THE AESTHETIC OF DECAY: SPACE, TIME, AND PERCEPTION

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The Aesthetic of Decay:  
Space, Time, and Perception

A thesis submitted to the University of Cincinnati,  
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There is a specific aesthetic that exists amongst architecture in the absence of routine human interaction; it is the aesthetic of decay. This aesthetic develops over time, as buildings cease to function in the way they were originally designed to do so. As this happens, such buildings become leftover, forgotten spaces that go unseen by the bulk of society; they are left to minor, often illicit alternate uses.

This makes the task of explaining the aesthetic rather difficult, and extra attention must be paid to the methodology that best accomplishes that task: photography. Photographs tell the tale of what these spaces are, in the clearest and most straightforward way. An exploration through photography coupled with a secondary level of exploration into how the space came to be, is capable of informing a reactionary exploration into what the space can become.

The goal of such an exploration is to not only understand this, but also to exploit the individual elements of it in order to inform an architectural approach. The aesthetic of decay has developed over time, and alternative uses should do the same; minor issues have drastically affected the decay of the building, and minor interventions will likewise affect the function of the space.
Acknowledgements:

This thesis project would not have been possible without the guidance and assistance of several educators, colleagues, and friends.

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INTRODUCTION

The aesthetic of decay is particularly present in the American Midwest, especially within its urban areas. On the internet, in galleries, and in published works, an interest in urban decay, and specifically photography of it, has grown over the recent past. This is indicative of the inherit beauty that many find in architecture that has lost purpose. Many of these works not only focus on, but rely upon the status quo. That is, if one finds beauty in dilapidated buildings, historical preservation or adaptive reuse could sometimes be viewed as problematic. Despite the architectural interest in preservation that has grown continuously over the past decades, a similar interest that feeds off of the forgotten aspects of our historical infrastructure has also emerged. This thesis serves not as a critique of preservation or urban renewal, but as a critique of the perception behind the initiatives for them. It explains how urban decay is characterized by a unique and unprogrammed function that is intertwined with an aesthetic style that can be fully described as that of a modern industrial ruin. These ruins have a place within the constantly changing realm of urbanity.

The first chapter of this document explores the concept of decay in specificity. The approach to explain the topic in depth is made through various lenses, each a contemporary or historical viewpoint on the topic. A focus is placed on the word decay itself; a word that can serve as either noun or verb, both of which serve an integral role in studying the aforementioned aesthetic.

Chapter two is an exploration of the perception of decay. This perception is primarily one experienced directly by few, but indirectly by many via various media, photography in particular. This notion has an immense effect on any potential architectural approaches. More importantly, the presentation and reception of the aforementioned media should play an integral part in any solution.

The third chapter describes a design proposal for a specific site in Cincinnati, Ohio. While the concept is intended to serve as a model process, the details of the process are heavily vested in local site conditions, and thus the third and fourth chapters are heavily reliant upon one another. The process outlined in the third chapter, however, is a direct reaction to the research and observations described in the previous chapters. The solution presented is inherently based upon the aesthetic of decay.

The fourth chapter is an in depth analysis of the site utilized in this thesis as a model for
decaying urban buildings. The information here, coupled with the process outlined in the third chapter, drives a design solution.

The fifth and final chapter consists of the culmination of the thesis design project. The section is heavily image based, and provides visual results of the previously outlined process.

Altogether, this document provides a model process and a specific example of the application of that process. The process is an outcome of the concept of decay, while the example is an outcome of a local application of the process.
1 URBAN DECAY

1.1 Decay

The term decay as applied to architecture is commonly accepted as a negative state for a building to exist in. It summarizes what happens to a building once standard maintenance stops taking place, or in other words once a building is abandoned. This abandonment occurs for a breadth of reasons, most of which are tracked back to the obsolescence or perceived obsolescence of the building itself. This obsolescence is either formal (as in the building has become dysfunctional), or simply by preference. Between lack of maintenance and a cessation of day-to-day use, decay of architectural features and forms takes places. As this decay perpetuates, an architectural ruin is eventually born. These modern variations of ruins exist amongst contemporary cities, and are either overlooked or mistreated by urban designers, politicians, land owners, and architects alike.
The negative perception associated with words like abandonment, decay, and blight has blinded the potential for a romantic aesthetic to be understood with regards to such places. The method of reuse normally put forth by established forces thus fails to account for the romantic aspects of the places being reused, and small pieces of unrepeatable history are often inadvertently lost. A simple keyword progression summarizes this process:

\textit{Abandonment - Decay - Ruin - Romantic - Reuse}

1.1.1 Review: Hugh Hardy - The Romance of Abandonment: Industrial Parks

Architect and critic Hugh Hardy discusses the "Romance of Abandonment" in an article from the fall 2005 journal \textit{Places}.\footnote{Hardy, Hugh. "The Romance of Abandonment: Industrial Parks." \textit{Places} 17, no. 3 (2005): 32-37.} The focus of the piece is on the aesthetic and experiential qualities possessed by the "plants, mines, mills and factories" of the Industrial Age. Importance is placed on the historical legacy such works of architecture have, as well as the subjective, yet dominant and startling beauty. In discussing the nature of reuse and development, these focal points are clearly represented. However, the piece proceeds to make other observations, such as the point that innovation is easily sparked by allowing remnants of the past to survive.

Naturally, there is a problem associated with renovation or reuse of any historical buildings in terms of preservation of aesthetic. This problem is even greater when it comes to the "behemoths of heavy industry," as Hardy points out. The architecture was designed to specifically suit a single purpose, often times perfectly accommodating of machinery or processes housed within. This could be perceived as an example of functional obsolescence leading to abandonment, and thus decay. Because of the unique design and often gigantic size, they have a sort of "startling beauty." However, this makes reuse difficult, even in comparison to renovation of similar, or even older historic buildings. The lack of accommodation of new program leads into what Hardy identifies as the three main issues concerning reuse of heavy industrial complexes: "The nature of the reuse (what activities to include); the availability of funding; and the aesthetic approach taken." While these primary issues are very concrete and normal from most adaptive reuse standpoints, Hardy constantly advocates for the preservation of romantic aesthetic while addressing the problems commonly faced by political
groups and developers who possess the fundamental driving force behind any potential reuse. In a sense, Hardy focuses on the aesthetic of abandoned industrial sites while prescribing a solution that fits within the status quo.

There are two extremes in terms of industrial redevelopment. Hardy points out that complete demolition and new construction lies on one end, and preservation as a museum on the other. Between these are a variety of mixed uses, including “housing, retail stores, offices, and entertainment venues.” Using the Landschaftspark in Duisburg, Germany as an example (perhaps because it had won a *Places* award in 2005) the author points out the interesting juxtaposition created by converting the lands around abandoned, decaying steel mills and coal plants into natural green space. Aside from the aesthetic, the environmental benefits associated with this reuse are often reason enough to pursue such plans. There are other rewards that Hardy points out, namely the potential to spur urban renewal in surrounding communities, create profit and a stronger urban tax base, and even encourage tourism - as a sort of monument to our nation’s industrial past.

The second contributing problem associated with reuse is funding. There are often a large group of potential funding sources, and an even larger mix of groups and persons with concerns. Because of this preexisting setup any plans “require consensus among varied constituencies.” The funding sources are often a combination of various private and public organizations, and thus renovation “requires a concerted effort by the surrounding community.”

Environmental factors also have a priority in when it comes to funding. In the United States contaminated places known as “brownfields” are subject to federally mandated remediation. Thus, funding is available for this aspect but often significantly slows a project. Even in the extreme case of complete demolition, this remediation work is a requirement in the case of most industrial sites. Hardy cites the problems associated with the Bethlehem Steel plant in Pennsylvania as a good representation of how environmental site conditions have the power to stall a project perpetually.

There are plenty of successful reuses of abandoned industrial era sites, though. In Birmingham, Alabama the Sloss Furnaces have become the only blast furnaces in the United States that are preserved as a museum of industry. A varied program of community uses - educational, cultural, and recreational programs - are currently undertaken at the site. The project was funded by public and private funds, and is now designated a National Historic Landmark. The aforementioned Bethlehem

2 ibid.
Steel plant, although stalled, was the site of interesting planning. It was once the second largest steel plant in the world, and proposals call for renovating the grounds as a casino, entertainment, and retail complex that would provide the financial justification for preserving the existing facilities. The Landschaftspark in Duisburg, the High Line in New York City, and the Promenade Plantée in Paris are a few more examples that illustrate the key points outlined by Hardy throughout his article. At Landschaftspark, which Hardy identifies as the most spectacular reclamation effort, the balance between the two extremes (demolition and static preservation) is at a perfect equity. The mix of nature and industrial ruin allows a supple modern use, while preserving the true character of the industrial facilities. The High Line and Promenade Plantée are other examples of this balanced juxtaposition.

On one extreme end of the reuse spectrum are places like Sloss Furnaces, where the original purpose and character of the site are clearly preserved. On the other are the Tate Modern in London and Dia Beacon in New York. These sites offer hardly any notion of former industry. While still successful as renovations, the romantic beauty of the historic industrial ruin has been erased, and a completely new aesthetic has been applied to the stripped, blank canvas. Hardy arrives at the conclusion that preserving the existing and sinister beauty of industrial ruin should be a priority, and it can be quite successful.

While mammoth ruins of industry still dot the landscape of most industrial age cities, the processes observed at a number of sites have shown to be successful from a very functional standpoint. There is value to reuse, not only in terms of revitalizing communities and returning profit, but also with regards to culture; local urban life, community, arts, and heritage are all greatly affected by reuse of abandoned industrial places. Through explaining the past, architects and developers can foster innovation, and the "rich history and offbeat aesthetic," of industrial sites are catalysts for that process. Much potential lies within these sites that exist all around the world, especially parts of the American Midwest, and specifically sites in Cincinnati. Hardy explains this from an architectural, economical perspective. He writes with prescriptive notions of how to physically bring about the solutions he describes, and takes a very concrete and formal perspective, overall.

3 ibid.
1.1.2 Review: Tim Edensor - Industrial Ruins: Space, Aesthetics and Materiality

Tim Edensor, a researcher and professor at The Manchester Institute of Social & Spatial Transformations, discusses the "space, aesthetics, and materiality," of forgotten industrial architecture. Edensor focuses his book Industrial Ruins: Space, Aesthetics and Materiality on the abstract program that is so often possessed by abandoned architecture of the Industrial Age. Through photographs and convincing narrative, Edensor shows how neglected sites accommodate certain activities that "over-designed spaces of the city," are incapable of supporting, and it is the disordered and fragmented sensuality of such places that leads to this. It is the ambiguity and surprise that makes industrial ruins an important cultural element, he argues. In the book's introduction, Edensor presents this statement: "I want to highlight how the contingent, ineffable, unrepresentable, uncoded, sensual, heterogeneous possibilities of contemporary cities are particularly evident in their industrial ruins." While he stops short of suggesting best practice examples, it shows that there exists a certain character of importance with regards to industrial ruin.4

Edensor concludes by making a point that is not often considered by designers. It serves as a critique of urban life, stating that we currently live "In a period in which strategies for arranging urban space seem insufficiently nuanced and notions of civic order are gaining a stranglehold which threatens to choke much of the life out of cities." He argues that over-design, be it demolition and replacement of industrial decay, or even adaptive reuse, leads to a sterile urban environment that possesses less character. By appreciating decaying industrial sites, designers allow residents to have "Other ways for using and reading the city, for making space in individual ways, creating paths and performing otherwise, sensing, fantasizing and desiring in the city."5

In summary, Edensor believes that (at least in the short-term) abandoned buildings can be left as is, and serve as unprogrammed leftover space that has a positive effect on the community as a whole. In Cincinnati and similar cities this already occurs, and the problem lies in perception. Urban decay is considered blight, and the sub-cultural service they provide is ignored. While technology and demand may not only make adaptive reuse easier in the long term, but also merit it, the short term purpose of abandoned structures should not be overlooked. Far too often does ignorance and/or negation of the positive contributions abandoned buildings offer to society lead to demolition and

5 ibid 171.
loss of historic fabric.

Edensor, as a professor of "Social and Spatial Transformations," is fundamentally perceiving abandoned spaces from the standpoint of their sociological existence. Unlike Hardy, his viewpoint is not from a concrete, architectural perspective. Rather, it is purely analytical and conscientiously thoughtful.

1.1.3 Review: Niall Kirkwood - Manufactured Sites: Re-thinking Post-industrial Landscape

Aside from the abstract and ambiguous concepts of aesthetic and unprogrammed functions, there are concrete and objective issues associated with abandoned industrial sites. In a recent book compiled by Niall Kirkwood, a professor of Landscape Architecture at the Harvard Graduate School of Design, some of these issues are studied and presented while the qualities of aesthetic and character are kept in mind. This is described in the introduction by Kirkwood, who states that "Two central themes of the book are the range of emerging technologies and design strategies used in reclaiming waste and contaminated urban sites and the creative alliances of technology and design that result." He continues throughout the book to discuss modern technology and how it specifically allows designers to approach industrial sites that are often contaminated. Kirkwood, with the assistance of several other contributors, points out several examples that are deemed successful in terms of the two main focus points of the book. Peter Latz, a landscape architect and contributor to the book, discusses a certain industrial ruin that was restored as an attraction within a park. He states that "The idea to develop the future out of human destruction has obviously existed for some time..." and continues, "We have to ask ourselves which spaces from among the dilapidated and redundant places we want to use and occupy, and which of those have to be changed by the mark of a cultural intervention or the remediation of historical contamination." Overall, Kirkwood and his contributing authors present a cohesive strategic guide for approaching abandoned industrial sites from a design perspective.6

The example discussed by Peter Latz in Manufactured Sites lies in the northern Ruhr Valley

of Germany, and is the site of one of the most massive revitalization projects that has taken place anywhere in the world (Hugh Hardy also refers to this site as an example in the aforementioned article “The Romance of Abandonment: Industrial Parks”). Over 100 projects occupying nearly 600 acres have been undertaken as part of a massive framework plan that has a focus on not only bringing new life into the blighted area, but also on preserving the character and unique beauty of the industrial infrastructure that is characteristic of the region. The redevelopment that can be seen here is important in that creates a link between contemporary cultural and economic needs and the industrial past of the blighted remains. Rather than the popular approach of remediating blight, the formerly existing conditions of the Ruhr Valley were used as design. From the onset of the design process, a certain beauty was perceived amongst the ruins of industry, and this perception helped to guide designers.

The scope of the work at Duisburg-Nord contains elements of economic, social, and environmental sustainability; indeed these concepts are all inherent in the nature of reuse. From an economic standpoint, land and buildings that had ceased to operate entirely have now been returned to a use. Through fees, donations, and volunteer efforts the park itself can operate successfully, while the grander impact on the surrounding community is even greater. The hundreds of thousands of annual visitors have also contributed to new growth in surrounding business areas. Nearby housing, as part of the larger framework plan, has also contributed to economic growth. From a social standpoint, eliminating a massive, unproductive site in close proximity to neighborhoods contributes to the success of the social environment. The environmental benefits of such a project speak for themselves. Large amounts of chemical contamination that would have otherwise slowly dissipated into the environment causing adverse affects on the surrounding communities were instead dealt with in a way that would cause the least amount of side effects. To summarize, the overall framework plan instituted in the Ruhr Valley has created semi-urban spaces that have performed successfully over the past twenty years. The combination of some surviving industry, new housing, renovated housing, and business districts were critical to the success of the park areas that have become iconic tourist attractions. The interaction of these community elements is what has allowed the overall framework plan to perform successfully.

What Kirkwood writes about is a combination of landscape architecture theory and real world

applications. His perspective, that of a landscape architecture professor, is quite clear. The perspective is analytical and based upon that of many built sites. From this analytical position, Kirkwood forms a prescriptive element that encapsulates the primary motivation behind the currently existing places, like the one described previously (Duisburg-Nord).

1.1.4 Review: Ignasi de Sola-Morales Rubio - Terrain Vague

Rubio writes of a concept he entitles the *terrain vague*. Through this concept he defines the empty, abandoned, and forgotten spaces within contemporary cities. His focus is on the absence of programmed use, and the activities of the subculture that occupies these places. As he puts it, “The relationship between the absence of use, of activity, and the sense of freedom, of expectancy, is fundamental to understanding the evocative potential of the city’s terrain vague. Void, absence, yet also promise, the space of the possible, of expectation.” The importance of abandoned spaces within the context of the city is massive and vital to the functional necessity of the city itself.

Rubio talks not only of the occurrences that take place within abandoned spaces, but also of the most common, albeit niche of a perspective, in which most people experience them. This perspective, though the eye of the urban photographer, shapes not only the perception of abandoned spaces, but how people react to the social circumstances surrounding them. He writes: “Yet by way of the photographic image we receive signals, physical impulses that steer in a particular direction the construction of an imaginary that we establish as that of a specific place or city.” Photographs represent these often overlooked spaces, and possess the potential to either represent the romantic beauty that they have, or to incite notions to fix or repair the perceived problems with the space.

The combined notions of the terrain vague and the photographic experience of them create an interesting potential. Rubio writes a powerful conclusion about the reactionary possibilities of the combination of these two concepts:

“...reflections of our own insecurity, of our vague wanderings through limitless spaces that, in our position external to the urban system, to power, to activity, constitute both a physical expression of our fear and insecurity and our expectation of the other, the alternative, the

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The terrain vague is an extremely diverse, important space in the overall framework or urbanity, the inherent complexities of which are often overlooked. This is evident in several examples (even within the aforementioned literature reviews) of reuse. Urban designers still constantly infill, demolish, and replace these spaces. There is little or no established appreciation of the terrain vague. Rubio has the perspective to have that appreciation however, and it is evident in this piece.10

9 ibid 121.
10 ibid 124.
1.2 Decay and Time

Naturally, the process of decay takes place over time. It is difficult to comprehend, appreciate, and address the existence of decay without first considering the effects of time on architecture, especially architecture that has been abandoned. As mentioned in section 1.1.1, decay is “what happens to a building once standard maintenance stops taking place...” It is possible to understand how decay has come to be by observing and researching elements that contribute to the vacancy of buildings that are decaying. For instance, the following diagrams track a few specific, quantitative percentages that represent the cost of construction and maintenance, as well as the percentage of the building that is programmed and functional. Aside from hard numbers, the implied notions of the intended architectural aesthetic and the aesthetic of decay are overlaid in order to demonstrate the relationships between the quantitative and qualitative elements of decay, with regards to time. The legend to the right applies to the diagrams on the following pages:

![Diagram Legend](image1.png)

Figure 1.2 - Cincinnati North Hotel

Figure 1.3 - Diagram legend
Zach Fein - The Aesthetic of Decay
1.3 Ruin: A Product of Decay

As has been shown decay is a process as well as an adjective (for example, “a decayed building”). At a certain, albeit ambiguous point, decaying architecture reaches the state of ruin. The Oxford English Dictionary defines the noun form of the word ruin in many ways, however the most applicable to the area of study is: “The state consequent upon giving way and falling down; a ruinous condition.” Usually when used in reference to architecture, the term ruin is concerned with ancient works that have decayed over hundreds or thousands of years, and still act as architectural expressions of culture, and on an exclusively aesthetic level: beauty. When applied to many of the great architectural works of the industrial revolution, this term and this definition are also befitting.

In a historical sense, the word is relatively young. It’s first usage came in the late 1300’s when

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it appeared in early modern English texts; at this point it was used to mean “act of giving way and falling down.” Nearly all of the initial uses of the word applied to complete destruction of a thing, with several examples concerning the apocalypse. In a sermon by J. Daus in 1560, where the word appears: “Partly by the ruine and fall of houses,” the meaning is still apocalyptic in nature, but has a literal architectural reference. Houses, specifically, are described as being ruined. The image of ruined houses as an apocalyptic symbol in the early usage of the word becomes interesting when examples from centuries later are observed.

During the birth of Romanticism in the late 18th century, the concept of ruin played an important role in the development of visual arts. In denying classical style, romanticism placed a special emphasis on emotion with regards to aesthetic beauty; specifically, the realm of negative emotions played a key role. Aside from the emotional aspects, romanticists found attractiveness in the exotic and unknown. This combination lead to a direct and specific interest in the remnants of Greek and Roman architecture that many Western Europeans had begun to observe during their educations. This interest began to manifest visually in works of art, and later physically in works of architecture.

The first architectural interest of note concerning the word ruin was one of the archaeological realm. Visiting, documenting, and studying ruins of the ancient world became a popular field of study during the 17th and 18th centuries. Simultaneously, a design and construction concept took the newly attractive idea of ruin into account in terms of landscape design; the English Garden style possessed a very specific concern with the aesthetic of ruins. The picturesque qualities of the style provided sculpted views that were often directed at recreated ruins of the ancient world, particularly at places such as the Stowe Landscape Gardens and Dessau-Wörlitz. These examples show that not only was beauty found amongst ruin, but so much that the aesthetic qualities of ruin were duplicated at great cost.

Both archeology and the English Garden, as well as the romantic beauty of ruin were born during the age of Enlightenment. The Enlightenment, which focused on reason as a primary factor, was the first time that the definition of the term ruin transcended from a negative, threatening, and dangerous word to one that possessed an inherent beauty. A beauty that was a combination of

12 ibid  
13 ibid.
reason and romanticism, with values lying both in the historical significance of a given ruin as well as the startling aesthetic qualities.14

In modern times, the word ruin has retained the same meaning that it developed during the Enlightenment. However, aside from having consistently applied to classical and ancient works or apocalyptic destruction, it has recently been applied to modern architectural works that have been abandoned, particularly those of and relating to the industrial revolution. Such book titles as *Industrial Ruins* by Tim Edensor and *Ghostly Ruins: America’s Forgotten Architecture* by Harry Skrdla are recent examples of this newly applied meaning. The buildings featured in these publications (amongst many others) are relatively young and differ from earlier applications of the term ruin in that they do not represent the destruction and loss of culture of past civilizations, but rather a lost facet of current civilization. This signifies a loss of some of the apocalyptic undertones associated with the word, yet shows that it retains a notion of romantic concepts of beauty. In fact, in *Industrial Ruins* the term is described in depth and possesses a wide breadth of meaning. Author Tim Edensor first begins by identifying an official definition: “Industrial ruins belong to the assignation, and are, in official parlance, ‘scars on the landscape’ or ‘wastelands’ whose use-value has disappeared.” In describing context and neighborhood relation, however, he goes on: “Ruins may become spaces for leisure, adventure, cultivation, acquisition, shelter, and creativity.” This is just one example of recent literature that explore the concepts of contemporary uses of modern ruins. Not only does the term now carry a negative, destructive quality and a possession of romantic beauty, but it implies a subcultural programmatic use. It implies the notions of remembering the past and the sensitivity of man’s creations, but it also now hints at uses such as plundering, home-making, adventure, leisure, and art space. These uses of subculture, often illegal, are now associated with modern ruin.15

The growing usage of the term ruin has ever-expanding effects on culture and society. Lebbeus Woods, in *War and Architecture* writes about the physical form of ruin:

“...their forms must be respected as an integrity, embodying a history that must not be denied. In their damaged states they suggest new forms of thought and comprehension, and suggest new conceptions of space that confirm the potential of the human to integrate itself, to be whole and free outside of any predetermined, totalizing system. There is an ethical and

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moral commitment in such an existence and therefore a basis for community”

It appears that modern examples of ruin not only provide an opportunity for designers, but demand responsibility. 

Some of the other meaningful and applicable definitions of ruin, as per Oxford English Dictionary:

- “The state consequent upon giving way and falling down; a ruinous condition.”
- “The condition of being ruined, of having been reduced to an abject or hopeless state.”
- “The remains of a decayed and fallen building, town, etc.”


2 PERCEPTIONS OF URBAN DECAY

“Yet by way of the photographic image we receive signals, physical impulses that steer in a particular direction the construction of an imaginary that we establish as that of a specific place or city.”

- Ignasi de Sola-Morales Rubio, Terrain Vague.

“Photography displaces architecture from the context of its physical site to the context of its media presentation.”

- Mitchell Schwarzer, Zoomscape.

2.1 Photographic Perception of Decay

Photography has influenced the perception of architecture from its very advent. The first photograph ever taken, a heliograph produced by Joseph Nicéphore Niépce, required eight hours
of exposure, and thus required a still, steady, and immovable subject: the buildings adjacent to
the photographers workshop.\[^{18}\] As much as photography and architecture have both advanced
dramatically since that day, the inherent link between them has also grown in complexity and
overall impact. Architecture, as a static construct, serves as a perfect subject for photography, while
photographs, an ever more transient two dimensional presentation, serves as a perfect means to
distribute visual depictions of architecture. In a recent book, *Zoomscape*, Mitchell Schwarzer claims
that “the modern understanding of architecture would be impossible without the information
conveyed rapidly and across great distances by photography.”\[^{19}\] Indeed, most of the world’s best
(and sometimes worst) examples of architecture are experienced through photography rather than
actual human interaction. For instance, while many people can recall what the Great Wall of China
or Taj Mahal look like, most have never been to these places. A series of photographic depictions of
such architecture construct a physical and spatial mental image of space.

In the introduction to the recent book *Reconstructing Space: Architecture in Recent German
Photography*, author Michael Mack takes the connection between architecture and photography to
an even greater level:

“If we judge the work of an architect according to what Adorno described as ‘the ability to
articulate space purposefully,’ then photographs have become the measure of that ability.
Architecture and photography have been inextricably linked ever since this medium, so
perfectly adapted to the two-dimensional representation of static space, came into existence.
Architecture has colluded with the camera’s ability to manipulate our sense of space, while
photography has been obsessively applied to the documentation and interpretation of
architecture as a manifestation of culture.”\[^{20}\]

Photographs not only depict architectural space and constructs to a wide audience, but they also
serve as a measure of success of space, or rather, the appearance of space. The reciprocal relationship
between architecture and photographs of it exists on a number of levels.

Alternatively, photographs encourage an interpretation that is based on a greater cultural

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\[^{19}\] ibid. 166.

Roland Barthes points out that “Thanks to its codes of connotation, the reading of the photograph is thus always historical; it depends on the reader's knowledge just as though it were a matter of real language, intelligible only if one has learned the signs.” Amongst a multitude of other readings, certain photographic elements (shown in figure 22.1) make up a specific visual language. While this language reads as a whole, even to those who do not directly recognize the signs (individual elements), studying and understanding those signs can have a dramatic influence on the representation of space.

Aside from the formal language of photography, there is also a greater social language. This language ultimately drives the interpretation of space with regards to the presentation media. As Schwarzer puts it, “Photography [...] removes the architectural work from its site, removes as well the dimensions of time and depth, reproduces its image, and introduces that image into new sites. Architecture constructs place; photography transforms place into media.” The disconnect between place and the media of presentation is particularly important when it involves abandoned, decaying places.

Because of the unique physical situation and context around decaying buildings, the role of photography is elevated in comparison to most forms of architecture. Put simply, most architecture is experienced via photography because of preference, or ease of access. While more people experience certain buildings via photography, there are, under normal circumstances, a smaller, specific group of people who interact with those buildings on an experiential level. Most abandoned, decaying buildings are only experienced through photographs of them, as abandonment almost always results in secured inaccessibility. This inaccessibility, while putting a more emphasized importance on the photography of space, also creates an unparalleled physical experience for the photographer.

PHOTOGRAPHIC ELEMENTS

**PERSPECTIVE**
A one point perspective is often used to depict interior architectural conditions. This composition allows for easy architectural study and alteration.

**BALANCE:**
Balance adds stability to a photo. Capturing a balance of abandoned space is particularly helpful in terms of making deductions of individual architectural elements.

**POINT OF INTEREST:**
Often a result of perspective, a singular point of interest provides a basic starting point for study of a photographed space, as well as future design iterations.

**CONTRAST:**
Contrast within a photograph of an abandoned space is important in terms of identifying potential activities; capturing light and dark spaces together helps to highlight the juxtaposition of those activities.

**FRAME:**
Framing a view is highly important not only in terms of the photographic composition, but also the study of the space pictured. A framed view can serve as a template for future designs.

**LIGHT:**
Natural lighting within a photo is key to depicting space as it appears. Particular types of lighting and times of day can highlight certain aspects of a space.

Figure 2.2 - Photographic elements diagram
2.2 Physical Perception of Decay

The perception of decayed, architectural space differs from the perception of typical space because of the nature of the concept of decay itself. While similarities exist amongst end users of all spaces, the inherent nature of the use of decayed space affects the perception greatly; certain aspects of space are amplified, while others are subdued or negligible. This is a product of the type of use abandoned spaces provide for; illicit and often illegal trespassing.

All spaces are experienced and perceived by basic architectural ideas such as form, color, light, time, etc. However, these elements provide a heightened contribution to the experience of abandoned, decaying space. It is possible for a photographer to use photographs as examples of

these heightened experiential qualities. Figure 2.4 is a study of two photographs of an abandoned space. The photographs are indicative of a typical abandoned building, specifically of the site that will be focused upon as a prime example later in this document. The aesthetic elements of the space pictured are broken down into those that are most characteristic of decay.

ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENTS

EMPTINESS:
One of the key physical components of abandoned buildings is a clear absence of objects and activity. This emptiness increases the power of certain localized objects and activities, however. Anything that occupies the void, no matter how trivial, is amplified in importance by the emptiness around it.

BROKEN WINDOWS:
Broken windows are, perhaps, one of the first and most obvious signs of abandonment of a structure. They are the quintessential component of decay, and were the prime example of the sociological effects of decay on communities, as outlined by theorists James Q. Wilson and George L. Kelling in their “Broken Windows Theory.”

STANDING WATER:
Leakage and standing water, oftentimes a result of the aforementioned broken windows and oftentimes a catalyst for the peeling of paint, leaves a distinguishable mark on abandoned, decaying space. Standing water results in reflection, humidity, mold, and other experiential qualities.

PEELING PAINT:
Similar to broken windows, peeling paint is a key component of decay, and a solid physical manifestation of absence of routine human interaction. Peeling paint is the result of improper care and conditioning of space.

DEBRIS:
Debris is the result of vandalism or neglect. Certain parts of a building can break and accumulate as debris, or be broken by vandals.

CRUMBLING STRUCTURE:
Aside from creating debris, crumbling structure stands out as one of the primary causes for concern in decaying buildings. It is the most intimidating physically visible element of decay, and poses the greatest concern for safety and stability of a given building.

Figure 2.4 - Architectural elements diagram
2.3 Perception and Prescription

The understanding of decaying space is limited on an experiential level, and elevated through the media of photography. This can provide for an aesthetic analysis of space, via photographs. The aesthetics of decay, coupled with a study of the function of abandoned places can ultimately provide for a prescription for reoccupation that respects the aesthetic of decay because it is born from it. This prescription is based on the link between the function and the aesthetic of decaying spaces. The following chapters further detail this prescription.
3 DESIGNING FOR DECAY

3.1 Traditional Reuse Strategies

With regards to decaying, abandoned buildings, typical strategies are, most commonly, one of the following: demolition, renovation, replacement, or continued neglect. These strategies do not take the existing aesthetic into account, and in some cases provide direct opposition to it. Each strategy has a major fault that ultimately highlights a need for a creative solution: demolition removes all traces of a building entirely; renovation provides for a complete redesign of space, replacement destroys evidence of the previous decay, and no action perpetuates common negative connotations. These points are illustrated in the diagrams on the following page:
Figure 3.2 - Traditional reuse strategies
3.2 Phased Program Approach

In order to reoccupy decaying, abandoned space in a way that respects the research presented in the previous chapters, the process of decay must be inverted. Complete preservation, adaptive reuse, or renovation are not always viable options due to the state of the existing structure, the location, modern technological needs, or, most commonly, financing and/or economic situations. In addition to the non-viability of those options, the inherent design solutions of each lacks a respect for decay. This absence of respect (by current reuse options) forms the basis for the concept of a phased program approach. Such an approach will, by the very nature of the notion, encapsulate a respect for and react to decay. The primary aspects of this approach are: the acceptance of decay, a perpetually evolving program, the aesthetic of the confines of that program, and a readdressing of the site of the decayed structure (what the decayed building means to its site and surroundings).

In detail, the site of focus for this thesis, the Crosley Building, is a vacant industrial building located in the Camp Washington area of Cincinnati, Ohio. As is the case with the vacant building type in general, the vacancy has, over time, created a space that allows for deviant and illicit public behavior. This behavior, in some sense, is a product of necessary public functions. These functions are uncoded, but they ultimately shape the usage of the building, as well as the public perception of it. In Industrial Ruins: Space, Aesthetics and Materiality author Tim Edensor points out that he wants “to highlight how the contingent, ineffable, unrepresentable, uncoded, sensual, heterogeneous possibilities of contemporary cities are particularly evident in their industrial ruins.” These properties can be exploited, programmatically, and assist in the creation of a quasi public space through a slow, phased process of reoccupation.

The program for the design of the Crosley Building is complex, in that it is a product of a phased reoccupation. The design itself will develop over a period of twenty years, and is primarily focused upon the aesthetic of the existing building; an aesthetic that is characterized by decay. The space program will develop over time with respect to the aesthetic. The programmed spaces are part of an exploration into what heterotopic urban functions can exist in decaying urban space, and how the decaying space can begin to function in more mainstream areas as a result of that exploration. The goal of this exploration is to not only understand the aesthetic and how it came to be, but exploit the individual elements of them in order to inform an architectural approach. The aesthetic of decay has developed over time, and alternative uses should do the same; minor issues have drastically affected the decay of the building, and minor interventions will likewise affect the function of the space.
The first phase of reoccupation will be a guerrilla style takeover of the space. The illicit uses already observable on the site will become more commonplace after some encouragement by a handful of people. This use will not be legal or condoned, but will show how architecture can exist positively and functionally while in a state of decay. The primary goal of this phase is to change the public perception of decay. The aesthetic is hidden behind closed doors and boarded windows. If the space weren’t off limits, it would have a completely different contextual and functional role.

These guerrilla spaces will be purposely ambiguous. As the users will be engaging in illicit activities, their actions will be discreet and only minor interventions will allow for their occurrence. For instance, parking will be blocks away, entry will be made through broken windows or doors, and primary occupation will be in hidden away spaces. This loose space is difficult to formerly program as a prescriptive process, and is only hypothetical. It is, however, based upon observation of common activity already occurring on site. Minor architectural interventions will allow for those activities to perpetuate.

The second phase of reoccupation will begin to blur the line between legal and illicit usage. Some aspects of the site will become so common that they will be accepted and encouraged by many within the surrounding community. Interventions by users will be at a larger scale and permit increased functionality of the space. The goal of the second phase is to bring the functional aspects of the decaying site to the public realm, through transparency of occupation and development.

This concept of transparency will begin to cause the development of a program in the traditional sense. While parking was once at a distance, discreetly, the limited amount of on-site open space will double as parking. Entry will occur along the perimeter of the building, as once boarded-up windows and doors will become open and accessible. The interior spaces that were once off-limits and illicit will start to function as community space; Figure 2 (attached) is a stacking diagram of the heterotopic program spaces that will potentially develop during the second phase of reoccupation.

The third phase of reoccupation will be an officially encouraged usage of some spaces within the building. The property owner and a developer will begin to formalize the interventions made during the first two phases. Cooperation between formerly illicit users and ownership is integral to the success of this phase. The goal of this phase is to bridge the gap between minor illicit use and full scale development. It will be an integral step in terms of occupying a decaying building with regards to its unique aesthetic.
As the building owner and a developer begin to make interventions in the project, a formal program will be applied. This program will include coded parking requirements, public and private entry, as well as private usage of the site that coincides with the public, heterotopic program described during the previous phase.

The fourth and final phase of reoccupation will be the culmination of the guerilla takeover. A formalized, legal use will develop out of the idiosyncratic functions that occur within the building over time. This will likely require a juxtaposition of a modern intervention within, into, or adjacent to the decaying building. The ultimate goal is to use the building in a fashion that provides the benefits of a contemporary urban development yet respects the alternative uses of a seemingly abandoned, decaying site. A slow, phased, but natural reoccupation is the best process that is capable of producing this result.

This final phase will result in a fully programmed building that is, ultimately, a product of the slow reoccupation process. A mix of heterotopic uses on the lower, public floors will juxtapose a private, industrious use of the remaining floors, by the owner and developer of the site. Parking will be on site and likely require an adjacent lot, while various entry points and interior circulation will exist for different uses.
PHASE ONE: 0–5 YEARS

GUERRILLA OCCUPATION
The first phase of reoccupation will be a guerrilla style takeover of the space. The illicit uses already observable on the site will become more commonplace after some encouragement by a handful of people. This use will not be condoned or legal, but will show how architecture can exist positively and functionally while in a state of decay.

The primary goal of this phase is to change the public perception of decay. The aesthetic is hidden behind closed doors and boarded windows. If the space wasn’t off limits, it would have a completely different contextual and functional role.

Figure 3.3 - Phase 1 Reoccupation Timeline

PHASE TWO: 5–10 YEARS

AMBIGUOUS OCCUPATION
The second phase of reoccupation will begin to blur the line between legal and illicit usage. Some aspects of the site will become so common that they will be accepted and encouraged by many within the surrounding community. Interventions by users will be at a larger scale and permit increased functionality of the space.

The goal of the second phase is to bring the functional aspects of the decaying site to the public realm, through transparency of occupation and development.

Figure 3.4 - Phase 2 Reoccupation Timeline

PHASE THREE: 10–15 YEARS

SPONSORED OCCUPATION
The third phase of reoccupation will be an officially encouraged usage of some spaces within the building. The property owner and a developer will begin to formalize the interventions made during the first two phases. Cooperation between formerly illicit users and ownership is an integral part of the success of this phase.

The goal of this phase is to bridge the gap between minor illicit use and full scale development. It will be an integral step in terms of occupying a decaying building with regards to its unique aesthetic.

Figure 3.5 - Phase 3 Reoccupation Timeline

PHASE FOUR: 15–20 YEARS

COMPLETE OCCUPATION
The fourth phase of reoccupation will be the culmination of the guerilla takeover. A formalized, legal use will develop out of the idiosyncratic functions that occur within the building over time. This will likely require a juxtaposition of a modern intervention within, into, or adjacent to the decaying building.

The ultimate goal is to use the building in a fashion that provides the benefits of a contemporary urban development yet respects the alternative uses of a seemingly abandoned, decaying site. A slow, phased, but natural reoccupation is the best process that is capable of producing this result.

Figure 3.6 - Phase 4 Reoccupation Timeline
3.2 Classification of Spaces

As outlined previously, there are four phases of reoccupation within the design scheme for the Crosley Building. The following charts depict snapshots of various program areas and sizes, one for each phase. The square footages are determined by precedent studies as well as the diagrams on the following pages. The column spacing in the existing structure creates a grid of 296 square feet units, and the spaces are roughly laid out within that grid.

3.2.1 Phase 1: Guerrilla Occupation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Square Footage (Gross)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Squatting:</td>
<td>2,376</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trespassing:</td>
<td>3,168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art &amp; Graffiti:</td>
<td>7,920</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total:</strong></td>
<td><strong>13,464</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Building Size: 285,000
Percentage Occupied: 7.12%

The guerrilla occupation phase takes what occurs on site now (squatting, graffiti, and trespassing) and exploits the ways in which they function. Precedents such as the work of Gordon Matta-Clark are ways that these functions can begin to transcend from a functional niche to a culturally acceptable movement.

The chart on the following page shows a sample of some of the building's floor plans, and examples of activity locations and adjacencies.
Figure 3.7 - Phase 1 program diagram
3.2.2 Phase 2: Ambiguous Occupation

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Activity</th>
<th>Square Footage (Gross)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Squatting:</td>
<td>1,584</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trespassing:</td>
<td>3,168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art &amp; Graffiti:</td>
<td>11,880</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Storage:</td>
<td>21,780</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Market:</td>
<td>5,544</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utility:</td>
<td>3,960</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entry/Lobby:</td>
<td>2,772</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total:</strong></td>
<td><strong>50,688</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The second phase consists of an ambiguous occupation. During this phase, more community uses begin to take place on the site as the first phase functions begin to create transparency throughout the building. This is in opposition to the traditional methods of dealing with abandoned, decaying urban space, which usually consists of closing and boarding up a building.

The chart on the following page shows a sample of some of the building’s floor plans, and examples of activity locations and adjacencies.
3.2.3 Phase 3: Sponsored Occupation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Square Footage (Gross)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trespassing:</td>
<td>1,584</td>
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<td>7,920</td>
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<td>Storage:</td>
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<td>Utility:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Entry/Lobby:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Manufacturing:</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total:</strong></td>
<td><strong>121,176</strong></td>
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</table>

During the third phase of reoccupation, owners, developers, and community members begin to adapt to the functionality of the space and begin to sponsor other uses. The building begins to become viable from some traditional standpoints, while remaining a product of the previous explorations.

The chart on the following page shows a sample of some of the building’s floor plans, and examples of activity locations and adjacencies.
Figure 3.9 - Phase 3 program diagram
3.2.4 Phase 4: Complete Occupation

<table>
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<th>Activity</th>
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<tr>
<td>Trespassing:</td>
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<tr>
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<td>7,920</td>
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<td>Manufacturing:</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total:** 285,120

Building Size: 285,000

Percentage Occupied: 100.00%

During the fourth and final phase, the building becomes almost fully functional and viable in traditional terms, yet the mix of alternative and traditional uses is ultimately a product of the exploration into the decay of the space.

The chart on the following page shows a sample of some of the building’s floor plans, and examples of activity locations and adjacencies.
Figure 3.10 - Phase 4 program diagram
3.3 Spaces, Relationships, and Organization

Aside from showing sizes and amounts of program spaces, the diagrams on the previous pages also show spatial relationships and organizations. During the early phases, a juxtaposition of illicit and semi-illicit activities helps to create a diverse but functional space. As the building evolves over time, the latter phases of the design scheme begin to show planned spatial relationships and arrangements. These relationships are a product of the phased reoccupation process. The intent is that the resulting final phase will be a compilation of heterotopic inputs during the early phases, and economically viable programmatic spaces of the more traditional, later interventions. The following descriptions detail this development, per phase:

3.3.1 Phase 1: Guerrilla Occupation

The early spatial adjacencies are a product of guerrilla action. Trespassing, graffiti artists, and squatters are the primary occupants of the space. The most suitable spaces for squatting and trespassing activities are the most secure, hidden, and derelict locations, that are separated from one another by distance and floor level. Alternatively, the most attractive locations for graffiti are the most visible, as the occupants rarely use the space, but leave a lasting element upon it.
3.3.2 Phase 2: Ambiguous Occupation

The spaces formed during the second phase are dependent upon the decisions of many made during the first phase. As guerrilla action opens up the space, more active uses, such as a market of sorts, are formed within and around the building. As this occurs, the illicit activity spaces move away from the quasi-public community space formed on the lower, open floors. Floor level, proximity, lighting conditions, and transparency all begin to effect the locations of certain activities within the building.

Figure 3.12 - Phase 2 axonometric program
3.3.3 Phase 3: Sponsored Occupation

The first sponsored reoccupation of the building creates a rift in the previous activity spaces. As certain floors are chosen for renovation, traditional programs are applied within the context of a semiambiguously functioning space. Some illicit uses are permitted to coexist, while others are erased completely, and some move to even more discreet locations within the building.

Figure 3.13 - Phase 3 axonometric program
3.3.4 Phase 4: Complete Occupation

The program during the final phase of reoccupation makes full use of the building, as pointed out in Section II. Office, studio, and manufacturing spaces become the largest programmed areas. Their proximity is necessary as the final program calls for a vertically oriented manufacturing facility. This is a natural progression from the heterotopic nature of the process of decay, the driving force behind the occupancies of the early phases.

Figure 3.14 - Phase 4 axonometric program
4 THE CROSLEY BUILDING

"Industrial ruins belong to the assignation, and are, in official parlance, 'scars on the landscape' or 'wastelands' whose use-value has disappeared."


4.1 Context: Client and Program

A lack of potential or applicable clients is a major cause of the abandonment of buildings. Many urban buildings throughout the country were built to suit a very specific program, and once that program and the particular client it was intended to serve have ceased to be warranted, the space providing for it becomes vacant. In this vacant state, it decays perpetually while existing in what could be considered an ambiguous programmatic state of abandonment. That is, the primary function of the space is to serve the heterotopic and often illicit needs of those who have no permission to occupy it.
This being said, the type of client and program commonly sought for such properties must be reconsidered, and the status quo must be taken into account. In most instances, abandoned properties are owned by one of four main groups: the government, banks, investors, or developers. For the following proposed strategy, any of the first three organizations should throttle the property through a developer, or any end client that stands to profit from creating leasable space suited for a variety of uses. In this particular example, the Crosley Building in Cincinnati, a private industrial company owns the property, but does not make use of it. The local community council is often at odds with the ownership over the treatment of the decaying building, and the Cincinnati Port Authority (a regional governmental development authority) is actively attempting to find potential development for the site. The current stalemate amongst these bodies has existed for some time, allowing the process of decay to continue to this day.

4.1.1 Historical Programming Context

The building type, however, must be considered in its current existence, as well as its proposed end use. While decaying urban architecture is often thought of as blight, one could instead consider it to be that of ruin. Ruins have, historically, been of major cultural significance. The first architectural interest of note concerning the concept of ruin was one of the archaeological realm. Visiting, documenting, and studying ruins of the ancient world became a popular field of study during the 17th and 18th centuries. Simultaneously, a design and construction concept took the newly attractive idea of ruin into account in terms of landscape design; the English Garden style possessed a very specific concern with the aesthetic of ruins. The picturesque qualities of the style provided sculpted views that were often directed at recreated ruins of the ancient world, particularly at places such as the Stowe Landscape Gardens and Dessau-Wörlitz. These examples show that not only was beauty found amongst ruin, but so much that the aesthetic qualities of ruin were duplicated at great cost. Industrial Ruins by Tim Edensor and Ghostly Ruins: America's Forgotten Architecture by Harry Skrdla are two recent examples of modern reconsideration of abandoned, blighted buildings as ruin, in the traditional sense.

Thus, it is understandable to approach abandoned, decaying buildings as ruin, and propose a strategy based upon that understanding. Lebbeus Woods, in War and Architecture writes about the physical form of ruin:
"...their forms must be respected as an integrity, embodying a history that must not be denied. In their damaged states they suggest new forms of thought and comprehension, and suggest new conceptions of space that confirm the potential of the human to integrate itself, to be whole and free outside of any predetermined, totalizing system. There is an ethical and moral commitment in such an existence and therefore a basis for community."

It appears that modern examples of ruin not only provide an opportunity for designers, but demand responsibility. Author Tim Edensor also contributes to this conceptual school of thought by defining ruin in a modern sense: "Industrial ruins belong to the assignation, and are, in official parlance, 'scars on the landscape' or 'wastelands' whose use-value has disappeared." In describing context and neighborhood relation, however, he goes on: "Ruins may become spaces for leisure, adventure, cultivation, acquisition, shelter, and creativity." These thoughts can begin to contribute to a modern programmatic use for ruins. This use is based upon historical principals, but is readily adapted to the vastly different spatial, functional, and aesthetical qualities of modern ruins.

Several recent examples exist of design strategies that take abandoned buildings into account as architectural ruin. The Landscape Park at Duisborg Nord and the Gasworks Park in Seattle are two prime examples. The clients in both these instances, however, were local and regional governments, and the program solution was public space. The existence of these examples, in and of themselves, provides precedent for the cultural significance of modern ruin. What they do not provide is precedent for private and economically successful development based upon that notion of cultural significance. This concept will be one of the contributions to the architectural field provided by this thesis.

4.1.2 Fundamental Client Issues

In order for this proposal to be successful, a phased programmatic timeline will be applied. Four phases, stretched over a period of twenty years will allow for a slow but natural reoccupation of space. Because of this proposed process, a period of time exists in which the space is programmed to illicitly fulfill the needs of an ambiguous faction of the regional public; trespassers, artists, the homeless, etc. will take on functions in the semi-publically programmed space. However, the final phase will culminate in a quasi traditional architect-client relationship. The primary client will be Hosea Worldwide, the light industrial company that currently owns the space.

The ultimate program would be a diverse one however, and require a spinoff leasing agent
to maintain the building. This agent would primarily develop space suitable to the owners industrial and warehousing needs, while maintaining and legitimizing the heterotopic occupancies. This result would provide a space much different than traditional industrial facilities, not only in that it would be mixed use, but also in the heterotopic nature of that usage and the connections to the local community. Behind this accepting viewpoint of the leasing agent is a motivation to respect the history of the building itself, the history of what it has become in recent years, and ultimately to appease the local community in a way that is still economically viable.

4.1.3 Political Issues

The political implications concerning abandoned buildings are numerous and vast. In the status quo, local community organizations from the official Camp Washington Community Council to beautification committees like Keep Cincinnati Beautiful are troubled by the existence of vacant structures. At a grander scale, the City of Cincinnati has official regulations for the maintenance of vacant buildings.

The phased reoccupation of the building calls for completely illicit use during the initial phase. The political implications of such activity would be vast, essentially upsetting community and city leaders, as well as redevelopment agencies such as the Port Authority, and even the client itself. The goal of this phase, however, is to ultimately change the perception of this activity. In order for this to happen, community efforts (that aren’t necessarily government sponsored/sanctioned) will need to observe, mimic, and transcend the illicit activities that occur in the Crosley Building. This second phase of positive community-oriented usage will then, in a matter of time, transition into sanctioned private usage and accommodation.

In the end, the political unrest that exists with regards to abandoned buildings currently will be dispelled. Guerrilla action, community interaction, and private development will share in the formation of a phased program that is beneficial to most, but more importantly not detrimental to any interested party.
4.2 Context: Building and Site

The Crosley Building is a vacant industrial building located in the Camp Washington area of Cincinnati, Ohio. The community is urban and primarily industrial, with a small population but a large amount of manufacturing and warehousing spaces, as well as one of the largest rail yards in the Midwest region. The immediate site has adjacencies that have, over time, contributed to the disuse of the space; the major physical contributor being Interstate 75. The location of neighborhood streets, the adjacent rail yard, and the interstate have cordoned off the Crosley site, and isolated it on a dead-end type corner of the neighborhood. The physical characteristics of the site coupled with the demographic context of the neighborhood and city play a key role in the abandonment and decay of the building, and thus these concepts must be understood in order to reoccupy the space in any means, especially the means called upon in this particular proposal.

4.2.1 Physical and Experiential Site Context

The Crosley Building is located on a site that is very indicative of common Cincinnati geography. Aside from the physical geography, the physical characteristics of the neighborhood are common for a Cincinnati inner ring suburb, with the exception being the industrial aspects. The following figures illustrate this premises, and prescribe a methodology for a design approach that accordingly addresses the issues associated with this physical location.
Figure 4.2 - Cincinnati Proper and Crosley Building location

Figure 4.3 - Aerial image looking north
Figure 4.4 - USGS 7.5 Quadrangle Topographic Map
4.2.2 Location and Topography

Figures 4.2 and 4.3 show the Crosley Building location within Cincinnati, and an aerial image of the immediate site. The overlay below illustrates the economic zones of Cincinnati, showing the industrial nature of the Camp Washington Neighborhood, as part of the Mill Creek Valley. This determination is made based upon land use, zoning, and physical appearance of the structures.

The topographic map (figure 4.4) shows the topographic conditions of the site and its context. Between the aerial view and the topographic map, the site of the Crosley Building can be interpreted as a flat floodplain within a valley. The valley can be seen as extending the north and east, through the entirety of Hamilton County, as well as to the south until joining with the Ohio River Valley. The valley is centered around the Mill Creek, a large creek whose very name illustrates the historical nature of the valley itself - a regional industrial center.
4.2.3 Primary Approaches

**Interstate 75** - Interstate 75 is the busiest interstate highway in the region, and is immediately adjacent to the Crosley Building site. Access from the interstate is made via the Hopple Street interchange to the south of the building.

**Spring Grove Avenue** - Spring Grove is one of the major industrial routes through Cincinnati, connecting Queensgate and Camp Washington to the interstate system, rail yards, and downtown.

**Queensgate Rail Yard** - The rail yard is one of the largest in the region, and contributes significantly to the industrial economic success of the neighborhood.
Figure 4.7 - View from rear alley

Figure 4.8 - Highly visible and iconic tower

Figure 4.9 - Site view from neighborhood street, Arlington St.
### 4.2.4 Significant Views and Approaches

The Crosley Building, while situated in a dead-end corner of the neighborhood, still provides ample opportunity for views into and out of the site. The bulk of the building itself, and the iconic tower atop it, make it visible from great distance throughout the valley and surrounding hillsides. The proximity of Interstate 75 means the building is clearly visible to hundreds of thousands of passersby every day. The omnipresence of the building has contributed to the political issues surrounding it, as discussed in the previous assignment submission.

The Aesthetic of Decay, as this thesis is titled, is also a contributing factor to the importance of views of the site. The numerous reads of the site are pictured in the figures on this page and the previous page. Each read has a different relation to the interpretation of the building, space, and associated aesthetic. Figure 4.7 is a photograph taken from an alley in the rear of the building. This view is the slowest paced experience of the site, and provides for the deepest appreciation of the nature of decay. Figure 4.8 is a close-up of the iconic tower of the Crosley Building, the feature most visible from a distance. Figure 4.9 is a photograph of the street frontage. This area provides the greatest potential for pedestrian and vehicular experience at close proximity. However, the most often experienced view of the site is shown below, from the perspective of the automobile traveling, in this case southbound, along Interstate 75.
4.2.5 Historical Building Conditions

The Crosley Building was a state-of-the-art facility built to house the headquarters of the Crosley Corporation in 1928. Cincinnati architecture firm Samuel Hannaford and Sons were responsible for the design of the building; the famous namesake architect had retired in 1904 and passed away in 1911, leaving the firm behind to his sons. They carried on his legacy, and adapted their style to fit the popular trends of the time and requests of the clients. The ornamentation of the Crosley Building is based upon the art deco style, a new and trendy style in the late 1920's; this detailing is visible on what is left of the street level facade, as well as on the tower.

The lower floors of the building originally served as manufacturing and production facilities for Crosley radios and other appliances. Aside from this building, an adjacent structure now owned by Reliable Castings was part of the Crosley facility. A large warehouse across the street was built and operated by Crosley as well, and originally connected via an enclosed bridge two stories above the ground. The secondary structures are still used and occupied, having undergone modernization while under consistent use. The large and iconic main building, however, has fallen into disrepair and abandonment over the past several decades.
4.3 Context: Urban Scale

The Crosley Building is located on a site that is very indicative of common Cincinnati geography. Aside from the physical geography, the physical characteristics of the neighborhood are common for a Cincinnati inner ring suburb, with the exception being the industrial aspects. The following figures illustrate this premises, and prescribe a methodology for a design approach that accordingly addresses the issues associated with this physical location.
4.3.1 Historic Site Conditions

The Camp Washington neighborhood has almost always been Industrial in nature. The aerial images to the left date back as far as 1932, shortly after the construction of the Crosley Building in the northeastern part of the community. The oldest image available shows while industrialization of the Mill Creek Valley was clearly already occurring, between 1932 and 1956 the biggest changes in context occurred, primarily due to construction of Interstate 75 and massive expansion of the Queensgate Rail Yard.

Prior to construction of the Crosley Building and other industrial facilities, however, the neighborhood was much different. From the earliest settlement in the mid 1800’s to the early 1900’s, the community was a more balanced mix of agricultural, civic, and industrial uses. The Mill Creek was naturally flowing as opposed to channelized, and the Miami & Erie canal still flowed where Interstate 75 runs today.
4.3.2 Neighborhood Forces and Effects

The Crosley Building occupies a site similar in size to many of the other nearby industrial buildings. The footprint is also similar; however, the major difference is the height of the building. The ten stories and tower atop approach 140 feet in height, and in doing so create a massing that is much bulkier than many buildings around. The view below, taken from the tower, illustrates just how much taller the Crosley Building is than its surroundings, even the other largest buildings in the area.

![Figure 4.20 - View from the tower of the Crosley Building](image)

The Crosley Building site is within the heart of an industrial district of Camp Washington. While the community as a whole is very industrial in nature, it also contains several pockets of residential and commercial zones, as shown in Figure 4.22.

In terms of assessing program and client designations, this diagram illustrates a clear potential for industrial and manufacturing uses.

A combination of land use maps, zoning designations, and architectural observations were used to identify these rough zones.
CAMP WASHINGTON
Economic Development Opportunities

Development Area Types:
- Light Industry & Warehousing
- Government & Institutional
- Commercial - Neighborhood Business Districts
- Commercial - Auto Oriented Development

Figure 4.21 - Figure-Ground study
Figure 4.22 - Camp Washington economic areas
The phased reoccupation prescription presented in Chapter 3 ultimately results in a final, albeit perpetually adapting, design solution. However, the process of how that design comes to be is as important as what it is. Therefore the final thesis project places equal importance upon the design of the Crosley Building at each phase. The illustrations attached on the following pages are examples of how the reoccupation will appear at the culmination of each phase.
Figure 5.6 - First phase plans and axon
Figure 5.7 - First phase example photo/rendering
Figure 5.8 - Second phase reoccupation photo rendering

Figure 5.9 - Second phase reoccupation section/plan diagram
Figure 5.10 - Second phase plans and axon
Figure 5.11 - Second phase example photo/rendering
Figure 5.12 - Third phase reoccupation photo rendering

Figure 5.13 - Third phase reoccupation section/plan diagram
Figure 5.14 - Third phase plans and axon
Figure 5.15 - Third phase example photo/rendering
Figure 5.16 - Fourth phase reoccupation rendering Figure

Figure 5.17 - Fourth phase reoccupation section/plan diagram
Figure 5.18 - Fourth phase plans and axon
Figure 5.19 - Fourth phase example photorealistic rendering
CONCLUSION

The aesthetic of decay will ultimately be altered immensely by reoccupation of the space. However, through the understanding of the individual elements of such decay, it will not be forgotten, erased, or corrected as it often is during a typical renovation project. The new, alternative aesthetic that will be developed will inherently possess qualities that are evolutionary of the elements of decay. This result will not only focus upon manipulating those elements, but will also provide a natural and economical solution to the commonly perceived problems surrounding vacant and abandoned buildings.

The most important feature of the phased reoccupation of abandoned space is the focus on prescribing a solution that is initially based on observation of existing conditions and activities. The illicit alternative uses that develop as a result of the aesthetic of decay are as unique programmatically as the aesthetic is physically. The combination of aesthetic and use develops as part of a process, and an ever-changing architecture is the result. In conclusion, the abstract of this document can be revisited:

There is a specific aesthetic that exists amongst architecture in the absence of routine human interaction; it is the aesthetic of decay. This aesthetic develops over time, as buildings cease to function in the way they were originally designed to do so. As this happens, such buildings become leftover, forgotten spaces that go unseen by the bulk of society; they are left to minor, often illicit alternate uses.

First and foremost, the aesthetic and associated use inform a basis for designing a reoccupation process. However, there exists complications in explaining the aesthetic, as it is not readily viewable and lacks common social constructs:

This makes the task of explaining the aesthetic rather difficult, and extra attention must be paid to the methodology that best accomplishes that task: photography. Photographs tell the tale of what these spaces are, in the clearest and most straightforward way. An exploration through photography coupled with a secondary level of exploration into how the space came to be, is capable of informing a reactionary exploration into what the space can become.

Because of the illicit nature of typical abandoned, decaying sites, presentation of depictions of
such spaces is integral in terms of implying an aesthetic. The historical links between photography and architecture are exemplified when abandoned sites are the focus. This heightened focus then provides a platform from which architectural exploration and prescription can begin.

The goal of such an exploration is to not only understand this, but also to exploit the individual elements of it in order to inform an architectural approach. The aesthetic of decay has developed over time, and alternative uses should do the same; minor issues have drastically affected the decay of the building, and minor interventions will likewise affect the function of the space.

The prescription, a phased reoccupation consisting of minor, pinpointed interventions is ultimately born from the study of decay. Through understanding and presentation of decay, a prescription for an architectural approach can be formed. This approach, because it was born from decay and how decay came to be, will inherently respect the aesthetic of decay. The final, reoccupied building and its associated aesthetic will consist of the same elements of decay, altered to varying degrees.
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