The Bunker: Metaphor, materiality and management

Luke Bennett*

Department of the Built Environment, Sheffield Hallam University, Sheffield, UK

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

Keywords: metaphor; materiality; organisational symbolism; bunker; nuclear war

Introduction: The bunker as organisational metaphor

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

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

Here, the allusion implies physical separation from the ‘outside world’ (and/or the thing that is object of the ‘bunkered’ political or managerial clique) debilitates and degenerates the ability to effectively perceive and manage that object.

In contemporary usage ‘bunker mentality’ is attributed to a combination of the inward, and defensive, stance of the management clique and also – implicitly or explicitly – to the influence of the physical form of the place that has been retreated

*Email: l.e.bennett@shu.ac.uk
to. Commonly, therefore, outings of the ‘bunker’ metaphor will feature three elements:

1. the emergence of a disconnect between the object of control and those seeking to administer that control;
2. a paranoia (individual or collective), manifesting in excessive defensiveness within that clique; and
3. physical retreat to, or situatedness in, a place of (chosen) confinement – and consequent feedback effects whereby that place amplifies the disconnect and the paranoia.

This paper will seek to explore sites of ‘bunker mentality’, to trace the essence, the contemporary ‘meaning’, of the bunker as both a symbol and as an actual place of dwelling and organisation. To study this ‘idea-in-form’ (Barthes [1957] 1973, 121), we must embrace ‘the concrete’ in a real sense, for these bunkers were made of that material. We must go inside the bunker, for (as Kornberger and Clegg aptly note) ‘enter an organisation and you enter a building’ (2003, 76). This analysis will therefore draw upon metaphor in use, military archaeology, history, films and site visits.

Metaphors and management

This paper follows Morgan (1986) in its belief that metaphor, and metaphorical thinking, needs to be studied as part of organisational analysis. In doing so it seeks to delineate the ways in which bunker imagery resides in organisational discourse – and what that usage is alluding to. The analysis seeks, in particular, to draw from (but also to mutate) Morgan’s metaphor of the organisation as ‘psychic prison’. The dark, symbolic themes ascribed by Morgan to the image of a non-physical entrapment by ideas can equally be applied to the physical confinement of the bunker – and the ideas that led to its creation and the choice to retreat into its confines. Thus, we will draw from Jungian psychology, cultural theorists such as Virilio, and (echoing Lesser 1987; Parker 2005; Höpfl 2005) explore broadly gothic tropes in order to interrogate the bunker, and its symbolic and material likeness to earlier dark archetypes: the ‘underworld’, the ‘labyrinth’, the ‘cave’, the ‘dungeon’, the ‘crypt’ and the ‘tomb’. In their material form such places confine or channel movement and action within them. Yet that confinement and constriction is – to a degree – chosen.

There is an emotive, ‘dark’, abject dimension here: one that both attracts and repels due to the ontological instability of the bunker as a place that seeks to defer death, a place where the denizen lives moments and inches away from entombment – the sudden paradigmic shift of the bunker from shelter to grave (applying Kristeva 1982). We will explore this abject dimension shortly – by looking at the resonance in the bunker metaphor of Hitler’s final days in 1945 in his Berlin Führerbunker. We will then explore the symbol of the hyper-modern, ‘all-knowing’ nuclear command bunker and its relationship with, what Virilio (1989) has called, ‘the logistics of perception’. Here, once again, we will contrast image with the physical reality and capabilities of such bunkers.

The paper will conclude with an attempt to situate its descriptive analysis alongside contemporary social and organisational theory, in particular the rise of ‘relational materiality’ (Law 2007, 9), ‘social materiality’ (Dale 2005) and an increased interest in the ‘place-boundedness’ of organisations (Burrell and Dale 2003, 178).
The rise of the bunker

Bunkers emerged during the twentieth century, necessarily, as an organisational response to technological advances in warfare. They are a material testimony to the anxieties of their creators. For Vanderbilt, they physically embody nightmares – as ‘abstract doomsday scenarios poured in hard concrete’ (2002, 135). Their form reflects the essential features of the ‘bunker’ reflex: the urge for shelter, to roll defensively into
a ball, to focus resources for survival and/or response to the prevailing situation, to dispense with the unnecessary. Bunkers are a physical embodiment of organisational essentialism; they are (or aspire to be) extreme self-contained forms of ‘hyper-organisational space’ (Zhang, Spicer, and Hancock 2008, 890). The retreat to the bunker is a retreat to a (pre-prepared) place of protection, a place where the organisation will ‘know what to do’, a place of reserve power and capacity to control (or at least monitor) the assailing circumstances. At its essence a bunker is (or claims to be) an individual and/or organisational ‘survival machine’ (Gane 1999, 90).

The trenches and defensive emplacements of the First World War are the origin of the bunkers we will examine. This is not to rule out precursors – the frontier and core defensive function of castles, forts, cave complexes and other pre-modern refuges cannot be ignored; however, it is the industrialised scale of twentieth-century ‘digging in’ that is noteworthy, for those in command in 1939 had direct experience of bombardment in those 1914–1918 trenches. The defensive medium of choice for the next Great War would be reinforced concrete, rather than mud. The speed and scale of construction of the resulting ‘bunker mania’, a wave of civil (and military) engineering on a par with the earlier ‘manias’ of intensive canal and railway construction in the nineteenth century, was testimony to advanced engineering, rational project management and procurement skills of the mid-twentieth century. In such outbreaks of bunker construction we see fear of attack physically written upon the land. In the underground shelters and command centres, we see emergence of an ‘architecture of disappearance’ (Vanderbilt 2002), a form seeking not to be noticed, to be hidden – in contrast to the traditional symbolic function of the linear defence – the fort or castle, for which visibility and seizure of the high ground is integral to the defensive function (Thompson 1991).

The bunker building mania was the result of widespread fear of aerial attack, an anxiety that grew steadily following the invention of powered flight (see, e.g., Wells The war in the air (2002) – first published in 1908). Progressively through the first half of the last century the focus of war moved from the horizontal to the vertical axis. Aerial danger in the form of battlefield artillery of 1914–1918 evolved into the airborne bomb, later the guided missile. Widespread fear of sustained aerial bombardment in ‘the next war’ drove the quest for military, civilian and political shelter below ground. The Cold War, and anxiety about nuclear Armageddon, only served to accentuate (and sublimate) a fear of danger from ‘above’ and urge on the drive underground, as one young boy put it when interviewed in the USA in early 1950s ‘please mother, can’t we go some place where there isn’t any sky?’ (Kahn 1953, 23).

Our subsequent experience of nuclear anxiety, in Coupland’s words our sublimated waiting for ‘the wrong sun’ to suddenly appear in the sky (1994, 86), hinders our ability to understand the fear of spectre of ‘conventional’ bombing in the run-up to the Second World War. But as Calder (1991), Lindqvist (2001), Bourke (2006) and Holmes (2009) each show, that fear was as palpable in its day as subsequent nuclear anxiety. That fear manifested itself in bunker building on a vast scale, and the subterranean migration of military and political command centres, a process embraced at first rather optimistically, as Churchill declared, with verve, in a letter to the worried wife of the former Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain at the inception of his own underground command centre in Whitehall: ‘I propose to lead a troglodyte existence with several “tROGS”’(Gilbert 1983, 800).

But Britain’s bunker building was small scale compared to that of Nazi Germany. Britain’s provision of civilian shelters can best be described as ad hoc; meanwhile Hitler took great interest in bunker building both for his own and for civilian use.
According to Hitler’s architect, Albert Speer, Hitler was, from the early 1930s onwards, obsessed with designing bunkers (Fest 2004, 16) and frequently ordered reinforcing work to his bunkers with the desire of outpacing the increasing destructive power of Allied bombs. This fortification mania reached its zenith with the Wolf’s Lair (Hitler’s eastern front HQ); here brutal concrete forms were created, colossal, near solid blocks of reinforced concrete, with small rooms sheltered deep within a much thicker carapace of concrete (Baxter 2009). These, like the pyramids, were structures that inverted architecture, for their walls and ceilings were thicker than the rooms within. By May 1945, 19 fortified underground (or semi-underground) headquarters for the Fuehrer either had been built or were under construction. These were all built by the organisation Todt (using Jewish and other slave labour) and consumed an estimated 12.9 million man-days work: a massive diversion of manpower and construction materials (Seidler and Zeigert 2004). Indeed, Speer conceded that construction of one Fuehrer headquarters (appropriately named ‘Giant’) consumed more concrete in 1944 than was available for air-raid construction use by the entire German population of 70 million that year (O’Donnell 1979, 39).

Thus, fear of aerial attack drove governance underground, and to an extent the civilian population too. This was building for protection, for shelter in the most primal sense. Yet, increasingly, neither Allied nor Axis (or Soviet) powers found themselves able to fully protect their populace and the Home Front from destruction. We may view this failing as seed corn of Beck’s ‘Risk society’ (1996) thesis, for it was public anxiety about the paucity of civilian shelters that fed much of the anti-nuclear movement’s
support. That a government either could not, or would not, take steps to protect its
civilian population (but was prepared to protect itself with its own system of nuclear
bunkers for the chosen elite) touched at something fundamental. Whilst ‘society must
be defended’ (Foucault [1976] 2003), and this primary drive for survival lies (for
Hobbes 1985) at the heart of notion of a social contract underpinning the legitimisation
of those who rule, the reality appeared that even the modern, technologically advanced
state could not protect its populace against nuclear war.

The bunker as abject place of defeat and degeneration

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

All of these descriptions can be found in accounts of Adolf Hitler’s final days in
the lead up to his suicide in the *Führerbunker* in May 1945. The article therefore
appears to attack Brown by allusion, without ever once expressly likening him to
Hitler. It does so by invoking two powerful, and related, images – that of Hitler’s
degeneration in the final days of his life and of the end-game played out in Berlin in
his crowded bunker in the grounds of the Reich Chancellery. Speer, interviewed in
the mid-1970s (cited in O’Donnell 1979, 293), talks of ‘the nihilist Bunker mentality
at the end. Only Hitler, only that one Bunker, only the mountain people really
counted’, and thereby gives us an eyewitness connection between the Hitler’s bunker
and the bunker/bunker mentality metaphor.

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

The symbolism of Hitler’s final 105 days, spent enclosed within that bunker,
draws from German Romanticism, Expressionism, Dante, Shakespeare and Greek
tragedy, as a melodrama played out with intense emotion upon a single, confined
stage. And, it appears, even the participants were keen to embrace the mythic poten-
tial of the events and to interpret their situation through metaphor. Martin
Bormann’s wife (Fest 2004, 31) and Albert Speer (Lehmann 2004, 21) both antici-
pated a valiant death for Hitler in that bunker as chiming with Wagnerian opera – the
*Götterdämmerung* (Twilight of the Gods). But it was Propaganda Minister
Joseph Goebbels who most consciously (and calculatingly) sought to construct a
glorious, enduring myth from those last days and of this dank redoubt. Influenced
by Georges Sorel’s theory of the mobilising power of ‘social myth’ and the virtue
of violence (Sorel [1908] 1999), Goebbels sought to stage the death of the Nazi elite
in symbolic terms that would inspire a future revival of that movement (Trevor-
Roper [1947] 1995, 41), yet, ultimately, achieved only the suicide of himself, his
wife and the murder of their six children. Whilst the Nazis may have wished for the
image of Hitler’s last days to be one of a valiant death, the enduring image is that of
a degenerate, out-of-touch, abject existence within that bunker. In the words of one of the officers stationed in the *Führerbunker*:

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

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

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

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

Besieged in the shattered capital, cooped up fifty feet below the ground, cut off from ordinary communication, a physical and mental wreck, without power to enforce or reason to persuade, or machinery to execute. ([1947] 1995, 149)

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

In linking the man and the bunker a form of environmental psychology is invoked, at times verging on architectural determinism, that the bunker formed the event. This depiction is also enmeshed with Jungian symbolism (Jung 1964, 1968). For Jung symbols are the primary means of communication with the unconscious – as these symbols resonate with underlying archetypical patterns – schemata of knowledge that are revealed metaphorically (Marshak 1996, 150). Indeed O’Donnell claims for his interpretation of Hitler’s last days in the bunker – in the opening credits of *The Bunker*
(Schaefer 1981) – if not a literal truth, then ‘a psychological truth’, and in his book he claims support for this approach from Jung, who told him in 1961 that he considered Hitler’s bunker to be ‘a dark reflection of a universal symbol in the collective unconscious of our culture’ (O’Donnell 1979, ix).

Hitler’s bunker fate has an enduring, dark cultural resonance – one from which fiction has in turn drawn, and blended with other gothic tropes, for example, in the
cross-over Nazi-bunker-zombie-horror of *The Bunker: The Evil is Within* (Green 2001) which centres around the abject depiction of the entrapment of seven Nazi soldiers within a bunker built on the mass burial site of soon to be resurrected massacred plague victims.

**The bunker as supreme citadel of control**

If German Romanticism fed the myth for Hitler’s last days, American Modernism fed the image of the nuclear command bunker. For Vanderbilt the image and reality of nuclear bunkers are out of alignment in western culture, as the only public representations of these places during the Cold War were those imagined by film makers. For:

> 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. (Vanderbilt 2002, 110)

These places were top secret – no image of the reality was available during the Cold War. Thus, films and fiction took over. It is only since 1990 that we have progressively been able to get to see these places and thus compare image with (a) ‘reality’.

Ken Adam had an important role in forming our image of the nuclear command bunker. As the production designer for *Dr Strangelove* and seven James Bond films in the 1960s and 1970s, his designs augmented reality, inventing views of places that could never be seen for real – for example, inside Fort Knox or the megalomaniac’s lair. To depict the Pentagon War Room in *Dr Strangelove* (Kubrick 1964) Adam, designed a vast, dark, triangular hangar (drawing, as Sylvester shows (1999), from Bauhaus Modernism, German Expressionism and the grand eighteenth-century memorial cenotaph architecture of Etienne-Louis Boullée).

Here a massive conference table flanked by enormous screens depicts the flight of ballistic missiles towards the Soviet Union. President Reagan is rumoured to have asked to see the room when he visited the Pentagon for the first time upon taking office (Sylvester 1999, 13). It did not exist, but we came to expect command bunkers to look that way. Surely world domination (or world destruction) could only originate from such awe-inspiring places.

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

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

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

> We are now going underground! All the most important rooms in my factory are deep below the surface … there wouldn’t be nearly enough space for them up on top! … But
down here, underneath the ground, I’ve got all the space I want. There’s no limit – so long as I hollow it out. (Dahl [1964] 2004, 59, emphasis in original)

But the 1960s also saw the emergence of oppositional research into the materiality of the secret state, protesters against the existence of nuclear defence for government (but no corresponding protection for the populace) started to search for the ‘real’ citadels of control. What these amateur investigators found was scary in its own terms:

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

Researchers such as Laurie (1979) and Campbell (1980) had found physical evidence of military and governmental bunkers. Here was tangible, embodied evidence of a secret state, but the cramped, drab bureaucratic form of the bunkers did not fit with the movies; they lacked the panache of Ken Adam styling. Image and reality tended not to marry up – real bunkers were built quickly and were a triumph of function over form. They were, in essence, burrows – and building underground was expensive and suffered from all sorts of prosaic physical constraints.

Such bunkers reveal by their form and content the bureaucratic institutions that built them and the organisational systems that would have run them. They present the state in microcosm – revealing the minutiae and vulnerability of preparedness and provisioning. For example, UK ‘regional seat of government’ (RSG) bunkers featured
a control room with 12 desks, with one person to run an entire functional area (NHS, water supply, disposal of the dead), using only telephone, paper, pen and voice. Visited now, such places do not resonate the strength of the state, but rather its fragility and its embodiment in flesh and paper. Viewings of Cold War bunkers, now that they are abandoned, declassified and (in some cases) open to public inspection, attest to the approximateness of governance as an organised activity.

The view from the bunker

Whilst the RSGs and their civil defence function were abandoned at the end of the Cold War governmental and military control bunkers live on. The image of the modern command bunker sees war enacted as video games. Fighting becomes a desk job. Drones are flown by remote control from offices half way across the world. Everything is known and controllable, ‘thanks’ to satellites and remote sensing; a war of pictures replaces a war of objects (Virilio 1989, 4) and perception, technology and aesthetics merge (Bishop and Phillips 2004).

That’s the theory. But even the ‘modern’ bunker still has its limitations in terms of the ability to understand what is going on ‘in the outside world’. Like Plato’s man in the cave, the bunker denizen seeks to perceive the world by whatever feed of data can still reach him – and in turn comes to believe that image to be reality (Morgan 1986, 199). But the image perceived within the bunker is not reality. Eyewitnesses in Hitler’s bunker repeatedly noted his fixation upon his battle maps and deploying upon them the models representing named military units – yet the reality, in the ‘outside’ world, was that those units survived in name only, they were emasculated and could achieve nothing when deployed by Hitler into the battle, via this board game in the bunker (Von Loringhoven 2007, 80). In the isolation of this command bunker the only direct perception of the outside world was that of vibration transmitted through the concrete:

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

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

> This was a war fought with drawing pins and bits of coloured wool, with pen and ink in dusty corners, in rooms so gloomy that sun-lamps were brought in to try to boost the vitamin D levels of workers living a troglodyte existence in a six-acre underground maze with more than a mile of corridors. By contrast, Blair’s war day is a frenetic succession of carefully measured meetings, travel, public statements, private e-mails and telephone calls, starting at 8 am and ending when the last call is made to the US, often after midnight. Modern technology ensures that information moves at blinding speed, between individuals, departments and capitals; the rules of modern politics require that as much time is spent on presentation as policy. Coloured pins on wall maps showed Churchill the Second World War’s approximate progress; Blair gets a daily computer printout, depicting the bombing of Afghanistan with pinpoint accuracy. (Macintyre 2001)
Yet, this faith in cybernetic advance needs to be tempered. Subsequent experience has shown the fallibility of the intelligence data and the not so surgical nature of modern weaponry. To envisage the modern command bunker as having now achieved the all-knowing Panopticon is to still fall victim to the filmic image rather than the chaotic reality of the ‘logistics of perception’. For example, Ridgeway (2009) reports the confusion in the White House bunker on that September day in 2001 and notes President Bush’s testimony to the 9/11 Commission that his attempts to contact his
representatives in the Presidential Emergency Operations Centre (PEOC), a command bunker beneath the east wing of the White House were:

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

Meanwhile, writing of the chaos in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, and the failure of US federal and state authorities to successfully rise to the challenge of a decimated New Orleans, Thomas (2005) portrays how:

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

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

The bunker is dead; long live the bunker

Churchill’s and Hitler’s bunkers each have a narrative – but whilst one is a symbol of pride, ingenuity and resistance, the other is feared as a ‘dark’ cipher for evil and a potential beacon for resurgent far Right extremism (Holmes 2009; Ladd 1998). These places live on in metaphor beyond their physical life, alongside the still beguiling modernist image of the nuclear command bunker as a citadel of omnipotence. Yet, for some, something has been lost:

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

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

Conclusion: Metaphor, materiality and management

As Markus (1993, 4) has observed: ‘Language is at the core of making, using and understanding buildings … [yet] … every building is experienced as a concrete reality’. This paper has sought to challenge the implicit duality between the material and the ideational by simultaneously exploring both the genealogy and operational history of this extreme form of space/place of organisation. Bunkers are structures which are ‘known’ for both their brutal physical expression in concrete and as a powerful dark resonance in language and imagery. This paper shows, following Dale

Figure 6. Eisenhower’s ‘deep shelter’, Goodge Street, London – now Channel 4’s archive.
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(2005), that (for the bunker at least) there is no neat dichotomy. Instead the metaphoric and the material interpenetrated and en-fold: bunkers were built because of fundamental mortal anxieties; the physical form of the bunker as lived or imagined then fed back into the realm of ideas as metaphor and mimetic fantasy of evil and/or omnipotence. That fictional imagery then, in turn, fed back into future physical iterations of the bunker.

The case studies presented here have illustrated how the concrete and the discursive are (in Dale’s words) ‘mutually enacting’ (2005, 649) or ‘intrinsically entwined’ (2005, 674). This approach has been influenced by the ‘material turn’ to be found in actor network theory (ANT) (which for Latour (2005, 71) ‘bring[s] objects back into the normal course of action’), ANT’s ‘material semiotic sensibilities’ (Law 2007, 2), Bennett’s eco-political theory of ‘vibrant materialism’ (2010), recent trends in material culture studies (Keane 2003), cultural geography (Edensor 2005), geosemiotics (Scollon and Wong Scollon 2003), the phenomenology of dwelling (Bachelard [1958] 1994; King 2004; Virilio [1975] 2009) and the investigation of ‘place-boundedness’ within organisational studies (e.g. Gagliardi 1992; Burrell and Dale 2003; Zhang, Spicer, and Hancock 2008).

For Taylor and Spicer – echoing Foucault’s original observation in these terms – until relatively recently social theory tended to view places as ‘fixed, dead and immobile containers or setting[s]’ (2007, 325). But the new found appreciation of the relevance and contribution of materiality to a social situation, its ‘place-boundedness’, now helps us to see the ways in which sites and physical structures operate as an embodiment of organisation and its discursive processes – and in the case of bunkers those structures intimately and fundamentally interact with ‘the human’ as the ultimate symbiosis: the shelter as a ‘survival machine’, as an exo-skeleton, a life preservation chamber and a shaper of perception.

This paper has sought to acknowledge in equal measure the role of the material and the discursive (particularly the role of metaphor) within the production and use of bunkers. In doing so it has been concerned with ‘relational materiality’ (Law 2007, 9) rather than materiality *per se*. The *relations* involved here are the questions of ‘why?’ and ‘how?’ such places came to exist in concrete and in metaphor, and how the *translation* (Latour 2005, 108) between the ideational and the material realms was performed.

This desire to trace ‘translations’ is not unique to ANT. The translation between metaphor and materiality has been a point of focus for social science as part of both the ‘spatial turn’ and the ‘linguistic turn’ (e.g. Merrifield 1997; Smith and Katz 1993; Watkins 2005). Both ‘turns’ are found reflected in Lefebvre’s theorising of the (social) ‘production of space’ (1991, 404) and his advocacy of a holistic triad which should have as its proper aim and application an analytical reunion of ‘practised, planned and imagined space’ (Taylor and Spicer 2007, 335). For Merrifield (2000, 175), Lefebvre’s triad comes alive in its empirical application in charting actual instances of the production of space as it ‘needs to be embodied with actual flesh and blood and culture, with real life relationships and events’ (emphasis in original). As we have seen, there is plenty of flesh, blood and culture to be found within the bunker.

In the spirit of such holistic enquiry this paper has sought to explore both the concrete and the dream world. As Tiedemann (1999, 933) notes, Walter Benjamin’s *Arcades Project* was situated in ‘the field of tension between concretization and the dream … By turning the optics of the dream towards the waking world, one could
bring to birth the concealed, latent thoughts slumbering in that world’s womb.’ And as Benjamin himself put it: ‘In order to understand the arcades from the ground up, we sink them into the deepest stratum of the dream’ (1999, 933). For bunkers the dream is a dark one: a nightmare.

Many bunkers now lie derelict. Stripped of their purpose they present as abandoned artefacts, ‘remains of organisational life’ (Gagliardi 1992, 3). Gagliardi offered an early bridge between materiality and metaphor within organisational studies with his foregrounding of the relationship between physical artefacts and root-metaphors. Both contribute to (and express) the organisational ethos. Both tell something of the ‘how’ and ‘why’ of the organisation’s existence and durability, and both leave physical or linguistic traces of an organisation even after its ‘social death’. Tilley (2002) also provides a useful bridge between the material and the metaphoric. Whilst he cautions against the structuralist temptation to read artefacts directly as a language – suggesting that artefacts are more oblique – he argues, however, that language use is essentially metaphorical in nature, and it is in this area that the artefacts become ‘readable’. They are (to echo Benjamin) dream-like and require (for Gagliardi 1992, 32) interpretation at the level of *pathos* – through the affective, sensory and aesthetic. This is therefore the spirit in which the dark meaning of bunker imagery and materiality – its ‘organisational gothic’ (Parker 2005) – has been engaged in this paper.

Notes

1. The motives, methods and meanings of such amateur ‘bunkerologists’ and their exploration of abandoned bunkers form the focus of a separate study by the author (Bennett forthcoming).
2. All photographs are the author’s own and are reproduced with author’s permission.
3. Albania is an extreme example of this phenomenon – between 1950 and the death of dictator Enver Hoxa in 1985 an estimated 700,000 pillboxes were emplaced across the country to repel the perceived threat of foreign invasion (Howden 2002).
4. Calder (1991, 42, 60) cites official UK pre-war predictions of 600,000 air-raid deaths and an actual death toll of 60,000. By contrast, Calder estimates that up to 50,000 residents of Dresden may have died in the 13–14 February 1945 air raids alone.
5. Albert Speer was Armaments Minister, with responsibility for German factories and infrastructure. At the Nuremberg war trials, he was spared a death sentence because evidence showed that he had opposed Hitler’s ‘Nero’ Decree of 19 March 1945, an order calling for the destruction of Germany’s civil infrastructure, and had planned an abortive assassination attempt upon Hitler in the *Führerbunker*.
6. In ancient Greek and Roman literature a three-headed hound which guarded the gates of Hades (Hell).
7. Von Stauffenberg led *Valkyrie*, the unsuccessful 20 July 1944 attempt to assassinate Hitler in the Wolf’s Lair bunker.
8. Speer also acknowledges Boullée as an admired influence upon his Nazi architectural style (1975, 232).
9. Furthermore Virilio (1989, 64) notes that the production designer of both *Star Wars* (Lucas 1977) and *Alien* (Scott 1979) was influenced by Adam’s *Dr. Strangelove* control room design. We might therefore speculate that depictions of spaceship interiors in contemporary fiction owe much to attempts to depict Cold War bunkers.
10. In a post-modern turn an ex-nuclear bunker in Stockholm is reported to have been refitted as a command centre ‘in the style of Ken Adam’ as part of its redevelopment as a secure data centre (Judge 2008).
11. See Curtis (2008) for a critique of the conventional view that the hurricane was chaotic. Curtis argues that the weather system was in Deleuze-Guattarian terms a ‘nomad’, an alternative organised (non-human) system.
12. This quote is taken from an interview with an amateur ‘bunkerologist’ who traces and visits abandoned bunkers as a hobby, see Bennett (forthcoming).
References


Dr. Strangelove, or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb. Directed by S. Kubrick. Los Angeles, CA: Columbia Pictures, 1964.


