Rising from the Ruin:
The Aestheticization of Detroit's Industrial Landscape

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"'Our ruins if we ever have any, must be the ruins of factories and warehouses.'…after all, numerous classical ruins, most notably the ruined aqueducts of the 'campagna di Roma,' were 'in their original purpose, of anything but a romantic character.' Moreover, all structures—even functional ones—inevitably acquire 'some degree of romance and interest' as they disintegrate over time, becoming unintentional monuments."

-Anonymous American Traveler, 1835 [1]

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&

To my Mom, for everything you do for me.

Cover Image
Yves Marchand & Romain Meffre, "Packard Motors Plant", *The Ruins of Detroit*.

[1] Nick Yablon, *Untimely Ruins: an archaeology of American urban modernity, 1819-1919,* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 57.

ABSTRACT

Globalization has shifted much of America's industry overseas, leaving a hole in the American landscape, most visible in the many cities that were built around particular industries. The transition in these cities from industrial to post-industrial has been dramatic and distinct. Cities like Pittsburgh, previously home to the steel industry, have succeeded in the transition with the help of emerging new industries brought in by large universities. Others remain decrepit and abandoned. Detroit is arguably the hardest hit, perhaps worldwide, of cities in post-industrial decline. Detroit is particularly interesting because though there are few signs of active renewal, the image of its decline has captured worldwide attention. The city is benefitting from the aestheticization of its decayed landscape. Artists, scholars, and urban explorers have become obsessed with the ruins of Detroit and are travelling to the city to experience and document them. Images, beautiful and eerie, are making their way into coffee table books and desktops. These images focus on the symbolism of the new phenomenon and romanticization of modern ruins. They have created an artistic movement that has inspired conversation and discussion concerning shrinking cities and have attracted explorers and planners to the city as both tourists and problem solvers. This thesis explores the environmental narratives embedded in the images of Detroit's industrial ruins. I argue that the artists are constructing Detroit with the narrative of the 'post-apocalyptic sublime'. I conclude that these photographs are acting as a medium for concrete conversations and plans for urban renewal.

INTRODUCTION

Rusting into the landscape, amidst the grasses and trees of an emerging urban prairie, lie the dormant and abandoned warehouses, factories, homes, and skyscrapers that once thrived with the birth of America's Golden Age. Some see beauty in these decaying structures and opportunity for exploration and adventure. Most see a narrative of failure and a fear of what else the future might hold. For these this landscape represents a giant urban wasteland, the cause of unemployment, violence, and the grime of urban decline. For these, the remains of industrial America symbolize the end of the American Dream. Industrial cities were spectacles of prosperity. The billowing smoke stacks analogous with pride and power. With globalization came the shifting of industry to other shores. The transition to the post-industrial era has shifted the aesthetic ideal. In the post-industrial era it is not the evident industry that represents prosperity but the clean and sterile glimmering of a glass tower.

The globalization of industries has shifted the aesthetics of cities worldwide. Western cities, those in America and Europe, have deindustrialized rapidly and the industrial cores they once centered on have experienced immense economic hardships; skyrocketing unemployment, and little instances of reinvestment. Available and efficient transport opportunities allowed industrial production to migrate to less expensive locations, largely overseas in developing nations, and communication by computers made management of distant factories possible. As a result of the deindustrialization of the West the rest of the world is rapidly industrializing, perhaps faster than ever before.

At the beginning of the 20th century, American cities and everyday life became increasingly 'machine-like'.[2] Jobs centered on blue-collar factory work. Cities became centered on industrial production and were designed around a concentration of industrial components: factories, warehouses, transport, offices, and worker housing. This was the image valorizing American success, and as industry boomed new advancements, ironically, led to the rise of the 'post-industrial' era. The term 'post-industrial' became popular in the 1960's, coined by Daniel Bell, as,

[2] Elizabeth Barlow Rogers, *Landscape Design: a cultural and architectural history,* (New York: Harry N. Adams, 2001), 358.

> the transition from a society in which industrial production, physical goods, and material property and their ownership and management were the dominant themes. The new postindustrial society, in contrast, finds knowledge-based and knowledge-driven industries dominant.[3]

The transition has not only required a change in dominant themes, but these new, abstract, industries require a new clean, sterile, and modern aesthetic. Boyer uses the term 'imageability' to describe the new 'design codes and architectural pattern languages' which have become increasingly important in selling the look of an 'upmarket, upbeat environment'.[4]

Industrial American cities have negotiated this transition in one of three ways: gentrification, a fall to dereliction, or a rise into ruins. Pittsburgh, PA, a city rooted in steel production, has been praised for its transition by scholars such as Richard Florida, who comments that the city, "has sought to reimagine itself as a high-tech center, and has met with more success than just about anywhere else."[5] The projects restructure the city to adhere to a "New Urbanist" model—one that focuses on walkability, mixed-use buildings, open spaces, and the preservation of historic architecture.[6] One tactic has been to convert old industrial spaces to mixed-use (i.e. commercial and residential) properties. Success was in large part due to the University of Pittsburgh and Carnegie Mellon, who expanded their bioengineering and biotechnology operations into the empty steel mills.[7]

Smaller industrial cities struggle with the transition because they lack the resources of a larger city. Built as satellite cities, they not only center on a single industry but they rely on the success of that industry in their parent city. As the parent city collapses, the satellite city falls with it. Unlike the parent city, the satellite city has little resources to fall back on. Gary, Indiana is a satellite city reliant on the success of the steel industry. As the industry began to collapse and production migrated elsewhere, the city had few resources to turn to. There are no well-endowed

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[3] Gary Gappert and Richard V. Knight, *Cities in the 21st Century*, (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1982), 179.
[4] M. Christine Boyer, "Cities for Sale: Merchandising History at South Street Seaport", in *Variations on a Theme Park: The New American City and the End of Public Space*, ed. Michael Sorkin, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1992), 193.
[5] Richard Florida, "How the Crash Will Reshape America", *The Atlantic,* March 2009, accessed April 15, 2013. http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2009/03/how-the-crash-will-reshape-america/307293/.
[6] James J. Connolly, *After the Factory*, (Plymouth, UK: Lexington Books 2010), 222.
[7] Christine H. O'Toole, "Arts and Science Remake the Steel City", *The New York Times*, July 20, 2005, accessed April 23, 2012.
http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CA134181039&v=2.1&u=lacc_main&it=r&p=AONE&sw=w.

universities or sports teams to support reinvestment. As a result, these smaller cities fall into decline and dereliction.

Detroit, MI is a peculiar situation. Unlike Pittsburgh that has negotiated through gentrification, or Gary that has fallen to dereliction, Detroit has experienced the transition through artistic celebration of its so-called ruins. The ruins of Detroit have attracted travellers, explorers, scholars, and artists to the spectacles of modernity, and have kept the city an object of fascination. The images of the city produced by explorers and artists, and the discussions they have provoked have gained attention worldwide—Detroit has become the ultimate urban planning challenge. Although the city has seen few physical acts of rejuvenation, the consistent attention it receives is acting as a method of urban renewal—the city has not been allowed to die, particularly because these conversations emphasize its future renewal, questions of what next? The narrative of Detroit's picturesque ruins echoes the narrative of a reassertion of 'nature' into the iconic industrial landscape. It has emphasized how the aestheticization of urban decay is itself a means of urban renewal.

This thesis explores the environmental narratives conveyed through photographs taken of Detroit's industrial ruins. I begin by explaining the evolution of Detroit and how the city fell into ruins. In doing so I explore how the city and why the city is so iconic of America, and why it's fall to ruins is so significant. I next move to how the Detroit landscape plays a role in shaping the American landscape; I explore the evolution of the landscape in the arts from settlement to present day. The middle section of my thesis explores my research. I explain the structure of my methodology, and how I chose to examine three distinct environmental narratives. The heart of my paper explores my results, and what I have come to see as the 'post-apocalyptic sublime' that defines Detroit's cityscape. I conclude with a discussion of wider implications, I look at how the narrative of the post-apocalyptic sublime and the emphasis on the reassertion of nature appeals to an exclusive audience; the new rising middle class that Richard Florida has termed "the creative class."[8]

[8] Richard Florida, "The Transformation of Everyday Life", *The Rise of the Creative Class,* (New York: Basic Books, 2002).

CASE STUDY: DETROIT, MI

Industry was once the heart of American cities. Automobiles in Detroit, steel in Pittsburgh. Artists intrigued by the industrial cityscape commemorated the machines and the architecture housing them. Diego Rivera, a Mexican muralist, travelled to Detroit to capture the "monumentality" of the Ford River Rouge plant. His frescoes capture the spectacle of man verse machine; they "depict workers dwarfed by furnaces belching fire, engaged in seemingly mortal combat with machinery so overwhelming that it called for herculean labors."[9] At the height of Detroit's Golden Era, visitors flocked to the factories to marvel at the spectacle of the machine. Tourists were fascinated with the technology, they "crowded into the observation areas at auto plants… stood rapt as the twentieth century's premier consumer object, the automobile, rolled off the assembly lines by the dozens an hour."[10] Both artists and tourists were attracted to the grandeur of the industrial city; the technological sublime it created. The factories composing the industrial skyline made Detroit an icon of modernity.

Detroit's urban fabric epitomized the influence and appearance of industry in an American city—the city was entirely industrialized.[11] It was a city built on the promises of automobile manufacturing. Detroit hit its peak in the 1940's. Led by Ford, manufacturers were able to convert to mass production of military hardware, airplanes, and tanks.[12] In the short term, this industrial promise seemed worthwhile. Yet Detroit's Golden Era was short lived. In the 1950's, technologies and transportation opportunities arose that allowed industries to expand outward and overseas. During this time, manufacturers and suppliers reduced their Detroit-area work force; they closed plants and relocated to other parts of the country, and eventually built their networks internationally.

The auto industry is incredibly vulnerable to recessions due to its sensitivity to shifts in consumer demand, and in the following years as consumer demands did shift, the city continued to experience hard-hitting recessions. Detroit took its cataclysmic hit during 2008. During this year, the United States experienced its sharpest decline in the production and sales of motor

[9] Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit,* (Princeton: Princeton Universty Press, 1996), 17.
[10] Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis,* 17.
[11] Ibid. 18.
[12] Ibid. 19.

vehicles since World War II.[13] Detroit was hit harder then other areas because it had only recently began to recover from the restructuring that occurred during the 1950's. Consumer demand again shifted, toward sustainable products (fuel efficient), and led consumers into the hands of foreign headquartered corporations. Since the city had been built on industry, the collapse of industry meant extreme consequences socially and politically.

The image of Detroit was symbolic and iconic of American industry, and evoked a sense of nationalism. As writers such as Herron emphasize, Detroit's modern skyline makes it the most emblematic and representative city of America.[14] The city itself was a spectacle because of the industry it housed, as Sugrue comments, "the melding of human labor and technology that together had made the United States the apotheosis of world capitalism"[15] It was a landscape of the technological sublime.

FROM PRISTINE WILDERNESS TO INDUSTRIAL PARADISE

The new interest and focus on Detroit's ruins shows a new acceptance and defines them as significant and definitive features of the contemporary American landscape. Before the ruins of modernity, the American landscape had been composed distinctly without ruins; there was purposeful avoidance of man's presence. Early nineteenth century landscape paintings focused on celebrating the 'pristine wilderness'. Painters composed scenes of 'virgin lands', as Thomas Cole writes in his *Essay on American Scenery,* "you see no ruined tower to tell of outrage—no gorgeous temple to speak of ostentation; but freedom's offspring—peace, security, and happiness, dwell there, the spirits of the scene."[16] American settlers had a unique freedom; the 'untouched land' symbolized a freedom from the past, and a blank canvas to build anew. During the nineteenth century, the image of the American landscape emphasized the nation's pristine

[13]Thomas H. Klier and James Rubenstein, "Detroit Back from the Brink? Auto Industry Crisis and Restructuring, 2008-11." *Economic Perspectives* no. 2 (June 2012), 35.
[14] Jerry Herron, *AfterCulture: Detroit and the humiliation of history*, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1993), 4.
[15] Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: race and inequality in postwar Detroit,* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 17.
[16] Thomas Cole, "Essay on American Scenery", in *American Art: Sources and Documents,* ed. John W. McCoubrey (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prenice-Hall, 1965), 109.

'wildernesses' and unique geologic landforms. Hudson River School painters focused on waterfalls, the Catskills, and the changing autumn leaves as means of defining America as distinct from Europe. Rather than celebrate and exhibit the built environment and early settlements, the focus was on the "virgin land".

The scenes focused on the powerful and spiritual relationship that the 'wilderness' offered. Cronon states that it "had once been the antithesis of all that was orderly and good—it had been the darkness one might say, on the far side of the garden wall—and yet now it was frequently likened to Eden itself…One by one, various corners of the American map came to be designated as sites whose wild beauty was so spectacular that a growing number of citizens had to visit and see them for themselves."[17] It is important to note that it was only once 'wilderness' was seen as romantic, as Edenic and safe, that it could be celebrated. Before Thoreau declared the 'wilderness' a "preservation of the world", it had been the dangerous and feared—the unknown. Scenes of the American landscape proudly depicted an unpopulated wild land, with brilliant colors—sunsets, and autumn leaves. It was a landscape that was awe-inspiring; a landscape evocative of the sublime. These scenes reinforced a relationship with God and the viewer more than any other; "for those scenes of solitude, from which the hand of nature has never been lifted, affect the mind with a more deep toned emotion than aught which the hand of man has touched."[18] Not only did the scene allow the viewer to feel closer to God, but in doing so it drew attention to the power and importance of man truly experiencing the power of 'nature'.

Figure 1: ***Westward the Star of Empire Takes is Way,*** **Andrew Melrose, 1867.**

The landscape evolved as civilization encroached and the frontier mindset took over. Trains, for example, carved through the land, and symbolized progress and man's achievement in conquering the once-unruly wild. The train shifted the experience from a spiritual sublime, to a technological sublime. The stark, dark metaled figure carving through the landscape juxtaposed the conquering of man with the soft and romanticized harmony of nature. Progress, and forward thinking dominates. "Westward the Star

[17] William Cronon, "Trouble with Wilderness", 1995, 3.
[18] Thomas Cole, "Essay on American Scenery", 102.

of Empire Takes its Way" (fig. 1) illustrates the juxtaposition. To the right, the dominating headlight of a train rushes towards a flock of deer. To the left, a clear-cut forest sprawls across the land—symbolic of the time of man's progress. In the far back the "sublime" is present, the sun sets romantically behind a log cabin. The scene emphasizes exactly what the title says; the Star of Empire—quite literally—takes its way over the land.

During the industrial revolution technological achievements became further entangled and rooted in the American scene. Modernist painters such as Charles Sheeler turned their attention toward the machines and factories. The artists emphasized a sterilized and clean industrial landscape by composing the scene in precisionist style. Sheeler's painting *American Landscape* (fig.2) depicts solely the expanse of a factory; smoke billowing from its chimneys. He was an artist inspired by Detroit and the Rustbelt, America's industrial core. His photographs of the Ford River Rouge in Detroit celebrate the world's largest foundry of the time. He composes the photograph so "the building rises majestically in the foreground; railroad tracks, cars and conveyors recede dramatically to the right."[19] His photographs not only celebrate the enormity and the power of Ford's industry, but they begin to naturalize and turn society's focus to the beauty of machinery. Sheeler, as seen in fig. 3, "re-creates the myth of industry as the new religion of the machine age by focusing on the monumental grandeur of the factory buildings."[20] Just as the 'wilderness' was translated as a 'cathedral', the factory became the 'cathedral' for the machine. The machine and industry was celebrated as the image of America's success—the image of the new American landscape.

Figure 2: *American Landscape*, Charles Sheeler, 1930. The landscape is entirely focused on industrial production--man

Figure 3: *Criss-Cross Conveyors*, Charles Sheeler,

Although ruins had not been considered crucial or significant features in America's early landscape, they had always been objects of fascination. American elite travelled the 'Grand Tour' of Europe, and they continue to do so in a less formal fashion today. Individuals from all

[19] Karen Lucic, *Charles Sheeler and the Cult of the Machine,* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 92.
[20] Lucic, *Charles Sheeler and the Cult of the Machine,* 95.

over the world travel to Egypt to wander amidst the pyramids. There is an inherent gravitation towards a site as a ruin, a distinct making of significance out of a pile of rubble that captures man's attention.

Georg Simmel in his essay, "The Ruin", grapples with the concept of ruin gazing. He offers that our fascination with ruins stems from their intrinsic spiritualism. Ruins are sites where the powers of man and the powers of nature find unity. He writes, "the ruin of building, however, means that where the work of art is dying, other forces and forms, those of nature, have grown; and that out of what art still lives in the ruin and what nature already lives in it, there has emerged a new whole, a characteristic unity."[21] What differentiates a ruin from a pile of rubble, or a dilapidated building is this unified form.

Dylan Trigg offers the idea that our fascination with the ruins of modernity lies in their accessibility to us. These spaces resemble the classic ruin, the walls crumble and nature encroaches, but unlike classical ruins that tell the tale of fallen civilizations, modern ruins warn of this fall occurring to our own beloved cities--"a derelict factory testifies to a failed past but also reminds us that future may end in ruin."[22] This is especially true when viewing the photographs of Detroit's industrial ruins, a city fallen due to corporate greed. Trigg writes, in "dereliction, the ruin attests to the logic of capitalism: what was once built to testify to a singular and eternal present becomes the symbol and proof of its mutability." [23] The questions and warnings evoked at the site of the modern ruin differentiate it from a classical ruin—but reiterate that the space is indeed a ruin, and not merely a vacant and defunct building. The photographs produced of Detroit's ruins focus on the dereliction and decay; they seek out its beauty. The specificity of these sites as ruins, introduces them as a new distinct and significant feature in the American landscape.

[21] Georg Simmel, "Die Ruine", translated in: *Essays on Sociology, Philosophy, and Aesthetics,* ed. Kurt H. Wolff, (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 260.
[22] Dylan Trigg, "Introduction", *The Aesthetics of Decay: Nothingness, Nostalgia, and the Absence of Reason,* (New York: Peter Lang, 2006), xxvi.
[23] Trigg, "Introduction", xxviii.

METHODOLOGY

To properly explore contemporary visions and perceptions of Detroit's ruins, I chose to explore photographs. Photographs of the deteriorating city influence our perception of Detroit's decline. Visual culture pervades media, blogs, and galleries. We are exposed to and absorb, unconsciously, thousands of images daily. Rose writes, "the visual is central to the cultural construction of social life in contemporary Western societies." She further emphasizes the significance of photographs in particular, writing that they 'interpret the world; they display it in peculiar ways."[24] Since, I argue, the majority of the focus on Detroit is sculpted by the proliferation of photographs, the exploration of the narratives conveyed by them felt most appropriate to analyze. I chose to conduct content analysis on photographs focused on Detroit's industrial landscape. Content analysis helped to extract narratives embedded in the images, and the rigidity of its structure helped to prevent any sort of bias.[25] I used Gillian Rose's book, *Visual Culture,* and Phillip Bell's essay "Content Analysis on Images"[26] as guides for composing my methodology.

I created a collection of sixty images by six different artists (ten images each). The artists chosen were, Julia Reyes Taubman, Camilo José Vergara, Andrew Moore, Michelle Andonian, Yves Marchand & Romain Meffre, and Scott Hocking. The artists are all contemporary, and are both commercial and independent, and of foreign and native origin. I believed that this would provide me with a robust variety of perspectives, and eliminate any biases towards the city. There are numerous other photographers centered around Detroit; however I felt that these represented a balanced sampling.[27] I wanted to explore artists' work who either have claimed their fame from their depictions of Detroit, and/or whose work has been re-appropriated for art exhibits and the media. For example, Andrew Moore and Yves Marchand & Romain Meffre have both been used for photo-essays on mainstream media sites such as TIME, and Michelle

[24] Gillian Rose, "Researching Visual Materials: Towards a Critical Visual Methdology", *Visual Methodologies,* (London: Sage, 2001), 6.
[25] Rose, "Content Analysis", 55.
[26] Philip Bell, "Content Analysis on Images", in *Handbook of Visual Analysis,* Theo Van Leeuwen, (London: SAGE, 2001).
[27] Online forums where urban explorers can share photographs, site locations, and experiences have arisen. Flickr groups such as "Detroit Ruins" are places where individuals can share and explore photographs. Online tours such as "The Fabulous Ruins of Detroit" allow one to explore the ruins with a click of the mouse.

Andonian and Scott Hocking have been used in museum exhibits that explore Detroit's changing landscape.

I chose to focus on contemporary artists who have produced work from 1990-present day. I felt that this period would allow for the images to illustrate a more accurate present day portrayal. The images both led up to the depression and convey the aftermath, so they tell a progressive story. I focused on pulling out images that dealt directly with an industrial city: train stations, factories, warehouses, worker housing, and office spaces. I chose these images because these were the business that achieved the economic prosperity during the Golden era: factories and industries provide the jobs and wealth, and the train stations and auto industries made expansion and transportation possible. I chose to keep images of the business districts of the city, because they were the buildings and spaces that once thrived with the success of the auto industry. Their emptiness reiterates the ripple effect that occurred with the downfall of industrial production in the city.

The Artists

Julia Reyes Taubman, Andrew Moore, and Yves Marchand & Romain Meffre each combined their photographs of the city into their own coffee table books. The books are oversized and consist primarily of full-page, high definition, glossy images. Each book includes essays by authors explicating the history of Detroit, the economic decline and it's effect on the city. However these essays are all written in language that celebrate the empire. They emphasize the strength of the city, and the vibrancy of its decay; they emphasize that the city has not died, that there is still a thriving community amidst the decline.

Andrew Moore's book *Detroit Disassembled* begins with inspirational historical and economic essays, and ends with two essays, one written by him. His essay commemorates the strength of Detroit to pull through, and emphasizes the beauty of the encroaching wilderness. He writes with a sense of optimism and acceptance of nature's re-assimilation, for example he notes, "it's the undisturbed vitality of nature that transforms a leftover soggy carpet into a lushy fluorescent bed of moss."[28] Throughout the entirety of his essay, and his chosen compilations,

[28] Andrew Moore, "The Phoenix and the Pheasants", in *Detroit Disassembled,* Andrew Moore and Philip Levine, (Bologna: Damiani, 2010) 119.

flowery and decorative language is used to romanticize the deterioration and abandonment of the city. He ends his essay with a bold statement: "As Americans have gone to Europe for generations to visit its castles and coliseums, it is now the Europeans who come to Detroit to tour our ruins."[29] He specifies that the decayed buildings of Detroit are ruins.

Yves Marchand & Romain Meffre also use the term 'ruins' to describe the abandoned buildings they photograph. Their book goes so far as to title itself *The Ruins of Detroit*. Being from France, the work of the two photographers introduces a foreign perception of Detroit. Like Moore, the photographs all have taglines with a short sentence defining the location and, at times, the use and significance. Their artist's statement highlights the monumentality of ruins in the American landscape, and emphasizes their desire to capture and record their significance. In their artists statement they write,

> Ruins are a fantastic land where one no longer knows whether reality slips into dream or whether, on the contrary, dream makes a brutal return into the most violent of realities. Therefore they appear to be a natural and sublime demonstration of our human destinies and of their paradoxes, a dramatisation of our creative and self-destructive vanities. A decisive moment in which one could suddenly catch a glimpse of his condition past, present and future at once. In our view, no other place on earth symbolized this state of things more than the city of Detroit.[30]

Their statement emphasizes a romanticization of the ruins. The language in particular, using the 'dream', 'sublime', and 'human destinies' introduced their book as one of an escape: an escape into the fantasy the ruin provides.

Taubman's book, *Detroit: 138 Acres,* though similar in structure, includes barely any text. Her images have no titles, making it difficult to know the location of the site. Her book is over four hundred pages, and is split into the four 'quadrants' of the city (i.e. "Central" and "West"). Taubman's photographs are meant to stand on by themselves. Her book, unlike the other artists, doesn't specifically focus on ruins. Her book aims to document the entirety of Detroit, she photographs modern spaces, abandoned spaces, industrial spaces, and people.

[29] Moore, "The Phoenix and the Pheasants", 120.
[30] Yves Marchand, Romain Meffre, and Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Ruins of Detroit*, (Göttingen: Steidl, 2010), 16.

The photographs analyzed by Michelle Andonian were found in the book, *Detroit Revealed*, the accompanying book for the *Detroit Revealed* exhibit.[31] The book also features sections on Andrew Moore and Scott Hocking, however I chose to use other sources for them since the exhibit explored a limited collection of images. I chose to use this collection of Andonian's work because the images all cohesively spoke to the transition occurring within auto-industry manufacturing plants. The essay introducing Andonian describes her work as a commemoration of the past, and a representation of auto-industry workers struggle to survive.[32] Her photographs are taken in journalistic black and white style, and work to tell a story of both steel production, from ore to furnace, and the transition of industrial work, from human labor to robotic machines.

Scott Hocking is an independent photographer. Unlike the others his work was taken from his online portfolio, he does not have a published compilation. Photographs of Detroit's industrial spaces by him were taken from two of his collections, "Garden of the Gods 2009-2011" and "Pictures of a City: Detroit 1997-2006". His statement for "Garden of the Gods" writes,

> Only a handful of Kahn's cast concrete columns remain standing among the rubble, leaving a site reminiscent of both the Roman Forum and Bernini's Piazza San Pietro. Using the columns as pedestals, the twelve gods of the classical Greek Pantheon are replaced and represented by wooden television consoles found elsewhere in the building.[33]

This same language resonates with Moore's statement comparing Detroit's ruin to those in Europe. His photographs of his installation are very much tied to text, and his photographs of the city are less reliant but their comical constructions add an important element. He creates his own unique one or two word titles, often a pun on the location. For example his photograph of Michigan Central Station is cleverly titled "Double Trainbow", a play on the rainbow that arcs over the derelict building.

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[31] "*Detroit Revealed"* was an exhibit organized by the Detroit Institute of the Arts. It was held from October 16, 2011-April 8, 2012.
[32] Nancy Barr, "Identity Management: Photography and Twenty-First-Century Detroit", *Detroit Revealed: Photographs, 2000-2010,*(Detroit: Detroit Institute of Arts, 2011), 20.
[33] Scott Hocking, "Garden of the Gods 2009-2011", accessed May 6, 2013. http://scotthocking.com/gardenof.html.

Lastly, Camilo José Vergara. His book, *American Ruins,* differed from the books of the other artists. His book appears as more of a photo-essay rather than a coffee-table book. Unlike the book of, for example Andrew Moore, photographs do not appear as the main focus of the book. Each photograph is matched with a short essay describing the history and significance of the site. Also, Vergara's collection does not focus entirely on Detroit. His book is a sampling of ruins found in numerous Rustbelt cities. His photographs do not appear manipulated or artistic but meant to be used as a documentation of urban decline. In a larger sense his photographs appear as an ethnographic study of urban decline.

I analyzed the photographs for variables adhering to three different environmental narratives. These were 'urban reclamation', 'picturesque ruins', and 'post-apocalyptic'. These narratives were extracted from artists' statements, discussions, and media coverage on the topic of Detroit's current state. I coded for these three narratives looking for elements associated with each. Bell and Rose highlight the importance of objective compositional elements as variables to be used in analysis. For example, Rose emphasizes the importance of exploring color, because color is not only a highly significant element but it is used as a means of guiding the viewer through the image. Where the light falls in a painting either emphasizes or shadows specific elements, creating a compositional hierarchy. Rose explains that the degree of harmony in color (the balance of saturation, hue, and value) affects "how realistic audiences will imagine that image to be."[34] Since the narratives are largely subjective, I relied on formal elements of similar genre paintings as means of comparison.

Justifications for Terms

"Picturesque Ruins"

I looked at the narrative of the 'picturesque' as a means of exploring the aestheticization of the landscape. The "reversibility between human design and natural formation is a telltale sign of the picturesque, an aesthetic paradigm that celebrates roughness, irregularity, and variety."[35] I

[34] Rose, "The Good Eye", 40.
[35] Andreas Schönle, *Architecture of Oblivion,* (Dekalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2011), 75.

found that in many accounts of Detroit's landscape emphasize the increasing presence of grasses, empty lots, trees and shrubs; the encroachment of nature. In an article by Rebecca Solnit she compares Detroit's transformation to that of the Mayan Empire. She writes the city "is so depopulated that some stretches resemble the outlying farmland and others are altogether wild."[36]

The picturesque became common during the late nineteenth century. Artists began exploring the imagination rather than depicting reality. Artists leading the movement include Piranesi and J.M.W Turner. Piranesi etched fantastical scenes of imaginary prisons, in which the grandeur of their wildness equates them with that of the sublime.[37] He takes his inspiration from the Roman ruins. His reflections on and incorporations of architectural ruin entwined with 'encroaching vegetation' inspired followers such as J.M.W Turner as they embraced romantic notions of architecture—entangling ideas of dreams, and the beauties of the natural world.

Figure 4: *Tintern Abbey*, J.M.W Turner.

J.M.W Turner's "Tintern Abbey" (fig. 4) depicts the classic picturesque ruin; the emphasis is on the crumbling building, illuminated by a glowing light, and the encroachments of 'nature' (vines and trees) emerge from the crevices. The ruin appears to "merge harmoniously with nature and intimate a sense of calm and eternity."[38] To explore the picturesque I chose variables pointing particularly to the state of decay, the lighting of the composition, and the appearance of nature. I relied on the compositions of these two artists as means of understanding the construction of 'picturesque' architecture.

[36] Rebecca Solnit, "Detroit Arcadia: Exploring the Post-American Landscape", *Harper's Magazine,* July 2007, accessed May 6, 2013. http://harpers.org/archive/2007/07/detroit-arcadia/.
[37] Miranda Harvey, "Introduction", *Piranesi: The Imaginary Views*, (New York: Harmony Books), 7.
[38] Schönle, *Architecture of Oblivion,* 93.

"Post-apocalyptic"

Detroit's depopulated and empty cityscape has been compared by some to the post-apocalyptic. As quoted by an individual interviewed in the documentary film *Detropia*, the city "looks like a bomb went off."[39] The post-apocalyptic is a difficult narrative to visualize because in many respects it shares principle elements with 'picturesque ruins'. The post-apocalyptic emphasizes an intense end; an entire depopulation often caused by a force greater than humanity. In this respect, the post-apocalyptic represents an extreme situation, one that is easier felt rather than illustrated; there is an elevated thrill to the landscape. The narrative has become widely popular in contemporary literature, games, and film. Movies such as Will Smith's *I am Legend*, set a scene of terror, gloom. The movie depicts depopulation resulting from a plague eliminating an enormous amount of the population and turning some into monsters. Buildings are empty, with shattered windows, and collapsing structures. The city is in a complete state of disarray. The absence of human is replaced by the prominence of nature, the new 'residents' of the city. The trees grow old and grasses turn the city into an urban prairie. These elements reiterate the picturesque, but the addition of world-wide (or city wide) extermination makes the scene one of terror, fear, and the ultimate end rather than a romanticized slow deterioration.

In literature, the language used in post-apocalyptic sci-fi novels takes on negative and harsher tones. The classic novel, *Day of the Triffids* by John Wyndham, presents a post-apocalyptic story where an invasive plant has strangled the city: it has become depopulated and left in shambles. Looking at the language, for example, Wyndham writes, "patches of plaster detached from house fronts had begun to litter the sidewalks. Dislodged tiles and chimney pots could be found in the streets. Grass and weeds had a good hold in the gutters and were choking the drains."[40] The scene is described as victimized by decline. We see this in the use of the terms "litter", "dislodged", "a good hold", and "choking". I looked at how these could be applied to the deterioration and debris that appeared in the images.

[39] Interview with resident, *Detropia*, directed by Heidi Ewing and Rachel Grady, (Loki Films, 2012).
[40] John Wyndham, *The Day of the Triffids,* (Greenwich, CT: Fawcett Publications, 1969), 161.

"Urban Reclamation"

I looked for ideas of reclamation by asking the question whether the image showed signs of continued use. The use didn't have to be industrial, or pertaining to the original function of the space but there was indication of continued human presence and attention. I looked for this idea by looking for art, for residency, and for people. I looked for graffiti and other forms of art such as installations, performances, murals, and sculptures. If a photograph didn't appear to show any easily identified art (i.e. graffiti), but noted that the space had art in it then I categorized it as having art. Other means of urban reclamation are uses of the space for temporary homes, such as homeless residencies, and in greater instances on a more professional scale in sites such as the High Line in New York, where the site has been entirely reconstructed to become a gentrified park.

I looked to artists such as Jennifer Marsh and Nikita Nomerz for examples of artistic reclamation. Jennifer Marsh covered an abandoned gas station in Syracuse, NY with crochet and knit panels contributed by individuals from all over the world. The project transformed the site from dereliction to art-installation gaining huge attention from the public.[41] Nikita Nomerz's project "The Living Wall" (fig. 5) revitalizes the dull brick walls of urban buildings by painting faces onto them. The space is transformed, and the image draws new attention.[42]

Figure 5: *The Faces,* Nikia Nomerz, 2011.

In addition to the arts, reclamation can be the use of the space for events and for shelter. For example, in New York, defunct subway tunnels have been used for underground art exhibits and galleries. Other uses can be for temporary shelters, and the spaces become residences for the homeless. Though these are not official functions, the spaces are being independently repurposed.

[41] "The Gas Station Project", *International Fiber Collective*, accessed May 6, 2013. http://www.internationalfibercollaborative.com/html/gasstation.html.
[42] Nikita Nomerz, "Toothyman 2011, Ekaterinburg", *The Living Wall*, accessed May 6, 2013. http://nomerz.blogspot.com/p/living-wall.html.

Explanation of Terms for Coding

1. Garbage and Litter: Ephemeral materials.
2. Structural Debris: Building materials, i.e. bricks, glass, concrete, beams.
3. Blanketed Grass/Moss: Indicates a slow emergence of 'nature'.
4. Trees and Shrubs: Speaks to longevity, and presence of 'nature'.
5. Mold/Puddles: Shows vulnerability to elements, a moist site; alludes to the atmosphere of the place.
6. People: Presence/Absence shows abandonment.
7. Structural Deterioration: Exposed/peeling/crumbling walls, shattered windows, etc. The building is not compromised structurally.
8. Structural Destruction: There has been a harsh, and immediate collapse. The building has lost its strength and becomes weak, rather than solid in the landscape.
9. Graffiti: Tags and images that have been spray-painted onto the walls.
10. Art: Intentional acts of reclaiming and re-working the space, i.e. installation, murals, performances, sculpture.
11. Temporary Shelter: The space is used for (temporary) residency.
12. Atmospheric/Hazy: The photograph is either been manipulated (i.e. intensified colors) or hazy. The photograph doesn't have overall clarity; some areas are out of focused or in shadow.
13. Clarity/Definition: There is clear definition and focus throughout the entire image.
14. Machinery: Looks at how significant industry is to the identity of the space.
15. Empty: The space has little to no material objects; there is a sense of vastness, and an intentional removal.
16. Cluttered: Material objects remain in the space, in disarray, there has been added waste to the space.
17. Steel frame: Attention to the architectural style.
18. Stone Structure: Attention to architectural style.
19. Muted Colors: Desolation, silent, and darker emotions.
20. Bright Colors: Optimism, warmer, and vibrant; the space feels alive.
21. Black & White: Documentary focus, less about emotion and more about content.
22. Activity: The space is actively being used, either by people or machinery.

Example of Coding

Figure 6. Image: Scott Hocking, “Dragoon Lagoon”

I categorized this picture as **vast and empty**. I did this because I saw that the insides of the space had been cleared, all that is being portrayed is the structure. Because there seem to be largely **puddles**, and **structural debris** I categorized the space as having emptiness. I noted that **grass** is present. I said this image architecturally emphasizes the **steel frame** structure. I saw this particularly in the roof, but also in the repetition of structural columns. The lighting in particular in the upper center of the photo illustrates the complexity of the steel frame, making the architecture crucial to constructing the scene. I said that this photo was **atmospheric** there is an overall lack of clarity; the majority of the structure is in shadow. Because of this darkness, I categorized the picture as having **muted colors**. There does not appear to be any sign of **activity**. There does not seem to be any indication that humans are currently or have recently interacted with the space. There does also not appear to be art, or evidence of current or previous residency. I said that this photo had elements of **structural deterioration** because of the rusting frames. The photo shows the barebones of the structure, but it does not appear to be un-sturdy.

RESULTS & INTEPRETATION

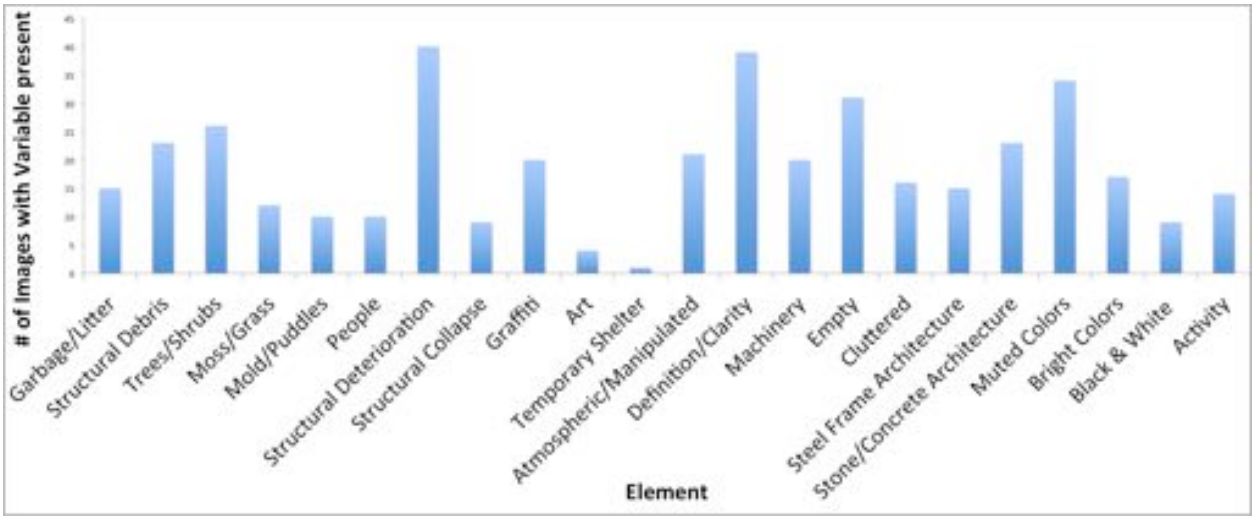

Figure: The graph shows the presence of each variable as it occurs throughout the entire image collection.

The variables that appeared most often were structural debris, trees and shrubs, deteriorating structures, clarity/definition, emptiness, and muted colors. The variables that were least present were structural destruction, residency, moss and grass, mold and puddles, people, and art. The relative lack of people, temporary shelters, and art showed that the photographs were not attempting to convey a narrative of urban reclamation. The variables most prevalent indicated that artists were composing scenes of 'picturesque' ruins with an embedded notion of the 'post-apocalyptic'.

The majority of the photographs were of spaces that were relatively or entirely empty. This told a story of elimination, a progression, or a conscious decision to take away material objects that indicated a sense of time. Additionally, the lack of material objects took away from the ability to fully contextualize the space in terms of the original identity and use. This meant that titles and text provided by the photographers were crucial.

Structural deterioration appeared more often than structural destruction. Most of the photographs focused on spaces where the walls were peeling or exposed, the windows were shadowed, and a general slow deterioration of the internal structure of the building was visible. There were few instances where the building had collapsed entirely. The emphasis on deterioration rather than collapse also hinted to the passing of time. The buildings were not destroyed, but allowed to decompose over time. The decay is a process rather than an event.

Structural debris is portrayed more often than trash and garbage, ephemeral material left behind. This resonated with the emptiness of the spaces, since the spaces were largely empty, the debris expected were from the deterioration of the building itself. Structural debris resonated with visualizing the bones, the internal workings of the buildings structure. They mirrored the romanticized deterioration of the building.

Figure 7: "Miller Pigeons", Scott Hocking

Trees and shrubs were the most common form of nature present in the images. Trees and shrubs symbolized longevity. Trees and shrubs were more apparent than moss and grass whose appearance would indicate a more recent abandonment. Mold and puddles were also one of variables least present. These variables were meant to indicate moisture, and if the spaces were vulnerable to the elements. Their absence indicates that the spaces were relatively intact; the spaces that were indoors were largely sheltered from the elements. The significant presence of trees and shrubs, of nature, pointed towards a picturesque narrative; one that emphasized a re-assimilation and unity of the industrial and the natural world. An example of this is Scott Hockings, “Miller Pigeons” (fig. 7). The photograph pastoralizes an old warehouse.

Figure 8: Andrew Moore, "Shelter"

Art and residency were the two least present variables. Residency only occurred once. In “Shelter…” by Andrew Moore, fig. 8, a plastic sheet hangs from a second story creating the illusion of a waterfall, behind it a small fire is lit and the makings of a small home are found. The subject of the photograph is the temporary shelter. Although people aren’t present in the photograph, the lit fire indicates the space is inhabited. The illusion of a waterfall romanticized the space, making it appear no longer industrial but a space

one would find in the natural world. The photograph naturalized the artificial through a western romantic: a shelter amongst a different kind of wilderness. The light of a fire glows rather than roars and the shelter appears tucked behind the waterfall of a plastic tarp.

There were few instances where art was present. Graffiti appeared in more images than art performances or installations. Graffiti ranged from tags to 'paintings' on walls. Art, performances, installations, and sculptures, appeared in Hocking, Taubman, and Vergara's photographs. Vergara and Taubman photograph found art. Vergara photographs a sculpture of a person, standing alone in the midst of the empty train station. Taubman photographs a performance occurring in an old industrial site. Hockings photographs were different because the only way to understand the photograph as one of art was to have read the accompanying text explaining his work.

The majority of the photographs were presented in high-definition and clear. This largely rooted from the majority of the photographs being commercial in nature, and taken from coffee-table book compilations. Although the images were taken in high-definition, there were few instances where there was clear narrative content. The empty space meant that the focus was on structure and physical space rather than materiality, people, and activity/use. Atmospheric photographs were not always unclear or hazy; rather, they were focused on a particular area in the photograph leaving the rest slightly out of focus. Additionally numerous photographs emphasized intense colors; the intensity of color made the photo feel manipulated rather than instantaneous—these images were edited and perfected. Some photographs had full clarity; however some also had a degree of unrealistic color. In this instance, they were categorized as both atmospheric and clear.

Lastly, the photographs depicted scenes with muted rather than bright colors. As quoted in "Detroit is Not a Ruin", "the muted palette of the buildings creates a sense of 'loneliness, desolation, and abandonment.'"[43] Brighter colors appeared, but were largely matched with the solemn grey of a concrete or stone structure. In large part, color was introduced via the sky and the colors of industrial materials (i.e. bricks, glass, steel) in juxtaposition with the green or browns of 'nature' (trees, shrubs, grasses). The emphasis on muted colors in a depopulated environment evoked the narrative of the 'post-apocalyptic'.

[43] J. Green, "Detroit is Not a Ruin", *The Dirt,* January 9, 2013, accessed May 4, 2013. http://dirt.asla.org/2013/01/09/detroit-is-not-a-ruin/.

The artists varied in their compositions. They each approached the industrial landscape in a unique way. Although some, such as Andrew Moore and Julia Taubman, exhibited their work in a similar fashion, their images differed in subject, perspective, and focus.

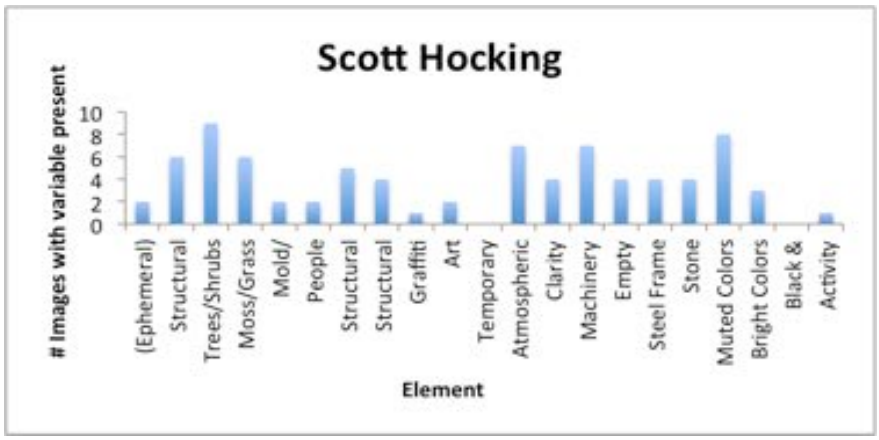

Figure 8: Frequency of occurrence of each variable within the collection of images produced by Scott Hocking.

Scott Hockings photographs had a greater 'raw' quality to them. This is shown through the significant number of photographs categorized as 'atmospheric'. The photographs do not appear as glamorous or high-definition; they aren't glossy and bound as the other artists' collections are. The atmospheric quality of the photographs made them appear more personal, more instantaneous and less crafted. Because of this, the lack of people in his photographs emphasized the city as desolate and post-apocalyptic, as if he, and his installation, were all that remained.

Some of the photographs of Hockings that were analyzed were taken as part of his series, 'Garden of the Gods'. The photographs document the installation over time, highlighting different seasons, and from different perspectives recording their presence in the landscape, an example of one of these photographs is found in figure 9.

Figure 9: *Hephaestus and the Garden of Gods, Winter 2*, Scott Hocking.

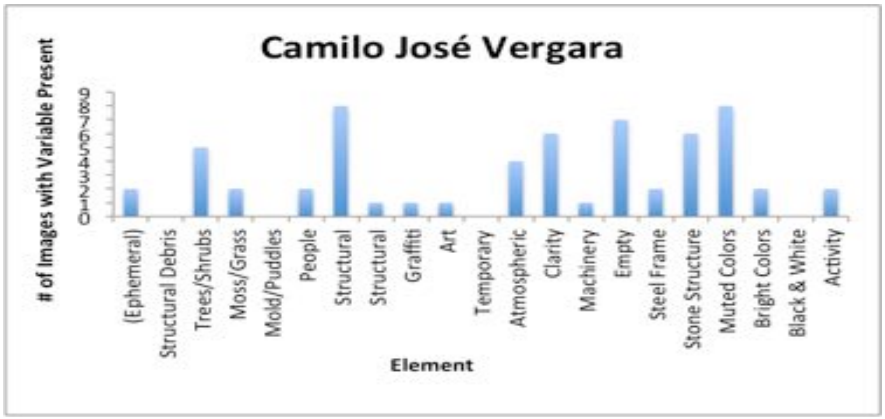

Figure 10: Frequency of occurrence of each element within the collection of images produced by Camilo José Vergara.

Vergara differed from the other artists because his photographs appeared more spatial, and documentary. His photographs varied in content much more than any of the other artists. His photographs did not show any images where structural debris was present, but did show images where ephemeral waste was present. This was interesting because it did not point towards the notion of architectural ruins, but rather pointed to the dirtier side of urban decline—the dirty and neglected.

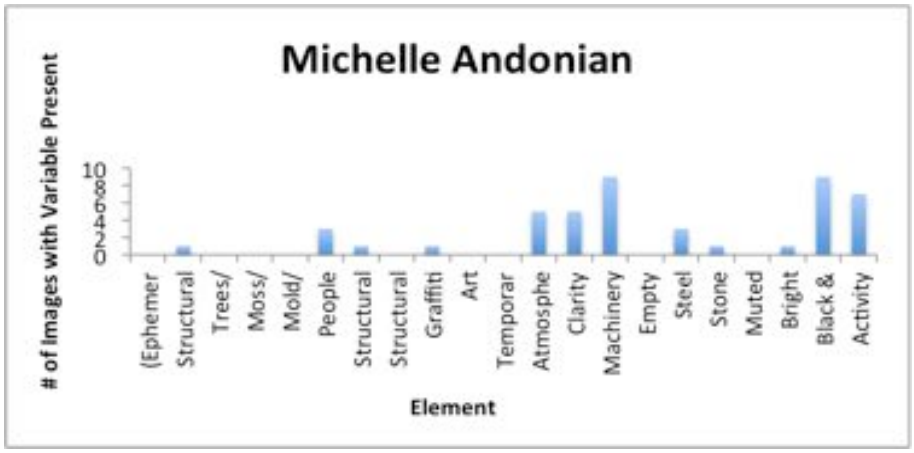

Figure 11: Frequency of occurrence of each element within the collection of images produced by Michelle Andonian.

Michelle Andonian's photographs, as seen in the graph above, were the exception. Her photographs did not focus on architecture, or the encroachment of 'nature', rather she focused on the transformations that were occurring indoors and in active factories. The most prevalent elements in her photographs were machinery and activity. The activity emphasized that the space was still actively being used, however, since the prevalence of people did not match activity it showed that people were not necessary for activity to occur. For example, her photographs of the

of the Rouge show the silhouette of machinery against a grey sky. The photograph is static, but looking closely there is a steady stream of material that flows from machine to pile. The lack of brightness and detail makes the photograph atmospheric. The tone isn't vivacious; the activity is rather solemn. The only photograph in color depicts a car emerging from the assembly line. The colors of the assembly line are bright, and sparks create a halo around the product. Although the scene is bright and active, people are not present. This is, perhaps, the manner by which Andonian is emphasizing the transition from the industrial to the post-industrial city. Work remains celebrated, but there's a transition to the robotic.

Andonian proved the exception but even her photographs of life in the industry were clear, atmospheric but defined (due to their journalistic nature), and were in the grey scale. The photographs showed activity and people, but the people were in juxtaposition with their machine counterparts. Instead of feeling vibrant, their haze and their grey coloring made them appear as solemn, particularly the landscape photographs. One of her photographs, is small, but shows only machinery the tones are hardly present, and only by looking closely can one notice that the machines are in use. They seem frozen in time, in shadow, and are not so clear as to what they are—they are only doing work. The scene is dark and industrial.

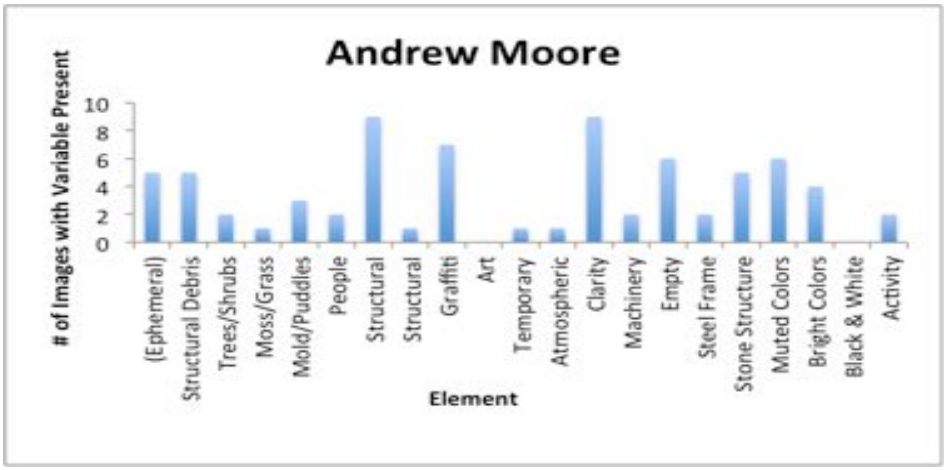

Figure 11: Frequency of occurrence of each element within the collection of images produced by Andrew Moore.

Moore's photographs resembled Yves Marchand and Taubman's in his persistent focus on colors, both manipulated and true. Moore's photographs in particular had a greater emphasis on clarity and definition than they did on constructing an atmospheric perspective. Moore's photographs had a much higher occurrence of graffiti than the other artists. His photographs focused on largely empty spaces, with graffiti, and structural deterioration. His was the only

photograph a temporary residency. His photograph 'Shelter' was the only image of a temporary shelter. The photograph emphasized a naturalizing, and a romanticizing, of the space by creating the appearance of a waterfall out of a plastic tarp.

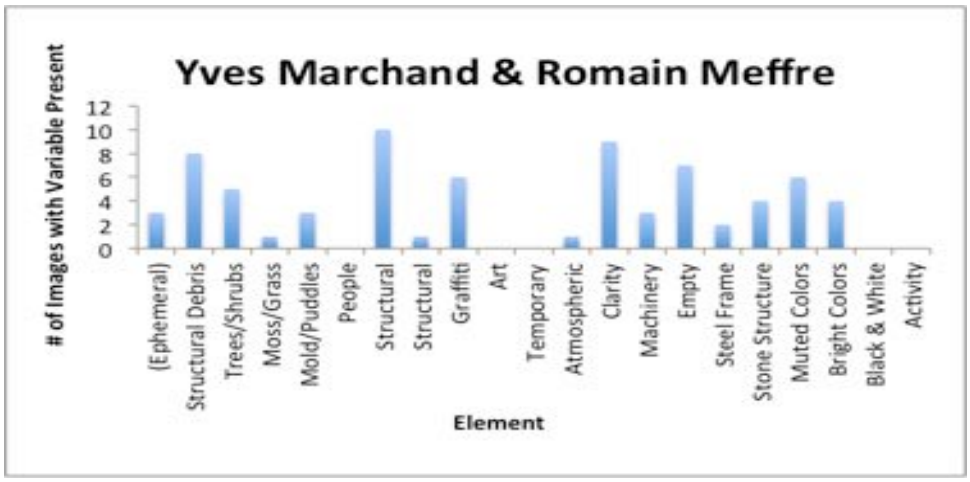

Figure 12: Frequency of occurrence of each variable within the collection of images produced by Yves Marchand & Romain Meffre.

Of the photographs analyzed by Yves Marchand and Romain Meffre only graffiti was found as a means of conveying the reclamation narrative. The photographs showed no people, no temporary shelters, no 'art', and no activity. The photographs emphasized physical space, this can be seen in fig. 13. There was a strong presence of structural deterioration, structural debris, and empty spaces. Additionally, their photographs were almost entirely clear; an atmospheric perspective rarely occurred.

The artists' statement reiterates these same findings. They write about the importance of preserving the architectural ruin, and it does not appear that their focus is on culture or people. Their main concern is the experience of the physical constructed place.

Figure 13: *Fisher Body 21*, Yves Marchand & Romain Meffre.

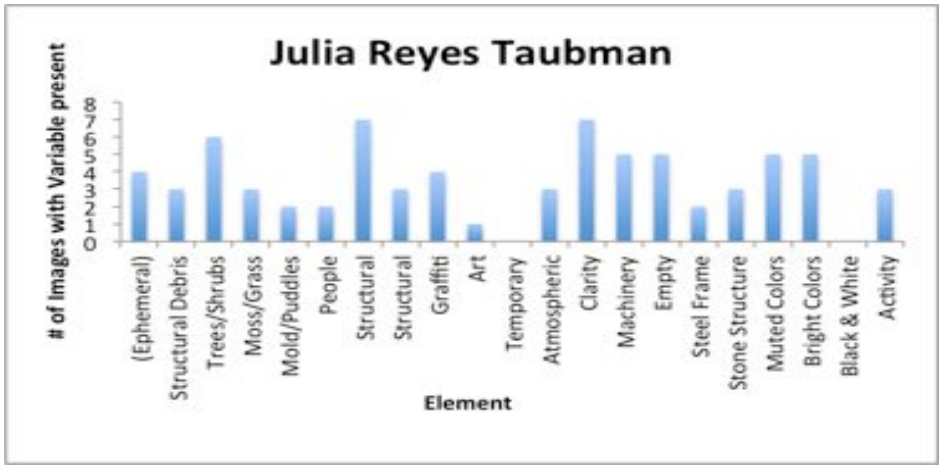

Figure 14: Frequency of occurrence of each element within the collection of images produced by Julia Reyes Taubman.

Julia Reyes Taubman focused on a multiplicity of locations, and was the only artist with photographs of a residential neighborhood (for industry workers) in her collection. She was the only one with an explanation that accompanied the photograph, identifying the neighborhood as an industrial residency. That being said, the photographs could not be defined as having residency because the subject of the photographs was a street were homes had been demolished. There were no temporary shelters set up to indicate that residents had attempted to remain there. Instead, there was only a house that had been entirely deconstructed, an empty first floor with no roof.

Her photographs largely resembled Moore's and Marchand's in that they were high-definition with an overall sense of clarity. Her photographs that were atmospheric were largely out of focus and blurry. Her photographs emphasized structural deterioration, trees and shrubs, and definition. However many of the other variables also were present. She did not appear to focus on one singular type of environment more than another. The only element her photographs lacked was temporary shelter. Her photographs were balanced between muted colors and bright colors. Many of the photographs expanded over a landscape rather than a singular room. For example, her photograph of the Shoemaker Carhouse (fig. 15) is taken from a window showing a multiplicity of perspectives.

Figure 15: "Shoemaker Carhouse", Julia Reyes Taubman.

Within the subset of her collection, there were images that showed activity, indicating that the spaces she shot were not all necessarily ruins, or abandoned. For example, one of her photographs was of a performance occurring at an industrial site. The scene is a strange mixture of people, fire, art, and industry. Without the caption, and the description, the activity occurring is largely unclear. The performance occurs at night, which again disturbs a clear intention.

EVOLUTION OF URBAN IMAGERY: TOWARD THE POST-APOCALYPTIC SUBLIME

Photographs of Detroit's modern ruins are aestheticizing Detroit's industrial landscape. The images are emphasizing a romanticizing of the architecture. They are emphasizing the picturesque character of the abandoned spaces, by focusing on the slow deterioration, and the re-assimilation with 'nature'. The photographs are continuing artistic fascinations with ruins and conveying an adaptive narrative, one that evokes present day conceptions and fascinations with the post-apocalyptic with romantic notions of classical ruins.

Early photographs of industrialization in American cities by Jacob Riis and Alfred Stieglitz emphasize changing environmental conditions in the city. Jacob Riis and Alfred Stieglitz were two popular photographers who explored the individuals and the environments that modernization introduced. Jacob Riis sought to emphasize the disarray and the negative consequences of modernization as it victimized the lower class and minorities. Stieglitz mirrored nineteenth century portrayals of urban decline through a picturesque lens. His work, unlike Riis, illustrates moments, sites, and characters throughout the city to symbolized that which American cities are built on. His photographs romanticized New York City and urban America. His photos were a commentary, not a plea for reform.

Jacob Riis focused on illustrating tenement dwellers and factory workers as victims of modernization. Factory work motivated and gave, as he saw it, false hope to immigrants, minorities, and the lower classes. Individuals migrated to cities, such as New York, because they were sites that supposedly promised the 'American Dream'. Riis pointed to the harsh realities of what this entailed: low wages, filthy living quarters, overcrowded spaces (fostering disease), and harsh environments. Riis pointed to the "slums as hellish and the unassimilated poor as potential

agents of the devil."[44] He saw that "the city, lacking forests and fields, fresh air and water, crowded with poor homes, was the ideal environment for the breeding of beasts and barbarism."[45] Riis's motivations for his project rooted in his perception of the city as lacking proper connections to 'nature'. The lack of forests and fields emphasized his idea that the pastoral—that the rural—have greater moral associations. The lack of 'nature' in the city was detrimental.

His photographs pointed to urban squalor, to holes in the wall, broken floorboards, overcrowded spaces, and trash heaps. These were the reasons in large part the upper classes looked away from the tenements. He photographed dark spaces with a flash, which gave the scene, greater intensity; there is harshness to the photograph. This is seen in figure 16, where a dark home is brought to light. The flash intensifies the grit; he did not romanticize the site in any way. Riis was the exception at the time; his radical inclinations added a new dimension to urban photography.

Figure 16: *In Poverty Gap*, Jacob Riis.

The photo-essay produced by Riis not only exposed the harsh truths of urban slums but allowed the middle class the luxury of viewing the images, the slums, from a safe distance. It was possible "to purchase and thumb through a copy of the slum in the privacy and security of one's home—served to remind members of the new urban middle class of their difference from the Other Half they viewed."[46] Contemporary photographers are focusing on similar gritty areas, with heaps of debris and ephemeral waste but their photographs do not aim to make a change; they are not asking to renew, revitalize and reconstruct. The photographs of Detroit are geared in a similar manner to the upper classes. Bound into coffee table books, the high-definition photographs of romanticized decay offer images to marvel over. Their photographs are aestheticizing and romanticizing the decline rather than pointing them out as atrocities. These artists and coffee table books are presenting outsiders romanticized and artistic portrayals of the aesthetics of landscape. They point to the conditions occurring as a result of the transition out of the industrial era.

[44] David Leviatin, "Introduction", in: *How the Other Half Lifes*, Jacob Riis, (New York: Beford Books, 1996), 28.
[45] Leviatin., 21.
[46] Ibid., 30.

Stieglitz took a different approach by romanticizing and composing his photographs through a picturesque lens. His photographs echo compositions from the nineteenth century where "poverty was prettified. The poor were rarely seen as threatening, potentially destructive agents of chaos; their simple lives were made to appear precious rather than vicious."[47] Alfred Stieglitz's photograph "The Rag Picker" (fig, 17) pictures a lone woman, dressed in rags, sorting through the 'detritus of the city'. As Bramen writes, the rag picker was also "a figurative analog to the picturesque traveler. The rag picker's search for valuables amid refuse mimicked the traveler's own quest for unusual sights amid ruins."[48] The image of the woman does not beg for sympathy, but rather creates nostalgia for a pastoral past; the image evokes the idea of the picturesque traveler. Stieglitz photographs aesthetically soften urban decline. The streets are portrayed with a whisper of steam emerging out of vents, the vivacity of a sidewalk market, or the vibrant and eclectic mix of characters inhabiting the streets. In a similar sense, contemporary photographers of urban decline mirror the picturesque travelers. The explorers and artist are wandering through urban streets and ruins taking photographs as a means of extracting, exhibiting, and collecting beauty amongst the rubble. Instead of depicting people, or the traveler, it is the photographer traveling and experiencing the city and we, the viewer, as experiencing it through his eyes—contemporary artists very rarely show other people in their photographs.

Figure 17: ***The Rag Picker,*** **Alfred Stieglitz, 1938.**

Contemporary artists are following in the footsteps of Stieglitz and constructing the sites as ruins; through a picturesque lens, rather than commenting on the negative consequences of urban decay which connects the sites to classical ruins rather than portraying them as urban dereliction. The photographs of Detroit's ruins have been compared to those of European ruins; to classical ruins. The 18th century is credited with the emancipation of ruins from their traditional meaning rotting decay to decadent, whimsical decay.[49] During this time, artists, poets, and authors began to explore the imagination and looked at ruins amidst the landscape as

[47] Leviatin, "Introduction", 23.
[48] Caroline Bramen, "The Urban Picturesque and the Spectacle of Americanization", *American Quarterly* 52 (2000): 454, accessed May 6, 2013. http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/american_quarterly/v052/52.3bramen.html.
[49] Nina L. Dublin, *Futures & Ruins: Eighteenth Century Paris and the Art of Hubert Robert*, (Los Angeles, CA: Getty Research Institute, 2010), 15.

dreamscapes. Responding to Hubert Robert's depiction of ruins, Diderot describes the subject as more poetic, "'more of the accidental…in a single tree that's survive many years and seasons than in the façade of a palace. A palace must be in ruin to evoke any interest.'"[50] By emphasizing the imagination, the artists call attention to the beauty inherent in the ruin—in the decay.

The depictions of Detroit's ruins echo early artworks focused on classical ruins. For example, looking at two early nineteenth century depictions of classical Roman ruins, similarities in composition and intention emerge. The water-color *A game of Dice Amidst Roman Ruins (fig. 18),* and the photograph *Night Views of the Roman Forum* (fig. 19) by Gioacchino Altobelli, and both explore the Roman Forum. In each, the Forum has a greater imaginative and whimsical character. The artists are romanticizing the space. Dubin describes the ruin in Robert's paining, "a caprice of disparate architectural elements supported haphazardly by fragmented columns—its own motley character makes it a monument to the vagaries of fortune. Its eroded acanthus has given way to real sprigs of foliage, just as the burning altar depicted in the medallion at far right finds its counterpart in the ruin's smoky interior."[51] The ruin softens the deterioration, and monumentalizes the structure. Elements of the present and the decayed past are echoed and contrasted as seen in her description of the medallion and a notion of greater harmony between man and nature, past and present, is depicted.

Figure 18: *A Game of Dice*, Hubert Robert

Figure 19: *Night Views of the Roman Forum,* Gioacchino Altobelli

Gioacchino Altobelli's photograph of the Roman Forum plays into this same creation of a dream. Altobelli is known for his practice of combining negatives to construct an image all his own. In his photograph of the Roman Forum, his image seeks to "recreate the sense of moonlight—a popular image because of the tourist viewing of the ruins by night."[52] By

[50] Dubin, *Futures & Ruins*, 13.
[51] Dubin., 11.
[52] Naomi Rosenblum, *A World History of Photography*, (New York: Abbeville Press, 1997), 115.

manipulating the image, combining two negatives, he sculpts the photograph to exaggerate a romantic view, a desired view, of the ruin. He is playing on the identification of the ruin as a tourist attraction: a spectacle sought out. The contemporary artists are doing the same. The images produced are pictures produced as the artist tours Detroit's urban ruins. The artists often photograph the same sites, and even the same perspectives of Detroit's ruins. This is creating an itinerary for urban explorers to follow; a guide to Detroit's ruins.

Contemporary photographers compose their images with similar elements. They are emphasizing a picturesque scene of crumbling walls, monumental structures, and the encroachment and emergence of 'nature'. They are emphasizing the inherent beauty of the ruin, and some are manipulating their images to exaggerate the magnificence of the decayed space. For example, Andrew Moore's "Ford River Rouge Hall" (fig. 1) is composed of an empty hall, with brilliant colors, purples, oranges, and blues that make the space into a fantasy rather than a dirty, abandoned, and unused hallway. It is drawing attention to a space that wouldn't normally receive attention, or be perceived as beautiful. The photograph evokes the sublime through the vibrant and brilliant color scheme, the soft glow illuminating the architecture, and the vastness of the space.

The photographs produced by contemporary artists are conveying scenes of the post-apocalyptic sublime. They are composing the images by romanticizing the deteriorating structures of Detroit' s industrial past. The images are presenting a picturesque scene, exaggerating the re-assimilation of the city with 'nature'. The slow deterioration is pointing towards the increasing neglect, in large part due to the emptying out of the city. The lack of people in the photographs and the muted colors relay a sense of silence and desolation: a notion of the post-apocalyptic. Yet the end is not portrayed as negative, harsh, or victimizing Instead, the photographs are pointing towards the beauty in the fall—the sublime evocations of the deteriorating industrial landscape.

Figure 20: ***Rolling Hall, Ford River Rouge,*** **Andrew Moore.**

Ruin Porn: Satisfying Post-Environmentalist Desires

The photographs of Detroit's abandoned spaces have been called by some residents 'ruin porn', a termed coined by Jim Griffieon, because they are seen as exploitative and a fetish.[53] Griffieon himself is a photographer of abandoned places, but being a native sees his work as a means of cultural explanation, rather than aesthetic exploitation. Griffieon's greatest issue with the majority of recent photographs of Detroit is that they lack truth, and fact. He believes the artists are too caught up in the thrill of dereliction and the aesthetics of it, that they overlook the harsh realities that dereliction has brought to the cities residents. The photographers and explorers travelling to the ruins are not the ones who live amongst them. They are merely tourists. Griffioen has been quoted as saying; "these photographers were showing up with $40,000 cameras to take pictures of houses worth less than their hotel bills."[54] He further applies exploitation and detachment, principles of pornography, to ruin photography.

As the images spread in popularity, little attention to drawn to their context, they merely become aesthetic attractions. John Leary, doesn't take a side, but writes,

> So much ruin photography and ruin film aestheticizes poverty without inquiring of its origins, dramatizes spaces but never seeks out the people that inhabit and transform them, and romanticizes isolated acts of resistance without acknowledging the massive political and social forces aligned against the real transformation, and not just stubborn survival, of the city. And to see oneself portrayed in this way, as a curiosity to be lamented or studied, is jarring for any Detroiter, who is of course also an America, with all the sense of self-confidence and native-born privilege that we're taught to associate with the United States.[55]

The fascination with Detroit's ruins, according to Leary, is explored in a way that is in a larger sense un-American; an exploitation of ones own nation. From a greater perspective, those who

[53] Thomas Morton, "Something, Something, Something, Detroit", *Vice*, 2010, accessed May 4, 2013. http://www.vice.com/read/something-something-something-detroit-994-v16n8.
[54] Richard B. Woodward, "Disaster Photography: When is Documentary Exploitation?", *Art News*, February 6, 2013, accessed May 4, 2013. http://www.artnews.com/2013/02/06/the-debate-over-ruin-porn/.
[55] John Patrick Leary, "Detroitism", *Guernica,* January 15, 2011, accessed May 4, 2013. http://www.guernicamag.com/features/leary_1_15_11/.

deem the photographs 'ruin porn' are continuing the long lasting American tradition of rejecting ruins from the American landscape. They are rejecting the categorization of derelict space as ruins, because to do so is valorize the decay. Instead, by criticizing the photographs and categorizing them as 'ruin porn', they are attempting to point towards the victimization of the city. They believe that these contemporary photographers are looking at the city through a lens focused on a "a mythic past, than a vivid present."[56] Instead, they argue for the revitalizing and awareness of the immense hardships that the derelictions in truth symbolize.

In large part there is truth to this criticism: the majority of the 'ruin gazers' are those who do not live amongst the ruins. They are artists, scholars, and urban planners: members of the new rising middle class—Richard Florida's "creative class", "a group of creative professionals in business and finance, law, health care and related fields. These people engage in complex problem solving that involves a great deal of independent judgment and requires high levels of education or human capital."[57] These are individuals who are not blue-collar workers lamenting over skyrocketing unemployment. These are individuals who can afford fancy cameras, and leisure time to travel to Detroit in order to seek out the ruins. They are the tourists who seek out areas of decline because they find the architectural decay beautiful, they do not understand or relate to those who see the structures as symbolic of struggle. On the contrary, as Steinmeitz points out, a large number of suburbanites are touring the ruins out of nostalgia for a Fordist past.[58] These suburbanites are in large part Detroit residents who had the economic flexibility to leave the city when the recession hit. They have gained distance from the city, allowing one to see the sites as monuments and memories rather than the cause of personal struggle.

The narrative of the post-apocalyptic sublime appeases the desire of contemporary environmentalists for a return to pre-industrial times. As discussed by Nordhaus and Shellenberger, contemporary environmentalists see a future shadowed by "apocalyptic fears". However alongside these fears "shine nostalgic visions of a transcendent future in which humans might, once again, live in harmony with nature through a return to small-scale agriculture, or

[56] Nate Millington, "Post-Industrial Imaginaries: Nature, Representation and Ruin in Detroit", *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 37 (2012): 280, accessed May 4, 2013, http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1468-2427.2012.01206.x/abstract.
[57] Richard Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class*, 8.
[58] George Steinmeitz, "Harrowed Landscapes: White Ruingazers in Namibia and Detroit and the Cultivation of Memory", *Visual Studies, v. 23 no. 3, December 2008*. 212:236.

even to hunter-gatherer life" [59] The photographs contemporary artists are producing of the industrial fallen to dereliction emphasize the encroaching trees, shrubs, and grasses—the urban prairie. As a result, these images are satisfying this desire and are thus being perceived as beauty and promising—perhaps even inspiring as Detroit sees the in-flux of urban farming.

The ruins are increasingly seen as spectacles; they are attracting individuals to the city to engage in photography and the arts, exploration and adventure, and the act of 'ruin-gazing'. The increasing interest in these sites, the advertising of them as attraction has created a larger movement and organization focusing on their use for tourism and adventure tourism. The tours being offered of them are by local residents and urban explorers, they aren't privately funded organizations.

The photographs of Detroit's ruins are making the abandoned sites into spaces for tourism. Although the sites are not official tourist sites, they are fostering independent guides, and creating online communities focusing on capturing the beauty, secrets, and memories of the industrial spaces. Urban exploration in particular has arisen as a facet of adventure tourism that focuses specifically on abandoned spaces. Their motto, "leave nothing but footprints, take nothing but photographs"[60] ensures not only the preservation of the site, but the emphasis on recording the memories via the arts—via photography.

As Urry discusses, photography plays a significant role in not only how we choose the places we tour, but how we record our experience of the places we tour. He writes:

> Photographic images organize our anticipation or daydreaming about the places we might gaze on. When we are away we record images of what we have gazed on. And we partly choose where to go to capture places on film. The obtaining of photographic images in part organizes our experiences as tourists. And our memories of places are largely structured through photographic images and the mainly verbal text we weave around images when they are on show to others. The tourist gaze involves the rapid circulation of photographic images."[61]

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[59] Nordhaus & Shellenberger, "Evolve", in *Love Your Monsters: Postenvironmentalism and the Anthropocene,* (United States: Breakthrough Institue, 2011).
[60] Luke Bennett, "Bunkerology—A Case Study in the History and Practice of Urban Exploration", *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space,* v.29 n3, June 6, 2011, accessed May 6, 2013, 427. http://www.envplan.com/epc/editorials/editorials/d13410.pdf.
[61] John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze: Leisure and Travel in Contemporary Societies,* (London: Sage, 1990), 140.

The photographs of Detroit's ruins illustrate this theory. The photographs circulating the media and galleries are shaping perceptions of the city and the sites into spectacles and tourist attractions. The photographs are inspiring travel to the city. Photography also plays a larger role in how explorers, tourists, and artists are engaging with the city of Detroit. The engagement is not in a stereotypical procedure, but rather, the itinerary for Detroit's tourism is constructed around photographing the ruins.

The photographs of Detroit's ruins are being used to start larger conversations about Detroit's current state. Online communities swap photographs of the ruins from their personal explorations, and in doing so they inspire and point out sites for others to do so as well. The photographs that are produced by commercial artists, such as Andrew Moore and Yves Marchand, are displayed in coffee table books; books that make the sites and images into marvels. As Urry points out, it's the text and presentation of these images that make them so significant. The presentation of the images in coffee table books commemorates the spectacle of Detroit's ruins. The discussion and sharing of the photographs in online forums emphasize a collective organization geared towards creating the sites into, unofficial, destinations.

The photographs of the city are constructing a distinct image of Detroit for outsiders. Christopher Woodward, a Londoner, learned of Detroit's ruins through Carmen Vergara's photo collection. In his discussion, "Learning from Detroit: The Aesthetics of Urban Decay", he mentions his initial shock when visiting the city.[62] He mentions his shock in finding a small island of commercial activity in the cities downtown area. The city is not entirely constructed of Piranesi-style ruins, instead there is a small pocket of commercial activity, of residents going about their mundane lives. He recalls the experience almost a bit of a letdown, what he had thought was an abandoned city was no different than any other. However, just a bit of a distance further outside, he found the extreme derelict and the irresistible decay. What's interesting about Woodward's account is his mention of a longing for the commercial island. He mentions that once he stumbled upon the irresistible ruins he had travelled to see, the sheer amount of abandonment and dereliction became a burden. There was a point where the excitement turned to sadness and to fear. This emphasizes the feeling of the apocalyptic sublime, the thrill but the

[62] Christopher Woodward, lecture, "Learning from Detroit: The Aesthetics of Urban Decay", *CRASSH: University of Cambridge,* November 28, 2001, accessed January 22, 2013. http://www.crassh.cam.ac.uk/events/1762/.

terror of the entire city abandoned and empty—the freedom to explore, but the fear of what may be ahead.

The DetroitUrbEx organization emphasizes Detroit's ruins as sites to be explored and photographed. For example, one can click on the 'tour' tab on the DetroitUrbEx website[63] leading to a page with an image of a silhouette of a photographer, standing on what appears to be a rooftop staring at the sprawled out Detroit city below. The camera sits on a tripod in as if it were a telescope, peering into the minute and hidden details of the city—the sunsets across the horizon. This type of image appropriation makes the city feel as if it was meant for photography. Next to the image are short sentence, brief points, outlining the tours. In particular, the page notes, "Detroiturbex.com offers an easy and safe way to see all sides of this incredible city with an experienced, knowledgeable, and professional tour guide."[64] The emphasis on safety is interesting because it implies that the tour will be, in a greater sense, one of luxury. The viewer is safe from the dangers of urban decay, and is ensured a safe and pleasing adventure—their desires for decay will be fulfilled.

Exploration itself implies an element of risk, because it implies a journey into an unknown. The tours eliminate this notion. The luxury is largely one for the middle and creative class, as the website notes, their past clientele includes movie studios, artists, and academics. They mention they cater to all walks of life, but because their tours are priced it automatically creates a notion of exclusivity—it begs the question, is this affordable to the remaining residents? It would seem that these tours are for the upper and middle classes who not only have the time to spare to come and explore abandoned and derelict spaces—a less than luxurious vacation spot—and those who have the means to pay for a guided tour through these gritty places.

The photo collections of Detroit's ruins highlight a trend, they highlight the essence of an itinerary. The photographers follow the same pathways, taking pictures of the same buildings and the same spaces. They shoot from different angles, and their photographs all display a sense of individuality. However at the same time they also share many similar characteristics and subjects. The touring of Detroit in large part mimics the Grand Tour travelers would take through Europe. The ruins of Detroit become the locale of an American version of the Grand Tour.

[63] "Tours of Detroit" http://detroiturbex.com/etc/tours/index.html
[64] Detroit UrbEx.

CONCLUSION

Though the images of Detroit are not a direct form of urban renewal they have kept the city at the center of international attention. Detroit has become the focus of urban theorists worldwide. The city poses such an extreme case of decline that it has become the model and challenge for all theories and theorists of urban renewal. Detroit has become a mecca of urban ruins and has drawn artists and explorers. The narratives conveyed through the images and stories tell of success and ruin, power and loss, prosperity and poverty. The images are powerful. The romantic and crumbling ruin set in a depopulated city satisfies the desires and perceptions of the creative class as well as those with contemporary environmentalist beliefs. The fascination is with the process and the notion of a city re-assimilating with nature. As such these images of Detroit are not a direct form of urban renewal but a new tool for urban planners worldwide.

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