# Wreck & Ruin:

Photography, Temporality, and World (Dis)order



*Chicago CAB Sex* (1997) Dimitre

James R. Hugunin

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## Photography, Temporality, and World (Dis)order



*Bomber, a chance unwinding* (detail, archival pigment print, 2011) Lewis Koch
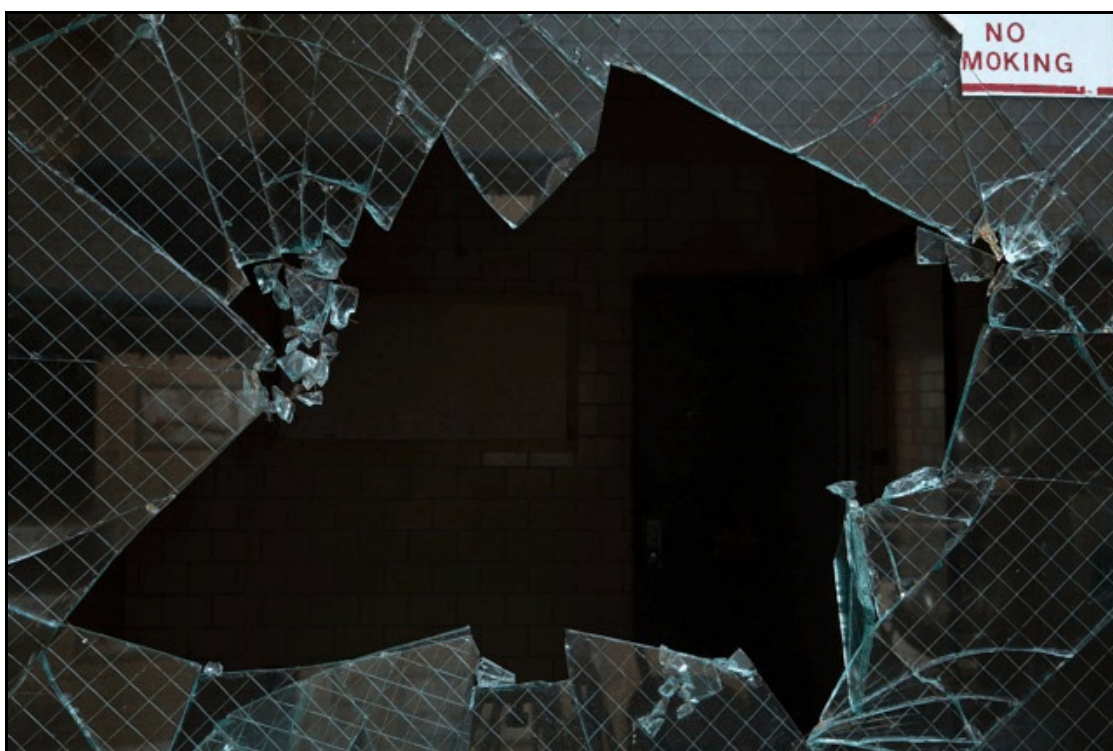


*Harlem Valley/Wingdale Project* (detail, 2011) Avery Danziger

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# Dedication

To the memory of my mother,
Jeane Louise Hugunin (1922 - 2009)



*Harlem Valley/Wingdale Project #8806* (archival pigment print, 2011) Avery Danziger

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# Acknowledgments

*Unidentified Relative of the Author* (c. early-20th C.)



*National Time Clock, former Cass Technical High School, Detroit, MI*
("Detroit Disassembled" series, 2009) Andrew Moore

*They laugh and at the same time they shudder. For through the ornamentation of the costume from which the grandmother has disappeared, they think they glimpse a moment of time past, a time that passes without return. Although time is not part of the photograph like the smile or the chignon, the photograph itself, so it seems to them, is a representation of time. . . .*

*The snapping of the camera shares with other modern technologies the drive to condense time, the aspiration for instantaneity. . . . Here, shock is aligned with photography's ability to arrest the ephemeral, to represent the contingent.*

— Mary Ann Doane*, The Emergence of Cinematic Time* (2002)

*The will cannot will backwards; and that it cannot break time and time's covetousness, that is the will's loneliest melancholy.*

— Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathrustra* (1896)

*We live the time of objects: I mean that we live according to their rhythm and according to their incessant succession.*

— Jean Baudrillard, *The System of Objects* (1968)

*Picnic's end for several thousand people after three women were trampled to death in an excursion-ship stampede, New York* (1941) Weegee



*Santa Ana Wash, Redlands, CA* (gelatin silver print, 1983) Robert Adams

Wreck and Ruin/iv

*Harlem Valley/Wingdale Project #7146* (archival pigment print, 2011) Avery Danziger

> *A photograph of ruins (ruins being a figure of what once was) doubles Roland*
> *Barthes's concept of the photograph as testimony to "that-has-been."*
> — James R. Hugunin



*Harlem Valley/Wingdale Project #8357* (archival pigment print, 2011) Avery Danziger

*The End of the Civic Repertory Theatre 7* (gelatin silver print, 1938) Aaron Siskind

*. . . an old, destroyed temple: you know the old temple was beautiful and beautifully built. We could once all believe and hope in it. But once it has been destroyed, it's nothing. It becomes another artist's material to build something completely contra-dictory to what it was before.*
        — Ai Weiwei, *Ai Weiwei Speaks* (2011)

*The photograph offers a modern counterpart of that characteristically romantic architectural genre, the artificial ruin: the ruin which is created in order to deepen the historical character of a landscape, to make nature suggestive—suggestive of the past.*
        — Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (1977)

# Preface

*Baltimore, in the early morning, is the best image to sum up the unconscious.*
— Jacques Lacan (1966)



*Packard Motor Company Plant, Detroit, MI* (2008 -2009) in *Detroit Disassembled* (2010) Andrew Moore

*When asked how long it took him to make a particular photograph, Gary Winogrand is said to have replied: "About a five-hundredth of a second."*
— Douglas Davis, "Photography as Culture" (1975)

*Newhaven Lass with Baby* (time-exposure, calotype, c. 1843 - 1848)
David Octavius Hill and Robert Adamson

At least there is no attempt to pretend that the image exists perfect, beyond decay, and outside time. At this point we are nearing the magnificent and terrible appeal of photography, which is anchored in the infinite complexities of time, and our exper- ience of time.
— Douglas Davis, "Photography as Culture" (1975)

Psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan's witty 1966 remark may have been appropriate to its time, but had he lived past 1981 and sojourned to the States again — like many French intellectuals, past and present — he would probably have substituted Detroit for Baltimore. When we find out that Andrew Moore — the author of the photograph taken in Detroit and featured at the start of this preface — confesses in his artist statement in his large photobook *Detroit Disassembled* (2010) that, "My initial visit to Detroit started with dinner in Paris," the Lacan connection becomes uncannily even more apt. Add the fact that some disgruntled online bloggers term such contemporary subject matter as Moore's "ruin porn." The sexualizing of ruins, Lacan's putting of a city and the term "unconscious" in the same sentence, well, it seems wholly appropriate to restate Lacan's insight as, *Detroit, in the early morning, is the best image to sum up the unconscious*. I think it would have won Monsieur Lacan's nod of approval.

Keeping with Lacan's sense of oblique thinking and apt humor, I am going to claim that a brief overview of six photographs, five of a typewriter and 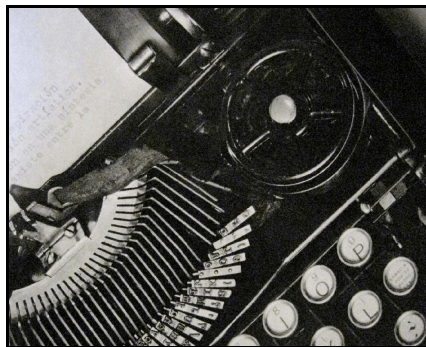one of a computer, will provide an entry point to my topic, "wreck and ruin," as these terms pertain to temporality in photography, that is, time as imbricated in that medium in two aspects: exposure and subject matter.



*Typewriter Keys* (1921) Ralph Steiner



*Julio Antonio Mella's Typewriter* (1928) Tina Modotti

Typewriters contained between two and four thousand moving parts, making them the most sophisticated machines of the early twentieth century. During the 1920s, referred to by historians as "The Age of the Machine,", it seemed appropriate that the efficiency of an increasingly Taylorized industrial mode of production was rooted in time-and-motion studies carried out by photographic means. Little surprise that time was celebrated in poetry (usually written on typewriters) and frequently the object recorded by another machine, the camera. Later, the machine's deleterious effect upon workers was lampooned in Charlie Chaplin's film *Modern Times* (1936).

Ralph Steiner's *Typewriter Keys* (1921) closes in on the very contact point between human operator and machine (today we'd say the *interface*) that permits the controlled, accurate, and fast translation of thought to paper. This aspect of thought-to-paper is touted in another close-up, one also employing the New Vision convention of slanted composition, Tina Modotti's shot of Julio Antonio Mella's typewriter. Mella, interfacing with a machine (today we'd say, borrowing a term from Actor Network Theory, that they are "actants") was in the process of typing a radical tract.
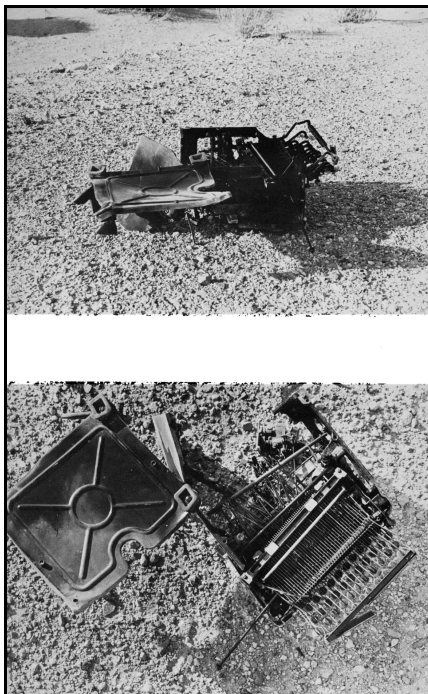
Both Steiner and Modotti's images assert the instantaneity of their chosen medium and tout modernity and its

*Onecaratstud* (2007) John Chamberlain


*Typewriter* (1951) Wynn Bullock


Images from Edward Ruscha's artist book, *Royal Road Test* (1967)

new, gleaming objects. Besides type-writers, photographers like Edward Weston and Charles Sheeler trained their sharp lenses on functionalist steel and glass factory sites, eschewing the nostalgic pastorales still popular with photographic Pictorialists and their audience.

After the destruction of the Second World War, machines and modernity no longer induced such admiration. Witness Swiss artist Jean Tinguely's self-destructive machines and American artist John Chamberlain's auto wrecks-*cum*-sculpture. A sense of an era gone is already evident in Wynn Bullock's melancholy visual meditations, such as *Typewriter* (1951). Here the pride of the modern age, is reduced to a skull-like ruin, like an artifact just uncovered from some ancient civilization, now a romantic *memento mori* of the once-was.

By the 1960s, such infusion of mourning into a photograph, a sure sign it was "fine art," became anathema to many young artists rejecting such personification of emotion in subject matter and turning their backs on the fetishization of traditional authorship and print quality. Now the conceptual art "dumb snapshot" took precedence, even as the object might still remain a typewriter. Evidence Edward Ruscha's seminal artist book, *Royal Road Test* (1967), where a destructive prank a teenager might devise — tossing a machine out the window of a speeding car — is meticulously documented, like a crime scene investigation. One might also see this "prank" as an oblique reference to similarly gratuitous demolition, often as dispassionately recorded, occurring in Viet Nam at the time.

By the end of that war, in the mid-1970s, the heavy industries responsible for the advent of the West's industrial revolution, particularly the steel and auto industries, were in decline. The infamous "Rust-Belt" was born, as capitalists fled home shores for overseas sites, the grim result of which Michael Moore recorded in his film *Roger and Me* (1989). Long-time resident of the area, Scott Hocking began an in-depth probing of those rusting ruins, his rationale to do so paralleling Henry David Thoreau's interest in Walden Pond. Just change "woods" in that writer's original statement for
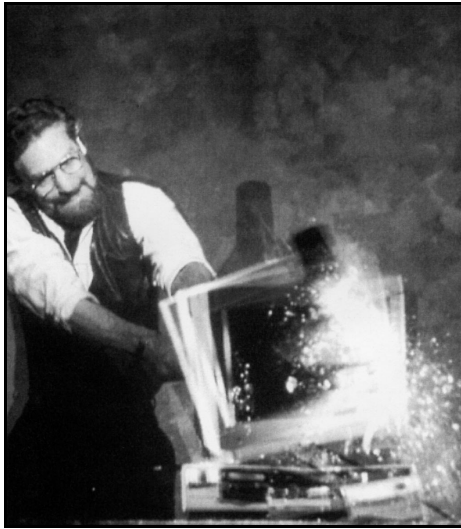
Neo-Luddite Kirkpatrick Sale smashes a computer
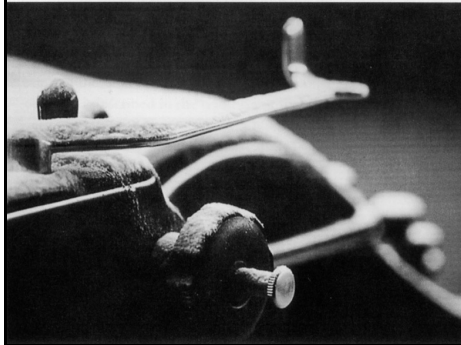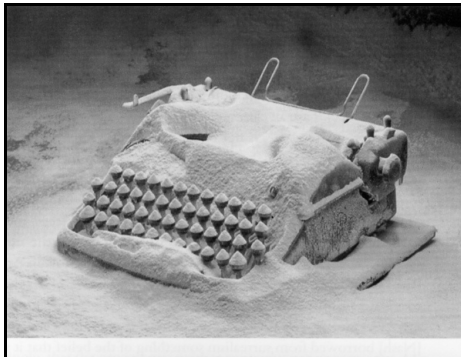


*Rheinmetall/Victoria 8* (diptych, 2003) Rodney Graham

"ruins" and we have: "I went to the [ruins] because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life [post devastating recession], and see if I could not learn what it had to teach. . . . Let's attend to the fundamental character of the world we inhabit [in such blighted cities as Detroit, Gary, and Cleveland]." Like Lacan, I think Thoreau would have approved of this appropriation and refunctioning of his insights.

The econo-blastscapes of America were echoed in other Western nations. In Germany, the Ruhr Valley's industrial might was decimated. All those industrial structures so meticulously documented and grouped into grids by the Bechers were becoming economic dinosaurs as they were photographed by that husband and wife duo.

The digital/information age of global capital flows was upon us. Computers began to appear in work places. And people began to lose jobs. Neo-Luddites like Kirkpatrick Sale staged dramatic protests, smashing a computer as the highlight of the event. One dramatic technological upgrade followed another. One season's computer was obsolete the next. How quickly the typewriter's replacement became a series of wrecks!

By the late 1990s and well into the new millennium, artists began to troll the rust-belt wastelands for visual treasure, but in ways quite opposed to Ruscha and other conceptualists' use of photography. A considered approach to the medium, often realized in large-scale prints (they may or may not be digitally enhanced or modified), what critics began to call "museum photography," replaced both the Szarkowskian snapshot aesthetic and its more deadpan, droll version as used to great effect in Ruscha's artist books. Fabricated-to-be-photographed stagings or "directorial mode" scenarios became prevalent. And again the typewriter found its way before the camera.

Rodney Graham, a Vancouver photo-conceptualist, found an old Nazi-era German typewriter in mint condition, dusted it with flour (the film industry's simulation for romantically soft snow) and photographed it. Are we looking at pastiche of German product shot in a staged romantic Black Forest winter scene? Or is this a rephotograph of an old photo someone snapped of a hastily discarded possession tossed in the snow during a violent SS raid on Jewish business or home? Maybe a clever meta-photographic riff on Wynn Bullock's overtly romantic image of the same? A melancholic reference to quaint past technology? Is it an in-art reference to James Welling's and James Casebere's photography of constructed props during the heyday of 1980s postmodernism, implying their work is now as obsolete as the machine Graham uses to figure it?

Say the image can be read as all that and more. No *specific* interpretation need hold. Our time is characterized by what theorist Ihab Hassan denominated "The Age of Indetermance," and Jacques Derrida touted as the unlimited "play of the signifier." I sense the range of possible responses to Rodney Graham's work also haunts other artworks brought forth here for your consideration. At a time when artists, like other producers, are "competing for eyeballs," access to this prolific body of recent work is through many venues, including the computer. Hence, these artworks are not only found in art museums, galleries, and in high-quality art books, but online. And online, they are beginning to share competition with images of devastation wrought by global-warming and climate change: floods, storms, rising sea levels. Will our next set of ruins to come under scrutiny by artists be postmodern "weather-ruins"?

Our time is figured by the computer, an item of technology our era celebrates as enthusiastically as we once did the typewriter; it is an ever modified and updated technology with increasingly intimate modes of interfacing with its human counterparts. Thanks to digital technology, we are seeing the most minute aspects of human behavior and decision-making simulated through ever-evolving databases and algorithms. So for some, the computer is also a machine to fear. It hints at our own obsolescence as "thinking machines." Are we humans next in line to end up on the rubbish heap of history, like those once highly-paid Detroit auto-workers, in the age of intelligent machines? Will the next round of "ruin porn" be shot by androids poking around debris of what were once our human dwellings, like in the 2008 computer-animated Pixar film, *Wall-E* ?

<p style="text-align:center">*    *    *</p>

# Introduction

*Photography does not create eternity, as art does, it embalms time, rescuing it simply from its proper corruption.*
—André Bazin, *What is Cinema?*

*Even in our post-photographic era, when sensory perception is being reformatted according to new technological paradigms, we continue to view photographs as snippets of an unreachable and yet real past.*
— W. J. T. Mitchell, *The Reconfigured Eye: Visual Truth in the Post-Photographic Era*



*The Ruins of Hamburg taken over by nature* (late 1940s) from W. G. Sebald's *Natural History of Destruction* (2004). The image follows nineteenth-century picturesque conventions.

*Eve Offering the Apple* (early 1500s) Lucas Cranach the Elder



*S.N. Ward and Sons Mobil Service, Wreck-of-the-Week, Pasadena, CA* (1976)
Victor Landweber



Ali Shalal Qaissi, detainee, Holding "Hooded Man" photograph from Abu Ghraib
Prison (*New York Times*, March 11, 2006)

An apple is picked, a point-and-shoot flash goes off, and the momentous handoff is instantaneously recorded for all posterity. (Don't Biblical historians wish!) But Lucas Cranach the Elder's composition and lighting anticipates photography's ability to forever hold an event. The instant of humanity's paradisical existence, wrecked when the first couple succumbed to the desire for knowledge, seems caught in a wink. For purposes of this monograph, let me propose this painting of a mythic event as an *Ur-Wreck*: a figure for one mode of photographic practice, the fraction-of-a-second snatching from the temporal flow an *event* recorded (often of a wreck itself) which also offers (via the optico-chemical chain of causality) evidence of what was, giving us knowledge.

The considered, but quick, snatch of that infamous apple may be seen as an allegory for snapshot photography: decisive moment (consideration quickly followed by motion of the hand on camera). Both apple and image offer knowledge. Like Cranach's painting, this knowledge offered is often evidence of a fallen humanity (infamously evidenced in those images from Abu Ghraib Prison), or documents of other disasters (such as the debris field from a deadly human stampede Weegee records where demolished shards of what was to be a pleasant picnic outing stand in for the unseen crushed bodies of the victims).

The space in Weegee's image and the notion of event are inextricably wed; we read the horrible event, a moment in time, as a function of space which is made to disport itself before us in a manner that evokes: 1) the actual disaster itself (not actually seen), 2) tells

*Hosni Mubarak's Headquarters, Cairo, Egypt*, a burned out wreck (2013) Stephen Perkins

*Tahrir Square, Cairo, Egypt* (2013) Stephen Perkins



Recent Wrecks
and
Spaces of Change

*Wrecked car and graffiti, Cairo, Egypt* (2013) Stephen Perkins

*Mickey in Rubble* (Aftermath of an Israeli Air Strike, Tyre, Lebanon, Aug. 6, 2006) Ben Curtis, AP
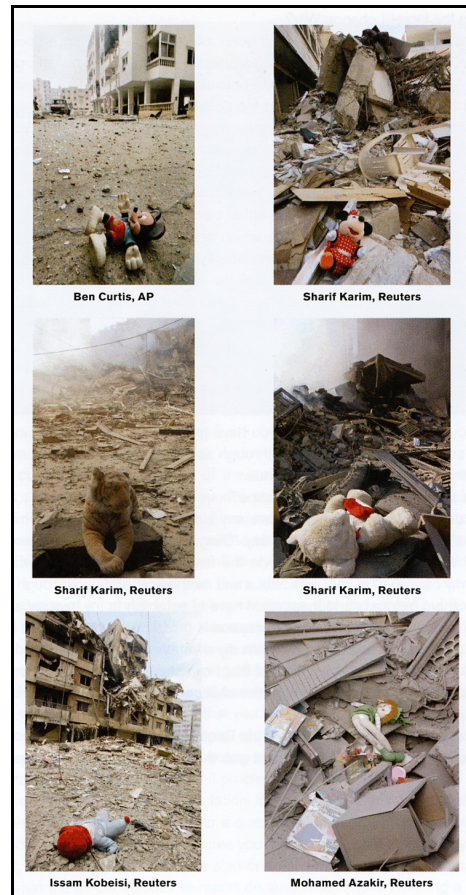


Copycat photographs

*The sheer number of other toys photographed seems to suggest that some of the images could have been staged.*
— Errol Morris, *Believing is Seeing (Observations on the Mysteries of Photography)* (2011)

*Dropping a Han Dynasty Urn* (gelatin silver print triptych, 126 x 110 cm each print, 1995) Ai Weiwei



*Provisional Landscape* (detail of 12 units, 93 x 42 cm each, 2002 - 05) Ai Weiwei

> *For China, a year and a half is an eternity.*
> — Ai Weiwei, *Ai Weiwei Speaks* (2011)

> [T]he work of Weiwei raises a series of questions about cultural violence and history; a violence that the artist often re-enacts. In this regard, the work of Ai Weiwei engages with the concept of a country that oscillates between ruin and production, patrimony and erasure — operating, that is, from within the logic of ruins in reverse.
> — Charles Merewether, *Ai Weiwei: Under Construction* (2008)
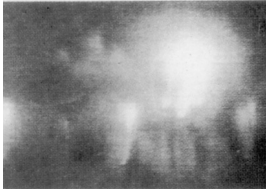
of its immediate aftermath, and 3) suggests the future disposition of bodies and the loss suffered by relatives.

Similar temporal-spatial dynamics, now drawn from recent political upheavals, such as the "Arab Spring" (2011), is given voice by French poet and novelist, Marie Étienne's recent writing on mass public political demonstrations, spaces rife with wreckage begging to be recorded by everyone from detached professional photojournalists to battered participants wielding iPhones and posting online. Her description is like an *ekphrasis* of such pictures of trauma:

> The expanse awaiting me really is no longer, not only, the site of the event where I must perform, it changes little by little. I glimpse bodies as they run, crawl or hide, a cloud flies above (smoke from the gun shots or tear gas?), its middle is deser-ted, as if over-exposed to the assailants' fire, the ground is strewn with corpses, rubble, and the light in which it bathes is studded with sparks. I understand that I am at Tiananmen Square, or Tahrir Square, or any other square which, with shared momentum, unites the crowds we are all part of.[1]

In these spaces of wreckage, contingency is figured, emerging as a site of awe and fear. Momentous change occurs rapidly as shock: revolution-aries burn a government building, bombs strike an apartment building, an airplane goes down, automobiles hit head on, a student challenges a govern-ment tank, an artist drops a Han Dynasty urn, or tosses a typewriter out a car window at 90 m.p.h, photographing the debris. Here exposures, attempts to grasp such fugitive events, must be instantaneous. But even here, at times, controversy over manipulation, digital or otherwise, confuses interpretation.

Meanwhile, other objects and spaces suffer a softer mallet of deterioration, time-crumbling and rusting over a long duration. They offer us the space of the ruin that may speak of past catastrophe and annihilation, induce melancholic musings over our mortality, or ask for translation into aesthetically pleasing images.

*Chinese Government Tank Destroying the "Goddess of Democracy,"* Tiananmen Square, Beijing (June 3, 1989)
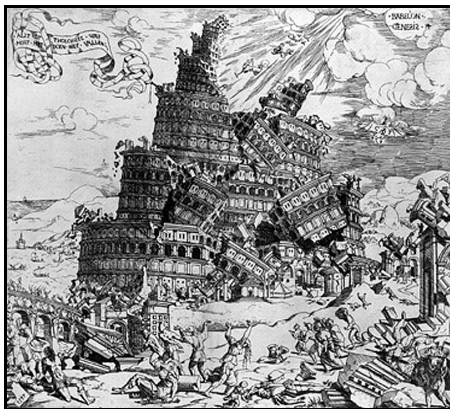


Tower of Babel in Ruins



Ruins of Babel today, Iraq

The *Ur-Ruin* is, of course, The Tower of Babel. Like Eve snatching the apple, it is also a mono-theist myth warning against forbidden knowledge. Humankind's proud aspiration turned into wrathful wreckage, becoming the most fabled of ruins. This aspect of temporal *duration* layered onto ruins has



"Twist and Turn series," Manteno State Hospital, IL  (2011) José Ferreira

its photographic counterpart in long time-exposures, as were necessary in early photographic portrai-ture. Exposed over several minutes, those mid-nineteenth-century images became imbued with a patina of time — "aura," as German thinker Walter Benjamin described the deeper knowledge exposures of *long durée* revealed of the sitter. Embodied in these photographs is a fading of time from presence to absence, absence to presence, resulting in the ebb and flow of memory, with, as French thinker Thierry de Duve asserts, the Freudian psychic mechanisms of mourning and melancholy at work underneath. Far from blocking memory and speech as trauma may do (figured in my argument as the "wreck"), the long-exposure (figured as the "ruin") welcomes it. De Duve claims time-exposure photography has a mourning process built into its semiotic structure, just as the instantaneous snapshot has a built-in trauma effect.[2]

Professor of Comparative Literature, Daniel Heller-Roazen, points out that the Babylonian Talmud claims that after the immediate wreck of the Tower, "the air around the [ruined] tower makes one lose one's memory." [3] Both Heller-Roazen and Derrida have inferred that after Babel language and confusion become synonymous.[4] The Tower's destruction and dispersal of languages therefrom, which subverted empire, is akin to Constantin-François Volney's anti-despotic tale, *Ruins of Empires* (1791); it was brought to England from France and circulated in Jacobin circles, celebrating the destruction of empire through death's entropic leveling that left only ruins. Later, Mary Shelley's gothic tale, *The Last*

*Roman Architectural Fantasy* (mid-1700s) Giovanni Battista Piranesi

*Man* (1826), also envisioned future ruin. A global plague, erasing the human species, leaves Verney as the last man remaining to tell the tale of order lapsing into undifferentiation and decay. Like Volney's vision, it's a fantasy of entropy, of a world plunged into chaos, obscurity, contrariness, and unintelligibility. But by the Renaissance, painters could romanticize Greek ruins. And in the eighteenth century, Piranesi memorialized Roman antiquity as its shards were being excavated. Ruins had started to speak and demanded we reply to their presence.

Ruins — if viewed properly, painted or photographed within a set of *picturesque* conventions adumbrated by British artist William Gilpin (1724 - 1804) celebrating the effects of the "judicious mallet" of time — could be sites of positive aesthetic contemplation. Gilpin's advice to estate landowners on how to design gardens with irregular sight lines and how to site simulated "ruins" of "classical" structures within, lead to a renewed interest in the ancient that, paradoxically, aimed at timeless depictions of change. Within this aesthetic, a crack in plaster, withered leaves, gnarly trees, old huts, and S-curve shaped streams or paths offer visual delight to eyes grown bored with staid Neo-Classical primness. The ability to discern beauty, where others might only find chaos and ugliness, offered entry into a coterie of connoisseurs sharing an increasingly fashionable cultural *distinction*. English romantic poet Robert Southey testifies to such: "within the last thirty years a taste for the picturesque has sprung up . . . a new science for which a new language has been formed, and for which the English have discovered a new sense in themselves, which assuredly was not possessed by their fathers." [5]

This picturesque aesthetic, firmly established in traditional art forms in the late-eighteenth century, emerges early on in photographic history with the William Henry Fox-Talbot's calotypes in *Sun Pictures of Scotland* (1844), maturing in the work of D. O. Hill and Adamson, continuing on through nineteenth-century documentation of ancient ruins as in Maxime Du Camp's work in Egypt; later in that century, photo Pictorialism softened the focus, but not the interest in such subjects. Then, during a nascent Modernism, photographer Eugène Atget sought to record the fast-disappearing



*Tomb of Sir Walter Scott, Dryburgh Abbey* (calotype, 1844)
William Henry Fox-Talbot

*Pylons, Rameses' Palace* (calotype, 1850) Maxime Du Camp

aspects of Post-Haussmann era Paris. Later, during the Great Depression, Walker Evans meticulously recorded weather-beaten sharecropper shacks, turning poverty into the picturesque.

But what now in our Post-modern times? Our ruins are *modern ruins*, the collapsing structures of our Post-Fordist era, where once gleaming utilitarian structures necessary to Fordist assembly-line production have turned to rust and rubble, leaving eco-nomic and human ruin in its wake. What, now, in a fast-changing Asia? Post-Communist China now embarks on widespread demolition of the tradition-al, followed by quick disposal of the wreckage and fast construction of the very factories and steel-and-glass high-rises that have turned to rust and rubble in the West. Areas of the East and the West seem to be living in two different historical time zones. The wrecks and ruins artists engage with must be understood within their respective contexts. Even on the order terminology, one must be attentive. In China, contem-porary art is usually denominated "Conceptual," whereas the same artworks in the West are termed "Post-Conceptual." This creates perplexing interpretational "parallax shifts" as one moves back and forth from Eastern to Western perspectives on contemporary art.

A variety of artists, not just photographers, have found this situation grist for a variety of artistic approaches to the ruin. Joann Greco in "The Psychology of Ruin Porn," muses about this pervasive interest: "There's no shortage of theories as to just why these images . . . fascinate us [speaking of Matthew Christopher's color photographs taken inside a long-shuttered Philadelphia mental facility]. They 'offer an escape from excessive order,' says Tim Edensor, professor of geography at Manchester Metropolitan University who studies the appeal of urban ruins. 'They're marginal spaces filled with old and obscure objects. You can see and feel things that you can't in the ordinary world'." [6] Greco notes that Len Albright, a Princeton post-doctoral student, claims that it's also for the thrill: "the derring-do" involved in accessing dangerous spaces, the sneaky Black Ops-ish crawling and skulking about in what seems like a modern battlefield. [7] Some label the visual resultant of this poking around collapsing structures "ruin porn." Senior editor at *The Atlantic*, Alexis C. Madrigal, addresses this term within the context of popular online (Tumblr) culture and the fine arts' aesthetic interest in modern ruins. In so doing he unwittingly adds an epistemological spin to Albright's point about scary places:

> 'Ruin porn,' as it has rightly been called, is a staple of Tumblr culture. Broken down
> buildings catching the light just so. Stacks of tires artfully arranged by the fates and
> the poor. Golden ratios of trash to light, of humanbuilt to humans, of what was to

what is. The frisson of ruin porn derives, in part, by how actually scary it would be to find oneself among the sublime decay [this is *not* the tamed realm haunted by that photographic *flâneur*, the street photographer]. IRL [in real life], finding yourself in a blight-filled neighborhood surrounded by decaying buildings, only the sound of trash swirling around your ankles, is not actually a good thing. Not to get too evo-psych on you, but I think a certain level of animal instinct kicks in. It might pay to stand on alert while you hold a $2,000 camera next to a crumbling building in a burned-out area of Detroit. And, of course, 'terror is in all cases whatsoever . . . the ruling prin-ciple of the sublime,' Edmund Burke wrote in 1757. As was true for the wilderness of the 18th century is true for the rewilded of the 21st. Sometimes, *the place where you're scared also feels closer to where the truth may be revealed* [emphasis added].[8]

Other claim ruins, past and present, displace our fear of death onto objects all the better to distance mortality from us as: *The death that's not me*. Blogger Daniel Jones, explaining popular Tumblr culture, offers an additional entry point into what may be fascinating about our modern ruins. He understands Tumblr culture as steeped in the electric speed of contemporary social media where, in Marshall McLuhan's terms, "the medium-is-the-message," [9] where our technological prosthetics shape our lived world:

Seeking to establish/reestablish our place in the visual universe as a society and as individuals, we turn to the pulse of the brief and the instantaneous. Thus is born the short-term post-physical consciousness, where our realities and identities are deter-mined by like buttons and self-curated blogs. This is the New Art of Being: as with IRL Reality, in URL Reality [unreal life] you establish yourself into a clique based on visual taste. Are you a Jock, a Punk, a Nerd, or a Stoner [or a Ruin Porner]? [10]

Given all the above, it's no surprise such a "New Art of Being," where all is flux, has found its latter-day Piranesies who have become fixated on today's ruins as figures of temporal change offering



*Roosevelt Warehouse, Detroit, MI* (2010) Scott Hocking

*Peacock Alley, Lee Plaza Hotel* in *Detroit Disassembled* (2010) Andrew Moore

melancholic musings on entropy which oscillate between a sense of loss and hopes for resurrection. They view our modern ruins as our not-so-long-ago past demolished, as once thriving industrial zones that have been "rewilded" (a term that suggests an urbanscape turning back into a new form of land-scape) within less than a generation. A gutted factory; a huge, rusted machine; a spread of many city blocks barren but for a few collapsing houses; a former library with soggy, torn books mulching the dissolving floor; abandoned and trashed automobiles, rotting beached ships — all physically mark the path of the Economic Bomb dropped during the painful transition from a Statist Welfare Capitalism to a Globalized Neo-Liberal Late-Capitalism when good paying union jobs vanished overseas.[11] The result? A tsunami flood of ruin in many cities not seen since the bomb-ravaged cities of the Second World War. In the United States, Detroit, Michigan has become the classic site of such "rewilding." In Germany that honor goes to the Ruhr; once haven to heavy industry, it experienced similar devastation during the seventies and eighties. Both the mass media and the art world have turned a curious eye to these ravaged spaces as artists and architects find inspiration there, as did their classical ruin-rovering counterparts in time-past.

The production and analysis of art centered around the topic of these modern ruins offer opportunities to engage geography, art history, landscape conventions, and social relations as space is shaped and structured by a variety of "global flows" (the term is social-cultural anthropologist Arjun Appadurai's).[12] Richard Wilk argues, "that the nature of cultural hegemony may be changing, but it is

hardly disappearing, . . . The new global cultural system *promotes difference* instead of suppressing it, but difference of a particular kind. Its hegemony is not of content, but of form. . . . Another way to say this is that while different cultures continue to be quite distinct and varied, they are becoming different in very uniform ways."[13] Can tackling the modern ruin result in artworks that subvert dominant economic and cultural ideologies or do they lapse into what naysayers call "ruin porn"? The more interesting images herein come from artists aware that the physical world is already an encoded and recognizable terrain and so riff on that knowledge, playing with the fact that their photographs of these "globo-blastscapes" are already representations of something that is already a representation in its own right. They become self-reflexive in relation to historical and aesthetic conventions pertaining to their topic.



> als ich an jenem naßkalten Morgen auf der Haupt-
> straße von Lovosice her auf Terezín zuhielt, bis zu-
> letzt nicht, wie nahe ich meinem Ziel bereits war.
> Noch verstellten mir ein paar regenschwarze Ahorne
> und Kastanien die Sicht, da stand ich schon zwischen
> den Fassaden der ehemaligen Garnisonshäuser, und
> einige Schritte weiter und ich trat hinaus auf den von
> einer doppelten Baumreihe gesäumten Paradeplatz.
> Das Auffälligste und mir bis heute Unbegreifliche an
> diesem Ort, sagte Austerlitz, war für mich von Anfang
> an seine Leere. Ich wußte von Věra, daß Terezín seit
> vielen Jahren wieder eine reguläre Kommune ist, und
> doch dauerte es nahezu eine Viertelstunde, bis ich
> drüben auf der anderen Seite des Karrees den ersten
> Menschen erblickte, eine vornübergebeugte Gestalt,
> die sich unendlich langsam an einem Stock voranbe-
> wegte und doch, als ich einen Moment nur mein Auge
> von ihr abwandte, auf einmal verschwunden war.
> Sonst begegnete mir den ganzen Morgen niemand in
> den schnurgeraden, verlassenen Straßen von Terezín,
> außer einem Geistesgestörten in einem abgerissenen
> Anzug, der mir zwischen den Linden des Brunnen-
> parks über den Weg lief und in einer Art von gestam-
> meltem Deutsch wild fuchtelnd ich weiß nicht was für
> eine Geschichte erzählte, ehe auch er, den Hundert-
> kronenschein, den ich ihm gegeben hatte, noch in der
> Hand, mitten im Davonspringen, wie man sagt, vom
>
> — 270 —

> Erdboden verschluckt wurde. War schon die Verlas-
> senheit der gleich dem idealen Sonnenstaatswesen
> Campanellas nach einem strengen geometrischen
> Raster angelegten Festungsstadt ungemein nieder-
>
> drückend, so war es mehr noch das Abweisende der
> stummen Häuserfronten, hinter deren blinden Fen-
> stern, sooft ich auch an ihnen hinaufblickte, nirgends
> ein einziger Vorhang sich rührte. Ich konnte mir
> nicht denken, sagte Austerlitz, wer oder ob über-
> haupt irgend jemand in diesen öden Gebäuden noch
> wohnte, trotzdem mir andererseits aufgefallen war,
> in welch großer Zahl in den Hinterhöfen mit ro-
> ter Farbe grob numerierte Aschenkübel der Wand
>
> — 271 —

W. G. Sebald, *Austerlitz* (2003, Hanser, p.270 - 271)

From a psychoanalytic position, our topic also gets us into the dark areas of trauma, memory, and melancholia. Such topics have been well-probed by the late contemporary writer W. G. Sebald (b. Bavaria, 1944). This German, living in England was a consummate *bricoleur* — as he often referred to himself, borrowing the term from Claude Lévi-Strauss to describe his cobbling together of diverse elements — and passionate autodidact. In both his fiction (*Rings of Saturn, Vertigo*, and *Austerlitz*) and in his controversial non-fiction essays on the German citizenry's numbed response to the Allied bombing of German cities in *On the Natural History of Destruction*, Sebald gives us a sustained meditation on these themes via scripto-visual texts in which photography plays an important role.[14] Sebald's writings will, throughout my discussion, help elucidate a wide-range of recent artistic activity centered around my theme "wreck and ruin."

Roberto Rossellini's *Germany Year Zero* (1948) brings both wreck and ruins together in one film. A child, Edmund Kohler, living in postwar Berlin suffers deprivations amidst the rubble of war ruins, eventually committing suicide by jumping off a bomb-blasted building. The camera lingers on the body of the child's wrecked body. The boy actor playing Edmund was chosen by Rossellini because he resembled his recently deceased son, Romano.

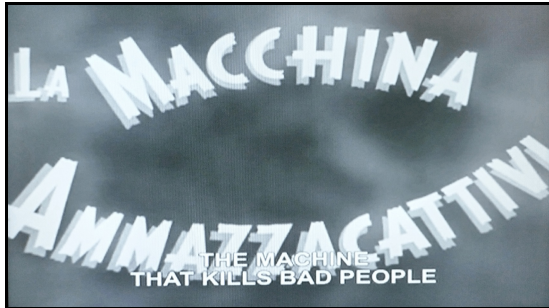Scenes from Rossellini's *Germany Year Zero* (in German)
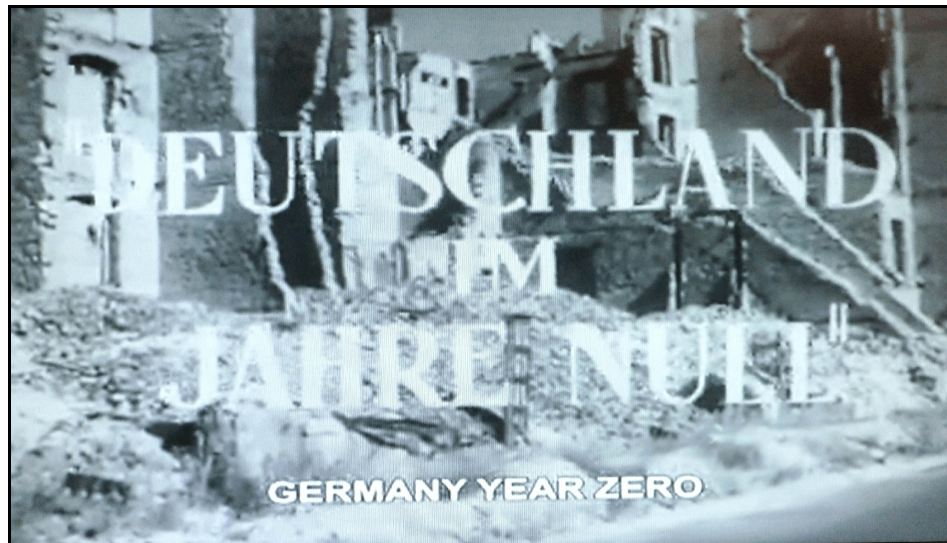
Scenes from *Germany Year Zero* (dir., Roberto Rossellini)

Four years later, Rossellini associates photography with death in *The Machine That Kills Bad People* (1952). Celestino (Gennaro Pisano), a high-strung portrait photographer, is thrust into the conflict between haves and have-nots when he takes in an old beggar who turns out to be (or is he?) the town's revered patron Sant'Andrea. The saint does something odd to Celestino's camera after a discussion of local bullies, and suddenly all Celestino has to do to wreck a villain is find a photo of the man and re-photograph it using his own camera. The victim dies frozen, a human ruin, in whatever pose he took in the original photograph.





This town really needs me.

Scenes from *The Machine That Kills Bad People* (dir., Roberto Rossellini)
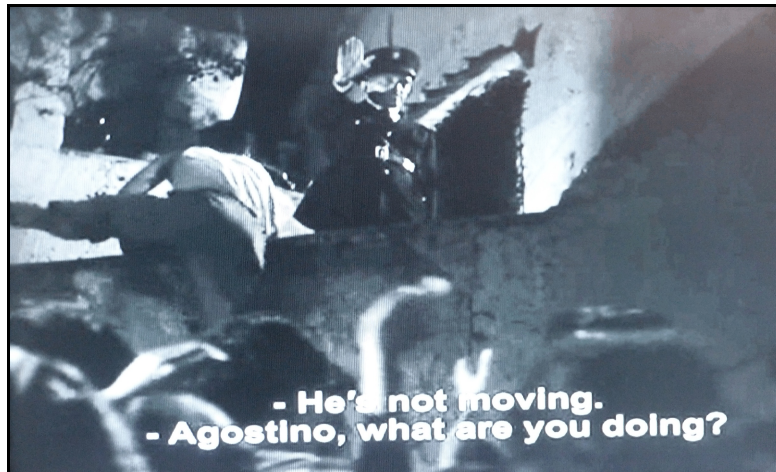
These two terms, wreck and ruin, as used in my thought-experiment refer to two temporal analogies, one bearing on camera-time, the other on historical-time as realized in space:

instantaneous exposure : wreck
as
time-exposure : the ruin



*Sidewalk Clock, New York City*  (1947) Ida Wyman

Austrian writer and poet, Konrad Bayer (1932 - 1964), member of the *Wiener Gruppe* [15] and major influence on W.G. Sebald, observed in his strange short fictional work, *the head of vitus bering* (1970) that, "the next discovery will not be made by water, land, or air, but in time." But, as suggested above, time has increasingly become incarnated in *spaces.* This becomes apparent in the diverse works that will come under examination in this monograph.

In his novels, Sebald frequently uses chance encounters in space/time to propel his narrative. Curator, John Szarkowski, notes Douglas Davis, has written somewhere of photography's "strange alliance with time and chance." [16] My early encounters with some of the artwork discussed herein were fortuitous, rather than sought out. A phone call here, an e-mail there, inviting me to look at an exhibition in Madison,



*Harlem Valley/Wingdale Project #8423, Building 22, Storage* (detail, archival pigment print, 2011) Avery Danziger

*Mummy #1, Guanajuato, Mexico* (Hand-held time exposure with flash-fill, 1976) Avery Danzinger
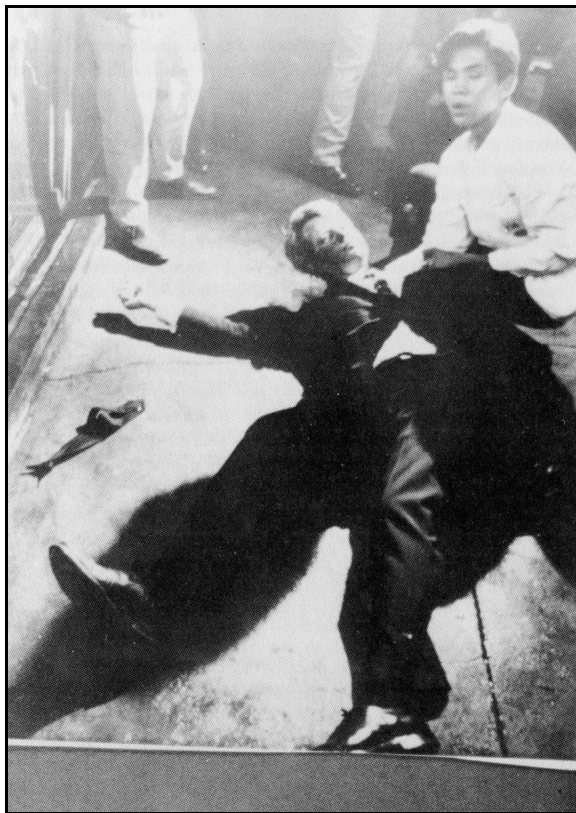


*The Assassination of Robert F. Kennedy* (June 5, 1968) Boris Yaro

Above:

This is a highly constructed image, combining long hand-held exposure and instantaneous strobe to achieve its disturbing effect.

Left:

*This is a raw and candid photography, performing what we are always told is the core task of the medium: to capture the instant moment.*

— Douglas Davis, "Photography as Culture" (1975)

Introduction/xxx

Wisconsin, or view a selection of images on a laptop in New York's Grand Central Station; an unforseen installation at the School of the Art Institute's Sullivan Galleries, a lucky find on the Internet with a link to another link, and so forth. These initial surprises were so intriguing, they have sent me on a more carefully mapped journey through what I have come to view as a subject as deep as the debris accumulating in Detroit's most exanimate areas. This monograph — with its several "case studies" focusing on Los Angeles artist Edward Ruscha and Madison, Wisconsin photographer Lewis Koch (wrecks) and globe-trotting José Ferreira, East Coast-based Avery Danziger, Detroit-based Scott Hocking, and Beijing-based Xing Danwen (ruins) — can only scrape the surface.

<div align="center">*  *  *</div>

# Endnotes

1. Marie Étienne, "Métamorphosis," *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies* 15 (Dec., 2011), 644.

2. Thierry de Duve, "Time Exposure and Snapshot," *October* 5 (Summer 1978), 117 - 119).

3. Daniel Heller-Roazen*, Echolalias: On the Forgetting of Language* (New York: 2008), 225.

4. Jacques Derrida, 'Des tours de Babel,' *Psyche*, vol. 1 of *Inventions of the Other*, trans. Peggy Kamuf et al., ed. Kamuf and Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford, CA, 2007), 196.

5. As cited by Malcolm Andrews, "Landscape Conversation," *Landscape Theory: The Art Seminar*, eds., Rachael Ziady DeLue and James Elkins (New York: Routledge, 2008), 215.

6. Joann Greco, "The Psychology of Ruin Porn," *The Atlantic Cities,* January 6, 2012 online at: *http://www.theatlantic cities.com/design/2012/01/psychology-ruin-porn/886/.* Also see Mark MacDonald, " 'Ruin Porn,' the Aftermath of the Beijing Olympics," *International Herald Tribune* (July 15, 2012) at: *http://rendezvous.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/07/15/ ruin-porn-the-aftermath-of-the-beijing-olympics/.* Also see Rustbeltchic's post attacking the use of this term in, "Ruin Porn, as Dirty as You Need It to Be," (November 14, 2012) at: *http://rustbeltchic.com/ruin-porn-as-dirty-as-you-need-it-to-be/.*

7. Ibid.

8. Alexis C. Madrigal, "Detroit 'Ruin Porn' from a Drone," *The Atlantic* online at: *http://www.theatlantic.com/technology/ archive/2012/07/detroit-ruin-porn-from-a-drone/259944/.*

9. The phrase was introduced in his most widely known book, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, (1964). McLuhan proposed that a *medium* itself, not the content it carries, should be the focus of study. He said that a medium affects the society in which it plays a role not only by the content delivered over the medium, but also by the characteristics of the medium itself. McLuhan frequently punned on the word "message", changing it to "mass age", "mess age", and "massage"; a later book, *The Medium Is the Massage (1967)* was originally to be titled *The Medium is the Message*, but McLuhan preferred the new title, which is said to have been a printing error.

10. Daniel Jones, "The Rise of Tumblr Culture and The Post Physical Reality," Deutsche Telekom's *Electronic Beats* (Aug. 3, 2011) online at: *http://www.electronicbeats.net/2011/08/03/the-rise-of-tumblr-culture-the-post-physical-reality/.*

11. The transition to a regime of flexible accumulation involving a new round of space-time compression made possible by electric speed global communications in our information age, a new combination of spatial and temporal response to the problem of over-accumulation, resulted in rapid shifting of jobs in the USA to overseas venues where labor costs were much less. See Manuel Castells, *The Informational City: Information Technology, Economic Restructuring, and the Urban-Regional Process* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989) and David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Inquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989).

12. See Arjun Appadurai. *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis, MN: Public Worlds Volume 1, University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

13. Richard Wilk, "Learning to be local in Belize: global systems of common difference," *Worlds Apart: Modernity Through the Prism of the Local*, ed., Daniel Miller (New York: Routledge, 1995), 118.

14. For an in-depth examination of photography in Sebald's production, see the anthology edited by Lise Patt, with Christel Dillbohner, *Searching for Sebald: Photography After W.G. Sebald* (Los Angeles: The Institute of Cultural Inquiry, 2007).

15. *Wiener Gruppe* (Vienna Group) was a small and loose avant-garde constellation of Austrian poets and writers which arose from an older and wider postwar association of artists called *The Group* that was formed around 1954 under the influence of H. C. Artmann (1921 - 2000) in Vienna and existed for about a decade.

16. Douglas Davis, "Photography as Culture," *ArtCulture* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), 74.
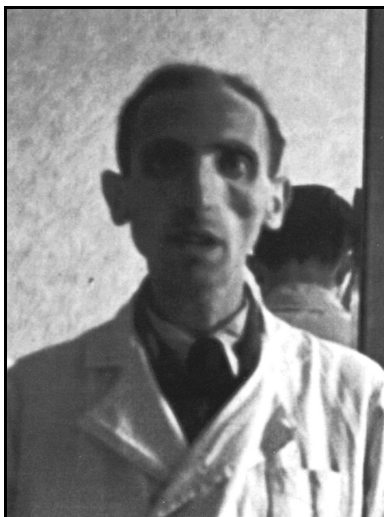
# Wreck and Ruin
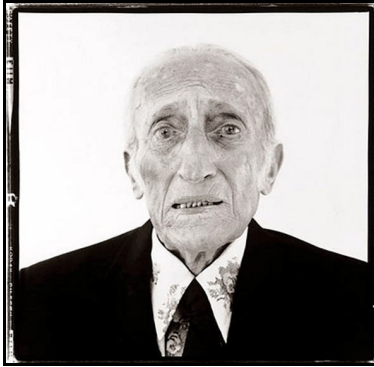


*Jacob Israel Avedon* (1973) Richard Avedon



*Survivor #1* (C-print, 2004) Liu Zheng



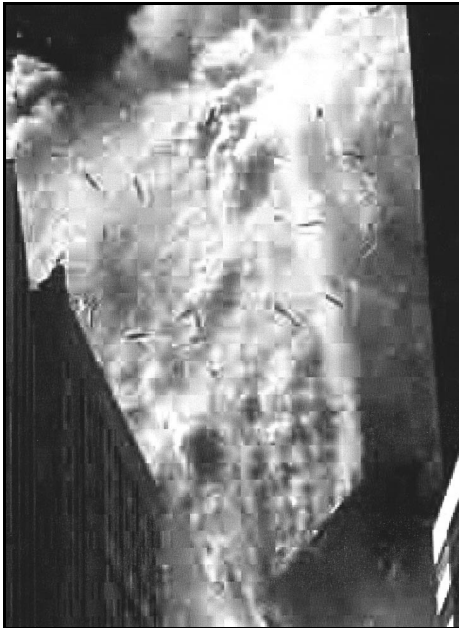*Lodz Ghetto Barber* (detail, color slide 183, c. 1942) Walter Genewein

Henri Cartier-Bresson observed, "Of all the means of expression, photography is the only one that fixes forever the precise and transitory instant. We photographers deal in things that are continually vanishing, and when they have vanished, there is no contrivance on earth that can make them come back again." And Roland Barthes in *Camera Lucida* writes that the photograph's "testimony bears not on the object but on time." Both Cartier-Bresson and Barthes were asserting photography's uniqueness as a medium, that an immediate fact about photography is that it's not painting. A photograph (even digital, if certain criteria are met) does not present us with merely the "likeness" of things, it presents us with the "things themselves." [1] William Henry Fox Talbot's *The Pencil of Nature* (1844) asserts: "Photography will enable us to introduce into our pictures a multitude of minute details which add to the truth and reality of the representation, but which no artist would take the trouble to copy faithfully from nature." Details as demanded by crime scene investigation, but also "rough," "intricate," "varied," "broken" forms so valued by lovers of the prevailing aesthetic of that day, the picturesque. Talbot continues: "A casual gleam of sunshine, or a cast shadow thrown across his path, a time-withered oak, or a moss-covered stone may awaken a train of thoughts and feelings, and picturesque imaginings." Walt Whitman expanded on the poetics of the everyday, that which Talbot sees as a perfect subject for the new medium. In *The Leaves of Grass* (1855), the poet writes: "I do not doubt but the majesty and beauty of the world are latent in any idea of the world . . . I do not doubt there is far more in trivialities, insects, vulgar persons, slaves, dwarfs, weeds, *rejected refuse*, than I have supposed [my emphasis]." This is not far removed from French surrealist Georges Bataille's 1929 conception of the "formless" (*l'informe*), which includes: "mess," "jumble," and "trash."

Both practices (evidence and aesthetic expression) were anticipated in Fox Talbot's insightful writings on the medium. But these things, "absolute Particulars," as Roland Barthes put it, are imbricated within a temporal flow and, with the advent of timed shutters, become frozen in time, become, as Barthes observes in *Camera Lucida* (1981), "that-has-been," even as it points to

Screen-shot from the film *Weekend* (1967) Jean-Luc Godard


*Jpeg co01* (enlarged, pixelated Trade Center collapsing photo, jpeg file, 2004) manipulated by Thomas Ruff


Kirkpatrick Sale smashes a computer

"there-it-is." [2] As André Bazin pointed out before Barthes (and congruent with Cartier-Bresson's statement above), photographic technology "embalms time, rescuing it simply from its proper corruption." [3] Roland Barthes succinctly describes this embalming as "the flat death," noting that "death is the *eidos*" of photography." [4] But that embalming can be of two types of corpses: 1) the accident victim (I always think of Godard's 1967 film *Weekend* and J. G. Ballard's novella *Crash*); the almost-dead (as in Liu Zheng's "Survivors" series); the instant ruination of a city by aerial bombardment (a dystopic site that three years after the war becomes lush terrain turned into startling shapes, intense shadows, and rich monochrome contrasts as in Jacques Tourneur's 1948 RKO production, *Berlin Express,* a mystery-film genre used to activate an aesthetic exploration of the ruined and displaced forms of postwar Europe's ruins), or 2) the gradual turn of a city, like Detroit, into a ruin as documented in Heidi Ewing and Rachel Grady's 2012 film *Detropia* (an urban site also mined aesthetically by Detroit artist Scott Hocking) focusing on what promotional copy for the film described as "the grim beauty" found in "hulking skeleton's of factories"; or humans suffering a slow death (successive depictions of cancer or AIDS patients' decline, Walter Genewein's shot of a Lodz Ghetto detainee slowly wasting away, or simply death by the inevitable pounding we take from time's mallet).
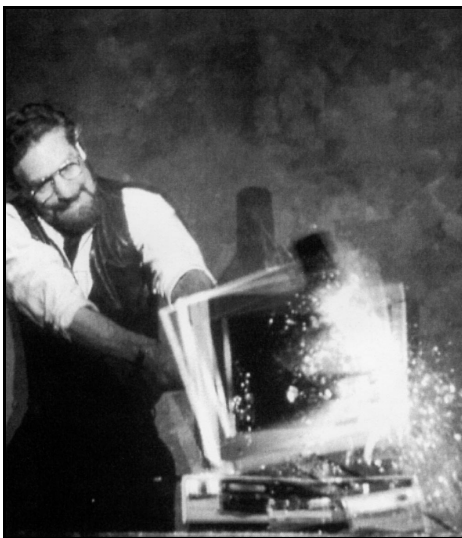
Such transformations can be suffered by the body of the built environment: the very sudden demise of the World Trade Center, or the more prolonged steady destruction wrought by urban renewal projects, or the rapid alteration of territories under conflict, such as Israel-Palestine (documented by Daniel Bauer).

The inherent temporal aspect of photography is directly connected to its light-sensitive chain of causality. It paints with light, in wink or via time-exposure. The "wink," the instantaneous exposure, "wrecks" the flow of time, abruptly crashing it onto film so a contingent *event* is captured. Time-exposure layers time, gently extracting the quintessence of the sitter during minutes in front of the camera; rather than negated as in the instantaneous

*Crash of PSA Flight 182* (Sept. 30, 1978) HaNs Wendt (also captured by local TV crew)

> In Crash TV, we suddenly exit modernist culture, and enter the unknown
> terrain of the postmodern primitive, that territory where all the postmodern tech-
> nologies involved in the virtualization of the flesh merge with the most primitive of
> human emotions: fascination with the smoking wreckage of the crash, chilled paralysis
> at the sight of the Catastrophe, one last joke as the plane falls through the air in its
> death spiral. . . . .
>
> — Arthur Kroker, *Spasm: Virtual Reality, Android Music, Electric Flesh* (1993)



*Bomber, a chance unwinding* (chapbook and installation, 2011) Lewis Koch

Modern ruins of shipbuilding yards featured in the film *The Company Men* (dir. John Wells, 2010)

*The Bird* (long time-exposure, 1958) Wynn Bullock

shot, temporal flow becomes an equal partner in the photographic portrait. This contrasting of two exposure types — one where time is blown apart, the other observing a *longue durée* that results in an evocative aura, is taken up in Walter Benjamin's 1931, *A Short History of Photography.* Thierry de Duve's 1978 essay, "Time Exposure and Snapshot," equates the instantaneous snapshot, a grasping at reality, with trauma wherein the present tense (as a hypothetical model of temporality) would "annihilate itself through splitting: too early to see the event occur at the surface; to late to witness its happening in reality." [5] De Duve says this is what Barthes understood as the photographic paradox: the image being illogically both *here* (an index pointing to) and *formerly* (a light trace of that which had been in front of the camera in some past time).[6]

De Duve adds that "the photograph is not traumatic because of its content, but because of immanent features of its particular time and space." In both trauma and the photograph, says de Duve, language fails to operate. "The trauma effect is of course a limit, but an internal one, enhanced by the subject matter of the photograph." [7] This consideration of time, trauma, and aphasia is the starting point for Ulrich Baer's *Spectral Evidence: The Photography of Trauma* (2005).[8] De Duve equates the snapshot's antithesis, the time-exposure, with another illogical conjunction: *now* and *there*.[9] — the slightly unsharp image where chiaroscuro so produced is not the background of shape, but its temporality, a fading of time from presence to absence, absence to presence — the ebb and flow of memory, with the Freudian psychic mechanisms of mourning and melancholy. Far from blocking speech, it welcomes it. For de Duve, ". . . photography is probably the only image-producing technique that has a mourning process built into its semiotic structure, just as it has a built-in trauma effect.[10]

One can extend Benjamin and de Duve's divide between two modes of photographic *exposure*



*South Vietnamese National Police Chief Brig. Gen Nguyen Ngoc Loan Executes a Vietcong Officer with a Single Pistol Shot in the Head* (1968) Eddie Adams

— searing the plate versus gradually painting with light — into two general types of *subject matter*: wreck and ruin. As one can combine flash and timed exposure — as seen in American artist Avery Danziger's early work (1980s) where sharpness and blur coexist and overlap, the division between wreck and ruin can shading into each other as well. This is exemplified in the object of Lewis Koch's *Bomber, a chance unwinding* (2011) project where a B-17 bomber crash from 1943 has remained on site, a wreck that stubbornly resists becoming a rusted ruin, which now honors those who perished in it.
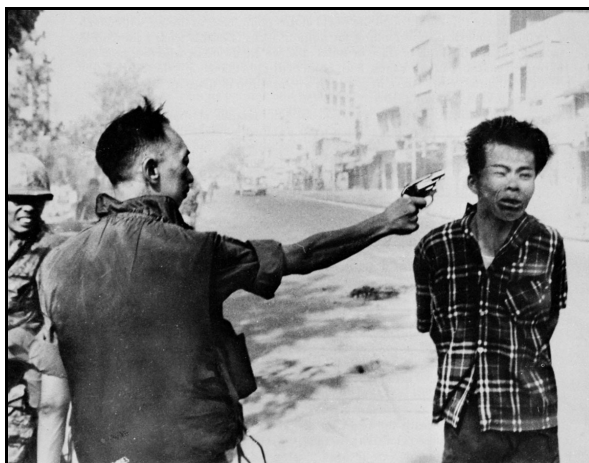
*Partially Buried Woodshed, Kent State* (1970) Robert Smithson


A page from *Interruptions in Landscape and Logic* (1977) Robert Cumming


*The Ruins of Opera House, Virginia City* (1949) Johan Hagemeyer

Photography is a most accident-prone medium fraught from its invention with accidents, ruined experiments, and what by happenstance gets into the frame (often traumatic events). But it also tames time, creating historical narrative, a space for mourning. Hence, it may be broadly examined from two mutually implicated aspects: wreck and ruin.

1) *wrecks*: contingent events (often newsworthy) so well captured by New York City news photographer Weegee; summary executions, like Eddie Adams's 1968 famous shot of the murder of a Vietcong infiltrator; post-bombardment photos of cities turned into instant ruins; lucky grab shots of disasters like in Hans Wendt's Pulitzer Prize-winning snap of a falling airliner over San Diego; Emmet Gowin's meticulous documentation of blasted nature in his series on the Mount St. Helens eruption (recording what in geological time would take many years of exposure to natural elements, but which has been accomplished in one huge snap of nature's fury); studies of slower destruction by urban renewal as in Danny Lyon's *The Destruction of Lower Manhattan* (1967); instant urban destruction played off on in Thomas Ruff's enlarged, pixelated "wrecks," culled from anonymous Internet imagery, of World Trade Center's north tower collapsing; staged-to-be-documented "destructive" events, such as neo-Luddite Kirkpatrick Sale's spectacular sledge-hammering of computers; a more arty, "cooler" approach is seen in Edward Ruscha's humorous photobook, *Royal Road Test* (1967) where a typewriter is tossed out of a car at 90 m.p.h.; and in Robert Cumming's witty photobook *Interruptions in Landscape and Logic* (1977) recording the devastation of a WWII beach assault of a Japanese-held island via a fabricated-to-be-photographed set; Jeff Wall's fabricated-to-be-photographed *Destroyed Room* (1978) figures here. More recently, Scott Hocking's "Shipwrecks" series of Detroit's wrecked autos and boats fit here. Then there is the more serious and complex riff on violent, contingent events, such as: Lewis Koch's chapbook and installation *Bomber, a chance unwinding* (2011), probing a B-17 crash-site in the Wyoming mountains in 1943, and Canadian photojournalist Ed Ou's shot capturing a man cell-phone-recording shards of Egyptian State Security documents confiscated in Cairo during the tumult of the 2011 "Arab Spring."
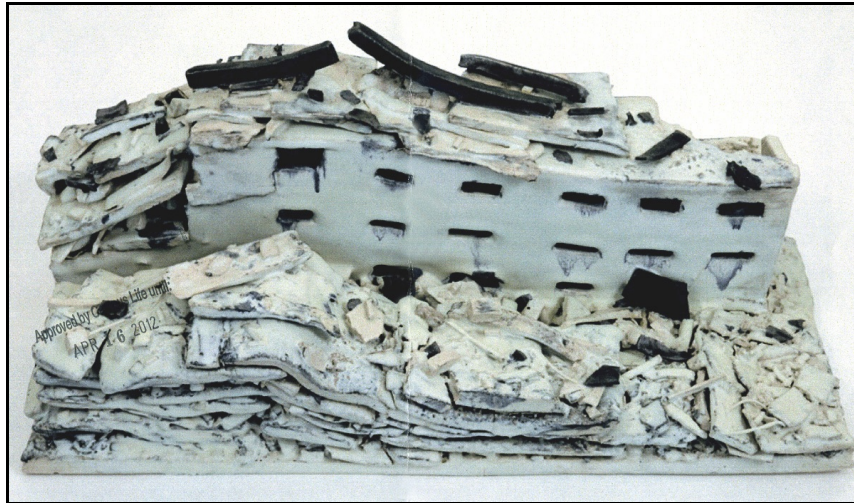
From *Man-Made Disasters* series (ceramic maquettes based on photographs, 2010) Alison Ruttan

> *Nothing is more interesting, I find, than an image where the possibility of adequate representation itself is in ruins.*
> — James Elkins, *Six Stories from the End of Representation* (2008)

> *Ruins are models or heralds of the disintegrating mind and collapsing principles of the age after the end of stable belief.*
> — Robert Harbison, *The Built, the Unbuilt, and the Unbuildable* (1991)



*Ronchamp Cathedral as a Ruin* (1981) Tom Mellor

*Ruin-room, trompe l'oeil* painting, Trinità dei Monti, Rome (c. 1766) Charles-Louis Clérisseau

      *And how fine a place the house seemed to me now that it was imperceptibly nearing the brink of dissolution and silent oblivion.*
      — W. G. Sebald, *The Rings of Saturn* (1995)



*Cabin, Hale County, AL* (1936) Walker Evans

Wreck & Ruin/8

"Shipwrecks" series (archival pigment print, 1999 - present) Scott Hocking

*The ship is the heterotopia* par excellence*. . . . In civilizations without boats, dreams dry up, espionage takes the places of adventure and police take the places of pirates.*

— Michel Foucault*, "Of Other Spaces, Heterotopias"



"Shipwrecks" series (archival pigment print,1999 - present) Scott Hocking

Wreck & Ruin/9

*The Typewriter* (1951) Wynn Bullock

2) *ruins*: a considered view, the recording of the effects of the "judicious mallet" of time as per William Gilpin's very influential text, *Three Essays: On Picturesque Beauty; On Picturesque Travel; and on Sketching Landscape: to which is Added a Poem, On Landscape Painting* (1792); following Gilpin's advice, many landowners began designing gardens with irregular sight lines and prefabricated ruins of "classical" structures that, paradoxically, aim at romantic, timeless depictions of change. John Robin-son, writing in 1839, addressed the nature of the picturesque (already a set of conventions) and the camera's suitability to render it well: "A crack in the plaster, a withered leaf lying on a projecting cornice, or an accumulation of dust in a hollow molding of a distant building, when they exist in the original, are faithfully copied in these wonderful pictures."

This picturesque aesthetic, emerges early on in photography, starting with the calotypes of William Henry Fox Talbot, maturing in the work of D. O. Hill, and continuing on through late-nineteenth-century Pictorialist soft-focus and non-silver media. Then into Modernist crisp documentary, as in Walker Evans's treatment of weather-beaten sharecropper shacks of which James Agee's description of in *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (1941) tells us what attracted that photographer's eye: ". . . each texture in the wood . . . is distinct in the eye as a razor; each nailhead is distinct; each seam and split; and each slight warping, each random knot and knothole: and in each board, as lovely a music as a contour map and unique as a thumbprint, its grain, which was its living strength, and these wild creeks cut stiff across by saws; moving nearer the close-laid arcs and shadows of those tearing wheels." Carl Chiarenza, pushing the photographic document into expressive photographic Stieglitzian "equivalents" in *Detritus, Interlochen* (1958), focused on fragments that in a wider scope would be a dystopian scene of urban rubbish testifying to the transience of durables (as in Xing Danwen's large chromogenic prints of Chinese electronics debris), not unlike Robert Smithson's conceptualist deadpan treatment of the same in *Monuments of Passaic*, 1967 and constructed in *Partially Buried Shed, Kent State*, 1970),


*Zeus Hole, Summer* from "Garden of the Gods" series (Detroit, MI, 2009 -2011) Scott Hocking
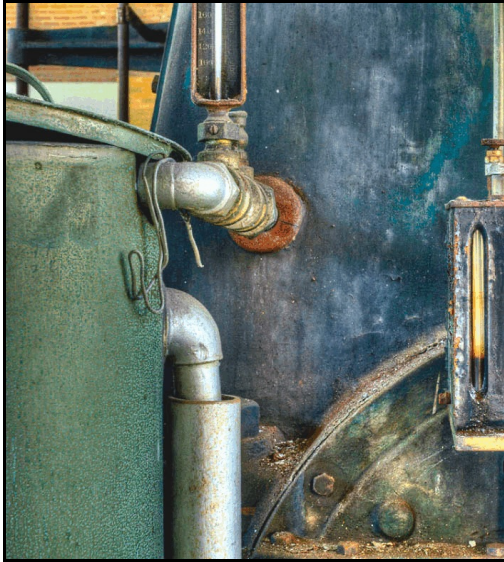
*Harlem Valley/Wingdale Project* (archival pigment photograph, 2011) Avery Danziger

or as seen in intense color in Michelangelo Antonioni's film *The Red Desert* (1964). More recently, decrepit structures have been sources of interest and intervention to artists: Margaret Stratton (unfunctional prisons); Candace Schutt (long-abandoned houses in job-depleted Michigan); Andrew Moore and (the ruins of Detroit's defunct auto industry); Scott Hocking (creative interventions among the ruins of Detroit's demolished auto factories as in his 2009 - 2011 series "Garden of the Gods"); Sara VanDerBeek (images of ruined post-Katrina New Orleans);[10] Zhan Wang and Rong Rong (ruins in Beijing); Lieko Shiga (photographing photographs *in situ,* scattered among Japan's Tsunami debris); Alfonso Zubiaga and Simon Norfolk (ghost towns, long-abandoned sites around the globe); Alan Cohen (his *Lines of Authority* project, recording fragments of space defining legal borders dividing land often fraught with violence past or present); Michelle Lord (digital fantasies figuring the future ruins of J. G. Ballard); Alison Ruttan and Sonja Kuijpers (maquettes of photographed ruins from both natural disasters and war); Jud Turner (mixed-media reliefs inspired by defunct factories, see *Oblivion Factory*, 2011); Lebbeus Woods (architectural depictions of altered war-scarred structures); photographer and urban sociologist, Camilo José Vergara ("skyscraper ruins park" proposal in his 1999 book *American Ruins*);[11] and, Christopher Payne,[11] José Ferreira, and Avery Danziger's detailed photographs of former penal and mental institutions, now near collapse. If hopes for true durability are lost, let's either focus on its biopolitical implications, or make such transience spectacular, enjoyable.

The range of this work in terms of process, subject, and approach should make it obvious that the construction of the "picturesque" as a form of expression cannot be understood to remain constant across this time continuum. In fact, what is most interesting is how a persistent focus on the ruin or site of destruction and debris (as actual site or as construct) mutates through "paradigm shifts" in how such sites are construed as knowledge and aesthetic concerns. Hence, William Gilpin's concerns were similar to, yet different from, today's interest in the *modern ruin* as given voice in the work of writers J. G. Ballard and W. G. Sebald. The latter takes us on a topological journey across the devastation wrought by years of economic recession, natural disaster, and migration to metropolitan areas, characterizing such in *The Rings of Saturn* as "extraterritorial," where we



"Twist and Turn" series, Manteno State Hospital, IL (2010) José Ferreira
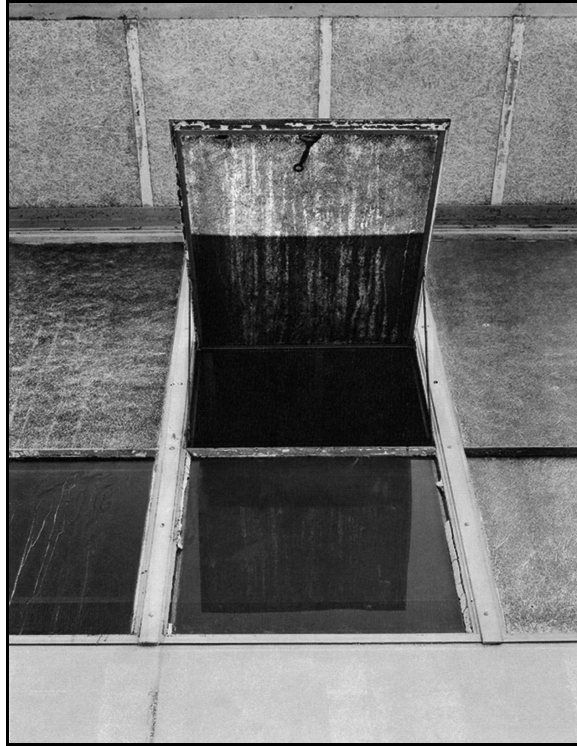
*Treme School, window, post-Katrina New Orleans* (chromogenic print,
20 x 16 in., 2010) Sara VanDerBeek



*Algernon on his Porch with Babe, East Side in Detroit Disassembled*
(2010) Andrew Moore

*A Bad Idea Seems Good Again* (ceramic maquettes, 2010 - present)  Alison Ruttan



*A Bad Idea Seems Good Again* (ceramic maquettes, 2010 - present)  Alison Ruttan

encounter a piece of human history that has become an enigmatic remnant, what Walter Benjamin called "a petrified unrest," that Sebald mines and which challenges artists discussed herein to endow with new meaning. This temporal and contentious dichotomy — wreck and ruin — echoes Baudelaire's famous distinction in *The Painter of Modern Life* (1859) between the "ephemeral, fugitive, contingent upon the occasion" depiction of the present time, which he associates with modernity, and the representation of "the eternal and unchangeable" associated with traditional art's distilling of the eternal from the transitory.[12] Philosopher Stanley Cavell elaborates on this concept of the fleeting event — "The candid, the event, must occur independently of me or any audience, . . . it must be complete without me, in that sense *closed* to me." [13] — why it often shocks.

In contradistinction, the picturesque, attempting to evoke the eternal out of the passage of time, uses ruins and decrepit features to keep death at bay for these representations "were not merely



*White Branches, Mono Lake, CA* (1950) Ansel Adams



*Pond* (1978) Linda Connor

*of* the world, but *to* it, as appeals or protests," explains Cavell. In our case here, protest against our fugitive existence, our mortality. Georges Bataille, in *Literature and Evil* (1957), notes that the arts "sustain anguish and the recovery from anguish within us," [14] and it is just this quasi-religious function that the picturesque, with its implied tension between temporal change and a lasting beauty surviving time, sets out to accomplish. The traditional picturesque scene plays to its audience, inviting us to peruse detail, even walk into the picture on paths conveniently laid at the viewers' feet; it asks us to relax and contemplate, to muse upon the view as *both* reminder of, and antidote to, transient existence. The more recent riffs of the picturesque scene (dust, decay, and transience so consistently exemplified in Sebald's melancholic writings)[15] range from the extremes of inviting relaxing contemplation akin to traditional picturesque (Avery Danziger's *Harlem Valley/Wingdale Project*, 2011 - present), to amping up a political response aimed at disturbing our sensibilities rooted in our understanding of events responsible for the ruins (Lewis Koch's "Bhopal, India" series, 2010) or the forthcoming reappropriation of the ruins (José Ferreira's "Twist and Turn" series, 2011 - present).

As suggested above, whether photographing "wrecks" of contemporary events, or "ruins" of structures, those who do so traffic in new circuits of meaning. They produce new types of knowledge and pleasure from these perennial themes. This re-examination of "wreck" and "ruin" has also informed contemporary literature.

Winston Churchill visiting the ruins of Coventry Cathedral in 1941 after its destruction in the Coventry Blitz of 14/15th November 1940

It is in a sense a shadow of the bombed city of London, [Elizabeth Bowen's fictional city in Mysterious Kôr] but retains for its dreamers a presence much more solid than that of any shadow. Describing that London in her diary, Virginia Woolf wrote: 'All the walls, the protecting walls and reflecting walls, wear so terribly thin in this war.' For Bowen, behind the thinning walls of London, stands Kôr.

— Alberto Manguel, *Black Water 2: More Tales of the Fantastic*



*Grand Gallery of the Louvre imagined as a future ruin* (1796) Hubert Robert

*East Gable of the Cathedral and St. Rule's Tower, St. Andrews, Scotland* (calotype, 1844)
D. O. Hill and Adamson


*I love above all the sight of vegetation resting upon old ruins; this embrace of nature, coming swiftly to bury the work of man the moment his hand is no longer there to defend it, fills me with deep and ample joy.*

— Gustave Flaubert, *a letter to a friend*



*Indeterminate Facade, Houston, Texas* (1975) S.I.T.E., James Wines

Excellent sources are a recently published compilation of J. G. Ballard's dystopic-themed stories, and W. G. Sebald's production. The latter's *The Rings of Saturn* (1995) relates a walking tour through Suffolk County, England as grist for his melancholic musings. Early on, he relates the story of one elderly local inhabitant, Hazel, who witnessed two American Thunderbolt fighters in a mock dog-fight, a mad *pas de deux* ending in violent collision directly over Somerleyton's lake in 1945. The water swallowed up the aircraft for years until the machines were extracted from their watery grave to reveal (rather humor-ously) one plane's moniker as "Big Dick," the other as "Lady Loreley." The bodies of the airmen had long-decayed. An interesting tale, as the scenario resonates with Lewis Koch's project, *Bomber, a chance unwinding* (2011), photographed at a B-17 crash site in Wyoming.



*Bomber, a chance unwinding* (chapbook, double-page spread, 2011) Lewis Koch
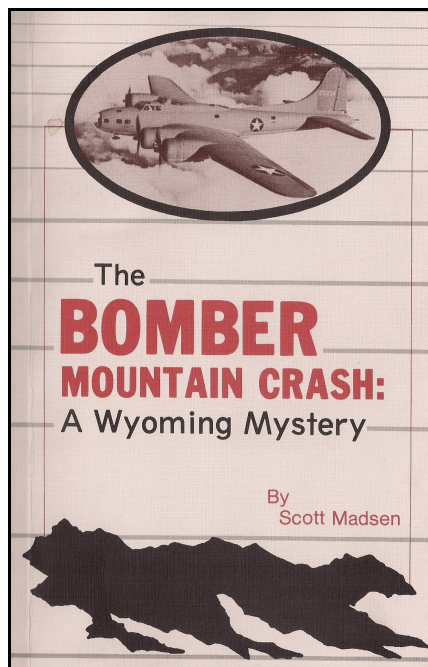


Tourist booklet sold in local bookstores

Sebald even includes nature in his melancholic musings, observing: ". . . dead trees lie in a confused heap where they fell years ago . . . Bleached by salt water, wind, and sun, the broken, barkless wood looks like the bones of some extinct species . . ." As I read this, I recalled Ansel Adams's *White Branches, Mono Lake, CA* (1950) and a very similar image by Linda Connor, *Pond* (1978). These ruins of nature, of course contrast markedly with nature ruined, as in Robert Adams's "Turning Back" series exposing Oregon clear-cut old growth forests or David Hanson's attack on strip-mining in the photobook *Colstrip, Montana* (2010).

Further into his novel, Sebald evokes negating transitoriness as a sad affair leading to entropy and death, musing (in a riff on the picturesque) upon a place encoun-tered on this sojourn: "How uninviting Somerleyton [Hall] must have been, I reflected in the days of the industrial impresario Morton Peto, MP, when everything from the cellar to the attic, from the cutlery to the watercloses, was brand

*Clearcut, Humbug Mountain, Clatsop County, Oregon* (1999 - 2003) Robert Adams



*Colstrip, Montana: Strip mine, powerplant, and waste ponds* (2010) David Hanson

*St. Albans Cathedral in Ruins, London* (1945) a proposal for a war memorial akin to Albert Speer's concept in his "A Theory of Value of Ruins" (1938)



*Future Ruins* (2008) Michelle Lord

new, matching in every detail and in unremittingly good taste. And how fine a place the house seemed to me now that it was imperceptibly nearing the brink of dissolution and silent oblivion." [16] This fascination with the-old-grown-mellow recalls imaginative sojourns into virtual ruins: Charles-Louis Clérisseau's engraving of a *trompe l'oeil* architectural fantasy, *Ruin Room* (circa 1766); Hubert Robert's *Grand Hall of the Louvre as Ruin* (1796), Joseph Gandy's *Architectural Ruins — a Vision (Bank of England in Ruins* (1798 - 1832); and, more recently, Tom Mellor's *Ronchamp Cathedral as a Ruin* (1981).

Even ruins of horrific devastation can mellow over time. Heinrich Böll, in *Der Engel schwieg* (1950, 1992), notes that some bomb sites eventually transformed into dense green vegetation, roads winding through like "peaceful deep-set country lanes." Sebald reacts differently to abandoned WWII British military installations — from which my father flew bombing missions, creating the ruins Böll remarks upon — with musings more akin to J. G. Ballard's entropic literary imaginings of such spaces: "But the closer I came to these ruins, the more any notion of a mysterious isle of the dead receded, and the more I imagined myself amidst the remains of our own civilization after its extinction in some future catastrophe." Reading this passage heralding a dystopic future, I recalled my own pensive response to Wynn Bullock's photograph of a trashed typewriter.

Bullock's study is interesting to compare, due to different formal treatments and differing temporal aspects in the subject, with Edward Ruscha's deliberately smashed typewriter in *Royal Road Test* (1967). Where Bullock's treatment of the found object codes it as an expressive "ruin," Ed Ruscha's "disinterested" record of a destructive act reads "wreck." Different moods of *being-in-the-world* are evoked by

*Structure 10* from "Cellular Deconstruction" series (2006) Kira Simonian

each image. The melancholic mood of the picturesque is continued in Wynn Bullock's eerie, melancholic time-exposures where long-abandoned WWII coastal defenses along the California coast are lapped by foamy tide as seen in *The Bird* (1958). In Ruscha's, humor is evoked.

Bullock's image could work as an illustration for one of J. G. Ballard's literary riffs on ruins in "One Afternoon at Utah Beach,": ". . . these World War II blockhouses seemed to transcend time, complex ciphers with a powerful latent identity." While in his novella, *The Ultimate City* (1976)*,* Ballard's protagonist, Holloway, experiences a "sense of gloom and psychic entropy" when listening to recordings from the last days of the Twentieth Century's demise. Yet Halloway is also exhilarated by the scenes around him," of the "self-made death" wrought by industrial pollution of times past: "Far from disfiguring the landscape, these discarded products of Twentieth-Century industry had a fierce and wayward beauty. Halloway is fascinated by the glimmering sheen of the metal-scummed canals, by the strange submarine melancholy of drowned cars looking up by the glitter of a million cans embedded in a matrix of detergent packs and tinfoil, a kaleidoscope of everything they could wear, eat and drink. . . ." Halloway extols a new take on the picturesque: "the undimmed beauty of industrial wastes produced by skills and imag-inations far richer than nature's, more splendid than any Arcadian meadow. Unlike nature, here there was no death." [17] British artist, Michelle Lord, purposely figured J.G. Ballard's "Ultimate City" vision in digital manipulations of urban decay which make up her "Future Ruins" series, a body of some 40 prints shown at Barcelona's Center for Contemporary Culture's exhibition, "J. G. Ballard: An Autopsy of the New Millennium" (2008). The late midwest artist Kira Simonian's "autopsy" of the twenty-first century is carried out in her "Cellular Deconstruction" painting series (2006). Urban ruins (buildings sectioned like a body autopsied) are encroached upon by imagery of new cellular growth; wrecking-ball ruins are resurrected into what may be a new, evolving form of life. In Lord's modified picturesque, death is transcended through transformation. Boston-based freelance photographer Winslow Townson also found a new picturesque in the wrecks of contemporary existence. In 2011, a truck carrying 8000 gallons of industrial printer cartridges crashed near Peabody, Massachusetts; the event was described in media as "a colorful disaster"
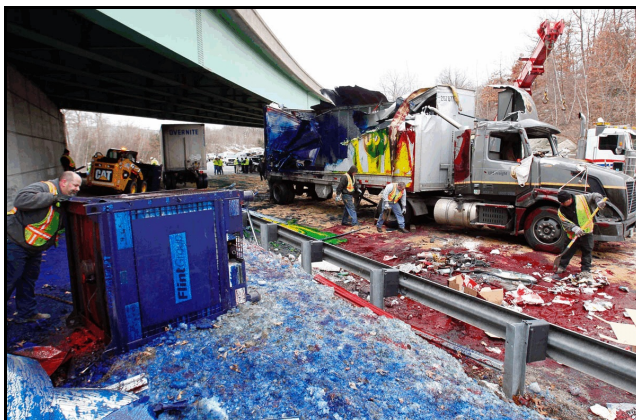

*Colorful Crash, Peabody, MA* (March 2011) Winslow Townson
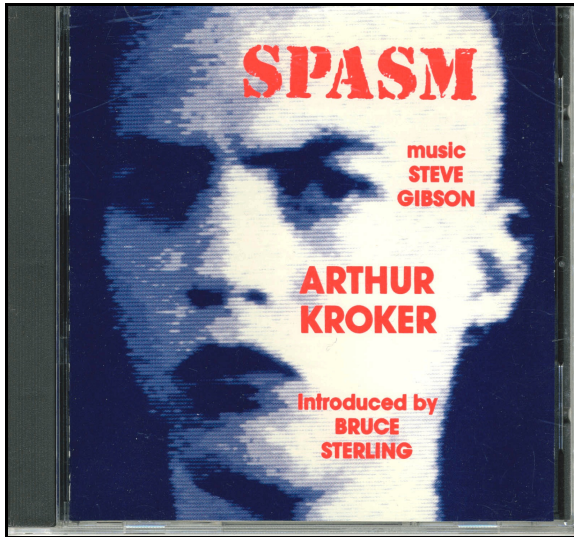
*Spasm* CD compiled by Arthur Kroker

that "adds color to [the] city in strange ways." The image, which looks akin to Michelle Lord's manipulations, went viral on the Internet.[18] Many bemoaned that the scene was cleaned up.

Wreckage left to become ruins are often suggested as monuments. In August 1944, Kenneth Clark, T. S. Eliot, and John Maynard Keynes sent a letter to London's *The Times* proposing that a number of bombed-out churches be preserved as picturesque ruins for war memorials.[19] The letter was probably a response to a British photobook with 270 images of war-torn London, *The Bombed Buildings of Britain*, published soon after the Blitz.[20] In *Walker Evans, A Biography* (1995), author Belinda Rathbone reports that in 1943 Evans ran

across a copy of that book and declared it "a handsome record of destruction . . . Ruin sometimes adds beauty as well as pathos." He was responding to older structures, visions in masonry by Wren, Adam, Nash, Soane, and Stuart that, Evans asserted, "make a moving reaffirmation of their dignity and style" (he could have been speaking about those picturesque sharecropper shacks in Hale County, Alabama). When a medieval cathedral in Coventry was razed by German bombs in 1940, it stood as just such a ruin-memorial; 22 years later a new cathedral was dedicated next to the shell of the older structure with



*Ramallah Check Point* (2005) Banksy

the premier performance of Benjamin Britten's *War Requiem*. But what about more contemporary ruins, often structures side-lined by changes in social policy or vacillating economic forces?

Sites of modernist ruins, sites of production, now become sites of reproduction, grist for visual or literary artists. Some have become impromptu sound studios (as in that Coventry cathedral) for musicians. One avant-garde music-maker, Steve Gibson, a Senior Research Fellow at the Institute of Creative Technologies, De Monfort University, Leicester, UK, used an Akai S-1000 (a stereo digital sampler) to generate electronic sound for Canadian media theorist Arthur Kroker's CD *Spasm* and accompanying book, *Spasm: Virtual Reality, Android Music, Electric Flesh* (1993). One improvisational recording session took place in the Buffalo River Grain Elevators, a series of cylindrical concrete structures approximately 150 feet in height. Kroker describes the session thus: "Each sound in *Windows/Strata* was

*Line of Authority (Israel/West Bank)* (gelatin silver print, 2006)
Alan Cohen



Illustration of a city in ruins in *Ruins of Empires* (1791) C. F. Volney

spontaneously created using materials found on this site and the voices of the participants. The resulting work, assembled and reconstructed from a number of sonic fragments, reflects both the abstraction and decay evident in the structure of those ruined monuments of the modernist dream."[21]

UK residents, noted deaf percussionist, Evelyn Glennie, and experimental musician, Fred Frith, improvised together in an abandoned factory in the fascinating film *Touch the Sound: A Sound Journey with Evelyn Glennie* (2004). Glennie and Frith improvise using discarded materials to make sound, the echoes available in the ruined structure enhancing the aesthetic effect *sans* computer tricks. What Steve Gibson and Fred Frith do with space and sound inside these rusting, dusty, decrepit structures is a sonic reactivation of the site, making the space come alive again with echoes of its past embedded in the contemporary. The new is nothing but the reiterated old, here given musical voice by its discarded artifacts.

This is as much a reclaiming of a site for new aesthetic intentions as: Avery Danziger and José Ferreira's photographs of time-blasted former mental institutions; Alan Cohen's meticulous global photographic inspection of detailed spatial fragments of subtle and not-so-subtle demarcations of territories, often sites of bitter historical and current conflict;[22] and British urban interventionist Banksy's deconstructive graffiti painted along the perimeter of Israel's West Bank barrier, where pigment turns solid concrete into rubble and vistas of freedom. A utopic challenge to authority also voiced by Banksy in his book *Wall and Piece* (2005): "Some people become cops because they want to make the world a better place. Some people
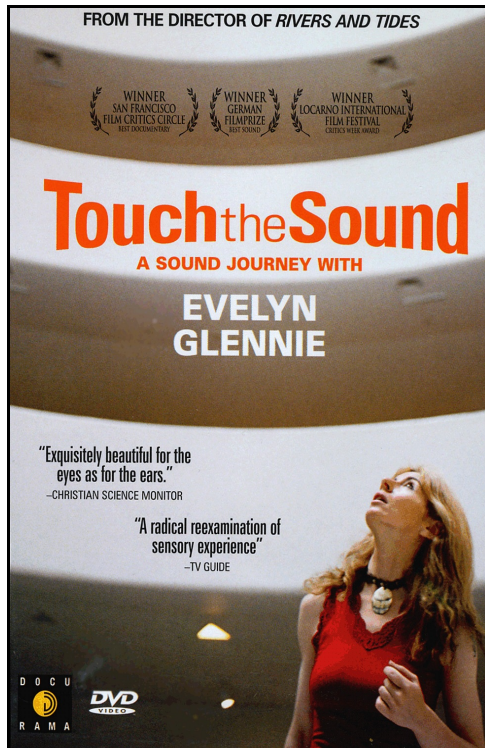
Evelyn Glennie and Fred Frith make music at an abandoned factory in Cologne, Germany.
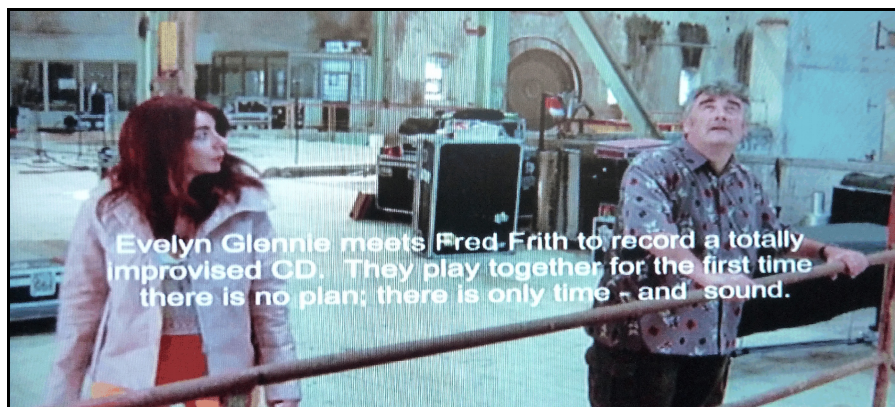
*Perimeter Wall, Union Carbide factory,* "Bhopal, India "*series* (2010)
Lewis Koch



*Abandoned Safety Controls Building, Union Carbide factory,* "Bhopal, India"
*Series* (archival inkjet print, 2010) Lewis Koch



*A Man Photographing Documents with iPhone, Cairo, Egypt* (2012) Ed Ou

become vandals because they want to make the world a better looking place."

Such a political spin on ruins as Cohen and Banksy's was first given in Constantin-François Volney's *Ruins of Empires* (1791), an anti-despotic tale which was brought to England from France and circulated in Jacobin circles. It celebrated the destruction of patriarchal empire through death's entropic leveling, leaving only ruins. Mary Shelley's gothic tale, *The Last Man* (1826), carries on this vision of future ruins. A global plague is erasing the human species, only Verney, the last man, remains to tell the tale of order lapsing into undifferentiation and decay. Like Volney's vision, it's a vast fantasy of entropy, of a world plunged into chaos, obscurity, contrariness, unintelligibility.[23] This condition — in fact, the picturesque — attacks the artificial symmetry that dominated the century of absolutism.[24] The political implications of a world plunged into chaos and the subsequent ruin that was the aftermath of the deadly toxic gas dispersal in Bhopal, India in 1984 which killed 8,000 and another 8,000 or more during the years after, gets the attention of Lewis Koch in his understated 2010 series of color photographs from that decimated city. Whereas conceptual artist Robert Barry's *Inert Gas series* (1969) is funny and clever in its attempt to photographically trap invisible helium emissions, Koch's digital photographs of abandoned shops and city terrain are *sans* gas, long gone now, but the after-effects on residents, as implied by the images, tug at one's political conscience as the greed of multinationals and the dangers of modern technology are revealed. The aim of his project is *biopolitical.*

*Detritus, Interlochen* (gelatin silver print, 1958) Carl Chiarenza

Celebrating the demise of modernist symmetry and absolutism, as figured in high-rise structures fallen into marvelous ruin, Camilo José Vargara proposed an "American Acropolis" in *American Ruins* (1999) that a dozen city blocks of pre-Depression skyscrapers be stabilized and left standing as ruins; in a later article in *Metropolis* magazine, he elaborated: "We could transform the nearly 100 troubled buildings into a grand national historic park of play and wonder, an urban Monument Valley. . . . Midwestern prairie would be allowed to invade from the north. Trees, vines, and wildflowers would grow on roofs and out of windows; goats and wild animals — squirrels, possum, bats, owls, ravens, snakes and insects — would live in the empty behemoths, adding their calls, hoots and screeches to the smell of rotten leaves and animal droppings." [25] This scenario is not unlike the film *Resident Evil: Extinction* (2007) where shards of the lost lights of Las Vegas are half-buried in desert sand, or as seen in a recent Moroccan film, *The End* (dir. Hicham Lasri, 2011), where the ruins of Casablanca become the setting for a post-apocalyptic fantasy of underworld gang violence and police repression reminiscent of *A Clockwork Orange* (dir. Stanley Kubrick, 1971). The fragments of civilization ruined over time are internalized in both Shelley's narrative and Vargara's description where the very textual structure is a series of fragments, creating structural indeterminacy. This is not unlike Lewis Koch's many-layered visual construct from aeronautical "wreckage" in *Bomber, a chance unwinding* (2011) where a tragic event unwinding over a span of 65 years is memorialized in a crash-site honoring the airman that died.

A fast change, a wreck, a trauma, spanning more like 65 days rather than years, the "Arab Spring," has been summed up in Ed Ou's photo capturing a man iPhone-recording shards of Egyptian State Security documents (with their implications of trauma suffered by citizens tortured) confiscated in Cairo, June 20, 2011. In Ou's *mise-en-abyme* record-of-a-record-of-a-record-of-a-police record,[26] the singed paper wreckage of state authority is eerily lit by the Web 2.0 technology that helped illuminate the minds of the youth in rebellion; employing the rhetorical device of metonymy, Ou's iconic image figures revolution's chaos and physical destruction, and confirms the wrecked authority of an oppressive regime. Temporally, the image references not only the *now* of the recording of an event, but to an immediate *past* (popular revolt) and an uncertain *future* of contending groups.

Ou's image contrasts how information, once circulated privately among police agents, has now been leaked to make its way via the Internet to a global audience. Both Jean Baudrillard and Jacques Derrida would theorize here an abyss of signs without something "presented," a traffic in signs that circulate as copies-of-copies-of-copies-of-copies, *ad infinitum,* as both the image the anonymous man records of liberated police documents, and Ou's image-of-the-man-recording-the-records which detail police surveillance, go viral on the Internet.[27] Ou's image shares a similarity to Carl Chiarenza's *Detritus, Interlochen* (1958) — flame-singed documents — but Chiarenza's image is framed tightly, expressively

Maquette of a ruin based on a photograph (2010) Sonja Kuijpers

printed, and contextualized within a discourse of landscape-become-mental-scape that defines the practice of the photographic metaphor or "equivalent," where meaning stands behind the image. Nothing stands behind Ou's image but a tissue of textualities, an unlimited semiosis.

Bridging the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Friedrich Schlegel spoke for the era's fascination with what came to be called the *picturesque* — wrecks, ruins, S-curved paths,[28] gnarly trees, irregularities of all sorts — yet anticipated our postmodern condition with its interest in the same when he observed: "Many works of the ancients have become fragments. Many works of the moderns are fragments at the time of their origin" (*Philosophical Fragments,* 1991). Not only are many instances of modernist architecture (think of the rapid demise of rust-belt factories and that failed utopian city, Brasìlia, crumbling in Brazilian jungle humidity) on their way to speedy obsolescence, transforming audacious architecture into the simple remains of a world that is falling apart before our eyes, but our postmodern structures take up this notion of the art and architecture in a state of fracturedness. Theodor Adorno, in his *Aesthetic Theory,* noted that in a post-Holocaust "damaged world," the fragment is a more truthful form of the work of art. In *Minima Moralia: Reflections from a Damaged Life*, he went on to say that the "modern" fragment sheds a retrospective light: all artworks are similar to those depictions of melancholic allegorical graveyards and broken-off stelae, for whatever perfection modern works lay claim to, they are also lopped off.[29]

I hear something of Adorno's thinking at work in filmmaker Ken Jacobs discussing one of his films: "I was very interested in combustion. There was even a long destruction sequence in which thing after thing was broken . . . Just watching things break, and in their breaking reveal their structure, had the most vibrant moment of life, all the clarity of their being made, like explicitly for the moment of destruction. I was interested in revealing things in their breaking and I wanted *Star Spangled to Death* [1957- 2004] to be a film that was constantly breaking." [30] The employment of the fragment has become *de rigeur* in postmodern architecture which rejects the simplicity and wholeness of modernist



*Doorways,* "Beauty in Abandonment" series (2011) Candace Schutt

*Now (Berlin Wall/Germany)* (gelatin silver print, 2005) Alan Cohen



*Piazza d'Italia,* New Orleans, LA (1984,destroyed) Charles Moore

structures. Alan Cohen's *Now (Berlin Wall/Germany)* (2005) details a fragment of the fragments of the Berlin Wall. We see a double-brick line (recalling Carl Andre's minimalism) that becomes a reminder of East/West German division and that now, after the debris from its wreckage was cleared, visibly separates Cold War/Post-Cold War eras. An architectural use of fragment finds a particularly vivid example in Charles Moore's *Piazza d'Italia* (New Orleans, 1984, *now destroyed*). Eschewing a straight Italian revival, the architect created "new" ruins, hybridizing steel (modern) and masonry (old) materials, producing in the scenographic structure (what in Hollywood film industry parlance is termed "wild-walls) a "double-coding" of architectural features touted by Charles Jencks in *The Language of Postmodern Architecture* (1977). The use of such fragments has contributed to recent architectural complexity, what Robert Venturi described as "the difficult-whole" in *Learning from Las Vegas* (1974). Thus, many contemporary buildings are *already-in-ruins.* "The image of the new already symbolizes the old. Fashion becomes old-fashioned; progress dispels progress," keenly observes French philosopher Sylviane Agacinski in *Time Passing: Modernity and Nostalgia* (2003). She elucidates: "If thinking of time as the source of being's scission allows for the idea of progress, it is forever opening possibilities for the opposite: time that undoes, degradation, corruption, decay — another meaning of history. . . . I do not know whether I have crossed through many epochs or whether various epochs cross through me. It seems to me that there are many worlds and many times." [31]

Earlier in this section I linked ruins and death. Agacinski's insights here can be brought into contact with Polish thinker Zygmunt Bauman's discussion of death in *Mortality, Immortality and Other Life Strategies* (1992). Bauman's text looks at concrete ways in which society tackles the role of mortality, modes of sublimating our terror of it which shift over time: ". . . the ineradicable ambivalence of existence [torn as we are between mortality and immortality] supplies the raw material from which

*Ballroom, American Hotel, Detroit, MI* "Beautiful Dismay" series (2010) Sonja Kuijpers

social organizations are woven and cultures are sculpted. . . . There would probably be no culture were humans unaware of their mortality; culture is an elaborate counter-mnemotechnic device to forget what they are aware of." [32] Adds Bauman, "As La Rochefoucauld used to say, one cannot look *directly* at either the sun or death." [33] The pictur-esque, the valorization of time and decay, functions as such a counter-mnemonic. One image of Danziger's, *Harlem Valley / Wingdale Project #8806*, explicitly harkens toward our dark demise (all the better to "manage" it) for here a black void awaits beyond a hole smashed through safety glass, figuring a violent exit (see "Dedication" page). In both this image and the one below (recalling Italian artist Lucio Fontana's pierced canvases), we see a text attempting to find, against the tenets of Derridean theory, an *outside-of-the-text.*

Some of the artists discussed herein also construct within ruin sites, or use shards of debris from therein, to make constructions, giving a second life to what was ruin, transforming death, as Jean Baudrillard put it in *Seduction* (1979), into "a brilliant and superficial appearance." [34] Baudrillard, in *Symbolic Exchange and Death* (1976) describes this as "the despair that nothing lasts," but offers that there is "the complementary enjoyment of knowing that beyond this death, every form has always the chance of a second coming." [35]
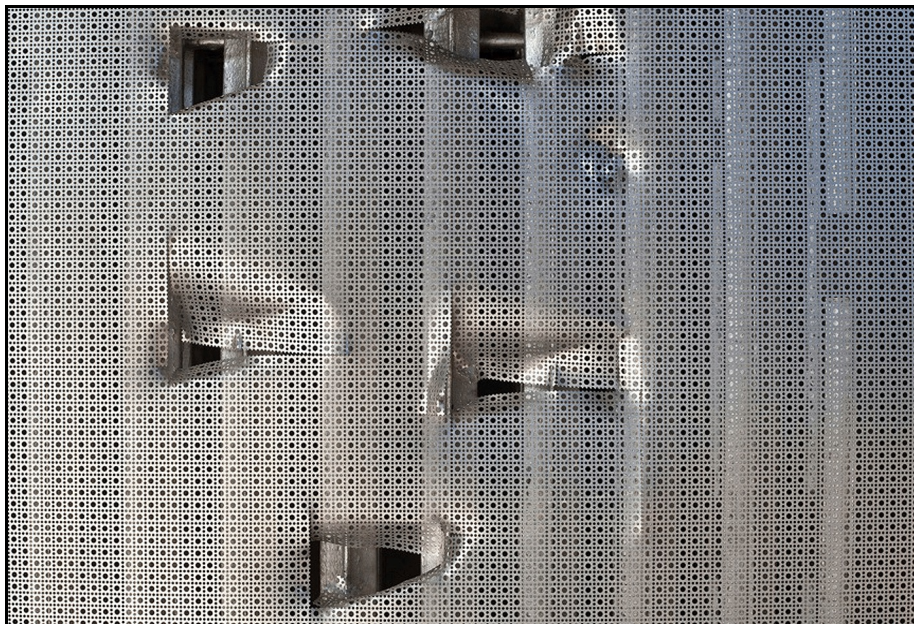


*Harlem Valley/Wingdale Project* (archival pigment print, 2012) Avery Danziger

Edmund Burke in his *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1757) said of classical beauty that the soft gentle curves appealed to male sexual desire, while the sublime horrors appealed to our desire for self-preservation, countering horrors of death anticipated. The picturesque arose as a mediator between these opposed ideals of beauty and the sublime, showing the possibilities existing between these two rationally idealized states. As Thomas Gray wrote in 1765 of the Scottish Highlands "The mountains are ecstatic. . . . None but . . . God knows how to join so much beauty with so much horror." [36] Bauman contrasts pre-Enlightenment-era engagement with mortality and immortality — the individual dies but lives on in his offspring and/or in spiritual immortality — to two recent historical types: 1) "the *modern* type, with its characteristic drive to 'deconstruct' *mortality* (i.e., to dissolve the issue of the struggle against death in an ever growing never exhausted set of battles against particular diseases and other threats to life; and to move death from the past position of the ultimate yet remote horizon of life-span right into the center of daily life, thereby filling the latter with the defenses against non-ultimate, relatively smaller and thus in principle 'soluble' problems of health hazards)," and 2) "the *postmodern* [type], with its effort to 'deconstruct' *immortality* (i.e., to substitute notoriety for historical memory, and disappearance for final — irreversible — death, and to transform life into an unstoppable, daily rehearsal of universal 'mortality' of things and of the effacement of opposition between the transient and the durable). . . . everything becomes immortal, and nothing is. . . . only the transience itself is durable." [37] In my opinion, Bauman's description of the "postmodern type" with its sociological function *vis-à-vis* death seems to underlie and unify, despite its diversity, the wide-ranging contemporary aesthetic practices surrounding wrecks and ruins as subject matter as sketched in this section.

<center>*     *     *</center>

# Endnotes

1. I paraphrase and elaborate on Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), 17. For discussions on the ontology of photography (the distinction between either a mechanical or intentional production as characterizing the medium), see Roger Scruton, "Photography and Representation, *Critical Inquiry* 7 (Spring 1981) and Kendall Walton, "Transparent Pictures: On the Nature of Photographic Realism," *Critical Inquiry* 11 (Winter 1984); for a critique of the automatic or mechanical conceptions of photography in Scruton and Walton, see Joel Synder and Neil Walsh Allen, "Photography, Vision, and Representation," *Critical Inquiry* 2 (Autumn 1975). Apropos the ontology of photography, Markus Zisselsberger reminds us of an important temporal disjunction at the heart of that medium: ". . . the creation of photographs depends on a delay between the moment the light hits the photographic plate and the moment the images become visible" ("Melancholic Longings: Sebald, Benjamin, and the Image of Kafa," in Lise Patt, ed., with Christel Dillbohner, *Searching for Sebald: Photography After W.G. Sebald* [Los Angeles: The Institute of Cultural Inquiry, 2007], 293). Also see *Critical Inquiry* 38 (Summer 2012), an issue whose theme is "Agency and Automatism: Photography as Art since the Sixties," edited by Diarmuid Costello, Margaret Iversen, and Joel Synder.

2. Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (New York, NY: Hill and Wang, 1981), 4, 77.

3. Andre Bazin, "The Ontology of the Photographic Image, "*What is Cinema?* Trans. And ed., Hugh Gray, vol. 1. (1967, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press), 14.

4. Barthes, 15.

5. Thierry de Duve, "Time Exposure and Snapshot," *October* 5, (Summer 1978), 117.

6. De Duve, 118, elucidates Roland Barthes adumbration of this paradox of tenses in *Camera Lucida*: "*Here* denotes the superficial series as if it were a place . . . The surface of the image is received as a fragment of space that cannot be inhabited, since inhabiting takes time. . . . *Formerly* refers to a past sequence of events that are plausible but deprived of any location."

7. De Duve, 119.

8. See Ulrich Baer, *Spectral Evidence: The Photography of Trauma* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2005), 1 - 8, for more discussion of photography and time where the author opposes the Heraclitean notion of time as a river, a flow, with the Democritean conception of random collisions of primal matter, producing unconnected events, and examines photography under each of these two conceptions of the world. The former he associates with slotting photography into historical narrative, the latter he associates with the shock of trauma, explosive, the recording of isolated events that challenge our ability to place them adequately into a context of temporal flow. Concerning the latter, and using a Freudian framework, Baer says, "it parallels the defining structure of photography, which also traps an event during its occurrence while blocking its transformation into memory" (9).

9. De Duve, 118, explains these terms: "*Now* denotes the superficial series as if it were a time, but without any spatial attachment, cut from its natural link with here. Therefore, it is not a present but a virtual availability of time in general, a potential ever-present to be drawn at will from the referential past. *There* denotes the referential series as if it were a place, i.e., the referential past as frozen time, a state rather than a flow, and thus a space rather than a time."

10. De Duve, 121 - 123.

10. See Claire Barliant, *Art in America* (March 2012), 114. where it was noted that VanDerBeek has been increasingly turning to deteriorating architecture capturing the entropic effects of time and economic dissolution. For a 2009 installation at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, *A Composition for Detroit*, VanDerBeek focused on a city in deep decline, taking pictures of "a bank of broken windows that I encountered in these factories." She organized the movement of images throughout the work's four panels to reflect the rhythm of the remaining panes. Each panel was 65 x 48 inches and combined the artist's own photographs with found imagery, such as Walker Evans's 1935 *Belle Grove Plantation.* In 2010, VanDerBeek showed a series at the Whitney Museum of American Art called "To Think of Time," which included images of an abandoned schoolhouse in Treme, a neighborhood in New Orleans that was severely damaged by Hurricane Katrina, and constructions she made in her childhood home in Baltimore which was then being put up for sale.

11. See photographs of Christopher Payne, with an essay by Oliver Sacks in *Asylum: Inside the Closed World of State Mental Hospitals* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009) wherein Sacks's essay, "Asylum," takes a more sympathetic view on the old state mental hospitals, touting their architecture as well as the stable environment they offered disturbed psyches.

12. Charles Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays* (London, UK: Phaidon Press Limited, 1995), 12. Baudelaire notes that more modern artists prefer "the *outward show of life*," which includes military life. His goes on to note on page 25 that the military man is "accustomed to surprises" and "is without difficulty caught off his guard," and will exhibit "a curious mixture of calmness and bravado; it is a beauty that springs from the necessity to be ready to face death at every moment." Now I find this description to tally perfectly with what one would consider to make a fit photojournalist, sent to cover any of today's places of wreckage (war or natural catastrophe).

13. Cavell, *The World Viewed,* 111.

14. Georges Bataille, *Literature and Evil,* Alastair Hamilton, trans. (London and New York: Marion Boyars, 2006), 68 - 69: "... the being which we are is primarily a finite being (a mortal individual). His limitations are no doubt necessary to the being, but he cannot endure them. It is by going beyond these limitations which are necessary for his preservation that he asserts the nature of his being."

15. In *Searching for Sebald: Photography After W.G. Sebald,* Lise Patt, ed. with Christel Dillbohner (Los Angeles: The Institute of Cultural Inquiry, 2007), 17, in the "Introduction," the editor notes how "Sebald's project [labyrinthine stories of memory and melancholy] was quickly embraced by a wide range of post-medium artists who were laying the groundwork for a fictive genre in art. . . . adopting . . . memory, trauma, and loss . . . the same leitmotifs of Sebald's troubled *Nachgeborenen* (born-after 'the war') conscious[ness]." Further into her remarks she says that a new adjective, *Sebaldian*, has entered the academic and artistic jargon along with Freudianism, Deleuzian, and so forth: ". . . *something Sebaldian* . . . has permeated art . . ." ("Introduction," 94). Apropos this observation, Daniel Lash in "Translation and Repetition: An Architectural Translation of W. G. Sebald's *The Rings of Saturn* in the anthology *Searching for Sebald*, remarks: "Why was Sebald chosen for this study? At one level there is a sense that the ideas inherent in

Sebald's writing not only allow, but in some sense call for, translation and expression in different media. This indicated by the black-and-white photographs placed in his novels, his interest in the visual arts, and his collaboration with artists such as Tess Jaray and Jan Peter Tripp" (451).

This heavy tome focuses on Sebald's scripto-visual production. The editor puts Sebald's *oeuvre* within the context of conceptual art: ". . . Sebald was someone who appeared after the de-skilling of the medium [of photography by the likes of Edward Ruscha, Douglas Huebler, John Baldessari] in the 1960s, when the artist's purposeful degradation of photography's materials, subject matter, and overall look . . . pointed to the tacit differences between the role photographs assume for the collector, the archivist, the researcher, the cataloguer, the historian, the investigator [think of Edward Ruscha's treatment of the "crash-scene" of his typewriter in *Royal Road Test* (1967)], *and* the artist" ("Introduction," 90)."

Patt's lengthy introductory remarks on how Sebald makes use of photographs leads her to ultimately suggest that with Sebald even photography itself becomes a ruin, not just a visual vehicle to show the reader ruins: "Sebald's employment of a multitude of photographic genres, his multilingual announcements of photography's porous boundaries, and his various attempts to 'out' the wounds the ravage the photograph's surface are not acts that help build an argument for photography's medium status but seem instead to be acts that contribute to a tentative medium's collapse" ("Introduction," 94).

16. These several citations are from *The Rings of Saturn* (New York: New Directions Books, 1998), 40, 36, 64, 237, respectively. Photography and ruins figure prominently in Sebald's work where they are closely associated with loss and recovery; history and memory are condensed in architecture and these aspects of Sebald's writings are elucidated in Eric L. Santner, *On Creaturely Life: Rilke, Benjamin, Sebald* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006) where Santner cites a 1998 interview with Sebald: "I'm very taken with the whole business of ashes and dust. You'll find them again and again in my writing; they're always there in some form or another" (Sarah Kafatou, "An Interview with W. G. Sebald," *Harvard Review*, no. 15 (Fall 1998): 32. Santner notes in his "Preface" (p. xv) the influence of Walter Benjamin on Sebald's interest in ruins where, "we truly encounter the radical otherness of the 'natural' world only where it appears in the guise of historical remnant. . . . that is both inside and outside the 'symbolic order' — for Benjamin, this is the un-nerving point of departure of the allegorical imagination — that is where we find ourselves in the midst of 'natural history'." French artist, Christian Boltanski, explores memory, loss, and uses rusted objects in his *ouevre* and can be said to do in visual art what Sebald did within literature.

17. J. G. Ballard, "One Afternoon at Utah Beach," and "The Ultimate City," in *The Complete Stories of J. G. Ballard* (New York, London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2009), 973, 903, and 915 respectively. Ballard's comment here on death and urban ruin are interesting in light of Georges Bataille's discussion of mortality (see note 9 above).

18. For an example: *http://www.crazynfunny.com/tag/peabody/.*

19. British author, Elizabeth Bowen (1899 - 1973), referenced in my citation from Alberto Manguel's *More Tales of the Fantastic* in relation to her fantasy tale of her fictional city, "Mysterious Kôr," has also authored *The Heat of Day* (1948) wherein the bombed city of London is described through the absence of the living even while she uses the negative to accentuate the presence of the absent, as Beryl Pong observes: ". . . the persistent way in which the city is haunted, not only by the literal ghost of its dead inhabitants, but by the infrastructure it used to have, the image of what it was before" ("Space and Time in the Bombed City: Graham Greene's *The Ministry of Fear* and Elizabeth Bowen's *The Heat of the Day* by Beryl Pong at url: *http://www.literarylondon.org/london-journal/march2009/pong. html*).

20. J. M. Richards and John Summerson, *The Bombed Buildings of Britain: a Record of Architectural Causalities* (London: The Architectural Press, 1940 - 41) depicts the extent of destruction by German bombs from August 1940 - May 1941.

21. Arthur Kroker, *Spasm: Virtual Reality, Android Music, Electric Flesh* (New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 1993), 104.

22. See Alan Cohen, *Earth with Meaning: Alan Cohen* (D.A.P./Distributed Art Publishers, Inc, 2012). In reference to many of the territories, particularly Holocaust sites, he has photographed, Cohen explains his work as, "The assignment of meaning to earth and of memory to places that bear no evidence of the complexity of the past, of the implications that happen at the edges of these pictures ..." (cited by Mary Jane Jacobs as an epigraph to her "Editor's Note," *Earth with Meaning,* 13). Cohen's images allegorize, making readable, photography's link with traumatic memory. As such, Cohen's images should be seen in the context of Ulrich Baer's discussion of current Holocaust site photography by Dirk Reinartz and Mikael Levin in "To Give Memory a Place: Contemporary Holocaust Photography and the Landscape Tradition," in his book *Spectral Evidence: The Photography of Trauma*.

23. Rosemary Jackson, *Fantasy, the Literature of Subversion* (London, New York: Routledge, 2003), 103.

24. See Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (London, New York: Continuum, 2006), 51, 472.

25. See Geoff Manaugh, "Chapter Five, Landscape Futures, *The Bldg Blog Book* (San Francisco, CA: Chronicle Books, 2009), 220 - 211.

26. For a similar *mis-en-abyme* image, but concerning the Holocaust, see Mikael Levin's untitled photo in his book *War Story* (1997) which depicts a farmer holding a photograph taken by Meyer Levin (father of Mikael) during WWII as the man holds that image before him, trying to fit it into the present scene. (Baer *Spectral Evidence*, 97 - 98). Also see Ashraf Khalil, *Liberation Square: Inside the Egyptian Revolution and the Rebirth of a Nation* (New York, 2002).

27. The electric-speed dissemination of Ou's image can be contextualized within Paul Virilio's discussion of "chrono-scopic (underexposed, exposed, overexposed)" instant of realtime communications where "the interval of the light kind (the interface)" is taking over from "the before, during, and after" of space and time (*Open Sky* [London, New York: Verso, 1997, 2008]: 15. Ou's metaphotography here recalls Garry Winogrand's approach to media culture in *Public Relations* (1977). Ou's embedding of levels of distance from the actual event — the liberation of secret police files by activist Amr Salama during the storming of the Egyptian State Security Building in Cairo on June 20, 2011 — can be analyzed by reference to Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset's phenomenological levels of human relation to the given world as sketched in "Consciousness, the Object, and its Three Distances" (1916): 1) presentation (the event before us), 2) representation (the event as reported, a verbal or visual sign), and 3) mentioning, the re-representation of that representation, a sign-of-a-sign. The latter, a metalanguage, has been further theorized in a postmodernist context by Jean Baudrillard as the media-saturated culture of the "hyperreal," the "simulacrum." Consequently, both Winogrand and Ou draw attention to the *construction* of events within media. Events are now often manufactured for the media. French Situationist, Guy Debord, referred to culture industry as the society of the spectacle: "The spectacle is ideology par excellence, because it exposes and manifests in its fullness the essence of all ideological systems: the impoverishment, servitude and negation of real life. The spectacle is materially 'the expression of the separation and estrangement between man and man' " (*Society of the Spectacle* [Detroit, MI: Black and Red 1983]: sect. 215).

28. In W. G. Sebald's *Natural History of Destruction* (New York: The Modern Library, 2004), 40, the author reproduces a photograph (see my Introduction) composed in picturesque conventions, but instead of the S-curved path leading through classical ruins, we see long-standing ruins in bombed-out Hamburg now becoming pastoralized. Sebald adds a note below the photo concerning the Morgenthau Plan for allowing woodland to cover the mountains of ruins all over Germany: "This was a 1944 proposal by the U.S. Secretary of the Treasury, Henry Morgenthau, calling for the 'pastoral-ization' of Germany by the removal of all its heavy industry."

29. Ian Balfour, " 'The whole is the untrue': On the Necessity of the Fragment (after Adorno)," in *The Fragment, An Incomplete History*, William Tronzo, ed. (Los Angeles, CA: Getty Research Institute, 2009): 87 - 89. Balfour traces how, "the fragment had come to have interest and value as a fragment," noting that the "fate of Coleridge's celebrated 'Kubla Khan; or A Vision in a Dream' is emblematic of the dramatic change in the value accorded to fragments, the shift from negative to positive. He details the influence of Edward Gibbon, Giambattista Piranesi, Hubert Robert, Constantin-François de Volney, et al. in this regard.

30. Ken Jacobs, unpublished interview, Anthology Film Archives, as cited by P. Adams Sitney, *Visionary Film* (London: Oxford University Press, 2002, 3rd ed.), 320.

31. Sylviane Agacinski, *Time Passing: Modernity and Nostalgia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 58, 67.

32. Zygmunt Bauman, *Mortality, Immortality and Other Life Strategies* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1992), 19, 31.

33. Bauman, 15; on the same page, Bauman argues from the position that, "Reason cannot exculpate itself from this ignominy [that death is the scandal that defeats it, even as it cannot imagine its own death]," and so "human societies have kept designing elaborate subterfuges, hoping that they would be allowed to forget about the scandal . . . ."

34. Jean Baudrillard, *Seduction*, trans. B. Singer (New York: Saint Martin's Press, 1990; originally 1979), 97.

35. Baudrillard, *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, (London: Sage, 1993; translation from 1976), 119.

36. James Buzard, "The Grand Tour and after (1660-1840)," *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing* (2001).

37. Bauman, 10, 174.

# Case Study I

## Wreck-Ages: Edward Ruscha, Lewis Koch

*wreck·age* [rékij] noun

*1. remains after destruction: the broken pieces left after something has been extremely badly damaged or destroyed*

*2. process of wrecking: the ruin or destruction of something (formal)*
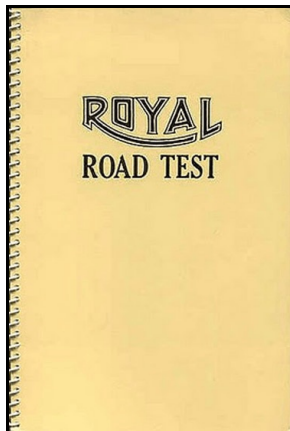

Cover


*Royal Road Test* (1967) Edward Ruscha


Cover


*Bomber, a chance unwinding* (2011) Lewis Koch

Sitting before me on my desk are two artist books, each filled with machine wreckage, from two ages: proto-postmodernism (Ruscha, analogue) and the post-conceptual years of a waning post-modernism (Koch, digital). What might be gleaned from a comparison of these "bookends" to post-modernity? In what way are they similar? In what way are they different? What are their respective relationships to technology: the recording camera, the object recorded? What are their relationships to
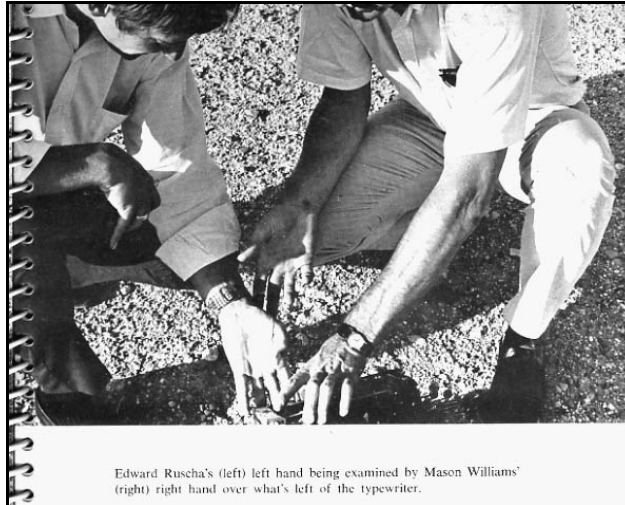
Edward Ruscha's (left) left hand being examined by Mason Williams' (right) right hand over what's left of the typewriter.

*Royal Road Test,* playful caption



Crash path of the typewriter



Left ribbon spool and ribbon

a key concept in postmodernism, "the fragment?" In what manner do they construct a form of knowledge?

Ed Ruscha's book exemplifies the second definition given above, "a process of wrecking: the ruin or destruction of something." In *Royal Road Test,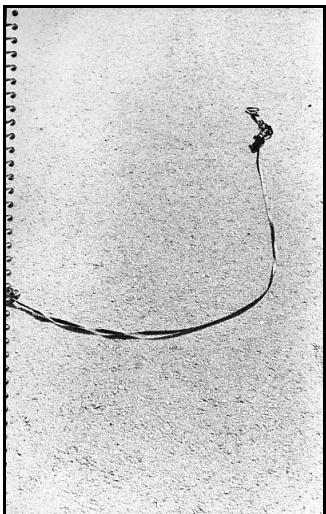* Mason Williams tosses an old Royal Model-X (circa mid-1920s) typewriter out the window of a Buick *Le Sabre* speeding along at 90 m.p.h. on August 21, 1966. Like an accident report, the wreckage is assessed photo-by-photo along its 189-foot crash-path on U.S. Highway 91. The weather ("Perfect")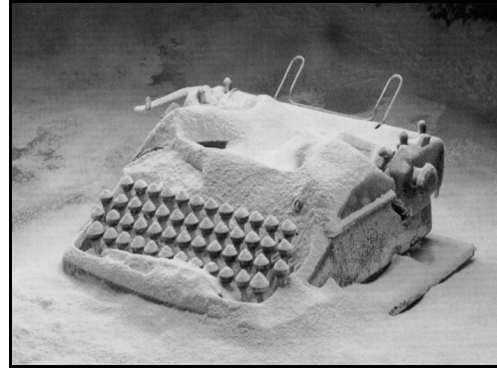 is recorded, other parameters of the event are, with tongue-in-cheek meticulousness, listed and diagramed. The straight-forward black-and-white photographs (most *not* shot by Ruscha) are captioned snapshots *pointing* to the shards of the machine, visual data which, in a few shots, is a pointing that is humorously *doubled* in-frame by a conspicuously pointing index finger.[1] The deadpan, monochromatic photos are bled off the pages in this offset, small edition book. Text is descriptive, yet can become playfully interactive with the photograph (see above image). The photographs depict a machine reduced to smashed parts, exemplifying an increasing interest in wrecks from Wynn Bullock's *Typewriter* (1951), to Jean Tinguely's self-destroying machines, some of Robert Smithson's works and writings that parallel J. G. Ballard's literary exploration of dystopian landscapes, to overtly staged wrecks like Rodney Graham's set-up of faked "film-snow" dusting an old typewriter and Chinese artist Ai Weiwei's dropped Han Dynasty urn.

This book is one of several witty photobooks Ruscha produced during the 1960s: *Various Small Fires and Milk, Every Building on Sunset Strip* and *Twenty-Six Gasoline Stations, Real Estate Opportunities, Thirty-Four Parking Lots in Los Angeles*, and so forth. Margaret Iversen discusses these little books as "cool in conception and as hotly subversive as Duchamp's Readymades." [2]

The implications? Art can be fun and sell for $3.00 per copy. This deadpan mockumentary at the behest of the *seemingly* trivial (Rube Goldberg devices and Jean Tinguely's crazed machines mine such humor) *is* funny *and* yet profound. The trivial can be fascinating as curators John Szarkowski and Peter Galassi assert when they state that banal photographic subjects can be raised to new heights of *formal*

*Typewriter* (1951) Wynn Bullock


*Rheinmetall/Victoria 8* (2003) Rodney Graham
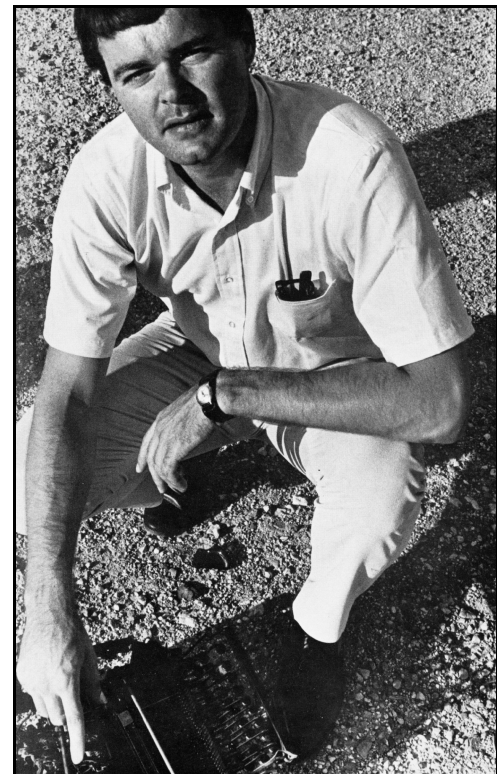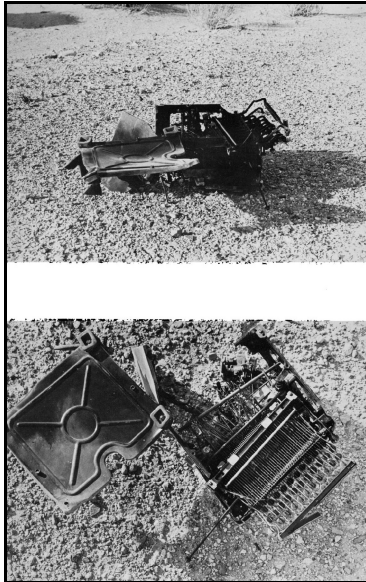

*Royal Road Test*, 1963 Buick *Le Sabre*


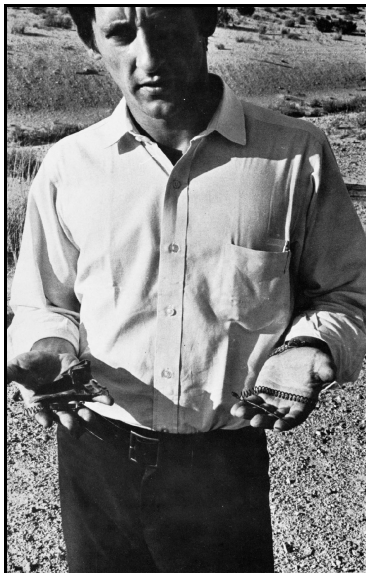*Royal Road Test*, window from which test was made


*Royal Road Test*, Ed Ruscha and Mason William with debris


*Royal Road Test*, Mason Williams, index finger pointing to the typewriter debris
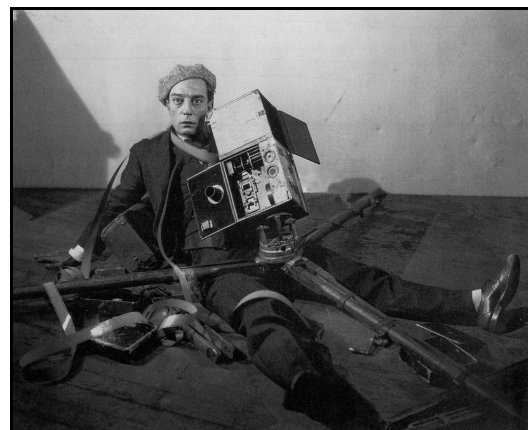
*Royal Road Test*, typewriter debris



*Royal Road Test*, deadpan expression

*coherence* by "the intelligent eye of the photographer." But Ruscha and his photographer, Patrick Blackwell, compose so as to *foil* such optical *haut cuisine.* In Ruscha's world, art can be *anything*. And photography? What do you know! It need not exhibit an Ansel Adams print fetishism, nor Szarkowskian formal astuteness, nor a romantic air as in Bullock. Traditional photo-connoisseurs reacted defensively: "It's art (maybe), but is it photography?" Ruscha's scripto-visual text counters traditional pictorial aesthetics with the "auto-maticity" (car, road, typewriter, toss, camera) of a controlled experiment, a crime-scene investigation.

In *Photography After Conceptual Art* (2010), Margaret Iversen and Aron Vinegar reassess Ruscha's bookworks. Iversen sees *Royal Road Test* "most obviously as an instance of instruc-tional-performative photography," but where "the photographs are a trace of the act and do not necessarily document a perform-ance,"[3] what Aron Vinegar understands as evoking a "pre-symbolic state." [4] Iversen reads Ruscha's book as putting into practice instances of what will later be denominated as "systemic art," carrying out a predetermined set of instructions, a counter-expressionistic mode of working akin to the computational methods of punch-cards and computer programing.

Much has been made of Ruscha's "deadpan candor" in these photobooks, a nonjudgmental approach to their subject matter.[5] Seemingly banal objects have been touted by André Breton and other Surrealists, and Iversen notes a surreal flavor to Ruscha's books. But she misses an opportunity to re-enforce that point when she overlooks the book's title, "Royal Road Test," as a play on Freud's famous dictum that the *dream* is the "royal road to the unconscious," probably because Ruscha's objects are most often the quotidian of our car culture

(gasoline stations, pools, parking lots, cheap apart-ments, etc) and *not* the "old-fashioned, broken, useless, almost incomprehensive, even perverse," uncanny objects Breton found in the Saint-Ouen flea market.[6] But Ruscha may have put forward his "road test," where an old-fashioned machine is smashed as obsolete, to introduce its old-fashioned remains as a pop-oriented, neutrally depicted object. *Royal Road Test* transforms a nostalgic, surreal, uncanny object into a pop/conceptual wrecked object via



Buster Keaton, *The Cameraman* (1928) publicity still

"indifference" and a nod to entropy, employing a neutrality of observation akin to Edmund Husserl's sober phenomenological reduction, bracketing the natural world and imposing an *eidetic* reduction so as to reveal essences underlying variants. Speaking of sobriety, Vinegar reproduces a publicity still of Keaton, a collapsed machine (a camera no less) flattening him to the ground. The photo records the scene in deadpan, mimicking Keaton's expression and revealing his equanimity under stress, what Heidegger in *Being and Time* terms "*a disclosive submission to [the] world out of which things that matter to us can be encountered*."

Like that philosopher's attending to a mode of deep receptiveness toward the facticity of the world (an approach consciously expressed as an aesthetic in photographer Edward Weston's essays and in his famous *Daybooks*),[7] Ruscha also goes "to the things themselves," but he does so tongue-in-cheek, putting to the "road-test" Husserlian seriousness and Weston's modernist exemplification of Husserlian essences. (Having the same surname, did Ruscha see the wordplay potential in having the two "Eds" butt heads on the field of photographic contest?) While Weston took great care in selecting his subject matter and arranging it on his ground-glass (becoming the "ground" of the situation), Ruscha plays the role of the naive snapshooter (Jeff Wall affirms this in " 'Marks of Indifference': Aspects of Photography in, or as, Conceptual Art," 1995) where one is thrown into a situation that is already there; in this case, *the situation* becomes "ground" upon which the photographer finds him/herself. This ground, this situation, will become important in Aron Vinegar's take on this "dumb snap-shot" aspect (evoking "happy accidents" or "fortuitous wrecks") as used in Ruscha's photobooks.

Calling attention to issues of random sampling and aleatory choice in Ruscha's work (the naive and quotidian), Benjamin Buchloh offers its source in Duchamp and Cage's legacy of an "aesthetic of indifference." [8] But Vinegar critiques Buchloh's Adorno-inflected socially-oriented critique wherein Ruscha's work is viewed as in conformity with the dominant structures of our "administered" society, a stance that meshes well with Stanley Cavell's analysis of film actor Buster Keaton's poker face where, in "What Becomes of Things on Film" (1978), he reads it as "acceptance of the external world and the things in it." Vinegar counters this by citing Jaleh Mansoor's article in *October,* "Ed Ruscha's One-way Street" (Winter 2005) that reads Ruscha's practice as much more critical of mass culture than Buchloh and Cavell's positions offer. But Vinegar, attuned to the anti-Marxist trends these days, moves his discussion away from societal issues toward an understanding of Ruscha's existential *being-in-the-world* as exemplified in his photobooks.

Vinegar proceeds to take the Keaton-like rhetorical delivery of "deadpanness," the comic acknowledgment of the world remarked upon by so many about Ruscha's work, and rethink it as *not* ironic distancing, but a mode of *being-with-the-world*. He uses Martin Heidegger's existential spin on Husserlian Phenomenology to focus on the sense of our "attunement" to things that constitute our Life-World, our moods. According to Heidegger, our *Being-in-the-World* entails no "objective" that is not also accompanied by an interpretation; hence, no mood ever comes from merely "without" nor from just "within," but arises from our whole situation that discloses our mode of existence (note some similarities here to Systems Theory's emphasis on relation and reflexivity).[9] For Heidegger, "indifference" is not merely negative, but opens out into "equanimity," a calm and even vision of the possible situations of the *potentiality-of-being-as-a-whole*. Douglas Davis lauds this "indifferent" use of photography in a December 1976 *Artforum* essay, "The Size of Non-size": "Cheap, flat, and accessible, the photograph is the signifier of recent art, as canvas-stretcher and steel frame served its predecessors. The photograph furthermore calls no attention to itself (as medium)." Unlike "museum photography" now.[10]

B-17 debris, Bomber Mountain, Lewis Koch

In a 1976 lecture, Davis offers a way to understand "dumb snapshots" within a Pop sensibility: "Among other qualities, the Pop sensibility is markedly in-different to content and to personality. It accepts what it finds in the world [like typewriters], prefers that to the subjective regurgitation of the psyche [as seen in Bullock's typewriter], and uses it quite often directly [in what looks like deadpan] . . ."[11]
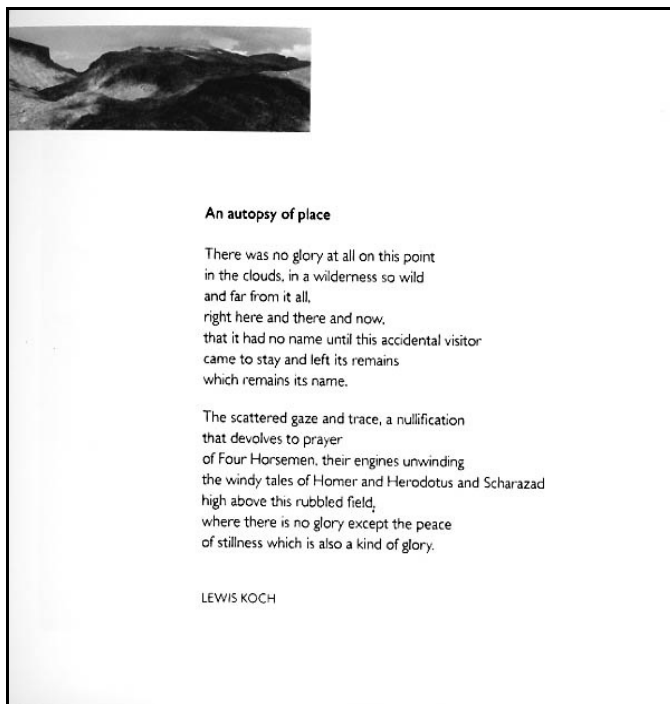
Vinegar expands on the attitude of Pop and "deadpan" in an argument that rests upon Heidegger's description of deadpan expression as "resolute rapt-ness," the ability to remain open to the ordinary in the pursuit of some distanced and more "knowing" con-dition which, he says, explains why Los Angeles's "superficiality" (Ruscha's description) can be profound and funny and worth living for, as it makes one aware that everything is ephemeral when you look at it from the right angle.[12] Ruscha's photobooks are read as an expression of wonder (rather than critique) of our era, specifically, wonder evoked by Los Angeles's very mundaneness and captured in his books. Object (L. A.) and subject (Ruscha) seem fated to a perfect phenomenological pairing of world and self.

Lewis Koch's book, *Bomber, a chance unwinding* (Madison, WI: Areness Press/Blurb. com, 2011) exemplifies the first definition of wreckage sketched above: the "remains after destruction: the broken pieces left after something has been extremely badly damaged or destroyed." Like Ruscha's


Epilogue to the book and wall installation (2011) Lewis Koch

book, the event recorded is tied to a specific date: June 28, 1943, when a B-17 Flying Fortress bomber on its way to join the air war over Germany, crashed in Wyoming's Big Horn Mountains, killing all the crew, scattering shards of the plane across what became known as "Bomber Mountain" (elevation 12,840 feet).[13] Koch reverses the entropic direction of Ruscha's project, constructing a new meaning from the imaged debris (non-rusting aluminum, so the debris looks "new"), and sets up a comparison/contrast between geo-logical time (the site) and human time (the historical event of the crash).

Unlike Ruscha, Koch gives us a scripto-visual autopsy of a site of an *actual* disaster. Deaths haunt the scene; no tongue-and-cheek here. A

Top and bottom: Images from *Bomber, a chance unwinding* (chapbook and installation, 2011) Lewis Koch



Case Study I/39

war (diminished) and

nature (remains).

Left page, freeze frames by Lewis Koch from WWII documentary footage

pathos pervades both the book (conceived in full-color with *InDesign* software, published via print-on-demand) and installation. Installation? Yes. Whereas Ruscha's book is a stand-alone object in a series of similar texts, Koch's was conceived as a supplementary chapbook (yet named one of twenty notable recent photobooks at PhotoIreland, Dublin) to accompany gallery installations of this project, such as at the James Watrous Gallery at the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters in Madison, Wisconsin (June 24 - August 7, 2011) where the artist used the walls and glass of the space like giant book pages that envelop the viewer *inside* the text.

Where Ruscha's photography is purposely casual, mocking the tenets of formalist fine art photography, Koch's is meticulous, considered.[14] After all, he's been working and defining himself as an art photographer for decades. And much of that work has been an exploration of the possibilities of the visual fragment and the importance of text in and outside the image. The traditional versus conceptual employment of photography (where language was to be purged on the one hand and foregrounded on the other) debate is now shopworn, inapplicable in our post-conceptual times.

These images (in the book and exhibition) are well-rendered, the text (both appropriated and written by Koch) is serious, poetic even. Important to Koch's efforts here is his use of screen-shots appropriated by unwinding archival WWII black-and-white documentary film-footage of B-17s in action. We have the interlacing of two "databases" and two historical junctures — a THEN (our "good" war, World War II) and a NOW (our problematic war, Afghanistan) — realized via a monochrome-and-color



Right page, B-17 debris, Lewis Koch

contrast, each contrast is key to the aesthetics and ethos of the work. When Koch selected the screen-shot, often a double-image resulted, giving an illusion of motion, a dynamism which contrasts effectively against the very stable images of the scattered debris, aluminum debris that has rested in place for decades *without* showing the effects of time, of the slow combustion we call *rusting* (coding this more a wreck than a ruin).

The word *unwinding* in the title of Koch's project obliquely refers to the unwinding of the archival footage and the considered deployment of film fragments from a war past, and the chance, sudden, brutal unwinding of the

Ehlers Caudill Gallery, Chicago, 1992 (left to right): *Slender Thread Totem* (7 prints, 106 x 19 in., 1991); and *Dream Portal: The Manifestations* (13 prints, 100 x 106 in., 1992) Lewis Koch

Boeing bomber's integrity as it smashed in the dark night across the boulder-strewn heights of a remote mountain. For a thousand and one nights these shards have been there to tell their story. This hints at another level of reference to *unwinding* in his project and it has to do with the airplane's nick-name. It was customary for crews to name their "bird," usually with a female appellation. Pilot William Ronaghan and his crew chose "Scharazad," an alternate spelling for Scheherazade, the famous female protagonist holding death at bay (the *raison d'être* for it being chosen) in the frame tale of *One Thousand and One Nights.* The bomber's namesake is described in Sir Richard F. Burtons' translation:

"She had perused the works of the poets and knew them by heart; she had studied philosophy and the sciences, arts and accomplishments; and she was pleasant and polite, wise and witty, well read and well bred." This was a *classy* war-bird.

Ironically, one night the tale turned tragic for "Scharazad's" crew. The fragments of this final tale had a small audience until, camera-in-hand, Koch began to "decode" these "ruins" which, despite time, still sit gleaming incongruously in their mountainous setting. Gathering them up visually, he unwound them for our thoughtful reflection in a small book and across gallery walls.

Koch has always had an eye and pen-chant for wreckage and an attention to signs and slogans that mark our public space, as seen in *Manitowoc, Wisconsin* (1999). His mature *oeuvre* (starting with his "Totems" series) has involved the arrangement of such photographs into new wholes, a poetic riff on Russian Constructivist "factography" (where complete images are juxtaposed rather than shards of cut-up photos into collage). These earlier works put individual photographs into close proximity, forming dis-tinctive shapes. However, these overall shapes retain within them the formal and semantic



*Manitowoc, Wisconsin* (1999) *Touchlesss Automatic Wonder,* page 71, Lewis Koch

integrity of the single image (we can refer to them as "pho-temes"). These photemes (like morphemes, words), are given a syntactical import that builds toward a "sentence," toward a fuller meaning that is more than the mere sum of the parts. In



*Every Building on Sunset Strip* (1969) Edward Ruscha

Case Study I/41

Ruscha, the closest one gets to this feeling of "language" is in unfolding his clever book, *Every Building on Sunset Strip*.

These photemes are the basic building blocks of Koch's aesthetic world which he combines to form a more complex poetic state of affairs. At times these photemes display a logical construct, like links in a chain, as in *Tar Pit Totem* (1994), where the figure's head grows from the tar pit/soil via interlocking vertical forms. Other times, the image linkages are more ideational than formal, as in Koch's text-image installation of *OSAYCAN-YOUSEE* (Wright Museum of Art, Beloit College, Beloit, Wisconsin 2008). *Bomber*, a *chance unwinding* is a development from such past work, but the gaps between images increase and text takes on a stronger purpose; the result is a complex dance between text-as-image and image-as-text. And between images and object: the installation includes rocks, simulating those at the crash-site, placed at the gallery's entrance.[15]

In Ruscha's *Royal Road Test*, the imagery flows over the page edges and through the turned pages without gaps or interruption, the text is informational. The book has a stable frame of reference, reveal its sub-ject unproblematically, *working* stereotypes of perception as a gauntlet tossed in the face of high modernism. Hence, it is easily deciphered, what Roland Barthes called a "readerly text," giving as its Barthesian reward a comfortable reading (*plaisir*). In contradistinction, Koch's book and wall installation (where the prints are nailed, suggesting rivets, to the wall) are products of interconnections that make effective aesthetic use of carefully positioned gaps (both spatial and conceptual, as seen in the actual crash site) to create a dance between revelation and concealment, between found imagery and authored.

The result is a Barthesian polysemic, "writerly" text open to many interpretational constructs as the frame of reference is more complex due to the ambiguous constellation of image-text; the codes regulating the text-reader/viewer relationship are fragmented, requiring imaginative restructuring that invites deeper participation by the viewer. This demands more effort to bridge these gaps. Significantly, the gaps function as pivots on which the whole text-reader/viewer relationship revolves; they trigger and control the activity of decipherment.

Unlike Ruscha's book where the segments are marshaled into a graduated sequence, here elements are transformed into reciprocal reflec-tors. The blank as an empty space between segments enables them to be joined together into a referential field where the two reflecting positions relate to and influence each other. Thus, the 1943 crash date is paired with the 2006 and 2008 dates when Koch made his photos *in situ*; monochrome images play off color; text off image; a past war resonates with a present conflict; a book reflects a wall installation, and so forth. Obviously, one must give sustained attention to these complexities, but one's effort is

*Tar Pit Totem* (1994) (7 gelatin-silver prints, 106 in. X 19 in.) Lewis Koch

rewarded by what Barthes in *The Pleasure of the Text* (1975) associates with a bliss accruing from the unsettledness and discomfort of aesthetic co-creation (*jouissance*).

The fragmented language — laconic phrases, found or authored imagery dispersed within the book and running across the gallery walls and glass — produce a charged, heightened expressiveness absent from Ruscha's book. In one double-page spread the poetic text on the left runs up and down the page: "a small punctuation *. . .* in the **everlasting** *. . .* of it all *... ***The everlasting** matter *. . .*," while a shot taken through a twisted flange bridges the book's gutter. That ruined flange, in turn, irregularly frames a shard of mountain distance, turning the landscape itself into a fragment. *The past frames our present.* But in *Royal Road Test*, entropy wins the day, the object remains abjected.



Double-page spread, *Bomber, a chance unwinding* (2011) Lewis Koch



*The Wichita Falls, Texas Tornado* (1979)
Frank Gohlke

The "dismembered" text/images in Koch's work are, nevertheless, given a conceptual order, a sort of visual post-mortem (the images in the installation, ranging from 4 x 6 inches to 14 x 30 inches, are tacked up with small nails as in a crash investigation), creating a tension between the broken and chaotic and the ideational net thrown over the evidence of disaster. Koch's color images of a rugged topography strewn with debris, in approach and subject matter, recall the cool, detached gaze of the "New Topographics" photography of the "man-altered landscape" as featured in the influential 1975 exhibition (curated by William Jenkins) which included Frank Gohlke. Gohlke later documented a damaged Wichita Falls after a tornado hit and recorded the same scenes a year later.

Common to New Topographics and Koch's project is a focus on the altered landscape, the antithesis of the sublime Ansel Adams type of landscape that had, by the mid-seventies, become moribund. But where Gohlke records destruction and then

Wall installation, bombsight photo, target map, *Bomber, a chance unwinding* (2011) Lewis Koch



the final sword, into this final rest,

and finally found
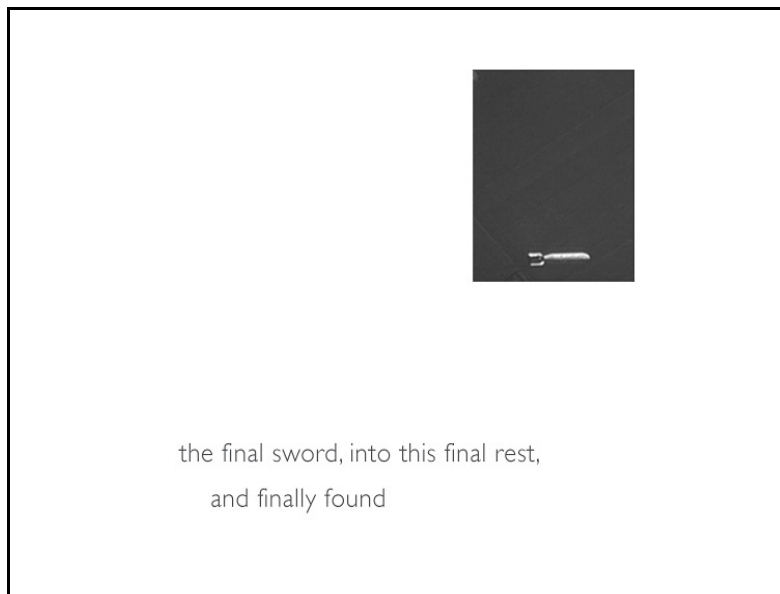
Wall image and text, *Bomber, a chance unwinding* (2011) Lewis Koch

restoration, or Robert Adams and Joe Deal visually comment on tract-home suburban sprawl, Koch loosens an historical object (the B-17) from its celebrated historical continuum (intimated by the documentary WWII footage) to become part of the viewer/reader's own present-day experience (Koch's image-text array). Koch's project generates an "afterlife" for this war machine in which a fragment of the past finds itself within, even framing, our present. This strategy asks us to uncomfortably revisit the theme of war and destruction, to recall the destruction wrought on cities and civilians during the Second World War and still to this day (my own father was a B-17 bombardier who later had moral twinges about the "collateral damage" from his bombs). The inclusion in the wall installation of appropriated bombsight photos and target maps, bringing to mind the awful effects of aerial bombardment, as well as reminding us of the fact that now nothing utterly disappears, history enters the realm of the permanently present via photography.

Koch's pun in one section on "sword" and "words" and the phrase "final rest," juxtaposed to a single released bomb, further connects the act of bomb destruction with the plane's crash. His project brings back for our consideration a fatal moment when the destroyers were destroyed, the destructive machine itself destroyed, an unwilling Tinguely-like act. The plane *carried within itself the seeds of its own destruction.* This observation opens Ruscha's *Royal Road Test* where it humorously refers to the ill-

fated typewriter; but Koch seems to suggest this existential fate is akin to Marx's notion of dialectical social contradictions, or even to "bad karma" (he's lived in India, photographing at Bhopal).

Koch's photo-poetic probing of wreckage (human remains removed in 1945) is more serious than Ruscha's and analogous to German critic Walter Benjamin's interest in the ruin, the corpse, the fragmenting of language, the captioning of photographs where images do not speak for themselves (found in both Ruscha and Koch's art), and the working of the past as something still uncompleted. Koch is Walter Benjamin's "angel of history": eyes backward as he flies forward.



*What is it about peace that its inspiration is not enduring?*
*Why is its story so hard to tell? …*

*I will not give up… Where are my heroes? Where are you, my children?*
*Where are my own, the dimwitted ones, the primordial ones?*

*Tell me, O Muse, of that poor immortal singer, who, abandoned by his mortal audience,*
*lost his voice… out on the threshold of no-man's-land.*
*I only have to lift my eyes and once again I become the world.*

FROM *WINGS OF DESIRE*, WIM WENDERS/PETER HANDKE

Appropriated image-text from Wim Wender's film *Wings of Desire* (1987), installation, *Bomber, a chance unwinding* (2011) Lewis Koch



Middle wall, *Bomber, a chance unwinding* (2011) installation, Lewis Koch

Walter Benjamin's seminal study of allegory in seventeenth-century German *Trauerspiel* asserts, "Allegories are, in the realm of thoughts, what ruins are in the realm of things." For Benjamin, allegory is a mode of ruination for the sake of truth. Might we say this is what Koch has given us for our contemplation? The ruins of a war-era event con-verted into a very mysterious set of scripto-visual "runes" we must decipher and come to

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grips with in our own destructive present. If the shards of wreckage in Ruscha's book speak to the issue of entropy and disinterested seeing, Koch's begins with entropy as a *fait accompli*, taking pre-symbolic fragments of wreckage and reassembling them into a Symbolic (text-image) that evokes indeterminancy and evokes the mood of trauma. Unlike Bernd and Hilla Becher's organized grid of serialized images, Koch places his images (in book and on wall) with large gaps between images and text, like a Scrabble Board incompletely filled.[16]

As in real-life trauma (war and nature) Koch's ideational elements remain unreconciled. They refuse us a single harmonious perspective, providing an uncertain knowledge, a knowledge-in-process as suggested in an epigraph for his accordion-fold photobook, *Slender Thread Totem* (1993), where he cites John Muir: "When we try to pick out anything by itself we find it hitched to everything else in the universe." As such, Koch's project refuses a deadpan approach and dodges Aron Vinegar's touting of the *wondrous* [17] (a reading of Ruscha that deploys the original Enlightenment promise of an aesthetic ability to judge without interest) in favor of a disaster scenario that remains committed to an anti-war stance without being tendentious, an ever open-ended scripto-visual unwinding offering many readings.

Koch's coda to his gallery installation is a scene snatched from the ending of Wim Wenders film, *Wings of Desire* (1987), on which is over-printed the voice-over from the film (screenplay by Peter Handke). This is not reproduced in his chapbook. We are confronted by a melancholy image of the Berlin Wall (later to become a ruin) blocking any perspective, the back of a person, Homer, sheltering himself from rain, blocking our view of the wall as he seems to contemplate it in a mood that could range from deadpan acceptance to sorrowful loss. It's as if we share a prison yard with him. The voice-over, a verbal clue from Homer, reads in part:

> *What is it about peace that its inspiration is not enduring?*
> *Why is its story so hard to tell?*
> *I will not give up . . .*


Text on glass, *Bomber, a chance unwinding* installation view (2011) Lewis Koch

So does Koch give voice to his commitment, his struggle for peace in the face of the trauma of war, nor can we viewers give up constructing and reconstructing our readings of Koch's complexly layered project.[18]

Finally, as if asking us to take time to *reflect* upon his installation and our place within it, to suggest the interpretational *mise-en-abyme* he's evoked, Koch uses the reflective glass surrounding the gallery space to his benefit as a virtual wall
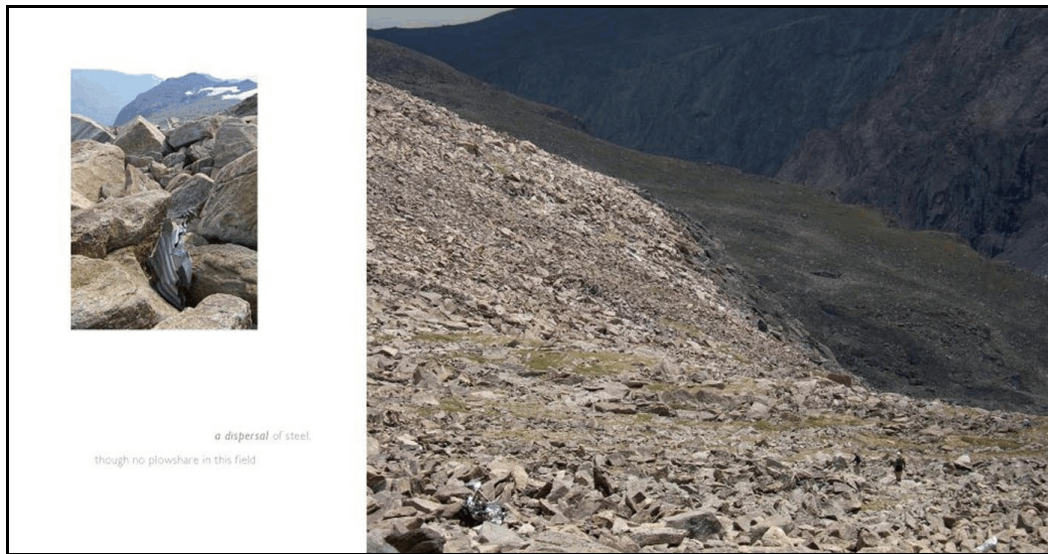
*Bomber, a chance unwinding*, chapbook double-spread, (2011) view of rock strewn crash site



Installation view, *Bomber, a chance unwinding* (2011)  a line of rocks suggest the terrain of the crash-site

*Bomber, a chance unwinding,* installation view with glass reflections



Patrick Blackwell, Photographer, *Royal Road Test* (1967) Edward Ruscha



Lewis Koch, Photographer, at the entry to his installation of *Bomber, a chance unwinding* (2011) James Hugunin

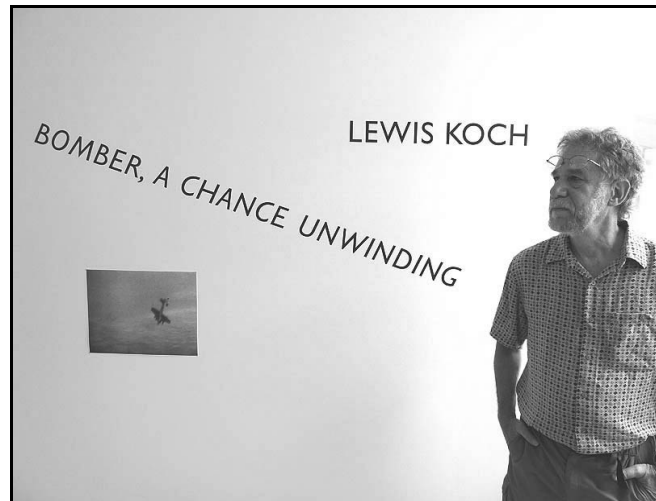that mirror-reverses shards of his poetic text (in this instance: "Only sun and stones, and soon") as you look up toward the sky, a sky from which that ill-fated B-17 plunged one dark night. And soon: a wreck (that fateful night) and/or soon, the wreck of war (now)?

In sum, Edward Ruscha's appropriation and re-use of a dead commodity, the typewriter, has shifted in Lewis Koch's installation to the invocation of the crash-site that "lives" through time. Beneath this shift one can posit, as Jan Verwoert does, "a radical transformation of the experience of the historical situation, from a feeling of a general loss of historicity to a current sense of an excessive presence of history, a shift from not enough history to too much history or rather too many histories."[19]

<p align="center">*    *    *</p>

# Endnotes

1.This use of the pointing index finger doubles the indexical pointing of the analogue camera and was used frequently in John Baldessari's early work — e.g., *Commissioned Paintings* (1969) and *Choosing ( A Game for Two Players) Rhubarb* (1972), *Choosing Chocolates, Choosing Green Beans*, etc. — and other conceptualists of the period. In *Camera Lucida* (1981), 5,  Roland Barthes writes: ". . . the photograph is never anything but an antiphon of 'Look,' 'See,' 'Here it is,'; it points a finger at certain *vis-à-vis,* and cannot escape this pure deictic language. This pointing to objects, implies we reply to that command to look, evoking a verbal response (precisely what for Greenberg made the medium problematic from his perspective). Language mixing with depiction meant photography could be construed as the enemy of all the values of late modernism.

This, in fact, enacts Marcel Duchamp's negation of painting by photography as espoused in a letter to Alfred Stieglitz in 1922, where he chides Stieglitz's touting of art photography: "you know how exactly I feel about photography. I would like to see it make people despise painting until something else will make photography unbearable"  (As cited by Luke Skrebowski in *Photography After Conceptual Art*, eds., Diarmuid Costello and Margaret Iversen [UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010], 91 and 106, n. 21). Skrebowski also cites John Roberts's *The Impossible Document: Photography and Conceptual Art in Britain 1966 - 1976* (London, 1997) on p. 106, n. 25: "Photography was the means by which conceptual art's exit from Modernist closure was made realizable as a practice."

Digital photography problematizes the notion of photography as index and recorder of the contingent event for in the latter, as W.G. Sebald observed in an interview: "The photograph is the true document par excellence. People let themselves be convinced by a photograph." Sebald aligns his use of photography with conceptual art: "The second point is that I use the camera as a kind of shorthand or *aide mêmoire*. I don't tie this to any artistic ambitions at all. . . . I don't want to integrate images of high photographic quality into my texts; they are rather documents of findings, something secondary" (" 'But the Word is Not a True Document': A Conversation with W.G. Sebald on Literature and Photography" by Christian Scholz in *Searching for Sebald: Photography After W.G. Sebald,* Lise Patt, ed. with Christel Dillbohner [Los Angeles: The Institute of Cultural Inquiry, 2007], 104).

2. Margaret Iversen, "Auto-macity: Ruscha and Performative Photography," in *Photography After Conceptual Art*, 13, where she relates Ruscha's use of image-text as showing the influence of structural linguistics and the critique of authorship coming out of French theory at the time. John Baldessari was also much influenced by such theory, carrying it more explicitly into his artworks. Both Baldessari and Ruscha would agree with, and make use of, Lady Eastlake's famous words concerning the automatic recording of nature by the camera, that the "obedience of the machine" in photography is no "picturesque agent." (Elizabeth Rigby, "Photography," *Quarterly Review* 101 (April, 1857): 466. However, Rosalind Krauss, in " 'Specific' Objects," in *Perpetual Inventory*, claims Ruscha is not debunking art photography's pretensions via the dumb snapshot, but exploring the mass-produced automobile (it was a favorite subject of Pop artists) as an artistic medium. Diarmuid Costello, "Automat, Automatic, Automatism: Rosalind Krauss and Stanley Cavell on Photography and the Photographically Dependent Arts," in *Critical Inquiry* 4 (Summer 2012): 849 - 851, engages critically with Krauss's claims.

3. Iversen, 16-20. She draws attention to the root of Ruscha's proto-Systemic Art approach (which undermines spontaneity, self-expression and immediacy) to the influence of verbal instruction as found in Sol LeWitt's system's based view of conceptual art, the performative aspects of Marcel Duchamp's *3 Standard Stoppages* (1913-14) as well as the performative "scores" of John Cage, Lamont Young, and George Brecht, such that Ruscha's books are here "presented as a totally pre-meditated, performative, and instructional piece." On this point Iversen draws upon Liz Kotz's *Words to be Looked At: Language in 1960s Art* (2007). In the same anthology edited by Costello and Iversen, Gordon Hughes

explores the intriguing notion that in Douglas Huebler's work this very predetermined system can seem to be adhered to, but is actually a clever conceit on Huebler's part, a "double assertion and negation," that futzes with the preconceived system ("Exit Ghost: Douglas Huebler's Face Value," 73).

Iversen goes on to mark the difference between Robert Frank's *The Americans* (1959) with Ruscha's earliest books, seeing it as a shift not only in subject matter, but that of personal expression (Frank) to an automaticity consisting of a systemic, neutral approach (Ruscha). It is this demotic use of the medium that can be generally taken as a rebellion against the expressive uses of painting and fine art photography. In a note on page 37 in her "Introduction" to *Searching for Sebald: Photography After W. G. Sebald* (2007), editor Lise Patt compares conceptual artist Ed Ruscha and W.G. Sebald's demotic approach to the medium and contrasts it with post-conceptual artist Sophie Calle's use of the medium: ". . . both Sebald and Ruscha use photographs arranged in a cumulative monotonous tone to evoke other 'jobs' for the photograph . . .Whereas conceptual artists used these techniques to record perceptions of language, time, and space as objectively as possible, for Calle they function as a means to register a range of subjective and psychological responses" (what Patt says about Calle, applies equally to Lewis Koch's *Bomber, a chance unwinding*). As example of the low status of photography during the 1960s, Luke Skrebowski, discussing Mel Bochner's photographic-related work in the mid-sixties, cites *Art Forum* editor, Philip Leider's rejection of Bochner's attempt at submitting for publication his *Dead Ends and Vicious Circles* (1967): "we're not a goddamn photography magazine, this is an art magazine, . . ." (*Photography After Conceptual Art*, 88).

But this very conceptualist choice of photography as a low medium has been reversed as photography after conceptualism has become the dominant medium, a medium wholly accepted within fine art circles and being shown extensively in museums. It is, of course, the key theme running throughout Costello and Iversen's anthology, a compilation that tries to steer an interesting course between the Scylla of Jeff Wall and Michael Fried's touting of "internal aestheticization" as behind post-conceptualist photographic practices and the Charybdis of Benjamin Buchloh and Julian Stallabrass's Marxist (market-driven) analysis.

Interestingly, Iversen fails to explore the influence of Systems Theory's relating of people, structures, and processes into complex systems, which was just putting a blip on the avant-garde's radar at that time. Such theory as touted by Niklas Luhmann, Claude Shannon, et al. stressed the interdisciplinary study of systems, explored a communication theory of inputs and outputs (unlike Heidegger's notion of "attunement"), and self-regulating systems. For instance, this theory, as realized in Talcott Parsons's "Action Theory," influenced Allan Kaprow's living systems as explored in his Happenings. In a video "Interview with Hans Haacke, 1980" (The Video Data Bank, Chicago, IL), Haacke stresses that Systems Theory influenced his move toward a more relational and conceptual (i.e., phenomenologically-structuralist-influenced) approach to his artwork in the early 1960s.

Although academically opposing theories, Phenomenology and Structuralism were often complexly interwoven in sixties-era aesthetics as they both adhered to a belief that what we take as "reality" was actually "the experience-of-reality," constructed in mind. Phenomenology took "mind" as an individual construct, while Structuralism saw it as a social construct; Douglas Davis's critical essays appearing in *Artforum* during the 1970s shows an easy slippage between such theories. For artists eager to move beyond Greenbergian models (as was Douglas Davis), these respective philosophical approaches were resonant with their intuitive sense of reality-as-a-construct. Artists absorbed from each branch of contemporary thought what they saw fit into their evolving manner of working. Hence, Structuralist-inflected artworks were often referred to as "Phenomenological artworks" by both artists and critics at the time.

4. Iversen, 24 and Aron Vinegar, "Ed Ruscha, Heidegger, and Deadpan Photography," in *Photography After Conceptual Art*, eds., Darmuid Costello and Margaret Iversen (UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), n. 17, 47 .

5. Aron Vinegar, "Ed Ruscha, Heidegger, and Deadpan Photography," in *Photography After Conceptual Art*, eds., Diarmuid Costello and Margaret Iversen (UK: Wiley-Blackwell,2010), 29. Vinegar elaborates on Stanley Cavell's discussion of Buster Keaton's face in *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), brings in Charlotte Cotton's discussion in her chapter "Deadpan," in *Photography as Contemporary Art* (2004), and Denise Scott Brown's article "Pop Art, Permissiveness and Planning." He then follows Martin Heidegger's thoughts on mood and attunement in section 29 of *Being and Time* (1927) to produce a more complex, less politicized, understanding of deadpan's status as a mode of *being-in-the-world*.

6. Andre Breton, *Nadja* (1928).

7. Edward Weston, "America and Photography" (1929) in *Edward Weston on Photography*, ed. Peter C. Bunnell (Salt Lake City: Peregrine Smith Books, 1983), 55: "With a medium capable of revealing more than the eye sees, 'things in themselves,' could be recorded, clearly, powerfully . . ."

8. Benjamin Buchloh, "Conceptual Art 1962 - 69: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions" in *October* 55, Winter 1990 (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press).

9. Hence, for Existentialists, there exists only a *subjective-objective* and never an *objective-objective*. When taken into knowledge theory, this "weakening" of our foundations of objective knowledge comes to be telescoped — via Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Derrida — into a hallmark of our postmodern condition which Italian thinker Gianni Vattimo describes as "weak thought." See Gianni Vattimo, *The End of Modernity: Nihilism and Hermeneutics in Postmodern Culture,* trans. John R. Snyder (Polity Press, 1991).

10. Apropos the debates surrounding the trend in large-scale photographic prints, what is often termed "museum photography," as seen most characteristically in Jeff Wall's work, Douglas Davis in "The Size of Non-size," *Artforum* (December, 1976) and reprinted in *ArtCulture: Essays on the Post-Modern* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), 38.

11. Originally presented in a lecture for the Northeastern section of the American Association of Museums at Winterthur, Wilmington, Delaware, November 1976, in *Artculture* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), 88. On this topic, I can speak with personal experience, living in Los Angeles at that time and being directly influenced by Ruscha (whom I understood as a Los Angeles version of New York's Pop Art) and Baldessari (whom I understood as more language-oriented in his interests). In my earliest conceptual word-text pieces (early 1970s) I perceived "the dumb snapshot" (in my work, often a Polaroid) as a direct rejection of fine art photography's formalism and print fetishism. And as Mel Bochner has testified to, I found what passed for theory on photography slim pickin's. It was reading Roland Barthes that changed that for me. In my work, "auto-maticity" was inspired by my pre-med training in the sciences; thereafter, I mimicked the form of my university laboratory notebooks, explicitly stating in my artworks "Intent," "Purpose," and "Procedure," going on to execute the aesthetic "experiment" as preconceived. Many of these early works were recorded in a grid-lined laboratory notebook in hand-written text with photos pasted in.

   Moving from lab notebooks, I began to do my first artist books. My first undergraduate photo instructor at California State University, Northridge was Jerry McMillan (long-time friend of Ruscha's), who first introduced me to Ruscha's books and even took us students to Ruscha's studio to meet him personally. My experience with artist books (1974 - 76) eventually led me on to expand my publishing interests by founding and editing (along with Theron Kelley) the quarterly art journal, *The Dumb Ox* (1976 - 80), in which our editorial focus was artwork exploring image-text combinations. One of our guest editors for that publication was Lew Thomas, who was the nucleus around which San Francisco Bay Area's "Photo-Language" group gathered. His many self-published books through NFS Press during the mid-seventies, books like *Photography and Language*, heavily influenced by Structuralism, remain an excellent source for innovative conceptual photography during that period.

12. Edward Ruscha, *Leave Any Information at the Signal: Writings, Interviews, Bits, Pages* (Cambridge, MA: M. I. T. Press, 2002), 245.

13. The bomber encountered bad weather and was not at a proper altitude to clear the mountain range. See *Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bomber Mountain*. Another source of information is a booklet available in bookstores near the crash site and from the publisher, Scott Madsen, *The Bomber Mountain Crash, A Wyoming Mystery* (Buffalo, WY: Mountain Man Publishing, 1990, 4th ed., 2004).

14. To compare Koch's imagery to other photographers visiting the site, see *Flickr, http://www.flickr.com/photos/ u1976turn/ 1246336658/*

15. In the 1970s, as if to double the indexicality of the photograph, artists (such as Robert Smithson) began to supplement their optico-chemical traces with physical traces of the site photographed. These fragments read as "specimens." In Koch's installation, however, this "evidence" is actually rocks from another locale, Madison, Wisconsin, and so a rhetorical diorama-like simulation of the actual rocks at the actual scene. They now function to recall *absent evidence* and become a gesture of welcome and enhances the fractal mode of presentation in the installation. This is a tactic wholly at odds with how Smithson deployed his "true" artifactual evidence. Overall, Koch's *modus operandi* is that of a perpetual collage of disintegration and reintegration.

16. Sarah James, "Subject, Object, Mimesis: The Aesthetic World of the Bechers' Photography," in *Photography After Conceptual Art*, eds., Diarmuid Costello and Margaret Iversen (UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 54, offers an analysis of the Bechers' use of seriality: "The cumulative effect of the series defines our reading. Yet, although it increases our knowledge of the subject matter, the work paradoxically renders it more abstract." Where the Bechers fill in the slots of their gridded series with images, Koch's use of seriality asks one to fill in gaps, like in a Scrabble game, inviting a play with meaning that leads from the past into the present. The project invites us to create questions and then pose answers.

17. Vinegar, 45-46.

18. Koch has been researching WWII bomb devastation of German cities, mentioning W. G. Sebald's *On the Natural History of Destruction* (1999) as important to the aesthetic and anti-war concerns developed in his *Bomber* project. Koch wants to counter the amnesia concerning the destruction produced by the strategic offensive bombing of Germany wrought by air forces, but does so by subtle implication that lets the work speak to our current issues of aerial war by impersonal drones. A more direct, journalistic indictment, Sebald's text cites a 1984 British book where British journalist, Max Hastings, comments: "In the safety of peace, the bombers' part in the war was one that many politicians and civilians would prefer to forget." Sebald reveals the horrors of a policy that was England's response to The Blitz, and ultimately resulted in the genocide of civilian populations in Hamburg and Dresden. At one point he tells the reader that "there were 31.1 cubic meters of rubble for every person in Cologne and 42.8 cubic meters for every inhabitant of Dresden," and that Pforzheim "lost almost one-third of its 60,000 inhabitants in a single raid on the night of February 23, 1945."

Sebald continues to detail people's numbed response: "But these things obviously did not register on the sensory experience of the survivors still living on the scene of the catastrophe. People walked 'down the street and past the dreadful ruins,' wrote author Alfred Döblin in 1945, after returning from his American exile to southwest Germany, 'as if nothing had happened, and . . . the town had always looked like that' " (Modern Library, 2004, 4, 5). Döblin's observation was recorded in Hans-Magnus Enzensberger's collection *Europa in Trümmern* ("Europe in Ruins") published in 1990, but the majority of the pieces in the book are from foreign sources, hinting how the horrors had been largely repressed within Germany itself. Koch's *Bomber* project is an attempt to visually recall those destructive days and permit us to meditate upon the chance destruction of a machine of death that died during the height of the aerial war over Germany.

19. Jan Verwoert, "Living with Ghosts: From Appropriation to Invocation in Contemporary Art/2007," in *Memory*, ed. Ian Farr (Documents in Contemporary Art, Whitechapel Gallery and The MIT Press, 2012), 150.

# Case Study II

## Ruins: José Ferreira, Avery Danziger

*ru·in* [ro´o-in] *noun*
*1. broken remains: the physical remains of something such as a building or city that has decayed or been destroyed (often used in the plural).*
*2. complete devastation: a state of complete destruction, decay, collapse, or loss.*
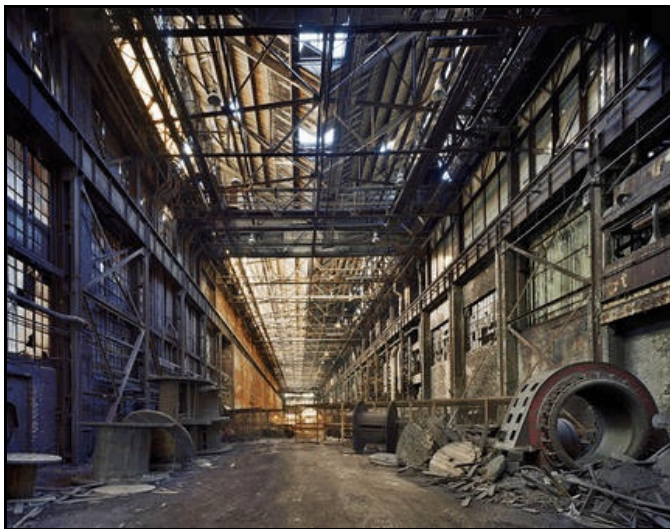


*The Rolling Hall at Ford's abandoned River Rouge plant, Detroit, MI* (cover image for *Detroit Disassembled*, 2010) Andrew Moore



"Twist and Turn" series, Manteno State Hospital, IL (C-print, 2011) José Ferreira

If we accept Polish thinker Zygmunt Bauman's contentions (as set forth in my "Wreck and Ruin" section)[1] for the "postmodern type" of sublimation of death in our society — of which Avery Danziger's *Harlem Valley / Wingdale Project #8806* (see "Dedication" page) seems a good example — and if we view the implications of W. G. Sebald's notion of ruins as an "extra-territorial" space-time structure, "a vortex of past time," [2] wherein we encounter a piece of human history as an enigmatic remnant — what Walter Benjamin called "a petrified unrest" [3] that challenges us to endow it with new meaning, adding, "Perhaps the mingling of the forgotten with the dust of our vanished dwellings is the secret of its survival" [4] — it is no surprise there is such contemporary interest in fragments and ruins across art media and practices, from artists in Europe and the United States.

Yet, this desire for wreck and ruin is hardly new. J. M. W. Turner painted the effects of dinginess, soot, dust, soilings and stains. He delighted in shingles and debris, heaps of fallen stones, all celebrated within the Euro-

*Eastern State Penitentiary* (gelatin silver print, 1997) Margaret Stratton



*Harlem Valley/Wingdale Project #0141, Building 34, Power Plant* (detail, archival pigment print, 2011) Avery Danziger

pean Romantic Landscape tradition.[5] However, the advent of the Machine Age and rationalist, functionalist aesthetics drove such into the realm of the to-be-repressed unclean and irrational.

The Age of the Machine, reaching its pinnacle in the 1920s, was celebrated in modernist depictions of the modern forms of utilitarian architecture, such as Edward Weston's *ARMCO Steel Works* (1922) which finds essential forms emerging from gleaming steel, enhanced by the play of light across this giant "light-modulator." But now these once gleaming structures have turned to rust. Detroit (and in the UK, Manchester) have become post-Fordist poster children for Rust Belt urban decay which followed upon collapse of modernist industrial production.[6] No surprise Detroit has been extensively photographed by the likes of Scott Hocking, Andrew Moore, Yves Marchand/Romain Meffre,[7] and Candace Schutt. Rust, rust — French artist, Christian Boltanski's use of rusted biscuit tins is well-known. *In toto*, Boltanski's work can be seen as a visual exploration of historical wreck and ruin that W. G. Sebald mines in his books.

Other modern structures besides auto factories have become popular subject matter. Margaret Stratton set her analogue camera up inside the ruined interior of Eastern State Penitentiary, Philadelphia, recording in monochrome traces of near-forgotten past.[8] José Ferreira records similar subjects at Manteno State Hospital, Illinois.[9] Stratton's paean to the unfunctional and Ferreira's more Benjaminian bringing of past and future into dialectic contact, suggests a comparison with East Coast photographer Avery Danziger's visually stunning reclamtion of the once-modern as a modern-ruin in his large lush color photographs shot inside

*ARMCO Steel Works* (gelatin silver print,1922)
Edward Weston



*Harlem Valley/Wingdale Project* (archival pigment print, 2011)
Avery Danziger

Structure to ruin/ruin to structure



German Postcard showing post-war recovery of Frankfurt (1997)

Case Study II/55

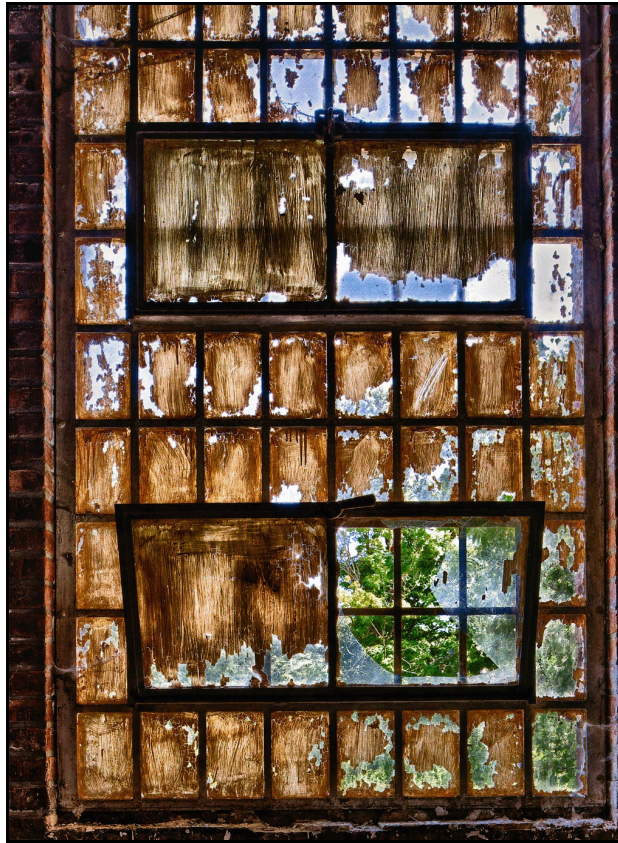*Harlem Valley/Wingdale Project* (archival pigment print, 2011) Avery Danziger



"Twist and Turn" series, Manteno State Hospital, IL (C-print, 2011) José Ferreira

Let me contrast two compositions: Edward Weston's  *ARMCO Steel Works* (1922) with East Coast photographer Avery Danziger's tight shot of metal tubing. Both images share formal pro- perties, but the gleaming steel in the former has, via slow combustion, rusted into a palette of ruddy hues (the structure was built in 1924 and closed in 1994). Each can be understood as visually appealing, but in contrasting forms of knowledge and aesthetics: modernist/ postmodernist.

Danziger has been exploring institutional ruins that offer him an intense photographic shooting experience in often hazardous conditions, resulting in large, high-resolution, unworldly, colored archival pigment prints that exhibit a *spectral materialism.* Jean Baudrillard's description of his own photography seems descriptive of Danziger's practice too: "I isolate something in any empty space and then it irradiates this emptiness — there's the irradiation of the object within this emptiness . . . it is a kind of automatic writing," The resulting prints evoke a *mystery of an encounter* — an encounter not unlike recorded in Rainer Maria Rilke's novel, *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge* (1910), wherein the protaganist (a *flâneur* on the verge of a nervous breakdown) describes a ruined Parisian apartment: "The stubborn life of these rooms had not let itself be trampled out. It was still there; it clung to the nails that were left, stood on the narrow remnant of flooring, crouched under the corner beams where a bit of interior still remained. You could see it in the paint which it had changed, slowly, from year to year: blue into moldy green, green into gray, yellow into a faded rotting white." [10] Commenting upon the manner in which Malte experiences these ruins, Eric L. Santner in *On Creaturely Life* (2006) observes: "That everything Malte 'sees' in the face of this urban ruin acquires its legibility in an *instant,* bringing this discourse of traumatic epiphany into proximity to the medium of photography." [11] Shortly, we will see how Malte's recollection of an estate he resided in when young can be put into relation to Ferreira's experiences.

*Harlem Valley/Wingdale Project #9334, Building 35, Power Plant* (detail, archival pigment print, 2011) Avery Danziger



*Harlem Valley/Wingdale Project #7538, Building 22, Storage* (detail, archival pigment print, 2011) Avery Danziger
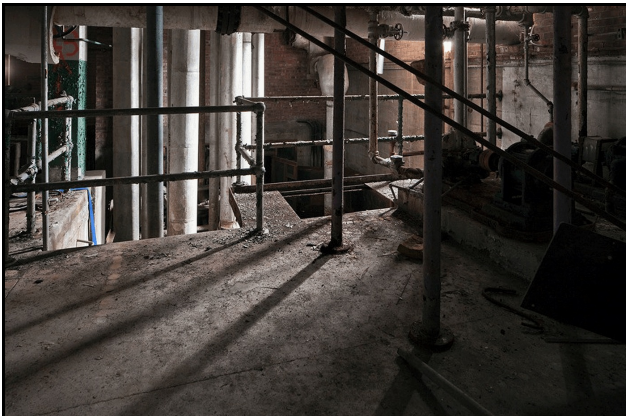
Avery Danziger, 5 photographs from *Harlem Valley/ Wingdale Project* (archival pigment prints, 2012). More recent work in the series which exhibit a more subtle use of saturated color and HDRI manipulation. More often these works read as references to Abstract Painting.
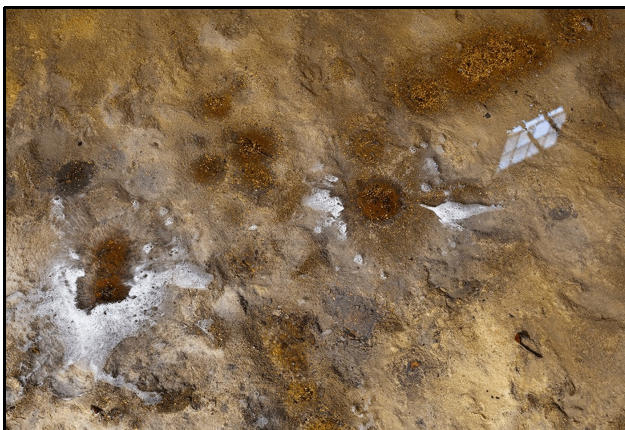
*Harlem Valley/Wingdale Project #7554, Building 22, Storage* (detail, archival pigment print, 2011) Avery Danziger



*Harlem Valley/Wingdale Project #1358, Building 85, Sullivan Tower* (detail, archival pigment print, 2011)
Avery Danziger

*Harlem Valley/Wingdale Project #7145, Building 34, Power Plant* (archival pigment print, detail, 2011) Avery Danziger

The digital images in Danziger's *Harlem Valley/Wingdale Project* are often made in almost non-existent light, extracted by long exposures giving superb detail from highlight to shadow. Some digital enhancement occurs in Photoshop, so the resulting prints are digital transformations of what was before the lens. The images resemble the "madeness" of elaborately constructed sets or overt digitally manipulated tableaux (precedents are John Divola's *Zuma Beach* series [12] 1977 - 78, and Jeff Wall's early work, *The Destroyed Room*, 1978), which gives the work its uncanny aspect. Thus, these images are unlike other photographers' approach to this subject that only faithfully records what the "judicious mallet" of time has wrought. Instead, Avery's images of this former Psychiatric Hospital and Juvenile Correction Facility are long-considered fabrications (a few even requiring multiple-exposures and HDRI compression) incarnating a "judicious palette of time," which was given the death-defying title: "Seeking Permanence." [13]

While Danziger wields his digital camera and tripod inside what are HazMat zones — he wears protective gear, making him into an urban deep-sea diver — Chicago sculptor/photographer, José Ferreira, sets up his 8 x 10-inch Deardorff view camera and explores the *biopolitics* of a similar facility. Recording exteriors as well as interiors using Kodak Professional Portra 160 film, he translates analogue negatives into large color archival pigment prints. Danziger, in contrast, uses vivid color to evoke the contentions of the picturesque in spaces devoid of human presence, often adding to his palette what John Ruskin gave voice to concerning what he complained his fellow men denigrated as "spoiled iron": ". . . we suppose it to be a great defect in iron that it is sub-ject to rust. But not at all. On the contrary, the most perfect and useful state of it is that ochreous stain; . . . [It is] sunshine, not of landscape, but of dwelling place. . . . It is not a fault in the iron, but a virtue, to be so fond of getting rusted, . . . we may say that iron rusted is Living; but when pure or polished, Dead." [14]



"Twist and Turn," Out-buildings at Manteno State Hospital, IL (C-print 2011) José Ferreira

*Zuma #9* ("Beach series" (Type -C print, 1977 - 78) John Divola



*The Destroyed Room* (transparency in light box, 1978) Jeff Wall

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*Harlem Valley/Wingdale Project #8974, Building 27* (detail, archival pigment print, 2011) Avery Danziger



*Harlem Valley/Wingdale Project* (detail, archival pigment print, 2011) Avery Danziger

Danziger remarks, apropos the play of desire in his work, "I am drawn to the incredibly paradoxical beauty as expressed in the transformation from man-made order into the beauty of natural chaos." [15] In Sebald's novel, *The Emigrants* (1992), the protagonist, during a Sunday peregrination in the ruins of Manchester, England, discovers an artist, Ferber, who feels closer to dust — "the grey, velvety sinter left when matter dissolved, little by little into nothingness" [16] — than to light, air, or water. This artist is a painter, but if he'd been a photographer, he'd probably be making images like Danziger's, suspending past, present, and future, halting time's gallop.

Rust is present in Ferreira's images, but not as part of his visual palette; he is a photographer in a straightforward sense and not painterly in his approach as is Danziger. Ferreira uses the conventions of landscape and descriptive

*Harlem Valley/Wingdale Project* (archival pigment print, 2011) Avery Danziger



*Harlem Valley/Wingdale Project #8181, Building 35, Smith Hall* (detail, archival pigment print, 2011) Avery Danziger

architectural photography, making ample use of his camera's swings-and-tilts, to explore structure and space, not only of an institution's main buildings (inside and out), but also smaller out-buildings scattered across these large acreage sites. But this description is at the behest of revealing the *carceral* nature of the institution he approaches, mapping the space (he refers to his photographs as "territories") [17] in relation to his presence in that space, as well as implying the *absent-presence* of inmates and staff who once traversed these hallways and grounds, both prisoners in a controlled environment. [18]

Rainer Maria Rilke's protagonist in *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*, recalls his childhood experience at an aristocratic estate, and in so doing suggests something of Ferreira's own response to the structures he prowls, camera-on-tripod: ". . . it is not a building; to my mind, it consists of discrete parts: here a room, there a room, and here a stretch of passageway that does not connect these two rooms but is preserved in isolation, as *a fragment* [my emphasis]." [19] Ferreira puts these fragments into a biopolitical frame, a mode of attention directed toward the past usage of the carceral facility, but also toward its future restoration as a commercial space in a way that registers the presence of these soon-to-be-resurrected ruins with the structural turmoil at the center of our contemporary late-capitalist empire of social, political, and economic relations. In Danziger's work, fragments become visually organized into lapidary compositions in which color plays a key role in getting our attention.

In José Ferreira's prints, however, color functions not as *form* where it calls attention to itself (as in Danziger's) but a *refined description* consistent with photo historian Jonathan Green's conception of "New Color" in *American Photography: A Critical History 1945 to the Present* (1984). Green touts the straight color photography of the seventies for its realism, attention to atmospheric effects achieved by careful gradation of tone, and the clarity of near and far that result in precise rendering of texture and color produced by direct and reflected rays. [20] In Danziger's project, light seems to often emanate from the forms themselves, a *ghost light* that can only be seen like some apparition, a "return of the dead" as Roland Barthes attributes to photographs in *Camera Lucida*. But in his later imagery, flat abstractive works rather than scenes in depth, this effect disappears (see page 58).

Not only will the site Ferreira is photographing be refurbished and transformed into new commercial usages, but Danziger's as well. [21] In fact, some of Danziger's large prints will hang inside the newly reconstituted multi-use condo facility where they will visually justify the renovation of the old facility. But Danziger's work does not explicitly engage this aspect of future resurrection; his images are more about the pleasures of memory, nostalgia toward past architectural achievement, and the sex appeal of decay as engendered in his use of color that draws attention to itself to elicit emotional possibilities. The lonely abandoned and outdated objects recorded in Danziger's interiors are suited to become "profane illuminations" for viewers, the mode of gaze the surrealists brought to outmoded material culture and celebrated in Andre Breton's novels. Just as Walter Benjamin, employing such "illuminations," noted how quickly capitalist production turned mass-produced objects into detritus, Danziger and Scott Hocking's images (among many artists now photographing in Detroit) hint how quickly such sites of production have become themselves detritus ripe for refunctioning. "All that's solid melts into air," remarked Marx in the *Communist Manifesto*.

Playing on the volatility of capitalist production with its uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, where all new-formed objects and relations become antiquated before they can ossify, the protagonist in W. G. Sebald's novel *Austerlitz* (2001), in an early conversation with the book's narrator, remarks upon the great monuments of the bourgeois age:
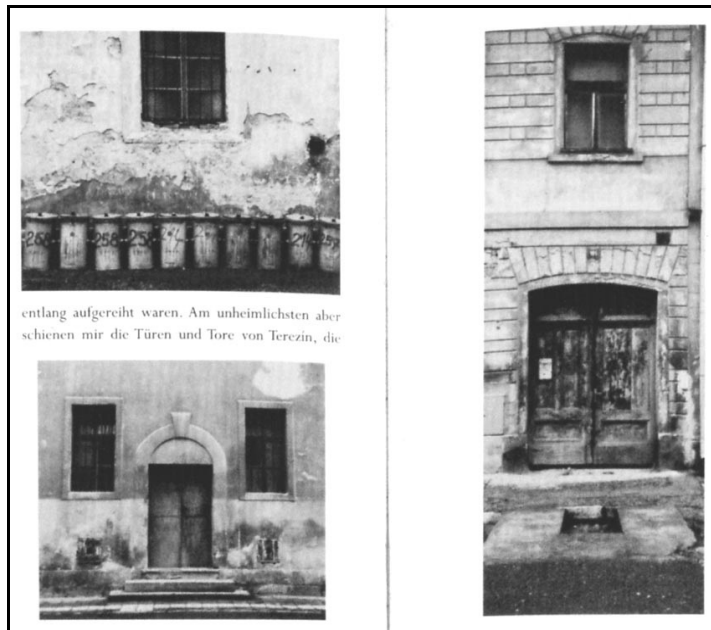
*The Night Hawks* (o/c, 1942) Edward Hopper

This image of a modern diner evokes nostalgia.

This image of a modern diner in ruins evokes melancholy.



*Harlem Valley/Wingdale Project #8312, Building 35, Smith Hall* (archival pigment print, 2011) Avery Danziger

Terezin/Theresienstadt facades, in W.G. Sebald's *Austerlitz*

"At the most we gaze at it in wonder, a kind of wonder which in itself is a form of dawning horror, for somehow we know by instinct that out-sized buildings cast the shadow of their own destruction before them, and are designed from the first with an eye to their later existence as ruins." [22] But the war ruins is the main theme in Sebald's writings. In *Searching for Sebald: Photography After W. G. Sebald*, editor Lise Patt redacts contributions examining Sebald's use of photography, mentioning both Sebald and Ruscha's use of objective snapshots. Mattias Frey's "Theorizing Cinema in Sebald and Sebald with Cinema," discusses how in *Austerlitz* Sebald reproduces a set of facade details of the modern ruins of the WWII concentration camp at Terezin/Theresienstadt (a "show-place" for outside observers to see how well the Jews supposedly were being treated under National Socialism). Unlike Ed Ruscha's amusing *Every Building on Sunset Strip* (1966) where a motorized Nikon impersonally record-ed each and every building facade in numerical order, the addresses listed below, Sebald's images, notes Frey, record merely jumbled numbers on an array of trash cans and crop to doorways so tightly any hope at determining a sequence or pattern fails — it's either nonexistent or undecipherable as we are placed too close to the subject. [23] Our visualization of the camp, our confrontation with the unrepre-sentable, is put to ruin, existing for us as jumbled fragments, like traumatic memories (or post-memories) bursting forth.



"Twist and Turn," Out-building at Manteno State Hospital, IL (C-print, 2011) José Ferreira

It is a matter of con-tingency that Danziger chose a mental institution for his project; any decrepit structure would have sufficed to rebuild the rem-nants of presence, spectral evi-dence, out of the ruins of old structures — not so for Ferreira. Like Sebald's Terezin/Theresien-stadt images, Ferreira's "Twist and Turn" series mines the carceral nature of the Illinois facility as the key element to the work. His current visual explor-ations at the Manteno State

Hospital is a direct offshoot of past work. The Foucault-inspired "Looking for Black Hamlet: A Secret History of Madness in South Africa" (2006) includes a living, traveling archive, a film, publication, and various exhibitions that reveal the history of attempts in segregated South Africa (Ferreira was born in Mozambique and raised in South Africa) to define differences in mental illness between black and white patients.

Ferreira — who has made past images in monochrome as well as his current color production — in text that accompanies his "Twist and Turn" series, cites Michel Foucault on the birth of prisons and "panopticism" in his artist statement. He views commercial reappropriation of this old space as problematic. [24] He hopes to continue to photograph this space — which is now devoid of furniture and equipment, voids ready to be filled with a new meaning, *consumerism* — as it is morphed into a commercial venue fitted, ironically, with surveillance devices as it was in its former incarnation as a prison — exploring marketing/consumerism as just another form of social disciplining. If German theorist Walter Benjamin, in his unfinished *Passagen-Werk* (1927 - 40),[25] saw the ruins of the nineteenth-century Parisian Arcades as meaningful fragments signaling the transitoriness and fragility of capitalist culture, Ferreira sees the site he visually maps as a revenant, shape-shifting entity which remain for late-capitalist repurposing. Danziger's approach "frees" these former carceral spaces into an aesthetic zone of visual delight, while Ferreira protests their being dragged back into service for the benefit of social control. Danziger occasionally reveals cries of desperation, some of hope, left scrawled on walls and chalkboards like messages in a bottle set adrift by inmates in a place where time would seem to have stood still. In these images one senses most directly a capacity to register the persistence of past suffering as absorbed into the substance of lived space, into the setting of human history; yet given the artists skill in poetic visualization, the "existence of the horrible in every atom of air" [26] that so pervades these spaces has been aesthetically redeemed. It is this redemption that Ferreira is careful *not* to give us; his saturnine gaze brings to memory the past usage of this "storied" site as a *place* (landscapes that display us a culture")[27] as he photographs it, but he strongly links it to its future use, both usages involving a politics of the body as developed theoretically in Michel Foucault's writings. This approach is also consistent with Walter Benjamin's view concerning the reanimation of such ruinous spaces, which he says can take place only based on a fundamental political decision and act.[28]



*Patients, Sambhavna Clinic,* "Bhopal, India" series (2010) Lewis Koch

Lewis Koch — in an earlier body of work that has some similarities to another, albeit smaller disaster, a B-17 bomber crash — also performs a biopolitical engagement involving memory. In 2010 he trained his camera at the ruins left from the havoc wrought by the 1984 Union Carbide plant disaster in Bhopal, India, restoring a sense of place of this historical event. Here the memory of unimaginable horror hovers between personal and impersonal history for Koch — what Columbia University professor Marianne Hirsch has termed

*Chingari Rehabilitation Centre*, "Bhopal, India" series (2010) Lewis Koch

"postmemory"²⁹ — where events one has not lived through personally, but that through exposure to personal stories of those who did experience them, have nonetheless entered into the fabric of the self. Koch and his wife — a pediatric specialist working there at the behest of an NGO, Sambhavna Clinic — were intimately involved with survivors and relatives of survivors of the horrific event, receiving first-hand accounts of their trauma, in addition to accessing the media record of the event. Postmemory's connection to the past is thus actually mediated not by recall, according to Hirsch, but by imaginative investment, projection, and creation — such as Koch's, who rooted his visual testimony on what he and his wife heard from those tortured bodies.³⁰ In his images, we have arrived too late, the grounds are now animated by a "spirit of place."³¹ But if the constructions of post-memory are to have root in objective fact, they must be open to confirmation by the real and one way this can occur is via photography, "spectral evidence,"³² which can prompt primary memory (based on



"Missing House, Berlin" (installation, 1990) Christian Boltanski

recall) and enhanced by postmemory (based on retrospective reconstruction).[33] Koch's images provide material for just this function.

Another *Sebaldian* artwork that is in intimate proximity to postmemory — like in  Sebald's Terezin/Theresienstadt facade photos, Koch's engagement with a past disaster in his Bhopal work, and Ferreira's studied glance at the "undeadness" of the Manteno ruins — is French artist Christian Boltanski's on-site installation of *Missing House* (1990). In this piece, the artist mounted plaques on the wall of a house on Berlin's *Grosse Hamburgerstrasse* — providing the names, dates of birth and death, and occupation of the residents who once inhabited the bomb-ruined, and now missing, adjacent house during 1930 to 1945 — at the precise location corresponding to where the missing residents, many Jews, once dwelt. The absent are given presence.[34]
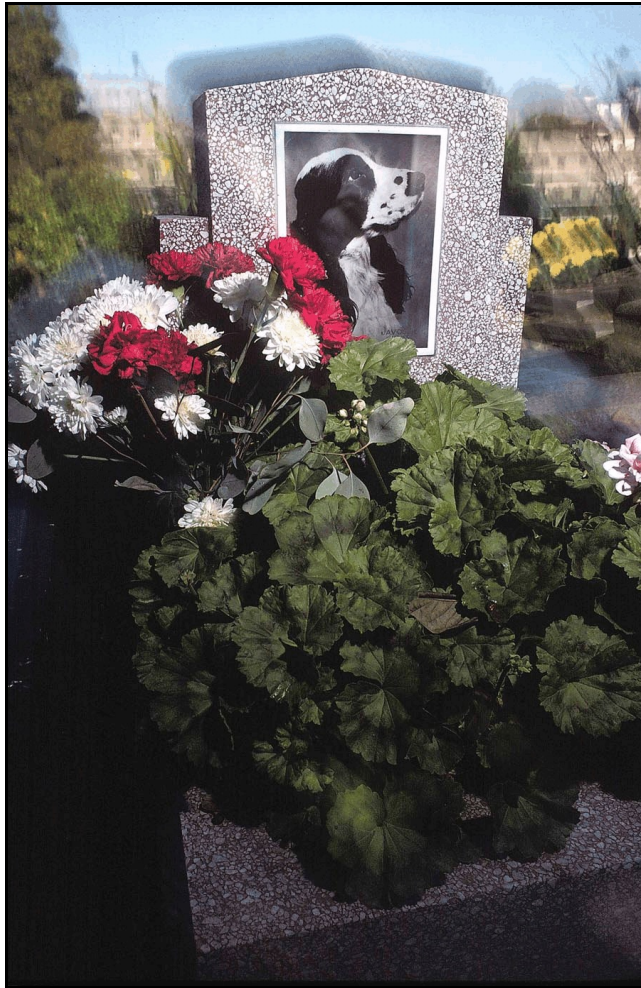


*Coeur Fidele* series (Cibachrome, 1980) Avery Danziger

Speaking of the dearly departed, in his early 1980s *Coeur Fidele* series, Danziger (born in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, residing in Los Angeles at the time of this body of work) trained his camera onto ornate pet graves in Paris's ancient pet cemetery.[35] Granite-inscribed, the headstones successfully resist becoming rusted out ruins as they attempt to counteract the mortality of the animal buried beneath, testifying to the enduring faithfulness of the loved pet to an owner who has returned the favor by attaching a photo-ceramic of poochie to the colorful flower-adorned headstone. All this sentimentalism plays upon cemetery visitors' heart-strings. It's the kitschy subject matter that attracted this photographer's sly eye, as do the dissolving structures he now shoots and where fern or moss are hard put to eke out a living among the debris. In this early Cibachrome work, sites of death (he made similarly mixed exposures of the famous mummies at Guanajuato, Mexico) are visually reanimated, given a disturbing aura. A nudge of the tripod, or hand-held

exposure, followed by a flash creates a soft, velveteen shroud where objects seem to struggle their way out of the dark. In recent work, at the Harlem Valley Psychiatric Hospital, scenes are also reanimated and manipulated, but more subtly, and by digital means. But in each body of work, aura, a "strange weave of space and time," [36] is formed at the liminal boundary between the absent, or decaying, subject and the present, or leftover, objects.

*Gardens of Babylon* series (Cibachrome, 1980) Avery Danziger

An analogous project from the same time period, *Gardens of Babylon*, sees the artist shooting, in the same long-exposure flash-fill manner, classic statuary of human forms; the mixture of blur and sharp rendition leaves passages of blurred color over-washing sharp realistic forms of statuary which seem to become "the undead." The flash promises instant revelation of truth, the time-exposure endeavors to regain some of the features through which painting traditionally enacts time. Hence, the uncanny effect is as much painterly as photographic.[37] Thus, Danziger makes us aware of the disjunction between photograph and referent — "an absence of relation" [38] — which also occurs in his most recent project. This artist's scenes become meaningful only in, and as, their representation. And he often problematizes what is figure, what is ground in these photographs.

Just as his renderings of a defunct mental institution are obtained by long exposures, at times HDRI, and printed in saturated hues, in this earlier body of work, Danziger combines two temporal modes — strobe flash with a camera-jiggled time-exposure — with hyped-up color. Also linking early work with later is the artist's animus toward death, chaos and destruction, his desire to find something enduring in a fugitive existence: "For me, as bizarre as it may sound, standing in many of these buildings [the mental facility], amidst all the chaos and destruction, it feels much the same for me as standing in a grove of giant sequoias out in California." [39] A statement recalling author J. J. Furnas's succinct observation: "Death is a low chemical trick played on everybody but sequoia trees." [40]

Both Danziger and Furnas's statements more than hint at our fear of death. Recall Zygmunt Bauman's thesis in *Mortality, Immortality and Other Life Strategies* that "in the light of mortality, all meanings of life look pallid, wan, insubstantial. This light must be extinguished, if only for a time and an occasion, for life meanings to appear solid and reliable," adding that there, "would probably be no culture were humans unaware of their mortality; . . ." [41] In these several bodies of work, Danziger explicitly engages this counter-mnemonic. Whereas Sebald's "melancholic longings" leads him "to travel

Case Study II/70
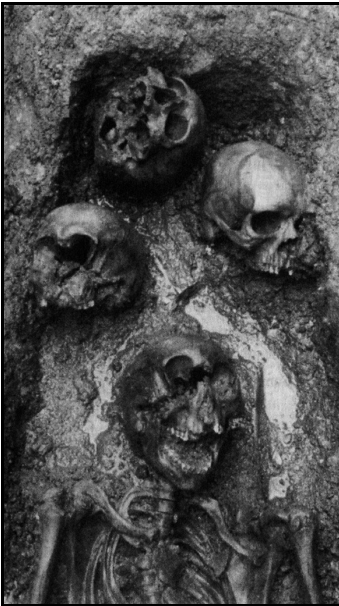
Illustration from *Austerlitz,* W.G. Sebald


Illustration from *Austerlitz,* W.G. Sebald

in search of remnants of his own childhood and for the origins of his melancholy disposition to see the world as one of permanent cala-mity," [42] Danziger eschews the personal and reverses such calamity by giving the objects that he images — grave sites, mummies, statuary, and ruins — what Walter Benjamin referred to as an *aura*.

In an essay on Charles Baudelaire, Walter Benjamin recalls that the poet famously opposed painting and photography by arguing painting's ability to continuously feed our desire with a beauty con-jured "out of the womb of time",[43] while photography, mere mech-anical reproduction, is immediate, barren and lacks depth, and so can only give us a quick satiation; hence, it is responsible for a decline of aura. But, as is well-known, Benjamin argues certain photographs, long-time exposed images, can evoke a certain perceptibility he terms *aura*. Such an effect, similar to Danziger's mixed exposures, can be seen in an illustration from W.G. Sebald's novel *Austerlitz* (2001)*.* Margaret Olin, in *Touching Photographs* (2012), describes it as, ". . . a beautiful hazy picture of a railway station [perhaps Liverpool Street Station], printed small, as though seen from a distance," and goes on to comment on a second image, that of skeletons that had recently been unearthed in another London Station: "It is as though the print, emerging from the developer, at first seemed to promise the misty beauty of nineteenth-century grandeur from a distance, but, when it finally appeared, offered instead a stark close-up of skeletons." Olin contrasts the two photographs, evoking what I've been distinguishing as wreck/ruin: "The two photographs bridge the gap between blessed ignorance and austere knowledge: the starkness of the tactile skeletons, reality, replaces the opticality of the distant railway station, their filmy curtain." [44] Unlike Danziger's mummies, these skeletons are rendered


*Mummy #4, Guanajuato, Mexico* (Hand-held time exposure with flash-fill, Cibachrome, 1976) Avery Danziger

Case Study II/71

matter-of-factly and sharp; yet like his mummies, these Sebaldian skeleton's stare back at us.

Benjamin explains the auratic experience as "rest[ing] on the transposition of a response common in human relationships to the relationship between the inanimate or natural object and man. The person we look at, or who feels he is being looked at, looks at us in turn. To perceive the aura of an object we look at means to invest it with the ability to look at us in return," which "comprises the 'unique manifestation of a distance'." A few lines on, Benjamin bolsters his insights with a citation from Marcel Proust: "Some people who are fond of secrets flatter themselves that objects retain something of the gaze that has rested on them." And further on, he cites Paul Valéry on aura and dreams: "In dreams, however, there is an equation. The things I see, see me as much as I see them." [45] I suggest that the three projects of Danziger's discussed above work *against* their roots in mechanical repro-duction in both their analogue and digital modes because of that artist's mastery of exposure manip-ulation and the painterly effects achieved therewith, as well as his creation of intense, unrealistic color. To look at Danziger's work, especially his most recent, is to enter a dream-space that the artist shares with us. It encourages an aesthetic projection that both soothes and rekindles the desire for a more immediate contact with these objects, even ruins, beyond the usual subject-object dichotomy photo-graphy automatically sets up. [46] Over a thirty-year span of working, his aesthetic concerns with these parameters have remained on a steady course — even though his subject matter has been as variable as the wind — lifting those subjects out of linear time, out of history.

We do not enter such a shared dream-space in Ferreira's visual projects as he always histori-cizes this subject. The conventions of perspective are employed to present to viewers a non-transcen-dent emptiness. This artist firmly maintains subject-object duality by creating a distancing between territory photographed and photographer (and, subsequently, the viewer of the photos) akin to that between audience and theatrical event that Bertolt Brecht called the *alienation effect*. Where Brechtian actors remained detached from their roles, Ferreira detaches himself from the images by showing him-self and his equipment in shots taken on site during the project; where Brecht projected text on screens behind his actors, Ferreira accompanies his imagery with textual asides. As mentioned previously, Ferreira uses a large format, analogue camera to record *descriptive* light and pulls his camera back to record both interior and exterior as *territories* set before him, all which re-enforce a studied distance between observer and observed.

The transitoriness as allegorically resurrected in, and the kind of empathy evoked by, Dan-ziger's asylum images, is wholly lacking here. The Ferreira shows us settings without permitting us to appropriate them through empathic identification or voyeurism. [47] Like in Brecht, this tactic favors a political agenda exposing the material, economic laws of cause-and-effect at work behind the reani-mation of Illinois's Manteno Asylum. Ferreira would agree with Czech thinker Vilém Flusser that, "The gesture of photography is the search for a standpoint, for a world view; it is an ideological gesture" (*Standpunkte*, 1998), and he shows his political commitment in other works as well.

In "Above Ground: Nuclear Fields" (2011), Ferreira documented decommissioned nuclear plant sites in South Africa, where he found "evidence of an anomalous past, still present in the landscape." In the synopsis for his earlier project, "Farnsworth House" series (2009 - 2011), the artist tells of his interest in temporality and architectural transformations: "Jim Zanzi, a colleague [at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago] and friend, took some compelling photographs of the Farnsworth House around 1968, at the time when the house was abandoned. *The images of dry leaves decaying on the outside deck, the property overgrown with weeds, still haunt me* [my emphasis]. In response to these images I
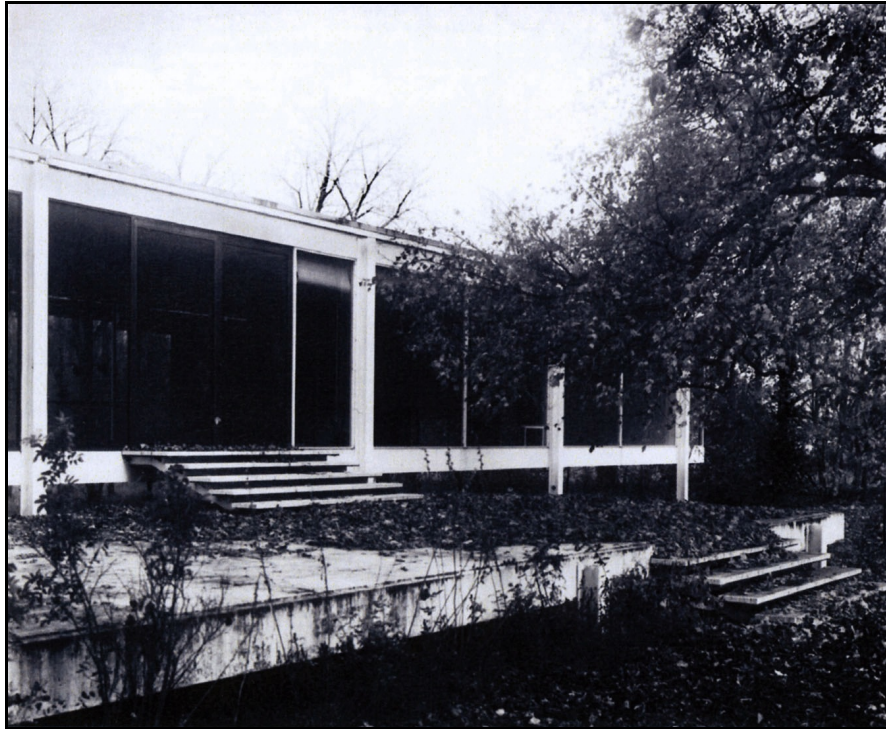
"Farnsworth House" series ( scan from 4 x 5 in. negative, 1968) Jim Zanzi


"Farnsworth House" series (scan from 8x10 in. negative, 2009 - 2011) José Ferreira

Case Study II/73

began to work with the Farnsworth House as a site. It became an inquiry into the notion of architecture culturally inculcated as a fixed entity — in reality architecture is constantly in flux, and its meaning shifts according to the cultural value(s) of its time. I have been compelled to explore notions of architecture inscribed as fixed and iconic." [48]

In this project Ferreira responds to Zanzi's images of a decaying Mies van der Rohe master-piece in Plano, Illinois whose future seemed bleak. Zanzi's images helped raised concern about the structure. It was eventually purchased by English aristocrat Lord Palumbo, a fan of Mies, who took possession in 1971 for a mere $125,000. Mies's grandson was then tasked to restore the home. Like the up-and-coming restoration of the Manteno facility, Ferreira is not unaware of the historical narrative and ironies at work at the Farnsworth property (Danziger, in contradistinction, seems to distill "the eternal present in time's every moment).[49]

At a time when Detroit's auto industry began to collapse and corporate wealth shifted priorities, wealth derived from Palumbo's father's immensely prosperous post-war real estate development turned wreck and ruin into new structures, saving a modernist icon from ruin (he also bought and restored Frank Lloyd Wright's Kentuck Knob in Pennsylvania). Later, due to economic reversals, Lord Palumbo auctioned off Farnsworth at a handsome profit to the State of Illinois who outbid a potential buyer who wanted to disassemble it and ship it to the East Coast. Illinois's Historical Preservation Society now oversees its operation. In each of these Sebaldian projects of Ferreira's (early and most recent), he interweaves with his considered photographs extensive research (not unlike Sebald's scripto-visual concerns) but emphases imagery over text.

*   *   *

# Endnotes

1. Zygmunt Bauman: "Reason cannot exculpate itself from this ignominity [that death is the scandal that defeats it, even as it cannot imagine its own death]," and so "human societies have kept designing elaborate subterfuges, hoping that they would be allowed to forget about the scandal . . ." Zygmunt Bauman, *Mortality, Immortality and Other Life Strategies* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1992), 15, 10).

2. The first expression is found in Sebald's *The Rings of Saturn* (1998), the second in *Austerlitz* (2001).

3. In Walter Benjamin's writings, discussed by Eric L. Santner, *On Creaturely Life: Rilke, Benjamin, Sebald* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2006), 16: the term "natural history" refers "not to the fact that nature also has a history but to the fact that the artifacts of human history tend to acquire an aspect of mute, natural being at the point where they begin to lose their place in a viable form of life (think of the process whereby architectural ruins are reclaimed by nature.)"

4. Walter Benjamin, *Berlin Childhood around 1900* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006).

5. "With European Romanticism, the environment that had once been ground to build on, plow, defend, or conquer are to be seen as an aesthetic entity to be contemplated by an enraptured subject in a process of introspection and increas-ing self-awareness" (Ulrich Baer, *Spectral Evidence: The Photography of Trauma* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2005), 68.

6. See Dan Austin's *Lost Detroit: Stories Behind the Motor City's Majestic Ruins* (2010) where, as advertising copy states, "the stories behind 12 of the city's most beautiful, all-but-forgotten landmarks and of the people behind them, from the day they opened to the day they closed are told. While these buildings might stand as ghosts of the past today, their stories live on within these pages."

In W. G. Sebald's novel, *The Emigrants* (1992), the narrator prowls the ruined British industrial landscape of Manchester, Detroit's English counterpart of a powerful embodiment of a modern ghost town in which even the grandest

structures appear empty and abandoned, "orphaned," without a master. Of interest here is Sebald's remarks in *Vertigo*, where he says he did not, as a child, associate "the mountains of rubble in places like Hamburg or Berlin" with the destruction wrought to German cities during the final days of WWII, "but considered them a natural condition of all larger cities."

7. In his acknowledgments in the catalogue, *Detroit Disassembled* (Damian/Akron Art Museum, 2010), Andrew Moore pays homage to a photobook, *The Ruins of Detroit* (Steidl, 2010) by two Parisian photographers, Yves Marchand and Romain Meffre.

8. See Stratton's photographs and a brief discussion of same at: *http://www.uturn.org/prisissue/stratton.htm*.

9. Concerning institutional space, W.G Sebald's *Austerlitz* gives us the history of the site for what became the notorious asylum, Bedlam. Eric Santner observes of this: "Austerlitz's reflection on this bit of London history gives us a version of what Benjamin meant when he claimed that for the baroque poets history merged into the setting. Whenever he passed through the station [Liverpool Street Station], Austerlitz tells the narrator, 'I kept almost obsessively trying to imagine . . . the location of that huge space of the rooms where the asylum inmates were confined, and I often wondered whether the pain and the suffering accumulated on this site over the centuries had ever ebbed away, or whether they might not still, as I sometimes thought when I felt a cold breath of air on my forehead, be sensed as we passed through them' (Sebald, 129 - 130)," (Santner, 110 - 111).

10. Rainer Maria Rilke, *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*, trans. Michael Hulse (New York: Penguin Books, 2009), 30 - 31.

11. Santner, 51. Santner draws attention to the fact that Sebald's writings include uncaptioned photographs which play an important role in that author's *oeuvre.* In fact, this aspect of Sebald's work has drawn the interest of photographers and photo-theorists.

12. See Mark Prince, "John Divola, Kunstverein Freiburg," *Art in America* (December, 2012), 116 - 117, for an exhibition review that engages Divola's active interventions in the profilmic event with photography-as-medium and its relationship to time. In Divola's work, "Intervention becomes performance; the photograph an acknowledgment of its medium's function as a surrogate for the act it preserves; the room [an abandoned life-guard shack on Zuma Beach, California]; a self-reflexive metaphor for the black box of the camera, the window [in that room] its aperture. Alternatively, the seascape [seen through the window] is cast as the non-art 'real,' the external world, the unassimilable other. And yet, conversely, the glittering sunsets are traditional art signs, clichés of Romantic yearning, and the images of the dilapidated interior a sociological record of urban dereliction, a familiar genre of photographic realism. Artifice and what lies beyond it — the documentary 'real' — keep switching their grounds, only for the distinction to collapse in the photograph's flattening of space. Time is also rhetorically negated — these are timeless records of elapsing time, with no clues to date them, and no human presences except for a blurred horse rider on the beach, an archetypally atemporal image (*Zuma #73*, 1978)."

13. A body of work from  this ongoing project by Danziger was exhibited at The Gallery, Lakeville, CT, November 9 - December 2, 2012.

14. John Ruskin, "The Work of Iron in Nature, Art, and Policy" *Unto This Last and Other Writings* (London: Penguin Books, 1997), 116, 118. Ruskin understands iron rusting chemically as a combination of air and iron, but one that forms a " fruitful and beneficent dust; gathering itself again into the earths from which we feed, and the stones with which we build — into the rocks that frame the mountains, and the sands that bind the sea" (117).

15. Avery Danziger, "Statement of Plans: the Harlem Valley/Windgale Project," unpublished artist's statement (2012).

16. Sebald, *The Emigrants,* trans., Michael Hulse (New York: New Directions, 1997), 161.

17. José Ferreira, unpublished artist statement (2011).

18. For a discussion on guards and staff as "other prisoners" within the carceral, specifically in Stephen Roszell's *Other Prisoners* (video, 1987), see James R. Hugunin, *A Survey of the Representation of Prisoners in the United States: Discipline and Photographs, The Prison Experience* (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1999), 340 - 361.

19. Rilke, 17.

20. Jonathan Green, *American Photography, A Critical History 1945 to the Present* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1984), 183.

21. This revival of former industrial sites is increasingly common these days. In Germany, *Landschaftspark Duisburg-Nord* once was an immense industrial wasteland covering 500 acres. But now, "Over the course of a decade, the local city council transformed the site into a vibrant, multifaceted park that exemplifies innovative post-industrial land use. What makes *Landschaftspark Duisburg-Nord* unique is the long industrial history that it honors. In 1901, the site became the home of a large blast furnace for August Thyssen's ironmaking company. Since the mid-19th century and fueled by the industrial revolution, the Ruhr Valley had become Germany's industrial center. Endowed with natural deposits of coal, the landscape quickly began to reflect the booming coal, iron, and steel industries and Thyssen's mill was no exception.

   "The mill closed in 1985 but was saved from demolition by a strong public commitment to preserve the 'temples of work' that were a part of the region's heritage. These included the blast furnace, engine house, blower house complex, cast house, gasholder, offices, and a store house all of which stand today in the form of an open air museum" ("*Landschaftspark Duisburg-Nord,*" Ruhr Valley, Germany: A Unique Industrial Heritage Park," online at: *http://voices. yahoo.com/landschaftpark-duisburg-nord-ruhr-valley-germany-56082.html?cat=54)* .

22. Sebald, *Austerlitz,* trans., Anthea Bell (New York: Modern Library, 2001), 19. This later-existence-as-ruins aspect has been explored in the eighteenth century by Hubert Robert and in our postmodern era by Tom Mellor.

23. Lise Patt, ed., *Searching for Sebald: Photography After W.G. Sebald* (Los Angeles: The Institute of Cultural Inquiry, 2007), 234 - 235.

24. Oliver Sacks discusses the issue of refunctioning mental hospitals in "Asylum" in *Asylum: Inside the Closed World of State Mental Hospitals, Photographs by Christopher Payne with an essay by Oliver Sacks* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009), 12 - 13.

25. Cf. Susan Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993): 170, where the author elucidates: "The crumbling of the monuments that were built to signify the immortality of civilization becomes [in Benjamin's eyes] proof, rather, of its transiency. And the fleetingness of temporal power does not cause sadness; it informs political practice."  One can see the relevance of Benjamin's ideas concerning modernist strategies to deny mortality to Zygmunt Bauman's thesis in *Mortality, Immortality and Other Life Strategies*;  see note #1 and discussion of same in my "Wreck and Ruin" section.

26. Rilke, 73.

27. Baer, 73 also mentions Washington Irving as describing our country's western territories prior to settlement as "unstoried" in the preface to his 1819 *Sketchbook.*

28. Santner has a pertinent discussion on this point, 62.

29. See Marianne Hirsch, "Pictures of a Displaced Childhood," *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative and Postmemory* (2002), 217 - 240 and *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust* (Columbia University Press, 2012). She first used the term "postmemory" in discussing Art Spiegelman's graphic novel *Maus* (1991) in the early 1990s.

   Concerning representation of trauma, memory, and the Holocaust, see "World Beyond Metaphor: Thoughts on the Transmission of Trauma," *Generations of the Holocaust*, eds. Martin S. Bergmann and Milton E. Jucovy (New York, 1982); Lawrence L. Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies: the Ruins of Memory* (New Haven, CT, 1991); Maurice Blanchot, *The Writing of the Disaster,* trans. Ann Smock (Lincoln, NB, 1995); Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub's *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History* (1992); and most recently, Amit Pinchevski, "The Audiovisual Unconscious: Media and Trauma in the Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies," *Critical Inquiry* (Autumn 2012, vol. 39 no. 1), 142 166.

30. Akin to Koch's Bhopal project are the photographs of Holocaust sites by Mikael Levin, a contemporary American photographer — son of writer and WWII war correspondent, Meyer Levin — who was among the first to enter the death camps at the end of the war. Levin's photobook *War Story* (1995) faces the Holocaust at what Ulrich Baer, in *Spectral Evidence,* calls "a double remove." He then goes on to comment about Levin's images of these sites where little remains but bare ground: "Their significance lies in the younger Levin's brilliant focus on transforming the act of bearing witness ... into an act of testimony that recognizes the Holocaust as a crisis of witnessing itself. . . . he creates images that bear witness to the difficulty of gaining access to a loss that itself corrupts the means of representing it" (19 - 20).

31. A term Ulrich Baer employs often in discussing current Holocaust photography, *Spectral Evidence,* 63.

32. Baer, discussing photography and the Holocaust coins the term "spectral evidence" to describe the nature of photographic work aimed at transmitting the impact of traumatic events. Cathy Caruth defines trauma as consisting "in *structures of its experience* or reception: the event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated possession of the one who experiences it" ("Trauma and Experience: Introduction," in Caruth, ed., *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* [Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1995], 4). Baer takes note of a theorized connection between trauma and photography: "Trauma is a disorder of memory and time. This is why in his *early writings* Freud used the metaphor of the camera to explain the unconscious as the place where bits of memory are stored until they are developed, like prints from black-and-white negatives, into consciously accessible recollections," and Baer further elaborates, "Normally, an event becomes an experience once it is integrated into consciousness. Some events, however, register in the psyche — like negatives captured on film for later development — without being integrated into the larger contexts provided by consciousness, memory, or the act of forgetting, . . . Because trauma blocks routine mental processes from converting an experience into memory or forgetting, it parallels the defining structure of photography, which also traps an event during its occurrence while blocking its transformation in memory" (Baer, 9). Hence, Baer can refer to both trauma and photography as "a reality imprint" (Baer, 11).

33. Santner, 158. If the photograph is literally an emanation from referent, as Roland Barthes states in *Camera Lucida* (1981), 81, then Koch's photographs are sort of skin shared between Koch and the bodies of the Bhopal clinic patients he photographed. These photographs are especially traumatic as many individuals photographed may not survive the long-term effects of gas exposure. Hence, there is something, as Barthes would put it, "spectral" about these images.

34. For a related artwork, see Baer, *Spectral Evidence*, 102, for a photograph from Mikael Levin's *War Story* (1997) where Levin records the former site of Frankfurt's largest Jewish synagogue and its ghostly signs, where a "small patch of the temple destroyed by the Nazis is a fake window plastered on the wall with bricked-up openings, a two-dimensional sign that holds the promise of depth and insight without delivering it, much as a photograph holds the promise of reality but delivers only a reminder of loss" (104).

35. This early body of work of Danziger's was discussed by me in James Hugunin, "Making Strange the Familiar," catalogue essay in *Three One Person Exhibitions* (Los Angeles: Mount Saint Mary's College, 1981).

36. Walter Benjamin, *One Way Street and Other Writings*, trans. Edmund Jephcott and Kingsley Shorter (London: Verso, 1979), 247. For a diverse range of examinations of Benjamin's concept of the *aura*, see Lise Patt, ed., *Benjamin's Blind Spot: Walter Benjamin and the Premature Death of Aura* (Topanga Canyon, CA: The Institute of Cultural Inquiry, 2001).

37. The photograph "resurrects" the dead. See the references to this theme in Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida* and Stefanie Harris, "The Return of the Dead: Memory and Photography in W.G. Sebald's *Die Ausgewanderten*" (The Emigrants), *The German Quarterly* vol. 74, no.4 (Fall 2001), 382.

38. Eduardo Cadava, *Words of Light: Theses on the Photography of History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), 7, elaborates on this aspect of photography.

39. Danziger in an e-mail to Aarik Danielsen and cited by that critic in, "Mining Beauty in Hazardous Places," *The Columbia Daily Tribune*, June 24, 2012. Danziger's observations about the rusting structures he was photographing in Pennsylvania and the giant sequoias in California recall my comments on Sebald and Ansel Adams's melancholic treatment of natural ruins in my "Wreck and Ruin" section.

40. Cited from "Welcome to the Quote Garden: Quotations About Trees," http://www.quotegarden.com/trees.html.

41. Bauman, 31.

42. Markus Zisselsberger, "Melancholic Longings: Sebald, Benjamin, and the Image of Kafka," in Patt, ed., *Searching for Sebald: Photography After W.G. Sebald*, 283.

43. Walter Benjamin, "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," in *Illuminations* (New York: Shocken Books, 1978), 187.

44. Margaret Olin, *Touching Photographs* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 96 - 97.

45. Ibid., 188 - 189.

46. See Carsten Strathausen, "Benjamin's Aura and the Broken Heart of Modernity," *Benjamin's Blind Spot: Walter Benjamin and the Premature Death of Aura*, ed. Lise Patt (Topanga, CA: The Institute of Cultural Inquiry, 2001), 9.

47. Ferreira's project at Manteno is not unlike Dirk Reinartz's *Deathly Still: Pictures of Concentration Camps* (1995), of which Ulrich Baer writes: "In Reinartz's print the viewer is placed in relation to a site that stubbornly refuses to become a 'place' " (Baer, 17).

48. Ferreira, unpublished artist statement (2011).

49. Wright Morris, "In Our Image,"in *Photography in Print*, ed. Vicki Goldberg (New York: A Touchstone Book, 1981), 535.

# Case Study III

## Ruins/Construction: Scott Hocking, Xing Danwen

**con·struc·tion** [kən strúkshən] noun
*1. act or process of constructing: the building of something, especially a large structure such as a house, road, or bridge.*
*2. a building's built structure: a structure that has been built*
*3. interpretation: the way in which something is interpreted or explained.*

Detroit-based artist, Scott Hocking, has produced an enormous body of diverse work — sculptures, installations, photographs — since the late 1990s, mining the aesthetic potential of recession-bombed Detroit. Given the amount of visual material coming out of that devastated city, he hasn't been the only artist climbing about dangerous structures, outrunning packs of wild dogs, sweet-talking hostile locals, explaining himself to suspicious police, and once even finding a dead body.

Growing up in the area, driving with his father past junk yards and eventually past economic-induced urban junk yards, it was natural for him to start pulling found objects out of the debris field spanning some 139 square miles of Michigan soil and exhibiting them in new contexts; in 2008 Hocking started to photograph the astonishing number of disappearing homes, decaying factories and collapsing civic structures in the Detroit area, as well as visually probing the vacant spaces of a 290 square acre urban renewal project gone bad: the infamous Clinton-era I-94 Industrial Park Renaissance Zone.[1] Hocking writes of this project, recalling W. G. Sebald's observations of similar reclamation by nature of Hamburg's war ruins:

> Over the last 10 years I have watched street after street of this neighborhood become abandoned, torn down, and blocked off by concrete barricades. The last residents moved out, their houses and the surrounding burnt ones were demolished; the haunt-ed church of St. Cyril's village was scrapped to the point of collapse; the vacant streets became dumping grounds, which brought on the concrete roadblocks; the trees were torn out, to appease potential builders; finally Cooper school on Georgia was closed and scrapped clean. But the sale of the land has been slow going. Aside from the massive complexes along Huber, most of the area still sits vacant. Hundreds of uprooted trees lay in piles. Random mounds of earth and demolished debris have overgrown with grasses and wildflowers. Flooded streets have become marshlands and swamps. Wildlife abounds: pheasants, rabbits, snakes, frogs, hawks, and numer-ous birds, along with stray cats or dogs, can all be found here. *The I-94 Industrial Park Renaissance Zone has inadvertently become one of the most topographically natural areas of Detroit* [emphasis added].[2]

Several series were begun, "Cast Concrete in the Auto Age" (2008 - present) and "The Zone" (1999 - 2010) were among them. As his initial interest in these areas had been the plethora of uncanny

*The Ruins of Persepolis, Iran* (n.d.) Anonymous from *The Pleasure of Ruins* (Thames and Hudson, 1964)

*Alexander, Thais, and the Macedonian soldiers/ Reeling with their torches through the Persian palaces/ Wrecked to flaring fragments pillared Persepolis. . . .*
— Christopher Marlowe

*. . . divergent objects . . . are similarly distorted by the pressure of traumatic events.*
— Eric L. Santner*, On Creaturely Life* (2006)



*Hephaestus and the Garden of the Gods*, *Snow*, Detroit, MI  (archival pigment print, 2010)
Scott Hocking

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objects — abandoned boats, burnt out cars (see his "Shipwrecks" series), busted kitchen appliances, smashed toilets, discarded toys, rotting books, cast-off car tires — that caught eye and mind, it was not long before he began shaping found materials into objects set inside these structures and photographing these "sculptures" *in situ*, letting object and environment playoff one another. In one body of work, "Garden of the Gods" (2009 - 2011), the artist placed discarded old 1970s style console TVs onto massive concrete pillars that once held up an old Packard factory's floors.[3] The artist titled each print for an Olympian god, as the sites were photographed over different times of day and season as they deteriorated. On his website, Hocking further explains the project:

> "GARDEN OF THE GODS" is an installation built on the collapsed roof of the Albert Kahn designed Packard automobile plant in Detroit. Only a handful of Kahn's cast concrete columns remain standing among the rubble, leaving a site reminiscent of both the Roman Forum and Bernini's Piazza San Pietro. Using the columns as pedestals, the twelve gods of the classical Greek Pantheon are replaced and represented by wooden television consoles found elsewhere in the building. Completed in December of 2009, the new pantheon of gods was documented through the seasons as the structure collapsed, and the TV towers were destroyed. In March 2010, another portion of the roof collapsed, and by April, a 4-story collapse created a semicircular cliff. A few TVs remain, and the structure is rumored as slated for demolition.[4]

Hocking utilizes the Romantic Landscape tradition in this body of work, employing that genre's power of absorption, its lure for viewers to project themselves into an imaginary pictorial depth. What was once urban landscape suffers violent transformation into mere terrain, but Hocking attempts to re-transform it back into landscape, imbuing his scenes with auratic significance, recalling nineteenth-



*Garden of the Gods, North Sunset*, Detroit, MI (archival pigment print, 2009 - 2011) Scott Hocking

*Metropolis Hole,* Detroit, MI (archival pigment print, 2010) Scott Hocking



*Chicago CAB sex* (archival pigment print, 1997) Dimitre

century picturesque views. Such landscapes were often framed by old gnarly trees or ancient ruins. Detroit's Scott Hocking and Chicago's Dimitre [5] have framed their respective city-views with crumbling urban debris, updating a staid convention. In both images we are offered something akin to Plato's Cave, where we are looking out from within. German artist Herbert Bayer's humorous photo-collage, *Metamorphosis* (1936), where ideal Platonic forms seem to march out of the darkness of that cave into the light of day, into the material world, the realm of flux, decay, and loss.
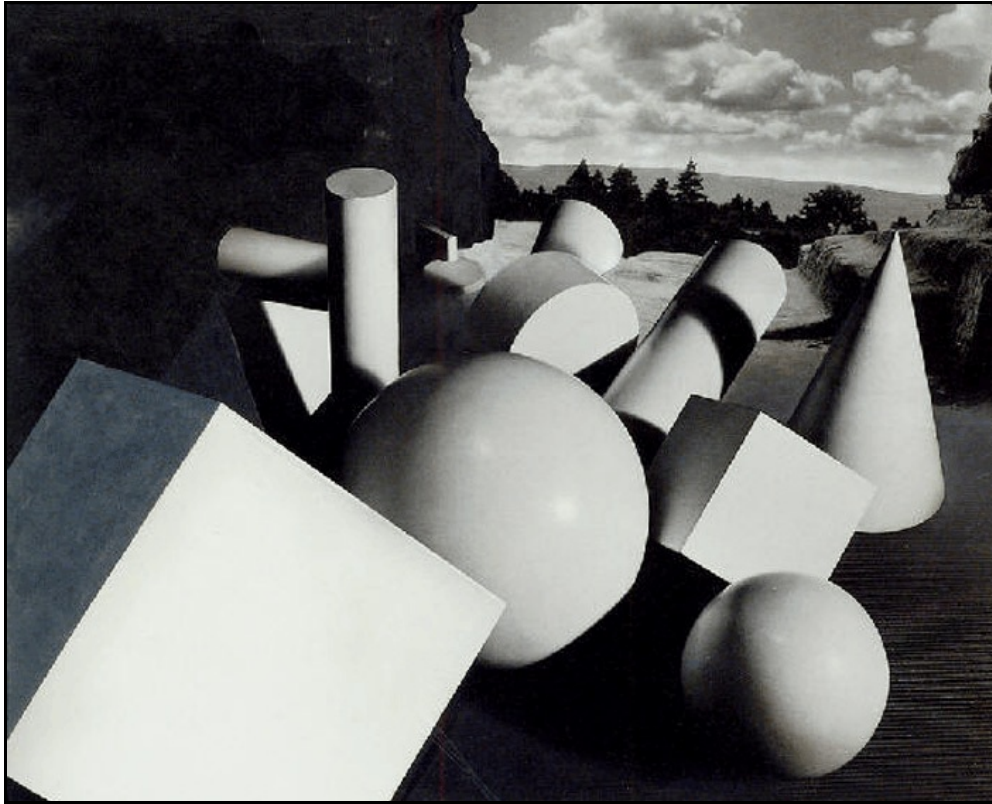


*Metamorphosis* (photo-collage, gelatin silver print, 1936) Herbert Bayer



*Ziggurat, Detroit, MI* (wooden blocks inside auto plant, archival pigment print, 2007) Scott Hocking

Hocking has literally taken such artifacts of urban decay in-hand to create fugitive sculptural works *in situ,* as in *Ziggurat* (2007), where 6,201 wooden blocks that once composed the plant's wooden floor have been arranged as a pyramid suggesting ancient cultures inside the ruined Fisher Body Plant 21. Ruined spaces become occupied by the sculpted structure and that space receives a special character as a breached and then reacti-vated volume that suggests a return to an

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Objects in reliquary walls from "Relics" (2001 - 2010) Scott Hocking


Detail of objects in a reliquary wall from "Relics" (2001 - 2010) Scott Hocking

archaic place of absolute commencement. This concept of earth-memory informs his photography of ancient First Nation earth mounds in several recent visual projects and his on-site constructions, like egg-shaped *Stone of Rejection.*[6]

Hocking also removes scrapped objects from their sites, displaying them as bizarre testimony to our material culture in a gallery or museum context where preservation is guaranteed. These objects become significant components of reality which his art makes visible. In one instance, "Relics" (2001 - 2010, produced in collaboration with Clinton Snider), hundreds of discarded objects are arranged into 400 rationalized, gridded slots arrayed as a wall-relief, or "reliquary walls" as the artist describes this ambitious series.[7] The installation recalls Kurt Schwitter's homage to urban detritus, the *Merzbau* (1923 - 37), and mimics a Natural History Museum's archive of shards of our once-was Fordist Era of production. Many objects hint at the disappeared people ravaged by the logic of global capitalism so well-exposed in Michael Moore's film *Roger and Me* (1989). The organized artifacts recall the stacks of shoes, clothes, suitcases, and other personal items testifying to the absent-presence of those annihilated during a more unspeakable type of Holocaust.

As the years of neglect tick away at Detroit's urban ruins, these shards of civilization — weather-beaten, burned, ground to rubble, vandalized, or overgrown with moss and left rotting — begin to turn into unrecognizable

Case Study III/84

*The Stone of Rejection*, "Sisyphus and the Voice of Space" series (Utica, NY, 2010) Scott Hocking



"New Mound City" series, (St. Louis area ancient mound sites, now invisible or destroyed, 2010) Scott Hocking

"Cast Concrete in the Auto Age" (Sullivan Galleries, School of the Art Institute of Chicago, 2012) Scott Hocking

> *Three years ago, I began collecting small boulders in my neighborhood. Builders in Raleigh were tearing down homes like ours, constructed in the sixties, and replacing them with gaudy mansions. Wreckers arrived and took out a house in a day, two days at most. Everything, including bricks and cabinets and those lovely pink tiles that lined bathrooms, was dumped into the city landfill. The next day, bulldozers arrived to scoop out the yard. Dogwoods and magnolias were felled and in a few efficient runs over the half acre, the bulldozers took it all — stepping stones, iris, still blooming azalea — dumping everything into a truck that would, like a hearse, follow the house to its grave in the landfill.*
>
> — Elaine Neil Orr, "The Stone Collector" (2012)



Detail of "Cast Concrete in the Auto Age" installation

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Detail from the installation, "Cast Concrete in the Auto Age" (Sullivan Galleries, School of the Art Institute of Chicago, 2012) Scott Hocking

artifacts, like something from the Moon or Mars. Hocking collects these peculiar items and spreads them out in gallery displays, as seen in his 2012 installation, "Cast Concrete in the Auto Age", at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago's Sullivan Galleries.

In a lecture Hocking gave to accompany this exhibition, he alluded to his interest in "transformation over time." But unlike Hubert Robert or Tom Mellor's visionary look at *future* ruins, these crumbling structures and odd remains are ours and we must "own" them, even as his own strategy of "ownership" is to seize these abandoned spaces, to "occupy" them, provoking a response. Empty space is transformed into a sign of potentiality, possibility, and plenitude.

If one were to suggest a type of "scholarship" implied in Hocking's approach to his "object of study," it would be that of the *longue durée*, the long term, an expression used by the French *Annales* School of historical writing. The term designates their approach to the study of history, which gives priority to long-term historical structures of events — what François Simiand called *histoire événementielle*, "eventual history"— over the short term time-scale that is the domain of the chronicler and the journalist. The *longue durée,* as elaborated on by historian Fernand Braudel, concentrates on all-but-permanent or slowly evolving structures. It substitutes for elite biographies the broader syntheses of the investigation of the common characteristics of an historical group whose individual biographies may be largely untraceable (*prosopography*). This twentieth-century theory has roots in ancient theories of

flux, the famous Heraclitean notion of time-as-a-river: "The river where you set your foot just now is gone — those waters giving way to this, now this." [8] Seen within this theoretical frame, the individual gridded compartments in Hocking's *Relics* installation, as well as his considered photographs of the Detroit area, are all frozen moments taken from the flow of long-time and pasted into a Braudelian type of historical understanding. As Hocking has confirmed in his gallery talks, he wants to archive the evidence of this prolonged ruination of large areas of Detroit, but turn that evidence of economic suffering into "beauty" and "solace" through the aesthetic interventions and constructions that keep time's arrow moving forward, fighting the shadow of entropy which hovers over Detroit's physical presence. A sort of Erich Auerbach,[9] Hocking wants to preserve from the ravages of time works that constitute an important heritage.  If, to follow Rousseau, the arrival of the "civilized world" introduced brutality, violence, and destruction in the form of our once thriving rust-belt industries — destroyers belching black smoke into a naturally peaceful world — our more recent post-Fordist, late-capitalist destroyer has destroyed the old destroyer. To these forces, Hocking plays the destroyer-of-destruction.


Unlike Danziger and Hocking's fascination with the rust-belt — which exudes what one might call, borrowing from Robert Frost, "the slow smokeless burning of decay" — Chinese artist Xing Danwen resides in a city undergoing vast transformations and requiring extensive demolition to do so. Stepping into Shanghai or Beijing these days is like dipping into Heraclitian "waters giving way to this, now this." In conversation with Richard Vine in *Art in America,* she describes such changes: " 'See way over there, where those high-rises are? That was the East Village once. Basically, a dump.' Photographer Xing Danwen (pronounced *shing dahn-wen*) gestured toward the new urban vista that spread beyond the window of the second-floor coffee shop of the Westin hotel in Beijing's northeastern Chaoyang district. Now home to the relocated Central Academy of Fine Arts (CAFA) as well as the 798 and Caochangdi districts, the area is, as she went on to say, 'all changed now' — a phrase that could serve as a veri-table mantra for post-Mao China, for its avant-garde art scene and for her own transformed career." [10]

Xing has evolved in photography from a "bohemian documentarian to deliberate, soulful orche-strator of straight photographic images to author of deftly fabricated digital tableaux and animations." [11] Where Hocking's melancholic peregrinations about the modern rust-ruins of Detroit yield possibilities for resurrection via a strong zap of aesthetic insight, Chinese artists such as Ai Weiwei and Xing Danwen's works are situated on a knife-edge between past and future, the era of demolitions. Xing's initial works were in Chinese scroll-form and shot in black-and-white; they consisted of moody, blurred images from Beijing, suggestive of nostalgia for China's fast-fading past. Vine
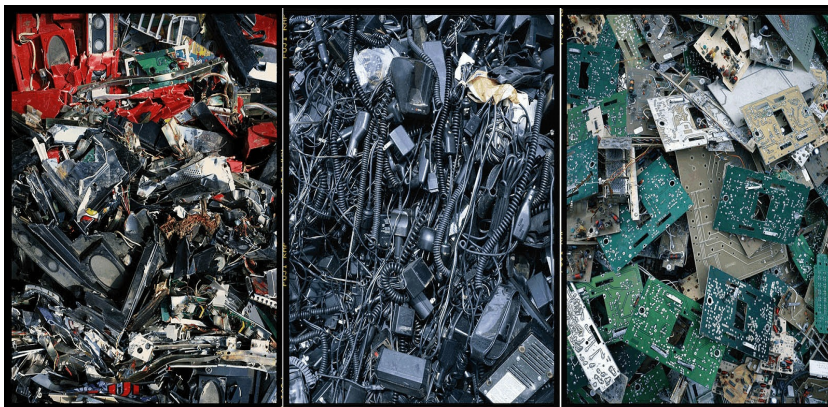


*dis-CONNEXION_D4, A3, B4* (Chromogenic print, 30 x 24 in., 2012) Xing Danwen

describes them as "elegiac meditations on lost worlds and broken ties." [12]

Xing's interest in the discards of a fast changing, modern society is shared by other contemporary artists in China like Zhan Wang, Rong Rong, and filmmaker Wang Bing. [13] Asian scholar and curator, Wu Hung, explains the disruptive context for this pervasive interest in the physical manifestations of temporal change in his catalogue essay, "Demolition Projects," for the exhibition/book he curated, *Transience: Chinese Experimental Art at the End of the Twentieth Century* (1999):

> . . . these works exemplify a sensibility toward a particular kind of modern ruin that I have termed 'demolition.' Unlike the representation of war ruins, images of demolition do not focus on human tragedies from a retrospective view. Instead, they respond to a dramatic change in the environment caused by an ongoing process of destruction/ construction. During a demolition, the human subjects are not destroyed, but debased; their experiences are confusion and disorientation, not a collective tragedy. [14]



*Classroom Exercise* (installation, 1995) Zhan Wang

Protesting the removal of their school, Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing, from near the famous commercial district of Wangfujing so a multi-million dollar "City of Commerce" could replace it, Zhan Wang and two other members of the Three Men United Studio (faculty at the school) organized a group installation and performance, *Property Development* (1995) to focus their outcry against "the complete defeat of art and education under the invasion of a market economy." [15] Zhan Wang's contribution was a simulated ruin, *Classroom Exercise* (1995), sited in his classroom of the soon-to-be-wrecking-balled building. Rubble, dirt and human figures (symbolizing the soon-to-be-missing faculty and students), spill through an open window. Here humans, school, and tradition become victims of crass "demolition."

Young Chinese artist Rong Rong's terrifying scenes of Beijing houses being turned to rubble, a whole area of the inner city becoming a no-man's land, recall Hocking's photographs of a similarly demolished Detroit. Rong Rong had lived in a radical artist's haven, East Village, a tumbled-down area on Beijing's east side, that was torn down by police in June 1994. Demolition had impacted him personally. He soon began to photograph sites where rubble and shards of torn pictures shared demolished space producing, "A mixture of beauty and vulnerability, these ruined pictures — mostly of famous movie stars and fashion models — captured Rong Rong's eye and were superimposed upon another image in his memory [a childhood liking of a calendar picture of a Taiwanese popular singer whose songs were forbidden by the government for being *obscene*, hence all that more desirable]." [16] At first glance it seems as if the artist himself had placed the torn pictures *in situ*, like Hocking's interventions and constructions.
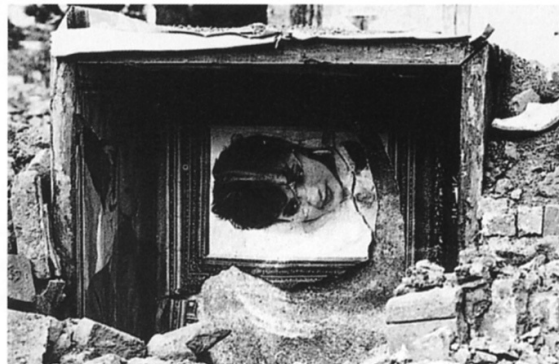
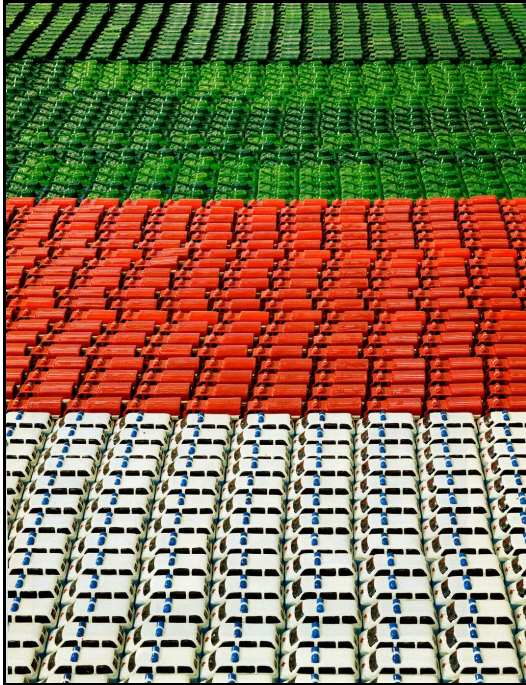*Untitled* (Beijing ruins, 20 x 24 in., 1996 - 97) Rong Rong
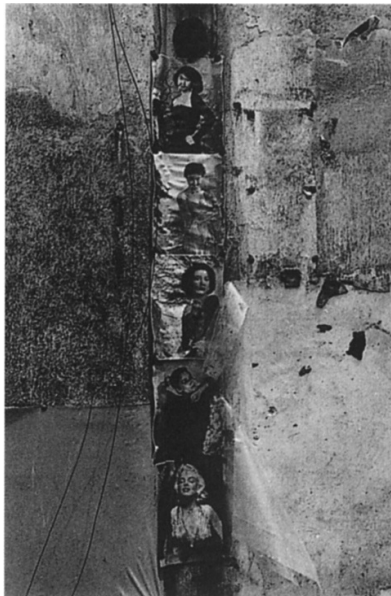
*Untitled No.2b* (gelatin silver print, 20 x 24 in., 1996 - 97) Rong Rong

*Untitled No.1b* (gelatin silver print, 20 x 24 in., 1996 - 97) Rong Rong

Rong Rong's Ruin Pictures (1996 - 97)

*Ruined Photo* (gelatin silver print, 20 x 24 in., Rong Rong

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*2004.05.09* (detail, miniature porcelain tanks, police cars, ambulances, army trucks and fire engines, 2004) Gu Dexin

Gu Dexin, similarly targets China's growing obsession with riches, consumerism, and rapid modernization. His works in the first decade of the new millennium were installations, sometimes featuring swaths of identical small sculptures or cheap toys associated with violence and disaster, but which had formal affinities to Xing Danwen's piles of cell-phones and other electronic items in her "dis-CONNEXION" series. His one-person exhibition in 2007 at the Shanghai Gallery of Art took a swipe at the new urban destruction/construction that was in full swing. Christopher Phillips describes it: "[H]e built a ramp of concrete paving stones rising from the gallery floor to the windowsill, encouraging visitors to go up the incline and admire the spectacular array of new glass and steel skyscrapers visible across the Huangpu River. Only those who chanced to look down through the grates inserted in the ramp noticed that they were standing over what seemed to be a pool of blood-drenched slime crawling with maggots. (In fact, the slime was red-dyed resin and the maggots were plastic sculptures. Nearby was a blue 'pond' infested with 'flies.') The dark underside of China's economic miracle could not have been more ghoulishly exposed." [17]

*2007.04.07* (3 installation shots, Shanghai Gallery of Art, 2007) Gu Dexin
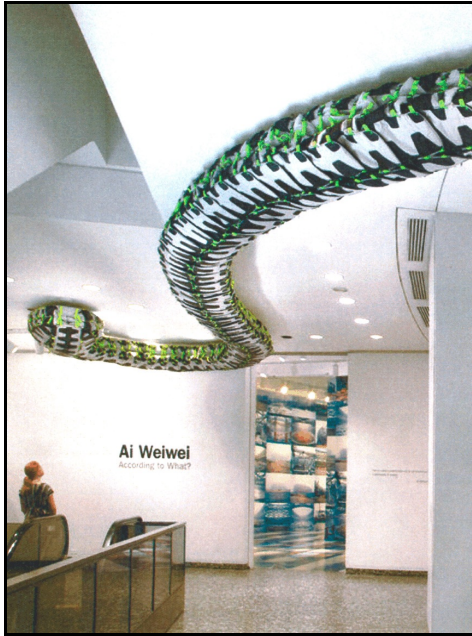
*Snake Ceiling* (2009 installation) Ai Weiwei

In 2008 Sichuan province suffered a devastating earthquake wherein 5000-plus school children died in poorly constructed "tofu-skin" schools. Chinese artist Ai Weiwei responded to that disaster in various works; in the installation *Snake Ceiling* (2009), children's backpacks, like linked vertebrae, snake across the gallery's ceiling.

Another installation, *Through* (2007 - 08), placed in Australia's Sherman Contemporary Art Foundation in Sydney, utilizes Qing Dynasty (1644 - 1911) tables and ancient temple beams refashioned into complex relation-ships that are symbolic and structural, referencing the destruction and re-invention that is a recurring theme in Chinese history. Weiwei's piece is described by Dr. Charles Merewether, curator and author of the catalogue *Under Construction* (Sydney: University of New South Wales, 2008), as "ruins in reverse." [18]
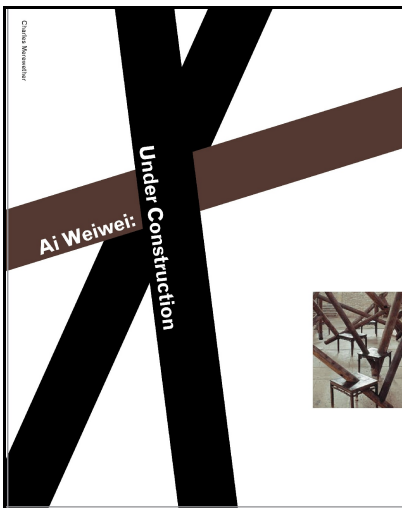


*Ai Weiwei: Under Construction* (2008) exhibition catalogue



Above and right: installation of *Through* (2007 - 2008, at Sherman Contemporary Art Foundation, Sydney, Australia



Case Study III/92

Returning to Xing Danwen, a shift from her earlier nostalgia to a more direct engagement with contemporary China came in her "dis-CONNEXION" series (begun 2002), where she collected large amounts of "E-Trash" and visually recycled electronics industry waste into large color triptychs of heaps of such ruinous discard from China's burgeoning production of twenty-first century technology. In June of 2002, while traveling in Guangdong Province, Xing encountered thousands of people earning their living by recycling piles of computer and electronic trash.[19] This black market industry, while providing much needed economic opportunity for migrant workers, is creating enormous environmental problems because of the high content of mercury and traces of heavy metals in the machinery. The artist has written: "These machines (computers) become deeply rooted in our daily activities, replacing the old ways of doing things. Being confronted with vast piles of dead and deconstructed machines, the over-whelming number of cords, wires, chips and parts, with the clear indication of American company names, mode numbers and even individual employees, I felt shocked." [20] The work, over forty images to date, is made to please us visually, even as it underscores the sheer amount of this waste going into the eco-system. Where Hocking delights in the aesthetic possibilities of the debris he recycles, Xing critically questions the future fate of the debris she places before us. The irony here, of course, is that a healthy economy ends up delivering a ruinous byproduct (and demolitions), where for Hocking it was a ruined economy that brought forth a booming amount of funky debris to play with.



*dis-CONNEXION"_A7, B12, C3* (Chromogenic print,  30 x 24 in., 2012) Xing Danwen

Where her artworks differ the most from Hocking's, due to a society fraught with demolitions, is seen in her "Urban Fiction" series (2004 - 08), a Laurie Simmons-like response to her world travels wherein she bemoans the global uniformity of urban existence, how her country is becoming increasingly like *every-place* as spatial and economic rationality overtake old China. In this series, she uses models of luxury apartment structures (Vine says the up-scale modernist housing frenzy is fueled by tantalizing, detailed scale mockups in Chinese real estate offices which often sell units even before the structure is completed) within which smartly dressed characters (many of them Xing herself posing) suffer staged "wrecks" typical of modern life, from sunburn to domestic violence and murder to car wrecks. A comical discord between elegant, new surroundings and human behavior is figured. Underlying this work is a critical concern about disorientation and isolation in these vertical living environments, at odds with traditional horizontal courtyard buildings and *hutongs*, long-lane complexes shared with extended

Gallery installation of several prints from "Urban Fiction" series (C-prints on Diasec, 67 x 95 in., 2004) Xing Danwen
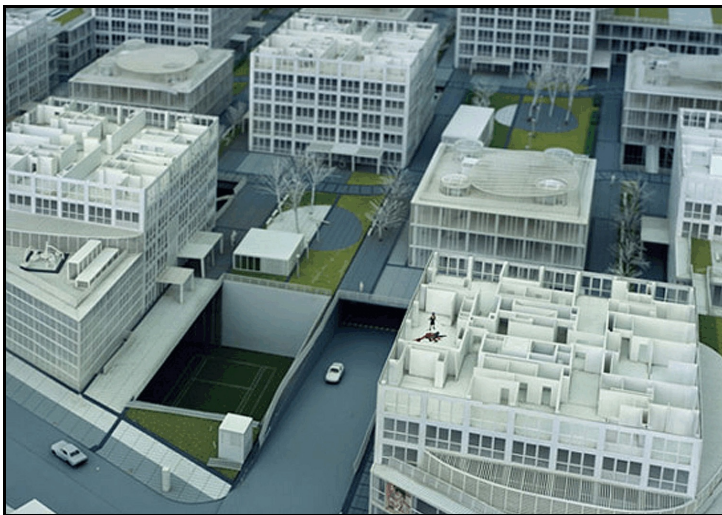

"Urban Fiction" series (67 x 95 in., C-print on Diasec, 2004) Xing Danwen


Details from above


Details from above

family members and intimate neighbors that span several generations. Of course, Western models from Le Corbusier's *Unité d'Habitation* (1952) to St. Louis's Pruitt-Igoe projects (wrecked on July 15, 1972) testify to the alienation from social context such structures invite, but which being new, are attractive to a fast-modernizing China in need of ways to house an increasing population of urban middle-class citizens.

For Xing, "Photography was a coincidence. I never had any influences that drew me towards photography. For me, art was very simply painting or sculpture, because they were very classical forms of art and all I had seen." Concerning this specific series, she confessed, "When I started this work it was clear to me that this subject was nothing new. There has been a lot of successful artwork done already by very well-known, established artists. For artists it's important to create original work, so I decided to use the fake to talk about reality." [21] It is appropriate her digitally modified scale models, "real" maquettes she appropriates, evoke film sets. "The developers create the dream before people even see it," says Xing, adding that such real estate models are given names to

Detail from "Urban Fiction" series (C-print on Diasec, 2004) Xing Danwen



Detail from "Urban Fiction" series (C-print on Diasec, 2004) Xing Danwen

target specific clientele: "Park Avenue" to attract a monied client or "SoHo" aimed at younger buyers. "You start to see who might live in the buildings and what kind of lives would manifest inside and it starts to become like a movie," she explains. Given the circumstances of her early life, as a child she could only dream of such a life as found in films or magazines. Carrying past childhood fantasies into a critical engagement with the present, she says, "I create my own stories," [22] by dressing up, putting on make-up and posing for a photo that is then digitally inserted in the photograph of the model shot inside real estate offices using the available lighting. The models appear like Barbie mansions complete with plastic trees and Matchbox-like cars, further emphasizing the artifice of the scene, suggesting "the impo-sition of homogeneity and trans-parency everywhere within the purview of power and its estab-lished order." [23] It is important that the models Xing employs are found at actual real estate offices, as it is often the case people are forced to vacate old housing and move into such structures. Had the artist made her own models and inserted pictures of herself within, "she would not be," argues art historian Madeline Eschenburg in an essay on the artist, "acknowledging this psychological upheaval." When people look at maquettes they automatically imagine what their life would be like if they lived therein and in this series, offers Eschenburg, "Xing reveals her own predic-tions." [24] Architectural space is not neutral space is the gist of Xing's project. As Henri Lefebvre in *The Production of Space* (1994) put it: "This space has nothing innocent about it: it answers to particular tactics and strategies; it is quite simply, the space of the dominant mode of production, and hence the space of capitalism, governed by the bourgeoisie. It consists of 'lots' and is organized in a repressive manner as a function of the important features of the locality." [25]

The transformations Xing addresses in "Urban Fiction" are, writes Eschenburg, "both awe-inspiring and treacherous." From the improvements Beijing begun when it was awarded the Olympic Games in 2001 and up to the present day, the city has undergone a series of modernization projects as

China becomes a player in "transnational space." [26] Elaborating on the nature of such space, Lefebvre writes that, "it suffers from the delusion that 'objective' knowledge of 'realilty' can be attained by means of graphic representations. This discourse no longer has any frame of reference or horizon. It only too easily becomes — as in the case of Le Corbusier — a moral discourse on straight lines, on right angles and straightness in general, combining a figurative appeal to nature (water, air, sunshine) with the worst kind of abstraction (plane geometry, modules, etc.)." [27]

The psychological implications for identities in such space and the complexities that people must engage as urban change accelerates are grist for this artist. Such repercussions were adumbrated earlier by Hou Hanru and Hans-Ulrich Obrist in their exhibition and catalogue *Cities on the Move* (1997) where they summarized the "double-bind" suffered by populations thus: "Modernization in many Asian countries, which has been considered as a process of re-enforcement of national identities, sometimes even religious and ideological identities, is ironically accompanied by a general deconstruction and disintegration of established values and cultural modes. . . . Uncertainty, along with the disintegration and liquification of the Self hence become the main issues that Asian people are about to cope with." [28]

Two years later, another exhibition and catalogue, *Transience: Chinese Experimental Art at the End of the Twentieth Century* (1999), finds Wu Hung,[29] noted Chicago Chinese art historian, commenting on artwork that confronts such rapid change and the double-edged sword it presents. He asserts that while in theory a demolition project "promises renewal, numerous demolition sites in Beijing have been left in a demolished state for several years." He continues, "These places lie outside normal life, not only spatially, but also in a *temporal sense* [emphasis added]: time simply vanishes in these black holes." [30] Xing's work continues this idea, but shows that even when these new spaces are developed, they still lie outside normal life, spatially and temporally. Madeline Eschenburg, extrapolating from Wu Hung's analysis to Xing's "Urban Fiction" series, observes: "In these [modern] places, too, time vanishes into black holes."[31] In such spaces, people live out their lives in, as one of Xing's artist statements puts it, "an accelerated era of development" which has "a defined goal of modernizing our systems and our lifestyle." Therein, people "study and struggle to achieve a standardized excellence in both their personal and professional life. We see fashion and beauty in advertising and media, and we find that the aesthetics used promote a universal model and that distinctiveness is not encouraged." [32]
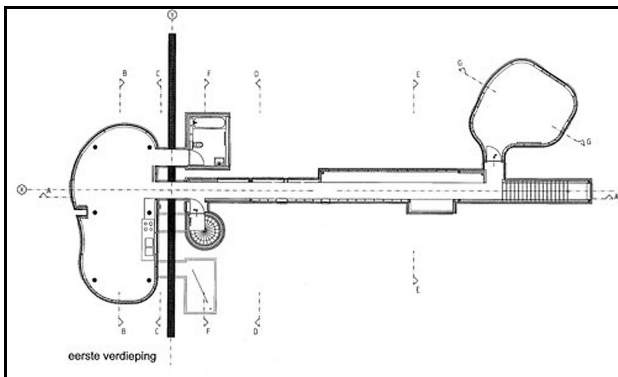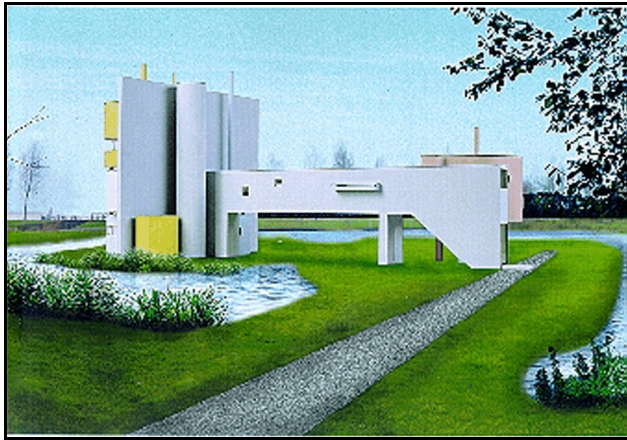
Looking at Xing's urban fictions, the compartmentalization of inserted figures within the models, I am reminded of George Tooker's 1950s era "magic realist" paintings of urban anomie, such as *Government Bureau* (1956). Tooker



*Government Bureau* (o/c, 1956) George Tooker

*Wall House II* (Groningen, Holland, 2001) John Hejduk





examines isolation in space that Xing explores photographically in her "Wall House" (2007) series. The project started when the artist took a residency at John Hejduk's highly theory-based construction, *Wall House II,* designed between 1967 - 73 and built in 2001 one year after the architect's death. Situated in Northern Holland, the structure's modernist design violates the De Stijl's modernist open-plan by cutting working and living areas with a large cement wall. One half is made up of three stories, consisting of living room, kitchen, dining room, and bedroom. The other half houses public and professional spaces, an office, corridor, and stairs. From the exterior, the sense of division is enhanced by the physical separation of one room from another, with each painted a different color. Inside, the visitor is forced to consider this separation as he or she moves back and forth between the cement wall to explore each room.

Eschenburg notes the reversal of audience perspective this project provides. Xing's photography inside this structure and her digital replacement of Dutch scenes outside the windows with images of Chinese cityscapes relates to her earlier "Urban Fiction" series: "In the context of Chinese urbanization, one is hard pressed to imagine a better foil to the traditional courtyard house. In this house [*Wall House II*], Xing found the perfect setting to physically examine the interaction of the human and the modern living space." [33] "Urban Fiction" has the audience voyeuristically examining from outside these miniature structures, while "Wall House" takes us into architectural interiors, where "inside" the large wall-mounted color transparencies, we virtually inhabit the space while looking out onto a modernizing China that is "wrecking" tradition.[34]

The substitution of China for Holland in the windows is doubled in *Wall House, Image 2* (2007) where the hair's shape and bleached color in the reflection doesn't match that of the figure making up

*Wall House, Image 2* (transparency in light box, 2007) Xing Danwen

before the mirror. What we see outside the window and inside the mirror are both modernized versions of Asian cities and women (the stylish *ganguro* look)[35] that contrasts with a traditional past that is becoming quickly erased by the Westernization of culture. In *Wall House, Image 3* (2007) an isolated figure (the artist) sits bored inside a modern cell-space before a window looking onto a Le Corbusier-like rationalized urban space. Her only companions are a coffee mug (not a tea cup) and cell-phone (an *indirect* connection to others). As in Tooker's paintings, anomie haunts the near bare room. Xing's artist statement sketches her feelings about this and similar images:

> Looking out the window is a view of a city — a large city, populated by people, build-ings, cars, and roads. In this scale and from this perspective, distance and time are no longer simple realities of everyday life. People commute from one place to another, passing within centimeters and seconds of each other. We can be so close but at the same time so far away from each other physically and emotionally. This is [how] I picture big cities. As the material quality of life has improved, less intimacy remains; the more a city develops and expands, the further we are alienated from one another. Loneliness becomes a fact, which envelops our everyday life and feelings.[36]

In sum, Xing Danwen's various projects span recording trashed objects, those polluting wrecks of modern culture, to evoking nostalgia over the ruins of a disappearing past, to engaging in a conceptual manner the wrecking of tradition in transnational space, as well as being sensitive to the desires of her people for a better level of economic existence. Her work stands out as a *critical construction* both aesthetically and theoretically.



*Wall House, Image 3* (transparency in light box, 2007) Xing Danwen

On this point of criticality, it is useful to compare Xing to New York-based Japanese paper artist/ photographer Yumiko Matsui. Her "Paper Cities," colorful, charming miniature diorama reconstructions of Tokyo and Osaka scenes (using colored paper and water-based glue) edge near to cuteness and nostalgia. The sustained theme of alienation within modernization is much less of a concern here. The Japanese, unlike the Chinese, have long lived within Western modernization,[37] experiencing the Shock-of-the-New sixty years ago during the post-war years of WWII. They may suffer the usual urban ills, but have largely come to terms with it.



Chang'an Avenue, Beijing in 2000

Matsui's artist statement elaborates on the equation of modern life with contingency, with the *wreck*: "As we all know, There is much brutality and violence around the world. Everything can change in a moment, a happy, peaceful day can be destroyed in a second by things that are not in our control. I used to be influenced by this continual potential for disastrous change and I felt compelled to paint what might be called a borderline: the line between light and dark, black and white, good and evil, etc. The way to express this was through abstract drawings and surrealism.[38] But I have changed [since 2006] and I have begun to focus on a more happier [sic]

"Paper Cities" series (installation view, 2008)  Yumiko Matsui



"Paper Cities" series (installation view, 2008)  Yumiko Matsui

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aspect of life [construction, not ruin] since I moved here to NYC." [39] This happier aspect are fond memories of her childhood in Osaka, but now scaled-down to doll-house size, which brings into intimacy an urban space that otherwise would be alienating, even traumatic, as already shown in the works I have probed by several notable Chinese artists. The urban space of NOW in Matsui's models becomes transformed into visualized memories of a nostalgic PAST. Her constructions are the result of a distillation of memories screened by idealizing childhood experiences. Unlike the memories of victims of traumatic events, this artist welcomes memories into her recollections and aesthetic spaces.

In summary, the artworks discussed in this monograph — especially that of Scott Hocking, Xing Danwen, and Yumiko Matsui — suggest that our NOW is an age when time has become a function of space. And where objects often appear to function as persons circulating through networks, trajectories, cycles, or lives of production, destruction, and reception. Overall, the works surveyed here probe in diverse ways *traces-of-the-past* as something to split apart and open onto a here-and-now.

<p style="text-align:center">*    *    *</p>

# Endnotes

1. Over a period of ten years Detroit's Economic Development Corporation has spent 8.6 million dollars acquiring property for an industrial park on the city's east side and $30,000 per year to maintain the area. As of 2011, only 10 per cent of that area has been developed (*Crain's Detroit Business*, Feb. 28, 2010, on the web at: *http://www.crainsdetroit.com/article/20100228/SUB01/302289961/i-94-industrial-park-an-idea-whose-time-is-past#*).

2. Hocking's website: *http://scotthocking.com/zone.html*.

3. The Packard plant referred to here (once makers of a top line of luxury cars) is five stories tall and a half-mile end-to-end. It was described by Steven Kurutz in "Life in the Ruins," *NYTimes.com* (February 6, 2013) as "a notorious ruin" within what Motor City Muckraker blog called "a lawless wasteland." But it is home to Allan Hill, a 68-year-old semi-retired auto-body worker, and his son, Randy, both of whom Kurutz interviewed. "Its 40-odd buildings sprawl across more than 35 acres on the east side," writes Kurutz, "attracting scrapers, graffiti artists, vandals and European tourists, who come to photograph the vast hollowed-out rooms and crumbling exteriors. It's the kind of ruin porn that Detroit has become known for, much to the frustration of its residents." A short film about Mr. Hill was made last year by two Brooklyn filmmakers and posted online.

4. Hocking's website: *http://scotthocking.com/gardenof.html*.

5. Dimitre's website at *http://www.dimitre.com*.

6. Hocking's website: *http://scotthocking.com/sisyphus.html*.

7. Hocking's website: *http://scotthocking.com/relics.html*.

8. Heraclitus, *Fragments. The Collected Wisdom of Heraclitus*, trans. Brooks Haxton (New York: Peguin, 2001), 27, 96 n.41.

9. Erich Auerbach (1892 - 1957), a German philologist and humanist who wished to preserve the best of human creation and open it to secular criticism.

10. Ibid.

11. Richard Vine, "Xing Danwen," *Art in America*, online features, Feb. 5, 2010, *http://www.artinamericamagazine.com/ features/xing-danwen.* Vine notes that Xing Danwen was born in 1967 in Xi'an, Shaanxi Province and received her BFA from the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing and her MFA from the School of Visual Arts in New York in 2001.

12. Ibid. Also see Wu Hung, *Transience: Chinese Experimental Art at the End of the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 190- 191, for biographical data on Xing Danwen.

13. Wang Bing's film *Tie Xi Qu* (West of the Tracks, 2003) details the slow decline of Shenyang's industrial Tiexi district, an area that was once a vibrant example of China's socialist economy. With the move towards other industries, however, the factories of Tiexi have all begun to be closed down, and with them, much of the district's worker-based infrastructure and social constructs. For an examination of this film that parallels my interests in his monograph, see Ling Zhang, "Collecting the Ashes of Time: The Temporality and Materiality of Industrial Ruins in Wang Bing's documentary *West of the Tracks*" (2002), *Asian Cinema*, Spring/Summer 2009.

14. Wu Hung, *Transience: Chinese Experimental Art at the End of the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 112.

15. Ibid., 111.

16. Ibid., 117.

17. Christopher Phillips, "Vanishing Act," *Art in America* (January, 2013), 90 - 94.

18. See Melissa Block's article online at the Sherman Contemporary Art Foundation's website: *http://www.sherman-scaf.org.au/exhibitions/project_1_ai_weiwei _under_construction/*. Also see page xvii in the "Introduction" to this book for more Ai Weiwei artworks.

19. In Ron Fricke's film *Samsara* (2011) there is a scene showing the crushing of various electronic devices in an electronic disposal factory in California. This film also has many scenes featuring "ruin porn" around the world.

20. "Indepth Arts News, 'dis-CONNEXION,' Large Format Color Photographs by Beijing-based artist Xing Danwen," at *absolutearts.com*, *http://www.absolutearts.com/artsnews/2004/10/01/32411.html.*

21. Cited by Rachel Duffell, "IDentity Check," *Ooi Botos Gallery* webposting (2010) at *http://www.ooibotos.com/ ftp/client_ftp/PDF-Article-Downloads/XDW-Press/2010-01-Kee(XDW).pdf*.

22. Ibid.

23. For more on this point, see Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), 383. To view more images from Xing's "Urban Fiction" go to: *http://www.danwen.com/web/ works/uf/index.html*.

24. Madeline Eschenburg, "Xing Danwen: Revealing the Masquerade of Modernity," *Yishu: The Journal of Contemporary Chinese Art* (July/ August, 2009), 58. The author offers us several insightful "close-readings" of Danwen's "Urban Fiction" images.

25. Henri Lefebvre, see *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), 360.

26. Anthony D. King and Abidin Kusno, "On Beijing in the World: 'Postmodernism,' 'Globalization,' and the Making of Transnational Space in China," in *Postmodernism and China*, ed. Arif Dirlik and Xudong Zhang (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 64.

27. Lefebvre, 361.

28. Hou Hanru and Hans-Ulrich Obrist, *Cities on the Move* (Ostfildern-ruit, Germany: Verlag Gerd Hatje, 1997)

29. Also see Wu Hung, *Remaking Beijing: Tiananmen Square and the Creation of a Political Space* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

30. Wu Hung, *Transience: Chinese Experimental Art at the End of the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 112 - 113.

31. Eschenburg, 53.

32. Ibid, 58. Henri Lefebvre examines this point of alienation in architectural space, saying, "It contains representations derived from the established order: statuses and norms, localized hierarchies and hierarchically arranged places, and roles and values bound to particular places. Such 'representations' find their authority and prescriptive power in and through the space that underpins them and makes them effective. In this pace, things act and situations are forever being replaced by representations (which, inasmuch as they are ideological in nature, have no principle of efficiency).The 'world of signs' is not merely the space occupied by space and images (body object-signs and sign-objects). It is also that space where the Ego no longer relates to its own nature, to the material world, or even to the 'thingness' of things (commodities), but only to things bound to their signs and indeed ousted and supplanted by them. The sign-bearing 'I' no longer deals with anything but other bearers of signs" (311).

33. Ibid. 63.

34. To view more images, see *Mi Modern Architecture*, "Wall House": *http://www.mimoa.eu/projects/Netherlands/ Groningen/Wall%20House.*

35. For more on the *ganguro* style, see: *http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ganguro.*

36. Xing Danwen, "Wall House," *http://danwen.com/works/wallhouse/statement.html.*

37. Jean-François Lyotard, in *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 76 - 77, regards modernist rationality as endemic to capitalism which he conceives as a "monad" — meaning it is a self-contained entity oblivious to everything except its own interests. It is this aspect of the modernization of China that the artists concerned over "demolition" focus their criticism.

38. Yet, there are films featuring Tokyo which stress the urban shocks of city life; for instance, the prescient film *Tokyo Drifter* (1966). More recently, *Tokyo Fist* (1995) layers sounds of corporeal noise (crashes of bone on bone, sound-scapes of malfunctioning internal organs, vocal cries) are mixed with sounds of relentless traffic and other urban noise on the soundtrack so the city becomes sonically mediated through the bodies and the urban acts of the film's characters. For an examination of films and urban space, see Stephen Barber, *Projected Cities: Cinema and Urban Space* (London: Reaktion Books Ltd., 2002).

39. Yumiko Matsui, "Artist's Statement," on her homepage*: http://www.siouxwire.com/2008/09/yumiko-matsuis-paper -craft-city.html.*

# Auto-Interview with James Hugunin

**Question:** Can you provide a "back-story" for this monograph?

**Answer:** Both of my parents died within six months of each other, my mother long-suffering from emphysema from smoking. My dedication page references that disease and symbolizes her exit from this realm in the photograph chosen to accompany that dedication. There is an underlying engagement with death here. Moreover, just prior to writing this book, I had a year-long battle with salivary gland cancer, during which I literally became a "wreck and ruin" after major surgery and 30 rounds of radiation treatments. Coming out of that experience coincided with working on this project. Of course, I always had an interest in dystopic spaces as found in Wynn Bullock's photographs, Robert Smithson's *Monuments of Passaic* (1967), and various sci-fi stories of J. G. Ballard.

**Q:** Which part of the text came to you first?

**A:** I initially wrote the piece on Ed Ruscha and Lew Koch's *Bomber* installation. I had been a fan of Ruscha's ever since my photo instructor, Jerry McMillan, introduced me to his work and took me to his studio where I got to meet him personally. I had been familiar with Koch's photography for nearly twenty years. After seeing Koch's show, *Bomber, a chance unwinding*, in Madison, Wisconsin in 2011, I saw the similarities and differences between the eras and the approach to a similar topic as interesting. Moreover, my father was a bombardier in B-17s, based in East Anglia, England during World War II — site of many of W. G. Sebald's peregrinations — so both Sebald and the tragic crash of that "war-bird" also keyed my interest.

**Q:** Anything of influence from your past artworks?

**A:** Well . . . once I took a series of dumb-snapshot photographs of trash cans on trash collection day in the alley behind my home, and wrote a formalist analysis of each pile of trash. Another instance. I discovered a large, empty, but waste-filled, field near my home — this was in the early seventies — and meticulously photographed the myriad stuff that covered what had been a tilled agriculture field. I then created a gridded map showing the precise location of each item photographed. It was like doing a survey of a specific territory, noting whatever was found therein, and presenting it as art. What the NTSB do at an airplane crash-site was in the back of my mind. The piece consisted of a laboratory (gridded paper) notebook with map and tipped in photos, presented on a white pedestal so people could leaf through it. The Robert Adams photograph on page iv of this book reminded me of that field of discards which I mapped in that early artwork.

**Q:** Why so many images? They do seem to take on a life of their own here.

**A:** The images are not there merely to illustrate the text. I wanted the images to not only "dialogue" with the written part of the book, also to "dialogue" amongst each other. I could have simply erased the text and the book would still make statements about its topic. Overall, I wanted the book to be, to cite from Deleuze and Guattari's essay "Rhizome," "a book made of plateaus, each communicating with the others through tiny fissures, as in the brain."

**Q:** As the book went to press was there other work you would consider treating in more detail?

**A:** Yes, I realized that one could extend the "Case Studies" section linearly, like pulling out Ruscha's folding book *Every Building on Sunset Strip*, engaging the work of many more artists in my discussion. For instance, the massive exhibition and superb catalogue, *The Way of the*


*Die Explosion in dem Canal* from *The Russian Ending* (photogravure, 2001) Tacita Dean

*Shovel: On the Archaeological Imaginary in Art* (2013) curated by Dieter Roelstraete, features Scott Hocking and many other artists whose work would fit the theme of this book. Pertaining to wrecks, the work of British artist Tacita Dean, specifically *The Russian Ending* (20 photogravure enlargements of old postcards, 2001), which figures explosions, bridge collapses, burials, and so forth would make excellent grist. Concerning ruins, the work of Romanian artist Daniel Knorr, his "readymade" *State of Mind* (papier-maché rocks, 2007), which are found clumps of pulverized Stasi files salvaged from the murky depths of what was once the Stasi Headquarters in Leipzig



*State of Mind* (papier-maché rocks, 2007) Daniel Knorr

*Copperhead No. 72* (chromogenic print, 24 x 18 in, 1990) Moyra Davey

would make interesting discussion. From secret police files filling locked cabinets to what looks like a collection of exotic moon rocks, the piece is a synecdochic comment on the natural entropy of things, and figures the ruin of a repressive political regime. Continuing the entropy theme, Canadian, Moyra Davey's extreme close-up examination of decaying U.S. pennies in her *Copperhead* photo series (1990) reveals the beauty in the metal corrupted over time by both natural and human activity. Arrayed in a grid format, the images recall the German artists, Bernd and Hilla Becher's objective treatment of their industrial subject matter.

**Q:** The topic you've selected does seem open-ended.





**A:** Every day something pertaining to this topic catches my eye. Articles are now appearing about Pop-up galleries flourishing in once-abandoned storefronts in Detroit (e.g., "Pop-Up Salvation," René C. Hoogland, *Art in America* (December 2013), 49 - 50), and Anthony Bourdain's TV show has done a survey of Pop-up restaurants appearing there.

In 2013, Chicago photographer, Dimitre, and Chicago painter Andy Paczos, (b. 1961, Detroit, MI) made highly detailed images inside Chicago's historic Three Arts Club, a building designed by Holabird and Roche in 1914 and abandoned in 2007. Paczos invited Dimitre to creatively interact with him in that dilapidated space (originally a women's club dedicated to painting, music, drama). I found it interesting to see the dance between two different media (photography and painting) as used by artists with ;ong-time overlapping visual interests in recording Chicago's cityscape.

The top image left is a HDR digital photo by Dimitre of the Club's dining room taken from the same point of view as Paczos's 28 x 36 inch oil rendition reproduced below, a fragment of which (the floor) Dimitre has digitally recorded and then blended into his own image.

This kind of exchange became clearly more literal when Dimitre did a portrait of Paczos at work in the building (left). This image then led Paczos to paint his own self-portrait (right), riffing off Dimitre's photograph. Then Dimitre did a self-portrait that mimes his portrait of Paczos (bottom left).







**Q:** So the work developed into a sort of performance of exchanges?

**A:** An exchange that a rhetorician might dub a *chiasm*, an intersubjective criss-crossing, to two points of view with a common subject as their crossing point:

I : You ::

# X

You : I

**Q:** The binding of oppositions into a unity?

**A:** A trope for friendship.

— The End —

*Bomber, a chance unwinding* (detail from chapbook and installation, 2011) Lewis Koch



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