“…Nothing That Has Ever Happened Should Be Regarded As Lost for History”: Detroit, Walter Benjamin, and the Legacy of Architecture

by

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Map of Detroit
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Images

Map of Detroit

Image 1.1- “How to Keep Suburbanites Out of Detroit” Detroit Saturday Night, March 1922. Courtesy of The Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library

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Prologue

“The chronicler who recites events without distinguishing between major and minor ones acts in accordance with the following truth: nothing that has ever happened should be regarded as lost for history. To be sure, only a redeemed mankind receives the fullness of its past—which is to say, only for a redeemed mankind has its past become citable in all its moments. Each moment it has lived becomes a citation à l’ordre du jour...” -Walter Benjamin, Theses on the Philosophy of History. ¹

How to be the chronicler to whom Benjamin alludes? How to capture the fleeting and the seemingly permanent in one moment? The true picture of the past flits by, Benjamin tells us.² He nearly dares us to try to find it, to track it down, to understand the past in its ephemerality.

In the city of Detroit, the past is perpetually at play in the current moment. Buildings stand vacant where they once were filled. Tracks of open land stretch out where houses used to be, and before that, there were tracks of open land. Ring-necked pheasants walk the city streets; they nest in newfangled prairie. In the discussion of the city, in both the national discourse and in the city’s own conception of itself, there appears to be a marked concretization of the past. Detroit’s Golden Age, when American-made cars rolled down Woodward Avenue. The pinnacle of modernity is reduced to a hegemonic epoch, a point to be both canonized and quested toward. This is not the type of history Benjamin’s chronicler aspires to, nor is

²Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” 255.
it, I wish to suggest, a methodology which relays anything close to what could be regarded as a more encompassing history.

I have chosen to approach this query by observing the constant interplay of the epoch and the moment. This thesis is a study of grandiose schemas and fleeting facts. Epochs and moments are two grades of time. Neither the longest nor the shortest, the most fleeting nor the most substantial, yet they are in sempiternal conversation. I wish to move towards a past that has become citable in all its moments.

The epoch renders history into long sweeps of time that bubble up and seep through society like a spring. The wonder of the epoch is its ability to render a place or history intelligible, the way in which it reduces long stretches of time into understandable collections of trends, thoughts, inclinations, and desires. In the popular understanding, epochs politely flow into one another. In Walter Benjamin’s terms, each epoch entertains images of its successor.\(^3\) Epochs are the scale at which much of history is wrought.

In the present, we generally inhabit the momentary. Things happen and then more things happen.\(^4\) Our lives are constructed of moments flowing into other moments, sometimes repeating but more often than not continuing their onslaught at a rapid clip. Rarely do we find ourselves turning towards questions of this epoch in the hegemony of the momentary.

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\(^4\) “They happen in impulse, sensations, expectations, daydreams, encounters, and habits of relating, in strategies and their failures, in forms of persuasion, contagion, and compulsion, in modes of attention, attachment, and agency, and in publics and social worlds of all kings that catch people up in something that feels like something,” Kathleen Steward, *Ordinary Affects*, (Durham: Duke 2007) 2.
The interplay between these two typologies deserves more attention. In this thesis, I attempt to capture the momentary in the epoch and the epoch in the moment. Its structure, with spurts and sputters, short facts and drawn-out occurrences, is an attempt to invoke an alternate approach to history, with the glaring and the expected running in tandem. One in which the connections between the epoch and the momentary can stand at odds for long enough that it can begin to be understood.

The project consists of three parts. The first revolves around a week my grandfather Thomas Peterson and I spent in Detroit during July 2012. That week we visited sites from his childhood throughout the city of Detroit. We walked through his high school dorm and his childhood home. We spoke at length about his memories of the city and his connection with it. I use this collection of moments and recollection to launch a query into the contentious and sordid history of the industrial development of Detroit and the history of housing in the city with which it is intrinsically tied. Swiss psychotherapist Carl Jung’s conception of the collective unconscious and Benjamin’s unconscious of the collective inform this section. I query how the forgotten past still plays a role in Detroit and effects the perception of the city.

In part two, I explore the impact of architecture in Detroit and how buildings, both populated and vacant, play a role in the conception of the city. The main site of study in this section is the Guardian Building, a thirty-six-story skyscraper that opened in 1929 as the headquarters of the Union Guardian Trust Company, then the largest bank in Detroit. While much of my research about the building was archival, last summer I took more than ten sightseers’ tours of the building. These tours
occurred throughout the day and were lead by Christopher, the building’s doorman. During the tours and the conversations I had around them, I was struck by the ways in which Christopher and other tour goers framed the past of the building and of Detroit. In this section, I work to parse out how a selective usage of the past effects the construction of Detroit’s identity for visitors and residents, both in the present moment and when the building was constructed. Central in this query is the role of luxury in the city and much of this section is theoretically informed by Georges Bataille’s early writing on architecture and excess.

A study of differing approaches to nostalgic tendencies grounds the third section. The institution of an emergency financial manager for the city by Michigan Governor Rick Snyder, the gentrification of downtown Detroit, and the recent return of some businesses and corporations to the central business district have all resulted in an new presentation of Detroit’s “Golden Age”. In this section I try to complicate the idea of a “Golden Age” of the city, and offer a study of the momentary in the conversation of revitalization. This part is informed by Lauren Berlant’s theory of Cruel Optimism and Theodor Adorno’s conception of the “curse of utility.”

Methods

This thesis is primarily based on ethnographic research conducted in the summer of 2012 and archival research that began in July of 2012 and continued through February 2013. The city of Detroit served as my main site of inquiry. I rode my bike around the city, observing and seeking out people to speak with. Casual conversations often became lengthy ones, during which I told people I was
conducting research on the city. I also took tours of buildings where I introduced myself as an anthropology student and answered questions about my research. I conducted interviews with friends and engaged in the anthropologic method of participant-observation during much of my fieldwork. During more formal conversations and interviews, I used a recorder. During spontaneous or casual conversations I kept a notebook when I thought it would be appropriate, and wrote follow-up notes.

I conducted archival research at the Burton Historical Collection, an archive within the central Detroit Public Library. There I had access to newspapers and photographs concerning the history of Detroit and the city of Highland Park, a small city within the bounds of Detroit, where my grandfather grew up. Unfortunately, the Highland Park Public Library closed in April 2002, so I had limited access to records and newspapers.

I approached this project as an outsider to the city of Detroit. Before my arrival in June, I had spent approximately three weeks in the city. Although my grandfather’s family originates there, I had little familiarity with the city when I arrived and expected to have more in common with many of the young, predominantly white people moving into the city’s downtown than with people who had lived in the city for a longer time, and were mostly African-American and poor. Over the course of the summer, that concern subsided in some aspects, aided by some difficult and inspiring conversations about the legacy that ex-Detroiters, including my family, left in the city and the recent influx of affluent white people into the city. That being said, as a
young, high-capital, white woman, my personal presentation was often read as that of a gentrifier. Downtown Detroit is currently undergoing a small but growing gentrification and my choice of residence (the Woodbridge neighborhood) and some of my activities (a soccer league, bicycle riding, frequenting coffee shops) aligned with the expected trajectory of a newcomer to the city. I chose this project because I wanted to try to understand the history of Detroit, which had begun to appear more complex to me than I had previously understood it. So, chiefly, I arrived in Detroit as a student; ready to listen and observe in the hopes of expanding my own understanding of a city I wish so much to understand.
Part 1- Highland Park and the Unconscious of the Collective

A Klee painting named ‘Angelus Novus’ shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to say, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress.

-Walter Benjamin, “The Theses on the Philosophy of History”

The Original Suburb- Highland Park

The city of Highland Park was founded on December 19, 1916. The original suburb, it is a small city which grew in tandem with the city of Detroit, housing some of the city’s richest residents and its burgeoning industry. By the mid 1930s, Detroit enclosed Highland Park on all four sides. Residents were attracted to the town’s smaller geographical footprint, enforced segregation, and plusher city services fueled by the income taxes of the wealthy. The city had “a policeman past every home in the city every hour of the night and every school crossing [was] protected by a uniformed policeman. There [were] more policemen per thousand population, more firemen per

thousand population, and more firemen per square mile than in Detroit.” The city resisted annexation in 1918 and again in 1922, ignoring Detroit plea for their tax dollars to go towards city services that these inner-urban suburbanites invariably used, the parks, the trolley, the paved road. After 1922, the suggestion went mute, except for an occasional newspaper article highlighting lingering suburban/urban hostility. “How to Keep Suburbanites Out of Detroit,” a headline published in an early March 1922 edition of the Detroit Saturday Night newspaper read, above it a line of cartoon men guard the Detroit City Limits, armed with bayonets and protected by charged barbed wire, they stand near a sign marking the Interurban Bone Yard and block off the buildings of downtown that sing the suburbanites welcome, tall buildings hung with banners welcoming strangers and begging them to “Shop Here if you Can Get In!”

![Image](image.jpg)

**Figure 1.1: “How to Keep Suburbanites Out of Detroit” Detroit Saturday Night March 1922**

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Henry Ford and his motor company were also early influences on Highland Park. Ford's original plant opened on Woodward Avenue in the early 1910s. The factory first made Model T's, followed by Model A's, and then a tractor plant was constructed in the mid-thirties. Highland Park was known as “Henry’s Town”. Daily, hundreds of workers from Detroit disembarked from the streetcar at the Highland Park stop, walking with their lunchboxes to the factory complex up the road. Every morning, at the same time, countless executives stood up from the breakfast table of their Highland Park bungalows and walked down the street, into the administrative buildings in the same complex. Highland Park was an industrial town as well as an island of wealth.

**Albert Kahn**

Albert Kahn was born near Frankfurt, Germany in 1869. In 1881, his family immigrated to the United States. They settled in Detroit, which in the late 19th century was only a junction of two major modes of transport, water and rail. Albert’s father, Joseph was unsuccessful in business and the rabbinical assignments he received in small mid-western towns. At fifteen, Albert began an apprenticeship at Mason & Rice, a local architectural firm. Seven years later, he received a scholarship from *The American Architect and Building News* to study in Europe, a mandatory experience for all young American architects at the time. The next year, he returned with the sharp drafting skills that distinguished him for the rest of his life. In 1895, he established his own firm with George W. Nettleton and Alexander B. Trowbridge.
Though that assemblage was short-lived (Trowbridge quickly took a teaching position at Cornell and Nettleton died in a tragic accident in 1900), Kahn continued to operate in partnerships until 1918, when he founded Albert Kahn Incorporated Architects and Engineers.3

In 1909, Kahn designed the Highland Park Plant for budding automobile producer Henry Ford. The commission marked the beginning of the most important partnership in Kahn and Ford’s professional lives. Two of Kahn’s previous designs, the Packard Plant 10 in Detroit and the Mergenthaler Linotype Company in Brooklyn provided much of the basis for the Highland Park plant.4 However, the building did incorporate some new ideas in industrial design. The new factory allowed for the implementation of the rudimentary assembly line that Ford had begun to test in his Piquette Street workshop. There the building was too small and had too many stories for single-line assembly. Workmen had to carry materials up and down flights of stairs or use cramped elevators that often failed mid-lift to work toward Ford’s vision.

The Highland Park Plant was everything the Piquette Street factory was not. It was four stories tall and ran for three blocks. Unlike future Ford plants, Highland Park still operated with a vertical assembly line as well as a final horizontal line. Automobiles sat in individual births that moved them down floor by floor. At each level, men assembled the car slowly, completing multiple tasks while the car hung

before them. At the top floor the body was assembled, on the next the axels and wheels were screwed on, and on the third the doors and roof were fitted before the automobile reached the bottom, where it was tightened and trued before rolling out into the storage lot on Woodward Avenue. The plant had high ceilings and an open floor plan that provided, according to Ford’s calculations, the “exact amount of room that a man needed” to complete his requisite task. It had so many windows; it was nicknamed “The Crystal Palace.”\footnote{Bucci, \textit{Albert Kahn: Architect of Ford}, 41.} The brightly lit and cavernous space was large enough to allow for the continual changes in the assembly line warranted by Ford’s strict ascription to Taylorism.

For Albert Kahn, Highland Park marked a groundbreaking demonstration of the unique capacities of reinforced concrete. Julius Kahn, Albert’s brother, held a patent on the Kahn System of Reinforced Concrete, a new means of concrete construction. The Kahn System was made up of a steel skeleton supported by soldered wings of angled slightly upward. It could support long expanses of concrete using the principle forces of compression. Albert Kahn saw the reinforced concrete system as a decisive aspect of his success in the industry.

“And then there came a turn in the use of reinforced concrete which meant much in the future of my career. My brother Julius, a graduate engineer, who had spent several years in Japan, returned to join me. He quickly saw the weak spots in the empirical system of reinforcement being used and promptly designed a form of reinforcement along scientific principles. We made tests which were conclusive, confirming his theories... the so-called ‘Kahn’ system quickly became established and popular throughout the country and while heartaches during the first years were many, the system won out finally.”
It was reinforced concrete that allowed for the soaring internal space of early assembly-line factories. It was Julius’s ingenuity that enabled Albert Kahn, a trade-architect with little formal training in industrial design, to become the most recognized architect in Detroit.

**Far Reaching Roads in the Shape of a Wheel**

The city of Detroit is laid out in the shape of a wheel. Six main thoroughfares, (Fort, Michigan, Grand River, Woodward, Gratiot, and Jefferson), branch out like spokes from the central axis of the city’s downtown. They roll out across the flat land, with a grid of smaller streets underneath allowing movement between them. Up to Eight Mile, where the city ends, the six thoroughfares subsume almost one hundred and forty square miles into the city’s bounds. That’s as many square milage as Boston, Manhattan, and San Francisco combined.  

**Brush Park**

The neighborhood is more field than house now. Only about fifteen of the brick and stone homes still stand. Brush Park was once the most fashionable neighborhood in Detroit, where the tycoons of industry built Victorian and French Revival houses with music rooms and libraries. The carved stonework and the intricate wood decoration around doorways and windows stood in sharp contrast with their lots, which were fifty feet wide. So that even in old pictures the houses

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appear perched on the soil, more ornament than dwelling. Albert Kahn was the last to build a house in the neighborhood in 1906.

![Image](image.png)

*Figure 1.2 - Brush Park, July 2012*

**Highland Park to River Rouge / Abandoned Factories**

Within the decade, Kahn partnered with Henry Ford to build an entirely new factory complex eleven miles southwest of the Highland Park plant, along the slow-moving and shallow River Rouge, which was diverged into a series of canals to power the humongous facility. The Highland Park Plant had grown too small for the company’s automotive ambitions. It was quietly transitioned into a tractor factory.

The new River Rouge Plant was a mass complex of single story buildings, most of them longer than the Highland Park Plant and wider as well. In it the vertical assembly line disappeared, instead the cars flowed down a single floor, with parts added at a rapid speed until the cars rolled out the door. “One important feature of this organizational model was the perfection of labor control. The foreman, the typical
figure in the Taylor model, was substituted by a timing gear composed of
synchronized mechanical apparatuses that signaled and prevented non-compliance on
the part of the worker with respect to assigned tasks and work rhythms.7 The River
Rouge was the exemplar of Ford’s faith in the efficiency and competency of the long-
form assembly line. Albert Kahn called Ford’s construction of the River Rouge Plant
courageous.

“...It was he, also, who after building hundreds of acres of floor space in
multiple story buildings, concluded that raising materials to upper
floors by elevators was an economic waste because of the time
consumed by men and the cost of transporting materials. He had built
six- and eight-story buildings in Detroit and many other cities. But
once convinced that multistory buildings were uneconomical for the
manufacture of his product, he abandoned one after another, replacing
them with one-story structures, top-lighted, with columns spaced some
forty feet apart as against twenty-five in the earlier buildings... The
courage of Mr. Ford, as shown in the development of the motorcar,
has been evidenced equally in his factory buildings. Who but he would
have the courage to practically abandon the enormous Highland Park
for the River Rouge Development where he had adequate room for
one-story structures, and opportunity for more economical production
as well as for bettering working conditions.”8

By 1941, Ford had almost completely adopted the decentralization Kahn describes.

He now wielded harsh criticisms against his previous belief in scaled urban
economies that supported enormous construction and turned instead to a project of
harshly decentralized plants throughout the state. Men who worked in these factories
were not migrants from the southern United States or Eastern Europe as they had
been at Highland Park and River Rouge, but farmers who labored making

8 Albert Kahn, Speech at St. Louis Engineering Society and St. Louis A.I.A. Joint Meeting,
typewritten, October 16, 1941.
automobiles when farm work was sparse. As a result, by the mid 1950s, the city of Detroit had already begun the economic decline that became big news in the 1960s and 70s. While writers and sociologists argued that America was in the age of affluence, places like Detroit were for the most part left behind. Ford had abandoned the city he was so instrumental in creating. He sang of its demise in his 1922 autobiography, *My Life and Work*:

“There is something about a city of a million people which is untamed and threatening. Thirty miles away, happy and contented villages read of the ravings of the city! A great city is really a helpless mass. Everything it uses is carried to it. Stop transport and the city stops. It lives off the shelves of stores. The shelves produce nothing... City conditions of work and living are so artificial that instincts sometimes rebel against their unnaturalness. And finally, the overhead expense of living or doing business in the great cities is becoming so large as to be unbearable. The modern city has been prodigal, it is to-day bankrupt, and to-morrow it will cease to be.”

**Brush Park, Summer 2012**

Almost every evening in the summer, streams of cars roll in off of I-75 towards the baseball stadium. They bypass the massive parking garage next to the stadium to line up on the wide, freshly paved streets of Brush Park. Streets which are said to have been paved specifically for their arrival when the new stadium opened in 2000. They unpack barbeques and unhook the tailgates of their trucks. They open beer cans and uncover dishes of potato salad. They crank up music and throw baseballs in the

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lots spread between the mansions that still dot the landscape. Their zealous suburban voices reverberate off the facades of the city’s founding merchants.

When the game starts, they lock up their cars, amazed at the sense of security they feel in this empty place. They could practically watch the game from here, the announcer’s vibrato booming across the fields and ruins. Instead they walk the couple blocks toward their seats, to order hotdogs and maybe watch the Tigers win. A security guard bikes through at the sixth inning, and again when the crowd staggers back to their cars. Tires crunch on beer cans and plastic plates as they turn back to the highway.

The Jungian

My mother says it has concentrated with age, but for as long as I have known him; my grandfather has spoken mostly in terms of the unconscious, the psyche, and the archetypical, all Jungian concepts.

In the car, we rode home from Eastern Market, the largest Farmers’ Market in the city, a destination both my grandfather and I visited almost every weekend when we lived in Detroit, him nearly seventy years ago, and me this summer. In the car I recorded a brief section of tape. On it my grandfather was speaking about the role of the symbol in life experience. “Symbol is crucial,” he said “and the image, which is a primary form of our experience, it is not just a thought. It’s an experience, and it’s a learning process that is inwardly as well as in our capacity to flow with it in outer life.”

In the background, a beeping noise grows more and more rapid because his seatbelt was undone.
My mother’s voice comes up on the tape, from the backseat, “Hey Dad, could you put your seatbelt on?”

“Thank you,” he laughs, and continues, “so what I'm doing right now is stepping around my inferior function, which I don't want to do completely.” He buckled the buckle and then looked out the window.11

Reinforced Concrete

In 1935, during a visit to the United States, Le Corbusier called the factories of Detroit the first fruits of a new age.12 The concrete-framed daylight factories were the first to have walls full of windows, the first to hold an industrial assembly line, and the first to be constructed of reinforced concrete. Harsh expanses of grey surface, reinforced concrete has a shamelessly naked purity of both lateral and vertical exposure.

Concrete has long been considered a modern material, not in its existence— it’s ancient— but in the possibilities that are particular to the substance. It is isotropic, meaning it transmits force equally in all directions. This fact renders the differentiation between load and support null; it silences the chief concern in all previous structural systems.13 With concrete, it has become possible to build

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11 Jung’s theory of personality is based on the interplay of the four cognitive functions, ‘thinking’, ‘feeling’, ‘sensing,’ and ‘intuition’ that he posits are in constant interplay in all people, forming a hierarchy where the most important function is ‘dominant’, with the other three filling ‘inferior’ functions. Carl Jung, Psychological Types, (Princeton: Bollingen Series, Princeton 1971).
superhighways, dams, and cities at a density that would have previously produce innumerable and immediate disaster. But, with this intense liberation comes particular destructive possibility, a slower form of disaster. To “concrete over” is to muffle nature in the city to a dull roar. The shift to welding and pouring eradicate the craft skills of stonemasonry, woodwork, and forging. In its barren rigidity, its soaring strength and its shameless nakedness, concrete is indestructible. Indestructibility is the mark of concrete’s resonance in the urban imagination since Julius Kahn devised soldered wings of steel angled slightly upward: first as the principle point of modernity in the city, than as a bunker of urban unrest by Ford’s description, and later still as naked markers of what once was, naked in the fact that the concrete of their verticals and laterals brandish no scars, no marks of epoch, little weather from age. It is as though their abandonment does little to detract from their initial establishment.

Buildings constructed from concrete generally discourage us from seeing them as historically constructed objects. Rather, they are perpetually conceived as buildings seeped in recurring newness.

Mistaken

In July 2012, my grandfather came back to Detroit. He had not been since the mid-sixties, when his parents moved to Birmingham, Michigan, a suburban town twenty miles outside the city. The first sunny afternoon, when we were driving down Woodward Avenue toward my summer apartment, my grandfather grew confused. As we passed Melean Avenue, the street where his old house was, I pointed out the apartment building at the corner, mentioning that we would walk around the
neighborhood sometime in the coming days. He smiled, and commented on how much Woodward had changed. Five miles later, as I turned to reach Trumbull Street, where I stayed, my grandfather clutched the handle above the car door, looking quickly around him.

“Is this Mclean?” He asked.

“No Papa, we’ll go there tomorrow,” I tried to assure him.

**Visiting**

The columns on the porch of my grandfather’s old house were hefty. The front porch was wide, and the grout between the clinker bricks was a few shades off under the large bay window to the right of the front door. My grandfather, mother, and I stood on the porch waiting for Mrs. Brown to arrive. Once she drove up, apologizing for being late, we went inside. We shook hands with her, her husband, Mr. Brown, and their daughter, Christina.

The front foyer was small, just a protective double door against the harsh Michigan winters. The second was crowded with all of us standing, greeting each other. “This means so much to him,” My mother told Mrs. and Mr. Brown. I had called Mrs. Brown when I first arrived in the city to set up a time to speak with her and visit my grandfather’s old home. This was the first time that worked for us both. My grandfather and mother presence was a lucky happenstance.

A staircase went up to the second floor, and a thin hallway led to the back of the house. To the left, the living room was large, made larger by the huge, unframed mirror hanging over the fireplace. To the right, a little room was dark with the shades
drawn. A huge mahogany cabinet sat against the north wall, tucked behind the
doorframe. It was from a store display at Mr. Brown’s company, he told us. My
mother said she remembered that room because there were rubber animals to play
with when she came to visit. We sat down in the living room. Mrs. Brown, Katrina,
was having a minor asthma attack. Mr. Brown brought her an inhaler and offered us
glasses of water.

We spoke about the Highland Park schools, my grandfather asking after a
school long defunct. We spoke about the city’s old library, which has been closed since
2002. We heard the story of the Brown’s purchase of 52 Mclean Avenue, and my great-
grandparent’s departure from the house in 1964. Like everyone else on their block, the
Browns are African Americans. That is relatively unsurprising, as ninety-three percent
of Highland Park identified as African American in the last census.¹⁴

Our tones were joking, our sentences polite and inquisitive. Katrina offered to
switch on the massage function of my grandfather’s chair.

“If I remember correctly, you lived here fifteen years. And you had five children
here,” My mother said.

“Yes,” Mrs. Brown nodded and took a sip from her glass of water.

“Just like my father’s family.”

“Ah, we had three boys, two girls,”

“Four boys and one girl,” My grandfather made the numbers with his fingers.

“Okay, well that other girl could have been a boy,” Laughter.

“That would have been alright.” My grandfather’s voice was very quiet.

The moments were cordial and celebratory. My mother sought overlaps in my family’s history and that of the Brown’s. Five children, a move from Detroit proper, similar domestic processes, the same track through the first floor, ridden on a tricycle, in the 1930s and the 1990s. At moments it felt like my mother, Mrs. Brown and I were grasping for a connection; at other points similarities and parallels seemed to flow easily.

My grandfather sat quietly for most of our visit. I noticed him glancing around himself sometimes, but mostly he just looked out into the distance as the conversation proceeded in front of him.

As the Browns and my family spoke, what became apparent to me were the hiccups in shared experience and the lightness of comparisons drawn between my family’s life in Highland Park and the life of the Browns, between the linear past and present. “When your family was here, they laid good roots,” Mrs. Brown said when she spoke of the success of her children and the children of the house’s previous inhabitants. A sense of collective momentum and a similarity in goals, these were all imbued in a sense of shared place. A good house can lead to good people; she seemed to say.

But in this seeking, it was impossible to ignore the glaring and perpetually highlighted contrasts. My grandfather lived in Highland Park at the height of its wealth; the Browns now live in the city at what may be considered the city’s worst
moment. There is a five-story apartment building on the northwest corner of McLean Avenue. When we walk by it down the street, the doors are boarded up; soot marks lick the marble casements of the windows. I asked my grandfather if he had known anyone who had lived there. “A few friends in grade school, a few in and out,” he said. I've seen pictures, the building used to be beautiful: Detroit's art deco at its height. Now it’s slated to be torn down, which Katrina fears will open up the street to “everything.”

By “everything,” I was swift to think she meant the midnight jaywalkers who stop traffic on Woodward Avenue. Any times they step in front of cars, seemingly unaware of the cars that speed toward them.

“Do the Highland Park Shuffle,” an acquaintance calls out on the dance floor weeks later. He makes his legs stiff, his feet heavy, and he switches the light in his eyes off.

“When I was here,” my grandfather spoke softly “the first years I was here, on Woodward Avenue, underneath the apartment was a drug store, a bank, as you go down Woodward in the north direction, a bank, a toy store, a very nice toy store, a bakery,”

“Amazing, right” Mrs. Brown nodded her head.

“A real fine bakery”

“Mhmm,”

“And a couple other stores, a candy shop and a tailor, and eventually... just very nice stores,” he continued.
“Yes, very nice stores,” Mrs. Brown nodded.

“Now you probably have to drive to go grocery shopping?” my mother turned to Mrs. Brown.

“Yes we do,” she patted her knee and nodded.

“When my grandmother was here she probably could just walk,” My mother said wistfully.

“Yes she probably did, there used to be a store just on the corner called Ivanhoe, that store had been there a long, long time, and then it just mysteriously caught fire...”

We continued speaking about other things. The talk turned to the house. The rooms upstairs, the garden in the back, and the electric window in the breakfast room. Before saying goodbye, we all crowed into the small light room to look at the mechanism, long broken, which once brought the window down into the wall below.
The Collective Unconscious

At the founding of the C.G. Jung Institute in Zurich, Switzerland on April 24, 1948, Carl Jung gave a speech. In it, he spoke of the opportunities for study and transformation the new institute provided, of the scholastic advances in the field of psychology that were bound to occur within the campus, and of the repercussions of complex psychology on the psychology of religion. He dwelled upon his personal history as a psychiatrist. And most importantly, he spoke about the collective unconscious. "This led, about 1912, to the actual discovery of the collective unconscious," he stated toward the end of his speech. "...with the hypothesis of the collective unconscious, the scope of our researches was extended without limit. Not only the domain of normal psychology, but also those of racial psychiatry, folklore, and mythology in the widest sense became the subject matter of complex psychology."¹⁵ The collective unconscious would prove to be the cornerstone of Jung's school of psychoanalysis.

Jung's formulation of the idea of the collective unconscious occurred in an important moment for analytical psychology presided over by Sigmund Freud in the beginning of the 20th century. Jung was a student of Freud's, and it was in that role that he began to construct the ideas that would ground his methods in contrast to Freud's model of the unconscious aspects of the psyche. Jung renamed this the personal unconscious. For Freud, the unconscious was essentially an appendix of

consciousness; its contents consisted of wishes, emotions and personal memories, all of which owe much of their significance to infantile sexuality. Freud’s unconscious served as a repressed aspect of consciousness. It was a predominantly negative space, where past experience and emotions lingered beneath the subject’s consciousness, coloring the subject’s engagement with the world.

The inherent negativity of the unconscious in Freud’s theory prompted Jung to formulate the broader conception of the collective unconscious. In Jung’s work, the unconscious constitution of the human experience was full of more than the irrational and repressed aspects of the personal unconscious; it was also a means of inquiry into a deeper and universal realm of humanity, the collective unconscious. This diversion is best highlighted by the two psychologist’s interpretation of dreams and their images which, for Freud, were considered with an empiricism which “equates the dream images with real-objects,” while Jung postulated a theory of unconscious expression which refers every part of the dream and all the actors in it back to the dreamer.”

The collective unconscious is defined in Jung’s essay, “On the Relation of Analytical Psychology to Poetic Art,” published in 1923:

In contrast to the personal unconscious... a relatively thin layer immediately below the threshold of consciousness, the collective unconscious shows no tendency to become conscious under normal conditions... it is no more than a potentiality handed down to us from primordial times in the specific form of mnemonic images or inherited

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in the anatomical structure of the brain. There are no inborn ideas, but there are inborn possibilities of ideas that set bounds to even the boldest fantasy and keep our fantasy activity within certain categories: a priori ideas, as it were, the existence of which cannot be ascertained except from their effects.\textsuperscript{18}

The \textit{collective unconscious} is not an aspect of the human psyche to expose, engage with, and then live out, some sort of process parallel and inverse to Freud’s interrogative methods. Instead, it is constructed of images, symbols, and archetypes that Jung situates as the reduced mnemonic images of archaic mythology, gleaned from the biological basis of cognition. It is the common underpinning of all of humankind, according to Jung and is thus impersonal, universal, and a priori pre-existent: the part of unconsciousness that consists “on the one hand of unconscious perceptions of external reality and, on the other, of all the residues of the phylogenetic perceptive and adaptive functions. A reconstruction of the unconscious view of the world would yield a picture showing how external reality has been perceived from time immemorial. The \textit{collective unconscious} contains, or is, an historical mirror image of the world. It too is a world, but a world of images.”\textsuperscript{19} While this aspect of the \textit{collective unconscious} is present in all humans, it is through the process of psychoanalysis that persons are able to begin to understand its influence and presence in their cognitive experience.


For Jung, *collective unconscious* is most accessible in the form of dreams.

Through the process of psychoanalysis and introspections, the world of imagery is almost immediate accessible to make sense of spontaneously produces symbols.

Through analysis, the reality of the non-personal and therefore necessary relationship between the symbol and its meaning is made visible. “Symbols are not allegories and not signs,” Jung wrote, “rather they are an expression of an intuitive idea that cannot yet be formulated in any other or better way.” Symbols acquired their resonance because they are produced by a natural and therefore essential relationship between the signifying phenomenon and the signified meaning. This meaning no longer relates to something repressed within the subject’s past but is a connection to the deeper realms of *archetypes and the unconscious*.

“An infallible sign of collective images seems to be the appearance of the cosmic element, i.e. the images in the dream of fantasy are connected with cosmic qualities... The obvious occurrence of mythological and religious motifs in a dream also points to the activity of the collective unconscious.”

Jung attests that these experiences, embodied in the cosmic images that enter into the subject’s dreams, are ancient. He describes the collective psyche as “unconscious

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20 “Man also produces symbols unconsciously and spontaneously, in the form of dreams.” Carl Jung, *Man and His Symbols.* (Garden City: Doubleday 1964) 6.
mythology whose primordial images are the common heritage of mankind.”  

But the seemingly spontaneous and expansive nature of the collective unconscious does not mean that it is expansive in its definitions. Jung’s archetypes function on a closed plane of meaning. “An archetype means a typos, a definite grouping of archaic character containing, in forms as well as meaning, mythological motifs. Mythological motifs appear in pure form in fairytales, myths, legends, and folklore. Some of the well-known motifs are: The figures of the Hero, the Redeemer, the Dragon (always connected with the Hero, who has to overcome him, the Whale or the Monster who swallows the Hero.) It is through defining the bounds of the collective unconscious and archetype that Jung perpetually stressed the scientific nature of his discovery.

Church

In the summer of 1965, my mother drove in a car down Woodward Avenue with her grandfather; she was six and was visiting her grandparents by herself for the first time. He pointed to a Presbyterian Church on the east side of the road. The steeple was six stories tall, the campus took up a whole block, there was a statue of the

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28 "A study of the structures of the unconscious collective mind would reveal the same discoveries as you make in comparative anatomy. We do not need to think that there is anything mystical about it. But because I speak of a collective unconscious, I have been accused of obscurantism. There is nothing mystical about the collective unconscious. It is just a new branch of science, and it is really common sense to admit the existence of unconscious collective processes." Carl Jung "The Tavistock Lectures: Lecture II" in The Symbolic Life: Miscellaneous Writings, C. G. Jung. Translated by R. F. C. Hull. (Princeton: Princeton, 1955) 374.
Angel Gabriel outside. He told her he had attended that church “before the negroes came.”

My mother says that what was particular about his remark was that she had never heard him say anything like that before, or ever again, and when he said it, it was with an air of sadness that she still finds confusing.

Downtown Hoedown

One afternoon this summer, our friend Frank called Charlie, my housemate, to invite us to the Downtown Hoedown. He had gotten free tickets at Arby’s and he and his sister and their friends were driving into the city from the small farming town forty miles outside, where they lived. When he beeped, we came downstairs, and said hello to the ten of them, all young and blond and wearing cowboy hats. They were piled into small cars and already pretty drunk. We tried to squeeze in. Charlie went with Frank and I fit into the backseat of the other car. Frank’s younger sister handed me a warm beer and told me to drink it in one go.

We parked and walked toward the stadium. All over people staggered through the street. It was five o’clock. Every year, hundreds of thousands of people flock into the city for Downtown Hoedown, a three day long barrage of country music sponsored by 99.5 WYCD, Detroit’s country radio station. It is a weekend where some of the most important artists in country music share the stage with some of the freshest young talent on the scene. It also the weekend when the most recorded property damage in the city occurs each year.
There was a very large man behind us. I was talking with Frank about the weekend's lineup; the man leaned over into our conversation. "Merle Haggard would never play here," he said. I had mentioned the country music star in jest while Frank listed the acts he was most excited to see. We both looked back at the large man. "You know what they would do to him if he came here, he wouldn't set foot in this city. They would stick a rail through him and run him out of town. This isn't a city for outlaws."

This isn’t a city for outlaws. That statement seemed to contradict every report or news article concerning the Detroit crime rate I had ever see. This city isn’t a city for a certain type of outlaw is what he might have meant. It isn’t a city for some white country artists, the outlaws like Merle Haggard, because it is a city full of black people, the people who would stick a rail through Mr. Haggard and run him out of town. They are the people who keep these country revelers, with their “Detroit is Where I’m From” posters and confederate flag t-shirts, in close range of the baseball stadium. The stadium is surrounded by a police barricade. Though it may be that the visitors bring more bedlam along with them than they encounter.

“They’re not from the city. They think there are no rules here—the city is crazy.” Later in the night, Charlie and I befriended a bartender downtown. The bar was quiet by then, but she was angry and annoyed. “I’ve been dealing with them for

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29 This man was imagining that residents of the city would cause harm to Merle Haggard because he is a white man from the south, who, in the late 1960s, was lauded as the voice of the "silent majority" and asked to endorse Alabama Governor George Wallace. Matthew D Lassiter, “Race over Region,” in Reviews in American History 35, no. 1 (March 1, 2007) 103.
years,” she said. “They’re rude and nasty, and somehow one of the toilets in the woman’s bathroom always ends up broken.”

The Unconscious of the Collective

*The Arcades Project*, Benjamin’s final and seminal work, is constructed under the auspice of the *collective dream*. This dream refers to the compilatory nature of history and the means through which the compilation is considered in the current moment. Benjamin refers to the data of the *collective dream* as the *unconscious of the collective* and used it to look at a seemingly new quandary of the 20th century, where the utopian promises of new social and technological developments sat in stark contrast with the apparently inevitable dystopian future current societal and industrial conditions seemed to promise.

For Benjamin, the archetypal role of in the *unconscious of the collective* had been freed from its archaic associations with the primitive and the ahistorical. The *Arcades Project* was comprised of the modern mythological archetypes of The Catacombs, The Stock Exchange, The Museum, The Street, The Panorama, assembled under the encompassing archetype of the Parisian Arcades. In Benjamin’s consciously pragmatic conception of psycho-social-synthesis, the archetype served as an image that connects all realms of time: past, present and future, to permit an expression of the material or epoch’s truth. It is not through a connection with the primordial past or biological truth, but rather through the creation of meaningful montages that it is possible understand an object, location, or affect in the current epoch. The project aimed to forge a new vocabulary in the midst of opening up the
encounter between the individual and the collective.50 Benjamin’s term, the
*unconscious of the collective*, draws attention to the particularity of each collective of
which he speaks.

Benjamin described the *collective dream* of society as “... deflect[ed]... back
upon the primal past,” wedding its content with “elements of primal history... stored in
the unconscious of the collective”51 Although these images and associations ran the risk
of disappearing completely with the onslaught of industrial capitalism, Benjamin’s
believed that they lingered, and imbued the current landscape and historical age with
a sense of *revolutionary* recognition of the disjuncture between the utopian future
anticipated in the past and the catastrophic future toward which the present seemed
to be headed.

**Redlining**

At the beginning of the 20th century, Detroit underwent an unprecedented
change from a sleepy midwestern town, a transfer point for goods from the Detroit
River to the railways that stretched west, to the epicenter of industrial America, the
city that Franklin Roosevelt deemed “the arsenal of democracy” in the mid 1940s.
This urban explosion is often credited to the vision of a few industrious men: Henry
Ford, the Dodge Brothers, the Fisher Brothers and the bankers who watched their
money. They were responsible for the gregarious urban plan that spread the city

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across 140 square miles, for the skyscrapers that began to stud the downtown, and for
the construction of the many urban factories that defined the city. But really, what
drove “Detroit the Dynamic” were the hundreds of thousands of people who arrived
in the city from rural Appalachia, depressed Midwestern farm counties, and the Black
Belt regions of the Deep South in order to build things.\textsuperscript{32} Their bodies were what
drove the city’s sprawling development, made use of its tall buildings, and manned the
cavernous factory floors. They also made use of the urban landscape, which consisted
of single-family homes, stretching from the third mile mark to 8 Mile. In 1931,
Edmund Wilson observed “The protoplasmic cells of Detroit are drab yellow or
redbrick houses, sometimes with black rock-candy columns or a dash of crass
Romanesque.”\textsuperscript{33} Detroit was most certainly, a city of houses.

For the first half of the twentieth century, the bulk of the city’s developments
were restricted to white residents. In the 1940s, more than 80 percent of property
outside of Detroit’s inner city was restricted from African Americans. African
American men and women who worked similar jobs to whites and earned similar
wages were restricted with their families to the oldest housing in the city.\textsuperscript{34} They

\textsuperscript{32} Thomas J. Sugrue, \textit{The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar
\textsuperscript{33} Edmund Wilson, \textit{American Earthquake: A Documentary of the Twenties and Thirties},
\textsuperscript{34} “The Second World War afforded great opportunities in manufacturing jobs for blacks in
the city. Before the War only Ford, Briggs, and Dodge employed black workers; nearly half
of the blacks working in the automobile industry were Ford employees. In the 1940s, women
previously employed as household workers began to seek employment elsewhere, a welcome
change from jobs that often lacked fringe benefits, paid very little, were exempt from Social
Security and were situated in a history that dated back from the era of slavery. Increasingly,
black women found employment as clerical and factory workers, where wage and benefit
lived in a small number of neighborhoods clustered around the downtown, black
Bottom and Paradise Valley, two densely populated neighborhoods with dilapidated,
overcrowded houses and apartment building and the West Side, a black "enclave" 
further out in the city, first settled in the 1920s, was home to more prosperous African 
Americans.

By the mid-1940s, most African-Americans lived in incredibly overcrowded 
neighborhoods. As a greater number of African Americans moved to Detroit from 
southern states to find employment, the areas they could settle in did not grow.
Families were forced to live in single room apartment, sharing small spaces and 
converting unlikely spaces, including garages and carriage houses into more housing.
The 1940s also marked a serious housing shortage throughout the city, due to a lack 
of skilled construction workers and scarcity of building materials during and after 
World War II. While many city residents experienced difficulty during this shortage, 
African-Americans a particularly tough blow.36 When builders did begin to construct 
new housing stock, they sought construction projects for wealthy clients. Both 
working class blacks and whites found it difficult to find contractors willing to work 
with them.

African American residents of Detroit also had difficulty securing the capital 
necessary to buy a home. This was because of the Federal Home Land Bank Board 
practice of redlining, which occurred in Detroit, as it did across the country. From the

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36 Sugrue, The Origins of the Urban Crisis, 42.
1930s until the mid 1950s, the Residential Security Maps and Surveys (a map devised by the Federal Home Land Bank Board with local real estate brokers and lenders) divided entire metropolitan areas into subsections ranked from A (green) to D (red). The RSMS marked all areas of the city where African Americans lived D, the lowest rating possible. This ranking made it almost impossible to qualify for a mortgage, because brokers and lenders used the maps as the chief determinant of eligibility. The effects of redlining were multi-fold. It kept many African Americans who earned wages high enough to afford to buy homes as renters, crowded into small apartment houses and tenements. The policy discouraged builders from working in areas marked C or D, by almost guaranteeing them no access to financial backing. It also spurred white resentment of African Americans. Even neighborhoods with a small African American population were marked D. Whites feared their property values would plummet if nearby houses no longer qualified for loans. Perpetuated by private and public institutions alike, redlining allowed for the systematic discrimination against African Americans in housing.37

The small amount of housing stock accessible to African Americans was some of the oldest in the city and the most dilapidated due to years of use and disinterested landlords. The dearth of housing forced African Americans to look for less conventional spaces to live in, from old churches to garages, carriage houses and lean-tos in the backyards of Black Bottom and the West Side. Over-crowding intensified as more African Americans arrived from the South during WWII and afterwards, and

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37 Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis*, 44.
created a housing situations that many looked forward to leaving as soon as they could.  

After WWII, when builders began to build again, it became apparent that two diverging approaches to housing had been initiated in the New Deal. In 1937, Congress passed the Wagner-Steagall Housing act, which provided for the construction of public housing under the regulation of the United States Housing Authority. The government’s New Deal commitment to public housing was reaffirmed in 1949, when the Truman administration and Congress passed the Taft-Ellender-Wagner Act, which again provided millions of dollars for the construction of public housing across the country. Between the two acts, New Deal and Fair Deal legislation budgeted over one billion dollars to public housing for the poorest Americans.

This push sat in uneasy contrast with a second promise of the New Deal, which hoped to increase homeownership across all classes through government subsidies for the purchase of homes and loans for new single-family home construction. The Home Owners’ Loan Corporation and the Federal Housing Administration, created in 1933 and 1934, subsidized home purchases and improvements with low interest loans and guaranteed long-term residential mortgages.

The localism required in most liberal social programs of the era preserved the concentration of power in city and state governments. Local governments, with the,  

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Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis*, 47.
had the final vote on the implementation of federal policy and funds. The hyperlocalism of program institution quickly reduced the implementation of these programs into an argument between public housing advocates and those invested in private home ownership; a battle between city planners, labor organizations, and inner city residents, especially African Americans, against real estate brokers, housing developers, and in the greatest number, homeowners—both black and white—who hoped to benefit from the New Deal subsidies. In Detroit, unlike other large cities across the country, support for public housing did not extend far beyond liberal activists. The small group of advocates were unable to put much pressure on the Detroit city government to spend money on public housing, who, in turn, were more concerned with pleasing the large contingents of vocal homeowners, builders, and grassroots neighborhood associations who were interested in low interest loans and guaranteed long-term residential mortgages.

Beginning in the late 1940s, black Detroiters began to move outside of the confines of the downtown ghettos and small pockets on the Westside, with capital saved from war years, when jobs were relatively plentiful but there was very little to buy. They were in search of better housing, different communities, and more space. Between 1948 and 1960, housing conditions for blacks improved significantly, with the number of blacks living in substandard buildings falling from 29.3 percent to only 10.3 percent in 1960.39 However, as African Americans moved into more neighborhoods, patterns of residential segregation remained the same. White

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movement allowed for an increase in income segregation within the black community as well, replicating the class divisions that characterized the city throughout the twentieth-century. The 1960s also marked the breaking point for a large-scale industrial restructuring that has been occurring in the city and state since the mid 1950s. While African Americans moved into a greater number of neighborhoods in the years following WWII, they often did so using their life savings, blacks continued to suffer levels of unemployment that were disproportional to those of Detroit residents in general.\textsuperscript{40} While frequently marginalized or flat out ignored, the forces of deindustrialization were already seriously at play in the city by 1965.\textsuperscript{41}

Like many American cities, the arrival of African Americans in a greater number of neighborhoods led to white backlash and flight, spurred by bigotry fortified by previous racial isolation, pernicious swindling by real-estate agents and suburban builders, and an increasing number of automobile industry jobs outside of the city. To house this flight, the suburbs surrounding Detroit expanded exponentially in the second half of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, while the population of the city decreased from nearly two million in 1950 to 700,000 in 2010. This exodus also

\textsuperscript{40} Sugrue, \textit{The Origins of the Urban Crisis}, 261.
\textsuperscript{41} While the national dialogue in the 1950s and early 60s was markedly upbeat, residents of Detroit who remained in the city after the closing of many automotive industry jobs were beginning to see a decline in economic prosperity. "Mainstream economists focused on the national-level statistics that showed phenomenal growth in the gross national product, in consumer buying power, and in industrial output. Even those who acknowledged that some workers suffered in the effects of economic restructuring nonetheless remained confident that it was just a matter of time before market forces pulled the labor market back to equilibrium.” Sugrue, \textit{The Origins of the Urban Crisis}, 254.
changed the socioeconomic and racial constitution of the city drastically. In 1940, nine percent of the city was African-American; in 2013, nearly eighty-three percent were.42

My Family

Grace McKinley, my great grandmother, was the daughter of a Lansing, Michigan businessman. She was the first woman to have a driver’s license in Michigan. She was one of the first people to ride with the Olds family’s first automobile, the antecedent to the Oldsmobile.

My great-grandfather was born in a small town outside of Lansing, Michigan. He was the son of a blacksmith. The eldest child, he was born in the last decade of the 19th century. He spent his childhood the town of Lake City, Michigan. For high school he boarded in Flint, eight miles away. He was studious and well liked, especially by the family he boarded with. After high school, he enrolled in the Michigan State engineering program on a baseball scholarship. It was in Lansing that he met Grace McKinley and married her. Her father, the Lansing businessman, only approved of Harry because he liked what he saw him do on the pitcher’s mound. They were married for over sixty years.

After he graduated from Michigan State, my great-grandfather and great-grandmother moved to Detroit, where Harry took a job with the Albert Kahn Company. On July 1st 1922, Albert Kahn fired my great-grandfather. There had been a structural malfunction in one of the firm’s largest projects.

42 Detroit (city), Michigan” last modified December 6, 2012, United States Census Bureau, http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/26/2622000.html
After he was dismissed from Kahn, my great-grandfather returned to Flint and sold encyclopedias door-to-door. At night, he worked mixing caulking compounds in an old blender in the basement. At year’s end, he had invented a caulking compound that expanded in heat and contracted in cold and could hold huge concrete slabs together. He filed a patent for iso-flex, which would later be used in the construction of the new General Motors Headquarters, countless parking garages, and the Tiger’s stadium fans flock to most summer evenings.

My grandfather was born in 1931. By then, my great-grandparents had settled in Highland Park, in a house they rented on the south side of Melean Avenue. The house was too small for the seven family members, so when the chance arose, they bought a house across the street from the Kresge family, who moved to a mansion they had built in the Boston-Edison neighborhood in Detroit. At that point the city and suburban boundary was more fluid, so much so that the family that invented K-Mart, and which now has their foundation headquarters twenty-two miles outside of the city, lived within its bounds.

The Implication of the Past

In the first pages of his memoir, *Speak, Memory*, Vladimir Nabokov describes the battle he has waged against the youthful realization that there was a time before he existed in the world and there would be a point at which he would die.

“I rebel against this state of affairs. I feel the urge to take my rebellion outside and picket nature. Over and over again, my mind has made colossal efforts to distinguish the faintest of personal glimmers in the impersonal darkness on both sides of my life. That this darkness is caused merely by the walls of time separating me and my bruised fists
from the free world of timelessness... I have journeyed back in thought—with thought hopelessly tapering off as I went—to remote regions where I groped for some secret outlet only to discover that the prison of time is spherical and without exits.\textsuperscript{70}

To me, these personal glimmers in the darkness of the past don’t feel so absent. Or perhaps it is that the bookends of darkness Nabokov describes don’t feel quite so solid. The permanence of the built environment and the power of stories appear as weak reminders of the personal and momentary aspects of the long time before which we were here, before we began to die.\textsuperscript{71} There appears to be something quite implicative in pointing out the way things once were and in trying to figure out how history plays out. To think of time as Nabokov does is to ignore the past’s power to amalgamate and reappear, and to inhabit what Walter Benjamin terms the \textit{unconscious of the collective}.

When I spoke to my grandfather the day after our visit to Mclean Avenue, he had little to say. He dwelled on the niceness of the visit, the superficial cordiality that had washed over the entire evening. “It was nice to be back,” he added, “nice to see that house, but it doesn’t do much for me. Your mother and you are better at holding conversations, better at engaging people, for me it felt as though we were not talking about anything, so why be talking at all?”

I had assumed that for my grandfather the act of returning to the house of his childhood and to the city of his birth would be a significant one. I assumed that the act of remembering would create something greater; a means of understanding that


\textsuperscript{71} Nabokov, \textit{Speak, Memory}, 21.
would give depth to my learned history and in some ways intensify the experience of the present for my grandfather. I thought that the application of the momentary into the prosperous past would somehow quiet the questions I still held about what this life was like, and how this place became what it is now. It turns out I had miscalculated somehow.

I had assumed this partially because I never walk through the city of Detroit without some sense of imbued history. Few days passed throughout the summer during which I wasn’t reminded of the magnitude that came before me, of the history that preceded my foot falling on a given section of sidewalk. Architectural details, the brick alleyways that wander through the city, the habits of the ring-necked pheasant in my backyard, the things I saw struck me with a poignancy that I found hard to articulate, but trusted could be easily cultivated. This was partially a symptom of spending many mornings in the Burton Historical Archives of the Detroit Public Library, but also, I see now, a definitive shift in my perception of the past. Which makes me wonder, in the act of recitation, of remembering, of recording, is it that we are in the history we look back upon or is the history in us? Is this a question of magnitude or of inheritance?

I think that this is the first moment at which I realized to what extent my grandfather and my own s of the way in which the past worked diverged. Through our conversations about the unconscious of the collective and Jungian archetypes, I had somehow miscalculated in the ways in which we both considered the interplay of the unconscious and the project of history. For my grandfather, the lines of the
*collective unconscious*, as for Jung, are much more constricted. While the archetypes of human consciousness are ever present, they are not quite as close to the surface as I wish posit. I hoped that the act of returning would be enough of an interruption in the *collective dream* to which Benjamin alludes, enough of an interruption in the normalized expectations of how things go that something would happen. But, looking backwards now to my intentions in July, I realize that I was too hasty; and in my haste, I was markedly selfish and singularly minded. I had assumed that it was possible to force the flashes of dialectics, when, in truth, it is not.

**Niceness and Newness**

When Constance Perin writes about meaning, she stress that different meanings of words and interactions sit on different planes of expression in everyday life. Some are more audible and obvious; others only hover in whispers, and some appear barely at all. It is often the meanings that are rarely spoken about that are most important. These are the meanings that are concurrently taken for granted and also imbued with a sense of charge that makes them nearly unspeakable, they offer the greatest insights toward a word's deeper meaning. Only by giving voice to these silent meanings do they stand a chance of being fully understood.72

When my grandfather spoke about his old neighborhood, he often phrased things with concern to how *nice* everything was. There was a *nice* toy store north on Woodward and a *nice* bakery where his mother did her shopping. The pool in the

basement of his elementary school was *nice*, so was the library.

On the surface, the designation of *nice* suggests a set of certain assumptions about the place, about how it looked, how it felt. Sheened in banality, *nice* appears to imply a sense of orderliness, respectability, pleasantry, helpfulness and cleanliness. The designation appears strictly aesthetic, a benevolent culturally coded category. *Nice* suggests something and at the same time, nothing at all.

Conflated with these aesthetic ascriptions, a moral dimension of niceness is often equally important in its designation, hovering beneath the surface. The delineation of *niceness* is often used to exclude, especially along racial lines.\(^{73}\) What goes without saying when my grandfather remembers how *nice* things were is the whiteness of the spaces he inhabited. When he contrasts the way things were with the way things are, he is not only assessing the transformation of occupied apartment building to abandoned blight, of the grocery store into a discount tire shop, of a toy store into a pay-by-the-night hotel. The latent meaning of *nice* remains beneath. The spaces he enjoyed in his youth were not only prosperous spaces, they were also exclusively white spaces.

My grandfather cannot bestow these designations alone. An epitaph cannot be written from momentary acquaintance. An epitaph cannot be written by those who only know the wreckage of the past from the children’s room of a library or from youthful glances into the lobby of a neighboring apartment building. This is a momentary acquaintance, a child’s take on a complex scene. And yet the epitaph of a

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place cannot garner its words from the ideal utopia where the winds of progress have their origin either. In fact, epitaphs cannot be written for places. The Angel of History’s wish to awaken the dead and make whole what has been smashed must produce an eternally amalgamating summation that hold all the data of history in the same field of study. This would require an un-telescoped past and present. An epitaph that places the smoldering apartment house at the corner of Woodward and McLean on the same plane as the well-stocked bakery, that does not hide in the ignorance of pleasantry and expunges the leveling of niceness from it all. The ascription of niceness onto the previous development of Detroit does not acknowledge the conditions of its production. And I do not wish to say that only by removing a blanket pleasantry, we move close to an understanding. This is why I still stand behind the idea that the conversation my family and the Browns had in July is important. Through the work of sought connections, of slightly forced overlaps, it is through these conversations that history can begin to appear less in staunch dichotomies, nice and ruined, progress and decline, and more in the complicated conversation of the dialectical.

Collective/ Unconscious/ Collective

In an August 5, 1937 letter Walter Benjamin wrote to Gershom Scholem, a German Kabbalistic scholar and friend, Benjamin described the work of Jung as the

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“devil’s work through and through, which should be attacked with white magic.”

Benjamin had begun to delve into Jung again during a self-imposed exile in 1937, in order to work anew into his Arcades Project. “It is my desire,” he wrote to Scholem earlier in the summer, “to safeguard certain foundations of “Paris Arcades” methodologically by waging an onslaught on the doctrines of Jung, especially those concerning archaic images and collective unconscious.” Throughout his study of Jung, Benjamin appeared determined to distinguish his work and methods from Jungian methodologies and perspectives.

The point of theoretical overlap for Benjamin and Jung concerned the unconscious, its collective manifestations, and the symbol as the means to make sense of it. In the Arcades, Benjamin attempts to clarify the difference between his “wish-symbol” as a dialectic image and Jung’s archaic archetypes:

The unequivocally regressive function which the doctrine of archaic images has for Jung comes to light in the following passage… “The creative process… consists in an unconscious activation of the archetype and in an… elaboration of this original image into the finished work. By giving it shape, the artist in some measure translates this image into the language of the present… Therein lies the social significance of art… it conjures up the forms in which the Zeitgeist, the spirit of the age, is most lacking. The unsatisfied yearning of the artist reaches back to the primordial image in the unconscious which is best fitted to compensate the… one sidedness of the spirit of the age.”

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It is striking, however, that it is not Jung’s imposition of primal images on the unconscious that Benjamin objects to, nor the supposition of an inexplicable current moment within the *collective unconscious*, but rather Jung’s description of the ‘conjuration’ of archetypes and their subsequent compensatory function. Instead of deriding the esoteric element of his psychology, Benjamin complains that Jung reduces the ‘esoteric theory of art’ to the banal function of “making archetypes ‘accessible’ to the ‘Zeitgeist’.”

His primary objection lay with the equations of the ‘Zeitgeist’ with the archaic symbol and the reduction of the artist (and individual) into a vessel yearning to be filled by primordial information. Rather than objecting in outright to Jung’s fixation on the archaic, Benjamin seemed more forthrightly concerned with Jung’s means of accessing the archetypical signs that in the symbols themselves.

Nonetheless, it is difficult to believe wholeheartedly that Benjamin’s chief objection to Jung had to do with was one of accessibility. It seems more plausible, given Benjamin’s greater project of the *Arcades*, that it was Jung’s dependence on mediumistic automatism cloaked in a guise of archaic singularity that was most discouraging for him.

While both Jung and Benjamin share a belief on the role of the image within signification, the non-personal and the non-rational areas of significance, Theodor Adorno, drew attention to the important differences between Jung and Benjamin,

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through Benjamin’s concern with the specific enchantment of the unconscious of the collective. “Thus disenchantment of the dialectical image leads directly to purely mythical thinking, and then Klages appears as a danger, just as Jung did before,” Adorno warned Benjamin in a 1935 letter. For Jung, the potential of the collective unconscious was accessible only through in the analysis of dreams. His method of psychoanalysis, though seemingly more mythical and mediumistic than that of Freud, when confined by the pseudo-scientific rigidity Jung imposed on it, provided a comparatively “disenchanted” means of understanding unconsciousness. For Benjamin, the symbolic was associated not with the acquisition of direct knowledge, especially the diagnostic, but rather with perception. Utility, and the subsequent direct applicability of these theories, were at the crux of this difference. “The dialectic image is an image that emerges suddenly, in a flash.” Benjamin wrote in the Arcades, “What has been is to be held fast—as an image flashing up in the now of its recognizability. The rescue that is carried out by these means—but only by these—can operate solely for the sake of what in the next moment is already irretrievably lost.”

Walter Benjamin perceives an individual’s connection to the collective as a rare revelation, rather than a constant undercurrent that needs only to be tapped into.

The unconscious of the collective is a secondary component of the suggestion that all experiences are constituted by an intersection of the past and present and collective and personal history. Through the Arcades Project, Benjamin worked to

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draw attention to the symbolic potential outside of the limited realm of archaic symbology. Though Benjamin attacked Marx’s historical materialism in his essay “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” it is significant that he defines the second aspect of the elementary doctrine of historical materialism as “History decays into images, not into stories.” This seems to be exactly what Benjamin is concerned about in the work Jung. For Benjamin, a symbol does not hold weight because of its connection to an ideal “fatherland” or nostalgic reference to an ideal past and thus an ideal future. Rather, a symbol holds weight because of its connection with now and the perpetual present that Benjamin’s fragmented project of images creates.

**Brush Park, August 3, 2013.**

Mist is washing in, maybe off the river, maybe from the incinerator a few blocks northeast. We were sitting on the stoop of the yellow house on the corner of Brush and Watson Street, eating brioche and talking aimlessly. The lots on Brush Park are wide and long, only two or three houses were visible from where we sat.

“Do you know what stoop you’re sitting on?” Our heads whirled around; we listened to a voice we did not see.

“I say, do you know what stoop you’re sitting on?” I could see him now, walking toward us on the sidewalk, past the Queen Anne’s lace, the burdock, and the wood sorrel growing in the adjacent lot. The stoop we sat on was crumbling. The door was boarded up, the ubiquitous Watchful Eye of an anti-arson poster pasted on

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it. Yellow paint flaked from the grey stone and the cement railing around the top of the stairs had split in two. We had brushed glass and cigarette butts aside to sit, and took note of the porch light wires hanging limp above our heads.

The man who spoke was wearing old pants and a t-shirt I could see straight through when he lifted his brown arms to point. “See where the paint is flaking?”

“That used to be stone, beautiful grey stone.”

“It was a Masonic Lodge, see the plaque, (he pointed) then a dentist’s office and now it’s this way. One of lots of Masonic lodges. Lots of Masons in this neighborhood.”

We nodded and nodded. We looked at the plaque and nodded again. Anna tore off another piece of bread and bit down on it. He started to walk away. “You’ve got to know the history, you’ve got to know the history,” he spoke softly to himself.
Part 2- “All Architecture is the Commendatore’s,” Tours of the Guardian Building, and Recitation of the Past

During long periods of history, the mode of human sense perception changes with humanity’s entire mode of existence. The manner in which human sense perception is
organized, the medium in which it is accomplished, is determined not only by nature but by historical circumstances as well.

- Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction”

Tour of the Guardian Building

Through the revolving doors and into the lobby, if one looks too long at the ceiling someone at the front desk will flag you down and ask if you know Christopher. People who look at the ceiling in an office building usually are not regular visitors, so the chances of recognition are slim. Christopher is the doorman, he will give you a tour, it shouldn’t take more than thirty-five minutes; you can see Canada from the 36th floor.

Christopher had a loud voice and a gregarious manner. When the small crowd began to assemble around him, he announced a single rule, “you can take as many pictures as you like, as long as you take most of them of me.” He wore a red bellhop suit and hat and an ID badge around his neck and looked comfortable in front of the fifteen people gathered.

The tour began in the lobby, in front of an ornate dual staircase leading to the promenade a floor above and to the vaults below. Spanning the entrance to the promenade there was a decorative metal screen. Two small figures etched in the metal guard the gated entrance. They wear Aztec headdresses and hold keys that obscure (or constitute) most of their bodies. The rest of the gate was decorated with notched diamonds, forming a rough Latin cross. The high ceiling of the upper banking room

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was visible through the cutouts. People walked up and down the grand staircase freely, the small accordion gate was open.

The metal of the gates has a peculiar luster, a cross between silver and brushed stainless steel. It is called Monel metal. Monel metal, it never rusts, it never corrodes. Every metal fixture in the building was made of Monel, from the doorknobs to the bank teller windows, the elevator doors to the inkwells. A perfect nickel alloy, it never needs polishing. Christopher turned to the crowd, “The only group to use more Monel than the contractors of the Guardian Building was the United States Navy, in the ship building unit.” Monel is great for hulls, but not for cars, it is too heavy. Above the promenade’s entrance, mounted in the center of the highly stylized crucifix, a Tiffany glass clock ticked away, one of only three in the country.

The three other walls were no less ornate. The lobby was five stories tall, the ceiling was vaulted and covered in terracotta tiles that spill down the walls. The spandrels are filled with tile work in the shape of feathers, the tiled ceiling resembles a Native American war bonnet. “Writ Rowland, the designer of the Guardian Building, used the motif of the Indian often,” Christopher told the group. “In the Guardian Building that took the form of a mix of Aztec, Penobscot, and Southwest Indian motifs. The Native Americans were used in skyscrapers of the era to communicate a sense of longevity, trustworthiness, and security.”

At the north wall, the tile work surrounds a large window, its edges wrapped in smaller tiles and more intricate details, as though they are the framing a massive
cranium. Below the window there was a flat space set on the revolving door bay with second story doors leading onto it and a tiled knee wall encasing it.

In the summer of 2012, the balcony was filled with potted plants, but at the buildings inception, it served another purpose. “In the evening, or in the late afternoon, keeping banker’s hours, the building would close and all the executives would come back downtown with their wives, and this was their dance floor. Up there, that space up there that was the bandstand,” Christopher told us. A few in the group gasped, looking back up at the ceiling and then around the entire room, trying to imagine the scene.

The Sight of People
“... I was shocked — shocked— to see dozens of pedestrians strolling along the street... In any other city, this would be unremarkable. But in Detroit, it was an amazing sight. Seriously.” Joann Muller described the experience of driving down Woodward Avenue during the summer of 2012 in *Forbes Magazine Online*. People sat “soaking up the sunshine at outdoor cafes, or taking a break from work at one of the downtown office buildings to stretch their legs or run errands.” For Muller, this was an almost impossible, because downtown Detroit is not only a dangerous place, it is also an empty one. The article’s title, “A Shocking Sight in Downtown Detroit: People,” is at once a celebratory call and a macabre punch line. The postulation that there could be people in the city was presented as so improbable that the headline comes off as a joke. The people who walked amongst these buildings are oxymoronic. Vacancy, demise, and populace cannot exist at once. They must be gone, or hidden away—scared into parking garages and buildings with doormen.

But in reality, the ruins of downtown Detroit are much more localized. Vacant and occupied spaces alternate by block, by floor, by office suite. In this context, what is important is not the “usefulness” of these ruins, as Tim Edensor describes in his discussion of ruins as a wasteland, but rather the actual qualification of downtown Detroit as an empty space.87 “There is no semantic turn to describe the deflated urban


87 “The consignment of ruins to the common categories of ‘wasteland’ necessarily obliterates the wide divergence which exists between the characteristics of such spaces. According to such notions, wasteland is devoid of positive social, material, aesthetic qualities, or is purely an abstracted and quantitative entity technically identified by the assumed absence of activity.
landscape that Detroit is now. Instead, the broad strokes of Forbes magazine reduce the urban landscape to an empty one. Full or empty, productive or not, those are the qualities of discourse we are able to function within.

In actuality, the turns are subtler; vacant and populated spaces sit on top of one another. One can jump from elevator stop to elevator stop between the low hum of a law office and the small ruin of fallen drop ceilings and expired fire extinguishers. The occupied and the unoccupied are in play, referring and upholding the others existence consistently.

When Forbes describes Detroit's downtown as a landscape where desolation is the expected condition, they are bolstering a set of descriptions often propagated by businesses and private foundations in order to enact their vision of the city into the landscape. By rendering a section of the city utterly vacant, when it is not, the desires of those with huge amounts of available capital, enough to buy a building say, or invest in a block of retail, can go forward without question. Mark Binelli, a local author, states “...private foundations and deep-pocketed members of the local business elite exercise an outsize influence in a city as broke as Detroit, providing financing for everything from a much-needed light-rail line to the ambitious Detroit Future City


Mark Benelli describes the large amount of influence a few people in the city of Detroit "People like Dan Gilbert, the owner of Quicken Loans and the Cleveland Cavaliers, and Mike Ilitch, a founder of Little Caesars pizza, have been snatching up shuttered skyscrapers and prewar office buildings — since December Mr. Gilbert has bought at least five buildings and, reputedly, an entire downtown city block — as if they’re Monopoly properties.” Mark Benelli, "Detroit Sinks With Belle Isle." *The New York Times*, February 7, 2013. Accessed February 26, 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/02/08/opinion/detroit-sinks-with-belle-isle.html.
plan, which would entirely remap the city." Anything can happen in a place where there is thought to be no one present to question the prerogatives of those at work.

However, this turn did not occur strictly in the rhetorical discourse. It is not as though businesses and foundations simply stepped into a bustling metropolis, called it vacant, and that was that. It was also through a staunch depravation of redundancy in the city that the partial misnomer of inoccupation became salient. When much of the city’s population and industry left Detroit in the mid 20th century, those who departed no longer had a consistent source of information about the city that had previously been acquired by being there. Instead, those outside depend on the information and perceptions they held when they left as well as a flow of information and hearsay surrounding it. As time progresses, the gap between recollection and relation grows wider, and the ascription of vast, totalizing rhetoric becomes a more conceivable project. Redundancy can be thought of as an interplay of the momentary and the epoch; one where the sequestration of moments in the city, which make it real, result in a sort of epochal imbalance, where hegemonic conceptions begin to hold a totalized narrative weight.

Crypt

Below the open promenade, where countless residents of Detroit filed in and out, depositing money and withdrawing it again, receiving loans and settling

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mortgages, getting their shoes shined and buying candy at the newsstand, the safe deposit crypt of the Union Guardian Trust sat separate. It is a restricted space. To reach it, bank patrons filled down two flights of stairs, the second positioned off to the side like a service stairway. It is the entrance to a crypt; the peripheral placement of the staircase communicated a sense of restriction by interrupting the expected flow of foot traffic. To follow it, one must know where the staircase leads. A person does not end up there offhand.

The decoration of the crypt also feels exclusive. In the crypt, the lights are dimmer, the fixtures more ornate, the floors carpeted, the tile work more delicate. Visible through the smaller Monel gate at the bottom of the stairs, the door to the main vault would have sat open, huge piles of money exposed. A third restriction sat in the entrant’s pocket. Both bank and patron required a key for the safe box to open, and the depositor required wealth to fill it with.

The people welcome in this crypt knew their initiate status. In the case of the women’s safe deposit crypt, Christopher describes the “ladies” of society who would have held safe deposit keys. These members of society were not only defined by their ability to enter restricted spaces in the building, but also in their ability to house their most prized possessions beneath its edifice. The wealth of some members of society in Detroit constituted the foundation of the Guardian Building.
Georges Bataille writes, “it is in the form of cathedrals and palaces through which the Church or the State addresses and imposes silence on the multitudes.” 94 Georges Bataille’s early writing on Architecture concerns the smothering of social life under stone monuments: the conflict that sits between the mob and the edifice. Most of Detroit’s residents experienced the Guardian Building with a sense of harrowing awe. A few were implicated into the architecture of the building through the situation of their precious possessions, which were built into the inner sanctum of the edifice, as the royal jewels are built into Buckingham Palace. This allowance not only implicates those who entrust the building with their excess into the building’s greater project, it also removes those members of society from the imposition architecture causes the multitudes. “Around modern banks,” Bataille writes in “The Notions of Expenditure,” “… the same desire to dazzle animates individuals and leads them into a system of petty displays that blinds them to each other, as if they were staring into a blinding light.” 95 When a woman placed her jewelry and documents into a safe deposit box with her name on it and turned her key in the lock, followed by the bank employer turning their key in their lock, she builds herself into the building, moving from a position of expected sociality and into that of architecture.

Top floor

By the time we reached the top floor, the tour group had grown more comfortable with one another. In the elevator, a younger man I did not know lifted

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the leg of his shorts to show an older woman the anarchy symbol he had to disguise for his wedding.

“Not so clever,” she said, shaking her head at the large floral tattoo that ran up his calf and thigh, “I can still see it.”

In the large and empty space of the dining room, the group milled about.

A group of old ladies clustered around a south-facing window to look down and out at Canada.

A young couple took turns taking pictures of one another next to the most colorful decoration in the room, a floor to ceiling spray of celadon-tile, encasing windows that once lead to a balcony.

“We use this for weddings, retirement parties, bar mitzvah parties, company functions, and the occasional bachelor party.” Christopher shouted from his station at the window, where he has been pointing out other famous office buildings to old ladies.

I stood next to a woman wearing sensible white tennis shoes and a t-shirt with appliqué flowers. Her companions were the young couple taking photographs, and she watched them for a bit before turning to the window. We shared pleasantries, about the tour and about the building. She was visiting from Europe, she told me, but has had a house outside of Detroit for a long time. “I’m from here,” she finally interjected, as though it was a confession.
“I’ve never been here before, I never thought to come until they were visiting,”

she motioned toward the couple, still snapping photographs. “And I wanted to show

them the city, you know, wanted them to see it in its best light, when it was beautiful.”

**Skyscrapers as Cathedrals**

“For a few years, if only a few, architects wanted to build tall buildings that

would be a feast for the eyes, that not only housed important functions and

ceremonies of the world but also convinced the rest of the world that whatever they

housed must be important.”


building design during the 1920s when a tendency toward ornate exteriors,

sumptuous and elaborately decoration, and meticulously appointed spaces gained

currency in large office buildings. For an almost singular moment, the Modernistic

sensibility dominated tall building design in the United States. The buildings

constructed in the business districts across the United States, from Chicago to New

York, from Cleveland to San Francisco, were expansive, sumptuous, and ebullient,

reflecting the current economic moment of excess and the desire of most urban

centers to “inject themselves with massive doses of glamor and hubris.”

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97 “The Modernistic movement was soon to be usurped by the more alluring and utilitarian
driven Modernist turn in architecture, propelled partially by the Great Crash of 1929 and the

Unlike the radically abstract and purely utilitarian buildings Modernist architects produced a few decades later, the affective bombardment intended by the Modernistic movement was more immediate, guided by a desire to appeal to more expected markers of wealth and luxury (colorful decoration, stained glass, stone from closed quarries). With the advent of the automobile the intensity of these markers was heightened to make them interpretable at a moment’s glance, from the front seat of an automobile, from the seat on a bus. These were intended to portray an environment of wealth and security, and most importantly, a sense of awe.

This awe, the immediate feeling summoned forth by an overwhelmingly beautiful visual experience, is a complex emotion. Awe is as much composed of fear as it is of wonder. Each gasp or finger pointed is simultaneously a movement based in revelry and in anxiety. Large ornate buildings induce awe. Awe in its crudest form is displayed when a person tilts their head back and gasps at the ceiling. Awe induces silence.

In his 1929 definition of the project of architecture, Bataille posits that all architecture is a prison for society and all buildings sit in complicity with authoritarian hierarchies. Architecture is society’s authorized super ego; there is no architecture that is not the Commendatore’s.\textsuperscript{99} In a Hegelian sense, it is an expression of a society’s essential being.\textsuperscript{100} But being only in its grandest and most dominant form. In a


\textsuperscript{100} “Architecture is something appearing in the place of death, to point out its presence and to cover it up: the victory of death and the victor over death. This allows it to be simultaneously the first of the arts – in its empirical, limited form as a stone edifice—and their tomb—in this
building like the Guardian Building only the “ideal being of society, (that which
authoritatively orders and prohibits) is expressed in architectural compositions in the
strict sense of the word.”101 The Guardian Building exudes a sense of glory,
permanence and extreme beauty that is steadfast and unflinching. It stood in praise of
the then possibility of American financial trusts, and a monument to the new shape of
American capitalism.102

Monuments are makers, serving as reminders of what is important for a
society to remember, preserve, and uphold. In their structure and towering presence
they communicate lasting and unquestionable values. Bataille writes, “Thus great
monuments rise up like dams, opposing all disturbed elements to a logic of majesty
and authority. This is in the form of cathedrals and palaces through which the Church
or the State addresses and imposes silence on the multitude. In fact, monuments
clearly inspire social sobriety and often even a veritable fear.”103 Monuments stand as
the true master of the urban landscape.104 “What exactly were the great cathedrals?
The answer is that they were political act,” Henri Lefebvre reminds us.105 What is

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102 “Most importantly from a later perspective, since nearly all of the skyscrapers of the 1920s
still stand and continue to flatter and define the American cityscape, the 1920s was a time for
the refinement and perfection of skyscraper style. Except for some critics who are hostile to
skyscrapers in general – and probably capitalism as well—the decade of the twenties was the
time of the erection of some of the most beautify and distinguished American skyscrapers,
those of the most enduring popularity.” George H. Douglas, *Skyscrapers: A Social History of
104 Georges Bataille “Architecture” in *Rethinking Architecture: a Reader in Cultural Theory*,
important and specific about the skyscraper in this moment in Detroit is a newfound ability of private companies and trusts to construct beautiful buildings that dominated the downtown landscape. And what intensifies this edifice? What communicates that this building is not a monument dedicated to all factions of society? There is a bandstand in the lobby.

Georges Bataille describes the need for expenditure in 20th century France as “still destined to acquire or maintain rank, but in principle it no longer has the goal of causing another to lose his rank.” In Detroit, similar movements were at work in the 1920s. In the lobby of the Guardian Building, there is a bandstand. The selective expansion of the function of the Guardian Building’s lobby for a particular class, from the staid and public function of banking to the private function leisure is another way in which high-capital members of Detroit society were situated into the architecture. Dancing in a space where the usual footfall is one directional, dwelling in a space that is usually only passed through.

**Safe deposit box**

“These are the boxes where the ladies of Detroit’s richest families would hold their valuables,” Christopher told the tour. He was standing next to a massive metal door, bolted to the ground. Through a glass panel the gears and levers of its locking mechanism were visible. The door was at least a foot thick. A sheet of Monel adorned the outside, etched with the building’s signature notched arches and another watchful

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Indian. Writ Rowland wanted the safe deposit space to feel like a crypt, like where they put the priests after they die, or royal jewels,

Inside, the small room was dark. Rows of walnut fronted boxes lined the walls. Each one was numbered with a small Monel plaque. Under the number, the names were brushed off. The tour group filtered in and out of the small space, while Christopher described the way the boxes were used. “Each lady had a key, and the bank held a key, and when they both unlocked the box, the lady would be able to open it and access her jewels, her cash, and her documents.”

“There are so few of them,” a man in a fedora observed, quickly counting the number of boxes: twenty-five. “That’s because there were so few ladies in the city at that time,” Christopher interjected. Laughter. One man tried to pull the massive door from its strong hold in the floor. Laughter, as his body strained against the bulk of it, steadfast in its bolts.

Two older black women from Maryland, visiting the city for an African-American Teachers Union convention asked to take a picture in front of the door. Christopher stood between them. They smiled for their companion’s camera-phone. As he fiddled with the buttons, one woman reached her arm around Christopher’s waist, fingers curling to tickle his side. He laughed under the meager flash. They separated, joking.

The rest of the space was nearly empty. Next to the ladies boxes, another larger vault was bolted open. Inside, the floor was covered in clean-smelling track
carpeting, though the vaults ventilation system, a series of small Monel covered holes in the ceiling, was still intact.

“This once was piled high with bills,” Christopher swept his arm around the entire room, almost touching the ceiling, “They didn’t keep it in boxes even, just in piles. Now they use it for dinner parties, Hollywood movie shoots, and the occasional yoga class,” that elicited Laughter as the group filed out of the dark old room. The Cathedral of Finance

The Guardian Building, The Cathedral of Finance. Writ Rowland designed the Union Trust’s new headquarters in the midst of a dedicated resurgence of interest in the Gothic form. Prompted in part by the Arts and Crafts movement’s fascination with fading artisanal practices and the ease of steel construction technology; across the country, but particularly in Detroit, a mix of sacred architectural traditions and new ideas in design and construction manifested in skyscrapers.107 These impulses combined in the project of expressionist theory in architecture, an outgrowth of art nouveau and a predecessor to the Bauhaus.108 Rowland designed The Guardian using principles of the movement, which included an intention to forefront expression over purpose, a predominance of a unified art over many arts, and a promise of a new utopian community celebrated above the expected productive norm. The Guardian

107 “In short, the Gothic ideals and even the Gothic vocabulary is well adapted to steel construction and has been so proved in a number of great monuments.” G. H. Engell, The American Architecture of To-Day (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1928), 72-74.
Building’s realization was a simultaneous celebration of the possibility of mass-produced steel framing and the spontaneity and rhetorical weight of the artisanal.

In the lobby of the building, a Monel metal plaque documents the role of significant craftsmen in the building’s construction. At the celebration of the building’s completion, every worker received a certificate commemorating their participation in the construction of a cathedral reimagined, the 1929 Cathedral of Finance. At that moment, the building held 25% of Detroit’s money within its walls, yet it was built of whims.

**Trespassing in the Penobscot Building**

I had come downtown in search of stamps, and when he approached me, Lucas told me he recognized me from somewhere, and I recognized him too, so he asked if I wanted to sneak into the Penobscot Building with him and his friend Ian. They had been “jumping from shadow to shadow” all afternoon and were looking to get inside for a bit. Ian was visiting for the weekend; he had fewer than twelve hours before he went back to England forever. He wanted to see some empty stuff.

I figured out later that I have first seen Lucas at a roundtable put on by Reimagining Detroit, a conference organized by Grace Lee Boggs, a celebrated activists in the city and widow of James Boggs, a Chrysler autoworker and Black Panther who was very active in left wing politics in Detroit in the 1960s and 60s. Lucas had stood out in the crowd. He’d worn a tropical button-down shirt, pink shorts, and a small shiny bag around his neck. At the round table, when he spoke, his English accent made everyone turned around in their seats to look at him.
On the street downtown, all the televisions were reporting on a heat wave sweeping the Midwest. The one in the window of the FedEx even had a speaker hooked up; broadcasting the news to the steaming sidewalk. When Lucas and Ian first walked towards me, their forms were wavy from the heat, the Michigan mirage.

A television was blaring over the front desk of the Penobscot Building too. That may be why the guard didn’t ask us who we were visiting when we walk toward the elevator bay. He was distracted by the television. Or he may have thought that we were going to the florist shop or the shoeshine stand on the first floor that managed to remain open, somehow. But we were not, we were in search of empty offices, where we could jimmy open the doors and then the windows and get out on the roof. We also were in search of air conditioning, which luckily, and probably unavoidably, was running on every floor.

This act of trespassing was the type of thing that I knew would happen when I arrived in Detroit, the type of thing I almost could not prevent, the type of thing I had been avoiding. Stories drifted around of explorations of the old Packard Plant and the abandoned train depot, of young people running across entire tent cities constructed on the factory floor, of Dutch filmmakers losing every scrap of equipment they owned to a group of thieves while shooting in the main hall of the depot. These stories, and the pictures of Detroit’s ruins that Andrew Moore and Camilo Vergara began to exhibit in the mid 1990s and became broadly recognized in the 2000s contributed to a sense that to come to Detroit and riffle around abandoned spaces ran the risk of perpetuating a singularized performance of the city. This was a performance that I
wished to complicate in my research, and one that I wasn't quite sure of the validity of in the first place.

We walked through the busy lobby and took the elevator up to the 19th floor. When we got out, a woman behind a glass door and a desk and on a telephone waved to us as we turned around. The carpet smelled clean. “That happens sometimes,” Lucas said as the elevator doors closed.

We tried higher up. On the 25th floor green wall-to-wall carpeting had crept towards the elevator. We had to step over folds of it to get out. The doors were all glass and we could see inside, papers still on the reception desk. In the corner, a desk chair missing a wheel sat akimbo. The locks looked faulty but held. We rattled them and tried to pick at them with my hairclip. We stepped back over the carpet. I was surprised that Lucas didn’t have more of a plan. The 27th floor was filled with people working. The 28th too. Both times, doubling back, we had to wait for an elevator to come back and pick us up.

On the 36th, the floor was empty and all the doors were locked again. We went out into the emergency stairs and got a window open which lead out onto a small roof. The landing had some standing water. Lucas was a bit grossed out because he was wearing sandals with holes in the bottom. We looked out to the north, pointing out landmarks for Ian and than decided to go back inside, it was still too hot. A sense of mischief pervaded. Ian kept trying to grab hold of exposed pipe to do flips on, Lucas had a habit of pressing his fingers to locks to see if they were open or broken. We wondered aloud what different offices had been like, who had worked there, what
they had done. "I wanted to show him this side of it, I guess” Lucas told me on the ride down, when I asked why they had been walking around downtown, why they had wanted to go into the Penobscot, “and coming to these building is a good way to get cool too, our house doesn’t have AC.”

What lingered with me after was a vision of a woman on a telephone waving at us to come inside her office. I can picture how Lucas, Ian, and I looked to her at that moment, three brightly-clad sweaty young people quickly doubling back. I wonder if she knew what we were doing.

Riding that elevator is an act almost parallel and definitely embedded in the dialectics of vacancy and occupancy that pervade in downtown Detroit. Not only is it a demonstration on how close one is to the other, our exploration was also a failure. In the search of “empty stuff” we found people and fax machines more often than not. Tim Edensor suggests that by exploring ruins, we are invariably putting them to use. But what happens when the use that the explorer is instilling is already there, a different orientation of the dialectic? That moment, in the elevator, was the only moment in Detroit last summer when I felt like a tourist, trying to fit my own expectations onto a site where they did not fit at all.

Looking up

My grandfather is looking at the ceiling. Other visitors are gathering around Christopher. They skirt around his long, thin body to form a cluster closer to the stairway, but he holds his gaze upward, letting it sweep across the entire length of the barrel ceiling. His head is tilted back far; his Adam’s apple is fully exposed.
“I remember hearing about this place,” he said when he finally lowers his head. “My aunt Mary would mention it sometimes in passing, she would meet someone here for lunch or come here for a meeting.”

He kept looking above himself periodically, as though he couldn’t quite look away. “Why have I never come here before?” he asked with his head looking up, a question I did not think was directed toward my mother or I.

Cigar room

“This is where the real deals went down,” Christopher told us as we walk past a small glass walled room on the sixth floor, where the original executive offices were. The walls were paneled in walnut and festooned with gold crown molding, a deviation from the silver tones used in the rest of the building.

The group curled into a semi-circle around the glass wall as Christopher pointed out the built in humidors and contemplated the hours and bottles of liquor that must have been consumed there. One woman absentmindedly stroked the place where two walnut panels came together. A young child poked his fingers through the jig-sawed full-length screen beside the boardroom. We were trying to picture the men who stood in these halls, trying to picture it as they saw it, trying to imagine what they were talking about in the few short years that the Union Guardian Trust Company existed.
Upper Banking Room

Once, to bank with the Union Guardian Trust, a visitor walked through the front lobby, through the Monel gates, under the Tiffany clock, and into the upper banking room. The room was long and grand, meant resemble the sanctuary of a Gothic cathedral. The Sanctuary of Finance. The vaulted ceiling went up five stories, with travertine notched archways providing the only break in the north-south vista. Aquamarine and orange glass filled the arches’ windows, creating an unworldly backlit glow. All the design detail seemed to point upward, to the painted ceiling.

The entire length of the ceiling was elaborately painted in tones of grey and maroon with accents of gold and silver. The painters reinterpreted Writ Rowland’s notched forms to reference the ribs, groins, and spandrels of a gothic cathedral. Rowland insisted that the builders use horsehair canvas on the vaulted ceiling, a nearly obsolete technique in the 1920s. The horsehair dampened the sound of voices and footsteps in the cavernous space, it made the most sacrosanct exchange possible in the vast line of teller windows.

Forty teller windows ran almost the entire length on both sides of the room. Their bases were Belgian marble, almost veinless and completely black. Monel gates formed the teller windows, and held the Favrile glass signs that illuminated when a teller was open. There were forty teller windows, spanning the entire length of the massive hall. In December 1929, the Union Guardian Trust was the largest bank in the city. The bank represented approximately forty percent of the total banking
resources of the metropolitan area. One out of every four Detroiters held a bank
account with them.\textsuperscript{109}

\textbf{The Great Depression and Renovation}

In February 1933, it became apparent that The Union Guardian Trust was in a
state of financial precariousness. Only $6 million of the bank’s $20 million in deposit
were liquid. The UGT requested a $50 million loan from the Reconstruction Finance
Corporation, a governmental aid organization founded by Herbert Hoover, to
stabilize and to guarantee enough cash to pay all deposits on demand. This was the
latest in a string of financial failures in Detroit; between 1929 and 1933, twenty-one
banks in the city failed.\textsuperscript{110} A loan of that magnitude was impossible; bank examiners
could only find enough collateral to warrant a loan of $37 million. This debacle
prompted UGT to ask their major depositors, specifically Henry Ford, to
subordinate their deposits to secure the $13 million not covered by the loan. Ford
refused, and loudly proclaimed if such a loan were to be granted, he would not only
withdraw all his personal holdings, but also those of the Ford Motor Company.

Despite pressure from President Hoover, Michigan senators James Couzens
and Arthur Vandenberug, and Charles Miller, then president of the RFC, Ford
refused to revoke his proclamation. At first, this forced the Governor to declare an
extended bank holiday, in the hope that Ford could be convinced to concede. He was
not, and on reopening, the Union Guardian Trust quickly fell into receivership.

\textsuperscript{109} James W. Tottis, \textit{The Guardian Building: Cathedral of Finance} (Detroit: Wayne State

\textsuperscript{110} James W. Tottis, \textit{The Guardian Building: Cathedral of Finance} (Detroit: Wayne State
“Union Guardian Trust found insolvent...” a *Detroit News* headline read, “The bank is prepared to pay 100% of deposits under one thousand dollars. Any amount over one thousand dollars will receive thirty-five cents on the dollar.” The bank closed its doors. It remained in legal limbo until 1952, when it was sold at public auction to a group of tenants. In 1952, they purchased the $12 million building for $6 million. That year, the tenants began a great “modernization” of the building. They hung drop ceiling from the tiled vaulted archways. They placed white walls over stained glass windows in the lobby. The large upper banking room sat empty. The rooms below were divided into small offices, the silver-leaf ceiling pierced to unrecognizability to support a suspended ceiling. Most offices were stripped to the shell.

**Diego Rivera**

In 1932 Diego Rivera arrived in Detroit, under the commission of Edsel Ford, Henry Ford’s son and heir to the Ford Corporation and William R. Valentiner, the director of the Detroit Institute of Arts, to paint a series of frescos in the museum’s Garden Court. Valentiner had met Rivera in California, and had returned to Detroit with the intention of convincing Ford, one of the few patrons of Modern art who remained philanthropic in Detroit during the Great Depression, to commission a mural project that would celebrate the history of Detroit and the development of industry in the city. It was originally intended that the frescos would take up two

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111 Detroit News, February 26, 1933.
large sections of the North and South walls of the court and would take less than six months to complete. However, after seeing the incredible productive capacity of the Ford’s River Rouge Plant, Rivera requested the use of all four walls of the court for his frescos. Ultimately, the piece was comprised of twenty-seven panels and took over fourteen months to complete.\footnote{113 Terry Smith, \textit{Making the Modern: Industry, Art, and Design in America}. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993) 204.}

The murals centered on the manufacturing of the Ford V-8 in all of its complexities. The series took the observer through the entire factory, and allowed for a glimpse of the rudimentary beginnings of the car and carried it out to the finished production. Surround the main frescos of the North and South Wall, which strictly portrayed the factory floor, medium sized panels, depicted other industries in the city, including the pharmaceutical industry, aviation, and the production of poison gas. Some frescos, smaller still, juxtaposed the industrial abundance of Detroit with that of the natural world. Warplanes were set above doves, plow blades cut through soil horizons, a fresco of gems and rocks hung above the grandeur of the factory floor.\footnote{114 Don Gonyea, “Detroit Industry: The Murals of Diego Rivera.” \textit{Remaking Michigan, Retooling Detroit}. NPR, April 22, 2009. http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=103337403.}

When the murals first opened to the public, the reactions were strong. Members of the clergy were up in arms over a small panel on the North Wall. In it a child stands draped in a white cloth, a nurse holds his right arm and a doctor administers a lifesaving vaccine in his left. In the foreground, some sheep, a horse, and an ox frame the scene while three scientists stand hunched over microscopes in the background. “Replicating an image of the Holy Family, the panel is a solid
endorsement of the benefits that accrue from modernity, the latter portrayed as
guardian of the fundamental unit of social life." Clergy called it blasphemous.

Other's accused Rivera of secretly producing propaganda for the Ford Company,
under the tutelage of Edsel Ford. The resulting controversy brought 10,000 people to
the museum on a single Sunday. Despite calls for their removal, the murals remained.

In the 1950s, at the height of McCarthyism, another call for the murals
removal sounded. Instead, the museum hung a banner over the entrance to the court.

Rivera’s politics and his publicity seeking are detestable. But let’s get
the record straight on what he did here. He came from Mexico to
Detroit, thought our mass production industries and our technology
wonderful and very exciting, painted them as one of the great
achievements of the twentieth century. This came after the debunking
twenties when our artists and writers found nothing worthwhile in
America and worst of all in America was the Middle West. Rivera saw
and painted the significance of Detroit as a world city. If we are proud
of this city’s achievements, we should be proud of these paintings and
not lose our heads over what Rivera is doing in Mexico today.

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115 David Lomas, “Remedy or Poison? Diego Rivera, Medicine and Technology., in Oxford
Art Journal 30, no. 3 (January 1, 2007) 464.
of Arts 57, no. 1 (January 1, 1979) 47.
117 Terry Smith, Making the Modern: Industry, Art, and Design in America, (Chicago: U.
Chicago 1993) 475.
How a Riot is remembered

By 1967, when massive riots subsumed the city, more than one third of Detroit residents were black. In July of 1967, one of the most violent riots in American history swept through Detroit. After a late night raid on an illegal saloon on Twelfth Street, 300 people gathered to avenge allegations of police violence shouted by bar patrons as they were arrested. By early morning, 3,000 people had gathered, the began a five-day sweep of violence that left forty-three people dead, thirty of them killed by law enforcement, and 2,509 buildings looted and burned. Nearly seventeen thousand law enforcement officers, national Guardsmen, and federal troops were

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brought in by the state to suppress the violence, and perception of the city of Detroit was permanently altered.\(^\text{119}\)

The characterizations of violence subsumed the previous ubiquitous though hollow narrative of Detroit, one in which the city remained an emblem of the good life, acquirable for anyone through hard work. “The violence of the 60s put an end to all that. Or perhaps what would be more accurate to say, the violence of the 60s demonstrated the bankruptcy of that narrative economy on which the city was founded.”\(^\text{120}\) The 1967 riot exposed the hollowness of the city’s previous characterization, and in turn, what replaced that characterization for many people were amalgamation of sensationalized reports on the city’s condition, intensified by distance, a disproportionate concern for violence in media outlets and gossip, and the challenging and contentious time at most Detroit expatriates departed.

**Frames of Steel**

Both the Highland Park factory and Guardian Building are built on frames of buttressed steel. The Kahn system of reinforced concrete, which Albert Kahn depended on for large factory floors was also used by Rowland for his cathedral skyscrapers.

In *Luxury and Capitalism*, Werner Sombart wished to expand the goods and industries included in the realm luxury, and asks how far that expansion can go. “But are we to apply the term ‘luxury article’ to the loom used for the silk weaving and


\(^{120}\) Jerry Herron, “Postmodernism Ground Zero, or Going to the Movies at the Grand Circus Park,” in *Social Text* no. 18 (December 1987): 63.
‘luxury industry’ to the manufacture of silk looms? Or does the picture change as soon as one deals with the instruments of labor.”

Luxury goods are invariably tied to the secondary and tertiary industries that enable their production. Expounding upon this point, Arjun Appadurai suggests that perhaps luxury products should be not regarded in contrast with necessities, but rather with a rhetorical and social bend. “The necessity to which they respond is fundamentally political.” Luxury goods are not a particular class of things, but rather a register of consumption.

For Kahn, steel support was quickly sheathed in concrete with few additional decorations. The building’s architectural design was no longer merely based on a study of the shell to dress the underlying structure, nor on the production function, but on a perfect and complete harmony of the two. These factories were not projections of a desire to repurpose the monumental figuration of European proto-rationalism for industrial architecture; rather the prerogatives for construction sat firmly grounded in a capability to respond to the demands of Ford’s mass production: perfect business architecture. The factories of Albert Kahn were holds barred buildings.

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124 Albert Kahn’s advice to young architects gives a telling look toward his goals in design. “Let the young man observe and follow the principles underlying the works that stood the test of time and avoid the pitfalls of the fashion of the day. This irrespective of acclaim or criticism. Let him be honest, sincere, conscientious and energetic and both the old and new will unfold to him the good in them. Thus he will neither be carried away by the present nor unduly fettered by the past.” Albert Kahn, “The Approach to Design” in *Pencil Point* (May 1932) 313.
The Guardian, in comparison, was a no holds barred construction. Travertine marble, horsehair plaster, glass inlay in elevator doors, the building was a constructed jewel, a sumptuous space. A neo-Gothic resurgence was the fulcrum of Rowland's modernistic project; Writ Rowland wished to build cathedrals. Of all the rhetorical, societal and monetary factors that made cathedral-like construction possible and desirable in the early 20th century, one thing was most assuredly the advent of steel reinforced concrete. “In this structure, a type of the American school of architecture, the masonry is only to protect the real supports of the building, steel beams,” an article describing the opening of the Chicago Masonic Temple read in the November 7, 1890 issue of the Chicago Tribune. The richly appointed exterior and interior were lauded as the collaborative fruits of artisanal labor, the tradition that John Ruskin and his followers suggested served as a metaphor for the role of individuals in a

125 J. Merwood Salisbury describes the Chicago skyscrapers built by the Freemasons and the Women’s Christian Temperance Union as ambiguously intended buildings that straddled the line of “secular and sacred, commercial buildings and ‘temples.’” Through groups like the WCTU and the Freemasons, tall buildings, often maligned as the product of greed, speculation, and usury were brought into the service of civic reform. “The Guardian Building was not built as a Masonic Temple, but rather a bank building with a layout and decorative scheme which harkened to masonic structures and symbols. However, similar themes of recreation, comfort, and expansive but limited access for the wider public were central in the Guardian Building, as they were in the Masonic temples of the late 19th century and early 20th century. That is not a surprising phylogeny. As in most US cities at the time, many members of Detroit's wealthy class were Freemasons, including Henry Ford, the Fisher Brothers (Masonic imagery played a large role in the decorative scheme of the Fisher Building, the auto body builder's elaborate headquarters built in Detroit's New Center in 1928), and Albert Kahn. The appearance of Freemasonry in Detroit marked a shift in the city from the Detroit's original industrialists, who, arriving before and just after the civil war, made their wealth in lumber, stove building, and ships construction, toward Detroit's new wealthy class, the producers of the automobile. The Detroit Masonic Temple, constructed in 1920, was the second largest Masonic building in the world at its construction, and helped to usher in a new moment in the city's social and architectural appearance. Joanna Merwood Salisbury, Chicago 1890: The Skyscraper and the Modern City, (Chicago: U. Chicago, 2009) 74. and Thomas Holleman, Smith, Hinchman & Grylls: 125 Years of Architecture and Engineering, 1853-1978, (Detroit: Wayne State, 1978) 128.
democratic society. Nevertheless, what remained beneath was the same technology that developed in tandem with the industrially produced automobile. These spaces are inherently linked; they are mutually reinforced. The reflection of practical and theatrically representational space leads to a heightened sense of magnitude for both poles. In Venice, it is the coexistence of everyday life, the canals, and the representational spaces of the streets that leads to a powerful establishment of space, “an involuntary mise en scène,” is how Henri Lefebvre describes it. 126

The Luxury of Abandonment

“Expenditure is still destined to acquire or maintain rank, but in principle it no longer has the goal of causing another to lose his rank. In spite of these attenuations, ostentatious loss remains universally linked to wealth, as its ultimate function.”127 To let a monumental building fall vacant is a luxury, only made possible by the capacity to construct something new or to dissolve. When the Union Guardian Trust closed, few of its chief executives and contributors felt the impact of the vacant building they left behind, just as Ford did not experience the most intense aftershocks of his partial abandonment of the Highland Park and River Rouge Plants. The people who do feel the aftershocks are the residents of Detroit, who still live in their houses, who are still holding on to a spatial connection to the city. Those who stay in the city now often do not have the luxury of abandonment, the ability to just let go of the These empty

126 “Here everyday life and its functions are coextensive with, and utterly transformed by, a theatricality as sophisticated as it is unsought…”Henri Lefebvre, Production of Space, (Blackwell: Oxford, 1991) 74.
buildings stand as markers of the incredible oscillations of wealth that are only possible with the financial enormity of trusts and corporations.

**How Christopher Became the Doorman**

“When people come in here for the first time, they usually gasp.” Christopher and I leaned against a trashcan in the lobby of the Guardian Building. Around us, people began to enter the office building for the day; they wore suits and carried official looking bags. They wait for the elevators without looking around them, they didn’t look up, they walk up the stairs without running their hands over to course-textured travertine. “The color, the tiles, the way it all comes together, they can’t help themselves. They’re in awe.”

“The first time I looked in here,” He leaned close over the trashcan and his voice grew softer, “there was a blackout in the downtown area and I was working across the street, at the Buhl Building, as a watchman. I came over to meet my buddy who I had been talking to around and he worked here. I remember it because the whole city was dark, it felt like. And when I looked in the glass door, I could see straight up the stairs and into the main promenade and the gold from the mural, I still could see it glowing.

“And then that stayed in my mind, how beautiful that was and then I came over here to become a watchman. And the place was so beautiful, and people were coming in to visit and they were asking questions, so I started to read up on the history and learn about the space and then I could answer people’s questions. The other people who worked here started sending people with questions over to me, and
pretty soon I was giving these tours. And then when Sterling Group bought the building, and began a big restoration, they decided to reinstall a doorman. So I started wearing this suit and hat, opening car doors, and giving longer, better, official tours.

“The main feeling people feel when they come in here for the first time is awe. They are in awe that such a spectacular building was ever built, that some people put that much effort into constructing something so intricate. And they’re also amazed that there is something this beautiful in downtown Detroit, I don’t think we acknowledge that enough, but it’s true, people don’t think that they will find something this beautiful here.”

**Fidelity/Security**

At the end of the two elevator bays, large stained-glass windows hover in the back wall. In each one, an angel clasps a portal to the Union Trust’s inner sanctum. One reads Fidelity, the other Security. When Christopher says the words, he is hard on the t. Most of the time when he speaks, he sounds like an auctioneer with good diction. He rolls through his script without taking many breaths. The two angel-women are holding these portals, balanced on their heads, and their heads are brown and they have long hair tied into braids, but the seams in the glass hide the braids. They are barefoot, their toes point down unnaturally, or perhaps that’s how they look when they are in flight. Their wings are yellow and blue, their garments are green and purple and amber; they are holding the portals on top of their heads on a purple
background. The angels' garments look like the tiling all over the main lobby. They are holding portals to Fidelity and Security; they look heavy.

From 1951 to 2003, the angels were walled over, covered in an effort to modernize the building. Hidden behind plain white walls, the angels stayed, preserved and not destroyed. In 2003 they were uncovered as part of the building's restoration.

**Buildings for/from Automobiles**

During the Guardian's construction, Writ Rowland wrote, "We no longer live in a leisurely age, nor do we move on streets from which it is possible to contemplate and enjoy minute detail. What we see we must see quickly in passing, and the impression must be immediate, strong, and complete. Color has this vital power." For the first time, urban spaces were experienced at a rate fueled by internal combustion rather than a foot pressing against pavement. Rowland recognized the need to exchange subtle symbols of wealth and expenditure for more crass monuments. With the advent of a more universalized automotive urbanity, the new

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138 Rowland's desire to relay impressions in the Guardian Building stand in interesting contrast with Robert Venturi's analysis of signage in Las Vegas. "This architecture of styles and signs is antispacial; it is an architecture of communication over space; communication dominates space as an element in the architecture and in the landscape. But it is for a new scale of landscape. The philosophical associations of the old eclecticism evoked subtle and complex meanings to be savored in the docile spaces of a traditional landscape. The commercial persuasion of roadside eclecticism provokes bold impact in the vast and complex setting of a new landscape of big spaces, high speeds, and complex programs." While Venturi's description of Las Vegas' bombastic road signage portrays a more severe visual experience, similar desires for legibility, communication, and joy are at play. Venturi, Robert, Denise Scott Brown, and Steven Izenour. *Learning from Las Vegas: The Forgotten Symbolism of Architectural Form*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1977.
observer needed things to look at that fit their method of observation. Immediacy, strength, and completeness became the chief visual aims in the Motor City.

Henry Ford played a key role in increasing the number of cars on the road in Detroit in the 1920s both through his wages and through the design of his factory. Fifteen years earlier, Ford instituted the five-dollar wage, which enabled more people than ever before the ability to see the city by car. Automobles were no longer only luxury goods, instead some were a commodity available to many people, including the people who built them. The Ford Motor Company's five dollar a day wage was chiefly intended to encourage the consumption habits of Ford employees, including the purchase of an automobile, which they could purchase at a discount. Ford's understanding and use of this fact was what ultimately separated him from simple Taylorism. What led to the ubiquity of Fordism was the creation of a “new system of the reproduction of labour power, a new politics of labour control and management, a new aesthetics and psychology, in short, a new kind of rationalized, modernist, and

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139 "Ford believed that the new kind of society could be built simply through the proper application of corporate power. The purpose of the five-dollar, eight-hour day was only in part to secure worker compliance with the discipline required to work the highly productive assembly-line system. It was coincidentally meant to provide workers with sufficient income and leisure time to consume the mass-produced products the corporations were about to turn out in ever vaster quantities.” David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1990) 126.

140 "Ford believed that the new kind of society could be built simply through the proper application of corporate power. The purpose of the five-dollar, eight-hour day was only in part to secure working compliance with the discipline required to work the highly productive assembly-line system. It was coincidentally meant to provide the workers with sufficient income and leisure time to consume the mass-produced products the corporations were about to turn out in ever vaster quantities.” David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, (Blackwell: Oxford, 1990) 127.
populist democratic society.”¹⁴¹ This development had a marked effect on how the city of Detroit was approached by architects.

However, the move toward the glaringly sumptuous is not only propelled by Detroit’s embrace of the automobile. Georges Bataille argues that wealthy members of 20th century French society failed in their societal obligation of “great and free forms of unproductive social expenditure,” and instead horded their wealth behind closed doors, “in accordance with depressing and boring conventions,” causing a universal meanness induced by a sterility of expenditure.¹⁴² In Detroit’s grand industrial development, early indicators of massive, unrestrained, and unhidden expenditure were very few. Albert Kahn and Henry Ford’s priggish cement factories, the staid brick fortresses of Highland Park and Boston-Edison, excuses for expansion strapped to ideas of yeomen industry, much of the city’s development was tied without slack to rationalized expenditure, utterly devoid of spectacle.

The Guardian Building is harrowingly beautiful. Its impressiveness is intended to be read through the windshield of a car at a stoplight or as traffic slowed to turn onto Farmer Street. For the first time in history, the grandeur of the city needed to be legible in nearly an instant. The “immediate, strong, and complete” reaction Rowland wished to evoke surely partially revolved around the imposition of beauty, and security, into the accelerated urban visual experience.¹⁴³ But, just as

¹⁴³ Equal to his concerns with beauty in the Guardian Building, Rowland hoped that viewers and bank visitors would feel a sense of security from the architecture. The substantiality of the building materials was an important aspect of the project, but the most direct means of imbuing a sense of security was through the stylized Native American sentinels flanking the
important, the Guardian served as a monument. More so than the factories of Ford and Packard, the Guardian served as a marker of the opulent architectural potential of the wealth amalgamated in “Detroit the Dynamic.”\textsuperscript{144} This was the type of building that would communicate what was possible in a 20\textsuperscript{th} century industrial city. Not only in the impressiveness of the building but also through the methods of construction. Rowland stressed the possibility of artisan labor for skyscrapers, which he considered to be the modern equivalent of gothic cathedrals.\textsuperscript{145} Every worker received a certificate recognizing their participation in the construction of the building and the names of forty significant craftsmen were emblemsized on a plaque in the lobby.\textsuperscript{146} Both were practices that situated the workers in the project of construction much further than they could be merely through the work of laying bricks or spreading plaster. This was a rhetorical turn, one that attempted to elevate the Guardian Building from the semantic space of the office building, and into that of a great communal work.

All at once the spectacular building in the city, previously a cathedral or a palace, was instead a monument to the storage and advancement of huge amounts of wealth that had been accumulated by the officers of Detroit’s automotive companies.

And in turn, Rowland designed the new spectacle for observation from the most illustrious fruit of this industrial project, the automobile. By 1929, most workers in the city could have seen the Guardian Building from the seat of their own car. These systems become reciprocal, and the Cathedral of Finance moves close towards being a cathedral to the city of Detroit itself.

Architecture Warehouse

A few blocks down Michigan Avenue from my summer apartment, across a freeway, and into another sort of nameless neighborhood, the Architectural Warehouse was open Tuesday through Saturday. Behind a chain-link fence, the doors of a large two-story garage are rolled up. Men sat in low folding chairs,
watching as customers meandered through the large building. The front of the first room was stacked three high with toilets, further back a collection of sinks was almost as high. Hundreds of doors off their hinges lined the walls; unmoored doorknobs sat in boxes stacked in a corner. Sunlight streamed through the windows and a few pigeons rustled in the rafters. Architecture seemed like a lofty word for this stuff: drawer pulls and washing machines, the entire contents of countless pink bathrooms and a number of attic trapdoors. I paged through windows, careful of the lead paint, and searched for posters on the backs of doors.

Hanging over an unmarked box a sign reads, “Own a Piece of the Old J.L. Hudson’s Department Store.” Inside there were bricks and small pieces of unrecognizable metal, a keyhole maybe, or an elevator button. There was molding too, carved edges of terra cotta and pink granite. In 1998, the 33 story J.L. Hudson’s department store on Woodward Avenue imploded by a controlled detonation, with over 4,100 charges and 36,000 feet of detonating cord placed throughout the 2.2 million square feet of retail space. The store had been shuttered since the eighties, but an estimated 20,000 people gathered to watch the building fall, and for weeks after the dust settled, guards were hired to watch the giant debris pile to prevent people from climbing the fence to gather remnants of the building. Bricks were sold in local Goodwills for five dollars each.

And boxes full of bricks appeared. Relics sold as tchotchkes, history up for purchase. An architectural turn to satisfy a yearning for holding onto what was.
Relations to the Past

Both the factories of Ford and the Guardian Building are monuments. Whether falsely empty or filled with a feigned busyness, they stand as markers of a previous urban impetus, an older desire. The buildings hold starkly different enactments of what Walter Benjamin refers to as the afterlife. The concrete ruins hold a grudging meanness about them. They aged, they crumbled, they played host to scrapper, graffiti artists, and people looking to abandon old cars. Their meanness comes from their decrepitude, surely, but also from their role as a record of a terminated moment in the American industrial imaginary. But in a discussion of their momentary meanness, I do not mean to suggest that the industrial monuments of

Detroit serve solely as markers of a previous industrial age. As Adrian Forty writes, concrete is draped in a type of unremitting newness, it is one of the material’s most persistent myths. While concrete is often seen as the silencer of a previous moment and the emancipator of others, it is now the screen on which the future is imagined, the surface where the next era is superimposed. The afterlife of these spaces is in perpetual flux. Concrete allows for the advancement of urban imaginary because in its slow and fragmentary dissolution, in a very strong way it is not situated in any moment. In its failure, in its modernity, and in its impossible inmomentariness, concrete allow a wholehearted assessment of the layered pasts of the current moment.

In contrast, the preserved glass and tile of the Guardian Building hold little resonance toward the passage of time. The Guardian Building allows for little enactment of a spatial interpretation of Benjamin’s notion of afterlife because the parameters of the past are already so strictly defined. The possibility of a space that will “happen to be re-constructed, out of occasional motifs, re-awakening the past tragedies, the compulsion to give meaning to what is left scattered in the corners of historical reconstructions,” falls silent. Instead, what is at play in the Guardian Building is the loop of a hyper-constricted past. To relay a sense of security, beauty,

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162 "Those that have not survived unscathed may still exist in fragments large enough, like Kahn’s ‘Old Shop’ for Ford at Highland Park, to assure us of the glory that is departed." Reyner Banham, A Concrete Atlantis: U.S. Industrial Building and European Modern Architecture 1900-1925 (Cambridge, MA: MIT 1986) 86.
and functionality, life in the Guardian Building is quietly composed into a specific moment, a glorious heyday that began to lose its prominence almost the day that the building opened in 1929.\textsuperscript{164} It cannot be rifled through, picked apart, or taken home like the relics of the Hudson Department Store. Brunella Antomarini writes that "a capitalistic ideology does not exist, it feed upon its own emptiness: cunning, tricks, stratagems, artifices aimed at adjusting itself on circumstances..." In the case of the Guardian Building, any work to envision the future is dampened. The emptiness of the capitalist project is accentuated by a hollow reenactment of the past.

\textsuperscript{164} "Say something about the method of composition itself: how everything one is thinking at a specific moment in time must at all costs be incorporated into the project then at hand. Assume that the intensity of the project is thereby attested, or that one's thoughts, from the very beginning, bear this project within them as their telos," Walter Benjamin, \textit{The Arcades Project}, (Cambridge: Belknap 1999) 456.
Part 3- Manufactured Crisis and the Urban Pioneer

Overcoming the concept of ‘progress’ and overcoming the concept of ‘period of decline’ are two sides of one and the same thing.
- Walter Benjamin, The Arcades Project

We Kahn Do It

We had been riding our bicycles for a few hours, up to Hamtramck, where we ate dollar fried eggs and fifty cent Wonderbread toast. The woman behind the counter looked like she had been there since the prices were more in line with inflation, and had rolled out of a bed we swore we saw in the back pantry. When my friend Teddy asked her why none of the bakeries were open, she looked askance. It was Sunday. Everyone was resting.

Then we rode back downtown. Through the original industrial area of Detroit. A few blocks north of Brush Park, it’s the area between Harper Street and Hastings, where Ford built the first Model-T in his eight-story factory at the intersection of Piquette and Beaubien Street. But in the summer heat, all I knew was that we were riding amongst empty parking lots and old warehouses. Through blocks of standing water and over potholes deeper than my arm, I rode in the back of our small parade.

There was a mural painted on the one building standing at the intersection of Brush and E. Milwaukee Street. It read “We Kahn Do It.” Background, light blue. Text, red. Writing, curly, baseball team script. The name Kahn, a glory of the pun, sat

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squished inside the black silhouette of the Fisher Building. It was a wink to the city’s history, a nudge in the ribs towards what people claim the city once was. The real Fisher Building was visible in the distance. The Fisher Brothers, seven sons of a wagon builder in central Ohio, built the auto bodies for General Motors.

![Image](image3.jpg)

**Image 3:** “We Kahn Do It” Mural on the Corner of Brush and E. Milwaukee Street

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**Carhartt**

“Let’s punch the past in the face.
John George doesn’t sit around and wish his neighborhood was something else. He swings at it with all he’s got. Drive down a Detroit street and you might see him boarding up a once-great building, renovating an abandoned house, or even roofing a brand new one. It’s a lot of work, but he’s got help. He and his son lead an army called the Motor City Blight Busters. These guys are not only building homes as well as cafes, kids’ centers and urban gardens, they’re doing most of it with recycled materials from what they tear down. Any good with an axe or hammer? Contact blightbusters.org. These guys love a good volunteer.”

All the models in the Carhartt Spring 2012 Catalogue are real people. Real people who are hard at work in Detroit, the “backyard [Carhartt has] called home since 1889”.

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The pages are filled with people (nearly all men, all white) who are “industrious, hell-bent, and trailblazing types” set on fixing the city. There is John, who tears down houses, Greg, who farms in brick-strewn lots and four suburban women who bring their friendly horse into the city to cheer up children with cancer. They are the future of the city, the catalogue assures the reader, and things are looking up for the failed place. Inspired by the grit of the city’s past and the new energy of the city’s current gentrification, this black, decrepit city will be saved. Thanks in some part to Carhartt’s 12-ounce, firm-hand, 100% ring-spun cotton duck and the inspiring young hell-raisers who wear it.

In *The Social Life of Things*, Arjun Appadurai argues for a more expansive analysis of need and utility, and as a result a more inclusive view of demand, consumption, and production.

“What does this view of consumption entail?” It means looking at consumption (and the demand that makes it possible) as a force not only for sending social messages but for receiving them as well. Demand thus conceals two different relationships between consumption and production: 1. On the one hand, demand is determined by social and economic forces; 2. On the other hand, it can manipulate, within limits, these social and economic forces.”  

The Carhartt’s advertisement campaign both responds to a growing movement of “urban pioneers” but concurrently gives rise to such sentiments. Or, perhaps it is more accurate to say that this advertisement gives a commoditized shape to romantic notions of the role of the individual in urban revitalization. By marketing their clothing through linkages to real people in the city, Carhartt sends the message that

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their clothing is a tool for the rebirth of the city, giving other consumers a means by which they can participate in the city’s revitalization without doing much of anything. They are inspiring readers to believe in the city, and very specific iteration of the city at that, and also to believe that Carhartt is part of what will bring the city back to its former heyday.

Not an Urban Farmer

“The thing is, I don’t want to be a farmer.”

I was looking over a fence, up to Josephine’s face. An older African-American woman wearing a sleeveless button-down shirt and matching drawstring shorts, she looked ravishingly beautiful with the sun behind her head. She was hanging out of the emergency door in the back of the school bus parked in a lot adjacent to her house.
She had waved me down from her perch, calling out a greeting to me from the road. I brought my bike to a halt in front of the fence.

The school bus had books stacked in some of the windows; others were filled with plants climbing out of inside onto the roof. A tall fence surrounded the lot and the one adjacent to it, which had a large, well-maintained brick house on it. Josephine kept her arm resting on the upper edge of the bus back door when she spoke to me. From that angle she could look over the fence and out across Gratiot Avenue at the empty lots and houses that bordered the other side of the street.

“Nice bus,” I said, stepping over my bike and leaning it on my hip.

“Thank you,” she smiled down and pointed to her house, “I have the house over there but I prefer being out here, it’s my own little spot. My husband jokes about setting a bed up in here, I spend so much time I might as well sleep out here.”

“Don’t you get hot?” It was an unseasonably warm March, and the prairie sun was shining strongly already.

“I have a fan in here, and I keep windows on both sides open. I have to take my plants out in the summer time or else they wilt, but even in July it’s pretty pleasant.”

She stepped back inside for me to see further in. All the seats had been taken up, and the resulting room was pleasant. There was a small desk, a couch, and plants everywhere, exploding from every surface: geraniums, begonias, spider plants, and a stand of African violets in the corner.

We spoke about the seventy-degree weather and my bike route until the conversation shifted to the city, as it does almost inexplicably in most conversations.
between strangers here. The Detroit Works Project, the most recent form of a
massive urban plan for the city, originally proposed by the Mayor, Dave Bing and
funded by many of the largest foundations in the city, including the Kresge
Foundation, had recently held a meeting in the neighborhood and Josephine had
been thinking about it.

“I've always worked to make this block better. When the house in the next
block wasn't being taken care of, and the ceiling was about to fall down, and they had
fleas and the people who lived there were making too much noise, I bought it. I went
down to the courthouse and paid the back taxes and got it.” The house she pointed
to was boarded-up, the lawn was mowed, but the front porch roof was sagging.

“What I'm worried is that they'll come in here, and see a place like this, where
there is a lot of open space and not many people, and they'll say ‘Okay, let's do
something different with this land.

“And trust me, I think that these things are important, making the city safer
and better is essential; community gardens, those are great.

“But I am not a farmer. My neighbors are not farmers. Our families moved
away from that to live in a city.

“And I'm worried that they'll come in here and make us either leave or really
change the way this place is, and I don't want to do that. I live in a city.”

Josephine’s sentiments were not unfamiliar to me. During the days I spent
working in gardens or speaking with my friend who were more closely associated
with the Works Project, I often heard about residents fears that they neighborhood
would be deemed undesirable, or not populated enough, or empty, and they would be forced to move. Massive urban farming plans also made many people nervous, and sentiments ranged from the more measured, “I am not a farmer,” to the furious, with some going so far as to liken massive farming programs to southern plantations.

Before my time in Detroit, I had been inclined to think of most urban agriculture programs as at least benign, and for the most part, good. But when I spoke with Josephine in March, I was already in the midst of rethinking that position. Similar to conversations about vacancy in downtown Detroit, many of the conceptions of vacancy in further reaches of the city were also fraught. What appeared to an industrious young white person like me to be a vast, open swath of prairie was really a long time resident’s extended front-yard, or the place their child played, or the lot where they planned to build a house, or a church. Or maybe they liked it that way. What was at work here were the abilities of ideas of vacancy and “frontier” to render entire areas “usable” for the newly arrived.

“I like the peace,” one woman told me from her front porch.

Manufactured Crisis

Detroit received little play in the national consciousness until the 2008 financial crisis, some people tell me. One friend described it as the plight of the ugly cousin at Thanksgiving, cordoned off to the back in family photographs. It was a city that sat outside of the country’s self-crafted image, too sad for the vacuous booms of the 1990s and 2000s. And then at once, when the mortgage crisis buckled the economy and the financial crisis raged, it was as though the country suddenly
remembered there was a city was up there, a glowing beacon of economic failure. A perfect test site for the apocalyptic daydreams that began anew in the post-2008 American consciousness. As the economy turned sour, artists, reporters, investors, and young people appeared on the city’s streets, taking pictures and writing emails home about the post-industrial playground they had discovered. *Time Magazine* stationed a mansion full of reporters in the Indian Village neighborhood from September 2009 to October 2010. 168 Detroit became a freshly poignant metonym for the American experience, a harbinger of the approaching demise of the American economy, and a testing ground for ‘solutions.’

Thousands of young people moved to Detroit to take advantage of what they perceived as a unique moment in the city’s lifetime.169 They moved downtown and into the surrounding neighborhoods quickly, aided by low housing costs and rent subsidy provided by employers and neighborhood private-public Community Development Corporations, creating the first housing shortage in the city in nearly fifty years. The recent population provided an almost overwhelming increase in demand for the typical fixtures in a 21st century gentrified area. Summer soccer league participation almost quadrupled in the two years it has been active. The wait at Slow’s, a fancy barbeque restaurant across the street from the abandoned Michigan

Central Station, is forty-five minutes even on a Monday. Every coffee shop in Midtown is crowded, every bicycle rack filled, every free lecture at the Museum of Contemporary Art hums with youthful energy. And at some point the fascination with the city’s “renaissance” became absurd.\textsuperscript{170}

The influx of young white people into downtown is only an aspect of a larger change underway in Detroit. The city is almost a textbook example of the massive chasm developing between business interests and the public sector in American cities. “Detroit may be the most extreme example of a city’s dual fates, public and private, diverging.”\textsuperscript{171} The city government has been troubled for years with annual cash shortages, including one expected to reach $100 million by June.\textsuperscript{172} In the midst of a city in the financial straits, where streetlights go unfixed and the fire department struggles to staff and outfit its employees, the executive chairman of the Ford Motor Company, William C. Ford Jr. promises that despite the decrepit political and financial situation, “...there is very hopeful business activity taking place.”\textsuperscript{173} The massive funding shortages in city government have opened up new possibilities for


the private sector to play a role in supporting the city. Some of this takes the typical forms of public-private partnerships, foundation sponsorship and Community Development Corporations, but some are more novel.

In March 2013, mayor Dave Bing announced that several of the city’s biggest businesses, including the Big Three, would donate $8 million to lease 100 new police cruisers and 23 new ambulances for the city. The new vehicles would not become city property, but would be owned and maintained by an outside nonprofit corporation.

“This is a perfect example of how the business community can work with the city,” Roger Penske, a motor-racing entrepreneur and chairman of the 2005 Super Bowl in Detroit told The New York Times. Over time, private capital in Detroit has moved from effecting the built environment into aspects of the city previously managed by the state. This often occurs under tropes of civic engagement and infrastructural and community improvement. Margit Mayer posits that these new modes function under the guise of “... earlier movement critiques of bureaucratic Keynesianism, [and] have been quite successful in seizing formerly progressive goals and mottos such as ‘self-reliance’ and ‘autonomy,’ while redefining them in a politically regressive, individualized and competitive direction.”

Dan Gilbert, a millionaire lauded for his commitment to the city’s revitalization and who recently purchased an entire block of the city’s downtown,

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made his fortune selling predatory, ad hoc mortgages at the height of the housing boom. Many of the foundations working to repair the city are sustained by wealth accumulated in the height of the city’s industrial boom of the early 20th century.

At the Detroit Institute of Arts

One of the progeny of the Fisher Brothers draped his arm on the edge of an ancient Persian water basin in the hallway of the Detroit Institute of Arts. FashBash, the annual party hosted by the young philanthropic committee at the museum, was in full swing. His elbow nearly grazes a ‘Do Not Touch’ sign. He took a sip from his miniature champagne bottle.

Emergency Financial Manager

On March 25, 2013, Kevyn Orr, an emergency financial manager appointed a state board overseen by Michigan Governor Rick Snyder began his appointment in the city of Detroit. At once, power moved from the city council, the mayor, and the school board into the hands of a single bankruptcy lawyer from Washington DC, who represented Chrysler in their 2009 bankruptcy case. Detroit is one of the largest cities ever to fall under the oversight of an emergency manager.

In 2010, soon after Governor Snyder’s election, he and the Republican-held Legislature rewrote a two-decade old emergency manager law. The new law granted these state appointees more power, including the ability to drop union contracts with cities. In the November 2012 elections, Michigan voters rejected the revised law by a four to one margin, but the Legislature quickly passed a third, slightly revised version,
which took effect in March 2013. Detroit is the fifth city in Michigan to fall under the oversight of such management. These cities are all distinct in their racial demographics and political affiliations. In a mostly white and largely Republican state, all of the cities that have fallen under emergency financial management are mostly black and dominated by Democrats.

Kevyn Orr holds a broad range of powers in his new station. He is able to cut city spending in multiple ways, change contracts with labor unions, merge or eliminate city departments, push for the sale of city assets and even, if all else fails, recommend bankruptcy proceedings. Orr's appointment was met with protests from many groups across the city, including labor unions, church organizations, and the city council.

Private business interests have lauded the appointment. Sandy Karuah, the chairman of the Detroit Regional Chamber of Commerce told The New York Times “This sense a positive message to business that Detroit is fixing its problems.” One of the largest problems Snyder lauded as precedent for the takeover is the fourteen billion dollars worth of long-term liabilities the city has compiled since the mid-1950s. According to Snyder, after decades of inaction and failed attempts by the city, it is finally time to fix the debt that has been dogging the city for over half a century.

Media outlets, state government officials, including Snyder and Orr, and not-for-profit foundations often blame this debt and the city’s other financial woes on the long deterioration of the American industrial system in Detroit. They place responsibility on the inefficiency of production and the stagnancy of unionized workforces. For success stories, they turn to the revival of the American auto industry, which has been reporting growing sales in the last months. From the timber of the revelry, it comes as little surprise that Kevyn Orr originally gained traction in Michigan as the chief representative of Chrysler during its bankruptcy proceedings in 2009 that allowed the company to abruptly shut down a quarter of its US dealerships.

**Lawn Mowers**

Every other Wednesday through the summer and fall, a group of suburbanites load lawnmowers and weed whackers into trailers and the backs of pickup trucks, drive the few miles down 1-75, across Eight Mile, and into the city, to mow the city’s fields. A vigilante public works department, they spend the morning cutting the grass in vacant lots and playgrounds around the city. Bringing order to the prairie chaos.

This mowing makes it easier for kids to swing on monkey bars, easier for people to walk down the street with some sense of security, easier to find the abandoned cars, couches, and bodies that tend to turn up in the vacant lots of Detroit.

The only problem is when they mow through the gardens. Horror stories circulate: the young urban farmer who returned one morning to find her entire tomato crop decimated, the start of an urban orchard weed whacked to oblivion. Around my neighborhood and all over the city, large wooden Do Not Mow signs
were nailed to fence posts, trying to dissuade the mowers from descending. Still they 
mow circles along the sidewalks, encroaching each week a little closer until the signs 
are taken down from trees and put on stakes near the lots boundaries, or tires are 
thrown along the curbs to stop them.

The Empty City

This narrative of “authentic” revitalization, of men picking up sledgehammer 
and “punching the past in the face,” hides the other narratives of the city behind the 
more alluring story of rebirth. The houses John tears down are empty and 
uncontested. They are the product of laziness, dwindling income, and increased 
vacancy, where little concern is required for how they appeared. The land Greg farms 
has long sat vacant; there is no one around him who might object to waking up to 
rooster crows. The men in these Carhartt ads are not addressing the problems of 
people, the problems of the city, but rather problems of blight and empty land. The 
act of “punching the past in the face” implied that they are throwing punches where no 
one can see them, or to claim the past that is being beaten back as their own.

These seeming well-intentioned attempts at revitalization can have 
detrimental effects when they are expanded away from single people initiating small- 
scale entrepreneurial efforts, such as Greg’s Brother Nature Farm, and enter a the 
corporate market place. John Hantz, of Hantz Farm, has recently persuaded the 
Detroit City Council to lift the limit on acreage for farms within city limits, and has 
successfully bought over 100 acres of city land at a steep discount which he plans to 
use as a Christmas tree and vegetable farm. “The repurposed lots — cleared of blight
and planted with roughly 15,000 hardwood trees — would establish an economic zone, raise property values and return vast tracts of abandoned land to the city tax rolls.” Mike Score, the president of the venture promises, “Ideally, the enterprise has promised, it would eventually become a major source of local food.” But there is fear that this venture is only a guised land grab, and when the three-year city contract expires, Hantz would be free to develop.  ^84

Cruel Optimism is the Curse of Utility

In an August 1935 letter to Walter Benjamin, Theodor Adorno responded to a draft Benjamin had sent him a few weeks earlier. In it Benjamin had begun a discussion of the ‘Golden-Age’, a mythical-archaic category which he situated in the prehistory of the 19th century, a period Benjamin placed wholeheartedly in staunch dialectical conversation with more recent history. ^85 Late in the letter, Adorno’s responses and critiques of Benjamin’s turn to the role the ‘Golden-Age’ and its attachment to the commodity. “If the crucial ‘ambiguity’ of the Golden Age is under-


^85 Early on in his letter, Adorno lays out his three objections to Benjamin’s original description of the dialectic image, and specifically a concept from Benjamin’s draft that traveled into The Arcades, the assertion that every epoch dreams the one to come.” For the proposition seems to imply three things: a conception of the dialectical image as if it were a content of some consciousness, albeit a collective consciousness; its directed—and I would almost say developmental—relation to the future as utopia; and the idea of the ‘epoch’ as the proper self-contained subject of this objective consciousness. This seems extremely significant to me that this account of the dialectical image, which could be described as an immanent one, not merely threatens to diminish the original power of the concept...” Theodor W. Adorno, “Theodor Adorno to Walter Benjamin, August 2-4, 1935,” in The Complete Correspondence 1928-1940, ed. Henri Lonitz, trans. Nicholas Walker, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard 1999) 103.
emphasized (itself a concept which urgently requires theoretical elucidation and should certainly not be left unexamined), that is, its relationship to Hell, then the commodity as the substance of the age becomes Hell pure and simple, yet negated in a way that actually causes the primal state to appear as truth.”

Concerned with this simplified conception of dialectics, Adorno warns that in Benjamin’s haste to demarcate a dialectical relationship he enters theoretical territory similar to Jungian theory of the archetype, a stagnant analysis of dialectics that results from a disenchantment of the image, object, or epoch.

This is where the conversation gets interesting. Rather than pointing out a flaw in Benjamin’s project and leaving it at that, Adorno draws attention to the ways in which other areas of the writer’s work already addresses the disenchantment with which Adorno is concerned. “Nowhere does your draft contain more remedies than it does at this point,” he writes, “This would be a central place for the doctrine of the collector as the one who liberates things from the curse of utility.” Benjamin’s concern with the collector doubles back to the conception of the commodity fetish. Adorno posited that through the spasmodic character of capitalist and industrial consumption, commodities become at once an object without a definable use value and an alien survivor that outlives its own immediacy. It is through commodities that we receive a promise of immortality. Thus the commodity fetish is the final turn in the “crisis of utility” which Adorno addresses, for even the recreational collector has an

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engagement with the object that hints of a utilitarian bond. Myths sit at the ultimate and indelible center of a commodity. This is the crux of it. Because commodities are not like us, they do not die; their ability to outlive us and outlast us renders them outside. Outsideness is the ultimate myth of a commodity, and thus their ultimate utility.

Lauren Berlant’s concept of cruel optimism is concentrated utilitarian thinking. Lauren Berlant describes it as "the condition of maintaining an attachment to a significantly problematic object." Cruel optimism is a trust in the myth of commodities, and its promise of immortality through attachment. Adorno speaks to similar ends in a continued critique of Benjamin’s manuscript: “the phrase ‘the new and the old are intermingled’ is highly suspect to me, given my earlier critique of the dialectical image as regression. There is no real revision to the old, but rather the newest, as semblance and phantasmagoria, is itself the old.” Benjamin’s assertion that new and old mix represents an assurance that what once was is still present and obtainable, and that the current moment and past moments are demarcated entities, capable of commingling. Adorno is much more concerned with the reinstallation of the past into the current moment rather than the possibility of merging epochs. Cruel optimism relies on a similar mode of consideration to Benjamin. In a certain way, the assertion that cruel optimism is a condition in which "the present is what makes itself present to us before it becomes anything else... a mediated affect, it is...under constant

189 Theodor W. Adorno, "Theodor Adorno to Walter Benjamin," 110.
revision,” is a suggestion that the stagnancy of cruel optimism is the result of a present that is in flux, and a attempted reinstallation of a past which is very much situated and unreachably backward.\footnote{Lauren Berlant, \textit{Cruel Optimism} (Durham: Duke 2011) 4.}

In the case of Detroit, a cruelly optimistic turn backwards to commodities and distinct urban practices depend on a Golden Age that is not set in a mythical-archaic past as Benjamin would have it, but in the city’s Fordist moment. The assertion that “We Kahn Do It,” as it appears in the mural by the Fisher Building and in tags around the city is a temporal looping mechanism.\footnote{“The materialist presentation of history leads the past to bring the present into a critical state.” Walter Benjamin, \textit{The Arcades Project}, trans by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge: Belknap 1999) 471.} It drags an architect from a supposedly illustrious moment in the city’s history into a role of reassurance in the present. “One makes affective bargains about the costliness of one’s attachments, usually unconscious ones, most of which keep on in proximity to the scene of desire/attrition,” explains Berlant.\footnote{Lauren Berlant, \textit{Cruel Optimism} (Durham: Duke 2011) 25.} Through the usage of the past as a reassuring placard, whether it’s a mural and a name or a bicycle and some rust, the comfortable concept of the Fordist good life remains close by, even if it is eschewed in normal conversation. The past is rendered so banal that it slips into suggestions of the future.\footnote{“In both instances, History has been rendered safe for post-historical commuting by a synthetic processing of space and time, here an ersatz past helps people get over the violation they are subjected to y the real one, so that you can at once ‘remember’ Detroit, and simultaneously know nothing about it.” Jerry Herron, “Postmodernism Ground Zero, or Going to the Movies at the Grand Circus Park,” in Social Text no. 18 (December 1987): 68.}

**Pioneer Rhetoric**
The narrative of revitalization, along with that of the Carhartt’s urban pioneer “punching the past in the face” can often lead to the suppression of other narratives of the city in order to present the single narrative of rebirth unencumbered. The language of frontier and of the “urban pioneer” implies that the landscape that these people are “returning to” sits vacant and uninhabited. Throughout the history of the United States, discourse of the frontier has legitimized the domination by more powerful people of spaces occupied by less powerful people, who are treated as other, and actively eliminated or rendered part of a timeless and un-progressive landscape. Neil Smith writes, “the idea of the urban pioneer is as insultingly applied to contemporary cities as the original ideas of the pioneers in the US west. Now, as then, it implied that no one lives in the areas being pioneered—no one worthy of notice, at least.”²⁹⁶ In American mythology, it is the city where social conflict occurs.²⁹⁷ The Frontier, in contrast, is a space of simpler problems that don’t require diplomacy or forethought, as cities often do, but only require gumption and warranted violence.

When the urban “frontier” is coupled with dehistoricized concepts of ‘authenticity’ and imposed on an urban environment, the city becomes a landscape

²⁹⁷ "Behind the ideological rationale of Jeffersonianism, the structures of the Frontier Myth operate as evocative signifiers. The newly acquired lands are a Frontier which promises complete felicity, the satisfaction of all demands and the reconciliation of all contradictions. In Jefferson’s myth language, the city’ is the symbolic place in which class conflicts tend to become irreconcilable, and lead to despotism. The very process of commerce that bring urban prosperity generated the conditions of collapse, by creating separate and antagonistic classes of the very rich and the very poor." Richard Slotkin, The Fatal Environment: The Myth of the Frontier in the Age of Industrialization 1800-1890, (New York: Atheneum, 1985) 70.
placed in a single epoch, wiped of many smaller expanses of time. Zukin touches on this in *Naked City*: ‘the tropes of ’grit’ and ’authenticity’ often lead gentrifiers to feel as though they are participating in the actual (re)production of the city, when in fact they are almost exclusively participating in modes of consumption that didn’t exist before an area gentrified.’\(^{198}\) The actual newness of these endeavors is often complemented by an active attempt to establish them in a more distant past.\(^{199}\)

### Nostalgia

If we are to take Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer’s assertion that “all reification is forgetting,”\(^{200}\) than the act of nostalgic revisiting by the state, corporations, and young urban newcomers in Detroit is a possible act of domination. This is not the first time the linkage between melancholy remembering and domination has been made. Renanto Rosaldo draws linkages between the imperialist project and the development of the term:

“Far from being eternal, the term nostalgia (from the Greek *nostos* “to return home,” and *algia*, “a painful condition”) dates from the late seventeenth century when it was coined to describe a medical condition. The term described, for example, a pathological homesickness among Swiss mercenaries who are fighting far from their homeland. (Even in its origins, the term appears to have been associated with processes of domination.)”\(^{201}\)

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\(^{199}\) Sometimes, it is an attempt to establish gentrification in an even more distant past, further back than Ford’s original factories and Ford’s massive workforce, while having little to do with the ”stove makers, brewers, and lumber men who wrote Detroit’s pre-industrial genealogy.” Herron, “Postmodernism Ground Zero or Going to the Movies in Grand Circus Park,” in Social Text no. 18 (December 1987): 62.


Nostalgia often serves as a marker of a more positive past by those for whom the past was 'better' time. “Nostalgia is a particularly appropriate emotion to invoke in attempting to establish one's innocence and at the same time talk about what one has destroyed,” Rosaldo continues to parse out how the affect enacts the project of domination.

In the case of Detroit, this question of who is remembering is mixed up in positionality quandaries that haunt the theoretical disconnect between Carl Jung and Walter Benjamin's collective unconscious and unconscious of the collective. “Memory fragments are often most powerful and most enduring when the incident which left them behind was one that never entered consciousness,” Benjamin writes in a discussion of Baudelaire.202 Nostalgia is often cultivated, spread out, and allowed to blanket the city, unlike the memory fragments Benjamin alludes to. A sense of ubiquitous and unilateral nostalgia denies the essential question. For Jung, this question is of little importance, as the remembering inherent in nostalgia and dreams is ultimately connected to the natural signifying phenomenon and the signified meaning, a naturalized history that is imbedded in the collective unconscious of everyone. But in a Benjaminian approach to the question of nostalgia, the conscious of the collective becomes a decisive factor in parsing out the origin of nostalgic notions.

The nostalgia that permeates the revitalization of Detroit, in the advertisement of Carhartt, the restoration of downtown skyscrapers, and the entrance of young people into the city’s neighborhoods is very often not vulnerable remembering. Instead it is a form of nostalgia forged with the intention of driving towards a pre-fabricated future where the remember’s desires sit. Much of what permeates the gentrification and re-corpretization of Detroit’s inner city is driven by a neoliberal utilization of tropes of the past to make the project of urban revitalization appear benevolent and informed.

Unlike Rosaldo, I do not wish to posit that the affect of nostalgia necessitates such domination. I believe that is possible to grieve for the past without the singularized trajectory of nostalgic recreation. Just as the linear temporal conditions of Benjamin’s “Golden Age” shift in the case of Detroit, so do the bounds of the unconscious of the collective. Restricted nostalgia, rather than an unmediated mourning for the past, which holds little connection to the actual act of remembering, can mark what was and prevent the reiteration of past mistakes.

**Pioneer Building**

I was standing under the tracks of the useless monorail in Detroit’s downtown, trying to get enough cell coverage to hear the man on the other end of the telephone. “We have an open house in early October,” He said, “we can talk about it then. But all I can tell you now is that we called ourselves Pioneers because that’s how
we felt. We were coming into a part of the city that was empty in the 1980s, even more than it is today and we were filling it with work, and art, and life.”

The coverage was spotty but I could hear him pretty clearly. “Is there a chance that I could come by to speak with you some more? I’m free all day tomorrow and the next...”

“You’re taking this pretty literally, but sure,” he said. “I’ll be at the building all afternoon.”

The next day, when I rode my bike out and knocked on the large metal door, under the PIONEER BUILDING marquee, with mannequins in the window staring down at me, no one came to the door. He didn’t answer my calls after that either.

**Same People**

I keep running into the same people. The man my friend and I gawk at the coffee shop was also at a potluck, making the same congenial rounds, shaking hands and talking about Burning Man. My roommate and I ride alongside a girl for a couple of blocks down Trumbull Street who later turns up in the same bleachers as us at a community soccer game. I run into people from my summer job at the museum all the time. We were in the city for two weeks and already people were calling our names as we rode our bicycles through our neighborhood.

“The city will keep getting smaller and smaller,” A man tells me after we run into each other a few times. “A city of 700,000 starts to feel like it’s just a little town, I run into friends everywhere, sometime more than once a day.”
Corporate Abandonment

To couch the city’s demise in the actions of Detroit’s working class and on the demands of unions and consumers is to approach this analysis with very broad blinders on. The impetus of Detroit’s demise is as much based on the massive abandonment of the city by a few giant capitalist corporations than it is on questions of efficiency, unions, or Japanese cars. The conditions of capitalist corporations and their hyper-concern with profits, business growth, and market share drove many of the decisions that have impacted Detroit. The almost singular power that board members, chief executives, and stockholders have in the work of a corporation means that desires of the people and places that enable them to function are often excluded from the decisions that gravely affect them. The city of Detroit was asked to deal with the detritus of industrial history, without the financial support it once received. “The factories, offices and stores abandoned by departing capitalist corporations increase the waste of resources and of workers’ lives. In the surrounding communities, tax bases eroded by capitalists’ departures mean reduced social services, public spaces, and qualities of life for all but the richest.”²⁰³ After the departure of many corporations first from the city, then from the region, the roles they played in the urban environment, as employers and tax payers go unfilled and yet the city is expected to conduct itself as it has before.

What is particularly marked in the case of Detroit is the utter commitment with which the city embraced the automobile. From the massive urban layout, the wide streets, single-family homes and leisure spaces that must be reached by car, Detroit’s character was intended to be consumed through the windshield of a well-maintained automobile. The abandonment of the auto industry in Detroit was not only a financial blow but also a severe blow to an aspect of the city imbedded in the geography and sociality of the city.

Governor Snyder, Mr. Orr, and the business leaders who laud his appointment seem to understand this situation. And yet they continue to place blame on a city for its circumstance while those that fabricated those circumstance are mysteriously absent. The expectation of how Detroit should function are presented as a “timeless truth” while the conditions of the city are in constant flux. I am reminded of a quote from The Arcades, where Benjamin posits that “Nevertheless, truth is not—as Marxism would have it—a merely contingent function of knowing, but is bound to the nucleus of time lying hidden within the knower and the known alike. This is so true that the eternal, in any case, is far more the ruffle on a dress than some idea.”

The implementation of an emergency financial manager is the most recent demonstration in the marked lack of democratic inclusion in the city of Detroit. These are manufactured crises that implicated the wrong sections of society in their aftershocks and attempts at reparation.

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**Industrial Grit**

On another page in the Carhartt catalogue, a man stands on a pile of burning coals; he has a rake in his hand. He is wearing reflective goggles, a hard hat, and a Carhartt jumpsuit, tucked into his sturdy work boots. Text hovers next to his head: “We’ve always been a pack your own lunch, never hit the clock ’til the job is done crew. Carhartt is the clothing that expects men to stay on the job longer and work harder than anyone else.” In *The Origins of the Urban Crisis*, Thomas Sugrue describes the conditions that gave rise to the riots of 1967 in Detroit as the culmination of negative feelings that had been stirring since the late 1950s.

For those who cared to listen, there were rumblings of discontent in the late 1950s and the early 1960s. The problems of limited housing, racial animosity, and reduced economic opportunity for a segment of the black population in Detroit had led to embitterment. When sociologist John Leggett and his colleagues interviewed black Detroiter in 1957 and 1958, they found that many were seething with anger about their living and working conditions. When Leggett asked unemployed blacks to predict what would happen if there were another Great Depression, their answers were grimly prophetic. “There’d be widespread riots,” answered one. “The young wouldn’t take it,” stated another... Black youths, as Leggett’s respondents knew, were increasingly alienated.207

While newly arrived members of the city’s growing gentrification may feel as though they are really participating in old tropes of gritty, working-class masculine habitus, the environment within which those attitudes arose is often further in the past than they acknowledge. What may feel like democratic participation in and consumption of the city may actually serve as a form of imposition. By bringing forth the narratives of working-class industrial labor without including those that worked and labored in the

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city, there runs a risk of usurping the history and supplanting the people who have
played a part in the city since that point.

It is curious that the tropes of industrial labor, brute force, and innate working
class know-how are what is called forth in the ads for Carhartt as though it is
impossible to imagine a livable, fixed, and revitalized city without those attitudes.
They are still the feelings depended upon by advertisers, even though much of the city
has not been a locus for those tropes in more than half a century. Jean Baudrillard
writes:

“Everywhere man has learned to reflect on himself, to assume himself, to
posit himself according to this scheme of production which is assigned
him as the ultimate dimension of value and meaning... through this scheme
of production, this mirror of production, the human species comes to
consciousness in the imaginary. Production, labor, value, everything
through which an objective world emerges and through which man
recognizes himself objectively—this is the imaginary. Here man is
embarked on the continual deciphering of himself through his works,
finalized by his shadow (his own end)...” 208

Revitalization

The concept of urban revitalization requires a sense of the possibility of
returning the city to the past. Detroit’s motto is etched on the bottom of a statue
across the street from the bulk of city hall cast in 1958, Speramus Meliora: Resurget
Cineribus, in English, “We hope for Better Things; It Shall Rise from The Ashes.”
Father Gabriel Richards, a French Catholic Bishop appointed to Detroit in the early
19th century penned the phrase in 1805 after a fire leveled the city.209 This is an

208 Jean Baudrillard, The Mirror of Production, trans. Mark Poster (New York: Telos Press,
1975) 19.
209 Christopher Michael Hammer. Forming an American identity on the Michigan frontier:
Fr. Gabriel Richard, Rev. John Monteith, Judge Augustus Woodward, and the attempt to
assertion that the past and present will produce a more perfect future in its image. Walter Benjamin situates this sense to a warped moment in the unconscious of the collective, where “... what emerges in these wish images is the resolute effort to distance oneself from all that is antiquated—which includes however, the recent past. These tendencies deflect the imagination (which is given impetus by the new) back upon the primal past.”

From what was, something better will come again. “Every epoch dreams that it has been destroyed by catastrophes,” and in turn dreams that it will return, reformed, into a utopian future. The concept of urban revitalization requires a belief in an inherent vitality of a city. Usually grounded in classed notions of the past rather than classless longing for a true society that Benjamin turns to in “Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century.”

In Josephine’s assertion that she is not a farmer, and in the city’s burgeoning bicycle-building industry in the present moment, what haunts is an assertion of industrially-constrained utilitarianism. Through the unspoken or under-spoken assertion that Detroit’s future must originate strictly in the ashes of its past, we run the risk of restricting discussions of the city’s resurgence to a covert and misguided attempt to return to the past.

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“Nevertheless, it is not in the form of the spoils which fall to the victor that the latter makes their presence felt in the class struggle. They manifest themselves in this struggle as courage, humor, cunning, and fortitude. They have retroactive force and will constantly call in question every victory, past and present, of the rulers.”

It is the humor and the cunning of the momentary that I find hope when I consider the next epoch of Detroit. What I find so unsettling is the apparent inability of many people to see beyond the conception of the epoch as the only frame with which to view history. The perpetual loop of an inaccessible Golden Age deludes from the friction of different types of time, and the alternating conceptions of space, progress and demise that go with it.

Epilogue

The class struggle, which is always present to a history influenced by Marx, is a fight for the crude and material things without which no refined and spiritual thing could exist. Nevertheless, it is not in the form of the spoils which fall to the victor that the latter makes their presence felt in the class struggle. They manifest themselves in this struggle as courage, humor, cunning, and fortitude. They have retroactive force and will constantly call in question every victory, past and present, of the rulers. As flowers turn toward the sun, by dint of a secret heliotropism the past strives to turn toward that sun which is rising in the sky of history. A historical materialist must be aware of this most inconspicuous of all transformations.

– Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History”

In “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” Benjamin assures us that the members of society who do not write dominant history are nonetheless present in it. The actual material of the past is constituted not so much by the spoils of the victor, but in courage, humor, cunning, and fortitude of all. The spirit of history resides both in the material and refined residue of time; one cannot be dissociated or discounted from the other.

Throughout Detroit, during the city’s industrial heyday and now in its current resurgence, a certain history has taken precedence. This has been the history of the “Golden Age,” an unquestioningly utopian conception of the city’s industrial development. Now, as Detroit enters a moment of supposed revitalization, this ‘Golden Age’ steeped in residual values of Fordism is being presented once again as

the new aim. Freshly stripped of any of the spatial, racial and class dynamics that play such a large role in the city.

When Walter Benjamin states, "to articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it 'the way it really was'. It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up..."\textsuperscript{215} I would like to believe that he actively thought that it is possible to seize a memory. The seizure of a memory and the insertion of the momentary are similar actions. Both throw a wrench into the epoch. Both place subtle recognition on the importance of the retroactive power of memory, and its ability to challenge hegemonic histories.

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