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Bunkers, Bubbles, Monuments, and Walls: Pathological Narcissism, Nazi Germany, and Donald Trump

Summary:

Certain physical structures may symbolically represent internal psychological states. Structures, like bunkers, monuments, and walls are especially rich in psychological meaning. These structures are prevalent when pathologically narcissistic leaders are in power. Bunkers and similar structures provide symbolic protection of the good object from being overwhelmed by split off and devalued bad objects. Monuments, on the other hand, externalize the good object into a seemingly invulnerable and permanent structure in the outside world. This sort of bunker mentality was seen during Hitler's leadership of Nazi Germany and is now evident with Donald Trump, the current president of the United States. Bunkers, bunker-like structures, and grandiose monuments provide pathologically narcissistic leaders with a source of adulation that feeds their grandiose self. When the desire to build such structures is accompanied by the projection of bad object characteristics on to specific groups of people, it may be an early indication that the leader suffers from pathological or malignant narcissism.

Introduction

Structures in the world can be seen as reflections of psychological states. Unlike other forms of human creation, architecture is rarely representational in that it does not directly report on a person's psychology in the way that other creative activities might. But designed structures, while fixed in place and generally having some utilitarian value, can communicate something about the psychology of the people who were responsible for their creation and the time they were brought into being (Goodman, 1985). Protective structures, like bunkers, walls and other barriers especially seem to carry psychological meaning. This may be because these structures are intimately related to our survival. They can protect what is inside from external forces and prevent what is outside from breaching the interior. The task of the bunker can be seen as reflective of psychic structures like the ego, which prevents what is unconscious from coming into conscious awareness. In this sense bunkers can be seen symbolically as defensive. Like the human ego, protective structures while being symbolically defensive, can also be flexible, permeable and animate. There is a constant, but regulated interchange across the bunker barrier, between outside and inside. But what happens in the psychological representation of protective bunker structures when the psychic structure is pathological, when defenses are primitive and when the ego is subsumed to a pathological self-construct? This paper will examine the psychological meaning of protective bunker-like structures associated with individuals with narcissistic personality organization. In the case of such individuals, protective bunker-like structures form an external representation of a pathological mental process that underlies severe narcissism.

Pathological Narcissism

The term narcissism and narcissistic are unfortunately overused and most often ill-defined. There are different levels or degrees of narcissism and it is possible to find any number of works which attempt to tease out the severity of differing types of narcissistic disorders. Works by Kernberg (1995) and V. Volkan (2011) are notable for cogent in-depth object-relations explanations of narcissistic disorders. Our discussion here will be focused on what has been called pathological narcissism, the narcissistic personality, or what in the official psychiatric Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (American Psychiatric Association, 2013) parlance is labeled as narcissistic personality disorder. Kernberg gives a succinct and accurate description of this type of narcissism:

These patients present an unusual degree of self-reference in their interactions with other people, a great need to be loved and admired by others, and a curious apparent contradiction between a very inflated concept of themselves and an inordinate need for tribute from others. Their emotional life is shallow. They experience little empathy for the feelings of others, they obtain very little enjoyment from life other than from the tributes they receive from others or from their own grandiose fantasies, and they feel restless and bored when external glitter wears off and no new sources feed their self-regard...In general, their relationships with other people are clearly exploitative and sometimes parasitic. It is as if they feel they have the right to control and possess others and to exploit them without guilt feelings – and behind a surface which very often is charming and engaging, one senses coldness and ruthlessness. (Kernberg, 1995, pp. 227-228)

This pathological narcissism has its origins in early childhood before the integration of good and bad object representations. In normal development the child achieves an ability to integrate object representations into a sense of self that is dominated by libido, or pleasure seeking which then allows significant and realistic relations with other people. Failure to achieve this level of development occurs because the child experiences inconsistent interactions with caregivers that are tinged with aggression. The child then becomes fixated at a primitive level of unintegrated objects using primitive defense mechanisms such as splitting to keep the good object representations from being overwhelmed by the bad/aggressive representations. This type of personality organization is typically found in people who have borderline personality disorder and results in severe diffusion of identity. Pathological narcissism has a similar etiology. It differs however, in that the inconsistent caregivers communicate to the child that there is something special about him or her. This *specialness* then becomes the focal point for the development of an identity that would otherwise be diffused. This identity, infused with a sense of specialness and with aggression, becomes the nucleus of a grandiose self. This grandiose self is defensive against loss of cohesion and a return to the fragmented identity of borderline personality organization. For the pathological narcissist this is experienced as a loss of identity, an annihilation, or a lack of existence. The defensive grandiose self is unstable since the feeling of specialness at its core is ephemeral. It must be perpetually renewed, or the narcissistic person will begin to feel as if they will no longer exist. Hence the constant need for attention and admiration becomes the central feature of the narcissistic personality. The feeding of the grandiose self with admiration and attention to maintain its sense of specialness is a life or death issue for the person with pathological narcissism. The grandiose self also wards off feelings from dissociated unintegrated object representations that are experienced as devalued and inferior. These are tinged with aggression and often projected externally, accounting for the narcissist's need to devalue and disparage certain groups of people. [1]

Malignant Narcissism

If the grandiose self is dominated by libido (pleasure seeking) then the narcissist will function better and will be less likely to manifest aggression toward others. If, on the other hand, the grandiose self is governed by

aggression, this will be directed towards the devalued objects which are projected externally on to individuals or groups of people. This has been labeled as *malignant* narcissism. In this case the narcissistic person will experience admiration and attention from others by having them seek out the people in the external world who represent the devalued objects and destroy them (Kernberg, 1995, 2014; V. Volkan, 2011). Unfortunately, this happens literally. The malignant narcissist has many traits in common with the psychopath, including ambition, lack of conscience, lack of remorse, paranoia, and power seeking. It is often difficult to distinguish whether narcissism or psychopathy predominates, and a differential diagnosis can be difficult. However, the underlying motivation of the malignant narcissist is different than the psychopath. The malignant narcissist is motivated to maintain and defend the grandiose self and will experience annihilation if the grandiose self becomes starved of attention. The psychopath is motivated primarily by gaining what is desired and the gratification of emotional impulses.

Bubbles and Bunkers

Pathological narcissists often will literalize their intense need to defend the grandiose self. This manifests in dreams of bunkers, walls, barricades, and bubbles. Kernberg understands that some pathological narcissists are able to maintain relatively good social functioning and control of impulses. This allows the pathological narcissist the ability to develop, in some cases, some real capacity, allowing him or her to realize admiration for “greatness”. Pathological narcissists often appear to have the ability to tolerate anxiety. Unlike someone with healthy personality organization, the narcissist is able to tolerate anxiety by increasing their narcissistic fantasies and withdrawing into what Kernberg calls “splendid isolation” (1995, p. 230). This seeking of anxiety-reducing defensive isolation may be why so many narcissistic leaders create, and at times retreat to bunkers or cower behind walls. [2] For some narcissists this defensive barrier may be symbolic, manifesting in dream imagery. V. Volkan (2011) outlines the successful analysis of a narcissistic woman who has recurring dreams of a daisy in a glass bubble:

It was a protective barrier under which she could replace her grandiose part and through which she could watch outside of her private and solitary kingdom to constantly observe who or what was threatening and who or what supported her being number one (Volkan, 2011, p. 225).

Over the course of her analysis the bubble imagery becomes more permeable to the outside and eventually fades. This woman, while having narcissistic personality organization, was not a malignant narcissist. As might be expected, the malignant narcissist, who defends against more aggressive impulses would have more formidable defenses. This may manifest in the literal creation of bunkers and walls.

When the external world doesn't cooperate with the narcissist's need for inflation, he or she becomes anxious, and the need to defend the grandiose self becomes paramount. In the situation where there is withdrawal of attention and admiration and/or the lack of persecution of those representing the projected devalued objects, the narcissist feels anxiety at the prospect that they will no longer exist. This motivates a return to a safe defended place where the external world cannot impinge. The bunker, especially those underground, may be a symbolic representation of this. Unsurprisingly we find that some pathological narcissists have what can almost be called an obsession with bunkers. When the narcissist can no longer see themselves as being at home in the world, they instead regress to a state of “narcissism-as-home” (Durban, 2019). When the pathological grandiose self is threatened, retreating to a bunker is possibly an attempt to return to the safe, undifferentiated body of the mother where the outside world doesn't exist.

There are many examples of pathologically narcissistic leaders who have bunkers. From elaborate structures like Muammar Gaddafi's “Splendid Gate” compound with miles of reinforced concrete walls protected by machine gun posts every 50 meters, to Saddam Hussein's “spider's hole” (Glancey, 2011). North Korea could be considered a bunker country. Its ruler Kim Jong Un not only has his own huge personal bunker

buried in a mountain, but has also riddled his country with so many bunkers that the US and South Korea are building up their arsenal of bunker busting bombs in case of an outbreak of hostilities (Ji, 2016; McGrath, 2020). While these leaders and others with bunkers are deserving of psychoanalytic analysis, the focus of this work will be constrained to two examples, Adolf Hitler and Donald Trump, who exemplify the relationship between pathological narcissism and bunker mentality.

Hitler & Bunkers Under the Nazis

Adolf Hitler presents an example of malignant narcissism. A number of works touch on aspects how Hitler's narcissism manifested during the Nazi rule over Germany. Two works from a psychoanalytic viewpoint (Bromberg & Small, 1984; Waite, 1978) and one non-psychoanalytic work (Haycock, 2019) illuminate some of Hitler's narcissistic traits. Hitler had an intense need for admiration and attention and developed extraordinary oratorical skill which brought him attention from masses of people. Hitler also projected the devalued aspects of his personality externally on to various groups, primarily the Jewish people. Through the development of the Nazi party and eventually coming to power in Germany, Hitler demonstrated his malignant narcissism by having his followers express their admiration for him by annihilating those who were the receptacles of the projection of the devalued aspects of his personality. The enthrallment of the German people and the Holocaust can be seen as direct manifestations of Hitler's malignant narcissism.

While Nazi Germany expanded and conquered it was concerned with building what has been called 'intentional monuments', which are structures that give an impression of achieving goals and mastering power (Hatton, 2000). In his memoir, Albert Speer describes many scenes where he and Hitler plan vast and grandiose buildings and cities (Speer, 1997). Building these grandiose structures can be a precursor to building of bunkers and other protective structures. As will be discussed below, the building of monuments is intimately related to bunker mentality. After reversals on the Russian front in 1943, the Nazis turn more and more to building bunkers. These bunkers are defensive, created by a regime moving towards collapse. As Chairman Mao observed:

If Hitler is obliged to resort to strategic defense, fascism is over and done with; indeed, a state like the Third Reich has from its inception founded its military and political life on the offensive. Put a stop to the offensive, and its existence ends (Virilio, 1994, p. 28).

Mao's observations fit well with Hitler's psychology. The Nazi regime, following the *Führerprinzip*, built bunkers in enormous quantities. Bunkers were built primarily as air raid shelters, U-boat and V2 bunkers, littoral protection (Atlantic seawall), and bunker dwelling/command centers like Hitler's infamous Wolf's Lair as well as the Berlin *Führerbunker* (Baxter, 2016; Foedrowitz, 2002; Forty, 2016; Karl-Heinz, 1999; Philpott, 2016; Tzalmona, 2011).

Virilio (1994), writing shortly after the end of WWII, commenting on the Atlantic seawall bunkers built by the Nazis says, "The immensity of this project is what defies common sense; total war was revealed here in its mythic dimensions" (p. 12).

There were around 12,000 *Atlantikwall* bunkers, built by slave labor along the Western European coastline (Tzalmona, 2011). There are more examples. The German *Bundesanstalt für Immobilienaufgaben*, until recently held 150 bunkers in Germany, which they have been trying to sell off. Most of these bunkers, plus 70 others, date from the Nazi era. Some of the bunkers were built on the site of former synagogues, and some above ground bunkers have been in continuous use until they were finally decommissioned in 2007 (Torry, 2013). The city of Hamburg had more than 600 bunkers which were primarily used as air raid shelters ("Rueb," 2019).

Armaments Minister Albert Speer was successful in moving a great deal of war production and “wonder weapon” bases underground before the end of the war. These facilities, which were often huge concrete structures, can also be considered bunkers. One example was the huge bunker built to house V2 rockets and liquid oxygen rocket fuel; code named *Kraftwerk Nord West* (Northwest Power Plant). This bunker was situated in the north of France in order to launch V2 rockets to the south coast of England. Construction commenced between 1943-1944 and the bunker was intended to house 100 rockets. The walls were up to 23 feet thick while the concrete roof alone weighed 37000 tons and was 16 feet thick. Allied bombing disrupted its completion (Henshall, 1985; Huzel, 1962; Ordway & Sharpe, 2008; Zaloga, 2008).

One of the most mysterious projects attempted by Speer was called *Project Riese* (giant) which was massive underground complex with seven underground structures in Lower Silesia. Speer claimed that when completed the structures of *Project Riese* could house 20,000 people. The purpose of *Project Riese* is unknown. It is possible that it was designed to be the last holdout for Hitler and other top Nazis. It has also been speculated that it was a secret test site for anti-gravity wonder weapons and time machines. A persistent rumor is that there is Nazi train filled with gold still buried inside. We do know that Hitler was anxious for it to be completed because he turned the project over to a construction firm when he felt Speer’s progress was too slow. Nevertheless, even with the addition of concentration camp slave labor, *Project Riese* was never completed (Halpern, 2016; Rosen, 2016).

Much has been written about the *Führerbunker*, where Hitler spent his last days. Historian Hugh Trevor-Roper was one of the first to visit the Hitler’s bunker and write about it directly after the war (Trevor-Roper, 2013). It was initially assumed that Hitler had escaped from the bunker. But consistent with Hitler’s psychology, there could be no escape. For Hitler, the bunker would be the place of last resort. Leaving the bunker would be like death to someone with Hitler’s personality makeup. In 2002, the Soviets opened their archives providing more details about Hitler’s last days in the bunker. Using this information German writer Joachim Fest wrote another book about what it was like to be in the bunker with Hitler as the Nazi regime collapsed. Fest documents Hitler’s delusional selfish state, his lashing out at loyal followers, and his shambling decline (Fest, 2005). This is bunker psychology at its purest. [3]

Donald Trump, Walls, and Bunkers

The idea that Donald J. Trump, the 45th president of the United States suffers from severe narcissism should be self-evident to any thinking person. Compared to Hitler, there is a paucity of psychological analyses of Trump, especially from a psychoanalytic perspective, making the pairing of these two men somewhat disproportionate. Nevertheless, the narcissism and bunker psychology of each is similar enough to make the contrast interesting, and to serve as a warning from the past to the present.

Among the few psychological works about Donald Trump, two have some relation to psychoanalytic thought. Written before Trump’s inauguration the book *A Clear and Present Danger: Narcissism in the Era of Donald Trump* was published in 2016 (Bolen & Furlotti, 2016). A collection of articles by Jungian-oriented clinicians the book pulls no punches in focusing on narcissism as the main factor in Trump’s mental makeup.

A year after Trump was elected president the book *The Dangerous Case of Donald Trump: 37 Psychiatrists and Mental Health Experts Assess a President* was published and quickly made the New York Times Bestseller list (Lee et al., 2019). While the book doesn’t offer a definitive unitary diagnosis of Trump, many if not most of the symptoms outlined in the book point to narcissistic personality disorder. Contributor and psychoanalyst Lance Dodes interprets a lot of these symptoms as being sociopathic. [4] As previously discussed, symptoms of malignant narcissism overlap to a high degree with those of antisocial personality disorder.

Dodes isn't the only one to associate Trump's narcissism with anti-social personality traits. A study where 10 personality experts rated Trump's personality found him to be a good fit with the Dark Triad of narcissism, psychopathy, and Machiavellianism (Visser et al., 2017). In another study Trump's personality was rated high on the characteristics of the Dark Triad by 75 experts on US politics. These results were in agreement with other psychological studies of Trump's personality (Nai & Maier, 2018). It is not necessary to be an expert to have this perception of Trump. One research study showed that, among people identifying as both Democrats and Republicans, Trump was perceived as demonstrating narcissistic, anti-social, sadistic, and passive aggressive traits (Fiala et al., 2020).

Of course, it is not possible to definitely diagnose Trump without the ability to examine him in person. Nevertheless, there is a great deal of consensus about Trump's pathological narcissism and anti-social personality traits. Mary Trump's book *Too Much and Never Enough: How My Family Created the World's Most Dangerous Man* (Trump, 2020) provides some information on Donald Trump's early life that is consistent with psychoanalytic theories about the genesis of narcissistic disorders. She describes the extremely inconsistent and neglectful parenting by Donald Trump's mother and father, as well as the development of a self that was organized around the one thing Donald Trump did get from his parents, the sense that he was special. Mary Trump's book does not delve deeply into Donald Trump's psychodynamics. Her psychological analysis mostly describes the external factors that shaped his personality. Nevertheless, it can be assumed that Donald Trump's early object pathology resulted from inconsistent, abusive, and neglectful parenting, providing fertile ground for the later emergence of his pathological narcissistic tendencies. In Mary Trump's book, these tendencies are attributed to Donald Trump growing up in a milieu where rules did not apply to him. He could flaunt authority with impunity and with encouragement from his father, this becomes worse as he grows older. According to Mary Trump, this leaves Donald Trump unable to function in the outside world, where there are rules and restrictions. She makes the case that Donald Trump has essentially been institutionalized:

Donald has, in some sense, always been institutionalized, shielded from his limitations or his need to succeed on his own in the world. Honest work was never demanded of him, and no matter how badly he failed, he was rewarded in ways that are almost unfathomable. (Trump, 2020, p. 13)

This becomes apparent when Donald Trump tries to strike out on his own without the support of his father. One of his first independent business ventures is buying casinos in Atlantic City, New Jersey. Donald Trump is unable to adapt his father's way of doing business to this new venture. As a result, he keeps buying casinos until he amassed a tremendous amount of debt. Eventually, his father and then the banks have to step in and bail him out. As Mary Trump says: "But Donald didn't understand, and refused to learn, that owning an running casinos were vastly different from owning and running rental properties in Brooklyn..." (Trump, 2020, p. 135).

Donald Trump's institutionalization is closely related to bunker mentality. If Donald Trump cannot function in a world where rules and expectations apply to him, he will, if possible, retreat to a bunker where he is only subject to his own whims and desires. This bunker mentality may be a social structure where he has surrounded himself with people who cater to his impulses and who serve as a defensive bulwark, preventing the external reality from impinging into the isolation of the bunker. Donald Trump's bunker mentality may additionally be literalized into physical structures.

One of the physical structures related to bunker mentality that Trump publicly contemplated was a border wall. During Trump's campaign for president he suggested the idea for a massive wall to be built on the Southern border of the United States. In 2015 speaking at the *Iowa Freedom Summit* and on the television show *Fox & Friends* Trump spoke of his plans for a wall: '*People are pouring across our borders, which is horrible,*' Trump said. '*We have to build a wall. ... Look, I build some of the greatest buildings in the world. Building a wall for me is easy. And it would be a wall. It would be a real wall. Not a wall that people walk over*' (Fitzgerald, 2015, p. 1).

A few months later on June 16, 2015 Trump announced his candidacy for president and the world got a sense of who Trump's wall would protect us from:

When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best. They're not sending you. They're not sending you. They're sending people that have lots of problems, and they're bringing those problems with us. They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists. And some, I assume, are good people... They're sending us not the right people. It's coming from more than Mexico. It's coming from all over South and Latin America, and it's coming probably — probably — from the Middle East. But we don't know. Because we have no protection and we have no competence, we don't know what's happening. And it's got to stop and it's got to stop fast (Washington Post, 2015).

Trump's southern border wall became a key aspect of his campaign for president. In addition to themes of white hegemony, U.S imperialism, and how demonization of people across the border serves the political elite (Santamaría Graff, 2017), it is possible to see the symbolism of the border wall as part of Trump's narcissistic psychological makeup. His obsession with a southern border wall can be understood as an appeal to his constituents and a method for obtaining their admiration, fueling his grandiose self.

In the wake of the George Floyd killing, Black Lives Matter protests began in front of the Trump White House on the last few days of May 2020 (Wu et al., 2020). As the protests continued a barrier set up near the White House was breached and President Trump and his family were taken to the presidential bunker beneath the White House. Contradicting officials, Trump claimed he was merely inspecting the bunker which hadn't been used since the 9/11 attacks. Not wanting to appear weak, Trump appeared publicly to resent going to the bunker and downplayed his visit. Trump said that he had been down in the bunker "two, two and a half" times before and had "done different things" that were related to inspecting the bunker (Shear & Rogers, 2020). Trump supposedly was very concerned over the impression that he was hiding and wanted to do something to counteract the idea that he was cowering in the bunker. It was after this that Trump decided to have law enforcement use violent riot control tactics to disperse peaceful Black Lives Matter demonstrators so he could hold a bible up in front of a church as a photo opportunity. While all this was going on Trump tweeted incendiary comments calling for the violent suppression of Black Lives Matter protestors who were likened to terrorists. Officials indicated that the President was never in any real danger. Since then Trump has continued to tweet incendiary comments related to the Black Lives Matter protests, a wild and hurtful conspiracy related to the 2001 death of a congressional assistant at the hands of former congressman and television personality Joe Scarborough, and claims that he was "winning" in the general election polls (Baker & Haberman, 2020; Shear & Rogers, 2020). In the meantime, the Secret Service has erected an additional eight foot tall fence around the White House more effectively walling off President Trump from the outside world (Egan, 2020).

The anxiety caused by the Black Lives Matter protests resulted in Trump retreating in "splendid isolation" to the bunker. After the protests became peaceful and there was no longer any perceived danger, Trump would feel a need to inflate his grandiose self. This was done by having his followers, in this case the police, attack those Trump devalues and denigrates. Clearly the Black Lives Matter protesters are a projective target for Trump's devalued and split off object representations. The reality of the protests and their message is not likely to affect Trump since he experiences this as part of a pathological psychological process. Posing with the Bible in front of the church was Trump's way showing that he has not been overwhelmed by the devalued and fragmented aspects of his internal world. Trump standing with a Bible at the Church became a sort of temporary monument, the significance of which will be discussed below. Since the protests, Trump's tweets demonstrate a heightened level of narcissistic fantasy that are further and further removed from reality.

Bunker-like structures do not confer psychological protection on their own; they need concurrent social structures as well. It is not surprising to find that bunker-like structures also contain followers who serve to insulate narcissistic leaders, forming a psychosocial barrier to a menacing outside world. [5] In this sense the White House and its actual bunker are not ideal for Donald Trump. The White House is not Trump's

creation and represents an alien environment for him. He has been known to disparage the physical structure of White House, calling it a “real dump” (Brower, 2017). While Trump has peopled the White House with family members and loyal staff, by necessity some who work in the White House come from outside Trump’s inner circle. As a result, Trump’s control is sometimes questioned, and his decisions challenged. The extremely high turnover of White House staff is indicative of how uncomfortable this is for Trump and how it engenders resentment among the people who work in the White House (Sherman, 2019).

The place that more faithfully serves a bunker function for Trump is his residence/club *Mar-a-Lago*, in Palm beach Florida, which has come to be known as the “Southern White House” (Klimas, 2017). *Mar-a-Lago* is a place Trump can retreat and be comfortable. Its current incarnation [6] is in fact his creation and is one of his only objectively great real estate deals (Blaskey et al., 2020; Trump, 2020). *Mar-a-Lago* highlights Trump’s bunker mentality. It is a place where he has total control and his whims and ideas are not questioned. It is designed to amplify the adulation and attention he needs while protecting him from the outside world. As Blaskey et. al. say: *Mar-a-Lago* is not just a historic mansion or millionaire’s playground – it is a castle. And Donald Trump is king. (Blaskey et al., 2020, p. 15).

The defensive bunker function of *Mar-a-Lago* is not represented so much in its physical structure than the fact that it is in an exclusive area that requires a great deal of wealth to enter. While there have been protests against Trump and his policies near *Mar-a-Lago*, there have also been counter protestors rallying in favor of Trump. In addition to professional security personnel, Trump can rely on cult-like throngs of supporters to challenge those who disagree with him, providing another layer of psychological insulation. Nevertheless, the increased presence of an intrusive public has caused security to be increased on and around the property (Hitchcock, 2020). The function of *Mar-a-Lago* as a club amplifies its bunker function since there is a hefty fee to join and to maintain membership. This monetary exclusiveness serves to ensure that those inside the bunker are not only friendly but are the kind of people Trump can identify with.

Within *Mar-a-Lago* there are further barriers to getting close to Trump, based on a person’s perceived worth. This is particularly evident in the dining room: Each person’s rank in the king’s court is discernable not in their title but in seating arrangements at dinner at the club. The closer you are to the president, the higher your rank in the shadow administration that has taken shape at *Mar-a-Lago*.”(Blaskey et al., 2020, p. 15)

Dinner at *Mar-a-Lago* also becomes a time for Trump to soak in adulation from his followers:

After Trump’s election, members began to applaud when their new president strolled from his suite to dinner. And there was little doubt that his Pavlovian response to positive attention caused Trump to opt for an even higher-profile dining location: *al fresco*, in the center of the outdoor terrace. The longer walk to the more prominent table gave his guests longer to clap. (Blaskey et al., 2020, p. 24)

As befitting a structure that functions as a good object, there is much gold and gilding in the interior of *Mar-a-Lago*. Trump spent almost as much money having real gold leaf applied to the ceiling and walls of the grand ballroom of *Mar-a-Lago* as he did to buy the entire property. While at *Mar-a-Lago* Trump seems to feel at ease and is known to generally be better behaved. He will eat a wider variety of food, wait in line with his guests to be served, listen to club members and project charm and charisma. Not surprisingly, this all benefits the bottom line and helps the club to make money (Blaskey et al., 2020). Money functions as a barrier to the ‘bad’ objects outside the bubble, but also functions as a filter for what gets through to be identified with the ‘good’ on the inside. Therefore, money is symbolically important.

Monuments

Bunkers, like those found in Nazi Germany, and places like Mar-a-Lago have an important corollary in monuments. Merloo (1954) claims that monuments are motivated by the expression of aggression, oedipal guilt, and a delusion of being important forever. Monuments free a person from feelings of sorrow and guilt, and represent the fulfillment of unconscious wishes, especially to escape death. In this sense, they can be seen as part of bunker mentality which serves many of the same functions. Monuments can be seen as the inverse of bunkers. Simply put, the bunker is defensive, while the monument is aggressive. Like the intentional monuments of Nazi Germany, monument building may be more likely when the narcissistic leader's power is expanding. Conversely, building bunkers may be more likely when the leader's power is on the wane. Bunker structures represent an internalized good object, they envelope and protect like a mother. The monument on the other hand, represents a good object that has been projected into a powerful (usually) phallic structure to endure for all time. The bunker protects the good inside, the monument asserts the good externally. For the narcissist the bunker provides an interior place to experience the adulation needed to fuel the grandiose self while it is defended against bad objects on the outside. The monument, usually composed of impregnable and hard stone or metal, exists in the external world, phallically aggressive and seemingly invulnerable. In the presence of the monument the feeding of the narcissistic self becomes a public ritual. The narcissist receives adulation *in vivo* in the bunker, while the monument stands in place of the narcissist and receives adulation *in situ* for eternity. Monuments may be cast in the likeness of the narcissistic leader or not. Donald Trump has publicly contemplated having his bust added to Mt. Rushmore (Cilliza, 2020). Hitler, on the other hand, did not like the idea of his likeness memorialized in large monuments (Oltermann, 2020). He instead preferred imposing public buildings and having things named after him. [7] Bunkers and monuments both serve as a bulwark against the pathological narcissist's fear of annihilation, just in different ways. For Hitler, the impending destruction of Berlin and its monument structures may have attended his realization that there was no possible path to a Nazi victory. The fear of annihilation may explain why Trump is so disturbed at the destruction of confederate monuments. Watching confederate statues be toppled by protestors or removed by government officials may remind Trump of his own vulnerability.

Conclusion

Bunkers, walls, and monuments can carry a deep psychological meaning. The symbolic protection of bunkers and walls, as well as the public display of monuments is important to the pathological, and especially, the malignant narcissistic leader, in order to preserve an identity that is built around a grandiose self. Anxiety over being overwhelmed by those who are symbolically identified with the leader's devalued objects can drive pathologically narcissistic leaders to seek out the symbolic protection and public assertion of the good. This type of behavior was seen in the leader of Nazi Germany and can now be seen in the leader of the United States.

An emphasis on building bunkers, walls, and monuments may be a warning sign that a leader is exhibiting pathological narcissism. This can be understood in a few ways. Bunkers and protective barriers may initially be built to protect the general population as in the case of air raid shelters. However, over time these structures become more focused on protecting the narcissistic leader and as well as supporting his destructive fantasies. Monuments may originally serve to inspire people and connect them to a collective ideal, yet that ideal can be derailed into the worship of a leader who is seeking to nourish a grandiose narcissistic self.

This was seen in Germany when the Nazis began to focus on *Führerbunkers* and V2 rocket sites instead of air raid shelters, and Hitler's elaborate plans for imposing public works, even while the country was facing defeat. This dynamic can be seen more subtly in President Trump's recent de-emphasis in building a southern border wall (which he claimed was to protect Americans) and subsequent retrenchment to safe spaces such as the White House and Mar-a-Lago. Trump's increasingly authoritarian and aggressive actions

towards protesters as well as his desire to add his likeness to Mt. Rushmore, show how he seeks to destroy the bad objects while simultaneously phallically asserting the good object into the world.

A propensity to build bunkers and other psychologically symbolic structures seems to be a hallmark of totalitarian or totalitarian-leaning regimes. It is also likely that many, if not all, totalitarian leaders suffer from some degree of pathological narcissism. Pathological narcissistic individuals do not suddenly become leaders. This process takes time during which the bunker psychology outlined here will be apparent in the narcissist's rhetoric. A potential leader's plans for bunkers, bunker-like structures, and grandiose monuments, as well as the devaluing and denigrating of specific groups of people, should be taken as early warning signs. Awareness of these warning signs could help prevent bringing pathological narcissists to power.

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Notes:

[1] When the narcissist is in therapy these devalued aspects are often projected on to the psychoanalyst or psychotherapist.

[2] The psychology of the bunker can be discerned in *The Burrow* (Der Bau) which was an unfinished story written by Franz Kafka in 1924 (Kafka, 1988). In this story, an anthropomorphic mole spends his life burrowing a vast underground bunker-like labyrinth. The story was written six months before Kafka’s death and the ending, which was destroyed, allegedly details a struggle with a beast who seeks to invade the burrow. Kafka’s story presents many of the unconscious defensive dynamics of bunker mentality including a withdrawal into isolated stillness. As Kafka puts it:

“But the most beautiful thing about my burrow is the stillness. Of course, that is deceptive. At any moment it may be shattered and then all will be over. For the time being, however, the silence is still with me. (p. 356)

[3] Most of us will never have the experience of closely watching a pathological narcissist like Hitler suffer a deadly collapse. However, viewing the film *Downfall* (*Der Untergang*) gives at least a visceral sense of this (Hirschbiegel, 2004). Based on the book by Fest, as well as a interviews with Hitler’s secretary who was present in the bunker (Junge, 2005), the film is a white-knuckle example of how the life of a malignant narcissist ends.

[4] This is an older term often used synonymously with psychopath. However, a sociopath is someone whose anti-social traits are due to his or her childhood environment, while the psychopath (to quote the singer Lady Gaga) is “born that way”.

[5] I have discussed the importance of the relationship between followers and pathological leaders in the context of Bion’s conception of group psychology in another work (K. Volkan, 1994).

[6] Mar a Lago was originally built by Marjorie Merriweather Post starting in 1923 and finished in 1927. By the late 1960s her idea was to donate it to the federal government to function as a “Winter White House”. This didn’t happen and eventually the Post Foundation sold the property to Donald Trump who eventually realized Post’s idea (Luongo, 2017)

[7] Of course, this distinction is not absolute. Hitler did permit small busts to be made of his likeness and Donald Trump certainly likes to put his name on things.

Bio:

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