

# Abandoned Potential

christopher bretecher

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## Abstract

An abandoned building contains distinct qualities that cannot be observed in occupied architecture of daily life. However, these distinct qualities are difficult to experience since the moment the building is entered this inhabitation negates, to varying degrees, the very definition of an abandoned building. As a space without regulations and restrictions, when entered an abandoned building can become a transient vehicle fulfilling one's innate desires. These spaces can play host to a series of alternate functions, limitless experiences and countless possibilities, restricted only by the inhabitant's imagination.

As individual desires and functions occur within the abandoned building, it is possible that these interventions and/or interactions damage the very qualities that we identify as abandoned. How then, might we positively interact with the abandoned qualities encased within these spaces? And, to what degree is it possible that architectural interpretation may preserve and enhance the unique qualities of the abandoned building?

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## The Abandoned Potential

### *: abandoned buildings and their contemporary uses*

Abandoned buildings have held my interest for quite some time. During the peak of the recent recession in 2008, I stumbled across several remarkable statistics regarding the city of Detroit. In particular, my attention was captured by the rate at which banks were foreclosing on mortgages held by homeowners. I was struck by the fact that the population of Detroit has been on a steady decline from its 1.8 million plus inhabitants in the late 1950s to less than half this number today.<sup>i</sup> The result is a tremendous number of vacated and abandoned industrial, commercial and residential properties throughout the city.

These numbers intrigued me and in the summer of 2009 I decided to visit Detroit. During my brief trip I found myself walking through the city's empty streets filled with an immense curiosity and an array of perplexing emotions. The sudden emptiness of the city was frightening, and the decay of the many surrounding buildings in the city's core was almost unbelievable. What kinds of events had these houses witnessed over their lives? Where had their occupants gone? What stories could they tell? Peripheral thoughts of mortality entered my mind, challenging me to engage with the temporality of life and the city. I felt insecure and yet fascinated by this eerie landscape. However, upon closer inspection of the city I also discovered many beautiful areas with plenty of inspired, proud residents creating new and interesting projects, fighting to instill new life in their communities. Some of these projects will be later discussed as precedents for the work involved in this thesis.

It is no secret that the abandoned buildings of Detroit and the plethora of other abandoned properties around the world stir similar emotions and interest for countless other individuals. The term *Urban Explorer* has been used to describe people like myself, whose interests in the abandoned world have driven us to seek out and enter abandoned spaces.<sup>ii</sup> An extensive network of information is available

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<sup>i</sup> Data retrieved from Southeast Michigan Council of Governments, (U.S. Census Bureau and SEMCOG: 2007-2008), <[www.semco.org](http://www.semco.org)>.

<sup>ii</sup> "Urban exploration - the study of parts of civilization that are normally unseen or off-limits, such as abandoned structures, drains, sewers, tunnels, etc." "Dictionary.com's 21st Century Lexicon," Dictionary.com, accessed February 18, 2011, <[http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/urban\\_exploration](http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/urban_exploration)>.

Source:  
*Abandoned house*, Detroit,  
Personal photograph by author,  
(2009).



Source:  
*Graffiti artist*, Quebec, Personal  
photograph by author, (2010).



to assist the urban explorer with this pastime, including published books, magazines, and perhaps most importantly, networking web-sites such as the Urban Exploration Resource.<sup>iii</sup> The abundance of these web-sites helps urban explorers share their photos and direct their peers to 'new', interesting, hard to access, rapidly decaying, and often dangerous abandoned locations. For the urban explorer it is difficult to explain this impalpable interest toward abandoned spaces. Professor of Geography, Dr. Tim Edensor discusses our attraction to these spaces in his book *Industrial Ruins*. Edensor begins by elaborating on the relationship between abandoned spaces and the qualities of "decay and death." Further he writes that to enter these places is "a confrontation with the unspeakable and one's own vulnerability and mortality, a diversion which is also a way of confronting death and danger and imagining it in order to disarm it, to name and articulate it in order to deal with it."<sup>iv</sup> The urban explorer is able to confront these issues simply by entering the abandoned building, exploring the spaces, and leaving without a trace. Apart from the urban explorer, there are a variety of other more utilitarian encounters that occur with abandoned buildings: the graffiti artist uses the abandoned wall as a canvas; the vagabond seeks temporary shelter in an abandoned building; the lazy pet owner finds the abandoned lot a convenient place to avoid handling dog droppings; and the wild plant seed finds refuge from the relentless wind and takes root in the cracks of an abandoned rooftop.<sup>v</sup>

The uninhibited mystique, unusual aesthetic, and unscripted program adds an alluring quality to abandoned buildings and sets them apart from the architecture of the inhabited city. While the abandoned building no longer has a specific purpose, it contains distinct traces of its history and is characterized by the decay it exhibits. Edensor explains that these places have the ability to "shock us back into a vague past" and conjure "involuntary memories."<sup>vi</sup> These thoughts and emotions are ambiguous and may inexplicably disturb one person while simultaneously exciting another. Because of their ambivalence, these places offer experiences not normally found in occupied space. In day to day life, we tend to tune out abandoned buildings; however, a closer look and deeper understanding reveals their truly luring character. These buildings challenge our image of architecture and the city,

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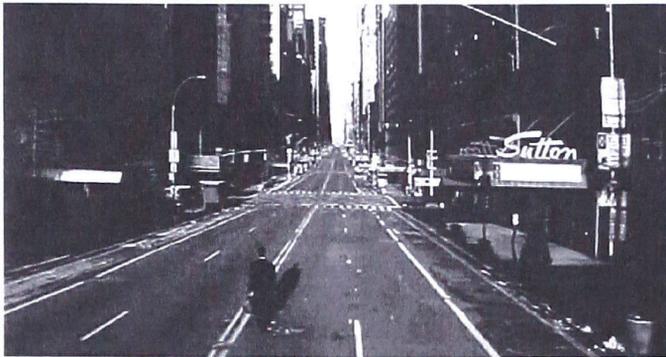
iii Urban Exploration Resource, accessed March 19, 2011, <<http://www.uer.ca/>>.

iv Tim Edensor, *Industrial ruins: spaces, aesthetics, and materiality*, (Oxford, U.K: Berg, 2005), 13.

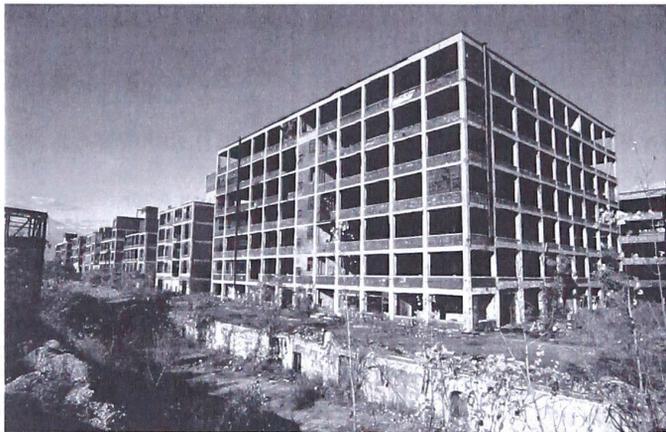
v For an expanded reading on the contemporary uses of abandoned space see Edensor, "2 - The Contemporary Uses of Industrial Ruins," 21-51.

vi Edensor, "5- The Spaces of Memory and the Ghosts of Dereliction," 125-164.

Source:  
*Devil's Advocate*, Dir. Taylor Hackford, Perf. Keanu Reeves, Warner Bros. Pictures, (1997).



Source:  
Albert Duce, 2009, *Wikipedia*. (April 23, 2010), accessed March 28, 2011, <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Abandoned\\_Packard\\_Automobile\\_Factory\\_Detroit\\_200.jpg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Abandoned_Packard_Automobile_Factory_Detroit_200.jpg)>.



Source:  
*Colosseum*, Rome, Personal photograph by author, (2010).



and confront our sense of stability in daily life. The abandoned building is seemingly reaching out, longing to be re-discovered and engaged.

*The industrial ruin is both a concrete place but also, because it has lost its identity, a hollow place that can engender and contain fantasy, desires, expectations. - Gil M Doron<sup>vii</sup>*

### **: what is an abandoned space?**

Although there is no one single characteristic or specific trait that defines abandoned buildings, their transitory existence is located between *emptiness* and *ruin*. By defining these outlying terms we can further our understanding of what is abandoned space, or more specifically what abandoned space is not.

Empty space may be defined as a space lacking something essential, most obviously, people. Office spaces in cities across the world are emptied each evening. However, this emptiness is temporary and recurring. These spaces are not left to decay. This recurring type of emptiness is not a unique phenomenon and fails to attract the imagination in the same way that an abandoned building does. To see the distinction consider the following example: A walk through a city's empty streets in the middle of the night evokes emotions far different from those experienced in the same deserted streets the following afternoon (as I experienced in Detroit). The quiet in the evening is normal and goes relatively unnoticed. It is the unexpectedness of the quiet or emptiness in the afternoon that captures our attention. This is a popular theme in dystopian fiction.<sup>viii</sup> In such stories we find ourselves experiencing empty city streets alongside an often bewildered, confused, and profoundly perturbed protagonist. The emptiness appears to have no explanation and therefore brings with it a sense of past disaster or impending doom.

On the opposing end of the spectrum is the *ruin*. While inevitably derived from abandoned space, a ruin is generally a building in an extreme and advanced state of decay that has some historical value. Ruins are often designated as a heritage sites, historical attractions, or museums, and as such have

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vii Gil M. Doron, "...badlands, blank space, border vacuums, brown fields, conceptual Nevada, Dead Zones...", Field Journal 1 (University of Sheffield: 2007), 16, <[www.field-journal.org](http://www.field-journal.org)>

viii The first one which comes to mind is the popular film "Devil's Advocate", however this has also been a subject in a number of episodes in the popular 1960's television series "The Twilight Zone", and written about in several of J.G Ballard's short stories.

become *presences* rather than *absences*. Often there is a required level of maintenance to avoid further decay. The word ruin has the ability to conjure feelings of past glories and eras of human triumph, as in the ruins of an ancient castle or a grand church. Failing to meet the requirements worthy of preservation, ruins merge with the landscape, degrading to the point of fusing with nature. Because of their regulated function, distant past, regular maintenance, and/or extreme state of decay, ruins do not fall under my definition of abandoned spaces.

The abandonment of a building is usually an unplanned and undesired occurrence. Differing from empty or ruin, an abandoned building is a permanently yet more recently vacated building. Its lifespan is therefore a temporary one, situated between emptiness and ruin.

Lastly, I must situate the term *industrial ruin* in this discussion. Although this term is used in much of the literature on sites that have fallen into disuse, I have avoided adopting the term because I find it misleading. In my opinion the term *industrial ruin* connotes a condition that is very different from that of the abandoned building that I study in this thesis. As I indicated above, including the word ruin (which is typically associated with a building or structure of historic value and prestige), puts a positive veil over the implicit negativity of the word *abandoned* in abandoned buildings. My intention is not to romanticize the condition, but simply to bring attention to it.

For the abandoned building there is a general lack of interest in its current state or structure. It is in essence a property that has been discarded by organized society, urban developers, and government planners. The decay of an abandoned building evokes the idea of danger and may contain potentially harmful debris, whereas the decay of a ruin evokes a more pleasant environs. The younger age of an abandoned building as compared to that of a ruin allows even the novice explorer to become a temporary modern day archeologist. The fact that abandoned buildings are deemed unworthy of preservation confirms that if it enters into a state of actual ruin then its unique qualities will be permanently lost.

### : *potentiality and interpretations*

As the number of abandoned properties increases so do the discussions of their future and the consequences they bear upon their surrounding area. However, as abandoned buildings propagate throughout our cities, it has become evident that there exists little discussion on the potentials held within their current abandoned state. Gil M. Doron, in his widely published essay, *...badlands, blank space, border vacuums, brown fields, conceptual Nevada, Dead Zones...* explains that while this imagery has existed in the architectural discourse “since at least antiquity... we have still yet to understand what exactly it is and what its potentialities are.”<sup>ix</sup> While Doron’s term *dead zone* suggests a negative space, there is evidence that these spaces are not without value, albeit a different kind of value from that we associate with consumer society. The current and ongoing engagement with these spaces points to an area of great potential worth and is manifested in countless ways. The creative interpretations of abandoned spaces may fulfill basic human needs and desires when authored by the graffiti artist or vagabond, or they may be less tangible as in the case of the urban explorer, who finds potential simply from the observation of the abandoned building.

My intention is to study potential *interpretations*<sup>x</sup> that can be accomplished through a meaningful consideration of the abandoned space, while being mindful of the impact that these interventions might have on the experience of the place.

*How many maps, in the descriptive or geographical sense, might be needed to deal exhaustively with a given space, to code and decode all its meanings and contents? It is doubtful whether a finite number can ever be given in answer to this sort of question.*

*What we are most likely confronted with here is a sort of instant infinity.* -Henri Lefebvre<sup>xi</sup>

While the number of possible interpretations is infinite, it is important to understand that there exists a degree or range of abandoned potential. An interpretation that too aggressively alters or occupies the building will remove the abandoned qualities and it will cease to remain abandoned. The skeptic will point out that by its very definition the moment we enter an abandoned building it stops being

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ix Doron, 22.

x Interpretation is the preferred term used because of its ability to signify the plethora of meanings, readings, writings, inhabitations, occupations, tests, works, interventions, et cetera, tangible or otherwise available within an abandoned space.

xi Henri Lefebvre, *The production of space*, (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1991), 85.

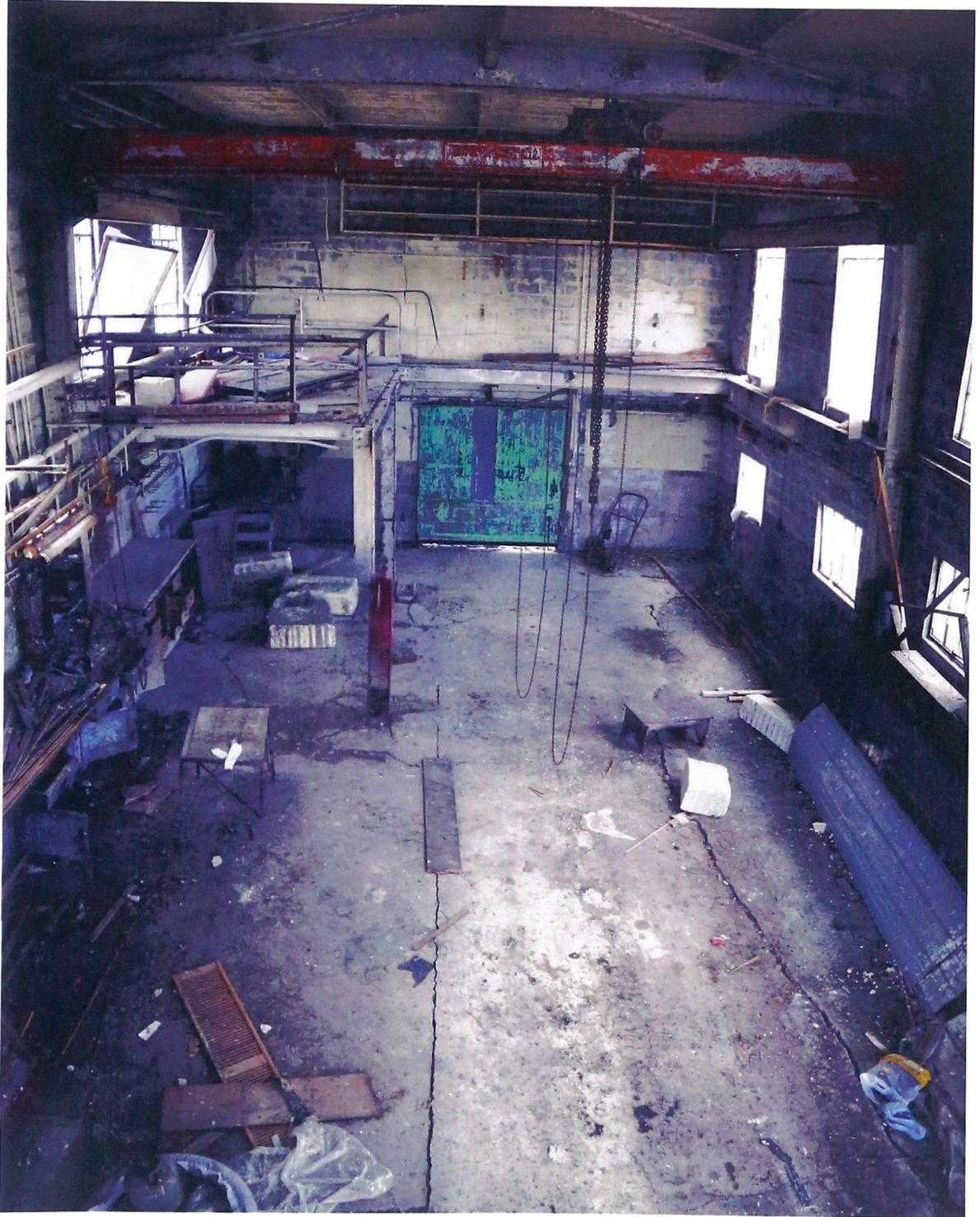
abandoned. I disagree. I believe that it is possible to exploit the potential of the abandoned building to a degree beyond mere human presence, while still maintaining the quality of being abandoned.

As a method of empirical progression I have performed a series of interpretational experiments within a single abandoned building. The intention has been to progressively increase the complexity of the interpretations (in terms of construction and occupation) while still preserving the abandoned character of the site, in an attempt to discover at what point that quality ceases to exist.

Each level interpretation has been defined and studied using a procedure similar to that of a laboratory report, customized for the purpose of this research. The reports document a single or multiple interpretations of the abandoned building and progress in chronological order. Each subsequent intervention attempts to capitalize on the understanding gained in the previous report, while pushing forward in terms of degree of intensity. The reports move forward gradually to reach a definitive moment wherein the *abandoned potential* is removed or damaged thereby defining the potentials threshold.

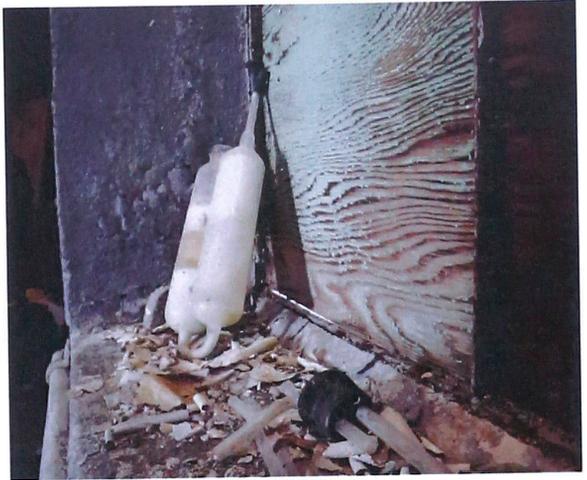
The typical scientific lab report includes a relevant selection of the following sections: Title Page, Abstract, Nomenclature, Introduction, Methods and Materials, Experimental Procedure, Results, Discussion, Conclusion, References, Appendices, and Further Reading. I have found it appropriate to compose the lab reports used in this study, of the following sections:

- + Outline - The level of interpretation being tested.
- + Precedents - Similar interpretations done on or about different abandoned buildings pertaining to the degree or level of interaction.
- + Possible Interpretations - The possible interpretations under consideration at this level;
- + Experimental Procedure - The interpretations chosen and how they have been carried out including the materials and participants involved in the process.
- + Discussion - How the interpretation is seen and understood by others and myself. This includes any irregularities or unexpected occurrences during the test.
- + Conclusion - The immediate and lasting effects of the test and how each level of interpretation affects the qualities perceived as abandoned.



## The Site

The abandoned building in question is located approximately 50 kilometers north of Ottawa, Ontario, near the community of Wakefield, Quebec. I briefly spoke with the owner, Mr. David Morrison, in June 2010 to request permission to study and potentially alter the building. His extreme disinterest and ease of consent are both indicative of society's general attitude towards abandoned buildings, and Mr. Morrison's affable character. Beyond this exchange little else about the history and ownership of the building is known. I have purposely avoided making inquiries, in order to capitalize upon my unfamiliarity with the site, and develop an independent understanding of it. The building's original purpose, period of use, length of abandonment, and other specific details are therefore unknown to myself, rendering this building analogous to other abandoned spaces.



## Nomenclature

In the following research 9 separate levels of interpretation have been conducted. Each of these levels increases in its degree of interaction and intervention. Their nomenclature is as follows.

- 1- Muse: "be absorbed in thought"\* No direct alteration of the space, only thoughts and imagery roused.
- 2- Occupy: "be situated in or at"\* Interaction directly with the building, no permanent physical alteration.
- 3- Modify: "make partial or minor changes"\* Minimal alteration, non-structural.
- 4- Alter: "make structural changes"\* Involved permanent alteration, potentially limiting the buildings experience and lifespan.
- 5- Install: "place or fix in a position ready for use"\* The installation of a new architectural detail.
- 6- Repurpose: "practical use or purpose in design"\* Repurpose the space for a temporary event.
- 7- Promote: "support or actively encourage"\* Highlight as a unique destination.
- 8- Adapt: "make suitable for a new use or purpose"\* Construct a new function within the building.
- 9- Possess: "have as a belonging to one"\* active ownership and/or permanent occupation.

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\* New Oxford American Dictionary. 2nd edition. U.K: Oxford University Press, 2005.

## Muse

### *The First Level of Interpretation*

#### Outline

This experiment investigates how a low-level human presence in the abandoned building and the subsequent inspired interpretations alter the perceived qualities of abandoned space. This presence may occur by physically entering the abandoned space or via a secondhand experience, e.g. viewing a photograph of the space. The abandoned space must not be permanently altered in any fashion. If physical contact occurs, in keeping with the urban explorer's motto, the interpreter may "take only pictures, [and] leave only footprints".<sup>i</sup> In other words, the first level of interpretation occurs when an experience of the abandoned building influences the output of an individual's work. The emotions stirred, words sparked, or images inspired by this encounter are boundless.

#### Precedents

Photographer *Todd Hido* has created an extensive body of work by photographing the inside of foreclosed homes.<sup>ii</sup> Simply by gaining access and documenting the findings, Hido is able to expose both the emptiness and traces left by the former occupants. This residue haunts the space, creating a narrative open to interpretation; the faded markings on a wall where a painting has been hurriedly removed; or a lingering office chair too cumbersome to fit into the final load of the moving truck. In an ironic twist, Hido's work, which depends on the abundance of foreclosures, also draws attention to these injustices and the plight of the current financial times, by exposing these tragedies.

In 1972 Robert Smithson gave a lecture to the architecture students at the University of Utah titled, *Hotel Palenque 1969-72*.<sup>iii</sup> This lecture was centered entirely on a hotel that Smithson stayed at while on a trip to visit the ancient Mayan ruins of Palenque, in Mexico. While there, he became infatuated with the abandoned and dismantled parts of his hotel and its architectural curiosities. Smithson's

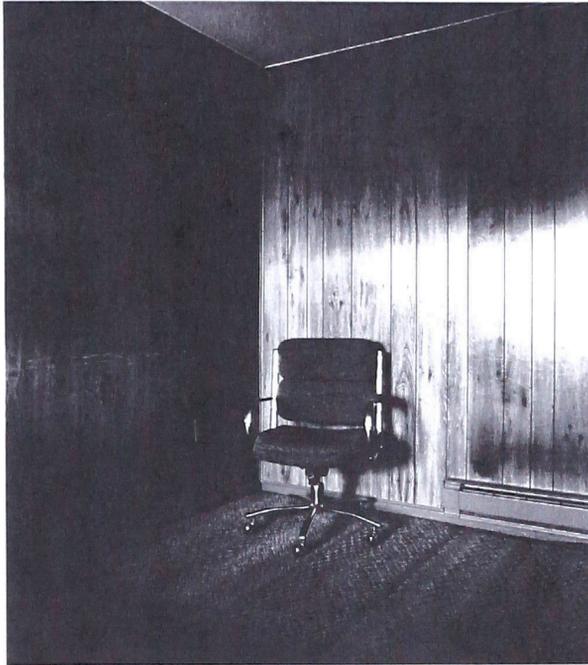
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i Andrew Emond, "Worksongs: Take Only Pictures, Leave Only Footprints," Interview by Rannie Turingan, Photojunkie, (August 22, 2005), accessed March 27, 2011, <<http://www.photojunkie.ca/archive/2005/08/worksongs-take-only-pictures-leave-only-footprints/>>.

ii Todd, Hido, *Between the two*, (Portland, Or.: Nazraeli P/JGS, 2006).

iii Robert Smithson, *Insert Robert Smithson: Hotel Palenque, 1969-72*, (Salt Lake City: University of Utah, Lecture, 1972).

Source:  
Todd Hido, *Between the two*, (Port-  
land, Or.: Nazraeli P/JGS, 2006)



Source:  
Robert Smithson, *Insert Robert  
Smithson: Hotel Palenque, 1969-72*,  
(Salt Lake City: University of Utah,  
lecture 1972), 7.



discussion drew many symbolic comparisons alluding to the culture and architecture of the ancient Mayan civilization through his rigorous understanding of Hotel Palenque. His stories concentrate on specific elements within the space; a single plinth, a lone palm tree, or a pile of bricks. As he interprets the characteristics and ponders the creation of these details, Smithson draws grand conclusions of the Mexican culture and way of life. This lecture acts as a method of understanding the embodied cultural references within the seemingly random decay and abandonment of a building.

### **Possible Interpretations**

*Text* - Any style of writing created as a result of experiencing the building. Poetry, short stories, analytical writing, etc.

*Depictions* - Drawings interpreting the space; maps of existing phenomena; and collages.

*Photographs* - Photographs taken inside the building without physically altering the objects within it.

### **Experimental Procedure**

*Text* - After experiencing the space on two different occasions and documenting it with photographs and video, I began writing about the space, producing a poetic interpretation, analytical survey, investigative report, and a short story, in respective order. The poetic interpretation is a subjective piece that describes the emotions that I felt during my visits and the associations that I made based on the character of the building, its rooms and the objects within them. This poetic entry draws a metaphorical understanding of the space in a manner similar to the Hotel Palenque lecture. The analytical survey is a more objective inventory of the physical aspects of the space. And the investigative report, and short story imagine the former use of the space based on the remaining traces of its past.

*Mapping* - I created two maps exploring the existing occupancy of the abandoned building. One plots out the likely pathway of a human interloper/trespasser. The other plots the observed flights and perches of birds within and around the building.

*Collage* - The first collage held to the constraint of only using images that I photographed within the space, while in the subsequent collages I used images from different sources.

## Discussion

The writings make it abundantly clear that there are a vast number of possible interpretations available to each author. The reading of a building is limited only by the imagination of the author. In writing about the building it can offer a better understanding of the physicality of the site and its abandoned qualities as well as insight into how the author personally feels about the space. Factual writing, such as a detailed history of the building, may diminish its sense of mystery. However, for many, the abandoned building becomes a muse that inspires the creation of literature and art. Writing about a space requires one to ask specific questions about its qualities, to create a personal connection to it. As such, the mysteries of abandonment become augmented through their interpretation within a text.

After the completion of the poetic description I showed it to two people in order to compare their understanding of the text. One of them had never entered or seen the building, while the other had been inside on several occasions, often photographing the space. Jacqueline Bretecher, who was unfamiliar with the site, found that from the hard poetic language she could easily create a mental image of the space, in particular what stood out was the dirty and decaying aesthetic of the building. Jen Stewart, who had previously visited the space, took more notice of the poetic interpretation's emphasis on humanizing certain relationships between objects inside of the building. The difference between these two readings highlights a number of ways in which a text on the abandoned may itself be interpreted.

The maps of the site can be seen simply as a form of documentation; an informative tool for understanding the site. Or they can be seen as poetic interpretations that lead the viewer to experience the world differently. The mapping of the birds offers a new point of view, allowing us to imagine the window as an entrance or the building as a resting point in the landscape.

While mapping can be an extremely informative tool for understanding a space, the maps created in this interpretation explain only specifically selected details. Therefore, a degree of mystery remains regarding the physical condition and aesthetic of the building. Similar to the photographs of Todd Hido, the maps likely create a further interest and questioning of the site, rather than increasing its familiarity.

The medium of collage responds well to the condition of the abandoned building by critically

reconstructing and reimagining the space. The collage provides an opportunity to bring the question of abandonment into the political sphere, altering its meaning and contrasting it with other imagery. Collages can address direct questions; for example, by juxtaposing the building in the context of the inhabited city essentially confronting the issues of deterioration, weathering, and decay. In his book *Industrial Ruins* Tim Edensor writes, "...charged with an evident transience, ruins of all sorts have long symbolised the inevitability of death and decay, the fragility of life and of the material world."<sup>iv</sup> Collaging has the ability to visually address these questions and open up the abandoned building to a broader discussion of its contemporary function.

### Conclusion

*After visiting and interpreting this space, does it still feel abandoned?*

The allure in abandoned buildings lies in our desire to discover their mysteries and search for "spaces of fantasy".<sup>v</sup> Humans have an innate desire to explore, and *the unknown* is something that captivates the imagination and draws people toward it. However, if repeatedly entered it is possible that as the abandoned building becomes familiar, some of the excitement may wear off. For myself this has yet to occur, the level of familiarity resulting from entering and re-imagining the abandoned building has provided me with a sense of the great poetic potential embedded in the various modes of interpretation. As for the outsider, the act reading the texts or viewing the imagery from these interpretations is likely to increase their intrigue and encourage them to visit this mysterious environment.

*The Hawthorne Effect* describes the consequence of participants in an experiment altering their behaviour and/or response because of the knowledge that they are being observed.<sup>vi</sup> For many of these tests my role has shifted between both participant and observer. It is difficult to know if I have truly altered my responses as a result of this investigation. However, one undeniable truth remains, that the fascination, excitement, and other elusive emotions still exist and draw me to return time and time again to continue asking deeper questions of the unique quality that exists in this abandoned space.

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<sup>iv</sup> Edensor, 139.

<sup>v</sup> Edensor, 25.

<sup>vi</sup> Michel Anteby and Khurana Rakesh, *A New Vision*, (Harvard Business School, Baker Library | Bloomberg Center: 2010), accessed January 14, 2011, <<http://www.library.hbs.edu/hawthorne/09.html>>.

Written Interpretations  
See Appendix [B]

*The Building appears from the outside to have sunk into the past. Upon closer inspection, I see it is the ground that has elevated beyond it. In a sort of layering up of history even the ground has moved on, forgetting the old structure, frozen in time. Birds fly freely in an out of a massive doorway, as it slowly creeks in the wind resting on rusted hinges. This space has become their readymade aviary. Perhaps in response to this new life filled with airborne inhabitants, the entire east wall has bowed out in the middle, in an attempt to spread its own wings.*

*As I move towards the stairway leading to the second floor, the cracks between cinder blocks become more personal, and the red 'xxx' childishly painted at the hallway landing is less than haunting.*

*Entering into a loft that overlooks the two story aviary, I have apparently stepped into the lowly latrine. The crispy floor is noisy and shifts beneath my feet. The door leading to the toilet bowl loft resonates proudly with a seafoam green. The pride in each paint chip is easily seen shining through the dirt and excrement.*

*The whistle from an old steam engine resonates through the shaky walls. Could I have been transported back to a time when birds still lived outside these walls? No, I recall, the town of Wakefield in all its nostalgia has stripped the old steam engine of its dignity in decay. The train has been held behind, while the others, including this building have carried on to complete their lifecycle.*

*This second story, with its many seafoam thresholds, is spun into a labyrinth of dirty concrete and shards of glass. The inanimate objects have been positioned with the greatest of ignorance and disregard for their intimate life on the floor. In a forced marriage, that surpasses the difficult cultural odds, a wooden stool and urinal have found true love. While just around the corner from one another two chairs missing the same piece long desperately for each other. What a relief it could be to find that their decay is mirrored in each other, that there is another, going through the same.*

*A dead end forces my feet to experience this space once again, in reverse. I'm beginning to understand these cracks, the cinderblocks of the staircases are trying to break free. Steps that have successfully risen an occupant, refuse to be named functionless, and therefore have decided to forgo the compromise with time that the rest of the building has made. Perhaps when they finally break free they will head to the rail line in search of refuge to negotiate their continued service of levitation.*

*Back inside the nest mansion, I capture two desks in the act of love making, so fortunate to have been placed on top of each other. Finally the steam whistle sparks my interest and I use this as an excuse to enter a long corridor in search of sky and smoke. This funnel is decidedly directional, turning around is not an option. For those entering the sharp corner at the end is far too luring to turn back. While for those on the exit pathway, the desire for a stench free breath is overcome only by the fact that your welcome, has also been worn.*

Worker's Story

8:12 a.m

A few minutes late, Chris was relieved to find that the floor chief had not yet arrived. He could tell because the factory doors were always swung open when the boss was in. He set to work, testing and setting up his welding unit. Today was a big day since their project was supposed to be picked up in the evening. After setting up, he headed upstairs to gather the parts necessary to finish the job from the store room. Hopefully Sam would be working the store room Chris thought. She knew the layout of everything much better than anyone else, and on their final day her efficiency would surely help save time.

10:00 a.m

Coffee time couldn't have come sooner, Chris's boss, Jim was already getting on his case. Jim never really did know how to handle stress and generally took it out on the workers. Up in the break room Chris and his co-workers whispered gossip over a cup of burnt coffee, while Jim and the company owner were nearby in their respective offices. Lunch and coffee breaks had been the only times when Chris was able to talk with Jerry and Miguel in the last couple of weeks. Since the project reached its final stages and had grown to over 20ft in height, they had spent most of their time working up in opposite lofts. Two teams had been created: Jerry and Miguel working together in one loft, while Chris had been paired with Ray in the other. They made a good team, Ray had the most experience in the shop but his age was beginning to show, while Chris, being the youngest, still had a lot of zip in his step. Jerry and Miguel were both in their 30's and started working in the factory at the same time, 4 years ago.

3:36 p.m

With only a few hours left Chris and his partner Ray started to lag behind. Chris was getting frustrated because it started to feel like Jim was playing favourites with Jerry and Miguel. He was sure that every time Jim used the overhead crane to rotate the project he would bring it to rest a few inches closer to the other loft. At times Chris was leaning so far out that he could barely operate his tools properly. Ray remained quite calm and steady, their entire time working from the loft space he had never seen Ray drop a single tool or screw. On the contrary, Chris's tools were always slipping out of his hands and would roll under their work. He would have to run down the stairs search for the part and run back up again. Chris felt he must have ran up and down the stairs 20 times a day.

6:43 p.m

Chris was always amazed at the accuracy of the drivers when backing into the garage. Their projects were often so big and delicate that even placing them incorrectly on the truck could damage their work. By now most of the straps were on and their day was almost through. No matter what the stresses were Chris and all of the employees always watched with great pride as their work rolled out of the garage and down the driveway. Another project successfully built.

Explanatory Notes

The building is difficult to age. The facade is relatively clean considering it is an abandoned building. The most obvious signs of dilapidation are the broken windows and their rusted frames. The building contains two discernible sections: One of 2 separate stories. The other a large open space appearing, from the exterior, not unlike a automobile service garage.

The larger open space is accessible through floor to ceiling height swinging doors. The hinged doors are peculiar for such a large space, one would expect a vertical doorway as seen in a garage. The first object of note is a large overhead crane. This explains the doorways being hinged. A vertical operating door would open into the operating space of the crane. The crane appears in-operative but not in total disrepair. The lack of grease stains on the concrete floor rules out the possibility of this space once being used as a mechanical garage. The height, best estimated between 25 and 30 feet would allow for large objects to move easily in and around the space. There are several large tanks for holding compressed gasses, most likely used in welding. There are two lofts on either side of this space. A possible use for these loft spaces could be as a permanent scaffolding, increasing mobility and access vertically. In this scenario I would posit that this space was used as an assemblage factory for large, heavy, steel objects.

The factory space connects into the first and second floor. There are 6 rooms on the second floor, not including one of the loft spaces above the factory. Each of the 6 rooms varies in size. Two of the rooms are sized appropriately for office space, one of them containing a broken desk. Two rooms were most likely washrooms, one still contains a toilet and urinal while the other has the plumbing reminiscent of a bathroom. The remaining two rooms are more ambiguous, they appear too large for office space, and there are no discernible signs of a fixed use. One of them is the front-room to the two office spaces, perhaps an informal break room for the factory workers. The fluorescent light fixtures hanging from the ceiling aid in this conclusion. The final room reveals the most wear, and has a unique C shape. There is very little inside of the room to help with its analysis. It is the last accessible room on the second floor and was perhaps used as a storage area. There is a large cutout connecting into the break room, this could have served as a pick-up/drop-off counter for parts from this potential storage area.

There is restricted access to the first floor, which makes it difficult to speculate on its former function. From the windows one can see that it is currently used for the storage of wood. It appears to have been gutted for such a purpose which renders all attempts to understand its former use virtually impossible. I venture a guess that it would of been similar office space as seen on the second floor.

Visual Survey of abandoned construction

Location: Wakefield, Quebec  
Reference Source: 00 03:44 Video  
Date: 12:44pm - June 6 - 2010

The exterior of the building is concrete cinder block construction. Facing the southern facade two distinct sections of the structure are separated by a central entrance. The eastern section is a large open space, two stories in height. This space contains direct access through large hinged doors on the south wall that are no longer operable. The western section contains two floors with access from the central entryway, which contains a stairway.

There is a fresh layer of gravel around the building which has been built up by approximately six inches in height, above the ground level of the interior of the building. Inside the eastern section the ground is poured in place concrete. Within this large open space there is a heavy steel structure made of interconnected beams supporting the roof and a dysfunctional interior overhead crane. The length of this space is approximately 90 feet in depth and 30 feet in width. There are two loft spaces inside located in the northwest and northeastern corners. Empty shelves, gas storage cylinders, tin siding, along with other dirt and artifacts litter the floor.

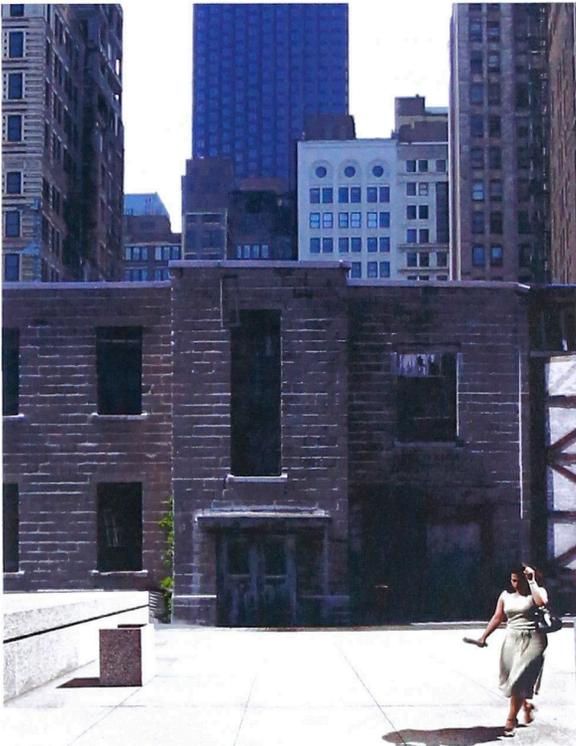
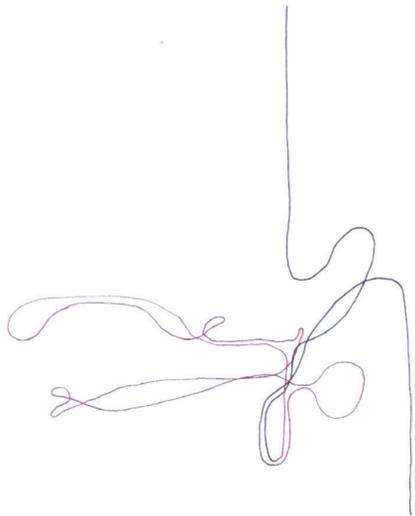
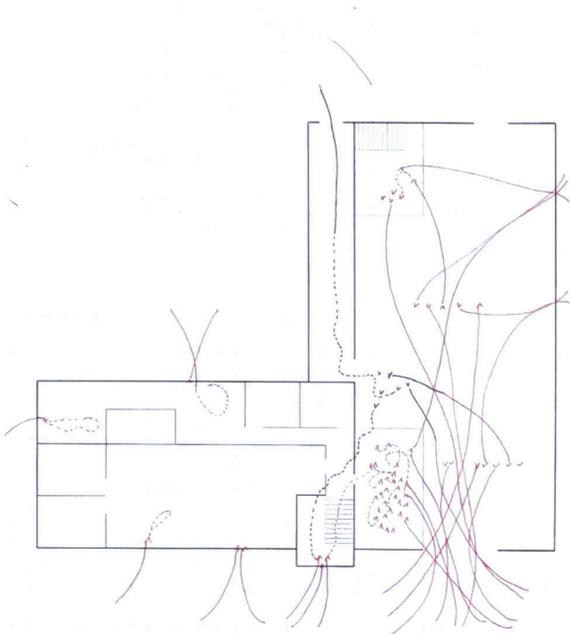
An open threshold connects the eastern section to the central foyer of the entryway. Here two desks are stacked on top of each other and miscellaneous items, mostly wooden slats, litter the floor. From this particular area there is access to all sections of the building.

The stairs leading up to the second floor are secure, however a slight list in the treads has occurred and the cinder block construction of the stair well is riddled with large cracks. There is a small amount of graffiti at the middle landing, a sign of vandalism. The railing, stairs, and radiator are all badly rusted, and the paint on the walls is visibly peeling with large chips scattered on the floor.

The second floor has many rooms laid out along an L shaped hallway. The first door at the top of the stairs leads out on to one of the loft spaces which provides a view out over the large space. This floor is covered in bird droppings. Each room of the second floor is varying in size and there are 7 doorways in total. All of the rooms are largely vacant save for the dirt, shards of broken glass and the occasional broken desk and/or chair. The floor is concrete and is still of sound construction. There is less weathering in this section of the building. The only discernible space is a bathroom which contains a toilet and urinal. Many of the walls and all of the doorways on the second floor have been painted in a vibrant turquoise.

The first floor of the Western section is locked. Through the exterior windows it appears to be used for lumber storage.

There are few openings into the building. A final entrance is found on the Northern facade which quickly turns into a hallway. This runs between the East and West sections of the building, connecting with the large open space. This hallway is approximately 50 feet in length and 5 feet in width.



## On Documentation Methods

Aside from the tools necessary to complete each interpretation, ranging from a pen to a reciprocating saw, there also needs to be a mechanism for studying the before, after, and during effects of each experiment. Early on in my study I realized that the perfect measurement for understanding these tests would be the stop frame video. This technique allows me to visually shorten the documentation of my individual tests (sometimes lasting many hours or days), down to a matter of seconds. The stop frame is therefore crucial in helping to write about, explain to observers, and understand the methods of the interpretations. It also serves as a control for the experiments. Using the same tools and techniques allows for a more accurate understanding of the differences between each interpretation and how each affects the building's character in its own right.

## Occupy

### *The Second Level of Interpretation*

## Outline

This level of interpretation will attempt to understand the effects of human activity and interaction within the building while avoiding any possessiveness of the space. The interpretations will take place directly in or around the building. They will be semipermanent; objects within the space may be relocated but not removed, and no objects may be added. In keeping with the previous and future experiments, each interpretation conducted will be in direct response to the abandoned building and questions the level of its abandonment or existence.

## Precedents

Andrei Tarkovsky's film, *Stalker*, was extensively shot in several abandoned locations and buildings, predominantly in the country of Estonia.<sup>i</sup> Using these industrial sites helped to create the surreal and supernatural feelings of the mysterious quarantined area known as the "the Zone".<sup>ii</sup> This cult classic has become famously known for its extremely long scenes, often lasting several minutes. These lengthy shots, many with only a single actor silently moving in the space, draw upon the visual strength of the eerie abandoned sets. The viewer's gaze is forced to engage these uncomfortable locations. The settings coupled with the story, music, and characters in the film; manage to heighten the qualities of abandonment in these spaces to a point of adding a paranormal fear of the abandoned.

*Exploring Spaces*<sup>iii</sup> is a brief amateur documentary that follows seven youths through an abandoned building on a scavenger hunt as they follow clues left by a friend who previously entered the building. In watching this documentary several faux pas' point to the amateur quality of the film; the participants are unsure of whether or not to look at the camera, boom microphones are visible in several scenes, and the camera work is jittery and disorientated. This clumsy filming and weak plot focuses the

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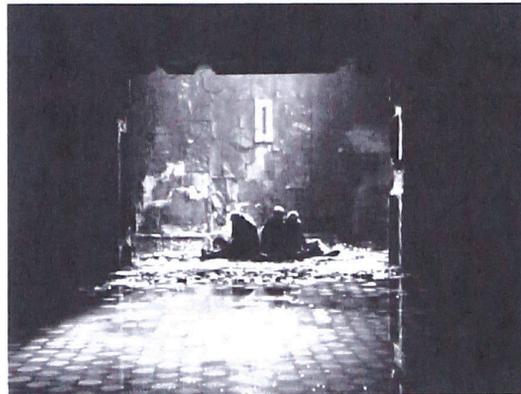
<sup>i</sup> James Norton "Stalking the Stalker," Nostalgia.com, (University of Calgary: September 16, 2006), accessed January 16, 2011, <<http://people.ucalgary.ca/~tstronds/nostalgia.com/TheTopics/Norton.html>>.

<sup>ii</sup> *Stalker*, Dir. Andrei Tarkovsky, Script by Arkadiy Strugatskiy and Boris Strugatskiy, (Gambaroff-Chemier Interallianz, 1979).

<sup>iii</sup> *Exploring Spaces (A Documentary Moment)*, Dir. Grant Patten, (Vimeo: June, 2010), accessed November 25, 2010 <<http://vimeo.com/12119647>>.



Source:  
*Stalker*, Dir. Andrei Tarkovsky, Script  
by Arkadiy Strugatskiy and Boris Stru-  
gatskiy, (Gambaroff-Chemier Inter-  
lianz, 1979).



viewer's attention towards the only integral point in the film; the abandoned building. It is easily understood that the abandoned mystique has lured this group inside the building and is essentially the only justification for their assembly in the first place.

### **Possible Interpretations**

*Office* - Bring a computer or book and enter the space to temporarily use it as a workstation.

*Stage Set* - Rearrange the objects of a particular space in order to create an alternate abandoned scene with no specific function.

*Film* - Make a short film, which walks through the space entering into each room documenting the abandoned traits.

*Gathering* - A social gathering of individuals. With more than one person, interact in the space for a period of time and afterwards remove all traces of the event.

### **Experimental Procedure**

*The Picnic* - Two others and myself entered the abandoned building and gathered into a chosen room for a picnic on the floor. A tarp and blankets were laid down for sanitation, comfort, and to keep the environment undisturbed. I had set up a timed camera to document the picnic, allowing us to focus on the event. There were no directives to the gathering other than to consume food and drink as a social activity. Our conversation varied from speaking directly about the experience and the building, to general banter. Everything was subsequently packed up and the room was left undisturbed.

*The Stage Set* - As a purely impulsive exercise, the aforementioned individuals, entered the large open area of the abandoned building and created an alternate scene. The only criterion of this test was to change the setting from how the room first appeared. The set appeared as a theatrically abstract room with incomplete walls, common signifiers, and bizarre additions. It was created rapidly and with relative ease due to the abundance of objects in the space. As I was documenting the final Stage Set I asked the other participants to interact with the space however they saw fit. The final documentation therefore contains three distinct images of the 'Stage Set'; before the scene was altered, immediately after with the occupants, and the final empty scene.

#### Participants & Materials:

- |                         |                         |
|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| + Adrienne Hossfeld     | + Beverages for 3       |
| + Cedric Boulet         | + Tarp                  |
| + Christopher Bretecher | + 2 blankets            |
| + Lunch for 3           | + 2 cameras and tripods |

#### Discussion

While the Picnic was quite enjoyable, there was a certain amount of discomfort involved in the consumption of the food. Since the environment was dirty and unkempt, it affected my ability to fully enjoy eating. Comparable perhaps, to eating a meal while discussing the physical symptoms of gangrene. Over time, it seemed that the participants became familiar with the space and were more capable of ignoring the distraction of the abandoned building and immersing themselves within the social event. The quality of this diminishing discomfort is found in the above precedent of the *Exploring Spaces* documentary, as both the audience and actors become more familiar with the abandoned space, the story becomes more developed and those involved become more relaxed.

The results of the Stage Set interpretation are most noticeable to those who participated in its creation. I discussed these lasting effects with Adrienne Hossfeld on November 9<sup>th</sup>, 2010, asking how she thought these events might impinge on her perception of subsequent visits. "I think the more I went there the more I would adapt to the situation. It's like how today I was in my bathroom and I noticed some dirt around the sink. I thought to myself 'I should probably clean that up, it's funny that I haven't noticed it before'. Yet if I were in someone else's washroom, I would have noticed it right away." This confirms my earlier conclusion in which there likely exists a level of familiarity wherein the abandoned feeling of a building might begin to wear off.

Because of its lasting effects, the Stage Set is more capable of affecting the experience of a new visitor to the abandoned space. A fortunate run in with a photographer allowed me to discuss just such an occurrence. As we were readying ourselves to leave the abandoned site, a car pulled up and two people with some camera equipment exited towards the quarry behind the building. I took this opportunity to make contact with the photographer to ask questions regarding his use of the site. His

name was Luc-André Paquette and, to my surprise, this was his first visit. He was doing a photo shoot with a female model and expressed interest in entering the building. I assured him that the owner, Mr. David Morrison, would likely not mind if he entered the premises and asked him if I might be able to view his finished work. A week later I went online to his Flickr: Photo Sharing account, and found the images. One photograph in particular caught my eye when I realized that he had used the 'Stage Set', created only moments earlier, as a backdrop for his model. When asked about his perception of the building with regards to the Stage Set, Luc responded that it made the abandoned space feel more "warm and at home."

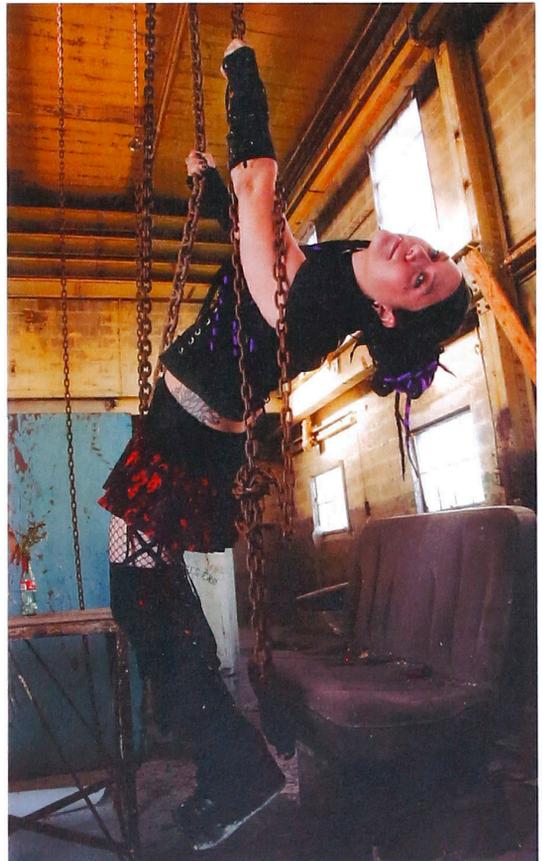
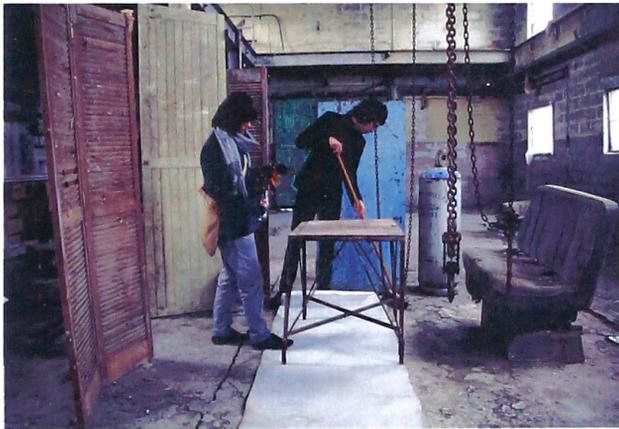
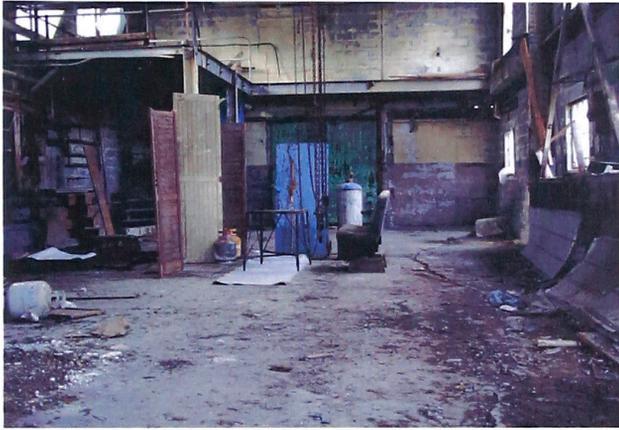
### **EndnotesConclusion**

*After inhabiting this space and familiarizing myself with it, including enjoying the activities undertaken, does the building still feel abandoned?*

For an outsider, nothing has changed and the building remains abandoned. The next person to enter this building will likely understand that others have come before them; that this abandoned building has already been re-discovered. They may recognize that others, stimulated by the quality of, and traces within, the abandoned building have left their own interpretations. Despite such occasional and random occupancies, however, what remains constant is the lack of a sustained human presence, the building's continual decay, and its utter disuse. When we see someone entering an abandoned building this does not dismantle the other major signifiers of abandoned space. In other words, it is hardly surprising that others have gained access to the space and this simple fact does little to remove the abandoned feeling.

As for myself having participated in the interpretation, the level of familiarity capable of removing the discomfort has not been reached. The impermanence of these interpretations, which dealt with human presence and interaction within the building, fail to either physically or mentally remove the abandoned qualities I associate with this space.





Source:  
Luc-Andre Paquette

## Modify

### *The Third Level of Interpretation*

#### Outline

This level of interpretation will test minor physical alteration to the existing building. The interpretation must not hinder the ability of others to enter or move through the space but it may visually alter their experience. The interpretations will be recognizable as an action that has occurred after the building had been abandoned. The tests may be spontaneous or planned. Each work will be a reaction to the building's environment; a personal response to the impressions that the building has imposed upon the interpreter. This experiment will be testing minimal physical change and thus, the interpretation must not offer a new function within the space. It will also avoid destroying or greatly altering the current condition of the building.

#### Precedents

Graffiti can be found all over the world, and on all sorts of objects, including trains, office buildings, garbage bins and abandoned buildings. The graffitiist chooses to paint on abandoned buildings because they are located in unfrequented areas of the city, offering a level of protection from being caught and/or prosecuted. Also graffiti on abandoned buildings is seldom cleaned or painted over and may be visible for the remainder of the building's life. A highly graffitied building can be a visible signifier of abandoned property. Abandoned buildings can be known for their graffiti with these illustrations eventually becoming synonymous with the building's identity.

*DDD (Detroit, Demolition, Disneyland)* is a group of anonymous activists whose project labeled *Object Orange* addresses abandoned homes in Detroit they deem to be unsafe or harbouring dangerous activities.<sup>i</sup> In response to these threatening situations, DDD paints the entire exterior of the homes in a vibrant orange colour called *Tiggerific Orange*. The attention brought to these derelict properties has, in many cases, served its purpose by forcing the city to demolish the abandoned homes. The minimal alteration in this instance contains significant consequences for the house, in the form of total

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<sup>i</sup> "Detroit. Demolition. Disneyland. a project," Thedetroiter.com, (November, 2009), accessed October 13, 2010, <<http://www.thedetroiter.com/nov05/disneydemolition.php>>.

Source:  
Katie Scarlett Brandt, *banksy in chi-*  
*cago*, (May 26, 2010) accessed April  
6, 2011, < <http://katie-scarlett-brandt.blogspot.com/2010/05/banksy-in-chicago.html>>



Source:  
*Object Orange*, Detroit, (December 8,  
2006), accessed April 6, 2011, < [http://www.woostercollective.com/2006/12/detroits\\_object\\_orange.html](http://www.woostercollective.com/2006/12/detroits_object_orange.html)>



Source:  
Matthew Radune, *Ice House Detroit*,  
(February, 24 2010), accessed July 8,  
2010, < <http://icehousedetroit.blogspot.com/2010/02/art-update.html>>



destruction. In this example of activism, DDD is addressing the negative aspects of the abandoned building. Because of the extremely high number of abandoned homes in Detroit, it is an inevitability that dangers may occur; either from the unlawful inhabitation of dangerous individuals harbouring illegal acts, or an extreme structural fragility, endangering any who unwittingly enter. By demolishing these 'dangerous' abandoned properties, while playfully drawing attention to them, the Object Orange project has helped create a safer environment, where perhaps the abandoned potential of the other homes in these neighborhoods may more safely be benefited from.

*Ice House Detroit* is a project created by photographer Gregory Holm and architect Matthew Radune.<sup>ii</sup> In the winter of 2010, as a social art project, they froze the exterior of an entire abandoned house in Detroit. This was accomplished by repeatedly covering the whole building envelope with water for over one week. Collaborating with the city, volunteers, and other artists, Holm and Radune succeeded in uniting the entire neighbourhood, and were overwhelmed by the positive feedback from the local residents. Their work has been widely published and is seen as a reference to the current urban conditions and plight of the vacant city. The Ice House Detroit has now been deconstructed as part of the agreement between the artists and the city. However, this engaging and brief work inspired the community was surely a dignified end to this derelict property.

### **Possible Interpretations**

*The Painted Square* - Paint a large white square on the interior floor.

*The Painted Door* - Clean and re-paint one of the existing doors.

*Labyrinth* - Create a labyrinth on the floor that meanders through the building; a suggested path for visitors.

*The Bow* - Respond to one of the major architectural features of the building, the bowing out of one of the exterior walls. Draw attention to this detail.

*Patch* - Sew the building back together. Figuratively, by using bright red yarn to weave between the cracks.

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<sup>ii</sup> Gergory Holm and Matthew Radune, *Ice House Detroit*, (August, 2009), accessed July 8, 2010, <<http://icehousedetroit.blogspot.com/>>.

*Park space* - Turn one of the lofts into a more pleasurable space for the birds or for picnics by adding sod, and cleaning the area.

*Graffiti* - Enter with spray paint and respond.

*Stencil* - Use cut out stencils to paint an image or phrase on the wall.

### Experimental Procedure

*The Leaner and The Raven: Pre planned graffiti using stenciled silhouettes* - I created two images; a raven perched on a tree branch, and a human figure leaning casually against a wall. After digitally creating the images I transferred and cut the silhouettes into cardboard. The stencil from The Leaner, a 1:1 scale figure, was temporarily fixed to an exterior wall and filled in with black spray paint. The Raven, a scaled up silhouette, is a two-toned image and became a black bird perched atop a white branch.

*The Painted Door: The repainting of a door* - I first cleaned the door by scraping away the old paint chips. I then re-painted it in a shade of green that closely resembled its original hue. Only one side of the door was repainted leaving the decay visible on the reverse side.

*Graffiti* - This interpretation is based on an intuitive response to particular moments in the building. Using a can of red spray paint I entered the building to perform unscripted graffiti. After moving quickly through a few of the spaces without feeling the 'spark' of inspiration I came back across a large, red "KKK" previously graffitied on the wall. It was this aggressive and offensive graffiti that inspired my subsequent reactions. I decided to alter the pre-existing graffiti to something that I felt would be more appropriate. The result of this was to change the word "RAPE" to "RARE BEAUTY", "KKK" into a diagram of three stick figures holding hands and flying a kite, and "KILL" to read "KITE FLYING".

Materials (used selectively for each interpretation):

- |                        |                                      |
|------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| + Roller brush         | + White spray paint                  |
| + Paintbrush           | + Can of green paint oil based paint |
| + Roller pan           | + Red spray paint                    |
| + 2x black spray paint | + Painter's tape                     |

- + Gorilla tape
- + Packing tape
- + Rags
- + Plastic bags
- + Paint scrapper
- + Two cameras
- + Tri-pod

### **Discussion**

The Leaner silhouette applied to the exterior of the building was in response to the outward bulge of the existing wall. Although I had briefly spoken with the owner of the building requesting permission to enter and work in the space, we had not agreed on specifics. Consequently there was a certain degree of anxiety involved in the action of clambering on stacked debris to spray paint a large figure on the exterior wall of Mr. Morrison's property. The anxiety I felt while conducting this interpretation is quite interesting and I attribute it to the fact that, unlike all my other activities on the site to date, this was a public act involving a transformation that would be clearly visible from the road. Like the Object Orange project, I was bringing attention to the dilapidated state of the building, and the owner might not appreciate this 'criticism'.

The Raven, located on the interior of the building was accomplished more comfortably, but was less exhilarating. It was placed in the loft space that contained to the largest number of bird droppings. This stencil also drew attention to a particular aspect of the building, but in a more benign way, as a label rather than a critique.

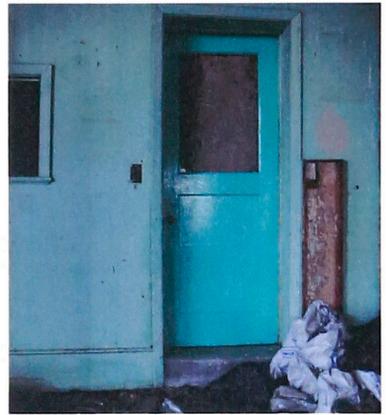
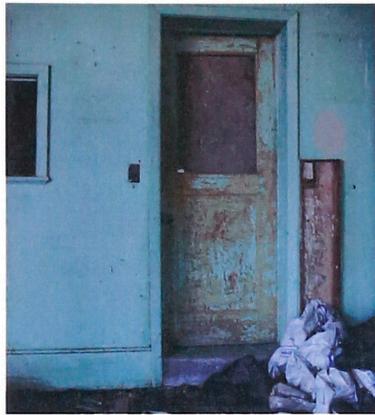
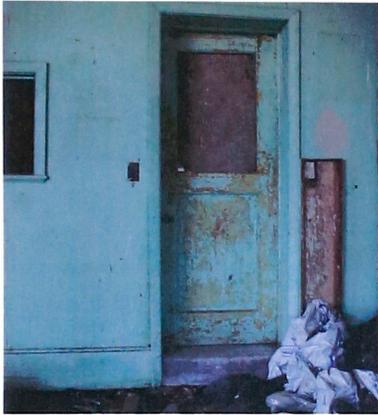
For The Painted Door I began by stripping off the old paint and repainting a door in the abandoned site. Through this interpretation I hoped to draw attention to the level of decay in the building while also asserting a human presence. Being the first occasion I spent a significant amount of time in the building by myself, working on a specific task, this test also allowed me to understand how a prolonged presence in the building could affect my feelings toward it. I was curious to know how creating a new personal dynamic with the space would alter my perception of the building as 'abandoned'. Painting the door served as a literal metaphor for cleaning up and restoring the site, allowing me to take pride in my activities within the building.

This graffiti was the most profound interpretation as there was a large degree of emotional reaction involved in altering someone else's work. Clearly, I was beginning to feel a sense of proprietorship as evidenced by my values in judging the appropriateness of the graffiti, what therefore occurred was a 'cleaning up' of previous graffiti. This old graffiti was, from my perspective, unsympathetic and damaged the beautiful qualities that I had come to associate with the site. It has become clear that after several visits to the site my sentiments have now begun affecting my actions. The act of assigning acceptable conduct within an abandoned space, such as judging appropriate graffiti, can drastically change my perception of it as an abandoned building. Once we begin enforcing rules and assigning rights, the abandoned space may lose its ambiguity and freedom. However, it could also be said that by covering up someone else's graffiti and damaging their original interpretation or expression, I have merely asserted my freedom in the building while recognizing that I have frequented the abandoned space more recently than most others.

### **Conclusion**

*Do these minor alterations compromise the qualities perceived as abandoned?*

From the perspective of a recent visitor this is unlikely. Certain activities may put the abandoned building at risk by way of an increased human presence; however, anyone who enters this or any other abandoned building and discovered graffiti will not conclude that the space is fully inhabited. As for myself, I do not feel that the incipient sense of comfort and personalization of the spaces detracts from the qualities I associate with abandonment. If anything, these interpretations augment and reinforce my sense of what that elusive "quality" might be.





## Alter

### *The Fourth Level of Interpretation*

#### Outline

This level of interpretation will test a large degree of physical alteration in the form of an artwork, which may begin to affect the structure and permanence of the building. It will assert prominence over other possible functions in the building. Using the materials, contents, or the structure of the building this intervention will attempt to create a space within the building which raises questions regarding the building's condition and decay. When experienced by others, the work should appear incongruous with the typical decay of an abandoned building. Focusing on the interpretational values of the building and its elements, this experiment will avoid the use of new materials.

#### Precedents

American artist Gordon Matta-Clark is most remembered for his building cuts carried out on vacated structures. His work was almost always done in buildings or homes that were set for demolition and in most cases only the powerful images and movies of the work remain. In *Splitting 1974*, Matta-Clark sectioned a two-story house in vertical halves, tilting one half outward. This act left a small wedge of empty space as if the house had been cut in half with one large stroke from a massive axe. Critics dispute the social significance of the project; however it is undeniable that Matta-Clark's composition offers the abandoned house a new existence as a cultural motivator.

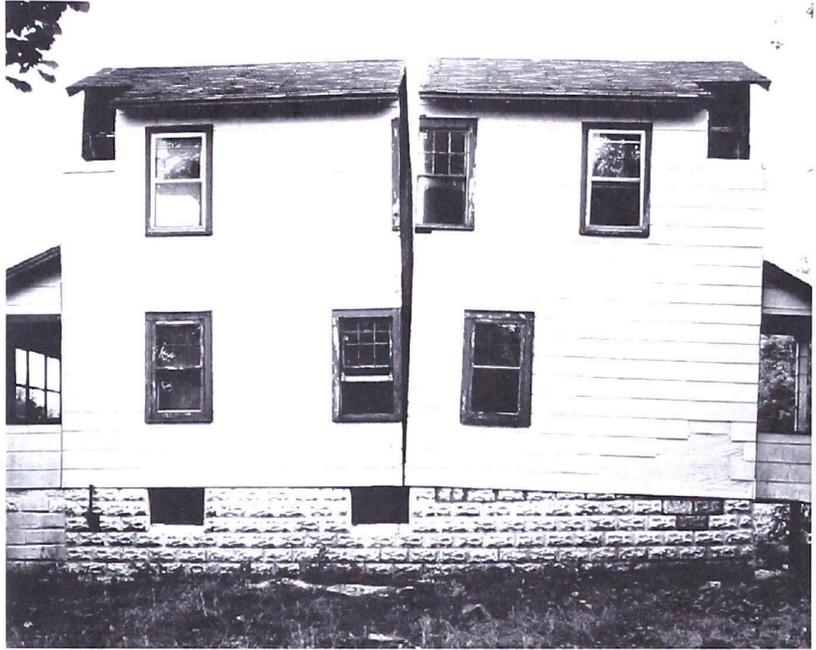
In *Objects to be Destroyed*, a retrospective about artist Gordon Matta-Clark, author Pamela Lee sums up Matta-Clark's project *Splitting 1974* and its relationship to the building as such:

*Its imminent destruction is what granted the artist the use of it in the first place. For with the imperatives of real estate beckoning, speculation taking its course, the lot will be cleared for its property value. Before this happens, though, photographs will be taken of the work and a grainy, noiseless film will bear witness to its making. Some articles will make their way into the contemporary art press. An artist's book will likewise appear. But save for some fragments of architecture the artist preserved-and save for the documentation itself -the work in question, *Splitting*, has all but ceased to exist.<sup>i</sup>*

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<sup>i</sup> Pamela M. Lee, *Object to be destroyed: the work of Gordon Matta-Clark*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT P, 2000), xii.

Source:  
*Splitting 1974*, (New York: Estate of  
Gordon Matta-Clark, 1974), accessed  
April 7, 2011, < [http://www.curatedobject.us/the\\_curated\\_object\\_/2008/01/exhibitions-san.html](http://www.curatedobject.us/the_curated_object_/2008/01/exhibitions-san.html)>



Source:  
Kevin O'Mara, *Art House*, Houston,  
(May 14, 2005), accessed April 7,  
2011, < <http://www.flickr.com/photos/kevinomara/14236253/>>



What is immediately evident from Matta-Clark's substantial cultural contribution is that it continues to create discussion and affect many people and their works, despite the project's physical erasure. Matta-Clark has capitalized on the abandoned potential, and the building's existence, however brief, has led to some surprising and valuable contributions throughout a number of cultural media.

The *Inversion House* was an artwork created by Dan Havel & Dean Ruck in 2005 in Houston, Texas.<sup>ii</sup> Using a vacated art centre, formerly two connected homes, the artists slowly dismantled the interior and reconstructed its materials into a parabolic tunnel running from the front yard through to the back of the property. This tunnel went from approximately a 12-foot diameter entrance to a less than a 3-foot opening at the rear. As a creative end to this building's scripted life, the artists have truly capitalized on the abandoned potential. The beautiful de-construction of this building has created a work of art with essentially no material cost, and resulted in a priceless amount of transient thought and potential.

### **Possible Interpretations**

*The Delicate Smash* - Break a hole in between two rooms, leaving one side rough and delicately finishing the other so that after it is passed through it becomes clear that it was a deliberate action.

*Upside Down Office* - Attach a desk and chairs upside down to the ceiling.

*The Missing Block* - Gently remove one cinder block from a wall at approximately eye level.

*Crossroad* - remove an intersecting portion of the wall shared by three or more rooms.

*The Peel* - Peel back one layer of an entire wall, laying it on the floor. Arrange it so that it appears intact and to have been delicately peeled off of the wall.

*Obstacle course* - A series of objects moved, constructed, and created forcing people to re-negotiate the space.

### **Experimental Procedure**

After considering the possible interpretations and taking note that every wall in the building was of cinder block construction, I decided the interpretation that could be achieved with the most control and the minimum of unknown variables would be *The Peel*. This level of control is important in maintaining

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<sup>ii</sup> Diana Lyn. Roberts, "Dan Havel and Dean Ruck: Inversion," *Art Lies: A contemporary Art Journal* (2005). accessed January 30, 2011, <<http://www.artlies.org/article.php?id=1256&issue=47&s=1>>.

the rigorous and careful progression of the interpretations throughout the study. While, it is possible for certain non-loadbearing walls to be removed, as suggested in the Delicate Smash, such an act could destroy future potentiality and may be more appropriately considered in future tests.

Entering the building with the materials listed below I chose to do this project in a large room on the second floor that still had finished walls intact on all four sides. I decided to peel back the finished particleboard from a wall punctured with two doorways. I began by slowly cutting an outline through the particleboard around the corners, floor, and doorways of the wall. After cutting the outline I began to peel back the wall very slowly pushing it outwards allowing the nails holding it to the framing to be pulled through the moist, soft, aged particleboard. After most of the nails had been pulled through I was able to simply and quickly lay the wall flat on the floor. Finally, I took care to bend the exposed nails creating a safer environment for animals and people who may subsequently enter.

Materials:

- + Power Reciprocating Saw
- + Dry Wall Saw
- + Crowbar
- + Hammer
- + Leather gloves
- + 2 Cameras
- + Tripod
- + Ladder (found in building)
- + Safety Glasses

### **Discussion**

This single interpretation contains two distinct readings of the site: one related to the reality of having acted upon the building, and the other relating to the final product as an artifact.

In the first case, being able to witness the artist at work offers a different understanding of the interpretation. Here, the stop frame video becomes essential for studying the effects of the interpretation's process. A connection between and the building and myself (the artist) is clearly seen as I move around the space, standing on planks to avoid the pooling rainwater, pausing to pet a stray dog, and arranging tools on a discarded bench. This sort of inhabitation gives new life to the building and the comfort visible in my movements lends a familiarity to the space - one, which might be perceived as challenging the notion of the building as being abandoned. Also visible in the stop

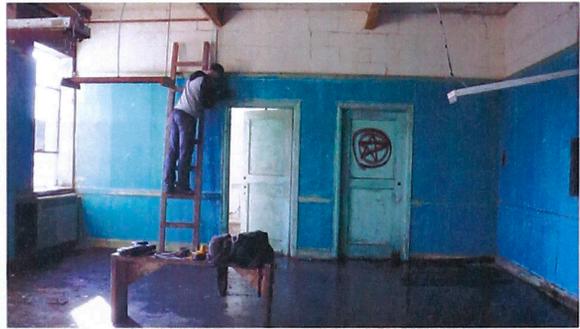
frame video is the animation that the wind gives to the space; opening and closing the doors, and moving particles of dust around in the water. By viewing this time lapse we see how a building comes alive when it is left to the elements. Nature moves in rapidly to reclaim the space. While abandoned by people, the building experiences a different kind of life as witnessed by the number of actions they host including the meanderings of stray dogs, the growth of wild plant life, and the storming of winds. These activities are unsurprising with many of them in fact being common signifiers of abandoned space.

Those who enter the space for the first time will likely view this work differently. As a way of objectively understanding this interpretation from an outsider's point of view, on January 11, 2011, I entered into a discussion of The Peel with a colleague who had previously visited the site. Speaking with Cedric Boulet I asked how he felt this could affect the abandoned qualities as someone viewing it for the first time. Cedric felt that this interpretation was essentially an acceleration of the decay that would eventually occur, stating that "the wall just has to come down." We further discussed that while the property of decay is often a good indicator of abandonment it is also an unnecessary characteristic. While a building inevitably begins to decay without a human presence, a recently vacated office tower, or foreclosed home, would undoubtedly feel abandoned despite a significant lack of deterioration, as seen in Todd Hido's photographs (a precedent in the first level of interpretation).

### **Conclusion**

*After occupying and altering the building to an advanced degree, do the abandoned feelings remain?*

Similar to the precedents for this section, this intervention aims to bring attention to the abandoned state of the building by accelerating the process of decay, but in a deliberate and recognizable way. The precision of the peeling of the wall acknowledges the human hand, but does not feel out of place because it underlines the notion of decay. Interpretations such as this reinforce rather than diminish the qualities we see as abandoned. In fact when art of this sort occurs with little regard of the buildings resultant state, it only further proves that these buildings are truly abandoned.





## Install

### *The Fifth Level of Interpretation*

## Outline

This interpretation will test the results of a new architectural element added to the building. This installation is not intended to contribute to its becoming inhabitable, rather the purpose of this architectural detail will be to provide an enhanced experience of the abandoned building. The use of new materials will help to visually separate this project from the existing architecture, but it will also attempt to exploit the characteristics of the space in order to communicate with the abandoned properties of the building.

## Precedents

The *Five Fellows: Full Scale* was a group project led by five students from the University of Michigan, Taubman College of Architecture in 2009.<sup>i</sup> Together they purchased a vacant home in Detroit for \$500 to test full-scale design projects. Working individually they transformed the house into an experimental factory, each completing a single project in a selected area of the home. Their ideas ranged from the testing of new materials and their lighting properties, to reinventing a staircase. While the student's projects took advantage of the extreme affordability of the house, they were not conducted as a commentary on the abandoned state of the house, and as such fell short of addressing the much larger contemporary social issue of the existence of these abandoned homes in the city of Detroit.

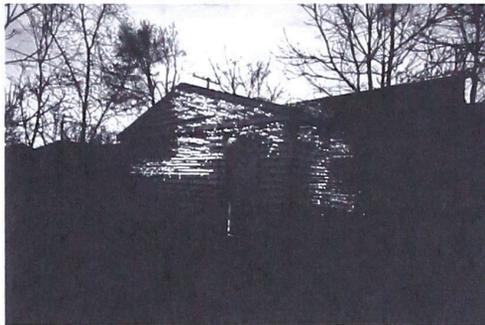
The *Michigan Theater*, originally built as a 4000-seat movie theater, now stands gutted and is being used as a parking lot. After having been abandoned for several years and falling into complete disrepair, the building was set for demolition; however due to engineering complications, it was saved from the fate of the wrecking ball.<sup>ii</sup> This building has become a landmark of urban exploration; however over time much of the theater's abandoned beauty and character has deteriorated and been removed. Today the only major remnants of its past splendour are portions of the sculpted plaster ceiling and

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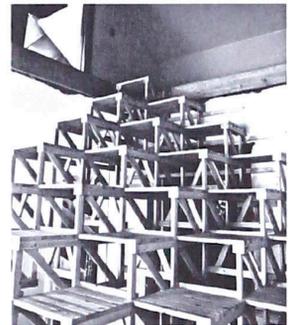
i Five Fellows: Full Scale, (Detroit: Michigan Architecture, Taubman College, 2009), accessed August 16, 2010, <<http://www.tcaup.umich.edu/architecture/faculty/fellowships/5fellows/>>.

ii Vivian M. Baulch, "Detroit's fabulous Michigan Theater," Michigan History, (Detroit: Detnews.com, March 17, 2001), accessed January 31, 2011 <<http://apps.detnews.com/apps/history/index.php?id=30>>.

Source, left:  
*Weatherizing*, Detroit, (Michigan Architecture, Taubman College, 2009), accessed August 16, 2010, <<http://www.tcaup.umich.edu/architecture/faculty/fellowships/5fellows/>>.



Source, right:  
*Tables and Chairs*, Detroit, (Michigan Architecture, Taubman College, 2009), accessed August 16, 2010, <<http://www.tcaup.umich.edu/architecture/faculty/fellowships/5fellows/>>.



Source:  
Sean Kernick, *The Michigan Theatre Ruins 2010*, Detroit, (March 8, 2010), accessed April 7, 2011, <<http://www.tcaup.umich.edu/architecture/faculty/fellowships/5fellows/>>.



velvet curtains. Because of its large open span the owners were able to transform it into a parking lot with a minimal amount of construction. The Michigan Theater would currently be considered an adaptive reuse project; however because it continues to attract urban explorers it would also appropriately be described as an abandoned building with a functioning element.

### **Possible Interpretations**

*The Bridge* - Construct a pedestrian bridge from one loft to another.

*Stage* - Build a stage in the open area that can be used as a platform for miscellaneous purposes.

*The Perch* - Attach a small stand to one of the raised horizontal beams providing a private perch from which a single person may view the space.

*The Ferry* - Set up a method for using the overhead crane that will allow people to transport themselves around the space with a bird's eye perspective.

### **Experimental Procedure**

*The Bridge* - Construction on the bridge first began with a site visit to select its location and to measure the height and distance that it would span. I chose to construct an 18-foot long bridge to span a 15-foot gap. The bridge is accessed through one of the loft spaces and terminates at an exterior wall. This particular wall was the subject of a previous interpretation because of its significant outward bow. The use of light materials was necessary since the design needed to be easily assembled and installed by only one person. In keeping with the material palette of the building, I chose to construct the bridge out of trusses made of light gauge steel studs in order to support the weight of multiple people. The bridge was assembled and installed over a two-day period. The deck of the bridge was built from materials found on site, specifically two doors nailed together, a desktop, and a blue piece of plywood. Before the final installation, the bridge was first tested at a lesser height to ensure its structural stability.

Materials:

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| + Tin Snips                              | + 5 10-foot long 4-inch deep steel studs |
| + Reciprocating saw with metal blade     | + 2 8-foot long 4-inch deep steel studs  |
| + Cordless Drill                         | + 6-foot steel tracking                  |
| + 2 18-foot long 6-inch deep steel studs | + Bridge cover (material found on site ) |

- + 60 self-drilling metal screws
- + 24 ¾-inch woods screws
- + 12 L brackets
- + Flash light
- + 2 cameras and tripods

## **Discussion**

To date, the construction of this bridge was the most involved process that I had undertaken in the building. On the first day of construction I worked in the space until well after sunset. Having never before entered the building after dark, and working by the light of a flashlight, I gained a new perspective on the space. The negative stigma attached to entering an abandoned building after dark was felt once I had finished work and was preparing to depart. The stillness of the air, the sounds of the wind through the broken windows and open doorways, and the cold December drafts all contributed to its eerie feeling. After working in this space for quite some time and becoming familiar and comfortable in the building, I was glad to find that the haunting feelings that I associate with abandonment still existed for me.

That eerie feeling notwithstanding, there is no doubt that the act of building something that was to be left in the building also contributed to a sense of ownership. I must ask myself to what extent these possessive feelings affect how I perceive the abandoned qualities of the building, and also whether these feelings would in any way affect how someone else would experience the building if I were not there.

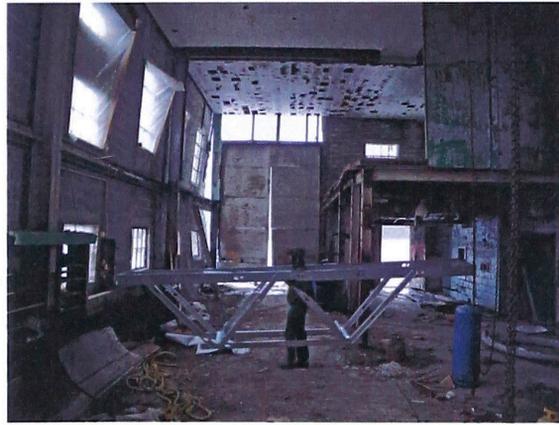
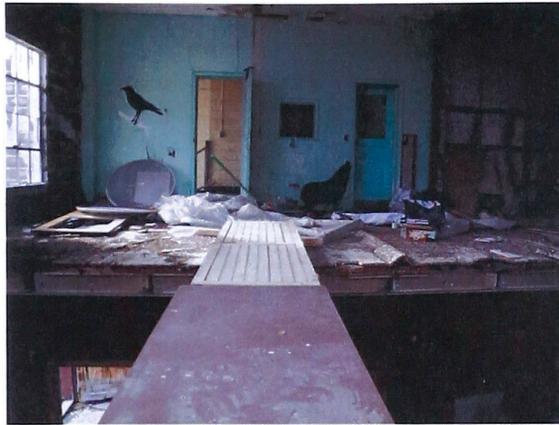
I was very pleased to be able to finally see the bowed out wall up close and to really understand the magnitude of its deformation. It was also an exciting opportunity to offer this same experience to anyone else who might subsequently enter the space. This particular feature, the bowing out of the wall, was something I felt was significant yet difficult to describe or photograph. I was pleased to have created an instrument that allowed others to experience one of this abandoned building's unique characteristics.

## **Conclusion**

*Does the installation and design of a new architectural detail remove the feelings of abandonment?*

It is important to note that the installation of this bridge responds specifically to a feature of the building in its abandoned state, rather than testing an unrelated design as seen in the Five Fellows project. The

design and construction of architectural details may seem contradictory to abandonment. However, when we understand that the bridge is responding to the decaying bowed wall, it would seem that the new construction actually reinforces the qualities of abandonment. For the outsider, regardless of whether they brave out onto the bridge, its curious positioning might guide them to question the bowing wall and the peculiarities of decay, increasing the building's overall intrigue. As for myself, while I have begun occupying the space more frequently and for longer periods, this has only left me with a vague sense of familiarity rather than feelings of total comfort.





## Repurpose

### *The Sixth Level of Interpretation*

#### Outline

This level of interpretation will repurpose the abandoned space. The intention is to test the many characteristics of the abandoned building by holding an event in the space; a social occasion with invited guests. Differing from the earlier experiments, this interpretation will not specifically respond to the existing functions of the space, such as the provision of shelter for a picnic or as a site for graffiti. Rather, the experiment will begin to alter the building in order to create a suitable environment for a unique function. Although the building will be temporarily repurposed, as with the other interpretations, the physical interventions will not be maintained and will be left to decay along with the building.

#### Precedents

*The Heidelberg Project*, located in Detroit, is an art project that occupies the abandoned houses of an entire neighbourhood. The houses act as the canvases as well as the subject for the artwork, while the streets and empty lots have been turned into the exhibition space. Tyree Guyton, a long-term resident of the area began working on this large-scale art project in 1986, which today contains numerous collaborations from many artists.<sup>i</sup> Although intended as a permanent installation, some of the houses have been demolished by the city on two separate occasions. While the needless destruction resulting from government regulation is seen as a tragedy, this social art project may ultimately spawn its own end. The Heidelberg Project is built as way of beautifying and revitalizing the neighbourhood as well as drawing attention to the plight of its abandonment. If the project succeeds in encouraging the reemergence of the community, it may become necessary to remove some of the artwork in order create new habitable environments. This is a result, however, that I am sure Tyree Guyton would welcome.

*99 Rooms* is an online collaborative art exhibit created by 4 Berliner artists known as, Rostlaub.<sup>ii</sup>

This interactive exhibit focuses on the subject of Kim Köster's graffiti applied in a number of different

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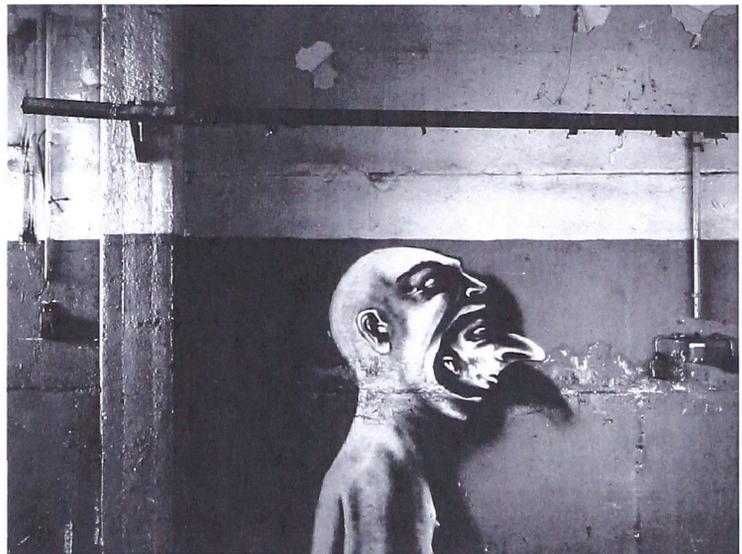
<sup>i</sup> The Heidelberg Project, accessed February 02, 2011, <<http://www.heidelberg.org/>>.

<sup>ii</sup> Kim Köster, Richard Schumann, Stephan Schulz, and Johanness Bünemann, 99 Rooms, (Rostlaub, June, 2004), accessed February 2, 2011, <[www.99rooms.com](http://www.99rooms.com)>.

Source:  
Yannick Molgat, *Heidelberg Project*,  
Detroit, (2010).



Source:  
Kim K oester, Berlin, (2006), accessed  
April 7, 2011, <<http://kimkoester.com>>.



abandoned buildings. The users are invited to experience this exhibit through their computer, interacting with the animated scenes and graffiti by clicking their way through the 99 rooms. This collaborative art-piece effectively capitalizes on the eerie aspects of the abandoned quality, complete with ominous soundscapes. The participants are drawn into the surreal environments with unknown events awaiting them in each room. While this project exists outside of the abandoned building, it offers a truly unique experience of the abandoned. The visitors can enter alone and uninhibited by other guests to explore the abandoned-scapes at their own pace, while preserving the integrity of the abandoned building.

### **Possible Interpretations**

#### *Possible Exhibitions / Installations*

*Photography* - Contact a number of different photographers who have worked either in the building or around the site and request submissions of their work to install in the building.

*The Fountain* - Display the video of the leaking roof taken on an earlier visit during a rainstorm.

*Previous interpretations* - Create a map showing the locations of all the previous interpretations for the attendees of the exhibition to follow and view.

*The Performance* - Organize a live performance as a special event for the opening of the exhibition.

### **Experimental Procedure**

Each of the possible exhibits is physically achievable and will therefore become part of the overall interpretation. The majority of the work will be permanently installed as part of the building and will be allowed to decay with it. This will be an exhibition with no end.

The opening date of December 5<sup>th</sup> was set by the availability of the pianist, Ms. Adrienne Hossfeld, who agreed to perform as the finale. I began by contacting a number of photographers who I knew had used the building as a site for their work. I informed them that I would be mounting an exhibition in the space and requested that they submit some of their photographs to be permanently installed in the building by way of fly-posting. In the end, a total of 15 images from 5 individuals including some of my own collages completed the photographic portion of the exhibition. In addition, a looping video of the serendipitous 'fountain' was played on a laptop (a recording I had taped weeks earlier of a steady

stream of rainwater running from an odd pipe into the centre of a room). Finally, an area was cleaned and a square white-stage was spray painted where the piano performance would take place.

I created an exhibition statement and map locating the previous interpretations, and left several copies in the building for future visitors to discover. A poster listing the event, as “an exhibition with no end” was fly-posted to the exterior of the room where the photography and collage work was installed. Lastly, invitations were sent out digitally to a small group of individuals with the hope that word of mouth communication would bring other attendees.

#### Materials:

##### Photography and collage exhibit:

- + Wheat paste
- + Paintbrush
- + Stir stick
- + Hot water
- + 15 photographs and poster
- + Name cards

##### Piano performance:

- + Green tape
- + White spray paint
- + Tape measure
- + Keyboard
- + Battery

##### Video exhibit:

- + Laptop computer

### Discussion

Over 15 people showed up at the event. This was the largest group of people that I had seen occupy the space and it was temporarily filled with life, as everyone meandered about, admiring the photography and the decay of the building. Judging from the guests' reaction the exhibition seemed to be positively received and, despite the cold weather, everyone waited anxiously for Adrienne's performance. Adrienne played two pieces of music: Frédéric François Chopin's "Fantaisie-Impromptu" and Yann Tiersen's "La Dispute". The piano performance filled the space with a beautiful aura that was shared and appreciated by all the guests.

Unfortunately, two of the contributing photographers were unable to attend the opening of the exhibit, and were only able to view the work at a later date. On January 12, 2011, I took advantage of this opportunity to interview both Alli Asudeh and Jen Stewart to ask how they felt about the continuing exhibit and if they were pleased with how and where I chose to display their work.

My first concern was to discover how they perceived the exhibition and specifically if either of them felt it damaged the abandoned qualities. Both Alli and Jen agreed that the building remained abandoned and that this was in part due to the fact that the content of the images were of the site. They felt that had the exhibition installed photographs of a different content then it would have removed some of the abandoned feeling. When asked how they felt about the manner in which their work was being presented (referring to the less refined method of fly-posting as compared to the more traditional process of framing photographs) I was pleased to discover that they were not taken aback, and in fact Alli stated "I think if they were too polished it wouldn't have worked and it would have stood out in the wrong way."

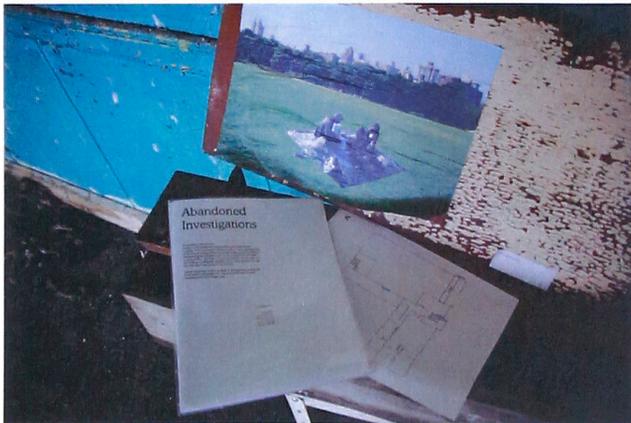
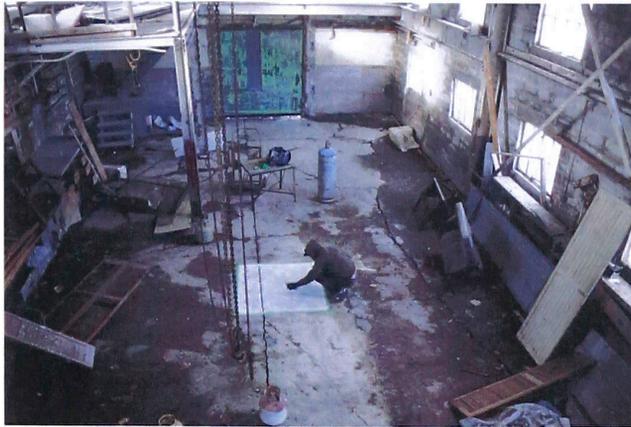
The method through which this exhibition was accomplished endured a level compromise and careful consideration of the building and its abandoned characteristics. After interviewing Alli and Jen, the fine line between a typical art exhibit and an abandoned exhibit is easily seen. Should this event have subjugated the building to strongly towards its own ideals it would have risked destroying the very abandoned qualities it wished exploit.

### **Conclusion**

*After repurposing the space, adding elements of design, and holding an event with guests, does the building still feel abandoned?*

This brief occupation did nothing to diminish the overall sense of the building as abandoned. Because the exhibition centred on the beauty of decay, I believe that it was experienced as abandoned for those in attendance. Similar to a passerby mistaking the neighbourhood of the Heidelberg Project as inhabited based on the abundance of artwork and life; a passerby during the opening of the event, may not consider the building abandoned. However, a closer inspection of the work inside would reveal

otherwise. During the opening, the thoughts and gazes of the guests were focused on the abandoned building and the work within it rather than the possibility of the building ceasing to be abandoned because of their presence. That is to say, *if the only presence within a building acts as a witness to its abandonment then the building irrefutably remains abandoned.* The lasting effects of this exhibition are minimal and similar to that of graffiti or the 99 Rooms exhibit. Those who subsequently enter may question the existence of the artworks or the white stage but it is unlikely that they would experience the space as anything but abandoned.



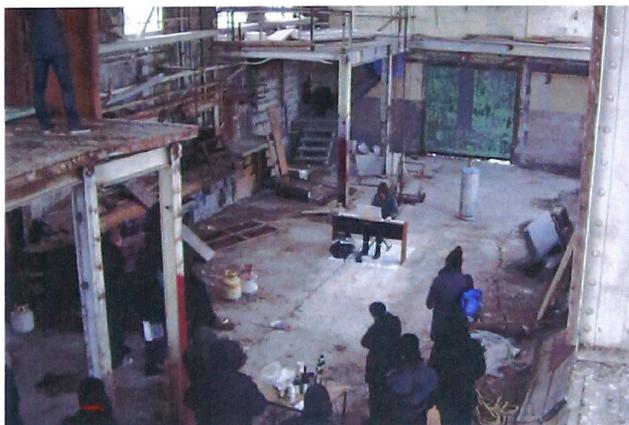
Source:  
Kendra Spanton, (2010).



Source:  
Kendra Spanton, (2010).



Source:  
Kendra Spanton, (2010).



## Promote

### *The Seventh Level of Interpretation*

## Outline

The seventh level of interpretation will test a range of large architectural interventions. Through these installations the building will be promoted as a unique destination. Although ownership of the building might be implied, visitors may still enter uninhibited and unmonitored. These installations will be constructed with new materials and maintained for safety, but will not be intended for the purposes of extended inhabitation, or economic gain. The interpretations will function to enhance the visitor's experience, provide an element of comfort, and advertise the value of abandoned space.

## Precedents

*Kunsthaus Tacheles* is a 5-story abandoned building in the centre of Berlin that houses a group of squatting artists.<sup>i</sup> While this war-scarred building is in an advanced state of decay, its dilapidated condition does not hinder the presence of the art collective or the many visitors and tourists who pass through it each day. The lease with the property owner expired in 2008 and although its future is uncertain, its current occupation is a valuable alternative function for this abandoned property. After visiting this building in the spring of 2010, and experiencing its extreme dilapidation as compared to the surrounding commercial area, I can appreciate that certain people wish to see it removed or gentrified. However, it is difficult to imagine that such a unique collection of creative minds from all over the world could have come together were it not for the existence of such an uninhibiting, carefree, and artistic environment.

The Darling Foundry is an adaptive reuse art gallery in Montreal, Quebec, which now occupies an old foundry that had been abandoned for 10 years.<sup>ii</sup> Much of the gallery's character is found in the preserved decay of its abandoned state. This aesthetic engages with the art in a unique way, not typical of the white walled gallery. The programming of a gallery into this space co-exists well with the formerly abandoned building, as there is little need for extensive infrastructure. Certain areas of the gallery, when entered alone, manage to retain some of the abandoned aura.

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<sup>i</sup> Kunsthaus Tacheles, accessed February 8, 2011, <<http://super.tacheles.de/cms/>>.

<sup>ii</sup> Fonderie Darling, February 8, 2011, <<http://www.fonderiedarling.org/index.html>>.

Source:  
Alexa Dvorson, *Kunsthau Tacheles*, Berlin, (CBC radio, November 4, 2010), accessed April 7, 2011, <[www.cbc.ca/dispatches/Tacheles\\_back.jpg](http://www.cbc.ca/dispatches/Tacheles_back.jpg)>.



Source:  
Marie-Christine Abel, *The "new" Darling Foundry*, Montreal, accessed April 7, 2011, <[http://www.fonderie-darling.org/images\\_e/fonderie.html](http://www.fonderie-darling.org/images_e/fonderie.html)>.



Both of these precedents have had interventions that although sensitively done, indicate that the buildings are no longer abandoned. However, these buildings still exhibit the quality of decay and their programs remain relatively open. The actions of the occupant in these spaces are highly unscripted, allowing them to engage with the buildings in an uninhibited manner, similar to the experience of an abandoned building.

### **Possible Interpretations**

*Preservation* - Introduce an architectural detail that both accentuates and preserves the bowed out wall.

*Acceleration* - Speed up the decay of certain aspects of the building, allowing visitors to more easily see and understand the process of decay.

*The Ticket* - Place a ticket dispenser outside providing information regarding the building and its use.

*Reflecting platform* - Construct a platform that hangs from the overhead crane, allowing people to move its location within the room and to comfortably sit and reflect in the space.

*The inverted glass box* - Construct an empty glass box inside one of the rooms, redirecting the occupant along the outside edges of the space to more closely interact with the materiality of the buildings wall's.

### **Experimental Procedure**

Due to the large scale of the architectural installations it has become necessary to accomplish the interpretations via representation rather than physical construction. Since they will not be physically built, the drawings and images will be created for the purpose of generating discussion and testing the criteria set forth in the outline.

*The Inverted Glass Box* - In a room on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor, a large glass box outlines the space, leaving a 3-foot wide passage between the glass and the walls of the room. This installation addresses two conditions: First it redirects those who enter to navigate around the glass box and connect with the space and walls of the room in more tactile way. Secondly, the glass box serves as frame; it highlights the void in the centre of the room and inversely frames the interior walls.

*The Floating Platform* - This interactive installation allows its users the freedom to navigate around the

space, positioning themselves in locations where they feel comfortable or desire to sit, view, and reflect on the abandoned qualities.

*The Ticket* - Rather than engaging in an expected money transaction, this ticket dispenser, placed in front of the building, delivers tickets printed with the website address for an organization called P.A.D. (the Preservation of Abandonment and Decay). The goal of this organization would be to raise awareness of abandoned properties and the projects that they inspire, as well as encouraging others to create their own installations. This organization will not take ownership of the buildings, but will contribute to the creation a safe environment for future visitors. As this organization grows, it would arrange to place ticket dispensers in front of any abandoned building that they became aware of.

### **Discussion**

When someone enters an abandoned building they tend to avoid any direct contact with the decaying walls, the dirty corners of the room, and the sharp edges of the windows. Being pushed out towards these objects, via *The Inverted Glass Box*, visitors might develop a more intimate relationship with the abandoned building, or perhaps become conflicted by their desire to position themselves safely within the glass enclosure. This intensified experience can raise the visitors' awareness of the building's relationship with death and decay, and by extension, of their own transient existence.

*The Floating Platform* builds upon the idea of the unscripted experience of abandoned space. It could become a popular hangout, allowing the visitors to sit in a unique location, perhaps to view an aesthetically interesting detail or to catch the morning sun. Someone might just as likely use the *Floating Platform* as a workspace, studying for an exam, or writing a novel, as to reflect on the abandoned potential. This lack of designated purpose is important to maintaining the sense of abandonment.

While the ticket booth requires the least amount of infrastructure, it may be the installation that is most at risk for challenging the sense of abandonment. While the P.A.D organization will not own the abandoned properties, they may still intervene with the building to ensure its safety. This realization might disturb the experience of urban explorers, who pride themselves on discovering hidden,

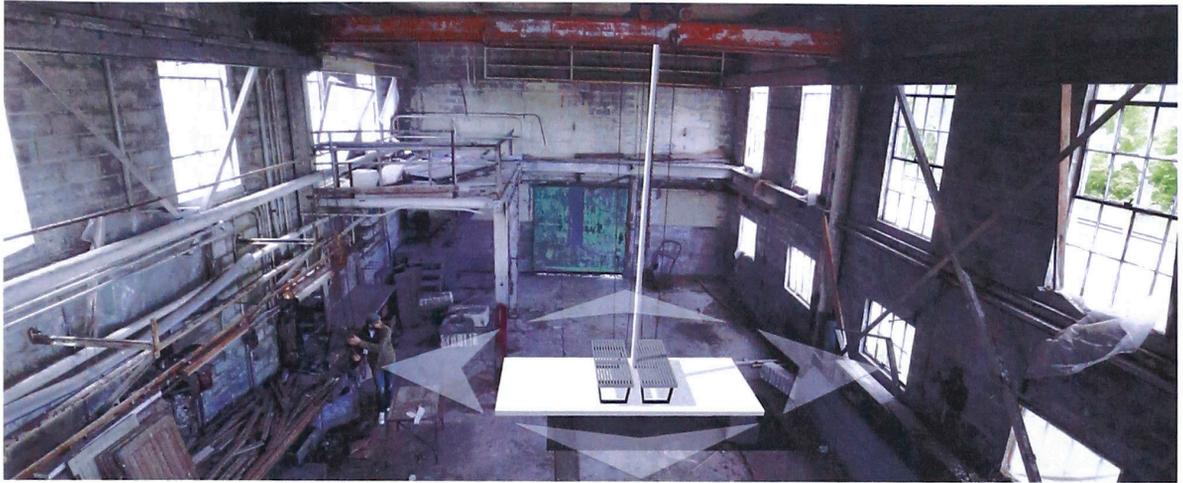
unknown and hard to reach locations. Should the P.A.D organization aggressively monitor these spaces, it may begin to negatively affect the abandoned qualities they set out to promote.

Drawing from the success of the precedents, these interpretations are designed with a non-specific program. While the installations themselves are open to interpretation, it is hoped that the P.A.D organization may generate a discussion about the abandonment and decay of this site by raising the awareness of its creative potential. As this occurs, so too will the search for methods of objectively contributing to these qualities while preserving the original abandoned characteristics, as the above interpretations have set out to accomplish.

### **Conclusion**

*As the abandoned building becomes proprietary with the installation of substantial architectural details, does it still feel abandoned?*

As more and more people access the site it runs the danger that it will begin to feel like a tourist attraction and approach the realm of the romanticized ruin. However, the ability for unmonitored entry, along with the ambiguity of the interpretations, maintains many of the characteristics of the abandoned building and would continue to intrigue the passerby. I believe that by preserving the building's characteristics and heightening the user's experience, these installations continue to help to bring attention to the qualities of abandonment while still maintaining those qualities.



April 21<sup>st</sup>, 2011

Preservation of Abandonement and Decay

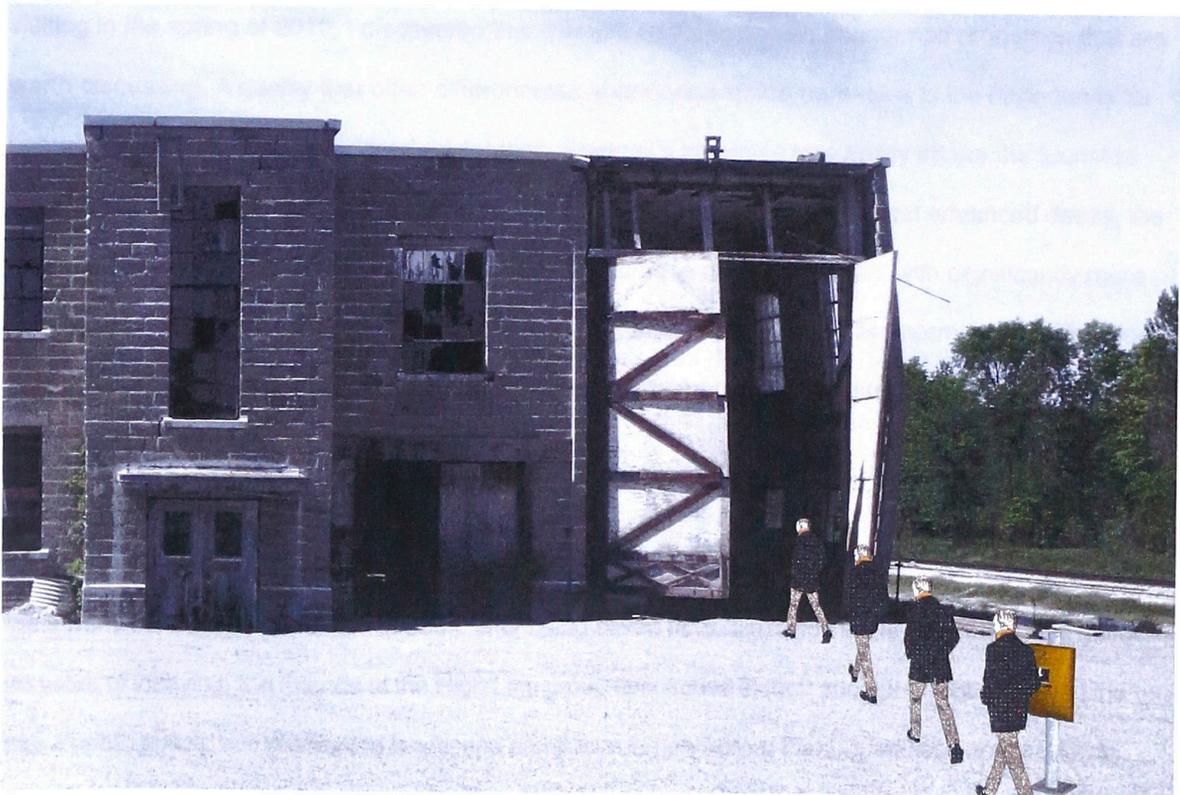
No. 193

Thank you for visiting this abandoned property, another building protected by P.A.D. organization.  
Visit us at [www.preserveabandoned.org](http://www.preserveabandoned.org)



# Wakefield

All of our efforts go towards preserving the continuation of this building's decay, and providing a safe environment. Please feel free to alter, interact, and take pieces of this building.



## **Adapt**

### *The Eighth Level of Interpretation*

## **Outline**

This level of interpretation will test an extended period of occupation in the building. The inhabitation will not be permanent, but will allow the visitor to spend a comfortable night in the building. In order to maximize the preservation of the abandoned character and minimize physical impact, the installation will be self-contained and entry into the building will not be restricted. The design of this intervention will offer a more comfortable and personalized experience of the abandoned building.

## **Precedents**

The city of *Pompeii* (Circa 7<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> century BCE), devastated by a volcanic eruption around CE 79 and buried under 4-6 meters of ash and pumice, was lost until its rediscovery in 1599.<sup>i</sup> While at first glance Pompeii falls under the category of a ruin, and therefore outside the definition of abandoned, after visiting in the spring of 2010, I discovered that this site contains certain abandoned properties that are worth discussing. A quality that often differentiates abandoned space from ruins is the opportunity for unauthorized entry or unsupervised exploration. Pompeii's immense size easily allows the tourist to enter many areas unnoticed. Also, although Pompeii is in a state of extreme and advanced decay, the large number of buildings, streets, frescos, and other unique details provide it with significantly more detail and relatable history than is typical of the single, stand-alone ruin. This enormous ruin therefore contains many similar qualities found in the contemporary abandoned building, in particular the ability to privately interact with empty and decaying space.

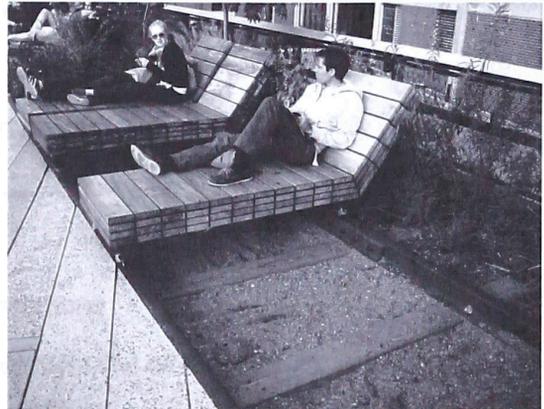
*The High Line* park in New York City is the adaptive reuse of a raised, abandoned rail line running through the lower west side of Manhattan. In 2004, after being saved from demolition in the mid 1980's and almost 20 years of lobbying, the Friends of the High Line group succeeded in their attempt to turn the High Line into a public space, commissioning landscape architects James Corner Field Operations and architects Diller Scofidio + Renfro for the design.<sup>ii</sup> The park incorporates natural wild plants and grasses that originally

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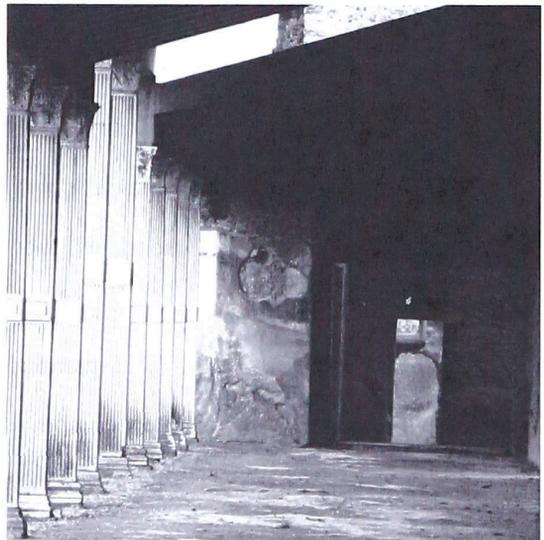
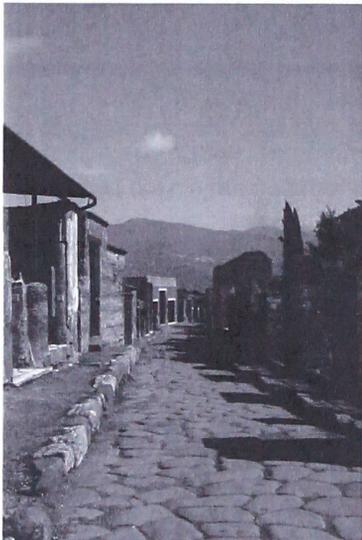
<sup>i</sup> Soprintendenza archeologica di Pompei, accessed March 2, 2011, <<http://www.pompeisites.org/>>.

<sup>ii</sup> The High Line, accessed February 8, 2011, <<http://www.thehighline.org/>>.

Source:  
*High Line*, New York, Personal photograph by author, (2010).



Source:  
*Pompeii*, Personal photograph by author, (2010).



occupied that abandoned space and highlights the character of the old rail line. The first section of this project opened in June 2009 with positive reception from the public. Differing greatly from its former abandoned state, the High Line keeps specific hours, is monitored, and highly maintained. There also exists extensive signage, requesting people to avoid stepping on the plants, and to “Keep it Wild”. Capitalizing on the abandoned aesthetic, the design retains some of the character of the old rail-line, creating a beloved neighbourhood park. However, when visiting in the fall of 2010, it felt decidedly un-abandoned as I was scolded by a passerby after being seen taking a sip from an alcoholic beverage, an activity I am sure that the former abandoned site would have been well suited to. Perhaps if the activities of this park were more self-governing and it did not maintain specific hours of entry, it would have more successfully preserved the abandoned aura.

### **Possible Interpretations**

*Hostel* - Construct a sleeping unit within the building; a small room that allows people to comfortably spend the night. The reservation process can be organized online, allowing the owner and operator to leave the area unsupervised.

*Concert Venue* - A summer venue for holding parties and live concerts. Basic infrastructure such as a bar and washrooms could be portable and thus removed when there were no events.

*Summer Home* - A cottage used only in the summer months, this would allow the design to remain simple, without the need to permanently enclose or heat the space.

### **Experimental Procedure**

*The hostel* is the preferred choice for this interpretation in regards to preserving the abandoned qualities while testing the criteria put forth in the outline. It is also a potentially feasible interpretation as hostels are associated with affordable no-frills accommodation.

The daunting task of refurbishing the building to meet health and safety codes and sealing it from the elements, led to the idea of creating a separate unit within the building. This hostel therefore creates its own space independent of the damaged structure of the decaying abandoned building. The rooms are a series of self-contained units that are mobile within the larger spaces of the existing building. Booking and checking-in is completed online, which allows for the continuation of an unmonitored

environment, similar to that of Pompeii. Upon registration, guests receive a unique access code, which allows them unrestricted entry to their room for the duration of stay. Each unit is equipped with a bed or a hammock, and a lounge chair. A notable feature of the units is their floor to ceiling glass wall on one side. This allows the tenant to position the view of each unit however they see fit, choosing a view in or out of the building or positioning the window flush with one of the building's walls, in effect making the fourth side of the unit a decaying wall.

In order to test the outline and enable discussion, I created a mock website where potential guests could read about the building's attractions, search for available vacancies, view the units and their locations in the building, and leave comments and suggestions.

### **Discussion**

An important difference in this interpretation is its move away from a direct manipulation of the existing building. Because the units are self-contained they remain quite distinct from the character of the space. However, the guests may develop a unique relationship with the building as they are invited to experience its abandoned qualities and personalize their visit through the positioning of the units.

Since the interpretation is only digitally represented, it has become difficult to document its specific consequences; however, I have become increasingly excited about the possibilities and feasibility of these larger scale interventions. I am intrigued by their open-endedness and their ability to connect with a wider audience.

In the hope of generating discussion, the website was distributed to approximately 20 people who were invited to leave comments. To my surprise, there was a general reluctance from my colleagues to partake in this discussion. After several weeks of waiting, I discovered that the website had continued to spread through word of mouth and according to the online data, had been viewed over 100 times. However, in the end only a few vague comments were posted. Perhaps the most positive result was that of a particular individual who was apparently fooled by the website's presence and seemed concerned to know if he would still be allowed unrestricted access to the space, in order to continue photographing it. It could be that the hostel removed many of the

abandoned qualities through its installation and therefore did not generate a significant discussion, or perhaps it was simply a result of the proposal being imaginary and not physically constructed.

### **Conclusion**

*With the existence of a few creature comforts capable of mitigating the most eerie or dangerous encounters, does the building still feel abandoned?*

At first glance being able to comfortably sleep in the building seems to significantly challenge the perception that the building is abandoned. However, one could argue that while the unit itself is considered inhabited, the building in which the unit is located might still be abandoned. The hostel creates a situation whereby the site may simultaneously exist as both abandoned and occupied. The clear independence of the unit with respect to the existing building still allows the temporary visitor to enter uninhibited and explore the abandoned space.



[about](#) [booking](#) [photos](#) [attractions](#) [comments](#)

The P.A.D (Preservation of Abandonment and Decay) organisation has been a non-for-profit group since 2010, and is now pleased to offer the services of an on-site hostel. We have been working hard to raise the awareness of the natural beauty of this decaying property and to highlight the possibilities of interpretation. For many years people have come from all over to take photographs, create graffiti, and experience this wonderful structure.

This new venture allows people to comfortably experience the building for extended periods. Our reservation and check in process is completely online and digital. After reserving your dates and making the payment you will be given a unique access code which will allow you to enter your secured unit. These mobile units have a floor to ceiling window on one side allowing the user to position their views independently and however they see fit. Feel like contemplating how the paint is peeling of a particular wall? Well give your unit a spin and voila, you're there!

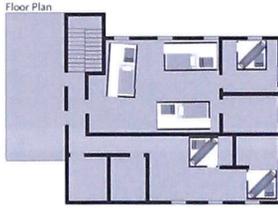


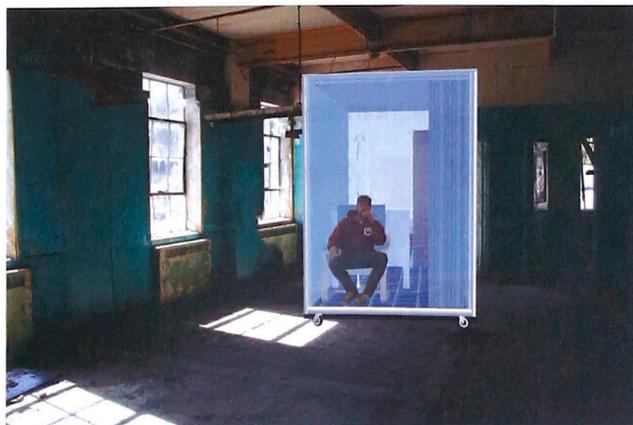
[about](#) [booking](#) [photos](#) [attractions](#) [comments](#)

Today: February 2011

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	1	2	3	4	5

Legend: vacant still available booked boarded abandoned





## Possess

### *The Ninth Level of Interpretation*

## Outline

This interpretation will explore the impact of active ownership and/or inhabitation of the site. The motive for the interpretation will be based on an economic model. In other words, the intention will be to create a profitable venture or a comfortable, sustained, long-term inhabitation (sustaining basic human needs). The intervention will attempt to preserve certain aesthetic qualities of the site and where possible will capitalize upon the building's existing structure. However, it is probable that the large portions of the building will need to be replaced or reconstructed. The building would have to meet building and safety code requirements. With a specific program and function, it is likely that unauthorized entry into the building will no longer be permitted.

## Precedents

The *What Happens When* restaurant is a project currently underway in New York City.<sup>i</sup> The entrepreneur, John Fraser, has constructed his temporary restaurant in a soon-to-be-demolished building. The reason he states for signing the temporary lease is the affordable rent that coincides with the building's indefinite future. This transitory restaurant will implement a number of affordable design strategies, and offer a limited menu that can be easily delivered without the costly appliances usually found in contemporary restaurants. Over the course of 9 months *What Happens When* will be redesigned each month based on customer suggestions with the help of a collaborating design team and online donations.<sup>ii</sup> Unfortunately these monthly interventions have so far avoided a strong emphasis on the decaying and formerly abandoned aesthetic, with many characteristics already being painted over or removed. The building's former state was one of complete disrepair, and when I had first discovered the development of this project some months ago, I anxiously awaited its opening, hopeful to discover an abandoned culinary experience.

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i *What Happens When*, accessed April 04, 2011, <<http://www.whathappenswhennyc.com/>>.

ii Frank Bruni, "The Now-You-See-It Restaurant," *The New York Times*, (January 4, 2011), accessed February 2, 2011, <[http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/05/dining/05temp.html?\\_r=1&scp=4&sq=see%20squat&st=cse](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/05/dining/05temp.html?_r=1&scp=4&sq=see%20squat&st=cse)>.

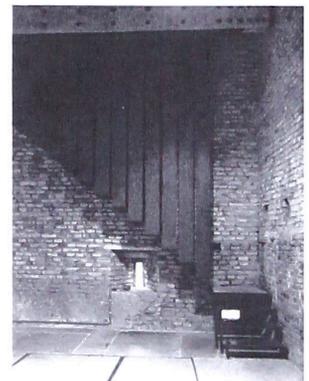
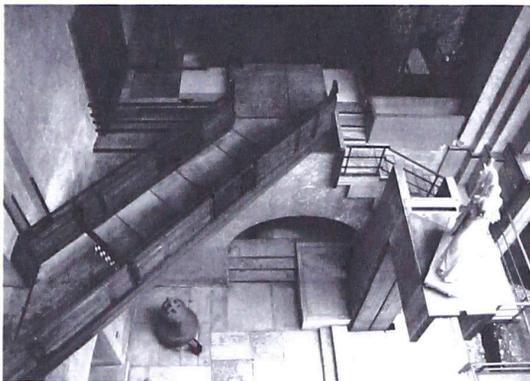
Source:  
Fred R. Conrad, New York, (The New  
York Times, January 4, 2011), ac-  
cessed April 7, 2011, <[www.nytimes.  
com/2011/01/05/dining/05temp.  
html?\\_r=2&scp=4&sq=see%20  
squat&st=cse](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/05/dining/05temp.html?_r=2&scp=4&sq=see%20squat&st=cse)>.



Source:  
Space NO. 1, New York (Janu-  
ary 2011), accessed April 7, 2011,  
<[http://www.whathappenswhennyc.  
com/2011/01/mov-no-1/](http://www.whathappenswhennyc.com/2011/01/mov-no-1/)>.



Source:  
Castelvecchio, Verona, Italy, Person-  
al photograph by author, (2010).



The *Castelvecchio* museum in Verona, Italy was made famous in part by architect Carlo Scarpa's renovations beginning in 1958. Constructed as a civic building between 1354 and 1356 by the della Scala family, less than 50 years later the castle entered into an extended period of military use. Over the years it underwent various additions and alterations, and in 1923 the castle finally began its current life as a museum.<sup>iii</sup> Despite never having existed as an abandoned building, the beautifully crafted renovations by Scarpa exhibit a remarkable case in which an interpretation preserves and highlights a building's past qualities, including those of decay. Scarpa uses a variety of techniques including collage and juxtaposition to bring attention to the spatial qualities and material details of the existing castle. The quality of this relationship, between old and new positions Carlo Scarpa's design as a valuable precedent. However, existing as a truly picturesque ruin, Castelvecchio's familiar and comfortable museum spaces, unfortunately remove the eerie aspects of death and decay.

### **Possible Interpretations**

*House* - A home for a young family or bachelor.

*Coffee Shop* - A small café for tourists and residents of Wakefield.

*Craft Store* - An arts and craft store, catering to the Wakefield tourists and resident artists.

*Community Centre* - A gathering place for the residents of Wakefield.

### **Experimental Procedure**

After careful evaluation of the building's existing structure and condition it is clear that the first step in such an intervention is to deal with issues of health and safety. While it may be possible to physically occupy the building in its current state, it is necessary to ensure the safety of those who enter. If the code and safety issues are to be seriously addressed, it is apparent that the building must undergo a significant transformation. Apart from reinforcing existing wall and roof structures and possibly installing new foundations, railings need to be introduced, stairs need to be rebuilt to meet code, water needs to be supplied, and sewage disposed of, not to mention some sort of environmental control strategy put in place (new roof, windows, insulated walls, etc.).

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<sup>iii</sup> History: della Scala Epoch, (Comune di Verona), accessed March 29, 2011, <<http://www.comune.verona.it/Castelvecchio/cvsito/english/storia.htm>>.

While undergoing such an intense transformation, it is hard to imagine that a passerby would consider this an abandoned building. It would no longer maintain the eerie feeling that stems from a proximity to death and decay. On the contrary, a passerby would credit it with having escaped death's grasp and been given new life.

It becomes abundantly clear that with an interpretation of this nature, the abandoned potential will be lost. The tenuous abandonment of the eighth interpretation has been truly severed. We have now moved into the realm of the adaptive reuse project- a reoccupation of a formerly abandoned building. As such, this interpretation exists outside the purview of this thesis.

### **Discussion**

Although the adaptive reuse project is detrimental to the sense of abandonment, there exist similarities and certain points of relation between the creative potential we find in abandoned buildings and the adaptive reuse project. The owner and/or architect of the adaptive reuse project is often drawn towards the existing building for reasons similar to those that draw the urban explorer to photograph it. However, by fully occupying and possessing an abandoned building, the adaptive reuse project essentially romanticizes the abandoned, making the mystique and aura of the unknown, safe. The building's life is renewed and no longer conjures a subconscious confrontation with death and decay, but instead alludes to new beginnings and the prestige of its past. Because of its ability to communicate and relate to the abandoned building, the adaptive reuse has been a source of inspiration and used as precedents as early on as the fifth level of interpretation. While it is usually guilty of embracing the abandoned potential to the point where it is smothered by the presence of the new use and construction, the adaptive reuse project is often a beautiful homage to its formerly abandoned existence.

### **Conclusion**

*How would such an interpretation affect the abandoned potential?*

As has been discussed, the possible interpretations at this level require aggressive interventions that would fundamentally destroy its abandoned qualities. One of the major criteria for defining abandonment

throughout these interpretations has been the possibility for uninhibited private exploration. This would no longer be possible once the space was enclosed and occupied. Many of the details that we associate with abandonment would have to be removed, arrested (ie. turned into an exhibit) or corrected: The bowed out wall would at least need to be stabilized, much of the dirt and broken glass would have to be cleared away to create a safe and sanitary environment, and the majority of fixtures, doors, and furniture would need to be replaced. Perhaps the most unfortunate result would be that the building would no longer exist as a dynamic environment, subject to the changing interpretations of future guests or its natural decay over time. For these reasons, I have determined that this ninth level of interpretation is the endpoint of these tests and constitutes the threshold at which the sense of abandonment is lost.

## Postscript

The preceding nine experiments are an array of interpretations performed within a single abandoned building, completed by an individual author. This independent research highlights the personal relationship constructed between the building and myself. Through this specific example and the unique interpretations that have arisen, it has been the intention of this thesis to bring attention to and encourage the exploration of the creative potential inherent in any abandoned building, by recognizing and appreciating its array of values.

These experiments only scrape the surface of the number of possible interpretations. However, this empirical progression has provided insight into a more definitive area in which the abandoned interpretation safely exists. These interpretations have been situated between mere thought and actual intervention, in an attempt to understand and draw attention to the abandoned qualities without damaging or infringing upon them. Each separate report is not meant to hold less or more value, but rather, it is meant to draw out situations whereby the individual and his or her work may comfortably coexist with the abandoned building.

Further interpretations of the abandoned site have been delayed in order to preserve and identify the abandoned qualities necessary for creating the personal relationship between the author and the building, thus ensuring the opportunity of a newcomer to similarly engage with the space. Although it is clear from the final reports that a more involved occupation or interaction with the abandoned building may disrupt the inherent abandoned quality this thesis set out to study, this does not remove the opportunity for further progression. As these interpretations have advanced through a delicate evolution from thought to inhabitation, a methodology has been created for understanding and responding to the abandoned building. Each interpretation has built upon the previous to provide an in-depth analysis and understanding of the architecture and quality of the space. From this, it is hoped that the series of reports may subsequently provide a road map for future architects, designers, or creative entrepreneurs to follow and gain their own individually distinct relationship and insight into the qualities of the abandoned space.

From an analysis of the interpretations and their effects on the building – as discussed in the conclusions of the preceding lab reports – I have created a list of qualities, which exist in abandoned spaces. Although this list is not an exhaustive compilation of abandoned traits, it does serve to define the major characteristics that allow a space to be perceived as abandoned. Written in succession, each trait discovered becomes more essential to maintaining the abandoned perception.

- 1- Unfamiliarity of the space.
- 2- Traces of the former use and occupancy.
- 3- Traces of unauthorized human occupancy.
- 4- Dirt, Debris, and Decay.
- 5- An impending sense of danger.
- 6- Temporal and changing environment.
- 7- Uninhibited access in spite of trespassing.
- 8- An unmonitored environment and disregard by the owner/general public.

A further extrapolation of this list and summation of this thesis yields the following statement regarding abandoned space:

With an innate desire to discover unfamiliar and mysterious spaces, and to explore our past, many human beings are drawn towards abandoned buildings. These buildings are often laden with old debris, dirt, and are in varying states of decay. Their qualities create temporal environments, which can be dangerous and are constantly changing, becoming spaces that challenges us to confront our very mortality. These unmonitored spaces can become transient vehicles allowing us uninhibited access to fulfill any number of desires and functions.

*...since it is known to be harbouring various spatial, natural, architectural, and social qualities that cannot be found in, and are often actively excluded from, other urban spaces, including the formal public space. These qualities show that these sites are not a waste of land. - Gil M Doron*

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## Appendix [A]

Below is a copy of the working storyboard and selection of stills for a short film produced as a contributing document to this thesis. It has been created as a filmic moment describing a relationship between a single individual (myself as the author and architect) and an abandoned building. This film is not meant as a synopsis of this thesis but rather an elaboration upon it. The preceding work, (developed through a series of laboratory reports) has set out to objectively define a range wherein the creative potential of abandoned buildings may be exploited without damaging their abandoned qualities. This film removes some of the prior objectivity by personalizing the abandoned experience and attempting to highlight the emotional worth that is possible for a single author interacting within a specific building. It is the hope that this film might serve to both inspire and educate future users of abandoned space.

- Tuesday, March 1st, 2011  
v = film attempt #1
- needs to be filmed  
(into wall for snow to melt)
- Script changes & editing notes
- Is this shot possible? does it need to be without snow? what are the other framing a little bit of the building, and you can see the entrance to the building. After a couple of seconds you can hear the truck drive by on the right side of the frame, maybe the mirror, or a shadow of it is visible. The truck stops, outside of the frame, and you hear it turn off. Someone gets out and closes the door, another door is open and then closed. You can hear someones footsteps and eventually their feet seen in the top of the frame as they enter the building through the large doors.
- 20:23 possibly film some still details (exterior)
- scene 1- Fade in, camera is positioned on the top of the building, it is looking down. It is framing a little bit of the building, and you can see the entrance to the building. After a couple of seconds you can hear the truck drive by on the right side of the frame, maybe the mirror, or a shadow of it is visible. The truck stops, outside of the frame, and you hear it turn off. Someone gets out and closes the door, another door is open and then closed. You can hear someones footsteps and eventually their feet seen in the top of the frame as they enter the building through the large doors.
- scene 2- at :30 seconds begin showing exterior stills of the building show approximately 74? stills - These stills should be of the exterior, one from the road, one from the front, a closer one of the front, showing a bit through the crack in the door.
- 34:21 walking past a window camera outside walking into stairwell scan floor
- scene 3- Halfway through the showing of the stills, show a quick clip of t-fer through a crack in the building, he walks past, (if no crack available, show a well defined shadow.)
- scene 3.5- show about 4 more stills, this time of the interior of the building. Show a few details, perhaps they could be filmed. Show the stage set (do a really quick flash of the set up 1-5 frames)
- scene 4- at :58 show t-fer walking up the stairs from outside the window. (Close need to be consistent)
- scene 5- at 1:11 begin showing stills of some of the interpretations the raven (film) the green door (show both, do a fade in) (guard door) graffiti (rare beauty)
- scene 6- at 1:34 t-fer walks past the first loft doorway, quickly (not hurriedly) as soon as he is out of the frame cut quickly.
- scene 6.5- another quick shot of t-fer walking into green room, cut quickly.
- scene 7A- same view as the picnic, t-fer walks past (his head passes through the camera) fade from camera view first frame of picnic in the 2 seconds of silence.
- scene 7B- same view as the picnic, t-fer is ghosted in the frame, just before piano begins, fade into the first frame of the picnic, t-fer sits down (as he is almost invisible at this point)
- scene 8- play stop frame of picnic as music starts @ 1:40.
- scene 9- @ 1:45 music has triplet. Stop frame (24 pictures) (maybe one with me in it) of camera moving into position of the peel. Take these pictures with camera.
- scene 9.5- show stills of the peel (in time with music 1/3 time, it is a waltz) show 4-6 stills
- scene 10- play video of the fall, just the letting go of the wall, briefly (stop as wall starts to fall)
- scene 11- show some finishing stills of the peel again at 1/4 time, 4-6 stills
- scene 12- t-fer is ghosted behind last position as the final image of the stop frame, he walks through himself (it fades to full view of video) and right past the camera, cut.
- scene 13- camera is positioned on the kite flying graffiti, you can see, just in the corner of the frame, the first door to the loft. after a few seconds t-fer walks past into the loft.

- ✓ scene 14- camera is positioned high in the loft. It is looking down towards the stage, its is a rather large shot, because of the height of the camera (attached to the ladder). t-fer eventually walks in positions himself directly in front of the camera. It slowly zooms towards his head, while simultaneously fading into a shot of Adrienne playing the piano. As soon as full fade is accomplished, cut. *could be re-filmed (pull back/higher angle) show floor in shot*  
*camera is looking*  
*up after t-fer walks over (t-fer)*
- scene 15- play, in time with the waltz, a few shots of t-fer painting the white stage.
- ✓ scene 16- cut back to camera behind t-fer, he walks away. cut.
- ✓ scene 17- *2:28???* camera positioned low in front of bridge. t-fer walks out onto bridge. cut. *2:23:22*  
*machinist thing (just feet) (walk all the way across) (maybe this shot can do it)*
- scene 18- 2:34 cut when t-fer is halfway across bridge. Play a few stills of t-fer setting up the bridge. (perhaps these stills can come intermittently, between t-fer steps across the bridge.) *see the bow*
- scene 19- from outside looking in, through the bow. You can see t-fer leaning against the wall, pushing against it, and looking closely at it. (maybe just one of these instances will be used, but be sure to film all three.) this shot can last longer, since it may take several moments for the viewer to understand exactly what they are viewing. *Extra may not be possible, with all the snow*
- 2:41:13 → scene 19- When t-fer is leaning against the wall, play a few stills of the leaner stop frame. Just enough to understand that it is a stencil and then the final view to see it as a leaning person. last still zooms up to the window, where t-fer is standing. *Adrienne made to be filmed just that moment.*
- scene 20- The camera turns from the window, and we briefly see some people and adrienne playing the piano. cut. *play some of the Seanes stop frame*
- ✓ scene 21- Camera is positioned behind the white stage and we can see t-fer sitting on the bridge he gets up and descends the latter and walks out of the building. cut. *slow shot (what's steps is possible)*
- ✓ scene 22- *3:26:04* camera is positioned on Adrienne as she plays the last few notes of the song. Just before she plays the last note the scene fades to view empty with out any people, but we still hear them clapping. Their clapping fades out of the empty scene and all we are left with is the empty scene and the noise of the wind in the building. *may not work with snow?*  
*merge* *Adrienne is seen through window walking up the stairs ladder*  
*needs to be shot some position !!!*
- scene 23- credits (filmed, written, & edited by Chris Bretecher, additional photography and filming by Kendra Spanton)
- scene 24- camera is positioned on top of dash board of the truck. car turns off and t-fer gets out. He has crow bar in his hand and walks up to a different abandoned building. He shoves the crowbar in the crack between the door and begins to pry it open. cut.

note: Music is played in triple time in the style of a waltz  
Piano begins at 1:40  
Crescendo in music occurs at 3:23 - *important (what happens here?)*  
Ends @ 4:00

4:00 min's of music 28 shots approximately 8.3 seconds per shot.  
*22* *24*





## Appendix [B]

Texts from the first level of interpretation.

### Poetic Interpretation

*The Building appears from the outside to have sunk into the past. Upon closer inspection, I see it is the ground that has elevated beyond it. In a sort of layering up of history even the ground has moved on, forgetting the old structure, frozen in time. Birds fly freely in an out of a massive doorway, as it slowly creeks in the wind resting on rusted hinges. This space has become their readymade aviary. Perhaps in response to this new life filled with airborne inhabitants, the entire east wall has bowed out in the middle, in an attempt to spread its own wings.*

*As I move towards the stairway leading to the second floor, the cracks between cinder blocks become more personal, and the red 'kkk' childishly painted at the halfway landing is less than haunting.*

*Entering into a loft that overlooks the two story aviary, I have apparently stepped into the fowls' latrine. The crispy floor is noisy and shifts beneath my feet. The door leading to the toilet bowl loft resonates proudly with a seafoam green. The pride in each paint chip is easily seen shining through the dirt and excrement.*

*The whistle from an old steam engine resonates through the shaky walls. Could I have been transported back to a time when birds still lived outside these walls? No, I recall, the town of Wakefield in all its nostalgia has stripped the old steam engine of its dignity in decay. The train has been held behind, while the others, including this building have carried on to complete their lifecycle.*

*This second story, with its many seafoam thresholds, is spun into a labyrinth of dirty concrete and shards of glass. The inanimate objects have been positioned with the greatest of ignorance and disregard for their intimate life on the floor. In a forced marriage, that surpasses the difficult cultural odds, a wooden stool and urinal have found true love. While just around the corner from one another two chairs missing the same piece long desperately for each other. What a relief it could be to find that their decay is mirrored in each other, that there is another, going through the same.*

*A dead end forces my feet to experience this space once again, in reverse. I'm beginning to understand these cracks, the cinderblocks of the staircase are trying to break free. Steps that have successfully risen an occupant, refuse to be named functionless, and therefore have decided to forgo the compromise with time that the rest of the building has made. Perhaps when they finally break free they will head to the rail line in search of refuge to negotiate their continued service of levitation.*

*Back inside the nest mansion, I capture two desks in the act of love making, so fortunate to have been placed on top of each other. Finally the steam whistle sparks my interest and I use this as an excuse to enter a long corridor in search of sky and smoke. This funnel is decidedly directional, turning around is not an option. For those entering the sharp corner at the end is far too luring to turn back. While for those on the exit pathway, the desire for a stench free breath is overcome only by the fact that your welcome, has also been worn.*

## Worker's Story

8:12 a.m

A few minutes late, Chris was relieved to find that the floor chief had not yet arrived. He could tell because the factory doors were always swung open when the boss was in. He set to work, testing and setting up his welding unit. Today was a big day since their project was supposed to be picked up in the evening. After setting up, he headed upstairs to gather the parts necessary to finish the job from the store room. Hopefully Sam would be working the store room Chris thought. She knew the layout of everything much better than anyone else, and on their final day her efficiency would surely help save time.

10:00 a.m

Coffee time couldn't have come sooner, Chris's boss, Jim was already getting on his case. Jim never really did know how to handle stress and generally took it out on the workers. Up in the break room Chris and his co-workers whispered gossip over a cup of burnt coffee, while Jim and the company owner were nearby in their respective offices. Lunch and coffee breaks had been the only times when Chris was able to talk with Jerry and Miguel in the last couple of weeks. Since the project reached its final stages and had grown to over 20ft in height, they had spent most of their time working up in opposite lofts. Two teams had been created: Jerry and Miguel working together in one loft, while Chris had been paired with Ray in the other. They made a good team, Ray had the most experience in the shop but his age was beginning to show, while Chris, being the youngest, still had a lot of zip in his step. Jerry and Miguel were both in their 30's and started working in the factory at the same time, 4 years ago.

3:36 p.m

With only a few hours left Chris and his partner Ray started to lag behind. Chris was getting frustrated because it started to feel like Jim was playing favourites with Jerry and Miguel. He was sure that every time Jim used the overhead crane to rotate the project he would bring it to rest a few inches closer to the other loft. At times Chris was leaning so far out that he could barely operate his tools properly. Ray remained quite calm and steady, their entire time working from the loft space he had never seen Ray drop a single tool or screw. On the contrary, Chris's tools were always slipping out of his hands and would roll under their work. He would have to run down the stairs search the floor for the part and run back up again. Chris felt he must have ran up and down the stairs 20 times a day.

6:43 p.m

Chris was always amazed at the accuracy of the drivers when backing into the garage. Their projects were often so big and delicate that even placing them incorrectly on the truck could damage their work. By now most of the straps were on and their day was almost through. No matter what the stresses were Chris and all of the employees always watched with great pride as their work rolled out of the garage and down the driveway. Another project successfully built.

## Explanatory Notes

The building is difficult to age. The facade is relatively clean considering it is an abandoned building. The most obvious signs of dilapidation are the broken windows and their rusted frames. The building contains two discernible sections: One of 2 separate stories. The other a large open space appearing, from the exterior, not unlike a automobile service garage.

The larger open space is accessible through floor to ceiling height swinging doors. The hinged doors are peculiar for such a large space, one would expect a vertical doorway as seen in a garage. The first object of note is a large overhead crane. This explains the doorways being hinged. A vertical operating door would open into the operating space of the crane. The crane appears in-operative but not in total disrepair. The lack of grease stains on the concrete floor rules out the possibility of this space once being used as a mechanical garage. The height, best estimated between 25 and 30 feet would allow for large objects to move easily in and around the space. There are several large tanks for holding compressed gasses, most likely used in welding. There are two lofts on either side of this space. A possible use for these loft spaces could be as a permanent scaffolding, increasing mobility and access vertically. In this scenario I would posit that this space was used as an assemblage factory for large, heavy, steel objects.

The factory space connects into the first and second floor. There are 6 rooms on the second floor, not including one of the loft spaces above the factory. Each of the 6 rooms varies in size. Two of the rooms are sized appropriately for office space, one of them containing a broken desk. Two rooms were most likely washrooms, one still contains a toilet and urinal while the other has the plumbing reminiscent of a bathroom. The remaining two rooms are more ambiguous, they appear too large for office space, and there are no discernible signs of a fixed use. One of them is the front-room to the two office spaces, perhaps an informal break room for the factory workers. The fluorescent light fixtures hanging from the ceiling aid in this conclusion. The final room reveals the most wear, and has a unique C shape. There is very little inside of the room to help with its analysis. It is the last accessible room on the second floor and was perhaps used as a storage area. There is a large cutout connecting into the break room, this could have served as a pick-up/drop-off counter for parts from this potential storage area.

There is restricted access to the first floor, which makes it difficult to speculate on its former function. From the windows one can see that it is currently used for the storage of wood. It appears to have been gutted for such a purpose which renders all attempts to understand its former use virtually impossible. I venture a guess that it would of been similar office space as seen on the second floor.

## Visual Survey of abandoned construction

Location: Wakefield, Quebec  
Reference Source: 00:03:44 Video  
Date: 12:44pm - June 6 - 2010

The exterior of the building is concrete cinder block construction. Facing the southern facade two distinct sections of the structure are separated by a central entrance. The eastern section is a large open space, two stories in height. This space contains direct access through large hinged doors on the south wall that are no longer operable. The western section contains two floors with access from the central entryway, which contains a stairway.

There is a fresh layer of gravel around the building which has been built up by approximately six inches in height, above the ground level of the interior of the building. Inside the eastern section the ground is poured in place concrete. Within this large open space there is a heavy steel structure made of interconnected beams supporting the roof and a dysfunctional interior overhead crane. The length of this space is approximately 90 feet in depth and 30 feet in width. There are two loft spaces inside located in the northwest and northeastern corners. Empty shelves, gas storage cylinders, tin siding, along with other dirt and artifacts litter the floor.

An open threshold connects the eastern section to the central foyer of the entryway. Here two desks are stacked on top of each other and miscellaneous items, mostly wooden slats, litter the floor. From this particular area there is access to all sections of the building.

The stairs leading up to the second floor are secure, however a slight list in the treads has occurred and the cinder block construction of the stair well is riddled with large cracks. There is a small amount of graffiti at the middle landing, a sign of vandalism. The railing, stairs, and radiator are all badly rusted, and the paint on the walls is visibly peeling with large chips scattered on the floor.

The second floor has many rooms laid out along an L shaped hallway. The first door at the top of the stairs leads out on to one of the loft spaces which provides a view out over the large space. This floor is covered in bird droppings. Each room of the second floor is varying in size and there are 7 doorways in total. All of the rooms are largely vacant save for the dirt, shards of broken glass and the occasional broken desk and/or chair. The floor is concrete and is still of sound construction. There is less weathering in this section of the building. The only discernible space is a bathroom which contains a toilet and urinal. Many of the walls and all of the doorways on the second floor have been painted in a vibrant turquoise.

The first floor of the Western section is locked. Through the exterior windows it appears to be used for lumber storage.

There are few openings into the building. A final entrance is found on the Northern facade which quickly turns into a hallway. This runs between the East and West sections of the building, connecting with the large open space. This hallway is approximately 50 feet in length and 5 feet in width.

Appendix [C]  
Unrealized Possible Interpretations

The following list is a compilation of the unrealized possible interpretations from the preceding 9 lab reports. This has been provided as a starting point for those interested in creating their own abandoned interpretation. Please feel free to copy, borrow, adapt, and use any of these suggestions.

- 01 Office - Bring a computer or book and enter the space to temporarily use it as a workstation.
- 02 Film - Make a short film, which walks through the space entering into each room documenting the abandoned traits.
- 03 Labyrinth - Create a labyrinth on the floor that meanders through the building; a suggested path for visitors.
- 04 Patch - Sew the building back together. Figuratively, by using bright red yarn to weave between the cracks.
- 05 Park space - Turn one of the lofts into a more pleasurable space for the birds or for picnics by adding sod, and cleaning the area.
- 06 The Delicate Smash - Break a hole in between two rooms, leaving one side rough and delicately finishing the other so that after it is passed through it becomes clear that it was a deliberate action.
- 07 Upside Down Office - Attach a desk and chairs upside down to the ceiling.
- 08 The Missing Block - Gently remove one cinder block from a wall at approximately eye level.
- 09 Crossroad - remove an intersecting portion of the wall shared by three or more rooms.
- 10 Obstacle course - A series of objects moved, constructed, and created forcing people to re-negotiate the space.
- 11 Stage - Build a stage in the open area that can be used as a platform for miscellaneous purposes.
- 12 The Perch - Attach a small stand to one of the raised horizontal beams providing a private perch from which a single person may view the space.
- 13 The Ferry - Set up a method for using the overhead crane that will allow people to transport themselves around the space with a bird's eye perspective.
- 14 Preservation - Introduce an architectural detail that both accentuates and preserves the bowed out wall.
- 15 Acceleration - Speed up the decay of certain aspects of the building, allowing visitors to more easily see and understand the process of decay.
- 16 Concert Venue - A summer venue for holding parties and live concerts. Basic infrastructure such as a bar and washrooms could be portable and thus removed when there were no events.
- 17 Summer Home - A cottage used only in the summer months, this would allow the design to remain simple, without the need to permanently enclose or heat the space.
- 18 House - A home for a young family or bachelor.
- 19 Coffee Shop - A small café for tourists and residents of Wakefield.
- 20 Craft Store - An arts and craft store, catering to the Wakefield tourists and resident artists.
- 21 Community Centre - A gathering place for the residents of Wakefield.

03-13-08

Thank you

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