

Archaeology, History

Reanimating Industrial Spaces explores the relationships between the past and the places of former industry through approaches that create and critique memory-work. The chapters in this volume address four broad questions: What is the relationship between industrial heritage and memory? How is memory involved in the process of making in regards to industrial spaces? What are the strengths and challenges of conducting memory-work? What can be learnt from interdisciplinary perspectives and methods? The contributors have provided a set of diverse case studies (including iron-smelting in Uganda, Albanian sugar mills, and concrete factories in Albania) which offer differing socio-economic contexts and approaches to industrial heritage both in the past and in contemporary society. A range of memory-work is also illustrated: from ethnography, oral history, digital technologies, excavation, and archival and documentary research.

From a global perspective, *Reanimating Industrial Spaces* presents new engagements with the archaeology, anthropology and geography of post industrial societies, drawing on approaches that simultaneously employ and critique both memory and post-work to restore and breathe new lives into the locations of industry."

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REANIMATING INDUSTRIAL SPACES

ORANGE

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CONDUCTING MEMORY WORK IN POST-INDUSTRIAL SOCIETIES



EDITED BY



3 Urban Exploration as Heritage Placemaking

Bradley L. Garrett

Introduction

The ruins of a now outlived urban dream revealed, more clearly than ever before, the phantasmagoric nature of the artefact and the hidden scripting of their making (Kaika and Swyngedouw 2000, 132).

I have spent the past five years as an embedded ethnographer with a group of about two-dozen dedicated urban explorers in London. In 2008—the first year of my research—the global financial system imploded. As a result, many architectural projects, including numerous plans to redevelop derelict buildings in the city, were shelved. As the language of media pundits, bankers and politicians slowly slipped from the notion of a recession to the possibility of a depression, I saw the eyes of my project participants light up. Riding in a car with an explorer called Winch through Belgium, where we were photographing and sleeping in abandoned buildings, he mused ‘If this keeps up, the UK is going to look like Belgium soon: a giant playground of dereliction’. Most of the ruins Winch, I and others explored together tended to be at least a few decades old, steeped in the enticing aesthetics of decay (Trigg 2006). However, on more than one occasion, as UK businesses fell victim to the collapse, we read of their shuttered doors in the headlines and then snuck in soon after to rummage through the remains, documenting ‘ontologies of the present that demand archaeologies of the future’ (Jameson 2002, 215).

Urban explorers are groups of people committed to researching, locating, scoping, exploring and often photographing temporary, obsolete, abandoned, derelict and infrastructural spaces in the built environment (Bennett 2011; Deyo and Leibowitz 2003; McRae 2008; Ninjalicious 2005; Paiva

and Manaugh 2008). Although the practice is, in many ways, a response to global urbanising forces which render the city increasingly clean, ‘secure’ and mundane (Augè 1995), urban exploration is not new; it is a manifestation of a continuing human curiosity to see what has been characterised as ‘off-limits’ that can be traced back through historic accounts for thousands of years. The stories of Livy exploring Rome’s Cloaca Maxima sewer (Brick 2009) and John Hollingshead’s insistence that London ‘sewers have been fruitful in furnishing antiquarian and geological discoveries’ (Hollingshead [1862] 2009, 453) reveal a long history of fascination with liminal urban spaces ripe for rediscovery. The writings of Walt Whitman, Charles Dickens (who first published Hollingshead’s London sewer explorations in 1861), Baudelaire and many later artists and groups including the Dadaists, Surrealists and Situationists serve as inspirational figureheads for the contemporary practice. All betrayed a passion for discovering dangerous, precarious, incongruous and absurd urban spaces.

Academics have depicted urban exploration either as a sort of shallow scholarship where ‘explorers are more interested in aesthetics than history’ (High and Lewis 2007, 55) or conversely as ‘an angry nostalgia—a near militant preservationism’ (Bennett 2011, 422). My ethnographic research with the community has revealed a far more nuanced and complicated relationship with place, one that participates in the various and contested material manifestations of the city and is, as I have written elsewhere, both critical and celebratory of investment, construction, waste and ruination (Garrett 2010, 2011a, 2011b, 2011c, 2013).

In this chapter, I posit what I see as the spatial (geographic) underpinnings of this historically engaged popular practice where it operates as a sort of informal heritage placemaking process. Three case studies have been chosen for this piece, in locations where industrial ruins are, and have been, the focus of urban exploration practice. I begin in London with Battersea Power Station, a decommissioned coal-fired power station. Battersea (as it is colloquially known) is an iconic site to Londoners (many people will recognise its ivory-coloured smokestacks immediately), and I am interested in teasing out the potential rewards of undertaking unguided tours, without permission, of this shuttered public icon as a placemaking exercise. Next I move to Germany to visit Duisburg Sinteranlage, an immense turn-of-the-nineteenth-century derelict steel-smelting factory in the Ruhr Valley where workers turned powder into metal. We snuck into the site with little information about its history, function or significance. From inside Sinteranlage, I interrogate the affectual qualities of exploring an unfamiliar derelict locale where personal discovery and photodocumentation can lead to moments of sensorial knowledge-gathering and spatial wonder akin to a psychological excavation. Finally, I head to Detroit, America’s widely derelict Motor City. Here I visit Fisher Body 21, an automotive body assembly plant which has been a destination for urban explorers since the late 1990s. Here, my primary interest is in urban exploration as a practice of meaning-making.

into residual site memory through imaginations of a post-capitalist future as opposed to exploring for architectural, aesthetic and adventure elements.

In all these surveys, in the tradition of the practice, these ruins are explored without permission, guides or formal elucidation. These explorations were, in the words of Susan Sontag, an ‘unguided tour’, playing ‘memory like a roulette wheel’ (Sontag 1977, 40). Urban exploration is a search for things unexpected, novel, strange and spectacular. Scrutinising the urban for ‘the random, the unscreened, allows you to find what you don’t know you are looking for, and you don’t know a place until it surprises you’ (Solnit 2001, 11). Inside ruins, material and memorial cultural eviscerations are relocated in incongruous situations and juxtapositions. Encounters with the other things, other times, other people and other places set off a flurry of psychological delving as the mind tries to make sense of the spatiotemporal perplexities encountered. At times, explorers find it just as enticing to be overwhelmed by, rather than to attempt to interpret, that alluring chaos.

Throughout this chapter, I reference academic research on urban exploration and the work of urban explorers themselves through personal communication. Explorer’s names here are self-assigned pseudonyms connected to their identity as an urban explorer. Searching for their names online will reveal a steady stream of fascinating urban adventure stories, should you choose to follow this story further. In addition, a plethora of writing and photography exists from individuals (Deyo and Leibowitz 2003; Gates 2013; Paiva and Manaugh 2008; RomanyWG 2010; Roppo n.d.) and groups, such as the Industrial Decay Network (Smart 2007, 2009, 2010), who have penned books on modern ruins, dereliction photography and urban exploration. So while this chapter speaks broadly to the themes of place, heritage, memory and perhaps amateur archaeological praxis, it is also situated at the heart of current debates around what the meaning of derelict space was, is and could be.

Our Places, Our History: Battersea Power Station

The form of a city changes more quickly than the human heart.

(Charles Baudelaire, *The Swan*, in Shephard 1869, n.p.).

Battersea Power Station is situated just south of the River Thames and London’s swanky West End: a place of careful spatial ordering filled with clean storefronts, expensive bars, shabby chic antique shops and quiet ‘new build’ apartments on the river. Battersea is a Grade II* listed building place on the Statutory List of Buildings of Special Architectural or Historic Interest, noted for being the central power provider for decades in London as well as the largest brick structure in Europe. It was closed permanently in 1983 due to decreased energy output and increased operating costs (Koefoed 2011). Today, Battersea is a sur-

from public view at street level behind high fences and barbed wire, awaiting permanent ‘redevelopment’. It is normally empty, save the security guards who patrol the perimeters and the bizarre temporary ‘extreme’ sporting events and film shoots that take place in its derelict car park a few times a year (health and safety regulations largely preclude entry to the structure itself).

It was a cold night in 2008 as we scaled the Battersea security gate, hopped over, and opened the fire door for the others to enter. After hiding in the bushes for a while watching security make their rounds, we quietly ran in and slid under the internal fences. Inside, time stretched as we stood under the massive crumbling brick walls and stared up at the colossal smokestacks towering over the place. I have probably been inside the power station a dozen times now. We have climbed to the top of the chimney scaffolding, onto the chimneys themselves, perched on the rim, found our way into Control Rooms A (Figure 3.1) and B, and into ‘the White Room’, an aborted studio model of flats intended to be built inside the power station at some point in the past. Sometimes we slept in the White Room.

Despite the important role this building has played in the modern history of the city, a history that ‘officially’ ended on closure, there has been little attempt to preserve Battersea. It is in a sort of heritage limbo; the site seems too large, disordered and publically contested to be renovated, retrofitted or redeveloped, and too culturally significant to knock down. Since 1983, when

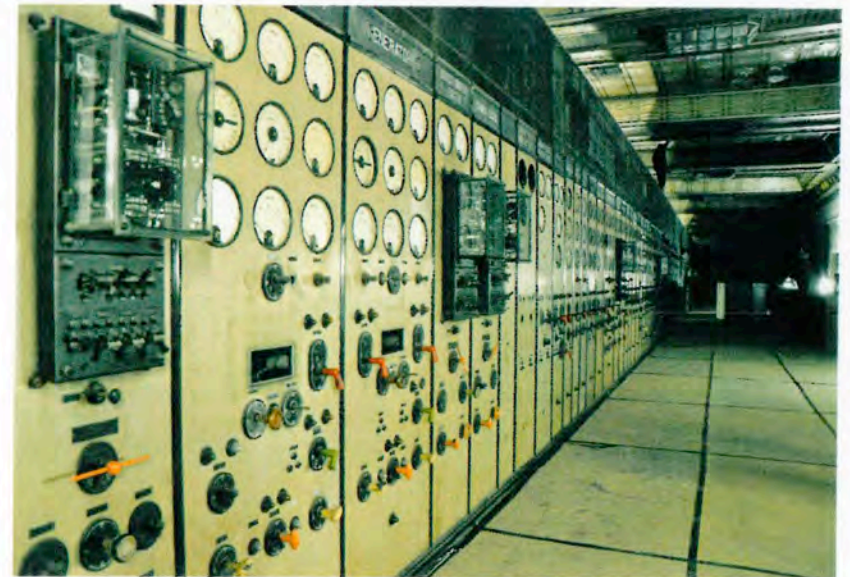


Figure 3.1. Control Room A inside Battersea Power Station, London, United Kingdom. Photograph by Bradley J. Camatt.

ideas for adapted reuse began to be floated, proposals have been drawn up to turn the place into an amusement park, a hotel with blocks of flats and a retail, housing and leisure complex. In 2006, an Irish company called Real Estate Opportunities bought the station for 400 million pounds. By November 2011 they were bankrupt, and Battersea was back on the market (Kollewe 2011). Similar scenarios have occurred at least four times since Battersea ceased to function as a power station. Current plans for an expensive housing development, which has seen the construction of a hideous glass structure between the Thames and the station and attracted 14,000 people to the planning meeting, may actually succeed on this occasion (Self 2013).

Every time we sneak inside Battersea, things have changed: more of the building has collapsed; the yard is being excavated; security found an entrance and sealed it; someone swept up a room; remnants of another exploration are found, such as an energy drink can or a lost camera lens cap. Sometimes people are caught and escorted out by security guards who seem relatively sympathetic to the desire to see the place up close and clearly enjoy the chase as much as we do. We often play inside the control rooms, filled with levers and switches, which numerous explorers have commented have a 'Doctor Who' feel to them. Here we pretend to shift power to different areas in London ('Goodnight, Wimbledon': clang!). Each Bonfire Night we climb to the roof and watch the firework displays from a chimney (Figure 3.2). Silent Motion, a London explorer, told me last year during the annual pilgrimage:



Figure 3.2. Bonfire Night from atop a smokestack on Battersea Power Station, London, United Kingdom. Photograph by Bradley J. Garrett

... it's crazy that in a city where we fight for every square centimetre of space, we can just sit up here alone and watch the fireworks. It feels like this is our ruin, this is our place.

It is possible that one day we won't be able to do this anymore, Battersea will be gone or turned into apartments, or the security guards will figure out how we get in there and actually make a concerted effort to stop us. But that is part of what makes the experience what it is: being in a ruin that, despite remaining popularly perceived as 'closed and dead', quite clearly still has an architectural and memorial life to live out. Explorers enjoy being a part of that afterlife, being witness to the creeping death of a place, a rare privilege. As Winch, the explorer I was with in Belgium, told me:

Everything has an end and I think we need to accept that, accept that this is the final stage of a building's life. While we can fall in love with it for what it is and what it represents and the experiences we have there, we do have to let go and accept that it's going to go. That makes our time there all the more rich.

There is a sense that even if Battersea were one day gone, it would still be a place, preserved in photographs and memory. The notion of place is central to urban exploration. Place, as the Greek philosopher Archytas (quoted in Jammer 2012, 10) writes, 'is the first of all beings, since everything that exists is in a place and cannot exist without a place'. While place at its most basic level might be thought of as space anthropomorphised (space given social and cultural context), as Cresswell (2004, 37) argues:

... place ... needs to be understood as an embodied relationship with the world. Places are constructed by people doing things and in this sense are never "finished" but are constantly being performed.

One argument that urban explorers often put forward in regard to heritage management is that heritage sites are 'inauthentic' because they have been preserved in a state of arrested decay (DeLyser 1999). The underlying objection is that heritage sites are static, their history stopped at a particular, ultimately arbitrary, point. DeSilvey (2011, 5) suggests that what many people actually desire is to write themselves into an anticipatory history of a place 'at the intersection of the imagined future and the imagined past'. As another project participant told me in regard to Battersea, while we drank beer in the empty Jacuzzi of the White Room, 'We could hardly do this in the Tower of London, could we? That shit is on lockdown. This place is London's real heritage, all gritty and raw'.

Urban exploration is a process of not only continual discovery and surprise but of inscription, where explorers imagine themselves as part of the ongoing

ceased: after 'official' histories have ended. The assumption that the social and cultural use life of places ends with the conclusion of their primary economic function is naive (see Edensor 2005a). It is the sense of the past in the present and the sense of place 'at any given point of time', which is 'quite as much a matter of history as what happened in it' (Samuel 1994, 15), that explorers interrogate.

In ruins, while placemaking is foregrounded in the present tense (the exploration event), space and time implode. The surreal nature of being in the ruin reminds us 'of the past that could have been and the future that never took place' (Boym 2007, 58). At the same time, 'the materiality of industrial ruins means they are ideally placed to rebuke the normative assignments of objects', and can give people opportunity to 'interrogate normative processes of spatial and material ordering' (Edensor 2005b, 314). It follows that part of the appeal of these places lies in the obvious gaps in ordering which leave ample room for play and imagination (McRae 2008). As the explorer Dsankt told me when I asked him about Battersea, 'Even though you may see exactly the same things on a tour, the experience of exploring it on your own terms will always be completely different. You can't fake that'.

Battersea Power Station, then, is an important London heritage landmark and destination for urban history tourism, despite lacking a clear official capacity or role within the heritage industry (i.e., it is lacking heritage commodification). It is, in the most basic sense, a public heritage site that belongs to everyone and no one, a liminal space for play, discovery and placemaking where we find:

... not a big picture but a fragmented one: local, specific, incomplete, multiple, personal, erroneous perhaps, but scopic nonetheless. ... Things are not in their place, there is jumble, clutter. We have to rummage around trying to find things (Hetherington 2003, 1942).

However, being Londoners, we are aware of the significance of Battersea in the city's history. Therefore, when entering, with foreknowledge plucked from Wikipedia, stories of friends who have been there before and, perhaps, knowledge of desperate corporate events that took place within its walls in the last few years (in an attempt to stall the inevitable economic failure of the bad real estate investment), all contribute to the types of spectralities we might encounter. Where these revenants manifest as a 'recurrence of that which has been expelled or abjected' (Dixon 2011, 436), we might find that memorial manifestations assert themselves with force where aborted histories inhabit popular knowledge. Other places we might explore, especially spontaneous finds, offer a less tangible sense of what kind of place, what kind of past, we are infiltrating, where embodied experience often overwhelms a place's

The Archaeological Sensorium: Entering Sinteranlage

... more powerful sensations may be sought in places on the urban margins ...

(Edensor 2007, 230).

The wind was howling and cutting when we parked the car and started climbing through the hills to Duisburg Sinteranlage in Germany, a country that contains a host of industrial ruins, but where corporate interest in and securitisation of those structures is far less acute. On this road trip Winch, Silent Motion, Statler and I were visiting dozens of locations, including the Ruhr Valley, where wholesale social change and globalisation had shuttered countless factories. We knew next to nothing about the place. Coming over a ridge, we were shocked to see a building that was vast and orange and ... blown out. No unbroken windows remained on the massive brick building. I couldn't even envisage how long it would take to break that many windows, let alone install them.

The place was so empty and extensive, it was hard to imagine there was actually anyone there, but we took no chances and ran low past the beaten circular track where the security guards obviously made their rounds. Once through a back door (ripped off the hinges by some massive machine no longer present), the wind was squelched and silence asserted itself. Inside, the factory was full of orange sand, or sand that had been turned orange (red? we debated) through some sort of smelting or firing process. It covered the floor, spilling in dramatic sheets through upper levels of the building where starkly contrasting green plants shot out of it in between rusting steel beams, creating a surreal interior desertscape (Figure 3.3). We began climbing the twisted metal to the top floors (the stairs long since removed or decayed away) and spent time listening to the calm surroundings: metal creaks, wind-powered powder cascades, and ceaseless drips. On a floor with some sort of control panel, I tried to imagine the building filled with workers but was then overwhelmed by a need to watch my footing crossing a beam. At the top, I looked out from a ledge and got a view of the blast furnaces (Figure 3.4).

Later, in another part of the factory, we met a German couple, a man and a woman, with cameras, who were also exploring the site. I asked them what they were doing there and the woman said 'having lunch'. When I inquired if they knew what the place was used for, the man said, 'Who cares, look at this!' and then pointed and stared into a vast expanse of rusting machinery with his mouth open, finger trembling at the incalculability and the silence. I understood what he meant but, as usual, found it difficult to encourage him to describe his seemingly inarticulate feelings about the place. Basso unpacks the complicated relationships we build in places:

Places possess a marked capacity for triggering acts of self-reflection, inspiring thoughts about who one presently is, or memories of who one used to be, or



Figure 3.3. Looking out over the blast furnaces of Sinteranlage, Duisburg, Germany. Photograph by Bradley L. Garrett.



Figure 3.4. The twisted interior of Sinteranlage, Duisburg, Germany. Photograph by

musings on who one might become. And that is not all. Place-based thoughts about the self lead commonly to thoughts of other things—other places, other people, other times, whole networks of associations that ramify unaccountably within the expanding spheres of awareness that they themselves engender. The experience of sensing places, then, is thus both roundly reciprocal and incorrigibly dynamic (Basso 1996, 55).

Through exploration, we build relationships with places where the embodied experience of being and dwelling creates affective associations between both place and self (Ingold 2000). The process of internalising that collapse of time and space (Hetherington 2003) makes it intensely personal and at the same time frustratingly difficult to communicate through language. Indeed, photography is often relied on as an explanatory medium, though most explorers will claim that photography also largely fails to relay the experience with any depth: the medium still lacks the emotional charge and affective associations of embodied experience.

Emotional responses can include fear of danger, where ‘the unfamiliar acquisition of a skilful apprehension of space is necessary for my own safety’ (Edensor 2007, 227). Often these feelings manifest quite violently in the body (in the fight-or-flight instinct), leading to increased levels of adrenaline triggered by a precognitive bypass of the sensory cortex: a processing of raw sensory data that is relatively uncoded and exhilarating (for more on the psychological benefits of taking risks, see Gurstelle [2009]). These neurological responses create affective association with places, the sublime experience that explorers find difficulty in relaying (Rapp 2010). So, ‘in comparison to individualised formulations of emotion, affect [here] is thus more attentive to both the embodied and intersubjective dimensions of human feeling’ (Condradson 2005, 105).

In our relationship with places, especially in the context of heritage management, we often ask ‘What meaning shall we assign this?’ or ‘Why is this place important?’ We rely on the voice of a guide, a narrator or an expert to mediate our relationship and to explain why the place is significant. Less often do we let places speak to us directly. However, ‘history, in the hands of a professional historian, is bound to present itself as an esoteric form of knowledge’ (Samuel 1994, 3). In the art of urban exploration, it is ‘not the philosopher or the scientist who [do] the pioneering but the solitary, uninformed traveller, setting out, hardly knowing why, in search of a new kind of knowledge’ (Jackson 1980, 4). If urban explorers, as Dsankt tells me, ‘do it because we want to do it, not out of a grand sense of preservation’, what then can we learn from taking the unguided tour? What might we learn when the important historical attributes of a place, for instance the intense working conditions experienced by employees over the course of many years (Milkman 1997), is overwhelmed by the sensory and affective experience of simply being there, watching those histories slip into oblivion?

It is perhaps the case that in such situations, explorers are less connected to the histories of those places than they might like to think. Yet it is not possible to quantitatively or qualitatively measure our affective relationships, the extent to which, for instance, atmospheric attunements emerging from concremented memories in places have the ability to affect us (Stewart 2011), for many times this registers viscerally and/or precognitively and can only be decoded in the aftermath. What we can say with some conviction is that exploration of these places, in the here and now, stretches the *histories* of these places into the *stories* of these places (Lorimer 2003), extending an ongoingness of place that persists before, during and after the exploration event. In cases where we are not likely to rely on urban exploration accounts to relay the historic significance of a place, the particular reverence that it pays the place itself—the small details and the forgotten traces—should surely be seen as a welcome addition to a heritagescape many see as rendered increasingly banal by negotiations with policies of economic relevance. When I asked Silent Motion on our way out of Sinteranlage whether he felt he learned anything about the place, he told me, ‘Exploration is, on some level, always a process of becoming less ignorant; you can’t have an experience like that and walk away with nothing.’

Mortal Architecture: Breaking Down Motor City

What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow out of this stony rubbish?

(T. S. Eliot, *The Waste Land* [1922, 1]).

I arrived in Detroit to meet with Marc Explo, a well-known explorer from France, in the context of ongoing journalistic debate around the nature, importance and future of the urban ruins that comprise much of the city today. These discussions often focus on a concept called ‘ruin porn’ (Rosenberg 2011): the rigorous popular documentation of dereliction in an economically devastated city desperately trying to rework its public image away from those associations. The ruins are a reminder of a time when Detroit thrived during the Second World War and in the postwar period producing weapons and cars. Eventually the city was crippled by unsustainable union wages, decreasing markets, manufacturing dependency, foreign competition and social tensions (Boyle 2001).

After sleeping in the derelict Michigan Central Station, we continued on to explore the almost 350,000-square-metre industrial ruin of the Fisher 21 automotive body plant (Fisher Body 21). Local explorer David Kohrman describes this as:

the ruin ... that best symbolizes Detroit ... No cars were manufactured here but the car bodies produced by Fisher became the industry standard. Fisher Body 21 was the birthplace for the bodies of countless Cadillacs (Kohrman 2005).

Inside, we found an empty multilevel edifice with some large industrial machinery (likely too large to get out of the building) left behind. We went to the roof where we imagined workers taking cigarette breaks, discussing home life, when they expected to get their next pay raise or their fears over the automation of jobs within the factory. We found remnants of assembly line tracks leading to what might have been paint booths (Figure 3.5) and were able to unravel some of the functions of the factory, imagining parts descending level by level to the delivery dock on the ground floor. Working our way through the ghosts of the production process, we had lively discussions about what things might be, cautiously tiptoeing between rooms expecting to run into people at any point. Ruins are never really empty in the strictest sense; an imagined presence always creates a tangible hauntology (Holloway and Kneale 2008). We negotiated an ongoing edge of possible encounter. We also discussed the fate of the building, which would clearly be demolition or continued neglect despite its important role in the history of Detroit.

Later, looking online as we drove to the next plant we wanted to reconnoitre, we found numerous accounts of Fisher Body 21 after its closing by urban explorers, stretching back to 1996. These accounts provide at least 15 years of solid illegal photodocumentation of the slow decay of the building, the gradual disappearance of the artefacts and metal inside, the inevitable smashing of windows and the encroachment of graffiti and piles of used syringes in secluded rooms (‘maybe old managers’ offices?’ Marc mused). Some of



Figure 3.5. The remains of the assembly line, Fisher Body 21, Detroit, Michigan, United States of America. Photograph by Bradley I. Garrett

the graffiti was quite poignant (Figure 3.6), and it occurred to me that one of the reasons why people enjoy discussing, exploring and photographing the ruins of the Motor City is that thriving creative edge; artistic liberation today often seems to flourish where capitalism has taken a fatal dive. More recently, explorers in Germany told me that they felt modern Detroit has resonance with 1990s Berlin, a place of recent personal liberation sparked by systematic institutional failure. We were shocked how much potentially occupiable space was in Detroit; it felt like a free zone for creation, and explorers (among many other groups) are clearly tapping into that potential.

As Leary (2011) suggests, Detroit's ruins appear to be 'a potent symbol of decline and the inevitable cycles of capitalist booms and busts'. Buck-Morris writes in *The Dialectics of Seeing* (1991, 164) that throughout Benjamin's *The Arcades Project* (1999), 'the image of the "ruin" is emblematic not only of the transitoriness and fragility of capitalist culture, but also its destructiveness'. Imaginations are bolstered by the thought that we are seeing ghosts from a future yet to come (Pile 2005). In exploring the ruins of a failed past, after hearing the stories of workers being shut out of factories after 30 years of dedicated corporate service (Cowie and Heathcott 2003, 15; also see Milkman 1997), explorers don't just experience that surreal collapse of time and space that exists within the ruin; they remind themselves that everything is transient and that anything we think we can hold on to is illusion (DeSilvey 2011).



Figure 3.6. A message left behind, Fisher Body 21, Detroit, Michigan, United States of America. Photograph by Bradley I. Garrett

Perhaps, on some level, this creates apathy toward history that can be translated as a lack of interest, or even generational selfishness, but it also reminds explorers that they must take responsibility to prepare for the next inevitable economic failure. In that realist future, Ninjalicious (1997, 2) argues, what we need are not wilderness survival skills but:

... urban survival skills. Fence climbing. Lockpicking. Breaking and entering. Wall scaling. Trap detection. Building navigation. Hole avoidance. Where better to foster such skills than in abandoned buildings?

Urban explorers are largely ambivalent about national economic prosperity. However, there is an identifiable strain of libertarianism throughout the community which is connected to the notion of personal responsibility for risk-taking (High and Lewis 2007, 61; RomanyWG 2010, n.p.). Explorers enjoy the excesses of capitalism—the construction, the development and the spoils—yet they also celebrate economic and capital failure by exploring 'ruin' space and by imagining themselves as the keepers of secrets that would put them at an advantage in a dystopic future. While this would technically be the case—given that explorers know intimately the infrastructural networks of cities, including places like nuclear bunkers, and have access to these places in a way the general populace does not—explorers also like to imagine themselves as being more heroic than they are. It is as if being gatekeepers to that information already makes them postmodern superheroes. Of course, given the surreal nature of the experiences explorers have, it may not be surprising to imagine the lines between fantasy and reality in the practice often become blurred.

Paul Dobraszczyk writes of a trip taken to the exploded nuclear reactor at Chernobyl which 'incorporated elements of both dark tourism and urban exploration' (2010, 372) as he searched for what Susan Sontag referred to as confrontations with 'inconceivable terror' (Sontag 1965, 52). Dobraszczyk writes:

Coupled with a century or more of apocalyptic visions of ruined cities in literature and cinema and a recent emphasis on realistic visions of urban destruction in many post-apocalyptic films and computer games, the links between real and imagined ruination are becoming increasingly blurred (Dobraszczyk 2010, 371, referencing the work of Davis 2002, 5).

This imagination, as Dobraszczyk found, is an undeniable part of the allure of urban exploration, often tied to lingering Cold War imaginaries. We can find resonance with this in Sebald's description of the derelict Orford Ness military installation:

... the closer I came to these ruins ... the more I imagined myself among the remains of our own civilization after its extinction in some future catastrophe. To me too, as for some latter day stranger ignorant of the nature of our society

wandering about among heaps of scrap metal and defunct machinery, the beings who had once lived and worked here were an enigma, as was the purpose of the primitive contraptions and fittings inside the bunkers, the iron rails under the ceilings, the hooks of the still partially tiled walls, the showerheads the size of plates, the ramps and soakaways (Sebald and Hulse 1998, 237).

Similarly, Veitch tours the remains of the Nevada Atomic Test Site, where he finds not the expected response of melancholy or nostalgia upon entering the ruins, but 'Baudelaire's Satanic laughter', a terror so visceral the only possible response is humour, as if the emotions have been short-circuited by the horror (Veitch 2010). This state of being overwhelmed by the environment or situation is becoming less prevalent in a society which prides itself on maintaining order, depriving the individual of agency over their existential trajectory in the same way that regulation of ruins in a heritage context might preclude the possibility of inscribing our own stories into them. At the same time, while our daily life may seem to be 'on rails', Lyng writes that (compare with Erikson 1976; Lasch 1978):

... increasing numbers of people in modern postindustrial society feel threatened, both physically and mentally, by forces entirely beyond their control, for example, threats posed by toxic chemicals in the environment, nuclear war, financial instability, the general instability of personal relationships, and so forth (Lyng 1990, 873).

And so, developing an embodied situational tactic for coping with dystopic future imaginations and developing the proficiency of the self and community to persevere in the face of utter catastrophe, the logical trajectory of a system dependent on constant growth, endless resource extraction and financial speculation seems logical, even as the armchair spectator may see these activities as inherently bizarre.

Conclusions

I argue that the fascination with industrial ruin exploration is nothing less than an interest in trying to get back to what we have lost in late capitalism: a sense of place, a sense of community and a sense of self. As Marc Explo told me later back in London, 'We want to be a part of a tribe again, where relationships matter'. And although urban explorers often pass through places rather than staking them out in any permanent way, urban exploration as a practice is a vital bridge or gateway, because it finally makes the move from imagination to action. As the explorers from the New York Jinx crew suggest:

... the system is alive, adapting, and a wilderness is born, shaped by the very drive that impels us to explore it, too vast and promiscuous to be fully known, but always rewarding further searches (Davis and Leikowitz 2003, 78).

Through these three case studies, I argue that the spatial anxiety that manifests itself when people are excluded from places registers with particular ferocity when those places are deemed to be of popular historic, memorial or archaeological value. A sense that people are being 'robbed' of their heritage is often voiced by urban explorers, of which some have labelled themselves 'guerrilla preservationists' and take it upon themselves to avoid being 'passive consumers of History with a capital H' (RomanyWG 2010, n.p.). As the explorer RomanyWG writes in his book *Beauty in Decay*, he is interested neither in being 'spoonfed by the Discovery Channel' or in having history 'intellectualised beyond our reach in a lecture hall' (RomanyWG 2010, n.p.). This sentiment is echoed by many of my project participants, who tell me that they are doing the work of 'making places ours again'.

Perhaps ironically then, as an academic geographer, I am fascinated by the spatial significance and political salience of opening closed space to document the largely unseen world. For me, this is the pulse of urban exploration, a sort of rogue archaeology that may lead to preservation where public pressure is mobilised by exposure to explorers' uncovering and documentation of 'hidden heritage'. At the same time, I want to make an argument for urban exploration as a practice open to material transience (DeSilvey 2011). Urban explorers may appear militant in their documentation of places, yet they remain largely ambivalent, or even celebratory, about the eventual deanthropomorphisation and destruction that all architecture will eventually experience. Finally, I want to argue that an acceptance of mortality that comes with being witness to, and indeed a participant in, the unregulated, unstalled death of places also leads explorers to question larger assumptions about the inherent stability of late capitalism, to imagine a world where the explorers of ruins and infiltrators of secret urban spaces become the spatial sages of postcapitalist society. As Winch tells me, urban exploration is:

... like postmodern archaeology. We are not looking to learn anything new but to learn in new ways—through experience rather than representation. We go into a place, we dig around, we interpret it ourselves.

Urban explorers are searching for authenticity they can touch, irrespective of whether it is perceived to be right or wrong, large or small scale, sanctioned or unsanctioned. DeSilvey asks us 'what kind of cultural work might be required to give time back to a timeless landscape, and to open up an appreciation of the past not as static and settled, but as open and active?' (DeSilvey 2011, 5). Perhaps Winch responds to that call when he tells me, inside a derelict Soviet military barracks later on our trip into Germany, that 'a museum is a collection of various items—but this is real, this is where people lived.... That's what I want to participate in'.

Despite this preference for encounter with the 'real', the embodied and the 'authentic', explorers inevitably become a component of the mythology of the places they explore. Through blog postings, photo sharing and, most important, storytelling (Cameron 2012), explorers 'become one ingredient in an existing hybridity. By entering the hybrid we change it; and in each situation we play a different role' (Lippard 1997, 5–6). However, ruins offer something different in terms of building and maintaining hybridity in two ways. First, as I have shown in Sinteranlage, experiences in ruins are often incalculable and inarticulable. Stories brought back 'from the field' then act as a motivator to experience those places anew, encountering others to 'layer up' the stories that dwell there. Second, while many places offer a predictable template for experience, such as a museum or an airport terminal, ruins offer a perhaps more tempting template for extraordinary experience. When retelling stories of a successful exploration, the only thing one can usually be sure of is that experience is gone. What someone else will encounter will be different because space, time and perhaps social context will have changed (remembering the ruin lacks an ordered, regulated material trajectory). However, what may be most interesting here is what that story-layering creates. The combined efforts of explorers as popular documentarians often means that collectively, a history of a site can be constructed as 'a social form of knowledge, in any given instance, of a thousand different hands' (Samuel 1994, 8). It is through these fictive, narrative and experiential constructions that urban explorers democratise history.

Urban exploration, in particular industrial ruin exploration, gives agency to the ruin. Those memorial layers, often thick and difficult to decode, reward the explorer with an opportunity for a visceral reading—a bodily interpretation of the material and immaterial histories of places—where 'decay implies not just evanescence but the accretion of experience' (Lowenthal 1985, 179). Taking a geographic perspective on decay and ruination, despite the potential downfall of reading more widely than deeply, also allows for a reading alongside, across or against the grain of history (Cooke 2003). This can breathe new life into old stories and bring to the fore people and places previous consigned to the margins. This legacy, preserved in hundreds of thousands of stories and images from hidden places across the globe, will be the urban explorer's lasting social legacy long after these places have crumbled to dust and been swallowed by the earth.

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