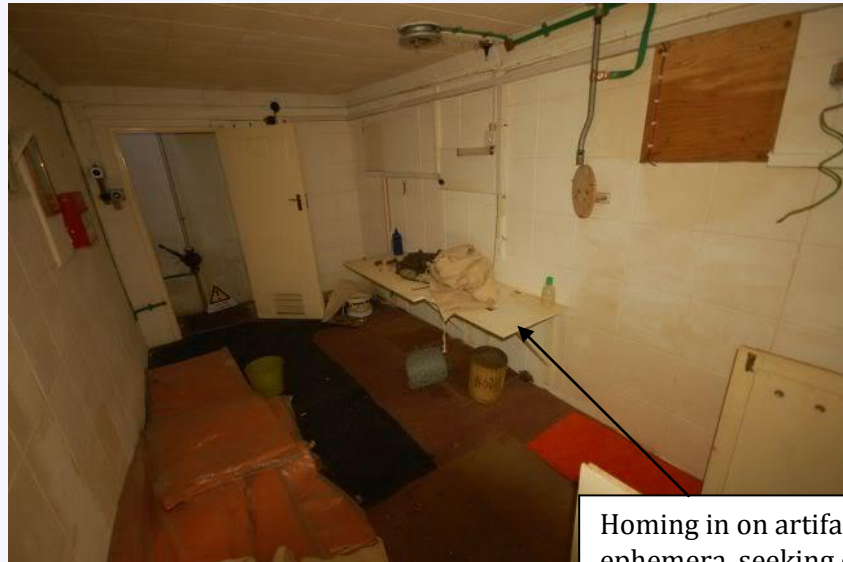

Surface view – little to see of these places, above ground. Images of doors, gates are a common ruin trope.
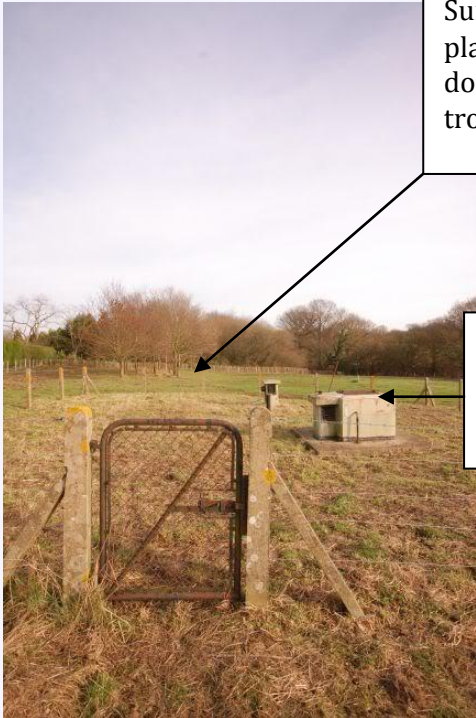
Hatch entrance (vertical ladder well beneath hatch cover)

A picture to address the "what stuff is still here / how complete a specimen is THIS site?" question

Homing in on artifacts and ephemera, seeking out signs of adapted / personalized habitation: ghosts of the place

Homing in on artifacts and ephemera, seeking out signs of adapted / personalized habitation: ghosts of the place

These are the "Tommy Cookers" noted in the textual account as noteworthy / unusual

"Glitto" brand standard issue powdered bleach. The condition of this staple item are a standard image for the orderliness / degeneration of a ROC Post

turk

turkey

View Public Profile

Visit turkey's homepage!

Find all posts by turkey

Closed
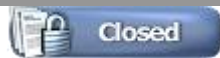
Links to further information about the account poster and status information about the viewer (i.e. the extent to which they have permission to participate in the forum). Note reference to 'Forum Rules'. This study confined itself to the public area of this forum site – membership was not sought so as to avoid inadvertent acquisition of confidential information about participants.

Tags

cuckfield, post, roc, sussex

Posting Rules

You **may not** post new threads

You **may not** post replies

You **may not** post attachments

You **may not** edit your posts

BB code is **On**

Smilies are **On**

[IMG] code is **On**

HTML code is **Off**

Forum Rules

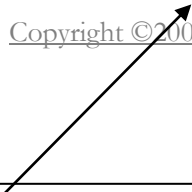Links to other posted accounts of previous inspections, by other forum members, of this and/or nearby ROC Posts

Similar Threads

Thread	Thread Starter	Forum	Replies	Last Post
Archived Report - Cuckfield ROC post - Sussex Group- 09/01/08	**[X31]**	ROC Posts	0	January 11th, 2008 23:59
Archived Report - Billingshurst ROC Post, Sussex - 21/11/07	**[X32]**	ROC Posts	1	November 22nd, 2007 16:40
Archived Report - Cuckfield ROC Post- Sussex Group - 6-10-07	**[X5]**	ROC Posts	0	October 12th, 2007 14:33
Archived Report - Cuckfield ROC Post - Sussex Group - Sept 2007	**[X33]**	ROC Posts	0	September 10th, 2007 18:48
Archived Report - Steyning ROC Post no 46, Sussex Group - 28-05-07	**[X5]**	ROC Posts	0	May 28th, 2007 17:52

All times are GMT. The time now is 15:58.

The 28dayslater forums (of which ROC Posts are but one) use a standard software architecture, one which is found in similar form in a variety of non-urbex related forums. This architecture also triggers the display of small text adverts adjacent to the content copied here: those adverts often operate on fairly basic word matching, thus searching for "bunkers" within this architecture will throw up links to adverts for coal bunkers, oil barges and golfing ware.

FIGURE 4 – SPECIMEN ROC POST DISCUSSION THREAD

Here the posters collectively identify the origin of the identified graffiti and collectively opine the state of this ROC Post

styru

View Public Profile

Find all posts by X34

#**3**

April 2nd, 2009, 13:14

[**X35**]

28DL Junior Member

Join Date: Oct 2008

Posts: 49

Re: Avebury ROC Post - Wiltshire Group April '09

Quote:

Originally Posted by [**X34**]

Don't you just love it when grafiti writers try (and, in this case, totally fail) to be clever

.

Physical evidence that some, seen as 'other' to this urbex community, are motivated to enter the ROC Post by video game culture – *Half Life* (like many games) involves post-apocalyptic fight for survival within confined spaces

Looks like they're fans of Half-life.

Its a pity, until relatively recently this post was in good condition and complete with the comms equipment and

Teletalk. At least the Glitto has survived. Nothing can destroy the Glitto. 😁

Quote

The ever present ironic preoccupation with the state of the powdered bleach canisters – as a cipher for the condition of the ROC Post as a whole

[X35]

View Public Profile

Visit X35's homepage!

Find all posts by X35

#4
April 2nd, 2009, 15:32

	[X36] 🔵		Join Date: Aug 2008
	28DL Junior Member		Location: Medway
			Posts: 96

Re: Avebury ROC Post - Wiltshire Group April '09

thats suxs what happened to the hatch

Quote

X36

View Public Profile

Visit X36's homepage!

Find all posts by X36

Status information – to tell other members of the forum what length and depth of association has been achieved with this community

#5
April 2nd, 2009, 15:59

| | [X19] 🔵 | | Join Date: Aug 2007 |
| | Still researching | | Posts: 125 |

Post - Wiltshire Group April '09

Here the member chooses to align his urbex specifically with ROC Posts as the image is of a ROC Post ventilation stack. The 'still researching' motto ties into the secret state research (or archaeology) dimension of urbex

117

so its now a silo LOL

Love the way they try and sound clever with the E=MC2 business too

Quote

#**6**

April 2nd, 2009, 16:18

[**X18**] ◯
28DL Junior Member

Join Date: Jul 2007

Location: Stourbridge , West Mids

Posts: 30

The postings show how the community work out the meanings of the graffiti (which requires an acquaintance with the *Half Life* game), and how they then seek to belittle *these* incursionists and *their* practices.

Re: Avebury ROC Post - Wiltshire Group April '09

Quote:

> Originally Posted by X19 ▸
>
> *so its now a silo LOL*
>
> *Love the way they try and sound clever with the E=MC2 business too*

It's a load of quotes from the game "Half Life" that they have painted on the walls.

Surpisingly this hasn't deteriorated any more since I looked at it a couple of years back.

_____

Implicitly a claim to prior experience and/or lasting interest in / monitoring of this site

"I laugh in the face of danger , then I hide until it goes away"

Quote

118

#7

April 2nd, 2009, 17:12

turkey ⬤

Est. Oct 2005

Join Date: Oct 2005

Location: Nuneaton

Posts: 1,321

Ironic alias and motto – each alluding to timidity / fearfulness

Re: Avebury ROC Post - Wiltshire Group April '09

Quote:

> Originally Posted by X39 ⏭
>
> *thats suxs what happened to the hatch*

Please don't text speak mate, makes you sound like a moron 😊👍
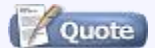
Quote

Moderator intervenes to chide junior member for use of text speak in posting – because it makes the poster appear less than erudite

turkey

View Public Profile

Visit turkey's homepage!

#8

April 2nd, 2009, 23:07

CAVEAT EMPTOR

[**X37**] ⬤

28DL Junior Member

Join Date: Feb 2008

Posts: 36

Re: Avebury ROC Post - Wiltshire Group April '09

An outward opening toilet door never seen one of those before!

Quote

An illustration of the preoccupation with identifying any 'non-standard' feature within these generic, pattern built, places

119

#**9**

April 3rd, 2009, 19:32

[**X38**]

I blow you kisses.

Join Date: Aug 2008

Re: Avebury ROC Post - Wiltsh

Quote:

Originally Posted by **X5**

A Teletalk is a specialized telephone unit which would originally have been present in each ROC Post. The presence (or absence) of this item is also a cipher for how well preserved the site is. Here the question is presented as a way of showing knowledge and serious engagement with review of anothers' account and a desire to establish the *precise* condition of the Post, and in part it may be a rhetorical device (showing the questioner's knowledge of what such a term means, and an ability to spot something in the photos that others have missed).

is that blue thing the teletalk? probably not im just using a very small screen here so i cant see it properly.

shame it's so trashed, nice work though.

This, in context, is praise for the account rather than praise for the graffiti

Call it, friend-o.

#**10**

April 3rd, 2009, 19:52

[X20] ⊙

MonkeyMan,Leveller,Expl..

Join Date: Jan 2007

Location: Hope Street

Posts: 311

Re: Avebury ROC Post - Wiltshire Group April '09

any shots of the stones? i allways rember going to the stones as a kid, being a new age traveller n that 😎

Police and Thieves...

On its face it's impossible to know whether this is ironic or an actual indication of a prior engagement with the stone circle as a new age traveller. It does, however, reveal that wider 'good day out' trope, in which this community likes occasionally to pause and enjoy more conventional aesthetic foregrounding

FIGURE 5 – A SPECIMEN *28DAYSLATER* ASYLUM ACCOUNT

To show the contrast in accounting conventions – it is only through seeing this more elaborate and stylistic form of urbex accounting that the irony inherent in the 'pared down' taxonomic style of ROC Post accounting can be understood.

NB: This account was prepared by Turkey, a senior 28dayslater participant, moderator of the ROC Post forum on that site and a visitor of over 400 RIC Posts. The photographs have been selected and re-grouped in order to illustrate the performance of the key ruin tropes.

Thread Tools ▽

#1

June 29th, 2008, 21:41

turkey ◉

Est. Oct 2005

Join Date: Oct 2005

Location: Nuneaton

Posts: 1,321

📄 **Cane Hill Asylum - Coulsdon - 29.06.08**

Visited here this weekend with [**X40**], [**X41**] and her friend.

Really good visit, and good to put a face to a name 🙂

After hearing about the imminent demolition of " The Hill ", I was more than happy to drive down to Coulsdon early and take yet another visit. This was my 11th or 12th visit since 2005, and I was still finding stuff I hadnt seen before, namely the verandah's and some more roll-top baths.

Anywho, we saw the whole lot apart from the tower. Whilst we were there we could hear constant machinery noise and falling masonry, which ended up being the Morgue. Saw the sights and left thinking it might well be my last visit.

Demolition seems to be going very quickly, and we were nearly seen by demo guys who were removing tiles and wood from near the art-room.

Anyway, enough words, on with my pictures. All of these were with my 50mm, which I was trying to use most of the time. Let me know what you think. All completely un-edited also...

Size and density of meaning making potential within asylums sustains repeat visits (cf. ROC Posts)

Standard reference to nearly being spotted. Significance of noises heard during the visit – atmospherics and phenomenology of visit much more importance to this form of accounting

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Tropes: Violence to building; traces of human presence

(broken mirrors, views out of windows and dirty beds are common tropes within asylum urbex)
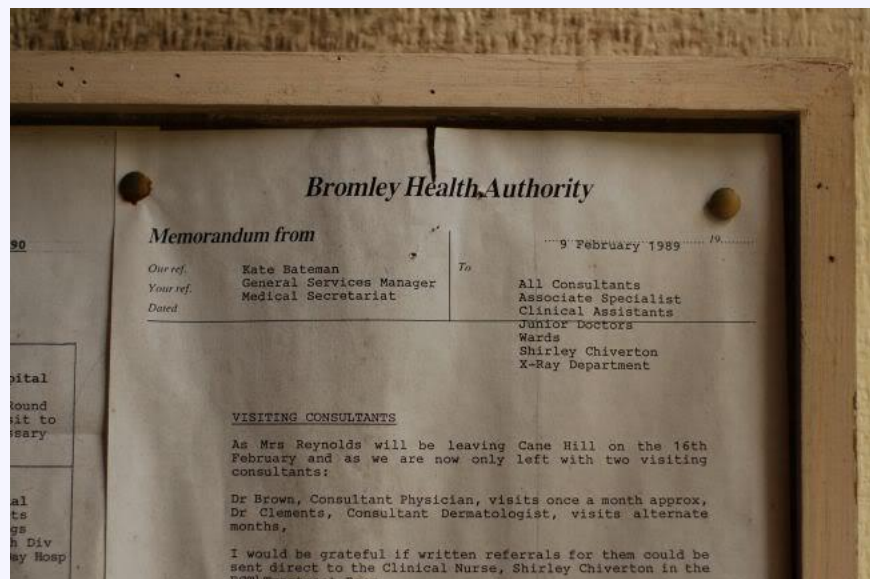
Tropes: Traces of human presence; signs and remnants of ordered space

Tropes: materiality, dirt, broken disordered facilities

Tropes: Nature breaking through / dilapidation / architectural atmospherics

Tropes: Passageways, doors

(windows and verandah's are particularly commonly framed as stilted means of inmates attaining the outside world)