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The following is a reprint of a fictitious periodical entitled *Filter Detroit* – my attempt at situating Warsaw and its wartime architectural morphologies in the context of the "motor city". *Skarpa Warszawska* [The Warsaw Escarpment], *Filter's* real sister publication, is the graphic and discursive medium by which I juxtapose post-1945 utopian Polish planning and current discussions around Detroit's future urban morphologies and real estate structures. *Filter* references Kirsten Niemann's Detroit house and art foundation by the same name. For two weeks in the summer of 2010, *Filter Detroit* hosted a group of urban researchers from the Bauhaus University Weimar under the supervision of Frank Eckardt. In each of my texts, positioned graphically in conversation with articles in the second issue of *Skarpa Warszawska* dated October 28, 1945, I reflect on the Weimar group's fieldwork in Detroit. Each article in *Filter* remains in conversation thematically and graphically with a specific article in *Skarpa*. Thus the two publications – the fictitious and the historical – come to exist in contemporary discourses on modernism, the picturesque, war, ruin art, ruin fascination, and the imagined decline of the American industrial city. In the image printed here, my annotated reproduction of *Skarpa Warszawska* peeks out from under a copy of a contemporary resuscitation of the post-war periodical. *Skarpa*, which existed for one year only, was a serialized manifesto for post-war functionalist planning and as such requires an architectural reading that includes a topographical and typographical analysis. For me, reproducing *Skarpa*, its overall dimensions, margins, gutter sizes, and variations in fonts, was a productive experience in graphic mimesis that allowed me to engage with the historical text in a spacial way, highlighting the transposition in space and time of Polish ideas onto Detroit and vice versa. The final mimetic act was to produce a logo for *Filter Detroit* – an engagement of the symbolism behind, rather than the form of, *Skarpa's* logo.
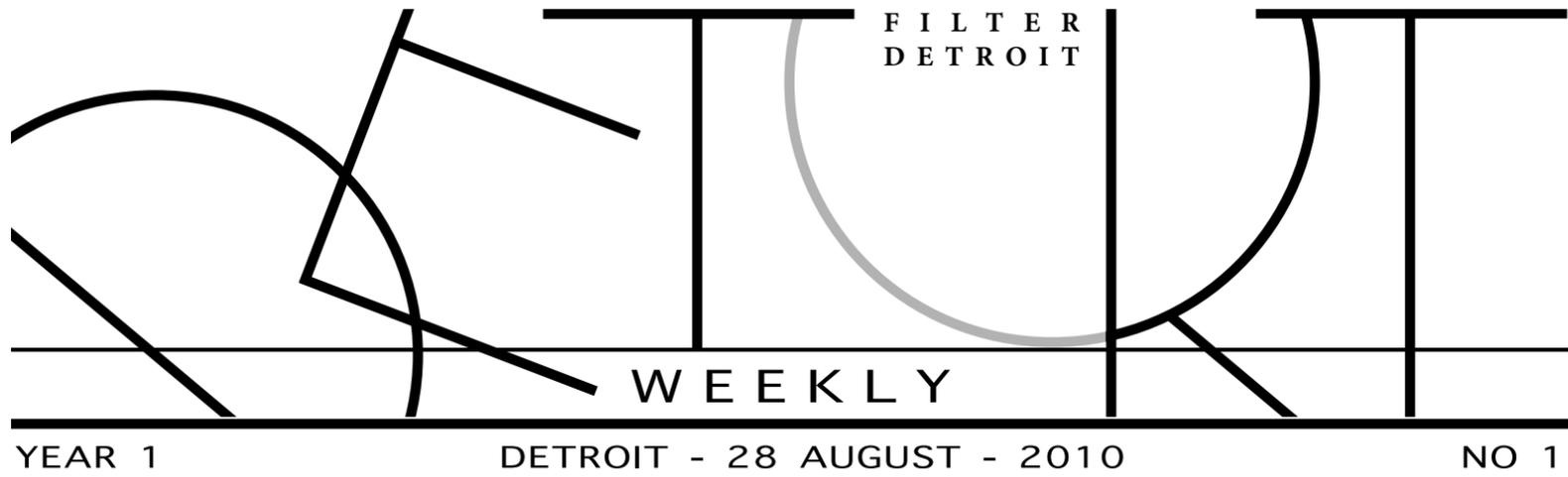
JERZY ELŻANOWSKI

BASICS OF MATERIAL CONVERSION

"Po dokładnym poznaniu istniejącej rzeczywistości ... można trzeźwo przewidziec takie etapy, w których poszczególne tereny dojrzewają do przebudowy. [*After a thorough investigation of existing conditions ... clear stages can be identified where selected areas become ripe for conversion.*]" (Zygmunt Skibniewski, "At the Foundations of Contemporary Urbanism" *Skarpa Warszawska*, 28 XI 1945)

When translating the Polish word *przebudowa* I was struck by its complexity of meaning. The word, that consists of the prefix *prze*, implying a transition or change, and the stem *budowa* meaning construction or the process of building, has no English equivalent. The word *odbudowa*, on the other hand, can be translated directly in a way that respects its original structure. *Od-budowa* is re-building or re-construction. However, in *przebudowa*, the relationship of the stem to the prefix cannot be respected in translation. Only the word *conversion* denotes that fundamental transition of form.

When applied to a city in ruin, especially in the case of 1945 Warsaw, *conversion* poses a formal problem. If the city is *converted* then it is forcefully made to change its allegiance. In a religious sense, a convert is a person who either chooses or is oblicgated to change one world-view for another; in Catholicism, that change leads to salvation. Conversion in Warsaw therefore encompassed the material transformation of the city as well as its ideological re-formation.

For a city this is an issue of representation. When a city undergoes a process of conversion, its surfaces are made to represent a new ideological order, while it is presumed that its basic material integrity remains. In a city weak from injury, such as 1945 Warsaw, is proposing *conversion* rather an act of *coercion*? What happens to memory in a converted city? And when is a city 'ripe' for conversion and by whose standards? Finally, what are the material results of conversion in a ruined city?

Writing in October 1945, just months after the end of the war, Zygmunt Skibniewski's exposé "At the Foundations of Contemporary Urbanism" proposes a total conversion of the city, including its architectural morphologies, as well as its structures of ownership. Yet his arguments concerning the need to return to a "cohabitation with the landscape (terrain)," and the stages of research and implementation for new urban plans, elide the material consequences of the proposed conversion.

In material terms, as Ella Chmielewska argues, in Warsaw, buildings "witnessed the turning of the city into an instrument of occupation: a massive process of relocations, dispossessions, annexations and conversions that took place in order to claim space." (Chmielewska, "Vectors of Looking: Reflections on the Luftwaffe's aerial survey of Warsaw, 1944"). Materially, these ideological conversion resulted in a landscape of destruction that reads through aerial photographs as a "morphology of ruins." Throughout 1939 – 1945, German and Soviet armies subjected Warsaw to compounded, layered violence creating a palimpsest of destruction - a diversity of ruin forms largely autonomous of their violent modes of production. The spatial conversion of Warsaw was dependent on an understanding of the statics and dynamics of different types of ruins. These became both the obstacles to, and the stores of material for, new construction.

Andrew Herscher proposes that destruction is a form of construction "irreducible to its supposed contexts and productive of the very identities and agencies that supposedly bear on it as causes." (Herscher, *Violence Taking Place*, p. 25) Thus destruction is formulated in a causal relationship with construction through various layers of violence.

If this contemporary concepualization were to hold for post-war Warsaw, why then was the ruin – the basic unit of urban morphology in 1945 – entirely absent from a conversation on the foundations of post-war planning? Where was the "thorough investigation of existing conditions?"

Conversion in Warsaw was spatial, ideological, but perhaps most importantly, material. A cycle of material conversion brought the pre-war building physically into post-war construction. Buildings destroyed in the war, no longer regarded as architecture and no longer private property, were termed *rubble*. As such, they were denied form, dispossessed of any site specificity or historical meaning; of any memorial or symbolic anchors. They became raw material – like an ore – ready to be mined and converted into practical construction units.

Most notably, the architect Bohdan Lachert built the housing districts that now occupy the areas of Warsaw's former Jewish Ghetto both *upon* rubble and *of* the same rubble. *Gruzobeton* (or rubble-concrete - a post-war neologism) was used to construct low-rise block housing. Initially left without an exterior finish, it was an eloquent reminder of the reality of the cyclical nature of destruction and construction; of remembering and structured forgetting.

Learning from Warsaw, how can we look critically at the material conversion of Detroit today? In Detroit, artists and architects propose conversion as a way of liberating the valueless, the waste, the rubble that occupies abandoned lots in various states of decay. In an intriguing parallel to early post-war Warsaw, they observe a revaluing of private ownership. and suggest revolutionary modes of urban occupation.

"As owners and caretakers, both formal and informal, abandon valueless property, that very same property becomes available for other forms of occupation, other practices and activities, and other regimes of value ... What usually appears to be the 'ruin' of the city thus becomes projective and potential ... Here architecture's pre-occupation with form-finding transmutes into a collaboration not only with given forms, sites and practices but also more profoundly with the entropy that form traditionally denies or ignores." (Herscher, "Detroit Unreal Estate Agency" *Volume* 18 2008, p. 95)

Detroit, as Herscher sees it, seems to have the opportunity to take the opposite route to Warsaw. Rather than a introducing a top-down economic and social plan, Herscher finds in the agency of "creative speculation" potential for an experiment in urban sustainability that, however, includes social and economic problems in its discourse. He claims that the "ecology of the abandoned city introduces new values." (Herscher, 2008, p. 94). Yet upon close inspection, the same conditions of dispossession that plague Warsaw, must be considered in Detroit.

When residents move material to create art installations, meeting places, or informal playgrounds, they slowly convert the street acccoridng to a new aesthetic that intentionally ignores value in its "hegemonic formulation." They frame this entropic transmutation as redemption.

The city's potential redemption relies on a form of conversion; the city as ruin is placed outside the market economy and its formerly *owned* spaces become dispossessed and therefore available for occupation by new groups functioning within different regimes. Although Herscher's proposition is based on a contestation of capitalist property regimes and the positive valuing of grass-roots movements, and while dispossession in Detroit could be construed as voluntary, occupation and dispossession as the bases for an urban strategy are nonetheless troubling.

Can Detroit be converted to a non-hegemonic, 'unreal' economy outside the market through its material transformations? Is this conversion simply a logical step in a 'natural' cycle of prosperity and decline? Is it a form of urban self-mutilation where the structures that traditionally organize the physical and social boundaries in a city have been weakened to a point where the city enters a process of self-destruction? Is the art community contributing to a self-inflicted violent occupation and dispossession of the city? Or are they, as Herscher argues, proposing an alternate economy that, by placing itself outside hegemonic structures, may hold the key to mediating the suffering and violence that is so often ignored in the planning discourse?

In the opening paragraph to "At the Foundations of Contemporary Urbanism," Skibniewski writes: *"The core idea of progress is contained in the continuous tendency of each human towards individual development. Only the planned organization of communal living, based on the conscious aspiration for higher forms of social life, can lead to the ideal of personal freedom."*

Acknowledging the different political and ideological frameworks within which Skibniewski, Herscher and I think and write, and those which we reference - our knowledge of so many urban failures - can we still place our faith in architecture and urbanism? Or have we lost that faith entirely and the only future Moran Street has is local, where the conversion of material and people, the energy of 'cultural entrepreneurs' and other residents will lead to new and provocative urban landscapes and new modes of social organization? Is Moran Street transitory in its material conversion? Is moving planks, glass, nails, furniture, a catalyst for exploring new modes of functioning outside the market economy? Will this experiment avoid the pitfalls of control and oppression that befalls established regimes? Let us hope that Moran really is a laboratory for urban change in America.

JERZY ELŻANOWSKI

"Amoeba project" - the lungs of the city

"Within the city's granite building mass, green spaces take the role of airways that channel wafts of air from fields, meadows, forests and waters, slitting urban neighbourhoods hot from the pulse of life, and giving them respite and relaxation. Greenery surrounding the entire urban organism guarantees its health." (Jerzy Grabowski, "Warsaw Among Gardens, Fields and Forests," *Skarpa Warszawska* 28 XI 1945)

The title of the Polish weekly architectural and planning magazine *Skarpa Warszawska* refers to the Warsaw escarpment that follows the river Vistula along the entire length of the city and forms the only significant change in elevation in an otherwise level terrain. The title, by referring to Warsaw's green space rather than to its built environment, communicates the functionalist program of its publisher - the Capital Reconstruction Office, commonly known by its Polish acronym BOS. (BOS was formed in 1945 by the interim Polish government to attempt the task of rebuilding Warsaw after the destruction of World War Two.)

BOS employed the picturesque, and specifically the English landscape tradition, as a tool for its program of de-densification, fulfilling pre-war longings for 'ventilation corridors' and 'wedges' of fresh country air. In the 18th century, a necklace of aristocratic residences and landscape gardens, stretching along the entire length of the city and well beyond, occupied the Warsaw escarpment. Although many of these parks were destroyed during the city's rapid expansion in the 19th century, many stand again today. The post-war reconstitution of these parks and elimination of dense 19th century inner city fabric was part of BOS's vision for a new functionalist Warsaw. The re-location of most planning institutions, including BOS departments, in reconstructed Palaces along the escarpment ideologically colonized the *skarpa*.

Complicated later by Stalin's tightening grip on Poland, during the early postwar years (1945 - 1948), in a politically dubious climate where the installation of the communist regime was still very much in process, BOS was composed of professionals whose credentials, as well as their pre-war leftist political allegiances, secured them a position in an organization that effectively determined the impulse for forming Warsaw as it is today. Although their imminent 'self-critique' under Stalin's dictate of socialist realism would render obsolete, at least superficially, their functionalist program, the years 1945-1948 were a time of great hope for creating a futuristic socialist city and continuing the ambitious ideological project of modernism begun in Warsaw in the 1930s.

That futurism relied on the picturesque as a narrative-creating machine for a city that was to be completely restructured. The aristocratic gardens appropriated for public use conveniently served both socialist and functionalist ideologies. The city, designed as detached buildings in park-like settings, would become an extension of its central nervous system – its symbolic lungs – the escarpment.

But the recycling of picturesque ideas did not stop at park conservation. In "Warsaw Among Gardens, Fields and Forests", Grabowski identifies specific ideological uses for the escarpment; it would not only constitute the environmental lungs of the city, but also become a physical narrative

for the entirety of Polish folklore, through an "ethnographic synthesis of all of Poland." Polish highlanders strolling among herds of sheep and past mountain cottages would replace the hermits and caves that famously mediated time in landscape gardens.

Although never realized, these visions, which at a glance seem to collide with BOS's modernist program, were inherent to accepting a doctrine of progress. The reality of ruins in Warsaw could only be forgotten if replaced by a manufactured rural landscape – a fabricated Heritage, as David Lowenthal calls it - that was to form the core of an urban complex!

According to Andrew Herscher, architectural heritage and modernization are directly linked. Describing a photograph depicting a modern building in former Yugoslavia rising behind the "abject" heritage of the pre-modern and pre-socialist architecture of the Kosovar town of Dakovica, Herscher writes: "In one guise, architecture was an object of construction, the 'modern constructions' that manifested what modernization was; in another guise, architecture was an object of destruction, an abject heritage of pre-modernity that made manifest what modernization was not." Heritage, in this understanding, is an invention of modernization itself - the creation of yet uncodified pre-histories.

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"Beside areas outfitted for blocks of residential or industrial buildings, enormous fields of vegetables, pierced by the geometric order of rows of fruit trees, will bloom alongside the rustle of nearby forests. The earth in the Warsaw Urban Ensemble will have to provide the necessary agricultural products – fruits, dairy products, potatoes and bread – to the people of the capital city." (Grabowski, 1945)

Against the backdrop of the 'failed' market economy, Detroit is reinventing itself. Residents propose modes of production and consumption that, some hope, will set the standard for both environmental and social urban sustainability. In the context of urban farms and non-profits that operate successfully, the city of Detroit is seeking the professional guidance of Dan Pitera who runs an alternative design practice out of the School of Architecture at the University of Detroit Mercy. Pitera's philosophy of collaborative design has led him to redefine traditional concepts of client and architect in favour of a cooperative model based on combining the professional competencies of the architect with on-the-ground knowledge of community members to propose joint projects where participation is not just tokenism.

One project that is noteworthy, is what

View of Detroit Conservatory at the Belle Isle Botanical Society. (Jerzy Elżanowski, 2010)

We surf the waves of capitalism
from crest to trough and back again
but the funny thing is
that no matter how often we ride the wave,
nobody notices it's wet.
When we are on the crest,
we believe that we have climbed a mountain
through our own virtuous efforts,
when we are in the trough,
we believe that we have fallen into a pit
through our own vice.

ADAM GOPNIK
excerpt from *Paris to the Moon*

Pitera calls the *amoeba* project. The concept is simple: In a city such as Detroit, which owns large numbers of individual lots as a result of foreclosures, but has no money to buy land for planned development, why not weave a city project over existing lots and redefine traditional notions of centralized, rigid, and geometrically contained public space? *Amoeba* would not only utilize abandoned land, but also abandoned infrastructure, turning factories into multilevel agricultural operations and residential buildings into greenhouses. Farming, in Pitera's project, takes the place of commerce which can consistently be found in almost every urban environment, differentiating it from the rural.

The current state of the Warsaw escarpment is relevant to Detroit (and Pitera's *amoeba* particularly) in two ways. Geographically, the *skarpa* is a continuous green space that weaves through and connects existing city parks to create a successful meandering pubic space. It can be used as a relaxing way to pass through the city, but can also be accessed at any point along its length.

Perhaps more importantly, BOS's early post-war proposals (partially realized) for the *skarpa* included urban agriculture as a necessary counterpart to de-densification. An enormous city that takes up what would otherwise be agricultural land, argued BOS planners, cannot sustain itself without devoting some of that green space to farming. Since densification is out of the question in Detroit now, embracing low density looks like the only solution.

Yet in implementing this solution, one cannot ignore the consequences of pushing the urban – rural boundaries to a point where either the urban disintegrates or the rural becomes semi-urban. One must question why we hold that boundary so dear, and perhaps the picturesque can be one of the tools that can help.

In Warsaw, architects invoked the picturesque not only as a pre-existing intellectual model that could be reorganized to promote a modernist urban logic, but also as a way to deal with catastrophe and its aftermath in the context of rapid change framed as progress. The mechanism of nostalgia, used frequently in different guises and under different names in the picturesque tradition, helps to fabricate a sense of longing for a place that does not exist. In early post-war Warsaw it was employed in a context where the present could no longer be imagined. BOS framed the removal of dense urban morphologies in favour of the semi-urban, semi-rural within the acceptable boundaries of the landscape tradition that had always been a part of the city. Elements of the rural that would be objectionable in an urban context (such as farmers, rural dwellings, animals) were to be placed safely in a sanctuary of fabricated heritage that left the rest of the city free to develop along modernist principles.

Historical amusement parks may seem inauthentic, but they provide comfort in an environment that questions the validity of urban dwelling. How will Detroit's administrative bodies negotiate these difficult boundaries and will they be able to successfully convince the population that the rural has a controlled place within the urban? Can urban agriculture - fields for both food and cultural production - literally outgrow the market economy?

ON THE EDGE

JERZY ELŻANOWSKI

Ruins at the mocad

"Only groups, social classes and class fractions capable of revolutionary initiative can take over and realize to fruition solutions to urban problems." (Henri Lefebvre, "Right to the City" in *The Blackwell City Reader,* p. 371.)

In his iconic text, Henri Lefebvre argues for a compassionate city - one which allows for struggle, where utopia and policy stand in a dialectic relationship of *praxis*. The dynamics of the "right to urban life" consider groups of practitioners, political and social fractions in a "[u]topia controlled by dialectical reason [that] serves as a safeguard against (…) visions gone astray." I could not help re-thinking Lefebvre as I sat in a large dark room, in a single storey restaurant building temporarily turned into Detroit's Gallery 555. The meeting was an introduction of two artists imported from Holland (just as I was imported from Germany) to profit from and, as they comforted the audience, to give back to the place.

The conversation in the room focussed on the city – precisely to the topic of the 'right to the city'. Who has a right to be an artist in Detroit? It seems a ludicrous question to ask of a city. Can we even propose that there are groups or individuals who do not have a right to the city – any city? Yet in a city that, as Andrew Herscher argues, lies outside the market economy, survival is about resisting appropriation by the regime of the market. Detroit's artists and farmers face a difficult problem: How to attract like-minded cultural entrepreneurs and at once avoid selling out?

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Warsaw itself is a city of ruins – with 400,000 people living in it. This, no doubt, will be read as a slightly emphatic description of a parallel to the centre of Coventry, to certain badly bombed parts of London, to Plymouth or Southampton.

A citizen of Warsaw could only consider the drawing of such a parallel as the grimmest kind of joke. I saw those endless vistas of ruin for the first time silhouetted against the evening sky as we drove in from the airport. From my hotel window what had once been the Central Station loomed up like a super-airship hangar, kicked and crumpled by a giant football-boot. Here surely was the original Abomination of Desolation – "our time ended in blood and broken bricks" I tried to imagine the feelings of people living in the middle of it all. I expected the next day I would have to steel myself to face crowds apathetic with despair, grey-faced with hunger, stolid with resignation to the inevitable. But it is the astonishing fact that the chief impression made upon the visitor by Warsaw is not its ruin but the vitality of its inhabitants. That vitality burns like a torch among its crumbled houses. The people live in cellars ; in holes or dugouts hollowed into the ground, roofed with corrugated iron or tarpaulins ; in odd rooms which have remained comparatively unharmed among the wreckage of houses, entered often only by what was once a window, or up a tottering staircase. They have no lighting, no heating, no telephones. Their water must be carried by hand. Sanitary conditions are beyond description. Yet they do not merely live. They live eagerly and with pride.

For the first time a line of tram cars began to run during my visit. They were wreathed with garlands. The shops are either rough shack-like places, set perilously between shattered buildings, or mere booths along the streets. But it seems that one out of every three or fours sells flowers. Their many-coloured gaiety flaunts itself, as it were in the teeth of the reason and belief which would groan that Warsaw can never recover. The same spirit has set high on the list of rebuilding priorities the restoration of one of the principal theatres. It has been planned that the theatre shall reopen in the first week of November – a beau geste paralleled by the reply made to me by a Pole whom I asked why German prisoners had not been brought to repair the destruction they had wrought: "Only Poles must rebuild the capital of Poland," he said.

Correspondence from Poland by the English writer Val Gielgud, included in the weekly "Spectator" (28.IX.1945) - excerpt.

It's my first week in Detroit and I'm sitting on a porch across from a boarded up house on Moran Street. Looking south, down the street, I see a few burned out shells made of studs and siding - but only until my glance hits the municipality of Hamtramck. There they stop. Hamtramck is a smaller autonomous administrative body and, perhaps due to the high Bangladeshi immigration and the persistent Polish residents, it has partially evaded the crisis of depopulation in Detroit. This process has been restructuring Detroit from an urban or suburban sprawl to a curious half urban, half rural economy based almost entirely outside the rules of the real estate market.

In Detroit, writes Andrew Herscher, *"what usually appears to be the 'ruin' of the city … becomes projective and potential. Reciprocally, the values that are conventionally understood to support the reconstruction of the city (optimization, capitalization, efficiency, functionality) are, by contrast, banal at best and destructive at worst."* (Herscher, "Detroit Unreal Estate Agency" *Volume* 18 2008, p. 95.)

The boarded up house I'm looking at is the Powerhouse project by a local painter and architect couple Mitch Cope and Gina Reichert of Design 99 (http://www.visitdesign99.com). The Powerhouse is an artist residence, studio space and art installation carved out of typical Detroit housing stock. Gina and Mitch's work from the Powerhouse (the utilitarian art objects they use as both tool and product) has been exhibited at a refurbished downtown dealership turned exhibition space - Detroit's new Museum of Contemporary Art. The work is professionally arranged against a backdrop of trendy green stripes that carry the group's name. In front, a small striped construction machine - a bobcat renamed 'hoodcat' - aligns with the wall painting. The composition is a three-dimensional logo - a sort of manifesto of design as work. (http://www.mocadetroit.org).

The porch I'm sitting on is very hot. The wind is strong and blows down the seemingly unending tunnel of flimsy metal front porches to my right. This is Filter Detroit - an artists' residence and local archive in the making. The Powerhouse across the street is very plain. The side is painted in stripes reminiscent of the work of Berlin architects Sauerbruch Hutton. Down the street, just out of my line of sight is a burned out house - a ruin waiting for demolition, reconstruction or - and perhaps most probably on this particular street - an intervention from a local artist.

The research group I'm part of meets the current director of the Museum of Modern Art and we have a discussion about the placement of art back in the community. He asks if a utilitarian art piece can be put back to work in a community after it's been exhibited in the museum? He introduces Design 99 as a practice that contributes to the community in Hamtramck. We're all surprised at the error - Powerhouse is not actually in Hamtramck. A colleague responds that the notion of community is ill-defined here and asks if claims on the part of activist artists that art can change or make community might be overstated.

Next to the hoodcat composition several large polygonal plywood cones or wedges are scattered throughout the space. They

are iterations of a blocking / art device meant to serve at once as a lock and an art installation. The third element of the exhibit consists of a neat rectangular opening cut into a white museum box; the bottom third of the opening is stuffed with stones, bricks, grass, mud and trash and the rest plugged with one of the 'neighbourhood wedges.' The composition is convincing - a window into the reality of half-ruined Detroit - but its implications on authenticity in the city are disturbing, instantiating what Herscher criticizes as the speculative
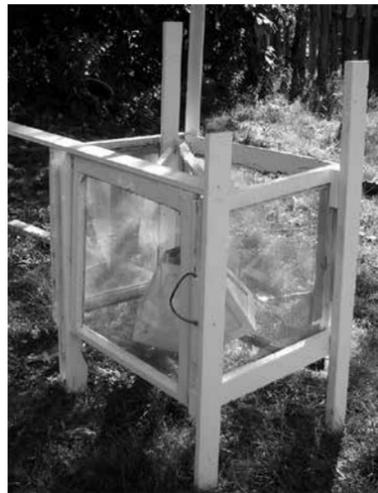
"aesthetics of sublime urban ruins."

I look up and see the Powerhouse. It too has a neighbourhood wedge; this time on site and in context, balanced over the property fence - presumably installed as a deterrent against trespassers. Painted in camouflage, the piece is reminiscent of the nose of a wartime aircraft dropped in place by the striped hoodcat.

Thinking of the MOCAD installation I'm suddenly reminded of the dioramas and barricades made of rubble and debris found in a Warsaw museum that celebrates the city's uprising of 1944. The Warsaw Uprising added hundreds of thousands of deaths to the close to half million who had already perished, and directly contributed to an attempt by the Germany army to annihilate the city. The museum is an award-winning multimedia project where filmed testimonies, throbbing walls, suspended air plane models, and loud footsteps of German soldiers accompany dozens of manufactured ruins: fake graves, walls, bricks, lintels, and reconstructed sewer systems litter the museum floors.

On the back porch of Filter Detroit, I talk to Fred (not his real name) about Detroit's relationship to the car. When I imply that Detroit might just be done for, that, predicated on the irresistible freedom that the automobile guarantees Americans, it might as well be based on self-annihilation, Fred exclaims, 'You can't kill Detroit. It's been a fort for 300 hundred years and you can't kill it just like you can't kill the car.' Perhaps Herscher claims a similar immortality for Detroit, redefining the idea of sustainability in the city, arguing that Detroit presents an alternative 'unreality' outside the reality of hegemony.

I can't help seeing wartime rhetoric and wartime camaraderie and methods of wartime subsistence in the motor city. Yet this is not a city in combat. There is no clear enemy and the danger felt in the first ill-lit

hour upon arrival subsides day by day. The respectful community takes over and, at least on Moran, eyes, to invoke Jane Jacobs, are always on the street.

I go around to the back, and start painting my ruin. I spent the morning putting together an installation made of material I found in the area. It looks like trash nailed together and I begin slathering it with white and then green paint (as the white runs out) in the hopes that it might turn into something. Architects and designers staying in the house are savvy to the pitfalls of bad contemporary art. They display a typical mixture of cynicism and curiosity. What are you doing? - they ask. I answer simply that all this discussion about the place of site specific art in the community (however defined) needs a spontaneous response in trying to make something! I test the words on the Design 99 website: "transformation can happen in a natural way, if we only take a look, think out-of-the-box and take action." Wordsmithing is not always enough, so I give myself three hours total and I make a box. I take pieces of ruin and sanitize it, manipulate it for aesthetic purposes, experimenting, I naively hope, with Herscher's non- hegemonic aesthetics.

"What is unremarkable to the market is the productive work of the non-productive play that rewards or compensates for that work. What is remarkable, then, is the privileging of play over work or even the blurring of boundaries between the two. Thus the unreality of unreal estate can be considered in terms of the practices, activities, processes and events these estates facilitate, each which fall between or reconsider 'work' and 'play': curating and displaying objects without value; tending and harvesting sites that do not yield gains or accumulations; playing with and for time; hanging on and hanging out; getting into and getting by. This unreality can also be considered in terms of architecture: the unstable, interim, ephemeral and provisional 'building' that is placed on unreal estate, less in denial of its unreality than in participation with it." (Herscher, 2008, p. 95)

Am I "curating and displaying objects without value?" Or does Herscher write of something altogether more real - an uncontrived, perhaps uncritical, *living*. At a reading of the first version of this text, Gina blatantly tells me that I've missed the point by fetishizing the ruin. I say it's on purpose, but why did I do it? Somehow, despite my criticism I've continued in the direction of the manipulated, manufactured, staged ruin. How is it that destruction by war, by natural disaster or by social decline can all be represented in similar aesthetic terms? And why do the commemoration of a wartime battle, and the intuitive response of a designer and curator to the particular conditions of Detroit, take the same form? Is this similarity intentional or coincidental?

Still sitting on the porch of Filter Detroit, in the distance I hear the clear sounds of demolition. Wood, metal brick and stone hit against each other and produce a tectonic symphony. The corpse of each abandoned house waits for its destiny - paradoxically tectonically more alive in its transitory ruined state than those well-kept bungalows just down the street in Hamtramck. I'm too curious about the noises to continue writing. This text is terminated by the fact of demolition.