The changing fate of urban bunkers

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Bunkers are or were built to provide safe havens to small communities for a relatively short period. Even in times of peace, they recall intensive antagonism between friends and enemies. But for construction reasons, bunkers can rarely be destroyed or removed when – after wars or cold wars – they are declared obsolete. They thus remain as ruins or monuments, archives or even strange playgrounds for more ephemeral cultural events.

We will in our paper present a couple of cases where bunkers have been used for artistic and political purposes, and take the opportunity to reflect upon the relationship between different kinds of materiality and different kinds of temporalities. We also present some theories about bunkers – notably the architectural philosophy of Paul Virilio – and of memory politics (Jan and Alaida Assman). We also discuss the artistic uses of concrete.

One of our cases of artistic uses of bunkers is the "bunker art" of the Albanian artist and Prime Minister, also the former Mayor of Tirana, Edi Rama, and the intensive political debates that have developed in the wake of his artistic policies. However, we also try to develop a more general understanding about the relationship between bunkers and artistic urban interventions.

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