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Military Bunkers

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Military Bunkers

There is an increasing interest, in urban studies, sociology, and archeology, in military bunkers. The concept informed Paul Virilio's Bunker Archeology (1994), for instance, and has been significant for the Brutalist tradition of European architects, including Le Corbusier. European cultural sociology has also expanded its themes and theorizing within particular militarized landscapes and bunkered urban locations, as has contemporary British archeology.

Military bunkers are then a key component of our urban condition, if not always consciously acknowledged as such. Nevertheless, the concept has been reframed regarding the increasingly synchronized themes of postmodernity, war, and the emerging interests of the new subject of combat archeology. The well-known characteristics of postmodern war - the worldwide scope of militarism, information warfare, unmanned aerial vehicles, compulsory or intentional urban mobility and confinement, nomadic terrorists, unstable patterns of military deployment etc. - have, so many contend, fundamentally changed the everyday experience and symbolic associations of military bunkers. Consequently, the supposed certainties of modern urban identity, confidently situated beyond the particularities of military bunkers, which typically house an underground shelter of reinforced concrete with an incline and embrasures for artillery above ground, are increasingly disturbed and relocated. A useful approach is to conceive of military bunkers as military spaces. For military spaces such as military bunkers are fields of military action. Military bunkers, accordingly, are military spaces to which the potentiality for military action has been assigned. Hence, military bunkers establish our sense of militarized and civilianized

urban identities through various communicative and physically destructive relationships, such as what or where we mean by the 'home front'.

Postmodern critics argue that the link between military spaces and military bunkers, which in the modern period physically positioned military-urban affairs, social behavior, cultural rites, and archeological customs, has disappeared in contemporary societies. Virilio, for example, discussing the currently prevailing 'orbitalization' of militarization and information, suggests that urban meaning has vanished from military bunkers, and thus from the city, which has itself disappeared and dispersed in the postmodernized logic of militarized spaces of orbitalization. This corroborates Mike Gane's belief that Virilio's allegiance to the concept of military bunkers as involving genuine inertia and a feeling of imprisonment adds up to little more than an unresolved dilemma or a plea for a new kind of resistance that has no means. Alternatively, Gane proposes a model of urban living influenced by Jean Baudrillard's analyses of simulation founded on spaces subject to reversibility.

Yet John Schofield asserts that sensitivity to military bunkers can offer an essential anchor in material culture and a stable approach to modern warfare. He perceives military bunkers as archeological sites and theoretical objects that can extend the methodologies of contemporary archeology. Challenging established archeological principles, Schofield travels beyond recent conflict to an accelerated field of research that deals simultaneously with historical events, material remains, heritage, and human catastrophe. Such an intense combination evokes a global awareness of political events, military actions, and military bunkers. Schofield's investigation into these issues in theoretical terms and in essays on military culture and archeological literatures, history and anthropology gracefully combine

sociological discussion and concrete case studies of military bunkers as heritage management practice.

John Armitage

Further Readings and References

Gane, M. (2000) 'Paul Virilio's Bunker Theorizing', pp 85-102 in J. Armitage (ed)

Paul Virilio: From Modernism to Hypermodernism and Beyond. London:
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