

# WHAT CAN THE VOID DO?

THE POLITICS AND AESTHETICS OF EMPTINESS  
IN THE URBAN IMAGINARY

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*Eve. So this is your wilderness. Detroit.*

*E. But this place will rise again.*

*E. Yeah.*

*There's water here.*

*When the cities in the south are burning.*

*This place will bloom.<sup>1</sup>*

*Adam. Everybody left.*

*A. Will it?*

It's *pre-pre-dawn* – somewhere between the hours of 1 and 4 AM, when city colors are coated in an incubator-orange outer glow; when sounds are hollow and ringing, peripheral if there at all. Car headlights wash over an otherwise empty and run-down street. A dashboard camera first studies the two blanched figures in the vehicle, and then – as if suddenly growing bored with the pair – pans outward toward the procession of darkened houses that border the crumbling road.

The traveling trio – one camera and two vampires – continues to make its way aimlessly through the suburban outskirts of the city – Detroit. A partially illuminated skyline, of which we are allowed a few seconds' glimpse in passing, is swallowed by an unending bramble of dark trees. After a brief stop at Jack White's childhood home (neat, wooden, and uncompromisingly inert), we are brought into the old Michigan Theatre.

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<sup>1</sup> 2013. Jim Jarmusch, *Only Lovers Left Alive*. Dialogue: 45:38 – 46:30. Michigan Theatre scene: 47:00 – 48:25.

An upward panning spirals while it surveys the space: it catches on all the impossibly ornate details, patiently letting the myth-like structure and the cavernous void within unpack itself. One of the vampires, Adam, laughs to his partner and vampire no. 2, Eve, as he points out the irony of this derelict structure as built upon the same site as the birthplace of Henry Ford's first automobile prototype. As the camera continues to cycle through several other shots, streams of blue light flood the curved shell of the textured stucco ceiling to reveal decades' worth of slow decay (fig. 1D).

With his fantastic immortal memory, Adam cultivates a spectacular image of the theatre in its golden age: filled to capacity<sup>2</sup>, chandelier lights reflecting from the many mirrors dotting its walls, protracting the space into an infinite illusion. At some point the hollowed space becomes hallowed: with the theatre's illuminated dome-like center, it's difficult to resist drawing comparisons to the Hagia Sophia. The camera saves us from total reverie as without warning, it pulls down from the ceiling to reveal the familiar structure of an urban parking garage as the vampires likewise return their attention to the building's current purpose. The worlds between Adam's romantic imagining of the theatre's past life and the mundane function it performs at present are jarring: his obvious disturbance prickles our own, and the poetic hyperbole of the film's title comes full circle. The city of Detroit, alienated from any real trace of its identity, is recast in the image of an apocalyptic wasteland, as much a shell as the building itself. What serves here to conjure the fantasy of an exquisitely rusted playground for two impossibly cool vampires poses in a separate world – that is, our own – a threat to the culture and future of one of America's most mythologized cities.

Jim Jarmusch's 2013 film *Only Lovers Left Alive* is an example of a recent trend within contemporary American film that takes up the image of urban ruin within the geographical arena of the American Rust Belt as a symbol of abandonment, slow decay, and disjunction. Used as both a subject and an aesthetic, these decompositional spaces perform at a base level through their affective sway; in the realm of the artistic imaginary the entire landscape or selected pieces within can be infinitely layered, fused, and pulled apart to generate new meaning and produce a nostalgia that looks both forward and back<sup>3</sup>. Within the aesthetic of abandonment these spaces are universally reduced to symbols toward post-industrial neglect, apathy, and ruin, which carries a weight of vast socio-political concern for cities such as Detroit that are currently struggling to remake their images on both national and global frontiers. Alternatively, this revived interest in defunct spaces can recast them via a blurring or formal 'letting go' of old boundaries and functionalities as a space of productive potentiality, where the element of fantasy is neither

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<sup>2</sup> Which, according to credible sources (if a vampire's word isn't good enough.), was 4,000 people – making it one of the country's largest theatres, historically and otherwise.

<sup>3</sup> As though Benjamin's *angel* were not a body but a building.

suffocating nor derisive but instead a gesture toward a future vision, where this building, the space it contains and that surrounding it are all becoming something.

While acknowledging “Detroitism”<sup>4</sup> as just a sample size of a much larger cross-cultural phenomenon of aestheticizing decay, this essay will use Detroit alongside Berlin – another city whose voids, though of a separate genre, have lended it the self-dubbed title of “poor but sexy”<sup>5</sup> – to first explore the affective sensibilities behind this fascination with open spaces as incongruences and pauses within the urban imaginary. As the stance assumed by this essay is largely built through an understanding of the forces underlining such a fixation as located in and worked through the body and embodied experience, it will draw upon multi-sensory visual and time-based data as well as traditional and experimental readings and practices within anthropology and aesthetic theory to evoke an atmospheric discussion of the topic it concerns. After looking at the network of forces at work to produce and maintain our unending fascination with the allegory of the disappearing city, this essay will turn to a discussion of the hazards and potentialities of cultivating the image of the urban void, using Detroit and Berlin as two case studies that work toward an understanding of what is reduced and what is produced within that space.

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<sup>4</sup> In his early 2011 essay “Detroitism” John Patrick Leary identified Detroit’s victimization in the recent wave of fetishizing decay in contemporary American culture and has since termed the whole spectacle as such.

<sup>5</sup> This descriptor was first used (dubbed?) over a decade ago by the city’s own Mayor, Klaus Wowereit, when he declared Berlin “*ist arm, aber sexy.*”

PART I. THE MAGIC OF WHAT ISN'T  
ON UNMAKING SPACE, COLLAPSING TIME, AND THE URBAN IMAGINARY

The city is perhaps the most direct representation of what Deleuze defines under the French term *agencement* (Eng. tr. *assemblage*) – or, “a multiplicity constituted by heterogeneous terms and which establishes liaisons, relations between them.”<sup>6</sup> As a product of interwoven affects this idea of assemblage is likewise a collective of “heterogeneous materials,” both human and not, spatial in nature and experience, temporally-based, shifting, sensitive and incredibly fragile.<sup>7</sup> And with assemblage, as with any work of art (of which the necessity of phenomenological decoding is prerequisite), bodily experiences of and within the urban environment are inseparable from, if not readings of, the city’s symbolic structure.

In the space of appearance, the city-as-assemblage is significant for its ability to stitch together any number of scales and temporalities to produce new mappings of relationships. As one navigates the topography of the cityscape, materials swing in and out of orbit with each another: relations bundle up, break apart, and are made and remade within inconsistent bursts. But as Eric Laurier and Chris Philo show in their observance of the rigorous architectures of social norms and regulations that reign over café encounters<sup>8</sup>, these connections, human or otherwise, are bracketed by any number of preconditions.

On the city scale, and of particular relevance to the topic of this essay, is that of history and the work it does to influence how we interpret and engage with urban geographies. Far from a distinguished and remote textbook knowledge, the historical import of a city is encoded into its materiality and therefore realized through the process of physically moving through it. The history of a city appears in the conglomeration of any number of its spatial manifestations – high-rise buildings, monuments, art installations, public parks, street signs and so on – experienced collectively, this curated sensory understanding might be better described as the *atmosphere* of a city<sup>9</sup>. But unlike the material

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<sup>6</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Dialogues II* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007.)

<sup>7</sup> Bruno Latour, “An Attempt at a ‘Compositionist Manifesto’” from *New Literary History* (Summer 2010), 474.

<sup>8</sup> Eric Laurier and Chris Philo. “Possible Geographies: a passing encounter in a café.” Talk given at the RGS-IBG Annual Conference in 2003.

<sup>9</sup> In his 1959 text *Experiencing Architecture*, Steen Eiler Rasmussen devotes the first chapter (“Basic Observations”) to unpacking our impressively complicated ability for sensory understanding, constructed by a protracted learning process related to “reading” objects with our bodies (i.e. knowing when a rope is slack from having once made a bow and “drawn the string so tightly that it hums” (28), or recognizing a work of poor architecture from the feeling of discomfort

structures that it is projected through, atmosphere is a distinctly social and sensory phenomenon, as immaterial and fleeting as any other feeling. Like Baudelaire's Parisian scenes<sup>10</sup>, the atmosphere of a city exists as an overwhelming force so long as there is someone around to experience it and to point it out. Acknowledging the loaded allegory of the city as a force structured by legacies and their affects and necessarily by human reification, it becomes apparent why the city void – an obvious contradiction to everything we know about urban life and by extension, our own – attracts such attention. Its emptiness isn't just spatial, but challenges traditional castings of history and is especially contextual: without a self-conscious structure or traction, it floats through the particular narrative of the city like a ghost.

We expect that cities be “crowded, dirty, loud, busy, and always growing,” as Leary suggests. So when they don't match up to that standard (which is, after all, indicative of our automatic vision of the city as economy and as body<sup>11</sup>) – whether by cultural specifics (like Amsterdam or Copenhagen, with their bikes and all related cleanliness and calm) or for less immediate and more opaque reasons stemming from history, economy, or politics (like Berlin and Detroit) – either through pockets of empty spaces or partially hollowed out spaces, produced suddenly or gradually – eyebrows are raised. The emptiness spooks for the same reason it fascinates – in that it behaves in ways quite unlike ourselves and everything else we know.

Elizabeth Grosz's essay “Bodies-Cities” shows us that bodies and cities are not representationally nor sequentially linked: one does not make or symbolize the other, but rather they are two unique forces that are continuously working upon each other to produce new realities (a true Deleuzian assemblage.)<sup>12</sup> But as all sorts of experiences of the city are sent and received through the medium-transmitter of our own bodies, and when this *modus operandi* is paired up with the human tendency to want to anthropomorphize nearly everything, it becomes tempting to imagine cities of all sorts as familiar bodies and so such comparisons are often made. They appear often in cultural reviews and essays as a poetic gambit in making sense of visual art that takes on particularly disturbing or confusing aspects of the city as its subject – the phenomenon of slow decay is one such embodiment that is becoming increasingly common:

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it produces, through “observing heavy pillars sinking into softer materials” as at the Stormgade in Copenhagen (28)) and producing a collective of these incidental understandings to reflexively call upon in each future experience.

<sup>10</sup> See “Tableaux Parisiens” from Charles Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du Mal*.

<sup>11</sup> For whom the *natural* growth rate is exponential, dizzying, miraculous.

<sup>12</sup> Elizabeth Grosz, “Bodies-Cities” in *Sexuality and Space* (Princeton Architectural Press, 1992), 241-253.

“A strange beauty is born of disintegration. Population haemorrhage, dry fiscal pockets and defunct industry leave their scars as weathered spaces where vines and leaves mingle with shattered plaster, tumbledown stone and rusted, curlicue iron; the body of the building eating itself from the inside out.”<sup>13</sup>

But what are the reasons for such a comparison? Inasmuch as our bodies can be drawn up in a 1:1 ratio to the city or individual buildings as an internally understood metaphor that positions us closer to the topics or sites discussed, its use in publications and projects involving the aesthetics of abandonment can also be explained in reverse. That is: watching a building or a city entire behave *unnaturally*, i.e. constricting, peeling apart, or collapsing altogether, might also provide a type of psychological buffering in processing the patterns of decay within our own life cycle as the growth of the body slows, plateaus, and eventually begins to decline. In any case the bodies-buildings casting remains ever-popular and relevant; perhaps more can be learnt from a study of the strings of fantasy and desire – forces that work to imagine the body politic of a city as a literal body, as Grosz contemplates; extend the density and magnificence and madness of the city to our bodies; and negate, through an urban embodiment, the short duration of our own – that run through the pairing, rather than the metaphor itself, which has obvious (if not immediate) connectivity.

The phenomenon of the void in the urban environment functions as a type of rupture or pause in the atmospheric and temporal grind of the city: the authority of this break, both immediate and affective, has been used as an organizational strategy in city planning and politics for millennia (Slide 3). A flat, exposed arena in which bodies can see and be seen universally likewise gestures to ideas of a similar sense of transparency among the governmental body overseeing such a space. But negative space, like positive space, has its own typology, and each is a unique sensory experience in the same sense as every other component of the city. Consciously or accidentally produced, whether by a process of slow decay or sudden removal: these conditions influence how a void is experienced, its accessibility, its contingency, and by necessity the genres of meaning that its visitors will project onto it, as the disruptive space of the void (as is the case with any affective material) is always held together by the forces of fantasy and desire<sup>14</sup>. Negative spaces in cities, while a type of paradox that continues to fascinate, are just as subject to the weight of the city imaginary as are their materialized counterparts.

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<sup>13</sup> Lucy Davies, “Beauty of the broken,” *The Telegraph*, 29 June 2010, web.

<sup>14</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minnesota University Press, 1983.)

When a building is gutted and repurposed, there is of course an applied understanding of the divide between its past function and present condition. The romantic yearning for the past, a not uncommon desire of city dwellers, often finds its roost in these sites as activated symbols of that history and also as a point of muted fascination for a space which appears to handle time differently – diametrically, fractal, dilated somehow – from the unrelenting reeling of everyday city life. Fetishized as sites where “time stands still,” these spaces also become the condensed embodiment of much larger, more complicated political and economic failure as opposed to “just one of many” affected spaces. Briefly pulling from the Detroit case, to which the next part of this essay will fully dedicate itself: the false nostalgia behind the repurposing of the Michigan Theatre – “once that grand movie palace, transformed by the wild west of capitalism into the next economic imperative: a parking station”<sup>15</sup> – is used as a cinematic trope: the sensations that overcome us when Jarmusch’s dotting lens rolls over the remnants of its glitzy original ceiling are, of course, steeped within an implicit reverence for its magnificent history (we don’t even need a three hundred year-old vampire to convince us.) Gutted buildings, which behave as temporal fixatives or dualities and as visual testaments to a time when things were definitely different and “probably better” – are typically anthropomorphized or romanticized through an aesthetic that caters to abandonment, a slow decay, and a warping or negation of temporalities.

The second type of urban void addressed within this essay is closer to the classical module of the agora in both its composition and affect. As with the case of the Berlin wall and the empty space that have rapidly unfolded within the city – the case study of the third section of this essay – the void as a negation of material produces new meaning without contingency: it does not assume the same burden of historicity superimposed upon repurposed spaces (and in the case for Berlin, suggests a new reading of history). Alternatively, the flatness and permeability yields a type of affective clarity or newness: these spaces are held to a saint’s work: historical negation, forgiving<sup>16</sup>, and the ecstatic promise of a future somehow scrubbed from the burden of the past – a site for remaking

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<sup>15</sup> I’m not making this language up. Narratives like [this](#) produced by the “Detroit Lamentor,” to borrow another one of Leary’s terms, are riddled with bombastic criticisms of capitalist regimes and finger pointing at government failure, the latter of which turns this sort of dramatized monologue into a real weapon with drastic consequences, which will be discussed in section II of this essay.

<sup>16</sup> The Arendtian understanding of forgiving as an act of release seems appropriate here. In *The Human Condition* forgiving is handled as an act of revitalization: allowing a body to free itself from the action to which it has been reduced to – a true unsticking that allows that person to continue living. This type of reanimation is also a rehumanization, and carries with it vast spiritual significance. I suggest that empty spaces in the city fascinate and excite for the similar fantasy of an infinitely possible future that is free from the structures of history embedded in the material geography of the city. See also the “Action” chapter’s work on promising.

memory and, as in the case of Berlin, recasting the identity of a city (on both national and global scales) to finally cover up past wounds and move on.

English can fall short in vocabularies of the void, as the Dutch architect Steen Eiler Rasmussen points out in his book *Experiencing Architecture*<sup>17</sup>, in a chapter that addresses the pocket of space produced within an architectural structure. What's lost in translation is a necessary headache to have: the words each language uses discuss spaces of the void no doubt reflect vastly different interpretations of and expectations for what urban emptiness is and what it can do. Even Rasmussen's hesitancy to resign his discussion of space to the word *space*, which he suggests is far too neutral and – well – spatial, reveals this difference in thinking (he maintains that *cavity* serves his purposes much better, as it emphasizes the nature of that absence as not just the necessary physical result of constructing four walls, but gestures towards the idea of that space having its own atmospheric bulk, a concept much more gilded in the Dutch term 'rum' and especially the German term "Raum-Gefühl."<sup>18</sup>

While acknowledging the worlds of difference that mark our encounters with and understandings of the void within urban geographies, and how that might impose limits on a universal discussion of that space, this essay will attempt to parse out some recognizable effects of the fascination with emptiness in the image of modern city. As a force marked by both a longing for the past and a desire for the future, a want to reveal and cover up, to promise and forgive, and to deconstruct and remake politics on a city-wide through global scale, the void has perhaps never been a more dominant and conflicting influence in the

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<sup>17</sup> Steen Eiler Rasmussen, *Experiencing Architecture* (The MIT Press, 1964.)

<sup>18</sup> It's interesting here to note the translation back to English: Raum being room, Gefühl being "emotion" – literally the feeling belonging to a room. In German the sensory quality of space slips into more casual vocabulary relating to architectural spaces – like Raumgestalt ("interior design.") Here Gestalt is literally "shape, form" but it also serves as the branch to *Gestaltism* or Gestalt psychology, a fin-du-siècle theory of mind introduced by the Berlin school which suggests that people register experiences in totalities, indeed atmospheres, prior to any possible conception of the individual strands of parts which make it up. While this entire idea does wonders to elaborate upon the ways that we experience, navigate, and in some sense buffer ourselves from the near-constant sensory overload of the topology of the cityscape, it can also cut in from underneath to explain our sensitivity toward the phenomenon of empty space in the modern city as a removal of vital matter from the overarching sway of an assemblage. This produces a type of unwinding effect that is most obvious when structures are not caught in slow decay but are suddenly and totally removed: casting a true cavity in the space of the city's appearance. The tightly knit scene of the cityscape comes undone; the illusion of the city entire breaks apart. The ability to *look inside*, in both a literal and symbolic sense, these disconnected/ing structures and aestheticize their physical conditions as a type of "terrible poetry" can be as jarring and unpleasant as it can be captivating. In any case, it necessitates a total reconception of all other strands of the city that hold the illusion together: more on this in Part III.

urban imagination, aesthetic language, digital worlds, and global political concern as it is now. To call again on the image of *Angelus Novus*, this essay aims – as does the void to history, I would like to think – to confront the current influence (manipulations and hopes, productions and restrictions and all) of the urban void to explore the social shapes and meanings of absence in modern city life.

## PART II. WHAT THE VOID TAKES AWAY

On fetishizing decay, immobilizing agency, and the aesthetics of abandonment

“It’s the zombies I’m sick of... and their fear of their own fucking imagination,” Adam laments to Eve in a bedroom scene that shortly follows the theatre – but not before a rigorous chess match, and some screen time for the *Amanita Muscaria* (“This goes to show: we don’t know shit about fungi.”)<sup>19</sup> What serves as Adam’s stock insult of the human condition has an eerie parallel in a world neither post-apocalyptic nor vampire-populated: our own. In its hyperbolic and condensed account of the urban decay of downtown Detroit the British filmmaker Julien Temple’s 2010 documentary *Requiem for Detroit?* cultivates the image of Detroit as an entirely abandoned city with “full-grown trees sprouting from the tops of deserted skyscrapers.” Of a greater political concern is his imaging of the city’s inhabitants:

“In their shadows, the glazed eyes of the street zombies slide into view, stumbling in front of the car. Our excitement at driving into what feels like a man-made hurricane Katrina is matched only by sheer disbelief that what was once the fourth-largest city in the U.S. could actually be in the process of disappearing from the face of the earth.”

Though the film artist might make a claim for ‘artistic license,’ a loaded privilege/responsibility deserving a paper unto itself and for which this essay does not have the space to provide a justly detailed discussion<sup>20</sup>, the imaging of Detroit’s inhabitants as a type of walking undead is incredibly problematic in regards to the city’s crisis (not to extremely mention morally suspect). In the middle of an effort to recover from decades’ worth of battery from complex political corruption, economic collapse and myriad social issues the current condition of Detroit cannot be properly evaluated without a sensitivity

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<sup>19</sup> Adam to Eve. 53:35 – 53:37.

<sup>20</sup> See *Art Scenes: The Social Scripts of the Art World* (2012) by visual artist and Director of Adult and Academic Programs at MoMA Pablo Helguera, for a recent, incredibly thoughtful and relevant (as per this essay’s own concerns) exploration of the creative rights and responsibilities of contemporary artists whose practices largely fall under the categories of public and social art. A more timeless though perhaps less relevant exploration of moralities surrounding the relationship among the triad of politics, art, and aesthetics in the modern world is, of course, Benjamin’s 1969 essay “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction.”

toward and appropriate space given for a conversation about the protracted nature of such crisis and the political projects attempting to cast a vision for its future<sup>21</sup>. In representing the city as an abandoned wasteland, deserted by its inhabitants – and zombifying those that remain, that ‘just so happen to get caught on camera,’ as Temple might suggest – the aesthetic of abandonment devalues the agency of the city; furthermore, it negates the need for very real and current concern for the crisis in Detroit, which allows the corruption threatening such basic human rights as access to clean water to keep happening.<sup>22</sup>

Projected through the aesthetics of abandonment, Detroit is flattened into a caricature of the post-apocalyptic metropolis. The allegory of apathy underlining the entire process of decay poses a massive threat to the viability of any future recovery plans: in other words, the aesthetics of abandonment and all art – film, photographic, painterly and otherwise – produced through it threatens to transform its own fantastical conjuring of a forgotten Detroit into a reality as this casting suffocates all other representations of the city that are strung throughout regional, state-wide, national, and international scales. The overwhelming dominance of such a vision discredits such recovery efforts and isolates the city within a permanent stage-setting of immobility, corruption, and disinterest reverberating from the inside out. To recognize the recent strategies released by the city for future revitalization would break the spell of the desolate city-wasteland trope that dominates Detroit as a visual aesthetic.

A major problem and explanation for this vision’s rapid-take over is the equally rapid proliferation of the ‘homemade documentary’ as a trend in contemporary internet culture, kept in all manners of robust form through the immediate and unfiltered video sharing website Youtube. A 5 minute-long video titled “Abandoned Detroit Skyscrapers” consists of a stitching together through a Powerpoint-esque presentation of amateur panoramas of various street-views and downtown buildings that its author captured during a walking tour of the city in July 2008,<sup>23</sup> complete with an audio track: “Little Child” by Din Din Wo [sic]<sup>24</sup>. In the adjacent sidebar which links directly to additional related videos are a myriad assortment of these ‘mini-documentaries,’ all of which take on a likeminded image of Detroit.

Among the more aggressive of the available videos (with an alarming 2.5 million views) is “Detroit in RUINS! (Crowder goes Ghetto)”: a 13 minute-long piece from Fox News contributor and professional comedian Steven Crowder, produced in 2010, which

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<sup>21</sup> See Detroit Future City’s [website](#) and the full text of its strategic framework plan [here](#).

<sup>22</sup> In most [recent news](#) the Detroit Water and Sewerage Department has shut off water access for customers who cannot foot the monthly bill, which at \$75 is double the national average of \$40/month.

<sup>23</sup> “[Abandoned Detroit Skyscrapers](#).” user SamaritanUSA, uploaded 12 July 2008.

<sup>24</sup> “Little Child” is the English translation of the featured track titled “Din Din Wo”, a song from the 1995 debut album by Senegalese singer-songwriter Habib Koité.

perhaps best embodies the specific concerns this essay presents regarding the negation of historical understanding (or any temporality at all), absolute suspension of moral concern, and a refusal to recognize the efforts of current political projects explicitly working toward a future vision for the “city wasteland,” that the aesthetics of abandonment effects in its production and use of such an image. Other video titles include “How the American Dream Went Wrong in Detroit,” “Dying Detroit,” and “The Abandoned Skyscrapers of Detroit”: a video-based news story endorsed nonetheless by *The Daily Telegraph*.

This particular use of the ruined city-imaginary is significantly more alarming and poses a much greater threat to the vitality of Detroit’s future than Jarmusch’s use of the abandoned city as setting for a fictional narrative featuring vampires nonetheless, which no doubt hints at the film’s own fantasy. Journalists and professional photographers who take up the “ruins of Detroit” as subject actively condense the city into this aesthetic, throwing its cultural and political qualities and conditions to the wayside to produce a fantasized narrative of apathetic abandonment that stands in for the reality of a city that is actively motioning toward a reparative future. The little resistance that these news stories and documentaries encounter is reduced further by the blind trust given to established news sources (such as *The Daily Telegraph*.)

A recent (2003) essay by Andreas Huyssen that addresses the next case taken up by this essay – the void in Berlin – suggests, if only in one sentence that is immediately afterwards inverted and left in favor of that opposite claim, that for “net surfers and virtual-city flaneurs, the built city has itself become obsolete.” In an admirably future-oriented and determinism perhaps appropriate for Berlin’s distinct void, he argues that it is precisely because of the decreasing emphasis on the material architecture of a city – a sometimes regional and other times national, but always experiential comprehension – and an increasing focus on a city’s communications, media, and services – an always global scale – as true representation of the city that Berlin’s voids are allowing it to remake its own image in the digitized global vision of urban imaginary. For Detroit, it would seem as if the authority of the Internet to recast the image of a city – virtual tours, GIF sets, Google Maps and Images (slide set 3: all) – is not only eclipsing its efforts towards a revitalization but also stitching the city onto the specific visuals of abandonment that cultivate its artistic “use value” at present, which deflects immediately to a false nostalgia for the past. Through the false promise and reductive capabilities of video-based “documentaries, virtual simulation, and both moving and still images, the “digital witness” of Detroit creates moralistic voids far more ruinous than the pockets of negative space produced within the city.

### PART III. WHAT THE VOID GIVES

#### ON NEW SPACES, REMAKING MEMORY REVOLUTION, AND THE POLITICS OF NOSTALGIA

As I hope to have made apparent in the first two parts of this essay, the affective capacities of the void within the urban imaginary is a force that – for better or for worse – is largely determined by those who experience it and act on their desire to share that impression through visual media. The Detroit case showcases the potential political consequences of casting of the void through the aesthetics of abandonment on both local and global scales by the flattening and isolating effect it has upon the city imaginary. The final section of this essay will discuss the productive capabilities of the void within the case of Berlin, a city whose physical and imagined topography has shifted massively in the past two and a half decades. The void of Berlin, as a topic of political, social, and artistic concern, has opened up space in the city and its memory for both activity and reflection. The fall of the wall and the resulting space which opened up within the center of the city of course produced new sites for creative production. And in how the new spaces were administered, typically invisible power structures dictating the relationship between the city government and residents were brought to light, picked apart, and rather incredibly revolutionized through virtual technology and representation. The limits of governmental control over the use and ownership of ex-“death strip” land is a dominant discourse in city life today. But in all of the generative material the void brought into the city, it also summoned to the center of public consciousness the immaterial figure of memory, and called into question the active forces of fantasy and desire that so too work upon the ways in which we choose to remember. Amid all of its conflict, incongruences, and allowances, Berlin’s void has opened up a space among the local, national, and global frontiers for a discourse concerning the politics and ethics of memory, forgetting, and nostalgia, and has provided a platform for a new way of exploring the urban imaginary and the material city as sites in flux, unhinged and gesticulating and constantly producing new meaning.

“Berlin today embodies “a grid of well designed and self-enclosed places in which the interstitial spaces are abandoned or neglected,” (Boyer, “The Great Frame-Up” 81). To walk through this city means to assume the role of a moving

channel flipper, to traverse disconnected segments that position the individual in different imaginary pasts, presents, and futures.”<sup>25</sup>

The most common interpretation of Berlin’s voids involves, quite understandably, the material that is produced within and takes over those pockets of empty spaces, whether on a temporary or long-term basis: graffiti, public installation, and performance art embrace the explosive, dynamic temporality of the modern cityscape. Unlike the fetishized voids of architectural decay, are not used as tools to dilate or suspend those kinetics but rather work inside of such structures to enhance the affective capability of their art. In response to the contemporary development of the ‘artist collective,’ many of Berlin’s social art groups emphasize public Art Lab (PAL) (Fig. 4A), an art collective started by Berlin-based curator Susa Pop, which produces exclusively public new media art<sup>26</sup> in the form of temporary installations and performances, and the Agora Collective (Fig. 4B-D), a restaurant/gallery/school/workspace which established itself in 2011 through reclaiming an abandoned building in Neukölln,

These takeovers of empty public spaces performs as a political strategy of resistance against private ownership in favor of public control over and representation of the city’s new topography. Scottish artist Robert Montgomery’s 2013 installation “The City is Wilder” (Fig. 4E) in the controversial plot of land across from the Holzmarkt (Eng. Tr. timbermarket) whose ownership has been vied for in an embroiled battle between collectives and private investors since the 90s. Montgomery’s installation, referred to as “an ode of rebellion,”<sup>27</sup> is situated in the open construction zone between railroad and waterworks; one can imagine its illuminated message catching the eye of club-goers, businessmen, and artists making their way through the city middle, encouraging a heightened awareness of the space, raising the conspicuousness of an attempted corporate takeover.

“In the summer of 1991, when most of the wall had already been removed, auctioned off, or sold to tourists in bits and pieces, the area was studded with

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<sup>25</sup> Lutz Koepnick. “Forget Berlin” in *The German Quarterly* Vol. 74, No. 4, Sites of Memory (Autumn 2001), 347.

<sup>26</sup> New media art is, in principle, a genre of contemporary art that uses electronic media technologies as both a subject and medium. From video games to Twitter, new media art is largely concerned with topics and techniques of interactivity, connectivity, and computability; it is logarithmic or computational in nature, and strictly technical and/or medium-based. If you find yourself in a contemporary art institution and wondering *Is it art?* then it’s probably new media art. For further explanation and examples, see [rhizome.org](http://rhizome.org).

<sup>27</sup> Eude de Montgolfier, “Robert Montgomery’s “The City is Wilder” Art Installation in Berlin” from *Untapped Cities*. 6 Jun. 2013. Web.

the wall's steel rods left behind by the Mauerspechte, the wall chippers, and decorated with colorful triangular paper leaves that were blowing and rustling in the wind; they powerfully marked the void as second nature and as memorial. The installation increased the uncanny feeling: a void saturated with invisible history, with memories of architecture both built and unbuilt. It gave rise to the desire to leave it as it was, the memorial as empty page right in the center of the reunified city, the center that was and always had been at the same time the threshold between the Eastern and Western parts of the city, the space that now, in yet another layer of signification, seemed to be called upon to represent the invisible wall in the head that still separated East and West Germany.”<sup>28</sup>

As Huyssen notes in his written and documented (Fig. 4G) study of the void produced by the fall of the Berlin wall, many art installations and projects in the early 90s situated themselves along the geography of “invisible history,” where the “scar between East and West is still visible” as an empty space of hypersaturated symbolism affecting all who moved through it – a site that was for so long impossible to cut through. But as time passed, and the uncanny sensation of crossing a space that had so long served as an absolute divide between worlds grew less intense and eventually subsided to a more spectral sense of discomfort, the pressures of the economy, the inevitable clouding of memory, and the fundamental human reflex to keep going all bloomed into the frontier. The desire to leave the void in tact was likewise replaced with the excitement of the sudden potential to transform history through geography – to construct, in a sense as physical as it was metaphorical, a new architecture of memory.

The more recent project proposals typically gesture toward a symbolic restoration of space, a healing of wounds; an exercise in smoothing over old histories and permitting the luxury of recasting them in a softer limelight – one could call it an aestheticizing of the excruciating burden of history (how does this effect of the void compare to its emphasizing of the “terrible poetry of abandonment,” re: Michigan’s capital?) Many project ideas such as Dutch landscape architect/curator Joyce van den Berg’s “New Light on No Man’s Land,” (Fig. 4F) presented to the public in the form of an art exhibition at the German Center for Architecture (DAZ) in Berlin,<sup>29</sup> take up the revitalization effort literally by suggesting a remaking of the space into a series of public gardens. But this desire rivals the economic motive to ‘close the void’: as van den Berg notes in her exhibit text, some of the sites comprising the former death strip have already been sold to private individuals, which would undoubtedly complicate any effort in such a remaking. Here, though, the conflict in the void doesn’t behave as an inhibitor to the city’s identity but

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<sup>28</sup> Andreas Huyssen, “The Voids of Berlin” in *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 24, No. 1 (Autumn 1997), 65.

<sup>29</sup> Andrew Spiering. “[A vision for the Berlin Wall: Dutch Landscape Architect Gives New Life to Death Strip.](#)” Published 3 July 2009. Web.

rather produces its own type of agency: a generous one that makes space for a changing narrative on global and local scales as the city considers the re-inscription/making of its own history and memory through a new architecture that likewise works to remodel traditional understandings of the function and responsibility of both.<sup>30</sup>

As Koepnick points out, that ambition is riddled with problems of a failure to acknowledge the risks of kitsch and *disneyfication*, and threatens to suffocate the poetic-political significance of a desire to remember the former East Berlin, or that of *ostalgie*. The apparent impossibility of faithful remodelings of history aside, and stomaching for a moment the immediate worry of forgetting history, consider this idea: the void makes apparent the willed *desire*, at least, of Berliners to revamp their city's architectural memory, and concern over the validity/ethics of such an effort shouldn't preclude a conversation about the productivity of exploring the significance of that desire, both as a generalized theory and within the specific case for Berlin. What could a study of this desire tell us about the ways that Berliners want to remember their past and how they might envision the future as their city moves into the global frontier? How does this image compare to the reputation Berlin currently holds in the global imaginary, economy, and politics? And how does the case for Berlin work to undermine the traditionally understood division between the forces of history and memory? Perhaps the fall of the wall signifies more than a collapse and remaking of the political and spatial divides of one city within one frame of time: perhaps it unwinds the filmstrip entire, and necessitates a reinterpretation of the divisions, hierarchies, and moralities we place on memory and remembering.

Consider that the interweaving narratives of history, memory, and fantasy may not owe their crossover to the clouding in the rubble; that they may not eventually unbind and slip back into neat categories. Instead of waiting for Berlin to reconstruct its image to fill the right silhouette crafted by history, consider this: that the city owes no part of its image to a constricted historical narrative. Consider the void as not negative space but *new* space: and that for every possible image and architecture that could eventually ossify, none is a better historical device than the other. Perhaps that isn't so much a concern to work out as it is a new way of understanding history: as like the urban imaginary, an active *assemblage* of moments, sensations, and visions stitched together in a web that is constantly reproducing itself, where contradictions and abnormalities are a part of the equation. Perhaps the digital tools that shape the cyber-frontier of the global imaginary are not merely a force leaning into the future but are agents too for the desire to reproduce the past. What might happen when that urge is allowed to take effect? The case for the voids of Berlin creates space for a global sensitivity toward that possibility.

In its final considerations of the productive potential of the void within urban geography and imagining, this essay will take a deeper look at the conflicting visions for the void held by Berlin's citizens and government, suggesting that this rivalry exposed,

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<sup>30</sup> Koepnick, "Forget Berlin", 348.

challenged, and is effectively remaking the traditional modes of power and authority that structure the relationship between state and citizen. And in a broader evaluation, tracking the conflicting agencies produced by the fantasy of re-imagining Berlin through its voids reveals a great deal – to Berliners and to the rest of the world – about the politics of memory and forgetting, of the rejection a linear and complete conception of historical memory in favor of one that is inconsistent and malleable, and it does so in a way that is aware of both of those conditions, particularly now in the age of digital and cyber spaces, temporalities, and technologies.

With the city's rapidly developing presence on the global economy, the marketability of the void as real estate intensified the battle between public and private ownership. When the reverence for the symbolism of an empty death strip subsided, the city began to close in on the open space, as cities do: In 2001 the city government founded *Liegenschaftsfonds*<sup>31</sup> (Eng. Tr. Real Estate Fund) as a web-based platform to easily manage and sell off thousands of empty lots and buildings that are technically owned by the public (in 2012, sold land equaled a total area of nearly 14,000,000m<sup>2</sup>.) For Berliners, who have imagined all sorts of potentialities<sup>32</sup> for the unused areas, this absolute end to the open space and possibility that these areas offered is unthinkable. Members of the mobile collective *Lab*, an urban-oriented organization with a permanent base camp in New York and temporary installations in Berlin (2012) and Mumbai (2013), worked to put together *Frieräume Berlin* (Eng. Tr. Free Space Berlin)<sup>33</sup>, a web-based live-update map of every property formerly or currently held by the *Liegenschaftsfonds* (Fig. 4H-I). The map shows an “X” for places that have already been sold, a “!” for those currently on the market, and a “?” for those under governmental control but not yet for sale. Since its 2012 conception, the span and density of the map's reportings have continued to grow as overwhelming demands from Berliners for this once-privatized information have caused the Senate to release more and more of these statistics to the public, which are then incorporated into the visual data produced by the Free Space Berlin project. Berlin's void has produced an actual geographical reimagining of the open spaces of the city and the “full” spaces that surround them within the cyberspace of the global urban imaginary.

Construct or concept, business operation or art proposal, the new architectures of Berlin produced within the void serve the same role as traditional monuments of the past – that is, they behave as articulations of a curated set of individual incidents –

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<sup>31</sup> <http://www.liegenschaftsfonds.de/>

<sup>32</sup> It's interesting to note that most of the purposes imagined for the land by Berlin's own residents involved less permanent, more experimental usages: such as a test strip for new models of affordable housing, or environmental, cultural, and social sustainable development for the city. Even among those who had no particular vision for such spaces, the desire to discuss the forms they might take and how these visions would contribute to the future image of Berlin was an absolute necessity.

<sup>33</sup> <http://www.freespaceberlin.org/>

exaggerations, conflicts, misconstructions and all – within the city’s memory, but they are attuned to the changing definitions of history and remembering in the changing landscape of the urban imagination. As Koepnick puts it, (traditional) monuments are understood to “help people commemorate painful pasts, and/or articulate present-day identifications and dissociations.” The basic principle of these traditional architectures of memory relies on the phenomenological experience of moving through the city as a type of binding agent: that is, how people learn of a city’s history by encountering its built environment, a topic discussed earlier. This idea has been underscored by the blooming of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century theory of psychogeography into postmodern literature, theatre, and subculture. But how does that understanding of the function of urban space work within the new configuration of the cyberspace of the modern city and the ways that cities are experienced and represented through multi-sensory digital media on the global frontier?

"How can architecture, whose historical role was to generate the appearance of stable images (monuments, order, etc.) deal with today's culture of the disappearance of unstable images (twenty-four-image-per-second cinema, video and computer-generated images)?"<sup>34</sup>

In the same sense that holding post-wall Berlin to old configurations of historical narrative and memory through the conditional of a “legitimate and ethical” reimagining seems to eclipse the generative power of the void at present, holding the imagining of new architectures to old functions would prevent the city from stabilizing that instability, or at the very least acknowledging it through its own built environment. In yielding to the contemporary configuration of the urban imaginary as a global geography fundamentally built on cyber-experience (as opposed to traditional means of experience), Berliners’ success in recalibrating the image of their city, voicing its concerns, and presenting propositions for its future on the platform of the world wide web shows us a city that is in the process of building a new system of relating architecture to memory and history, in addition to reinventing the ways it remembers and represents history. How the void is handled in Berlin, with its disturbances, pauses, contradictions and inconsistencies, allows us to do as Koepnick urges:

“Instead of reading urban space as a neatly integrated totality, we should trace memories and counter-memories that crisscross dominant territorializations of culture and history and thereby articulated difference, temporariness, and non—identity.”<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Bernard Tschumi, *Event-Cities:Praxis* (Cambridge, Mass., 1994), 367.

<sup>35</sup> Koepnick, “Forget Berlin,” 353.

Across all of its genres, the void of Berlin lets us contemplate our own fascination with exploring, editing, and remaking the space between past and present: it entertains the “basic human need to live in extended structures of temporality.”<sup>36</sup> But what happens when a city acknowledges that desire as a directional for the future, rather than nervously bundling around it and blockading the future with a cultish hallowing of the past? In an official ad campaign of 1996, literally written all over the city: “Berlin wird” (Eng. Tr. Berlin becomes). Becomes *what*, exactly? One is bound to question. For as much ecstasy and terror revolves around emptiness and the infinite potentiality of what isn’t, we – as unavoidably material beings traversing an unavoidably material world – hold a timeless faith, if not a weakness, for the finitude of matter, “for colored tissue, for papier-mâché, for distemper, for oakum and sawdust.”<sup>37</sup> But in the same sense that an excruciatingly beautiful dream or film doesn’t negate our active being within and or invalidate our love for the world-as-such, so recognizing the presence of the cyber- and immaterial geographies of the global frontier and their capacity to remake the functions of memory, history, and architecture within the urban imaginary does not prevent us from experiencing the intensities of sensation that take place everywhere around us in the real topography of the city, unendingly and all at once. Berlin’s void, then, does not so much disenfranchise the full, existing space that surrounds it but instead creates a possibility for new and future considerations of that space in light of an emerging global cybergeography, one whose invisible cities would shock even the most impassé flâneur into curious attention.

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<sup>36</sup> Andreas Hyussen *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia* (New York: Routledge 1995), 9.

<sup>37</sup>The 20th Polish poet Bruno Schulz perhaps put it best in his short story “Tailors Dummies”: “*Can you understand,*” asked my father, “*the deep meaning of that weakness, that passion for colored tissue, for papier-mâché, for distemper, for oakum and sawdust? This is the proof of our love for matter as such, for its fluffiness or porosity, for its unique mystical consistency... We love its creaking, its resistance, its clumsiness. We like to see behind each gesture, behind each move, its inertia, its heavy effort, its bearlike awkwardness.*”

## VISUAL DATA

### SLIDE SET 1: THE MICHIGAN THEATRE: ON THE “TRAGICALLY BEAUTIFUL”

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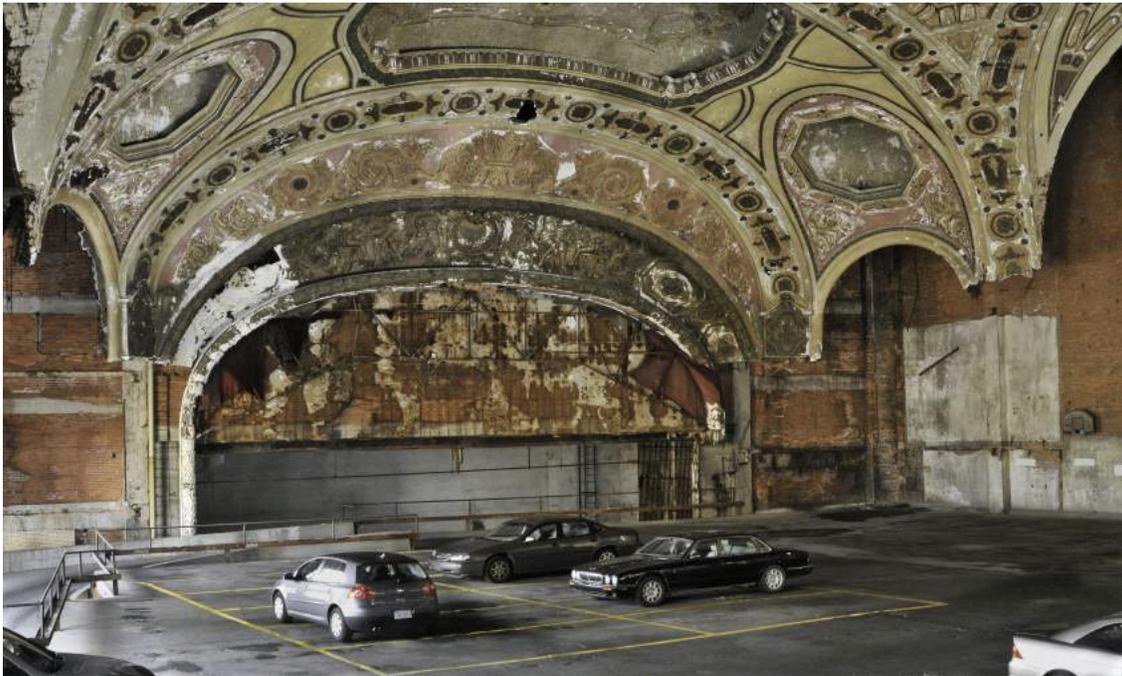


Fig. 1A. Clashing Worlds

*A common technique in photographing the Michigan Theatre involves a camera angle that uses the horizon line as a visual divide between the past and present architecture. The severing of the theatre in such a way behaves as both a compositional and conceptual divide that provokes an interpretation of the space as fundamentally disjunctive.*



1927



Present

Fig. 1B. Time Transfixed

*A side-by-side visual comparison of vintage photographs of the Michigan Theatre dating as far back as the 1920s serves another nostalgic invocation. By positioning these two images as immediate equals, thereby negating the vast stretch of time and process of spatial remaking that occurred between the two, how might a historical knowledge of and sensitivity toward this relationship be tossed to the wayside? How is this image set telling us to conceptualize the theatre in its modern-day condition and function?*



Fig. 1C. *A still of the Michigan Theatre panoramic shot from Jim Jarmusch's 2013 film Only Lovers Left Alive.*



Fig. 1D. *Then and Now*

*The panoramic shot of the Michigan Theatre's stunning ceiling ends back on the ground within the familiar setting of an urban parking garage. Meanwhile Jarmusch's vampires remain obviously transfixed. How does the illusionistic "stretching of the void" as produced by the panorama technique within photography and film influence our very real reception of the space?*



Fig 1E.

*Often through a 360° rotation, the panoramic photograph captures an entire space within just a single frame. Traditional photography techniques require a sequence of shots, which take the viewer much longer to process than a singular image; navigating the space in person is even more time-consuming. Does seeing a space in all directions at the same time reduce its affective ability, or does it elevate the structure to an even greater mysticism?*

SLIDE SET 2: THE AGORA COMPLEX

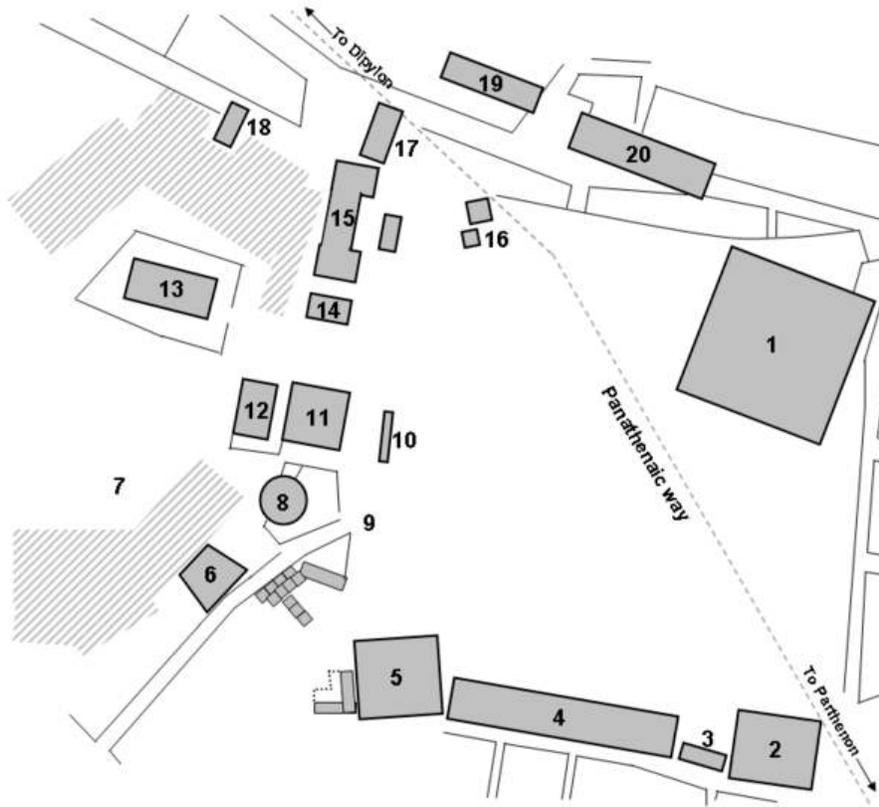


Fig 2A. Old-School Style

*This diagram reveals a bird's-eye perspective plan of the Ancient Agora of Athens circa the 5<sup>th</sup> Century BC. Despite the ways that the appearance and affect of empty space run counter to our perception of the modern-day city as an ever-growing space filled to capacity and teeming with sensory experience of all sorts, the concept of empty space in cities as a political and social convergence point dates back to the Classical vision of a healthy polis. How might temporally-sensitive usages of empty spaces in cities (ex. the Bughouse Square Debates in Chicago, IL or on election days in Washington D.C.) as tradition , Image produced by Wikipedia user Madmedea.*

2010

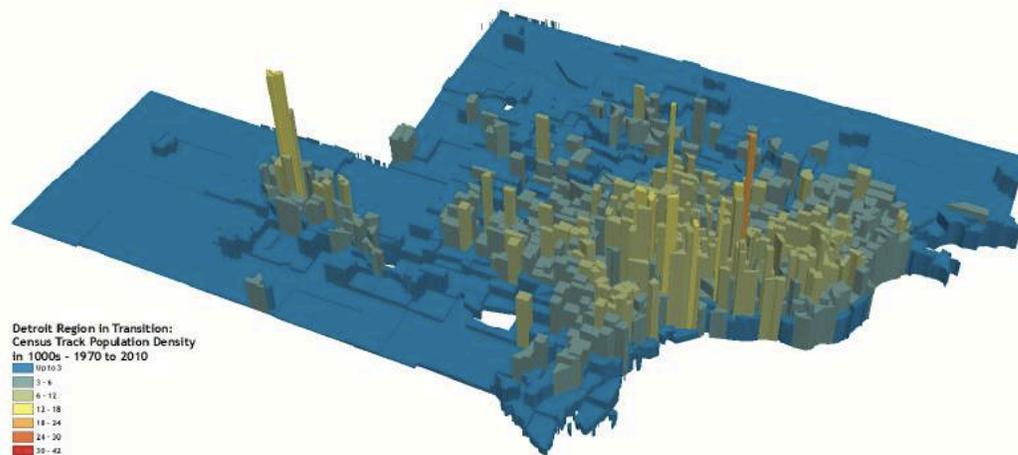


Fig. 3A. Visualizing Decay

*A [GIF set](#) appearing in a recent (April 2014) [article](#) by The Huffington Post: “Watch Detroit’s Population Disappear in Four Seconds”. Image created by Thomas Veldman. How does the article’s suggestion that the phenomenon of Detroit’s declining population over the past 40 years can be appropriately summarized in 4 seconds of consideration threaten to eclipse a more accurate understanding of the situation in Detroit? How does this spatial representation of the appearing void via population density statistics likewise shut down the proposition of a future vitality?*

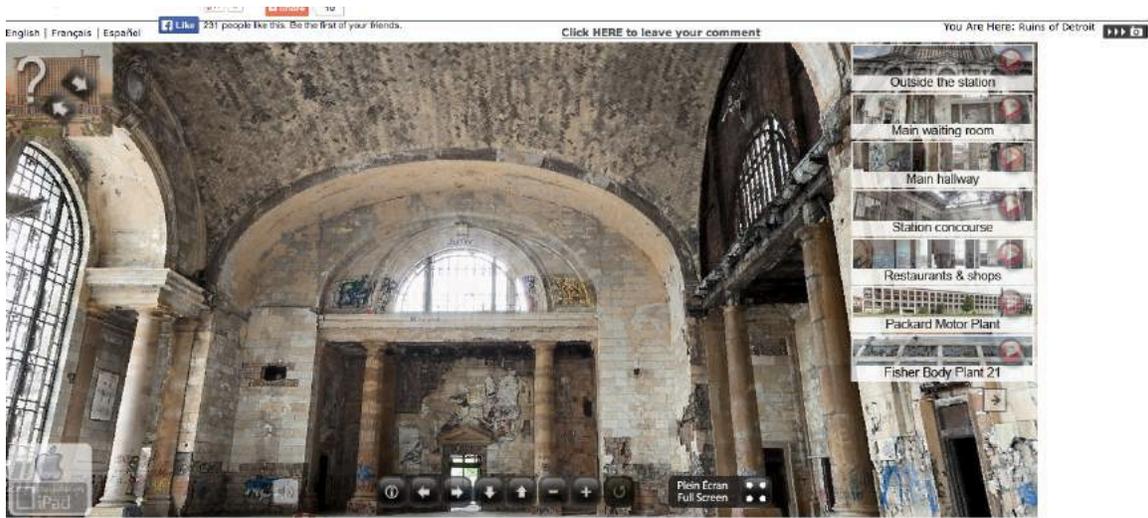


Fig. 3B. Virtual tours of Detroit's ruins (audio)

*A website featuring virtual tours of specific buildings within the city of Detroit utilizes the panorama technique to create a simulated experience of the "Detroit ruins." Of particular interest is its [4-part series of the Michigan Central Station](#), in which a "white noise" audio clipping of what the building might have sounded like while serving its original function is included by default (the user has no option to turn it off). What type of affective reaction is the artist attempting to conjure through this multi-sensory stitching together of past and present?*



**Fig. 3C. Information Bias**

*A Google Image search using the keyword 'Detroit' is overwhelmed with images of decay and abandon. It's interesting to note that the top 15 images (pictured above) under the image search make a point to avoid depicting any number of Detroit's 250,000 residents (2013 census), instead allowing the wrecked buildings stand-in as the exclusive representation of the city's lifeblood. The web depiction of Detroit as a wasteland isn't just wrong; it is actively recasting Detroit's image on the global frontier as such, which becomes an immense inhibitor to any attempts for the city's future restoration.*

SLIDE SET 4: BERLIN

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Fig. 4A.

*A recent public performance piece by the Public Art Collective based in Berlin. In staging their performances, PAC routinely takes over squares, parks, and other centrally located open spaces with high visibility.*



Fig. 4B.

*The Agora Collective, a project space founded in Neukölln in 2011, is based in a repurposed five-story building on Mittelweg. The Collective, like many of its kind, is multifunctional: as a gallery, café, co-working space, restaurant, and artist studio, it also serves as a landing zone for more transitory art and culture events that run through the city.*



Fig. 4C.

*Detail of temporary pop-up art installation inside of the Agora Collective. Photograph by co-founder and current director of the Collective, Caique Tizzzi.*



Fig. 4D. Der Werkraum

*Agora's five work rooms make use of the verticality of the building with an 'open doors' policy that allows guests to move freely between the stations: a collaborative zone, quiet room, café a multifunctional space, and a garden. Renting a desk throughout the building costs 15 euro a day or 100 euro a month. The café room (pictured above) behaves as an internet café by day and a restaurant by night.*



Fig. 4E. The City is Wilder Than You Think (2013)

*Robert Montgomery's light-based installations, situated in relatively exposed and unstable spaces within the urban environment, are always textual and often allegorical. How might the nature and location of this piece produce a heightened sensitivity to open space, by defining them even in black night? As seen in the image above, his work encourages additional "installations" in the open space (like graffiti, hanging string lights) – what happens when it pools others in? How might an art project so aware of its own materiality undermine the cybernetic "invisibility" of the city government's attempt to control and market such open spaces to private investors?*



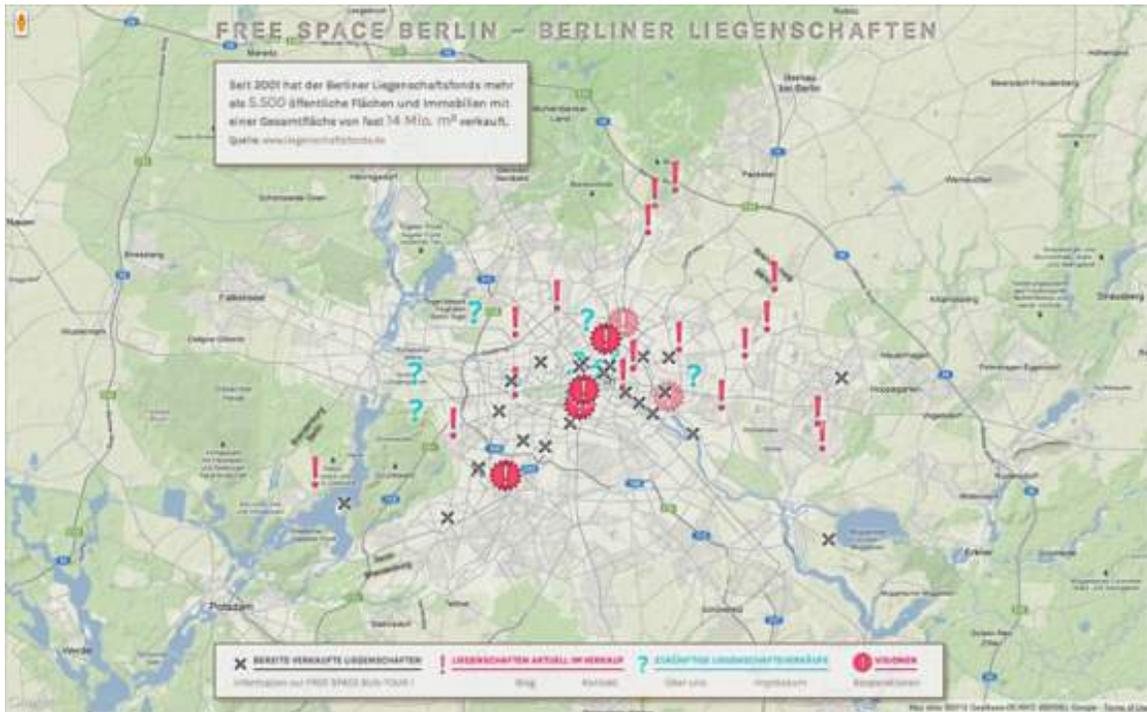
Fig. 4F. The *Death Strip* gets a life

*One of the images featured in Joyce van den Bern's exhibition-proposal "New Light on No Man's Land" shows an all-inclusive repurposing of traditional . More images and information [here](#).*

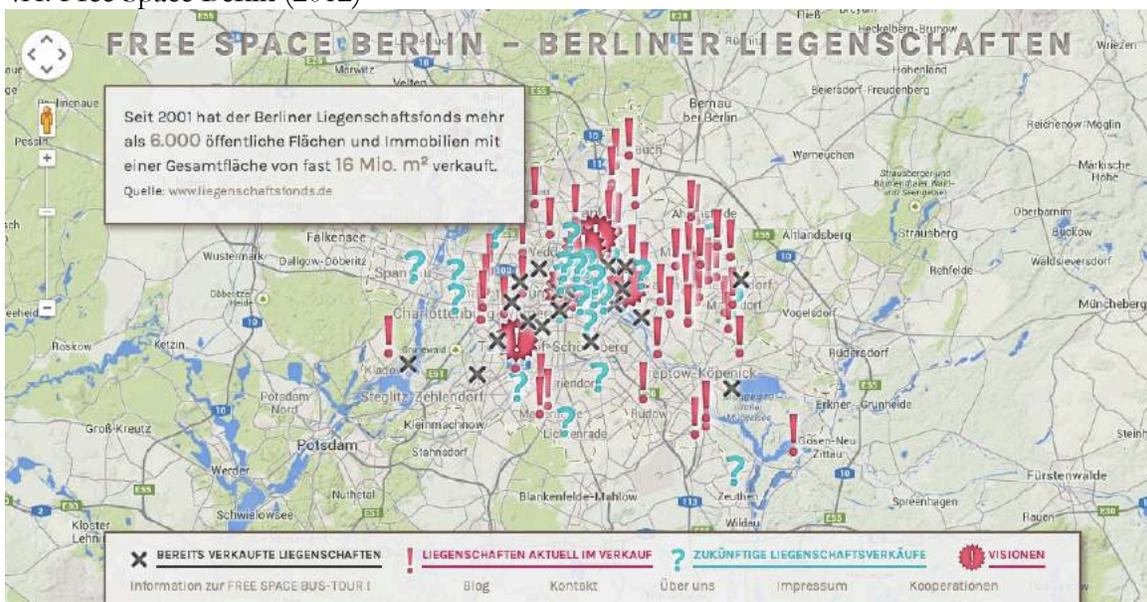


Fig. 4G. On Death and Life

*Rainbow flags installed within the void of the death strip (1991). Photograph by Andreas Huyssen.*



4H. Free Space Berlin (2012)



4I. Free Space Berlin (June 2014)

*As data has become increasingly available through Berlin's Senate, the virtual mapping of the contested "invisible spaces" has updated accordingly. By pooling together all of this information into a singular web-based location, Lab team member and project creator Corinne Rose aims to both promote an awareness among Berliners of how many of these spaces have already disappeared, and to empower them to change the fate of the spaces still up for grabs or not yet on the market, by simply knowing where they are. By making visible the invisible holds of state power on these public spaces, that control is constantly being called into question and encourages a conversation between politicians and citizens about who gets to determine the fate of these spaces, and to what end. In its ability to represent spaces previously unimagined, how could the cyber-rendering of Berlin's void alongside its material elements promote a new type of architectural imagining? How might this translate into or reshape traditional structures and functions of the built environment?*

## FURTHER READINGS



### CRITICAL ESSAYS/NONFICTION

The Force of Things: Steps to an Ecology of Matter

Jane Bennett

—

Cybercities: Visual Perception in the Age of Electronic Communication

M. Christine Boyer

—

The City as Liminal Space: Urban Visuality and Aesthetic Experience in Postmodern U.S. Literature and Cinema Postmodernity

Stefan L. Brandt

—

The Death and Life of Great American Cities

Jane Jacobs

—

Powers of engagement: on being engaged, being indifferent, and urban life

Alan Latham

—

Thinking with images in nonrepresentational cities: vignettes from Berlin

Alan Latham and Derek P McCormack

—

Toward a New Metropolitanism: Reconstituting Culture, Citizenship, and the Multicultural Imaginary in New York and Berlin

Günter H. Lenz, Friedrich Ulfers, Antje Dallmann

—

“Imaginary Space: or, Space as Aesthetic Object.” In Space in America: Theory, History, Culture

Winfried Fluck

—

Picturing place: photography and imaginative geographies

Ryan J. Schwartz

—

Infinite City: A San Francisco Atlas

Rebecca Solnit

—

A Pattern Language: Towns, Buildings, Construction

The Timeless Way of Building

Christopher Alexander

### FICTION

Street of Crocodiles

Bruno Schulz

—

Invisible Cities

Italo Calvino

—

Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close

Jonathan Safran Foer

—