

urban

exploration

&

the search

for

the sublime

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an introduction to urban exploration

We've all done it, at least the more intrepid inquirers of us have; and in all probability, unwittingly too: Its easy, under the chain link fence, onto the sill, pull back the chip board and squeeze through the gap, and you're in, under the cover of darkness its even easier. No-one should bother you, and why should they; the building has been rotting into obscurity for years... Once inside the remnants of past stories unravel in the detritus left behind, in the patina and palimpsest ingrained in the buildings very fabric. In the derelict, abandoned building, the signs of use give way to a future past; played out in the mind.

It seems to some the city is a playground an arena for adventure subsuming the dogged humdrum the majority of city dwellers pursue. '*...tear free from the shackles of mindless tv, celebrity bullshit and the constant bombardment of advertising. Shed your bubble wrap suits and live a little*'¹

We know the playground, so what is the game? Urban exploration.

*"The age of discovery is not dead: It lives on through urban explorers"*²

Urban Exploring, Urban spelunking, hacking, draining., or reality hacking. Broadly speaking Urban Exploring (UE) entails the exploration of manmade structures in our cities and suburbs, and anywhere graced with the urban presence of man, past or present.³

Before some detailed explanation, I wish to outline what I hope to achieve through the course of this study, and how I wish the study to be portrayed: My own experiences have allowed me to brush with urban exploration, so here follows as much a personal account as an academic attempt to dissect urban exploration, and reveal its act as just the *'punctum'*⁴ in a diverse range of methods which could be employed to take a wider view of the cities we inhabit. This study will focus on the scene and places of UE encounters and its architectural significance. I will attempt to unpick its sociological implications; to try and discern just why UE's followers are drawn to particular types of architecture, and what they are looking for; if any thing. To do this I shall draw on comparisons with other 'fringe hobbies', which I believe are striving for a similar goal.

In parallel to this essay runs a photographic essay, which is my attempt to document my own experiences with the subject. I have separated the text and image purposely, and you will notice that the images follow no particular order, on account of their retrieval from the floor of my room. Any

¹ www.sleepycity.net/faqs 14 Aug 2008

² Deyo, L.B. & Leibowitz, David, *'Invisible Frontier – Exploring the tunnels, ruins, and rooftops of Hidden New York'*, New York, Three Rivers Press 2003 p.143

³ www.wikipedia.org/wiki/urbanexploration 2 Apr 2008

⁴ Barthes, Roland, *'Camera Lucida – Reflections on Photography'*, London, Vintage 2000, p.27

apparent order is purely coincidental. This act is to convey the feelings invoked through the exploration of little known and often forgotten parts of the city, a sort of nostalgic *sojourn* if you will, through the landscape of those experiences, a journey sometimes fragmented and spontaneous. The removal of narrative and the removal of context is, in my view precisely the characteristics that the focus of explorations take on, thus enabling the reader to immerse in that reverie.

UE is considered a hobby, or at least a fringe hobby, an entails a sort of '*interior tourism*'⁵ of all the forgotten about places, or behind the scenes spaces, that infill our urban fabric. The breadth of Urban Explorations focus ranges from ventilation shafts, disused tunnels, towers, drains, sewers, bridges, underground complexes, mines, quarries, churches, prisons, military sites, old hospitals and asylums, train stations, theatres, and factories. With the goal of '*infiltrating*' and *venturing into otherwise restricted or off bounds areas or spaces*.'⁶ This usually but not exclusively extends to derelict and abandoned buildings structures and infrastructures.

UE is not a new hobby, although it has only recently been defined as such. The early explorations of the modern city are well documented; Considered by most modern urban explorers to be the first, Parisian Philibert Aspaire explored the catacombs of Paris by candle light in 1782, a successful exploration trip on account of how far Philibert got, but not a roaring success; eleven years later his body was found deep in the network of underground tunnels.⁹

The Situationist's most famously used the Flaneur to explore the city for those more serendipitous discoveries not infiltration, but looking for the chance, an opportunity to recode the city the Situationist's famously documented there travels and random explorations around cities during the 50's and 60's, perhaps the first of the contemporary explorations, The Situationist International movement argued that society consists largely of passive spectators and consumers, and suggest individuals interrupt or this state with creative play.⁷ More recently Patrick Keller's *Robinson in Space*⁸ sees an even more loose approach to the wanderings of the city, more particularly the fringe of London. UE may be considered a form of play, a re-codification of the city as we know it; "*...In and by means of space, the work may shine through the product; use value may gain the upper hand over exchange value*"⁹. To see the city as such we must transcend the city in terms of its commodity value or exchange value as Lefebvre puts it, and release the use value, could UE be one of the avenues that does this?

Urban Exploration is now within the realm of cyber space, the early ponderings on cities by the Situationist's has moved from the coffee shops and pubs of London and Paris, to the infinitely large chat rooms, of our collective knowledge, the internet. It is here that the UE imaginations are played out, in stories, journals, chronicles and blogs, but primarily photography. The UE web rings reached

⁵ Ninjalicious, '*Access all areas – a users guide to the art of urban exploration*', Canada, *infiltration*, 2005 p.3

⁶ Ninjalicious, '*Access all areas – a users guide to the art of urban exploration*', Canada, *infiltration*, 2005, p.3

⁷ Sadler, Simon, *Situationist Cities*, Massachusetts, The MIT Press 1999

⁸ Keller, Patrick, '*Robinson in Space*', London, Reaktion Books 1999

⁹ Lefebvre Henry, quoted in Borden, Iain, '*Skateboarding space and the city*', Oxford, Berg, 2001, p.236

critical mass in 1998 when the internet search engine ‘Yahoo’ stopped lumping the 30 or so UE sites into the category recreation:cool links:recreation and sports, and created a new category; recreation:Hobbies: Urban Exploration⁹. The power of the internet has aided the explosion of UE’s popularity, with the desire to exploit power of the internet has been expressed by Deyo: ‘...*build upon the already burgeoning online community of urban explorers and treat the information gleaned as “empirical” to be shared with the fellow community, and to build friendships with a shared eccentric world view.*’¹⁰ That empirical power made manifest in the first official UE convention in Toronto of 65 explorers which sealed UE cult status in June 2004, the cunningly titled convention ‘office products Expo 94’ is ironic hint to the defiance that the UE community holds against contemporary society.¹¹

‘For too many people, urban living consists of mindless travel between work, shopping and home.’¹²

It seems the hope or mantra of UE is to offer something different, something outside the predictions of contemporary life; is UE the latest derivation of escapism? Is it the urbanites bid for freedom, or the search for something more real, than in the perceived reality of the lives we lead? ...the search for something visceral, something authentic? ...a strive for meaning, or a search for the sublime? ...Rot decay surface, aesthetics? ...thrill of the chase, fear, adrenaline, or something more prophetic? Transcendent, transgressive? Peak experience, on the edge? This study hopes to tear the surface of this little known hobby.

¹⁰ Deyo, L.B. & Leibowitz, David, ‘Invisible Frontier – Exploring the tunnels, ruins, and rooftops of Hidden New York’, New York, Three Rivers Press 2003 p.139

⁹ www.infiltration.org/history~timeline.html june 2008

¹² Ninjalicious, ‘Access all areas – a users guide to the art of urban exploration’, Canada, infiltration, 2005, p.3

who

"...were we ready? Captain Sir Francis Burton, by the time he found the source of the Nile spoke 27 languages, had been ordained in the Hindu and Islamic faiths, and was the finest swordsman in Europe. I didn't even have a library card" ...we sprang from a whited epoch of online chat rooms, grade inflation, and psychic friends; years of thinking globally, but acting locally... where were honour, courage, guts, and style? Consigned to the classic section of the video store. An anaemic generation cowed through faddish decades, growing softer and more churlish."¹³

The protagonists of UE are wide and varied sort, although the medias portrayal is that of a Generation Y¹⁴, isolated by the virtual collective, this feeling is conveyed on UE websites too, perhaps it's a tactic to retain the scenes cult status, its subculture grittiness. *'Im that guy on the tube diligently tapping away on his laptop. Maybe I'm the wild eyed freak who stands a little too close. It doesn't matter who I am or what I do, we could be quite alike, you and I.'*¹⁵ In reality, we are all explorers of cities in one form, for us all the city is full of constant surprises, and revelations that come with wanderings, or even discoveries on a planned journey. This may be the innocent essence of UE, but its subculture focus is entwined with mysticism and adventure and is portrayed with a sort of 'hypereality'¹⁶. The focus of UE tends to have a particular yet not exclusive focus, the asylums and abandoned prisons, hospitals, ventilation shafts, disused tunnels, towers, drains, sewers, bridges, underground complexes, mines, quarries, churches, prisons, military sites, old hospitals and asylums, train stations, theatres, and power stations draw the most attention. Almost exclusively the sites are *res derelicta*. And of a recent past. But why?

If we are to discern the Urban Explorer's reasoning, it is necessary to unravel the object of their obsession, the contemporary ruin; to do this we must critically place the meaning of the ruin, and it's significance throughout history.

¹³ Deyo, L.B. & Leibowitz, David, 'Invisible Frontier – Exploring the tunnels, ruins, and rooftops of Hidden New York', New York, Three Rivers Press 2003 p.8

¹⁴ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Generation_Y

¹⁵ www.sleepycity.net/faqs (14 Aug 2008)

¹⁶ Baudrillard, Jean. Quoted in Lyng, Stephen, 'Edegewrok - The Sociology of Risk-Taking', New York, Routledge 2005 p.36

res derelicta

*"The human race is, and always has been ruin minded"*¹⁷

There has always been a fascination with the ruin, from the picturesque follies, and romanticized visions, the fashion of the 18th Century¹⁸, to Hubert Robert's¹⁹ 1796 interpretation of the Louvre in ruins and Gandy's render of Sir John Soanes Bank of England²⁰, a projected beauty of the building after the use and occupation has been overtaken, to Pirenaisi's Via Appia. No doubt inspired by the grand tours of the 18th century of Europe and of roman sites. Today the tourist pilgrimages to archaeological sites of failed past civilisations seem a more sterile affair; wandering the vast temples of Ankor Wat one cant help imagining what civilisation could be capable of such greatness, only to be distracted by the pestering hawkers, and hoards of similarly minded tourists intent on an authentic experience, yet preoccupied with the space on the memory card of their camera. Is it the mere aesthetic qualities that fascinate us, or something deeper?

The dystopian and phantasmagorical renderings of Lebbeus Woods²¹, depict a future of ruins, where new architectures are borne of disaster and ruination, a 'free architecture' that comes about when social fiscal values are displaced by cataclysm, non more chilling than 'Sarajevo' project, ravaged by war, Woods envisions a new future, but one that is wholly aesthetic, visual, and emotive. I shall delve further into values in a later section.

In more present and existing ruins; Macaulay on Angkor Wat states: *"...such dead cities stir us with their desolate beauty, in contrast with their past greatness and wealth"*²²

*"The ruin is most itself at night, the night time resides in its shell. At night the ruin loses the last vestiges of clarity and is totally invested with mystery... "as darkness veils, the imagination illuminates"*²³ The ruin is able to stir the imagination and the soul, perhaps elicited by the powerful beauty of decay. It could be argued that in its ruinous splendour, the promise of extraordinary sights and mysterious experiences facilitate this interest. Built into the popular culture of children's adventures, the promise of play, urge the would-be UE'r on. It could be argued that this form of play recounts a kind of primordial practice for survival.

¹⁷ Macaulay, Rose. "Pleasure of ruins". London. Thames and Hudson 1977, p.236

¹⁸ Woodward, Christopher, 'In Ruins' London 2002 Vintage p.122

¹⁹ Robert, Hubert 1796 'Louvre in ruins' in Woodward, Christopher 'In Ruins' London, Vintage 2001 p.155 (see appendix)

²⁰ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joseph_Michael_Gandy 'soane's Bank of England as a ruin', 1830 aug 2008 (see appendix)

²¹ Woods, Lebbeus. 'Radical Reconstruction'. New York. Princeton Architectural Press. 1997 p.22

²² Macaulay, Rose. "Pleasure of ruins". London. Thames and Hudson 1977, p.47

²³ Ginsberg, Robert. "The aesthetics of ruins". New York & Amsterdam, Rodopi B. V. 2004. P.317-325



fig 1.1 'Piranesi's fanciful reconstruction of the tomb-lined Via Appia in Rome.'
<http://www.newliturgicalmovement.org/2007/10/genius-of-piranesi.html> (sept 2008)

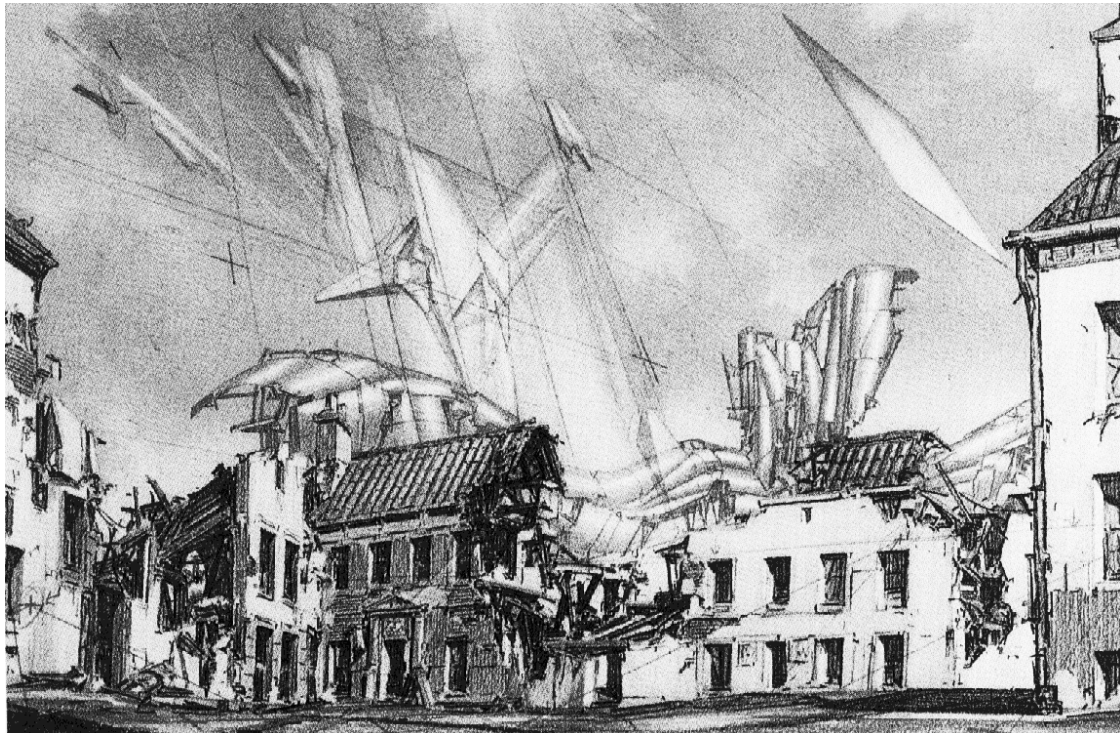


fig 1.2 'Sarajevo' – Woods, Lebbeus, 'Radical Reconstruction', New York. Princeton Architectural Press. 1997 p.34

The beauty of decay itself is undeniable, yet the reasons for just that are harder to pin down, as Chapman states: *“There is no denying the at the whole tragic process of decay is breathtaking to behold. There is a powerful sense of entropy, particularly when you see nature trying to reclaim an artificial area as its turf. Natures efforts always look pitiful at first, but you know that eventually nature will win”*²⁴

It can be argued that, it is what that decay represents, its ontological meaning that holds significance, a reminder of our precious mortality, as cities rise in promise, so to they crumble, it is that crumbling that hints at our own fragility.

*“You don’t know, (he said), why ruins give me so much pleasure . I will tell you... everything dissolves, everything perishes, everything passes, time goes on... How old the world is I walk between two eternities... what is my existence in comparison to the crumbling stone?”*²⁵

It could also be argued that it is a nostalgic appetite for the past? Or is that just romantic reminiscing though? It could be that there is a belief that it, (everything) was always better the way we remember it, in yesteryear. The notion of the ‘Golden Age’ is not new; there has always been a golden age²⁶, and it is never usually in the present or in the future, aside from perhaps the space race optimism of the 50’s and 60’s.

²⁴ Chapman, Jeff quoted in Trigg, Dylan. *‘The aesthetics of Decay: Nothingness, Nostalgia and the absence of reason’*. Peter Lang 2006

²⁵ Macaulay, Rose. *‘Pleasure of ruins’*. London. Thames and Hudson 1977, p.236

²⁶ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Golden_age

commodified ruin

Our interest, for ruins is most evident in what Edensor defines as '*Classical ruins*'²⁷, those buildings, structures and infrastructures, which have, through the passage of time, become obsolete, defunct, remnants of past civilisations. Through the passage of significant time, these 'classical' ruins now regain interest, namely in the eye of the tourist, and within the focus of their trained cameras. It can be argued these ruins become a 'free for all', at least for those willing to pay the entrance fee. The meaning of the ruin is stripped, removed and destroyed, through its commodification, its history is packaged, reedited and recomposed, served up to those with money at the ready, Lefebvre's notion of use-value no longer present, as exchange value triumphs.²⁸

The re-codification of ruins as archaeology sites or classical ruins, are argued by Edensor to fit into this category of the '*exemplary tourist site*' which are '*organised around the capture of famous sites for that 'kodak moment', and the "experience of these spaces come ubiquitously with a series of 'appropriate activities centred on consumerism"*'. Edensor goes on to argue that the space of tourism is "*..increasingly themed, staged, aestheticized, disciplined, highly regulated, smooth, homogenous*" so then these places become predictable."²⁹

Trigg notes that "*...classical ruins are merely aesthetic artefacts and that alone, since the ruins can no longer serve as objects which subvert our philosophical assumptions concerning rational progress. This means that the aesthetic merits become entrenched. Domesticated in the sphere of the heritage trail. Monumentalism remains after all another commodity of social servility which strive to maintain the abstract impression of the past.*"^{ibid}

It can be said that the maintenance of the staged apparatus of controlled environments, blinkers the imagination and dampens the soul; but unknowingly. Is one's conscience preoccupied with the barrage of signifiers? It could be argued that the ruin or monument becomes over coded, it becomes impossible to transgress, to day dream.

*'Most people think the only things worth looking at in our towns and cities are those safe and sanitized attractions that require an admission fee.' Their alertness has atrophied due to the lack of any real adventure in their lives, and their senses have dulled to help cope with the cacophony of noise and meaningless spectacle that surrounds them. Its no wonder people feel unfulfilled and uninvolved as they are corralled through the maze of velvet ropes on their way out through the giftshop*³⁰

²⁷ Edensor, Tim. '*Industrial Ruins: Space Aesthetics and Materiality*'. Oxford and New York, Berg 2005 p.84

²⁸ Lefebvre, Henri '*The Production of Space*'. Oxford, Blackwell 2005 p.100

²⁹ Edensor, Tim. "*Industrial Ruins: Space Aesthetics and Materiality*". Oxford and New York, Berg 2005 p.95

³⁰ Ninjalicious, '*Access all areas – a users guide to the art of urban exploration*', Canada, infiltration, 2005, p.3

In order to transgress, to experience something authentic, then a realm must be sought that subsumes the spectacle, and sidesteps the generic pre-packaged experience, to get to that something which is real. It can be argued that this what Urban Explorers are searching for. A real experience.

“I think the common element which draws me to these (prohibited) spaces is the feeling that I’ve earned myself a glimpse of something authentic, not designed for public consumption.” ^{ibid}

*‘...thus perhaps the appeal of the ruin is that it bypasses the regularization of normative sites of interest. Movement is rough, disrupted and potentially perilous, replete with sensations other than the distanced gaze.’*³¹

³¹ Edensor, Tim. *“Industrial Ruins: Space Aesthetics and Materiality”*. Oxford and New York, Berg 2005 p.56

disenchantment

*“Our century is not moving towards either good or evil, it is moving towards mediocrity.”*³²

It could be argued that in our consumerist society, religion as traditionally known is being overtaken, by our current form of religion; as slaves to shopping, the cult of celebrity, and devotees of the fantastically efficient time wasting apparatus the television³³, is therefore, meaning seeping from our very existence? Defining what is or is not meaningful requires a study alone, suffice to say the sheer scale of the entertainments industry and prevalence of weekend warriors or binge drinkers is surely testament to an under-fulfilled society, or *“disenchanted society”*³⁴.

*“Turn on, tune in, cop out.”*³⁵

Are our life's taken up with superfluous past times? It could be argued that in the interest of maximizing commodity values, our cities are becoming over sanitized, over controlled and homogenized. The cathedrals of consumption vying for our cash and our time; with the overwhelming diversity of consumption experiences, shopping malls, chain stores, cruise ships, casinos et al.³⁶

*“Through the predictable entertainment of television and movies by which the worlds growing number of consumers feel they are in touch with themselves and each other, and by the fashions in everything from clothing to buildings, which give a reassuring illusion of cultural unity and vitality, consumers are encouraged to suppress their inherent differences and conform. This serves well enough those who thrive on consumer dependencies, but reduces consumers themselves to a type of passivity that is historically new. It is this passivity foreseen by Aldous Huxley in Brave new world, when he wrote that the way to control people is not with pain (the modus operandi of the police state) but with pleasure.”*³⁷

The undertones of cynicism are omnipresent in the writings of some critics, declaring; *“An inextricable link between pessimism and consumption. “The more severe the pessimism the greater the demand for consumption. Knowing that a culture is in decline we find an increase in consumerism.”*³⁸ It seems capitalist consumption is an unbreakable cycle, to some extent I concur, but there are elements of the city which fall outside of the almost totalizing grip of capitalism. The focus of the critics is perhaps to honed in on the very epicentres of our cities, were the grip of capitalist consumerism can be said to be totalizing, it could be argued that that view is slightly myopic: Cupers *“pseudo-public space”* *“(is the public space we know just now places where the former gathering places of a community seem to be*

³² Julian 1971, quoted in Trigg, Dylan. *“The aesthetics of Decay: Nothingness, Nostalgia and the absence of reason”*. Peter Lang 2006 p.121

³³ Svendsen, Lars, *‘A Philosophy of Boredom’*, London, Reaktion Books. 2005, p.23

³⁴ Weber quoted 1958, quoted in Lyng, Stephen, *‘Edgework – The Sociology of Risk Taking’*, New York, Routledge, 2005. P.21

³⁵ Cook, Norman aka, *Freakpower (Skank Sinatra) – Turn on, tune in, cop out’* spectrum records 1993

³⁶ Lyng, Stephen, *‘Edgework – The Sociology of Risk Taking’*, New York, Routledge, 2005. P.22

³⁷ Woods, Lebbeus. *“Radical Reconstruction”*. New York. Princeton Architectural Press. 1997 p.13

³⁸ Cupers, Kenny & Miessen, Marcus *“Spaces of uncertainty”*. Wuppertal. Verlag Muller 2006 P.24

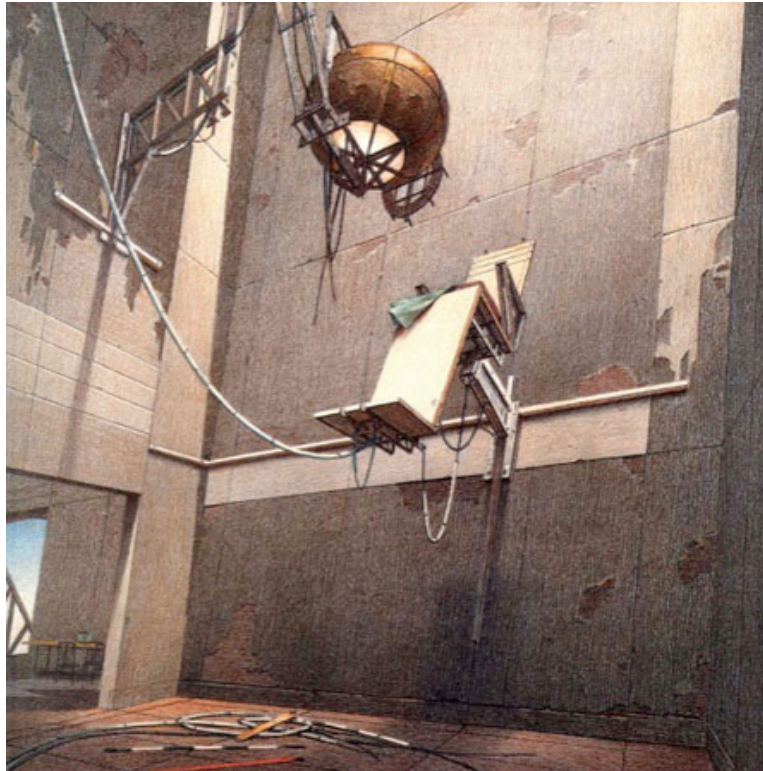
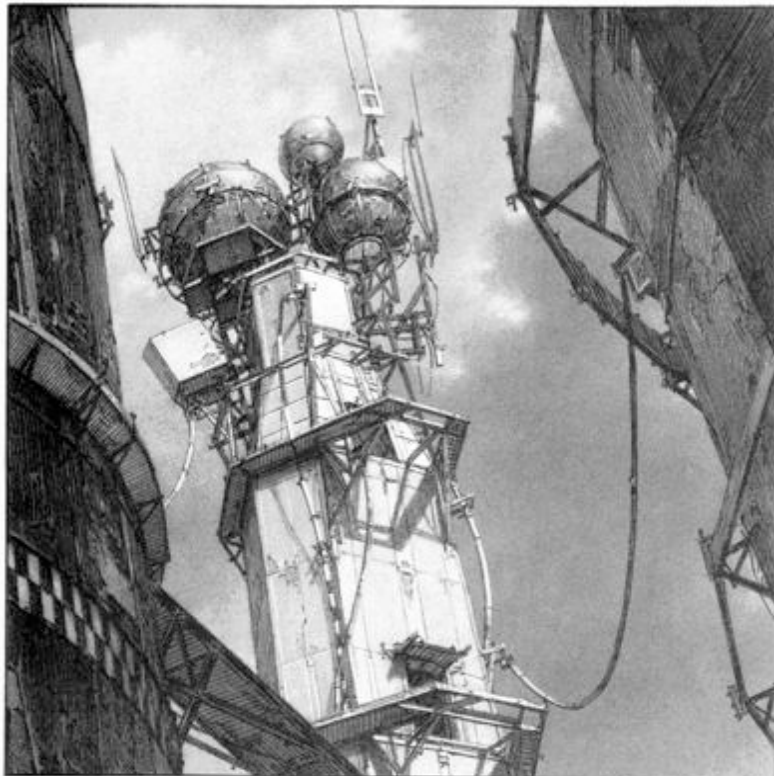


fig.1.3 'Centercity' 1985 Woods, Lebbeus www.lebbeuswoods.net (sept 2008)



Hand-drawn sketch of industrial structure, 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, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 72, 73, 74, 75, 76, 77, 78, 79, 80, 81, 82, 83, 84, 85, 86, 87, 88, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93, 94, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99, 100

fig.1.4 'Centercity' 1985 Woods, Lebbeus www.lebbeuswoods.net (sept 2008)

transformed into homogenous zones in which people accumulate rather than to socialise?”³⁹) and Auge’s “non-place”⁴⁰, Koolhaas’ “Junk Space”⁴¹, each describe a kind of surplus space, resultant of the drive to consume. It could be argued that if we look to the fringe we may find space which falls outside the totalizing grip of capitalism, or even within pockets of the city itself. Perhaps it is in these interstitial decoded spaces that the libertine can reign?

The UE web rings believe this to be so. Yet ironically critics of the modern city cite solitary sadness and alienation prevalent in contemporary cities, and partially attribute “*the boom of extremely privatized domina*” to the demise of the “*public genuine.*”⁴² To some sociologists it is consumption mass media as well as physical dislocation, there is “*digital dislocation ...getting wired up, the internet has become a contemporary symbol for the virtual extension of the physical domain.*” *ibid*

But it seems it is more than just the domain or physicality of the capitalist city, which has spawned a subculture of “*disenchanted*”; Weber’s notion which refers to the “*...steady erosion of meaning that follows in the wake of the rationalizing forces of modernity*”⁴³

“...in a world where looking good is more important than being good, faking it has become synonymous with making it, and beautiful lies hide grubby truths”⁴⁴

Framed by the quotes “*Abandon all hope ye who enter*” , ending “*this is not an exit*”⁴⁵ Ellis’ American Psycho is perhaps the most explicit (if extreme) view of “*disenchantment*” in the capitalist framework.

“Nothing was affirmative, the term ‘generosity of spirit’ applied to nothing, was a cliché, was some kind of bad joke. Sex is mathematics. Individuality no longer an issue. What does intelligence signify? Define reason. Desire – meaningless. Intellect is not a cure. Justice is dead. Fear, recrimination, innocence, sympathy guilt, waste, failure, grief, were things, were emotions, that no-one felt anymore. Reflection is useless, the world is senseless. Evil its only permanence. God is not alive. Love cannot be trusted. Surface, surface, surface was all anyone found meaning in... this was civilisation as I saw it, colossal and jagged...”⁴⁶

Ellis’ character seeks transgression, but his solution is extreme violence, chainsaws, torture and murder. It is only through this that he “*...actually gets hold of something real*”³¹

³⁹ Cupers, Kenny & Miessen, Marcus “*Spaces of uncertainty*”. Wuppertal. Verlag Muller 2006 P.17

⁴⁰ Auge, Marc, ‘*Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Super Modernity*’, London, Verso. 1997

⁴¹ Koolhaas, Rem, OMA, ‘*Content*’, London, Taschen. 2004 p.

⁴² Cupers, Kenny & Miessen, Marcus “*Spaces of uncertainty*”. Wuppertal. Verlag Muller 2006. P.18

⁴³ Weber 1958, quoted in Lyng, Stephen, ‘*Edegework – The Sociology of Risk Taking*’, New York, Routledge. 2005 p.21

⁴⁴ Percival, John, ‘*Dance: Pick of the Week – DV8 Physical Theatre Today*’ *Independent*, May 28, 2005 p.42

⁴⁵ Ellis, Brett-Easton, quoted in Svendsen, Lars, ‘*A Philosophy of Boredom*’, London, Reaktion Books. 2005, p.71

⁴⁶ Ellis, Brett-Easton, quoted in Svendsen, Lars, ‘*A Philosophy of Boredom*’, London, Reaktion Books. 2005, p.74

I'm that grimy guy on the bus you look down on because you assume I'm a grease covered construction worker. In reality I've just climbed a 60 level construction crane while you boozed it up and hit on skanks'.⁴⁷ In a less extreme yet real view the blog of a Urban Explorer see's him/her self as existing outside the normative rules of living, a member of a renegade society also looking for something real.

Perhaps in contrary to Wood's declaration of a passivity (mentioned earlier, p.10), or a reaction to that passivity; the shared view of UE is to rebel or escape. In the context of UE that escape may be described as transgression. Yet this is not exclusively the goal of UE, but UE is the mere avenue through which transgression may occur. More commonly this search for "*re-enchantment*"⁴⁸ can be found, or at least sought, through risk. "*Risk taking is an ascendant theme in consumer culture*"⁴⁹, made manifest in anything from drugs, crime, to extreme sports. Through these routes it is possible reach outside of the rational.

The requirement for "*re-enchantment*", or the search the ability to transgress therefore, is dependant on the removal of our normative rationalizing codes and value systems, onto which the users may project their own codification, or imagination. The user may discover a certain sublimity in the uncertain, or the un-known, and is able release the trappings of the everyday. In the highs of risk taking, the closer to the '*edge*' the further one gets from the present. The edge? As Lyng describes; "*...the line between life and death, between sanity and insanity, between ordered and disordered social reality*"⁵⁰

If disenchantment is the feeling of this disenfranchised subculture (UE), then perhaps the search for re-enchantment leads them to the ruin, the scene, the part of the city that has been left over, untouched. Not the ruin in the classical sense as described earlier, not ruin that is fully in the grip of focus, but the forlorn overlooked scraps, at the fringes of our cities, the contemporary ruin where values and codes are absent. Where there is an absence of reason⁵¹, in short, the across the boundary. Over the edge.

For the purposes of this study I will recount personal experiences to draw parallels in UE with risk taking, namely extreme sports. Firstly it is necessary to describe not what the edge is, but what is beyond it.

⁴⁷ www.sleepycity.net/faqs 14 Aug 2008

⁴⁸ Weber 1958, quoted in Lyng, Stephen, '*Edegework – The Sociology of Risk Taking*', New York, Routledge. 2005 p.21

⁴⁹ Lyng, Stephen, '*Edegework – The Sociology of Risk Taking*', New York, Routledge. 2005 p.22

⁵⁰ Lyng, Stephen, '*Edegework – The Sociology of Risk Taking*', New York, Routledge. 2005 p.28

⁵¹ Trigg, Dylan. "*The aesthetics of Decay: Nothjingness, Nostalgia and the absence of reason*". Peter Lang 2006

coding the code-less

“In the decaying arcades of pre-war Paris Benjamin saw the reflected image of surplus commodity. Just as the value of commodities removed from the labour that brought about that object. The ruin seems to suffer from a lack of inherent value, at least not in the framework of the capitalist society, or of use value and exchange value, it therefore becomes subservient to the city as a whole, value less, save for its aesthetic qualities? Market relations dictate the value of commodity; the origin of the object, meanwhile falls into obscurity. The ruin conceives a new origin, which refuses the capitalist logic of novelty and supposed improvement” ^{ibid.} The implication here is that outside the rational framework anything could be possible.

“...the abandoned place created by the absence of reason acts as spatial terminus in which the embodiment of silence and nothingness occurs.” ^{ibid.}

The contemporary ruin therefore, so recently negating its use and exchange value, becoming valueless within the framework of capitalist city, becomes *res derelicta*. With no meaning, it awaits re-codification. The ruin therefore, can become the backdrop for transgression, a canvass for our imagination.

new ruin

*“Ruins simultaneously signal an absence and a presence; they show, they are, an intersection of the visible and the invisible. Fragmented. Decayed structures, which no longer serve their original purpose, point to an absence, a lost, invisible whole. But their visible presence also points to a durability...”*⁵²

The focus of the UE is the contemporary ruin. The scene of late capitalist consumerism is awash with the malaise of the de-industrialized, where the forces of capitalism have ceased to find value and use so wealth has flowed elsewhere; leaving behind a vacuous glut of abandonment. The scene can be witnessed in the once industrial heart land of England, Birmingham. Tertiary service industry now paves the way, heavy industry ousted by the loss of purchasing power, emigration, an aging population, industrial obsolescence, and cheap labour^{ibid.}

*“Waste decay, elimination need not be condemned: they are necessary consequences of life, of the growth of life. The phenomenon of decadence is as necessary as any increase and advance of life; one is in no position to abolish it. Reason demands, on the contrary, that we do it justice”*⁵³

*“I’m so bad I party in Detroit”*⁵⁴

A recent field trip to Detroit perhaps yielded the most telling example of the downfall of the mono-industrial city; Abandoned sky scrapers loom in a past splendour marooned in the haunting emptiness of the inner city, the sound of people is replaced by the sssshhheeeuuu of the empty monorail looping its desolate course through the city. Ravaged by crime, and left to rot, with no economic forces to keep it afloat, Detroit appears stricken, in a latent, tiresome depreciation. Our inquiries took us through the eerie silence of Michigan Central Station. Tip toeing amongst broken glass and fallen plaster along its concourse, our errant investigation took a rather alerted meander, amid wall daubed warnings: beware crack house. Shit scared on the 12th floor, the gaping staircase and decayed twisted roof-scape become that much more visceral with no handrail. You try and imagine the footfall of the once many mo-town commuter, instead the clap of pigeon flight volley in the ticket hall beneath, adrenaline competes with childlike excitement, at the rediscovery of this forgotten behemoth building. Wide eyed, adrenaline coursing, and breath hard, awed by the both grand and decrepit beauty. On the way out we see bums and Hobo’s warming to oil drum brassieres, perhaps erstwhile boomtown workers? Back in the safety of the car a sense of sublimity takes over.

⁵² Oswald, Phillip, *Atlas of Shrinking Cities*, Germany, Erschienen, 2006, p.148

⁵³ Nietzsche, Friedrich 1967, quoted in Trigg, Dylan. *“The aesthetics of Decay: Nothingness, Nostalgia and the absence of reason”*. Peter Lang 2006 p.25

⁵⁴ Herron, Jerry quoted in *Shrinking Cities Vol 1*, Ed. Phillip Oswald, Germany, Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2004, p.342

“Detroit became the centre for the American automobile industry in early 20th century. Taylorism radically modernized production, Henry fords introduction of the conveyor belt 1913 made the automobile a mass product. Detroit became a symbol of unprecedented growth with the first freeway in 20’s. 1900 – 1950 population grew 285000 – 1850000. Boom-town became pioneer of greenbelt development, the inner city shrank whilst suburbs sprawled. Suburbanization in Detroit was caused in part by increased mobility of the car driven society, but also by racial conflict. Between 1940-60 African Americans comprised 1/3 of the cities population, as a result white middle classes moved to the outskirts, by 1998 78% suburbanites were white, 79% inner city residents were African American. The decay of Detroit’s inner city was caused by the exodus of mainly white inhabitants to the suburbs. The infamous white flight saw Detroit’s population drop by 51% population from 1950 – 2004.

...Between 1978 and 1998 Detroit authorized 108000 demolitions but only 9000 new builds or conversions. Thousands of tenements, offices, theatres stand vacant, department stores are closed, grass sprouts from the cracks in the sidewalks, in many streets Detroit resembles an ghost town.”⁵⁵

In Architectural Design Studio two’s absent wanderings of Detroit’s inner city (*jan 2008*), we filed across vast empty lots, past homes bought for cash signs, and empty dwellings; not through defaulted mortgages but through abandonment, an exodus. Our Sojourn took us through a residential district, a scarred landscape of fields, sliced by roads and telegraph wires but no dwellings to be served, save for the resilient few still in residence and the charred remains or houses burned without impunity. Detroit’s fabled Devils Night⁵⁶ sees the city torch its abandoned buildings in unprecedented arson, is this Detroit trying to cleanse its problems by eradicating? The dystopian landscape serves only as poignant reminder of the cities failings.

“today we are more objective, the ruin is part of a more general malaise, nostalgia, angst, frustration, sickness.”⁵⁷

“What remains in the ruin is the trace of the past, a palimpsest, fragmented, and unable to be placed in the present, Existence has become mediated through the presence of decay.... “(there is a) call to celebrate the ruin as a monument to progress,”⁵⁸

It is difficult to see ruins to be celebrated in Detroit; they stand as monuments to failure, totally against our perceived notion of progress. Yet chiming with Trigg, to the Urban Explorer the perceived blight continues not-forgotten, it is celebrated. As a *tabula rasa* for the soul, *terra nullis* has more to it for those willing to look behind the scenes, to look beyond the high street brand strap line. It could be argued that the contemporary ruin poses a place to reformulate and regroup our perceptions of progress. Perhaps it is in the ruin that one can progress, but with the soul.

⁵⁵ Oswald, Phillip, ‘Atlas of Shrinking Cities’, Germany, Erschienen, 2006, p.148.

⁵⁶ Mocerri, Toni, quoted in in *Shrinking Cities Vol 1*, Ed. Phillip Oswald, Germany, Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2004, p.302

⁵⁷ Macaulay, Rose. “Pleasure of ruins”. London. Thames and Hudson 1977, p.236

⁵⁸ Chapman, Jeff quoted in Trigg, Dylan. “The aesthetics of Decay: Nothingness, Nostalgia and the absence of reason”. Peter Lang 2006

real

Perhaps it is in the modern ruin, the places which epitomize the modern industrialized world, in the monuments to progress, that their demise is appreciated, if not lauded by the explorers. *“In the dead and abandoned factory lie the machinery which linger in the aftermath of motion, broken unused, the machine lies divorces from its owner. The emergence of a past time only seeks to reinforce the notion of the ruin as haunted. A delayed recognition of the ruins past.”*⁵⁹

“The modern ruins are close enough to the present to mirror an alternative past/present/ future. A derelict factory testifies to a failed past but also remind us that the future may end in run. Outmoded negative associations of the ruin are enforced... ..latent on the urban landscape (modern ruins) are privileged spaces which simultaneously invoke reactions of repulsion and sublimity”
*...ugly and wasted they are relegated to the wastelands.”*⁶⁰

The ontological significance of the contemporary ruin is clear, in its ability to form a backdrop to the future. In a our fast paced society, where change is so rapid, through obsolescence tied to consumerism. It could be argued that in the relics of the past our memories act as a validator of what has been. The ruin is proof of an authenticity, of a reality. *“The ruin succeeds in giving authenticity, even if unoccupied, through its display of a narrative, a past narrative, an identity, if fragmented one.”*^{ibid.}

Chapman describes; *“the beauty of authenticity, decayed or not...”*⁶¹ It could be argued therefore, that the drive of the urban explorer is a drive to seek the authentic, the drive for a validator of what is real.

⁵⁹ Edensor, Tim. *“Industrial Ruins: Space Aesthetics and Materiality”*. Oxford and New York, Berg 2005

⁶⁰ Trigg, Dylan. *“The aesthetics of Decay: Nothingness, Nostalgia and the absence of reason”*. Peter Lang 2006

⁶¹ Trigg Dylan interview with Chapman - www.dylantrigg.com Apr 2008

pop

The contemporary ruins as described earlier are not forgotten by the masses, on the contrary they are indeed celebrated in popular culture. Immortalised on film, abandonment and dereliction are revived used for their symbolism, as signifiers of societal failure. As a result they form the backdrop for associative symbols or acts of failure: horror, crime and science fiction. It can be said that the mystery surrounding the unknown settings themselves are exploited; the unfamiliar places few of us rarely see are dramatised with deftly efficiency. The innards of chemical plants, industrial works, and myriad abandonment's disarm the viewer enough to be shocked further with scenes of horror to come.

The focus UE therefore could be partially attributed to Hollywood. The abandoned and derelict, almost dystopian places which have recently fallen to the hands of time, into disuse, are still borne in mind, or at least the imagination.

Horror aside; the glut of cult futuristic dystopian films, also seem to link the cynical view of failure. Is this a new cynical worldview, of a dystopian future of cataclysm and apocalypse, certainly the post apocalyptic future is set amongst ruins, future ruins. *'RoboCop'*⁶², set in the abandoned steel mills of Detroit; perhaps the most pertinent example of the failure of mass industrialization, and the American dream. Yet the dystopian future portrayed by *'The Terminator'*⁶³, or Ridley Scott's *'Blade runner'*⁶⁴, are set in the future but also a future past, the main characters occupy an abandoned and rotting apartment block, no high tech future ruin, but a "retrofitted" future⁶⁵ that pangs of nostalgia, this is something which strikes affinity with the audience, a common denominator with which we all relate. It brings it into reality.

It could be argued that the scenes of crime horror and set so close to our past that they almost become real, so close that they still form part of the viewers memory. However, it could be argued that the ruins, not yet old enough to have been valorized by historians, and therefore escape value systems of the consumer society, and that without normative codes the ruin awaits re-codification, (in *Blade Runner's* case) by Rick Deckard and the replicant's he is bounty hunting. This is most clear in *'Centercity'*, Lebbeus Woods'⁶⁶ dystopian vision, the images are beguiling, but devoid of value or meaning, because so distant a future is portrayed. Yet the trigger's of dark sensibilities abound, at once gothic and dark, a future of dirt, grime and decay.

Are ruins only given authenticity after a certain length of time? At which point do ruins become the focus of the tourist, objective and reasoned, after sufficient passage of time, after the historians valorization, or after it is preserved on celluloid? Or can authenticity be found in the actions played out in the recently ruined, in subjectivity and mystery?

⁶² *'Robocop'* dir: Paul Verhoeven 1987

⁶³ *'The Terminator'* dir: James Cameron 1984

⁶⁴ *'Blade Runner'* dir: Ridley Scott 1982

⁶⁵ <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0083658/>

⁶⁶ www.lebbeuswoods.net - *'Centercity'* 1985'

The depiction of ruins by Hollywood, have not escaped the notice UE if anything it has fuelled the pastime. 28 days later.co.uk⁶⁷ is a site themed or inspired by the recent film of the same name, which depicts an abandoned London, where the cities usual functions have disappeared (albeit in the wake of virulent zombie virus), yet it is in that context that the cities functions uses and value systems disappear, the city then becomes (with the zombies around) a ground for survival. It seems strange that in this homage, UE falls prey to the very essence of society it meant to be escaping. The silver screen is perhaps the embodiment of consumerism. Are there other means for transgressing the present context of the city?

*“Rather than passively consuming entertainment, urban explorers actually strive to create authentic experiences, by making discoveries that allow them to participate in the secret workings of cities and structures”*⁶⁸

The burgeoning underground sub-culture of UE is now the property of mass media, MTV, Discovery Channel, and recent film ‘*Into the Darkness*’⁶⁹ documents the explorers. The authentic experience UE seek is now marketable. It could be argued that the portrayal of UE the kind of consumable entertainment UE is trying to escape.

⁶⁷ www.28dayslater.co.uk/forums/ july 2008

⁶⁸ Ninjalicious, ‘Access all areas – a users guide to the art of urban exploration’, Canada, infiltration, 2005 p.3

⁶⁹ ‘Urban Explorers - Into the Darkness’ dir: Melody Gilbert. 2007

aesthetized failure

*'The sublime moves, the beautiful charms'*⁷⁰ Kant 1986

Amongst text, blogs and anecdotes, the medium of choice for the distribution of the UE tale is the image, the photograph.

Trigg argues that the *'limited perspective of UE means the phenomenological reading of the ruin goes astray'*⁷¹

However it can be argued that it is through the *portrayal* of UE, that the phenomenological and ontological meaning do indeed go astray. In order to communicate with the masses, UE bloggers use the image as the most accessible form of representation, particularly in our digital era. As a result vast UE web ring is awash with the most evocative imagery of the experiences, and obsession. However it can be argued that those experiences are reduced to the image alone. cursory writings of the practicalities of UE abound too. But fundamentally, the essence of the experience is somehow lost.

"In a social universe in which all signs have been subjected to the powerfully transforming effects of endless simulations and other forces of consumer culture, it is undoubtedly true that the stability of
fig.1.3 'Centercity' 1985 Woods, Lebbeus www.lebbeuswoods.net (sept 2008)

*cognitively based meaning has been profoundly shaken." In hypereality corporeality vanishes as a form of resistance.*⁷²

Does the imagery hold any further significance other than the frozen visual? In our over saturated lives do those images hold any meaning? Are they devalued through the process of over exposure, each competing with one another not for supremacy per say, but for attention. What is clear, is the failure to articulate UE from a critical standpoint. Imagery, superficial anecdotes and tips of how to infiltrate buildings are prevalent, but the real reasoning for just so, is far from evident. Perhaps the publication of these images on the internet or otherwise, are contrary to the real essence of UE. In that the search for the authentic, or the discovery of the authentic is then devalued, stripped of it's meaning as soon as it is commodified (if not in direct monetary terms), as objects to be consumed, by the thirst of our insatiable appetite for the image.

Geoge bataille notes the relationship between trespassing and transgressing, and Trigg then posits argues that the future of UE *'will rely more on transgression than it will aesthetics, it opens itself up to failure, so leaves the significance of the ruin undiscovered.'*⁷³

⁷⁰ Kant 1986 quoted in Trigg, Dylan. "The aesthetics of Decay: Nothingness, Nostalgia and the absence of reason". Peter Lang 2006 p.68

⁷¹ www.dylantrigg.com Apr 2008

⁷² Lyng, Stephen, 'Edegewrok - The Sociology of Risk-Taking', New York, Routledge 2005 p.38

The portrayal of UE's real meaning is therefore lost, although the countless websites do serve to embolden the intrepid explorer, immortalized in lore within the circle they move, urban legends, like explorers of old. The reiteration of imagery and nature of the images portrayal serve to dramatize and accentuate, it can be said that this follows a Baudrillardian sense of hyper-reality⁷⁴, more real than real, this is how also Hollywood sells itself, the promise of better, bigger, louder, more colorful, more vivid. Cinema is an escape, for that duration of the movie the viewer is able to escape, to transgress. It can be argued that this is a shallow pursuit when compared to the real thing. It can be argued that the UE community is simply inability to articulate the true essence. Aesthetics alone do not convey the feelings sought in the ruin. It can be said that the urban explorer may be searching for something he is not able to grasp, or if they are, then at the very least articulate.

We need to look beyond the cherished trophies of urban explorer, the photograph. And look to the real destination of the urban explorers search. The sublime. To do this it is necessary to now look to parallels with UE, activities that's sole prerogative is to transcend the trappings of the everyday, to seek the 'peak experience' and discover the sublime.

⁷³ www.dylantrigg.com (Apr 2008)

⁷⁴ Baudrillard, Jean. Quoted in Lyng, Stephen. 'Edegewrok - The Sociology of Risk-Taking', New York, Routledge 2005 p.36

transgression and the edge

*"The acceptance of impurity, difficulty and obstruction", is part of the very 'existence of liberty.'*⁷⁵

*"Upon the melancholy grounds of the ruin comes the flight of the sublime"*⁷⁶

There must be something more to the exploration of the ruin, than just flights of melancholic fancy, brushings with nostalgia, aesthetic appreciation, and the search for that what is authentic? The inability of the UE community to fully articulate the true essence, could be because the true essence is simply unknowable, it cannot be written or described. The true essence has to be felt, experienced, touched, smelt, seen and heard. In short the prerequisite for understanding UE is in the *'embodied experience.'*⁷⁷ and cannot be found in its *'mediated representation'* ^{ibid} of image and text.

*"Sublimity refers to the moment when the ability to apprehend, to know, and to express a thought or sensation is defeated, yet through this very defeat, the mind gets a feeling for that which lies beyond thought and language."*⁷⁸

Therefore it can be said that the sublime may be achieved, though not actively sought in UE; It can be said there is a definite hankering for a feeling, a kind of feeling that is outside of the usual predilections of everyday society, *"In a highly rationalized society... "day-to-day existence is distinguished most by its closely regulated, predictable character"*

The parallels can now be drawn with UE and adventure sports as Edensor notes: *"Urban exploration is akin to the expansion of adventure sports which seek out thrills and 'peak experiences' at variance to an over regulated and usually quiescent life."*⁷⁹

Or more put more abruptly: *"we do it not to escape life, but to make sure that life doesn't escape us"*⁸⁰

The reasoning of the extreme pursuits is often quite hard to pin down, usually solo activities the sense of achievement of having conquered, reached a goal, is most cited, it can be argued that along with UE there is a further more indeterminable common goal that is sought. Following a recent climb of Mont Blanc this summer I was able to prove first hand that the reasoning is difficult to discern, however it can be said that answer lies in the experience itself, the *'embodied experience'*⁸¹ to some this is sensation seeking, or could be argued as a self empowerment, Lyng describes sensations of *"self-determinism and self actualisation... "(in) work carried out on ourselves by ourselves as free beings"* ^{ibid}. It can be argued that when closest to the *"edge"* ^{ibid} of reason a clarity of being materialises, the

⁷⁵ Sennett quoted in Edensor, Tim. *"Industrial Ruins: Space Aesthetics and Materiality"*. Oxford and New York, Berg 2005 p.95

⁷⁶ Ginsberg, Robert. "The aesthetics of ruins". New York & Amsterdam, Rodopi B. V. (2004) P.319

⁷⁷ Lyng, Stephen, *'Edegewrok - The Sociology of Risk-Taking'*, New York, Routledge 2005 p.37

⁷⁸ Shaw, Philip, *'The Sublime'* London Routledge 2006 p.3

⁷⁹ Edensor, Tim. *"Industrial Ruins: Space Aesthetics and Materiality"*. Oxford and New York. Berg. 2005 p.95

⁸⁰ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Extreme_sports june 2008

⁸¹ Lyng, Stephen, *'Edegewrok - The Sociology of Risk-Taking'*, New York, Routledge 2005 p.38

Knowledge that one's fate relies on one's own abilities "*in chaotic situations there is the provocation to manifest transcendent powers of control*"⁸². Joe Simpson says that "*(I'm) never more alive than when most at risk*"⁸²

The Mont Blanc⁸³ expedition required tremendous effort to achieve (and actually fail to summit); physical effort, learning of new skills, time in acclimatization not to mention expense. When asked why, my companions described it thus: "*Its always been a dream of mine*"⁸⁴, "*Since I saw Mont Blanc as a child I vowed to stand at its summit one day*"⁸⁴, When pushed for more precisely why, it became more difficult, an unknowable angst seem to drive us. The expedition did not quite make the summit due to a dramatic weather shift, a mere 400m shy, we may as well have been there, yet just not quite crushed our spirits, the demoralisation was an almost intolerable feeling. '*...as the absolutely unknowable void, upon whose brink we finite beings must dizzily hover*'⁸⁵

As for my own yearnings "because it's there" does not quite suffice, overcoming the challenges particular to the activity are an element to reason; the altitude, wind direction, webbing, rip cord, chute are factors implicit of BASE Jumping for instance, but the philosophical reasons are more prophetic; '*What jumpers are out for, besides the challenges of the sport, is to overcome the restrictive character of the city.*'⁸⁶

Lyng describes the pursuit of the extreme as existing or operating near a boundary or edge, terms this edge work: "*....the stultifying environments of daily work life (the institutional constraints of modern societies). little is there to match the transcendent qualities of edgework*" *...intense emotions and spontaneity of high risk situations*"⁸⁷ And of the 'Edge' itself: "*the line between life and death, between sanity and insanity, between ordered and disordered social reality*"⁸⁸

It can be argued that UE and 'Edgework' are one in the same both employ a certain amount of risk taking, but further more each rely on the dissolution of value or codification, where this occurs most is where transgression is possible; where transgression is possible is at the edge, towards a boundary of known order and rules. Within that boundary quite simply; the city as we know it, controlled. And beyond this boundary, or over the edge we find the ability to escape the trappings of that control. As defined by the OED; transgression is exceeding bounds or limits, transgression is the goal the urban explorer seeks, urban exploration is the means. "*The mundane everyday world provides the boundaries and edges that are approached. And it is the very approach to the edge that provides a heightened state of excitement and adrenaline rush.*"^{Ibid p.54}

⁸² Simpson, Joe, *The Beckoning Silence*, London, Vintage 2003 on back cover

⁸³ (Mont Blanc 4,810m 15,781ft, France) July 2008

⁸⁴ Author interview with Grégory Jedrezak & Marion Garcia at Refuge du Gouter Mont Blanc Massiff 11th July 2008

⁸⁵ Milbank, John 2004 quoted in Shaw, Philip, *The Sublime* London Routledge 2006 p.2

⁸⁶ Von Borries, Fredrich, 'Extreame/City/Sport The city as Adventure-scape' in *Shrinking Cities Vol 1*, Ed. Phillip Oswalt, Germany, Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2004, p.442 – 449.

⁸⁷ Lyng, Stephen, *Edegewrok - The Sociology of Risk-Taking*, New York, Routledge 2005 p.38

⁸⁸ Lyng, Stephen, *Edegewrok - The Sociology of Risk-Taking*, New York, Routledge 2005 p.28

As confirmation of this argument Derrida states that “...the sublime is not contained in a finite or natural or artificial object, it must be sought, rather, in that which has no boundary”⁸⁹

the end is the beginning

The search for sublimity is of course not exclusive to UE and the extreme; the sublime can be found in anything that is indescribable, something which induces awe and wonder, it may be the Alps, St Pauls Cathedral, a Shakespearean sonnet or the birth of a child. As such it can be argued that UE and Edgework are merely tools to reaching the sublime, if not intentionally sought, it may be found, and may shock and surprise. However the common thread of UE and edgework is the transgressive qualities brought about through participation, through the experience. A Means to provocation of thought or a means to a beginning, if you will.

This study is as much a call to arms as it is a search for reason. The inability to articulate the feelings and experiences is confirmation of sublimity; the only way to realize the true essence of UE is the embodied experience, the grip of sublimity itself. Turn off the TV and don your chute/board/crampons/skateboard/jetpack/belay and explore, the fringe/bowels/ends and lofty heights of the city.

peer

/crawl

/jump

/deploy

/run

/scare

/illuminate

/transgress ,

or just ponder...

⁸⁹ Shaw, Philip, 'The Sublime' London Routledge 2006 p.107

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appendix

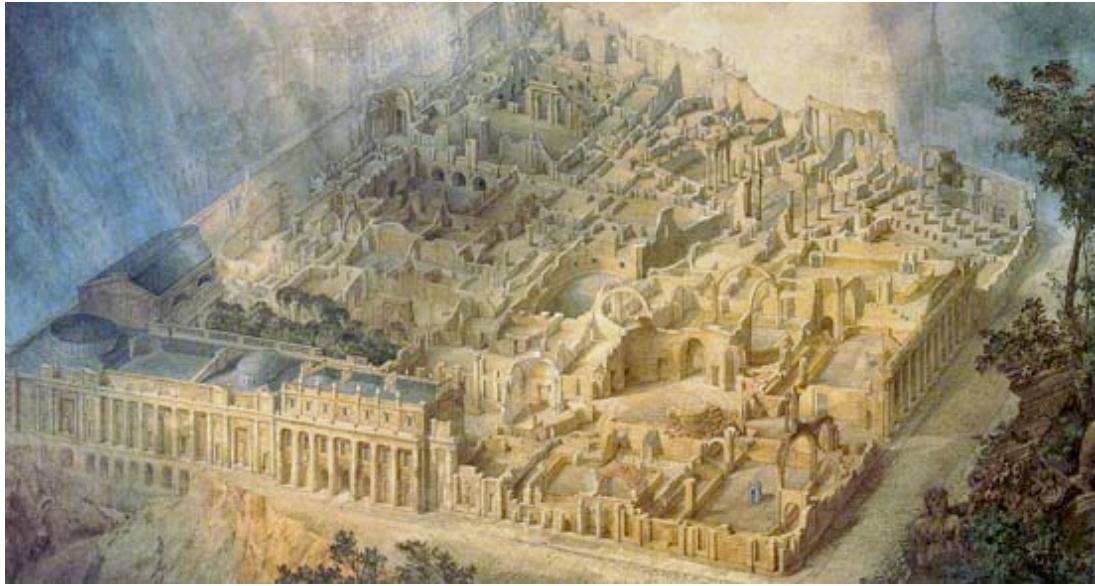


fig 1.5 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joseph_Michael_Gandy 'soane's Bank of England as a ruin', 1830 aug 2008



fig 1.6 'Robocop' dir: Paul Verhoeven 1987



fig 1.7 Robert, Hubert 1796 'Louvre in ruins' in Woodward, Christopher 'In Ruins' London, Vintage 2001 p.155 (see appendix)



fig 1.8 misstrixie 'The Louvre In Ruin' <http://www.worth1000.com/emailthis.asp?entry=142550> oct 2008