

**(RE)CONFIGURING RUIN: THE SACRED POETICS OF  
RUBBLE IN THE PHOTOGRAPHY OF SCOTT HOCKING**

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## **(Re)configuring Ruin: The Sacred Poetics of Rubble and the Representation of Ruined Space in the Photography of Scott Hocking**

### **Introduction**

In recent years, industrial ruins have attracted widespread academic interest from a variety of perspectives, including the aesthetic (Trigg, 2009), architectural (Boer, 2014), phenomenological (Edensor, 2005), ecological (de Silvey, 2012) archaeological (Buchli & Lucas, 2001) and socio-economic (Mah, 2012). These spaces are marginal, forgotten and ambiguous, liminal spaces ripe for transgression and offering some of the few remaining spaces of authenticity in the modern city. As such, they have proven to be irresistible to a new breed of urban explorers and artists, who trespass and document these sites, posting high quality photographs and blogging about their exploits online. Unsurprisingly perhaps, such images have generated accusations of the aestheticising of poverty, sensationalising decline with little regard for the communities who live in the shadow of such spaces. The notion that these images are circulated with little understanding of the context behind the decline makes the politics of ruin imagery a source of much contestation. Yet, despite the backlash, some scholars have recently advocated for the archaeological value of ruin photography, both as a medium of documentation and “as an interactive and attentive way to approach things themselves”.<sup>1</sup> This line of enquiry seemed to me to offer a refreshing counterbalance to a hostile and rather impoverished view of ruin art and photography, and to enrich our understanding of the ways in which dominant representations of place are not just constructed, but contested by such images. How do ruin art and photography mark decaying spaces as valuable and significant and as worthy of public attention? The images of Scott Hocking, whose photographs form the backbone of this thesis, are a unique example of this interactivity and attentiveness. Through a deep engagement with ruins, his photographs avoid the charge of superficiality so often levelled at these images; his is an oeuvre which, on the contrary, shows a powerful awareness of hidden histories and unseen dimensions. How does he creatively engage with the ruin in ways that challenge the narrative of decline usually associated with it? Specifically, how does his use of *sacred* imagery work to reconfigure our expectations of ruined space? In order to appreciate the significance of specific ruins, however, it is important first to grasp the general craze for ruins which has gripped the Western world for the better

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<sup>1</sup> Póra Pétursdóttir and Bjørnar Olsen, *Imaging Modern Decay: The Aesthetics of Ruin Photography*, *Journal of Contemporary Archaeology*, 1.1, 2014, pp 7

part of three centuries (Macaulay, 1953). I shall therefore turn to the theoretical framework which underpins this discussion: the aesthetics of decay.

## 1.1 The aesthetics of decay

During the peak of Romantic *Ruinenlust*, classical ruins were held in high esteem, celebrated for their ability to provoke melancholic reflections on the inevitability of decay and the return of man to nature. William Gilpin describes this Picturesque aesthetic beautifully upon a visit to the ruins of Tintern Abbey in 1770, which he finds to be “a very enchanting piece of ruin. Nature has now made it her own. Time has worn off all traces of the rule: it has blunted the sharp edges of the chisel, and broken the regularity of opposing parts. The figured ornaments of the east-window are gone; those of the west-window are left. most of the other windows, with their principal ornaments, remain. To these were superadded the ornaments of time.”<sup>2</sup> This is the ideal ruin of the eighteenth century, combining elements of both beauty and melancholy, regularity and disorder, the fragment and the whole: a roughness which is a key feature of the emergent category of the the Sublime. The combination of terror and awe inspired by the triumph of nature over man provoked melancholy and nostalgia in the viewer, a sensibility we continue to indulge to this day. Rose Macaulay (1953) argues that “humans are ruin-minded”<sup>3</sup>- that we need to indulge in melancholy gloom, to reflect on the vanished glories of the past, on our own mortality and the transience of material things. Ruins are “the eternal symbol.”<sup>4</sup> Classical ruins of this sort therefore form a vital part of the contemporary heritage trail, prized for their aesthetic beauty and carefully preserved for future generations. These ruins are seen as timeless, tranquil spaces which invite a passive, detached appreciation from the viewer.

Yet, new ruins do not enjoy this revered status. Until they acquire “the weathered patina of age,” to quote Rose Macaulay, “They are for a time stark and bare”, with “the smell of fire and mortality.”<sup>5</sup> Often labelled as ‘wastelands’, they are seen as spaces devoid of function and as blots on the landscape. Dylan Trigg (2009) describes such ruins as markers of ‘the absence of reason’, in which the

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<sup>2</sup>William Gilpin, *Observations on the River Wye, and Several Parts of South Wales Etc, Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty, made in the summer of the year 1770, London, 1772, pp 33. Quoted in Brian Dillon, Ruin Lust, Tate Publishing, 2014, pp 10*

<sup>3</sup> Rose Macaulay, *Pleasure of Ruins*, Walker and Company, New York, 1953, pp 46

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem* pp 453

rational, regulated and productive space of the city is revealed as illusory. Unmoored from the life cycle of capitalist commodity and use-value, ruins represent an apparently useless surplus, underlining the ‘tenuous foundations’ of capitalist logic. Industrial ruins are too new to be imbued with the aesthetic ideals of classical beauty and are therefore described as ‘derelict’, identified with crime and anti-social behaviour and seen as prime targets for wholesale demolition. Tim Edensor (2005) argues that contemporary ruins are more likely to be read through the lens of the ‘modern gothic’, in which abandoned spaces are sources of fear, a journey into “symbolic space[s] of darkness which prefigure future degeneration”.<sup>6</sup> New ruins are fundamentally disturbing rather than elevating in nature. Furthermore, the Gothic, in its preoccupation with the collapse of boundaries and the return of the repressed, makes it an especially appropriate lens through which to view the ruin (Edensor, 2005).

Post-industrial ruins, like their classical counterparts, provoke feelings of nostalgia and melancholy, yet their temporal closeness is likely to result in feelings of loss associated with the decline of industrial might. This is evident in much ruin imagery and writing on the cities where Scott Hocking’s images are taken: Detroit, where the artist was born, and of East St Louis, which is less widely documented but shares a similar background. These cities represented the golden age of Fordist America, an era in which the labour movement granted workers unprecedented rights and privileges in return for a lifelong stint with a single company. In its heyday in the 1950s, during which the booming auto manufacturing industry had come to represent the epitome of the American dream, Detroit was seen as a city of the future. By 1920, the population had doubled to almost one million, making it the fourth largest in the nation (Binelli, 2014). Optimism was at an all-time high; the Fordist model had been redeemed. East St Louis, once an important regional transportation hub and manufacturing center on the Mississippi River, was a much smaller but no less successful city at its peak. With a population of 80,000, twenty seven railroads and fifty factories, the city earned the distinction of ‘All American City’ in 1959. Yet, like Detroit, racial tensions and suburban exodus spelled the beginning of a dwindling population, lack of services, and poverty for the residents of East St Louis. These are cities now widely represented as being abandoned by the American Dream; writing on Detroit, Mark Binelli argues that “If, once, Detroit had stood for the purest fulfilment of U.S. industry, it now represented America’s most epic urban failure, the apotheosis of the new inner-city mayhem sweeping the nation... The fires of the rebellion launched a long-running narrative, one

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<sup>6</sup> Tim Edensor, *Industrial Ruins: Spaces, Aesthetics, Materiality*. Berg, 2005, pp 14

that persists today, of Detroit as a hopelessly failed state, a terrifying place of violent crime and general lawlessness”.<sup>7</sup> East St Louis fares no better; one reporter writes that the city, “with its acre upon acre of burned-out hulks that were once houses, its sad tales of backed-up sewers and of police cars that run out of gas, of garbage piled so deep that entire streets are rendered impassable and of books so poorly kept that no one can calculate its debt, has become a textbook case of everything that can go wrong in an American city.”<sup>8</sup> Such disparagement in the media of ‘rust belt’ cities is common, and mostly goes unquestioned. They corroborate the idea of ruined spaces as ugly, derelict blots on the landscape, ‘sad tales’ of once thriving communities gone awry.

Yet the ruin, as Julia Hell and Andreas Schönle remind us, “is predicated on a particular gaze cast upon it... The beholder defines the ruin, and the ruin could not exist without such creative appropriation.”<sup>9</sup> Thus Edensor (2005), for example, adopts an affirmative stance towards these spaces; he sees them not merely as spaces of darkness and fear, but as “sites in which the becomings of new forms, orderings and aesthetics can emerge rather than belonging to a ‘sinister, crepuscular world’ of death and stasis.”<sup>10</sup> Edensor celebrates the ruin as a space of transgression and opportunity, spaces which “open up possibilities for regulated urban bodies to escape their shackles in expressive pursuits and sensual experience... ruins act as spaces which address the power embodied in ordering space.”<sup>11</sup> The disorder of the ruin, far from being ugly and dangerous, offers liberating potential from the tightly controlled spaces of the planned city. Ruins provide essential spaces of ‘play’, activities which would be frowned upon and strictly curtailed elsewhere. Bradley Garrett makes a similar claim when he writes that “Industrial ruins are decaying but they’re not dead, they are landscapes full of possibilities for wondrous adventure, peripatetic playfulness and artistic potential”.<sup>12</sup> Ruins are unique in their affordance of diverse tactile and sensual experiences, spaces which reject smooth, polished textures in favour of roughness and corrosion. Such spaces, Edensor argues, “pro-

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<sup>7</sup> Mark Binelli, pp 3: Detroit City is the Place to Be.

<sup>8</sup> Isabel Wilkerson, ‘Ravaged City on Mississippi Floundering at Rock Bottom’. New York Times, April 4th, 1991

<sup>9</sup> Julia Hell and Andreas Schönle, *Ruins of Modernity*, Duke University Press, 2010, Introduction, pp 7, emphasis mine.

<sup>10</sup> Ibidem, pp 15

<sup>11</sup> Ibidem, pp 18

<sup>12</sup> Bradley Garrett in *Place Hacking, Savage Minds, Notes and Queries in Anthropology*, January 20th 2010, accessed via <http://savageminds.org/2010/01/20/place-hacking/>

vide a realm in which sensual experience and performance is cajoled into unfamiliar enactions that coerce encounters with unfamiliar things, and encourage playful and expressive performances.”<sup>13</sup> Ruins invite a creative engagement with raw materiality, particularly attractive to artists who are drawn to ‘unusual assemblages’ and ‘the random mixing of artefacts’ as material for their work. Accessing and moving around the ruin enables a different kind of somatic experience than is usually encountered in the city; these are spaces in which the constraints of health and safety are removed, facilitating encounters with risk unknown in sterile urban environments (Edensor et al, 2011). That these spaces should function as spaces of play is not a coincidence; play is often seen as other to order, work and productivity, much like ruined spaces themselves (Edensor et al, 2011). My investigations into the use of the ruin as an art-scape by Scott Hocking supports this view of ruins as spaces which are re-purposed into active use; rather than being seen as inert spaces of unsightly decay, ruins provide the backdrop for an active reconfiguration of the relationship between the viewer and the conventions of the ruined environment. Specifically, Hocking’s work reveals a fascination with sacred imagery, including cairns, pyramids, totems, scenes of worship, oracles, relics and sacred texts- which leads me to the major theoretical underpinning of this thesis: the concept of the *sacred*.

## 1.2 Critical methodology

This thesis, informed by the aesthetics of ruin as described above, will therefore use as its primary theoretical framework the concept of *the sacred*. Developed most influentially by Mircea Eliade in 1957, Eliade’s concept of the sacred primarily investigates questions of sacred space. Eliade’s primary assertion is that sacred space differs fundamentally from profane space, the former being marked as a significant, revered, transcendental and liminal space, the latter being homogenous, uniform, mundane and chaotic. Sacred space ‘irrupts’ into the profane world, through the active shaping of space by human beings (for example, in the construction of a shrine) or through the revelation of certain locations as sacred (through myth). Sacred space is necessary, Eliade argues, to create a sense of order, to centre oneself in a chaotic world and to access liminal spaces. It allows humans to ‘dwell’, to feel at home in the world. Such concepts allow me to analyse Hocking’s artistic creation of sacred imagery such as cairns, pyramids and mounds in order to ask my primary research question: *How does the artist’s use of sacred imagery transform the space of ruin into a sacred space?* This theoretical framework provides intriguing possibilities when applied to the space of ruin. It allows me to ask such (sub) questions as: what is the relationship between sacred imagery

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<sup>13</sup> Tim Edensor et al, *Playing in Industrial Ruins*, in *Urban Wildscapes*, edited by Anna Jorgenson & Richard Keenan, Routledge, 2011, pp 67

and space, and how are these notions subverted and transformed in the space of ruin? How do sacred constructions function to centre and unify space, and what effect does this have in the fragmented space of ruin? What is the relationship of the sacred liminal to the liminality of the ruin? What relationship does the sacred have to temporality and memory, and what might it tell us about the cyclical nature of ruin and rebirth in a postindustrial city? How might such representations elevate the ruin as spaces of significance rather than decline? The theory of sacred space is of course informed by broader socio-spatial theories which argue that space is socially constituted, metaphorical and ideological as well as physical. Particularly relevant here is Lefebvre's notion of 'lived space', in which physical space is creatively interpreted in order to resist dominant discourses; or equally, Foucault's *heterotopia*, spaces which exist on the margins of the established social order but which invert, question or critique that order. In this project, I hope to combine these broader cultural perspectives on space with the poetics and politics of sacred space, and apply them to Hocking's postindustrial representation of ruin.

With its focus on ruined and sacred *space*, what is the role of *place* in this thesis? How are notions of space and place related? It is crucial to clarify these terms at an early stage, as they are easily confused and risk being mistaken as interchangeable. Whilst *space* is often understood as abstract and scientific, *place* is lived, concrete and particular. If space refers to the geographical coordinates on a map, place is the lived experience of those coordinates on the ground. The geographer Franco Farinelli describes this difference as one of specificity, when he says that "Place... is a part of the terrestrial surface that cannot be exchanged with any other without everything changing."<sup>14</sup> With space, however, "each part can be substituted for another without anything being altered." John Agnew (2011) echoes this sentiment when he describes place as phenomenological and space as geometric. Edward Casey, whose work I will discuss in more detail in chapter three, positions place as absolutely central to our mode of being when he says that "To be at all- to exist in any way- is to be somewhere, and to be somewhere is to be in some kind of place."<sup>15</sup> With this in mind, I will use the term sacred *space* to refer to a category of space that is abstract, general, universal, but one that is realised in concrete, specific places. When I speak of ruined space, I am referring to the concept of ruined space in general; and in the course of this thesis, when referring to Hocking's installations, I

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<sup>14</sup> Franco Farinelli, quoted in John Agnew, *Space and Place, Handbook of Geographical Knowledge*, Sage, London, 2011, pp 2

<sup>15</sup> Edward S. Casey, *The Fate of Place, A Philosophical History*, University of California Press, 2013, pp ix



will often discuss the transformation of ruined *space* to sacred *place*. Indeed, this thesis resists the negative characterisation of ruined space put forth by scholars such as Dylan Trigg (even if this thesis sympathises with many of his other arguments)- that ruined space is inherently traumatised space, that it is a haunted void. My position is closer to that of Edward Casey, who argues that ‘the void’ is not nothing; it is a highly potent space from which new worlds are made. If ruin is a void, then it is only in the sense of being a *potential place*. With these crucial terms clarified, I now turn to the structure of the thesis.

### 1.3 Structure of the thesis

I intend to consider Hocking’s treatment of ruined space by visually analysing three of the artist’s installations as case studies, all of which allow me to focus on different aspects of ‘the sacred’: world-building, unity, reality and atemporality in chapter one; memory and the relationship of the sacred to the land in chapter two; and the sacred notion of liminality in chapter three. The research corpus, made up of Hocking’s photographs, was chosen according to its use of sacred imagery, and is supported by written correspondence with the artist, while the secondary corpus is made up of literature relating to the aesthetics of ruin, to the sacred (in particular the work of Mircea Eliade and Viktor Turner) and to memory studies and spectrality (Karen Till and Esther Peeren respectively). All three case studies will begin by discussing a major element of the sacred, as defined by phenomenologists and anthropologists of religion, before applying these concepts in my analysis of Hocking’s photographs.

Through an exposition of Hocking’s ‘temple’ in an abandoned automobile factory, chapter one will discuss the construction of sacred space in four distinct yet interrelated ways: a) as a means of world-building or imposing order on chaos; b) of unifying the fragmentation of the ruin; c) of representing the space of ruin as the only ‘real’ space as opposed to the illusory spaces of capitalism; and d) of imposing an atemporal, cyclical understanding of ruination. Chapter two explores the relationship between ruin and sacred memory, specifically focusing on Hocking’s investigations into forgotten sites of ancient burial grounds. These sites, now eclipsed by the post-industrial ruins standing in their place, are almost entirely forgotten. By commemorating these haunted sites through the construction of his own ‘burial’ mounds made of debris, Hocking thus embarks on an ethical remembrance of the ruin not as a peon of former industrial glory but as a site of a much older pedigree. Exposing the history of the ruin as stretching back many hundreds of years, Hocking reminds us of an existence before industrialism, an existence violently uprooted by colonial conquest and

then forgotten. While much ruin imagery seeks to remember industrial might and its subsequent decline, Hocking's archaeological assemblages warn us of glorifying one set of memories at the cost of obliterating others. Finally, I use chapter three to discuss Hocking's representation of the ruin as a liminal space. As a space in which cultural categories can be jumbled and recombined as a means of social critique, the use of the liminal is a fruitful one in the context of ruin. Finally, I deal with the politics of ruin photography, and consider whether Hocking's imaginative take on the genre rescues his work from the disparaging label of 'ruin porn'. On the one hand, his archaeological work challenges the assumption that ruin photography is nothing but a superficial sensationalising of poverty, by carrying out significant documentary investigations. On the other, his construction of sacred imagery within the ruin reveres what is nevertheless a space of loss for the communities who still inhabit post-industrial cities. This final section will thus attempt to outline the controversy and to evaluate Hocking's work against recent attempts to rescue the genre.

In all three case studies, the use of sacred imagery is construed as a type of *visual rhetoric*, in which the artist is understood to employ symbols in order to communicate (and often to reject) certain ideas of the ruin. This form of analysis, in which specific symbols are understood as 'visual figures of speech', enables a scholarly analysis of form and function of the image, as well as to suggest the rhetorical impact such images have on a wider audience- their role in community identity, for example (Foss, 2005). The idea that images and their reception are culturally relative, not universal, is especially interesting when applied to the ruin trope; could Hocking's visual reconfiguration of the ruin positively influence the wider cultural reception of these symbols and spaces? In other words, can images like his help to break the negative 'visual hegemony' of the ruin, widely seen as a space of decline? If images act as a kind of 'visual shorthand' for cultural assumptions, can works like Hocking's be seen as acts of individual resistance to such understandings? These questions are typical of the visual rhetorical approach, and of the 'pictorial turn' in general, using insights from fields as diverse as art theory, anthropology, rhetoric, psychology and media studies among others. As a description of the cultural artefact itself (in this case, a set of photographs), the method by which such photographs attempt to communicate (e.g. their use of religious symbols such as the pyramid) and their reception (influenced by wider controversies surrounding the genre of so-called 'ruin porn'), such an approach enables a flexible, diverse, yet coherent, analysis of the multiple aspect of the artist's work.

Scott Hocking, who was born in Michigan and has lived and worked in the city of Detroit since 1996, has so far been neglected by scholars working in the field. His art, which includes both site-specific installations and museum exhibits, has been shown at the prestigious Detroit Institute of Arts, the Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit, and the University of Michigan among many other regional and international institutions. One of many ruin photographers working in the postindustrial Midwest, his images can nevertheless be distinguished from those of his contemporaries such as Yves Marchand and Romain Meffre, Andrew Moore and countless other amateur bloggers and urban explorers, who capture, but do not modify, scenes of ruin. Because of his unique contribution, I immediately felt that his work deserved attention. Whilst many scholars, especially in recent years, have shown an interest in the aesthetics of ruination, Hocking is the only artist I am aware of who utterly rejects nostalgia and engages with the ruin as not just a historical, but as a mythological, space. I feel that this project also demonstrates clear societal relevance, being situated at the nexus of artistic engagement and complex socioeconomic urban histories and narratives, especially in a region of the United States that is often mocked, maligned and generally dismissed as something of a cultural and economic dead zone. Such imagery clearly rejects this notion of ruined space as inferior; rather, its otherness is celebrated. This is not without ethical ambiguity, however; Hocking's photographs also circulate and are received according to the same norms as other so-called 'ruin porn'; are such photographs exempt from charges of glorifying poverty just because they engage with the space in a more active and optimistic manner? These considerations will be dealt with primarily in my concluding chapter, yet they permeate the enquiry from the start.

## **Chapter One: Ruin as a Sacred Space**

### **2.1 Introduction**

Scott Hocking employs spiritual and esoteric imagery throughout his oeuvre, using the rubble he finds to construct sacred sculptures including temples, cairns, spheres, totems, mounds, oracles and more. Using his *Ziggurat* sculpture as a case study, I suggest that Hocking reconfigures the ruined Fisher Body car factory in Detroit as a sacred space in four distinct yet strongly interrelated ways. Firstly, the use of sacred symbolism enables Hocking to invoke notions of *world-building*. Secondly, he inverts the association of ruin with fragmentation, re-ordering the rubble to portray ruined space as a centre of *order* and coherence. Thirdly, he invokes the notion of the ‘*real*’, recasting the ruin as the locus of reality and exposing the capitalist ‘*real*’ as illusory. Finally, Hocking’s *Ziggurat* complicates the usual temporal treatment of ruins, by framing ruins as *atemporal*. By projecting ruin into a mythological time, outside of the terror of history, Hocking reminds us that ruin is part of a cosmic cycle, necessary for rebirth and transformation. Ultimately, Hocking’s use of sacred symbolism suggests a narrative of hope rather than decline. However, in order to appreciate the complexities of Hocking’s *Ziggurat*, it is necessary to begin by discussing in detail the theoretical framework of the sacred itself.

### **2.2 The Sacred and the Profane: Mircea Eliade and the concept of hierophany**

The title of this section will immediately recall the work of Mircea Eliade, the prolific phenomenologist of religion whose bibliography spans an impressive 1500 titles.<sup>16</sup> Eliade, expanding on Rudolph Otto’s 1917 work *Das Heilige* (The Idea of the Holy), argues that there are two modes of being in the world: the sacred and its opposite: the profane. The sacred colours every aspect of religious man’s existence: time, space, habitation, nature, food, work- elements which have steadily become desacralised and understood as purely organic or sociological mechanisms. The manifestation of the sacred, or *hierophany* (a combination of the Greek *hieros*, meaning ‘holy’ and *phainein* meaning ‘to show’) can reveal itself in the most ordinary of objects yet always designates something wholly extraordinary. Stones and trees, for example, are never worshipped merely as stones or trees, but as signifiers of a higher reality. Objects are not altered; they do not take on any special characteristics which differentiate them as holy. Rather, we become aware of these objects as pointing to a sacred realm *beyond* the object itself. Through human perception and interpretation, the or-

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<sup>16</sup> Statistic found in ‘Reconstructing Eliade: Making Sense of Religion’ by Brian S. Rennie, State University of New York Press, 1996, pp vii

dinary object is no longer seen as ordinary, but as a manifestation of the sacred in the mundane. Significantly for our purposes, the hierophany, no matter what its form, always represents an 'interruption' of profane *space*, marking that space out as somehow special or different, 'strong', 'significant', 'powerful' and 'rich'. Unlike profane space, which is "without structure or consistency, amorphous",<sup>17</sup> the construction of sacred space is a primordial means of providing a fixed centre from which to orient ourselves and found our world. Sacred space provides stability, safety, a means of making sense of the chaos outside.

Once recognised, a hierophany must be consecrated, the formless chaos of the world organised into habitable, bounded, ordered space. The act of construction is absolutely key to this ritual act of consecration, being an imitation of the 'cosmogony' - the creation of the world. Architecture is framed here as an existential act as well as an inherently hermeneutic and communicative medium that conveys a wide range of symbolic, socio-economic, historical and mythical ideas. It enables us to negotiate our ontology and structures our sense of being in the world. Through the symbolic narratives embodied in architectural forms, we protect ourselves from the boundlessness of space and assume a sense of existential place. As Eliade argues, "...settling somewhere... represents a serious decision, for the very existence of man is involved; he must, in short, create his own world... Every construction... [is] in some measure equivalent to a new beginning".<sup>18</sup> Architectural theorists have echoed this view on the existential significance of building. Alberto Perez Gomez, for example, writes that "Architecture offers societies a place for existential orientation".<sup>19</sup> Juhani Palasmaa, likewise, claims that "the timeless task of architecture is to create embodied existential metaphors that concretize and structure man's being in the world".<sup>20</sup> Karsten Harries (1998) argues that building facilitates 'dwelling', not merely in the sense of 'residing', but in the existential sense of 'being at home in the world'. Buildings 'speak' to us of higher planes of existence, Harries argues, creating fictions about themselves by 're-presenting materials', or what he terms 'letting materials speak' - making visible that which usually goes unnoticed and in so doing, pointing to an 'ideal' or "imagined architecture that answers to dreams of genuine building and dwelling".<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, Harcourt Inc, 1987, pp 20

<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem*, pp 57, emphasis original.

<sup>19</sup> Alberto Perez-Gomez, quoted in Thomas Barrie, *The Sacred In-Between: The Mediating Roles of Architecture*, Routledge, 2010, pp 23

<sup>20</sup> Juhani Palasmaa, quoted in *ibidem* pp 24

<sup>21</sup> Karsten Harries, *The Ethical Function of Architecture*, MIT Press, 1998, pp 118

Finally, the principle of constructing space is inseparable from its *organisation*, according to Eliade, who makes frequent references to ‘order’ versus ‘chaos’, and form versus ‘formlessness’; he claims, for example, that “human beings cannot live in chaos”,<sup>22</sup> or that “Through the experience of the sacred, the human mind grasped the difference between that which reveals itself as real, powerful, rich and meaningful, and that which does not- i.e., the chaotic and dangerous flux of things, their fortuitous, meaningless appearances and disappearances.”<sup>23</sup> Again, Eliade’s perspectives are echoed by contemporary architectural theorists. Paraphrasing Juhani Palasmaa, Barrie (2010) states that “It is through our interactions with and connections to, architecture that our dislocations may be reconstructed or, in other words, made whole”.<sup>24</sup> Christopher Alexander argues that architecture “must repair the world around it, and within it, so that the larger world around that place becomes more coherent”.<sup>25</sup> Sacred space is thus inherently ordered space; it is “the antithesis of confusion”.<sup>26</sup> Ruin is highly pertinent here; its formlessness is the paradigmatic embodiment of chaos, a chaos which is partly embraced and partly warded off in Hocking’s sculptures. Furthermore, the creative act of construction, if equivalent to founding one’s world, is a highly significant gesture in the context of ruin. Ruin, often conceived of in terms of the ‘end’ of the world, is in Hocking’s work given a new beginning.

We shall discuss Hocking’s strategies in our investigations into his *Ziggurat* below. For now, what is important is the fact that the hierophany is experienced as a break in space between the sacred and the profane. This is not to imply an obvious break between the two, however. The sacred hides itself, camouflages itself in the profane. Meaning abounds; we just have to know where to look for it. The artist is crucial in this hermeneutical quest of discovery. As the eminent literary scholar and Eliade specialist Matei Calinescu argues, “Meaning shrinks, as it were, disappears behind meaningless appearances. Its signs, which no one can read any longer, are hidden among and not beneath the trivia of day-to-day life. From this standpoint, hermeneutics, whose task is to recover lost worlds of

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<sup>22</sup> Ibidem, pp 33

<sup>23</sup> Mircea Eliade, *The Quest: History and Meaning in Religion*, Midway, 1984, pp v, quoted in Douglas Allen, *Myth and Religion in Mircea Eliade*, Routledge, 2002, pp 84

<sup>24</sup> Thomas Barrie, paraphrasing Juhani Palasmaa. *The Sacred In-Between: The Mediating Roles of Architecture*, Routledge, 2010, pp 37

<sup>25</sup> Christopher Alexander, quoted in ibidem, pp 50

<sup>26</sup> M.J. Palmer: *Expressions of Sacred Space: Temple Architecture in the Ancient Near East*, 2012, pp 40

meaning, may be defined simply as the science of recognition.”<sup>27</sup> In Hocking’s work, sacred meaning is camouflaged among the ruins of the postindustrial city, delivered from meaninglessness and imbued with the transcendent significance of the sacred.

### **2.3 Ziggurat**

It is thus the act of construction which consecrates space, endowing buildings, shrines and natural spaces with a metaphysical significance. Sacred architecture has historically been the site at which much of this ‘existential articulation’ has occurred, often reinforced through ritual acts (Barrie, 2010). Sacred spaces communicate a spatial and metaphorical ‘in-between’, liminal zones in which different spatial orders come into contact (Hertzberger, 1991) and in which, echoing the description of the ruin, a space in which “our senses are confronted by the complexity and profusion of images.”<sup>28</sup> One such ideal architecture, prevalent across many religious traditions, is that of the temple, a model of the ‘cosmic mountain’ which expresses the connection between heaven and earth. Temples are often identified as mountains and mountains as nature’s temples; as Knipe (1988) argues, “Mountains, real or constructed, crags, cliffs, even un-possessing hillocks rising from an otherwise flat landscape, all are liminal spaces denoting points of contact with celestial realms and their divine inhabitants or sacred powers. They are focal points for the divine-human encounter, for illumination, transformation, and passage”.<sup>29</sup> Mountains are widely seen as symbols of symbolic importance for their status as the land which rose out of the waters of chaos, the primordial ‘abyss’. Mountains were thus the first pieces of land to be created, and symbolise the expulsion of darkness and chaos in favour of light, order and refuge. Temples therefore symbolise control. Every temple is believed to be at the centre of the world, a high point which allows communication between the sacred realm and the realm of the dead. Temples continuously sanctify, and thus purify, the world by their presence. Once again, I turn to Eliade for a succinct description: “... the sanctity of the temple is proof against all earthly corruption, by virtue of the fact that the architectural plan... is the work of the gods and hence exists in heaven, near to the gods. The transcendent models of temples enjoy

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<sup>27</sup> Matei Calinescu, *Imagination and Meaning*, pp 4-5, quoted in Douglas Allen, *Myth and Religion in Mircea Eliade*, Routledge, 2002, pp 91

<sup>28</sup> Thomas Barrie, *The Sacred In-Between: The Mediating Roles of Architecture*, Routledge, 2010, pp 19

<sup>29</sup> Knipe, 1988, quoted in M.J. Palmer: *Expressions of Sacred Space: Temple Architecture in the Ancient Near East*, 2012, pp 49



### **Ziggurat and Fisher Body 21, Scott Hocking**

a spiritual, incorruptible, celestial existence.”<sup>30</sup> Temples both imitate and reproduce paradise. They provide a site in which sacred time can be periodically re-enacted through the practice of ritual, thereby reinvigorating ‘worn out’ time. In short, it is not simply a point located in space, but “the point in relation to which all space attains individualisation and meaning”.<sup>31</sup> Being the locus of security and goodness in the world, the destruction of the temple is regarded as catastrophic in all religious traditions (Palmer, 2012).

Having a more detailed understanding of the existential significance of construction, we can finally turn to Hocking’s *Ziggurat* itself. Built in 2007 in the abandoned Fisher Body Plant 21 in Detroit, Hocking’s *Ziggurat* was sculpted from 6201 creosote-preserved wooden bricks over a period of eight months. If every construction creates a world, then what kind of world does the Ziggurat create? How does Hocking’s *Ziggurat* ‘speak’ of the ruin? What does it say? How does his hierophanic construction influence perceptions of the space of ruination by ‘re-presenting’ the rubble of ruin and

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<sup>30</sup>Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, Harcourt Inc, 1987, pp 59

<sup>31</sup> D. Levenson, 1985, quoted in M.J. Palmer: *Expressions of Sacred Space: Temple Architecture in the Ancient Near East*, 2012, pp 26, emphasis mine.



by reconfiguring ostensibly profane objects into the sacred? How does this allow the viewer to glimpse an alternative ‘reality’, a sacred ‘real’ as opposed to the collapsed reality of capitalism? And how does his work relate to notions of history? Using the notions of unity, reality and temporality, I will now go on to argue that the sculpture dramatically re-presents the material, space and temporality of ruination- and in doing so, reconfigures our perception of the ruin.

## 2.4 The re-unification of rubble

As Harries (1998) argues, buildings convey fictions about themselves by re-presenting their materials using specific rhetorical strategies, to represent another, ideal architecture. So we must first begin by asking, what is the material Hocking re-presents, and how does this re-presentation convey the fiction of an ideal architecture? In my opinion, the concept of rubble as set out by Gaston Gordillo is especially helpful here. Gordillo, in his 2014 ethnographic study of the Argentine Andes, argues that rubble is less abstract and implies less of a consignment to the past than the concept of ‘ruin’. If ruin is the object of veneration, then rubble is usually dismissed as “shapeless, worthless debris”, formless matter which he gradually learns to see as “textured, affectively charged matter that is intrinsic to all living places”.<sup>32</sup> Gordillo therefore sets about “submitting the concept of the ruin... to the logic of disintegration”.<sup>33</sup> Ruin, he argues, “evokes a unified object that elite sensibilities often treat as a fetish”<sup>34</sup> even at the same time as it evokes rupture. They imply structures of ‘transcendental value’ as opposed to “nodes of rubble on the ground”.<sup>35</sup> This is valid, and yet perhaps applies mostly to classical ruins. Postindustrial ruins, as Edensor argues, are often seen as derelict, dangerous spaces of blight, even if they are fetishised. Gordillo’s distinction between rubble and ruin is useful, however, as it allows for a clearer differentiation between space and material. Where does Hocking’s ziggurat stand in relation to such categories? I would suggest that by gathering rubble into a sacred form, Hocking re-presents both material and space as sacred. The rubble of the factory floor, in this case creosote-preserved wooden bricks, has been recognised amongst the camouflage of the profane and reconfigured into a hierophany.

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<sup>32</sup> Gaston R. Gordillo, *Rubble: The Afterlife of Destruction*, Duke University Press, 2014, pp 4

<sup>33</sup> *Ibidem*, pp 6

<sup>34</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibidem*, pp 8

This re-presentation of rubble consecrates the space of ruin, overturning a number of negative connotations that (postindustrial) ruins usually provoke. Firstly, Hocking's *Ziggurat* and other such sculptures temporarily return the ruin to a state of unity, overcoming the chaos of the profane. This suggests an attempt by Hocking to tame the chaos of the surrounding space, to evoke just that sense of 'unity' and 'transcendental value' Gordillo says is typical of the way we characterise ruin. Contrary to Gordillo's logic of disintegration, Hocking reintegrates the rubble he finds, reminding us of Eliade's claim that humans 'cannot live in chaos'. Hocking's temple sculpture recalls a space from which all other space, metaphorically speaking, is created, can exist, springs forth. Temples symbolise control; they represent the space in which the primordial waters of chaos were first subdued. Hocking's sculpture thus wards off the chaos of the ruin as the same time this chaos is venerated. Yet, this attempt to re-order the ruin is complex; for Hocking clearly expresses an affinity with the chaotic forces of nature when he remarks that "I end up being drawn to to places that end up... somewhat forgotten, or maybe there's a sense of mystery, or of chaos, or of loss of control. I feel like when nature reclaims places there's a feeling that humans have stopped controlling it and it's gone back to this wild, organic way of moving and living."<sup>36</sup>

Hocking's temple thus invokes notions of order, coherence and world building in a space which provides solace precisely because of its disordered state. It is chaos, interestingly, which enables the artist to experience feelings of 'purity' and 'transcendence', precisely because it is through disorder that nature is allowed to re-appropriate the space. This affinity between nature's presence and the presence of the sacred is remarked upon several times by the artist. The beauty he discovers in ruin, for example, is found "not only in the scale and the size and the architecture... but the beauty of how nature takes them apart."<sup>37</sup> Ruins afford a level of contact with untamed nature which would be impossible in functioning urban space, bestowing on them a special 'hierotopic' quality: the sanctity of the natural world. In a 2011 interview he remarks that "I have an interest in these places that give me a sense of solace. In Detroit, going into an abandoned auto factory is my walk in the woods. It's the closest I can get to the top of a mountain peak- the top of a building."<sup>38</sup> He adds in the same interview that "Off the grid is where I have these experiences in my version of nature and can seek

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<sup>36</sup> Seeing Beauty in All Stages: An Interview with Scott Hocking by Sarah Margolis-Pineo, Originally Published in *Bad at Sports*, August 4th, 2011, [http://www.detroitresearch.org/?page\\_id=440](http://www.detroitresearch.org/?page_id=440)

<sup>37</sup> Ibidem

<sup>38</sup> Seeing Beauty in All Stages: An Interview with Scott Hocking by Sarah Margolis-Pineo, Originally Published in *Bad at Sports*, August 4th, 2011, [http://www.detroitresearch.org/?page\\_id=440](http://www.detroitresearch.org/?page_id=440)

purity and solace... And it's not only a walk in the woods for me, but it's kind of like my church too. It can be a metaphysical thing- I basically meditate when I'm working in these buildings alone, like a monk stacking blocks in quiet, in the middle of nowhere... It's a real peaceful, meditative experience to work like this... It's about inner peace and peace of mind..."<sup>39</sup> Likening the heightened sensory awareness of ruin to unnerving encounters with nature, Hocking writes that "There are a lot of risks you take... there's something about the way it affects your senses- they become heightened and aware... in the same way they would be if you were lost in the woods. If you were lost in the woods or at sea, and you're not in control... that way your senses sort of open up in these situations is the same. I think that is certainly appealing- that sense of being alive. You notice every fleck of paint on the wall, every sound you hear... Your senses become heightened..."<sup>40</sup> Thus, although Hocking's work represents a re-unification and thus reordering of ruin, his engagement with the space is borne out of a love of nature's chaotic and unpredictable intrusions. The ruin becomes a space of nature, and nature reminiscent of encounters with ruin.

## 2.5 The sacred reality of ruin

In addition to ordering the fragmentation of the ruin, Hocking also reveals his hierophany by a revelation of an alternative reality: the sacred, as opposed to the capitalist, 'real'. Competing notions of 'reality' are invoked by both concepts. First, we recall Eliade's numerous statements of the ultimate reality which the sacred reveals. As 'the only real and real-ly existing space', sacred reality strips the profane, empirically observable world of its illusions. Interestingly enough, this notion of reality is also pertinent to discussions of capitalism. Mark Fisher (2008) argues that 'capitalist realism' is "a pervasive atmosphere, conditioning not only the production of culture but also the regulation of work and education, acting as a kind of invisible barrier to thought and action".<sup>41</sup> Capitalism seems like the only viable option; there does not appear to be any kind of coherent, realistic alternative. In this sense, it is a new mythology, one which dresses itself as the ultimate reality whilst pretending to be free of any assumptions of ideological value or belief. Performing a disingenuous slight of hand, it persuades us that it has saved us from dangerous ideology, "present[ing] itself as a shield protect-

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<sup>39</sup> Seeing Beauty in All Stages: An Interview with Scott Hocking by Sarah Margolis-Pineo, Originally Published in *Bad at Sports*, August 4th, 2011, [http://www.detroitresearch.org/?page\\_id=440](http://www.detroitresearch.org/?page_id=440)

<sup>40</sup> Seeing Beauty in All Stages: An Interview with Scott Hocking by Sarah Margolis-Pineo, Originally Published in *Bad at Sports*, August 4th, 2011, [http://www.detroitresearch.org/?page\\_id=440](http://www.detroitresearch.org/?page_id=440)

<sup>41</sup> Ibidem, pp 16

ing us from the perils posed by belief itself".<sup>42</sup> Belief, we are told, is illusion. We have left belief behind; capitalism marks onward progress. As Fisher puts it, "Capitalism is what is left when beliefs have collapsed at the level of ritual or symbolic elaboration, and all that is left is the consumer-spectator, trudging through the ruins and the relics".<sup>43</sup> Yet, capitalist mythology is hard to sustain in conditions of industrial breakdown; "Capitalist realism", Fisher argues, "can... be threatened if it is shown to be in some way inconsistent or untenable; if that is to say, capitalism's ostensible 'realism' turns out to be nothing of the sort".<sup>44</sup> "Emancipatory politics," he continues, "must always destroy the appearance of a 'natural order', must reveal what is presented as necessary and inevitable to be a mere contingency".<sup>45</sup> The image of the ruined factory immediately springs to mind here. For what provides a more arresting example of the breakdown of capitalism's natural order than ruin? What better way to reflect its contingencies?

A similar position is advanced by Dylan Trigg (2006), who argues that ruins enable a critique of rational progress, the latter being seen as homogenous, universal, static and absolute. Yet, reason is unsettled by a widespread cultural pessimism and the evidence of ruin, which reveals what Trigg calls 'the absence of reason'. "If reason," Trigg argues, "is centred on the will to permanency, then *the space which resists that drive* will be vulnerable to mutability, uncertainty, and fragmentation."<sup>46</sup> Later, in a smilier vein, he adds that "Rational thought does not strive for what gives way. No rational certainty can co-exist with a process determined by entropy."<sup>47</sup> In its fragmentation, rupture and uncertainty, ruin exemplifies the disbanding of reason. Yet Hocking's temple constitutes a perverse *return* of the ruin to reason, providing a measure of order, unity and coherence. It restores a degree of rational permanence by *revolting* against the mutability of the ruin, by intervening in the 'irrational' process of spatial ruination. In one sense, then, Hocking returns the ruin to a state of reason, though not the capitalist reason it formerly knew. Rather, this is, paradoxically, a temporary returning of capitalist space to the sacred absolute, an absence of one reality

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<sup>42</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>43</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>44</sup> Ibidem

<sup>45</sup> Ibidem, pp 17

<sup>46</sup> Dylan Trigg, *The Aesthetics of Decay: Nothingness, Nostalgia and the Absence of Reason*, New Studies in Aesthetics 37, Peter Lang Publishing, 2006, pp xxv, emphasis mine.

<sup>47</sup> Ibidem, pp 85

principle and the unveiling of another. Hocking elevates the space in which capitalist reason is absent, by simultaneously celebrating and trying to tame its fragmentation. His sculptures thus reveal an ambivalence towards decline and the absence of reason. As Trigg remarks,

By confronting history without the framework of rational disguise, what was previously disguised is unhidden: namely, that progress does not guarantee a definite future in which the past is able to be incorporated without any surplus remains. At the end of its present narrative, history's morbid nostalgia toward reason has prevented us from ascribing virtue to decline and vice to formal abstraction. By being open to decline, reason is disputed and a critique of progress made possible.<sup>48</sup>

Although, as I will go on to discuss in chapter two, Trigg has described ruined spaces as 'traumatic spaces' and 'voids', he does make a positive case here for embracing decline, in that it is only by remaining open to decline that a genuine critique of rational progress is made possible. Hocking's *Ziggurat*, I would argue, displays an ambiguous attitude towards the rational 'will to permanence': his sculpture both affirms permanence *and* resists it. Firstly, the work itself seems to make a virtue of entropic decline in its selection of site: instead of sculpting a piece for the immaculate white cube of the gallery, it is carefully crafted in a disordered space from fragments of industrial rubble. His works are predominantly sculpted in spaces which are vulnerable to demolition, and with materials liable to be removed and/or destroyed. This does not suggest much attachment to the idea of permanence. Secondly, Hocking designates this space as a special space- a sacred space. Yet the very *act* of designating and consecrating sacred space can, as discussed above, be seen as an attempt to impose a degree of rational order on that space. The act of construction gathers and unifies scattered fragments, restoring the jumbled state of disordered matter to an ordered space of sacred, eternal symbolic forms. Furthermore, if structural restoration, as Trigg argues, "...means a return to a place that has once evaporated," and if "a semblance of order, even when cracked... is preferable to failure,"<sup>49</sup> then perhaps we can read Hocking's *Ziggurat* as a sign of both reverence and resistance towards decay and the absence of reason. For as long as the sculpture lasts, it rejects a narrative of failed space. Finally, the sacred itself as a conceptual category soothes our fears of individual tran-

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<sup>48</sup> Ibidem

<sup>49</sup> Ibidem

sience by emphasising cosmic eternity. Reflecting on the thought of Mircea Eliade, the scholar David Levy writes that

The symbols of religion reveal a continuity between the structures of human existence and those of the cosmos... [they allow man] to see himself as a partner in a world that manifests order. When archaic man interprets his life and destiny by analogy with the repetitive and cyclical rhythms of nature he lays claim to a unity between psychic and cosmic reality that assuages the fear of oblivion. He is never far from death but he knows that when the moon vanishes from the sky the darkness is only a prelude to its return... As part of the cosmos, archaic man sees his life as participating in the same rhythms. *No end is final*.<sup>50</sup>

The symbols of religion, then, including that of the temple, allow man to escape the fear of total oblivion by placing him in a larger cosmic cycle of eternal birth, death and regeneration. Recourse to such symbols can thus be seen as a means of soothing existential anxiety, contrasting the order of the cosmos with the flux of individual elements. Hocking's work can be seen in this context as a means of resisting the transience of *individual* ruined space in the knowledge that *all* spaces continue to exist in the eternal cycle of birth, death, decay and regeneration. I will explore the significance of cyclical temporality at the close of this chapter. For now, I would like to return to the notion of the 'real'.

In Hocking's photographs, the capitalist 'reality principle' is unmasked in favour of the transcendent values it seeks to obliterate, leaving us not with loss or lack, but with a coherent, ordered alternative. Capitalism is not reality, but rather what Lacan termed a 'reality principle' - the latter being "the ideology that presents itself as empirical fact"<sup>51</sup>. The Lacanian 'Real' is what is suppressed by any such reality principle, with the 'Real' defined as "an unrepresentable X, a traumatic void that can only be glimpsed in the fractures and inconsistencies in the field of apparent reality"<sup>52</sup>. Ruins represent a potent example of the 'traumatic void', the Real suppressed by the capitalist reality

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<sup>50</sup> David Levy, Mircea Eliade: an Appreciation, Modern Age, Vol. 25, No. 2, Spring 1981, Accessed via [https://archive.org/stream/MirceaEliadeAnAppreciation/Eliade-Levy\\_djvu.txt](https://archive.org/stream/MirceaEliadeAnAppreciation/Eliade-Levy_djvu.txt)

<sup>51</sup> Alenka Zupanic, quoted in Seeing Beauty in All Stages: An Interview with Scott Hocking by Sarah Margolis-Pineo, Originally Published in *Bad at Sports*, August 4th, 2011, [http://www.detroitresearch.org/?page\\_id=440](http://www.detroitresearch.org/?page_id=440).

<sup>52</sup> Ibidem, pp 18

principle of the urban socio-economic fabric. What makes Hocking's work stand out here is its ability to provide a glimpse of the sacred Real, not merely as fracture, but as a reordered, coherent whole. His sculptures re-centre the ruin, returning them from the social periphery. Opposing their status as marginal spaces, forgotten, hidden and ignored, the notion of the sacred centre endows the ruin with a renewed sense of appreciation and significance. The temple, we recall, is the point from which all other space gathers meaning. Thus, normalised urban space only gains meaning from ruin as opposed to ruin being stripped of meaning because of its lack of perceived use-value. The ruin has a much deeper, ontological significance than the capitalist reality principle allows; in Hocking's work, it becomes a liminal zone in which the sacred Real can be apprehended. Thus, the void in Hocking's work does not allow us to revel in passive despair or titillated hopelessness; rather, it represents a space of 'ideological rubble' in which alternatives can be imagined. As Trigg argues, the ruin "forges a new criterion for knowledge<sup>53</sup>". It is the ability to provide us with alternatives- in this case, the sacred- that gives them their 'epistemological value'. This is their true value, a value which eschews the narrow use-value of the capitalist commodity (Trigg, 2006).

## 2.6 Sacred temporality and the cycle of ruin

If the ontological value of Hocking's sacred ruin lies in its ability to reveal an alternative spatiality, it also reveals an alternative conception of temporality. Ruin is not, as Gordillo argues, in these images consigned to notions of 'priceless heritage' or 'pastness'; it is removed from temporal concerns altogether. Hocking's re-presentation of rubble endows the space surrounding it with a dimension of mythical time existing outside of history. In this sense, Hocking's sculptures are not 'past', consigned to the function of mummifying history; they are not, as Gordillo puts it, "objects without afterlife: dead things from a dead past"<sup>54</sup>- these sculptures do not invoke the 'past' at all. They are not, to borrow Gordillo's description of the modern heritage industry, "rubble that has been fetishized".<sup>55</sup> Hocking's work does elevate rubble, yet not in the static, historical sense described by Gordillo. The temporary nature of his site-specific work allows him to escape charges of attempting to overcome decay through preservation; he remarks that "When I'm working on projects like this, there's... a loss of control... I can't come home to the studio every day and resume working on the same project. I'm going out to a building I don't own that could be torn down, burned down, de-

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<sup>53</sup> Dylan Trigg, *The Aesthetics of Decay: Nothingness, Nostalgia and the Absence of Reason*, *New Studies in Aesthetics* 37, Peter Lang Publishing, 2006, pp xxvi

<sup>54</sup> *Ibidem*, pp 9

<sup>55</sup> *Ibidem*.

stroyed, renovated, boarded up, somebody could have broken in and spray painted what I'm working on, they could have added to it, or the materials I'm using could suddenly be gone. There are so many variables I don't have control over."<sup>56</sup> His use of debris and its placing within the ruin ensures its eventual destruction; his works are transitory, much like the structures they are standing in. The Ziggurat was, as he seems to have predicted, demolished in 2009 by the Environmental Protection Agency.

The transience of Hocking's sculptures reveal a preoccupation with cyclical conceptions of time and a critique of our preoccupation with the historical moment. His remark that "Mythology exists outside of time..."<sup>57</sup> positions ruin not as the end, but rather as a stage in the cosmic cycle of life and entropy. He doesn't submit to nostalgia for the specific site he works in; the time of industrial capitalism is not privileged as in the work of so many artists who engage with ruin. As he puts it,

I may work from the site and get ideas from the history and the site itself, but in the end, what I want the images to convey is something more universal...I'm trying to talk about people-about humans on earth... how we're really no different than we've ever been. When I put a pyramid in an abandoned building, one of the many things I'm thinking about is the fact that it's a ruin within a ruin. One is ancient, and I'm building a new one, and what's the difference? Why do we look at some ruins with reverence, and see others as failures? Why can't we realise that we've been creating things since the dawn of time, making structures and objects with our hands, and at some point they decay, at some point the civilisation that made it fails, at some point the city in which it was made disappears? It's not the end- there's never an ending. So maybe there's a certain countering to the idea that this is the end or something, that this is a failed city, or a failed industrial age. I just see it as a constant cycle that we're in the middle of. I just try to find the beauty in all the stages.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Seeing Beauty in All Stages: An Interview with Scott Hocking by Sarah Margolis-Pineo, Originally Published in *Bad at Sports*, August 4th, 2011, [http://www.detroitresearch.org/?page\\_id=440](http://www.detroitresearch.org/?page_id=440)

<sup>57</sup> Seeing Beauty in All Stages: An Interview with Scott Hocking by Sarah Margolis-Pineo, Originally Published in *Bad at Sports*, August 4th, 2011, [http://www.detroitresearch.org/?page\\_id=440](http://www.detroitresearch.org/?page_id=440)

<sup>58</sup> Seeing Beauty in All Stages: An Interview with Scott Hocking by Sarah Margolis-Pineo, Originally Published in *Bad at Sports*, August 4th, 2011, [http://www.detroitresearch.org/?page\\_id=440](http://www.detroitresearch.org/?page_id=440)



This idea of finding beauty in the transition of decay suggests hope for the ruin, a sense of potential rather than devastation- or, rather, potential in the devastation. Hocking's sculptures refuse to accept an overly pessimistic narrative of postindustrial ruin; for him, the 'pyramid' re-orientes our focus away from industrial decline and draws a parallel with much older acts of building, growth, and subsequent decline and regeneration. Civilisations have always risen and fallen; why do we privilege our own? Or, why do we see the decline of our own constructions as a definitive end point?

Perhaps the answer lies in our conception of history and how this perspective conditions our endurance of suffering. Eliade (1954) argues that for 'archaic' (pre- Monotheist) religious man, only cosmic time is 'real'. Profane time, which we would understand as concrete, historical time, could be periodically 'abolished' and regenerated by the performance of ritual. The archaic mode of thinking, argues Eliade, is fundamentally opposed to history, "regarded as a succession of events that are irreversible, unforeseeable, possessed of autonomous value. He refuses to accept it and grant it value as such, as history".<sup>59</sup> Archaic man 'has' a history, but his 'history' is mythical. Modern man would hardly call this 'history' at all; for the latter, the mythic, symbolic and archetypal structures of archaic religions seem entirely atemporal. They are outside of 'history' if history is understood as a linear succession of irreversible events. This conception of history has important implications for how archaic religious man understands suffering. For archaic man, Eliade claims, suffering "had a meaning; it corresponded... to an order whose value was not contested".<sup>60</sup> Suffering was thought to have been caused by the anger of the gods, the malevolence of demons or by an individual's own doing, making suffering easier to comprehend and thus to endure. As Eliade phrases it, religious man "tolerates [suffering] morally because it is not absurd".<sup>61</sup> Once the cause of a particular catastrophe has been uncovered and understood, it becomes tolerable. Cosmic understandings make catastrophe foreseeable and comprehensible, one stage in the necessary cycles of birth, death and regeneration. Death is never final, but a necessary transition in the return to origins.

The dawn of Monotheism, argues Eliade, begins to provoke a shift in a purely cyclical conception of time. Rather than viewing events through the lens of archetypal mythological time, monotheistic

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<sup>59</sup> Mircea Eliade, quoted in Bryan S. Rennie, *Reconstructing Eliade: Making Sense of Religion*, State University of New York Press, 1996, pp 97

<sup>60</sup> Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return, or, Cosmos and History*, Princeton University Press, 1954, pp 96

<sup>61</sup> *Ibidem*, pp 98

revelation occurs in time itself. Judaism and Christianity, for example, value history in so far as historical events are a revelation of God's will. God intervenes in history, revealing his wrath through catastrophes. Significantly, this confers a finality on the (sacred) historical event: history cannot be reversed. However, Eliade maintains that while Monotheistic religions represent the beginnings of a more linear conception of time, they are still essentially ahistorical in that they are positioned towards the final abolition of history in the form of apocalyptic salvation. If time in the 'archaic' conception is subject to cyclical death and regeneration, then the annulment of monotheistic time is the end of time altogether: history is not transcended through the atemporal time of the mythological beginning, nor through periodic ritual, but through a final, apocalyptic end: 'salvation' from the 'terror of history'. History can be tolerated, not because it is understood trans-historically, but as meta-historically- history is 'limited' to time, in that it will one day be abolished by time altogether (Eliade, 1954). Thus, in both religious modes of existence, the 'archaic', and the Monotheistic, history in and of itself does not participate in the higher order of sacred reality and therefore has no meaning.

Both conceptions of history are fundamentally different to the modern historicist view and both models, according to Eliade, offer ways of tolerating history that are not open to non-religious man, who views the historical event as significant in and of itself. For the historicist, beginning with Hegel, there is no possibility of transcending either time or history- things must happen as they do. Suffering no longer has a comprehensible cause; it becomes entirely arbitrary. This leads Eliade to ask how, "...when historical pressure no longer allows any escape, how man [can] tolerate the catastrophes and horrors of history- from collective deportations and massacres to atomic bombings- if beyond them he can glimpse no sign, no transhistorical meaning..."<sup>62</sup> Later, he adds that "justification of a historical event by the simple fact that it is a historical event, in other words, by the simple fact that 'it happened that way', will not go far toward freeing humanity from the terror that the event inspires".<sup>63</sup> For the historicist, there is only history, while for religious man, there is a coherent symbolic order; thus, "Every hero repeated the archetypal gesture, every war rehearsed the struggle between good and evil, every fresh social injustice was identified with the sufferings of the

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<sup>62</sup> Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return, or, Cosmos and History*, Princeton University Press, 1954, pp 151

<sup>63</sup> Mircea Eliade, quoted in Bryan S. Rennie, *Reconstructing Eliade: Making Sense of Religion*, State University of New York Press, 1996, pp 84

Saviour... each new massacre repeated the glorious end of the martyrs”.<sup>64</sup> Such a perspective enables religious man to avoid the ‘spiritual aridity’ which characterises the historicist, who has no such recourse to coherent symbols or narratives to explain his misfortunes. He bears ‘the burden of time’, with Historicism conferring an irreversibility on events. Catastrophes represent finality.

Yet, even historical man is not entirely free from the need to mythologise. According to Eliade, historical narratives have simply incorporated mythical structures as opposed to abandoning them (much like socioeconomic constructs such as capitalism have incorporated systems of belief while pretending to be neutral). Historical events and persons have been imbued with mythical narratives and archetypal tropes, demonstrating the affinity with a religious mode of thinking that (post)modernity has not quite banished. As Eliade repeatedly insists, we need myth to make sense of the world, especially when that world is crumbling around us. Although we think we frame events, objects, spaces and persons from within a historicist worldview, we couch our historiography in mythical terms- history becomes myth. Collective memory is, according to Eliade, ‘anhistorical’, preserving archetypes rather than individuals. It is thus modern historical narrative which occupies the archaic place of archetype, consoling us with its coherent emplacement of history in deep symbolic structures. This identification of history with mythical tropes is another way of resisting it, reinforcing Eliade’s contention that such resistance is a necessary coping mechanism in the face of turbulent times.

One cannot but help be reminded here of the popular tendency to mythologise the history of postindustrial decline. John Patrick O’Leary, in an influential 2011 article in *Guernica Magazine*, argues that stories of Detroit broadly fall into three categories: Detroit as metonym, the Detroit lament, and Detroit utopia. All are caricatures, none helpful to the city and the people who still live there; yet they do reveal a readiness to couch the historical detail of decline in either apocalyptic or utopian terms. Detroit as metonym equates the city with polluting industry, corporate subsidies, strong unions, big government and the auto industry in general- all of which relegate the city to a position of standing for something else as opposed to a complex entity in itself. The Detroit Lament, in which the city is represented purely in terms of loss (of buildings, people, a ‘way of life’) has now been widely criticised in its most visible and controversial incarnation, ‘ruin porn’. This will be discussed in more detail in my concluding chapter; for now, we need only recall how the history of

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<sup>64</sup> Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return, or, Cosmos and History*, Princeton University Press, 1954, pp 151-152

ruin is so often mythologised in such representations as total absence. Interestingly, ruin photography is often accused of being devoid of historical context, lending credence to Eliade's claim that we tend to remember by way of archetypal tropes rather than historical details. In the Detroit Lament, represented in photographs, newspaper articles, blog posts and increasingly in poetry and fiction, the city is mythologised as an apocalyptic dead zone. O' Leary's final trope is that of Detroit Utopia: the city as a new 'frontier' in which politically savvy, young white creatives present the city as a new land of opportunity, full of potential and hardy 'survivors'. If we mythologise Detroit and cities like it, however, it may be because such myths offer us ways of coping with its troubled history. We mythologise its history to abolish its history altogether; either in the form of a ruined scene of apocalypse, promising us an end and thus a reprieve from history- or, alternatively, as a site of regeneration, full of potential.

So where does Hocking's work stand in relation to these conceptions of history, time and mythology? I suggest that he exhibits a marked tendency towards the archaic, cyclical view. Hocking's sculptures 'counter [...] the idea that this is the end', refusing a narrowly historicist reading of history and restoring the ruin instead to a cosmic temporality. Echoing Hocking's sentiments, Eliade argues that "...just as the disappearance of the moon is never final, since it is necessarily followed by a new moon, the disappearance of man is not final either; in particular the disappearance of an entire humanity (deluge, flood, disappearance of a continent and so on) is never total, for a new humanity is born from a pair of survivors".<sup>65</sup> Ruin is simply one stage in the cyclical nature of all life; it is comprehensible as such and can be anticipated and therefore tolerated. Furthermore, the idea that "Archaic consciousness accords no importance to personal memories"<sup>66</sup> goes very much against conventional representations of ruin. The memory of individuals who once inhabited a space and the concept of memory in general are insignificant in relation to the impersonal, abstract cycles of cosmic time. Thus the realisation of our own transient existence which Benjamin argued ruins so powerfully conjure is secondary to the realisation that "...the disappearance of an entire humanity... is never total".<sup>67</sup> It seems that Hocking is less committed to the uncovering of personal

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<sup>65</sup> Mircea Eliade, quoted in Bryan S. Rennie, *Reconstructing Eliade: Making Sense of Religion*, State University of New York Press, 1996, pp 84

<sup>66</sup> Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return, or, Cosmos and History*, Princeton University Press, 1954, pp 47

<sup>67</sup> *Ibidem*, pp 73

or social memory and more to the witnessing of a universal collectivity. In the eternal regeneration of life, the archetypal concept of ruin is essential; yet the historical instance of ruin is infinitesimal.

Interestingly, Eliade argues that such perspectives will only grow more prevalent as we are confronted with the various terrors of history. Thus, as postindustrial decline proliferates, leaving devastation in its wake, people will resist narratives which brush off their suffering as ‘necessary’, understood as a narrow, nihilistic, historical necessity. They will refuse the notion that ‘things just happened that way’. Hocking’s constructions can therefore be seen as a kind of coping mechanism, a defence against the ‘terrors’ of postindustrial ruination in Detroit. The ‘making’ of history has led us close to the brink of extinction, Eliade reminds us; writing in 1954, the horrors of war must have been fresh in his mind. The repetition of symbolic archetypes is a way of immunising ourselves against historical catastrophes of our own making. Archaic man may be living under the onus of dull repetition, claims Eliade, but “At least he retains the freedom to annul his faults, to wipe out the memory of his ‘fall into history’ and to make another attempt to escape definitively from time.”<sup>68</sup> This bestows a special capacity for creativity on spiritual man: the capacity to ‘create the world anew’. He also has the capacity for faith: the only mechanism through which the terror of history can truly be endured. It is the loss of this faith, according to Eliade, which provokes “a despair of [man’s] presence in a historical universe in which almost the whole of mankind lives prey to a continual terror.”<sup>69</sup> If the ‘Detroit lamenters’, as O’Leary labels them, exhibit the tendency towards mythologising history as impending apocalyptic doom, a narrative borne out of deep dissatisfaction, then Hocking’s cyclical approach refuses such finality. Rather than abolishing Detroit’s ruined history altogether, Hocking incorporates it as a necessary stage on the road to rebirth. In his repetition of the ‘cosmogonic act’, the timeless act of building, Hocking is able to convey a fiction of ruin as a space of existential security, of centrality, fixedness and order. As spaces which often provoke feelings of loss and absence, Hocking’s sculptures instead allow us to perceive the ruin as a site of calm contemplation and engagement with the natural world. Such imagery hovers on the threshold between apocalyptic lament and utopian idealism, suggesting a more stoical detachment from the turbulence of the historical process. Yet although he distances himself from history, his sculptures still manage to provoke a certain kind of nostalgia: a nostalgia not for the lost spaces of industry, but for spaces of the sacred. Indeed, they remind us that ‘the sacred’ is not gone but simply camouflaged,

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<sup>68</sup> Ibidem, pp 158

<sup>69</sup> Ibidem, pp 162

and that if we look hard enough, we might just learn to see it- and with this new vision, learn to see ruins anew.

## **Chapter two- Ruins and Memory**

### **3.1 Introduction**

Chapter two reflects on themes of memory and forgetting, in which the artist uncovers ruins in two cities as forgotten sites of ancient native earthworks and burial mounds, former ‘cities’ which at their height functioned as important spiritual centres of the Mesoamerican world (Milner, 2004). Now almost entirely forgotten, the once-thriving cities of East St Louis and Detroit were built on the remains of a major Native American settlement, revealing these sites to be much more than sites of mere industrial ruin. In contrast to the many nostalgic representations of ruin, in which images are used to recall eras of lost industrial might and community cohesion, Hocking’s investigations into these sites do not privilege the ruin as former spaces of capitalism. His work focuses not (only) on the legacy of the recent industrial past and the absences it leaves behind, but on the almost entirely obscured history of these spaces as ancient sites of worship and burial.

In privileging a pre-industrial memory of site, Hocking thus subverts the notion of ruin as a space exclusively viewed through the lens of capitalism, and in doing so allows us to retrace an alternative, sacred history of these sites. Through a series of documentary photographs, site-specific installations, and archaeological displays, Hocking imaginatively reconstructs this historical absence, compelling us to question the familiarity of the city’s postindustrial geography as well as alerting us to its potential hauntings. The preoccupation with recovering lost histories through an engagement with archaeological sites and objects places Hocking’s work firmly under the rubric of both the ‘archaeological imaginary’ - (Roelstrate, 2013)- and that of the spectral, in which lost others are remembered as an ethical injunction. I will use therefore use this chapter to explore how Hocking’s excavations and photography perform an important work of counter-memory, exposing an urban palimpsest of a much older pedigree than is usual in ruin photography.

### **3.2 Mound City: an ancient metropolis**

The sites which Hocking documents are, on the surface, fairly typical industrial ruins. Yet whilst viewers think they may see a “weedy lot... in a depressed industrial town,”<sup>70</sup> Hocking’s photographs and installations actually trace the former site of what is known as Cahokia, a vast, Pre-

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<sup>70</sup> Andrew Lawler, America’s Lost City. 23rd December 2011, Science, Vol. 334, AAAS, pp 1618

Columbian settlement with an estimated population of 50,000 Mississippians at its peak<sup>71</sup>. Stretching from East St Louis, Illinois to St Louis, Missouri, the city is thought to have been linked with the Toltec or Mayan civilisations of Mesoamerica, and was, until the late 18th century, the largest city in North America (American Archaeology, Spring, 2011). Dating back to 1000 C.E., Cahokia was an important spiritual, political and ceremonial centre which became a thriving metropolis after what archaeologists call a ‘big bang’ - an explosion in population and labour activity linked to the large scale cultivation of corn and the presence of an ideology capable of attracting mass migration to the area. Huge feasts were held in which elaborate hunter-warrior rituals would take place. In addition to the cultivation of fields and the construction of houses, great earthen mounds were built - an estimated 200, many of which were aligned with the sun (American Archaeology, Spring 2011). Monk’s Mound, named after the Trappist Monks who built a monastery on it, has a base as large as the Pyramid of Giza and is thirty feet tall. Mysteriously, the city suddenly collapsed around 1300 CE. Archaeologists speculate that climate change and the resulting political strife, or warfare from neighbouring tribes, might be to blame. They do, however, agree that it was a sudden and traumatic series of events which led to Cahokia’s demise. Two thousand years of mound building in the South-Eastern United States had come to an end.<sup>72</sup>

### 3.3 The myth of the Mound Builders

By the time European colonists discovered the region with its mysterious mounds, they too could only speculate as to the origin of their builders. Many were reverent; Henry Brackenridge, for example, experiences “a degree of astonishment not unlike that which is experienced in contemplating the Egyptian pyramids.”<sup>73</sup> As Gordon Sayre (1998) writes, in a time before archaeology had become a specialised discipline, such mapping, excavation and myth-making surrounding the Mound Builders was rife, and often employed to various colonial ends: both to lend credence to the idea of an authentic, classical antiquity in the new world, and to confer good fortune on subsequent attempts to settle - in other words, a seal of approval for colonial conquest (Sayre, 1998). Both aims, however, depended on a vehement denial of the achievements of Native American populations. From the outset, the mounds and their builders were either ignored or appropriated for the colonists’ own gain. Whether these monuments were revered or dismissed, the French and British colonists

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<sup>71</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>72</sup> Andrew Lawler, America’s Lost City. 23rd December 2011, Science, Vol. 334, AAAS.

<sup>73</sup> H.M. Brackenridge, quoted in Thomas H. English, The Cahokia Indian Mounds: A Plea for their Preservation, Geographical Review, Vol. 11, No. 2, April 1921, pp 210



refused to believe that the Native American tribes they encountered in the new world could possibly be responsible for such constructions. Several more palatable suggestions were put forward, including Vikings, or perhaps a lost tribe of Israel. Thomas Jefferson, who excavated numerous mounds, remarked that “I know of no such thing existing as an Indian monument.”<sup>74</sup> One John Filson, upon encountering the mounds in Kentucky in 1784 writes that the “...ancient remains in Kentucky... seem to prove that this country was formerly inhabited by a nation further advanced in the arts of life than the Indians.”<sup>75</sup>

Thus, the dismissal of native American integrity was a key aspect of the ‘Mound Builder’ myth. The supposed ineptitude of the Native American population meant that they could not possibly have descended from the great civilisation of the Mound Builders; and, this being so, could justifiably be removed from their land. Europeans were making their home in a ‘wilderness’ rather than displacing native peoples. Native American ‘savages’, however, were given credit for driving this great civilisation to its knees; as Sayre (1998) puts it, “the Mound Builders became like the Romans, a great civilisation pillaged by vulgar hordes of invading barbarians”<sup>76</sup>- the barbarians being the Native population. Not only did the Mound Builder myth serve utilitarian and moral ends, but aesthetic ones too. As Sayre (1998) argues, ancient earthworks were the new world equivalent of classical Greek and Roman ruins, inspiring similar ideas about human finitude, the sublime, and nature versus culture; furthermore, they were used to confer ‘instant heritage’ on newly settled villages, with some mounds becoming popular tourist attractions and sites of pilgrimage. In these ways, then, the culture of Native Americans was selectively appropriated to deny the latter their rights, to bless the conquest of a ‘civilised’ people, and to establish a degree of heritage in the new world. All such notions served to designate white European colonists as the true heirs of Mound Builder land and history, whose role was to civilise the ‘barbarous savages’ they encountered there. Yet after a carefully researched 1894 investigation by ethnologist Cyrus Thomas, the Mound Builder myth was eventually dispelled and it was reluctantly acknowledged that Native American descendants were in fact the builders of the mounds. Thomas argued that Native American culture was far older than previously thought, that they were complex, agricultural settlers who did indeed possess the necessary

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<sup>74</sup> Thomas Jefferson, quoted in Gordon M. Sayre, *The Mound Builders and the Imagination of American Antiquity* in Jefferson, Bertram and Chateaubriand. *Early American Literature*, Vol. 33, No. 3 (1998), pp 225

<sup>75</sup> John Filson, quoted in *ibidem*, pp 228

<sup>76</sup> Gordon M. Sayre, *ibidem*, pp 229

skills for such an achievement. He also provided detailed ethnographic accounts of travellers who had seen Native Americans using and building mounds themselves, leading him to conclude that “The links directly connecting the Indians and the mound-builders are so numerous and well-established that archaeologists are justified in accepting the theory that they are one and the same people.”<sup>77</sup>



*The destruction of Big Mound, St Louis (Missouri History Museum)*

### 3.4 Erasure and excavation

Nevertheless, the mounds would eventually be forced to make way for the rapid development of cities such as East St Louis and Detroit in the 1800s, with the majority razed for factories, houses and other municipal works. The remains of central Cahokia, now partially preserved as a state historic park, has been a gambling hall, a housing subdivision, an airfield, and a pornographic drive-in (Hodges, 2011). Though some archaeologists have been pleading for the preservation of the mounds since at least the 1920s, their arguments have mostly fallen on deaf ears. Many archaeologists were simply uninterested in the site, preferring to focus their expertise on the wonders of Greece and Egypt. In the case of East St Louis, it was only the construction of a new bridge, opened in 2014, which uncovered evidence long thought destroyed by the 19th century city. United States federal law mandates archaeological digs in the event of construction projects which use federal money,

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<sup>77</sup> Cyrus Thomas in Robert Silverberg, *The Mound Builders*, Ohio University Press, 1986, pp 160

which explains the \$2.5m<sup>78</sup> dig in East St Louis. Archaeologists have so far excavated a site measuring sixty hectares, uncovering a staggering six thousand items: house foundations, pottery, ritual figurines, tools and bone fragments- all of which lend credence to the idea that East St Louis was a place of wealth and status (Illinois State Archaeology Survey).<sup>79</sup>

Archaeologists are thus simultaneously thrilled at the relics they have uncovered and dismayed at the continuing destruction as they struggle to persuade private land owners to save what they see as an important piece of historical heritage. As archaeologist John Kelly, who is working on the dig, says: “Once it’s gone, you can’t get it back... The best you can do is to protect it before it goes.”<sup>80</sup> Before the civil war, there would have been approximately fifty mounds in East St Louis; today, there are only seven.<sup>81</sup> One of the biggest finds in recent years was during the interstate dig of the 1990s, when a mound reaching forty feet high and covering the size of a football field was discovered. The mortuary mounds, plaza and palisade found nearby pointed to the former ritual uses of the site, while evidence of more than three hundred houses indicate a large residential community. Such finds made clear that the destruction of the 1800s hadn’t been complete, but partial, with the remains of the Pre-Columbian city just beneath the surface of the ruins. Across the river in St Louis, Missouri, much the same pattern of events unfolded. St Louis, which once had so many mounds it was known as Mound City, now only has one left: Sugar Loaf Mound. Burial sites and the remains of villages have been uncovered near the I70 interstate; yet even today, wanton destruction continues, with the site being used for landfill during recent construction work. Private landowners and developers resist archaeological work taking place on their land, because they fear restrictions to land use or delays to costly projects. This has led some archaeologists to take drastic action; one state archaeologist, Joseph Saunders, has bought up vast tracts of cheap, vacant land in the city of East St Louis simply to protect it from redevelopment- which, because of the new bridge, is likely to increase. Archeologist Tim Pauketat laments that “There’s evidence of some kind of major North

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<sup>78</sup> Statistic found in Andrew Lawler, America’s Lost City, 23rd December 2011, Science, Vol. 334, AAAS

<sup>79</sup> Statistic found in Susan Caba, The Beginnings of Urbanism? American Archaeology, Vol. 15, No. 1, 2011

<sup>80</sup> John Kelly, in St Louis Mounds: Plowed and Bulldozed by William Allen and John G Carlton, Accessed via [http://www.ausbcomp.com/redman/st\\_louis\\_mounds.htm](http://www.ausbcomp.com/redman/st_louis_mounds.htm)

<sup>81</sup> Ibidem.



*What remains of Big Mound (Missouri History Museum)*

American historic event locked up in that place, and I'm afraid we're going to lose it."<sup>82</sup> Echoing Pauketat's frustration, fellow archaeologist Thomas Emerson says that "We'd like to think of some way for the government to acquire this land and set it aside... But it's hard to show people- to say, 'See this rubble here? Underneath this is a really, really important site.'"<sup>83</sup> Though these sites are acknowledged to be of major cultural and historic value, only a minor proportion of archaeologists are familiar with the site, meaning that the general public, government agencies and business community suffer from a "cognitive dissonance that has led us to collectively ignore Cahokia's very existence."<sup>84</sup> Given this historical absence, it is artists such as Scott Hocking who can make meaningful contributions to acts of public remembrance- even if such acts are modest in scope.

### 3.5 Hocking's Mound Project and the ethics of the spectral

*"To be haunted by a ghost is to remember what one has never lived in the present, to remember what, in essence, has never had the form of presence." Jacques Derrida, pp 38 in Peeren et al (2013)*

<sup>82</sup> Tim Pauketat, in Jeannette Cooperman, Pompeii in East St Louis, December 22nd, 2011, St Louis Magazine

<sup>83</sup> Thomas Emerson, in Susan Caba, The Beginnings of Urbanism? American Archaeology Vol. 15, No. 1, 2011, pp 18

<sup>84</sup> Glenn Hodges, America's Forgotten City, National Geographic, January 2011

In order to better understand Hocking's work, Jacques Derrida's notion of *spectrality* is especially useful. Whilst the spectral has historically been taken to refer to actually existing supernatural entities, ghosts are today increasingly understood by scholars as 'conceptual metaphors', or what Esther Peeren et al (2013) describe as "a discourse, a system of producing knowledge."<sup>85</sup> The inherently ambiguous nature of the ghost, however, resists overarching meta-narratives and epistemic certainty. Spectrality, in its disruption of a linear sense of time, can only be approached through the fragment. Such revision does not and cannot take the form of a unified narrative; the ghost refuses total comprehension because its absence excludes it from the order of knowledge. As Peeren et al (2013) describe it, the ghost "specifically invokes what is placed outside it, excluded from perception and consequently, from both the archive as the depository of the sanctioned, acknowledged past and politics as the (re)imagined present and future."<sup>86</sup> In order to appreciate the kind of clarification the ghost offers, we must embrace the vague, the ambiguous, the disordered and jumbled. The ghost, then, as a theoretical framework, is particularly suitable for exploring questions of time, space, memory, materiality and the (traumatized) psyche, among many other topics (Peeren et al, 2013).

According to Derrida, who did much to popularise the discourse of the ghost with his 1994 *Spectres of Marx*, the spectral is an intrinsically ethical discourse, concerned as it is with our responsibility towards absent others. Rather than try to expel the ghost as something gruesome, Derrida argues, the ghost should be lived with- indeed, *must* be lived with, as a sign of ethical responsibility. It is only by attending to the invisible visibility of the ghost, according to Derrida, that a true politics of memory is enabled. The power of the spectre is thus that it demands "a politics of memory, of inheritance, and of generations."<sup>87</sup> It is this focus on memory, along with the ability of the ghost to disrupt our sense of time, that makes spectrality such a suitable lens through which to view Hocking's *Mound Project*.

### 3.6 Ghosts and the revision of history

We should welcome the ghost on this view and be open to its hauntings, as a necessary precursor to the ethics and politics of memory. According to Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock (2013), this intense pre-

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<sup>85</sup> Esther Peeren & Maria Del Pilar Blanco, *The Spectralities Reader: Ghosts and Haunting in Contemporary Cultural Theory*, Bloomsbury, 2013, pp 1

<sup>86</sup> Esther Peeren & Maria Del Pilar Blanco, *The Spectralities Reader: Ghosts and Haunting in Contemporary Cultural Theory*, Bloomsbury, 2013, pp 9

<sup>87</sup> *Ibidem*, pp 7

occupation with notions of historical memory and ghosts is precisely why the latter have come under such popular and academic scrutiny in recent times: for, "...the idea of the ghost, of that which... interrupts the presentness of the present... indicates that, beneath the surface of received history, there lurks another narrative, an untold story that calls into question the veracity of the authorized version of events. As such, the contemporary fascination with ghosts is reflective of an awareness of the narrativity of history."<sup>88</sup> Invoking the ghost, Weinstock argues, is a mechanism of addressing a cultural and predominantly American, anxiety; that by revising conventional historical narratives, hitherto absent perspectives can be included and past injustices rectified. Only then can we look towards the future with a semblance of hope. This is why

it needs to be acknowledged that our ghosts are... comforting to us. They represent our desires for truth and justice... They speak to our desire to be remembered and to our longing for a coherent and 'correct' narrative of history. We value our ghosts... because the alternative to their presence is even more frightening: If ghosts do not return to correct history, then privileged narratives of history are not open to contestation... without ghosts to point to things that have been lost and overlooked, things may disappear forever. How can we get it right if we do not know that we have gotten it wrong?<sup>89</sup>

### 3.7 The ethics of spectrality

This appeal to 'a desire for truth and justice' and the need to 'get it right' underlines Derrida's notion of the spectral as an ethical call to *action*. It is a call to "live otherwise, and better."<sup>90</sup> This ethical injunction, according to Derrida, comes in the form of a 'gaze', an intense scrutiny by the spectre which cannot be returned. The 'gaze of the other', is "a singularity on the basis of which a world is opened. The other, who is dead, was someone for whom a world, that is to say, a possible infinity or a possible indefiniteness of experiences was open."<sup>91</sup> Even though inaccessible, ambiguous, invisible, and never present, it is the gaze of the other which compels justice and respect towards those who have gone before us. As Derrida puts it,

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<sup>88</sup> Ibidem, pp 63

<sup>89</sup> Ibidem, pp 64

<sup>90</sup> Derrida, quoted in ibidem, pp 14

<sup>91</sup> Derrida, quoted in ibidem, pp 42

There is no respect and therefore, no justice possible without this relation of fidelity or of promise, as it were, to what is no longer living or not living yet, to what is not simply present. There would be no urgent demand for justice, or for responsibility, without this spectral oath.<sup>92</sup>

The acknowledgement and acceptance of ghosts, then, is a recognition of our duty towards those who are no longer or not yet present. By acknowledging the spectral presence/non-presence, in all its ambiguity, we acknowledge the need to bear witness to absent others. We have a duty not to banish the past and its ambiguities, but to respond to it. For only in doing so can we hope for a future which rejects the exclusion of the other. What spectrality teaches us is that "...the living present is scarcely as self-sufficient as it claims to be; [and] that *we would do well not to count on its density and solidity, which might under exceptional circumstances betray us.*"<sup>93</sup>

This striking description of a fluid, unstable present captures the instability of the ruin perfectly. If we cannot rely on the solidity of the present, Derrida warns us, we must turn back; only then can we unearth meaning, justice, respect. So how does Hocking's examination of historical narrative and absent others help us to clarify the contemporary landscape of postindustrial ruin? Firstly, his conjuring of ghosts undoubtedly reveals Weinstock's anxiety to overturn privileged narratives of history. His haunted landscapes, which reject narrative coherence, represent an attempt, however futile, to bear witness, showing a distrust of the official archive from which Native American others and their topographies have been erased. *Only* ghosts, it seems, are able to clarify these ambiguous landscapes. His photographs and sculptures invoke these spectral traces as a means of rectifying the erasures of the past, and uniquely among ruin photographers, sees the ruin's past as stretching far beyond the height of industrial capitalism. Yet Hocking also reveals a forward-looking, more optimistic bent. By linking the paradoxically invisible visibility of past others with the contemporary homeless community, Hocking shows a concern with both the insufficiencies of the present and a hope to do better in future.

In order to unpick precisely how Hocking's memory work clarifies the haunted postindustrial landscape, it is first prudent to work out in what ways ruins can *themselves* be described as spectral spaces. Only then can we begin to gather the fragments of Hocking's archaeological digs and photog-

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<sup>92</sup> Derrida, quoted in *ibidem*, pp 42-43

<sup>93</sup> Derrida, quoted in *ibidem*, pp 54, emphasis mine.

raphy in order to see how he embraces the spectrality of the ruin as a place which enables, rather than obscures, memory. By invoking the ghosts of the pre-colonial past, Hocking is able to reconfigure the ruin as a sacred place, a place where memory is enabled, rather than disabled, albeit in fragmented, and often fictional, form. Ghosts, as Derrida argues, offer clarification, only if one is prepared to accept their ambiguity and inscrutability. In Hocking's case, then, we shall see how his attendance to the spectral enables a fragmented and ambiguous form of memory to emerge, a competing history to that put forward by the archive. In doing so, he remembers both the absent others of the Native American tribes who once populated these lands, and the ruin itself, not as a space which obscures, but a space which allows a different, fragmented form memory to emerge. The ethical injunction to which Hocking responds includes both a concern for the erasures of the past, and the invisibly visible injustices of the present.

### 3.8 The spectral space of ruin

Ruins, being “out of joint in terms of both time and space”<sup>94</sup> are paradigmatically haunted spaces. Because of their ability to disrupt the linear flow of time, these spaces provide a perfect opportunity for counter narratives to emerge. Till et al (2008) quote Heidi Grunebaum, whose description of ‘multiple temporalities’ aptly describes the ruined spaces of East St Louis and Detroit, and moreover, closely echoes the emancipatory aspects of spectrality discussed above: “[o]n the fault lines where multiple temporalities of change are entangled with normative modes of domination, subordination and disavowal, the opportunity for a counter temporality, a time of the dead, open[s].”<sup>95</sup> Ruins offer precisely this opportunity for contact with alternative temporalities, a distinct space where the past irrupts into the present, flooding the latter with its jumbled and incoherent fragments.

Ruins, embodying loss and absence, may be seen as ‘wounded’ to use Karen Till’s phrase, “material evidence of unspoken pain.”<sup>96</sup> They may be seen as spaces of loss, absence, even trauma, in which the remnants of past events persist, unable to be incorporated into the present- in short, as haunted (Trigg, 2009). Furthermore, ruins are deeply fragmented, representing “the detachment of place

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<sup>94</sup> Steve Pile, 2004, quoted in *ibidem*, pp 306

<sup>95</sup> Heidi Grunebaum, 2007, quoted in *ibidem*, pp 306

<sup>96</sup> Karen Till, *Artistic and Activist Memory-Work: Approaching Place-Based Practice*, *Memory Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 2008, pp 108



from its site”,<sup>97</sup> with such fragmentation seeming to preclude the possibility of memory. As Trigg puts it, “At which point do the history and memories of a place slide into obscurity as the same place undergoes erasure or reconfiguration?”<sup>98</sup> Ruins ‘house what is absent’ to paraphrase Trigg, paradoxically representing a space devoid of memory. They do not so much monumentalise memory as “*bring about a non-memory*, a puncturing in spatial absence.”<sup>99</sup> Ruins for Trigg therefore represent “an architectural emergence without time and stability. In a word, an architecture of disappearance”.<sup>100</sup>

I suggest that it is precisely through the type of memory work practiced by Hocking that ruins can be rescued from obscurity, halting their slide into total erasure at least temporarily. If, as Trigg argues, that is in such spaces that the “testimonial attributes of the spatial trace, present as a void, come to the foreground,”<sup>101</sup> then Hocking’s work can be seen as an engagement with just such ‘spatial traces’, in which the traumatic erasure of Cahokia and the excluded residents of the contemporary city are acknowledged and brought to the fore. Interestingly, Trigg also argues that spaces of trauma, in which ruins are included, lose their meaning as ‘places’ and revert to being ‘sites’. Perhaps, then, it can be suggested that memory-work such as Hocking’s restores the ‘place’ to the abstract ‘site’? If “site implies a deficiency that connects the ruin with an isotropic homogeneity, rather than a heterogenous plenitude,”<sup>102</sup> then Hocking’s work can be said to bestow a degree of specificity and affective engagement which turns the ‘site’ into a lived and practiced place. If, as Trigg argues, “the emergence of site coincides with the *disappearance* of place,”<sup>103</sup> then Hocking, I suggest, reverses this process, bringing back the ‘place’ to the ‘site’ through his work.

### 3.9 Ruins and memory

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<sup>97</sup> Dylan Trigg, *The Place of Trauma: Memory, Hauntings and the Temporality of Ruins*, *Memory Studies*, 2009, Vol. 1, No. 2, pp 95, emphasis mine.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibidem*, pp 95

<sup>99</sup> *Ibidem*, pp 95

<sup>100</sup> *Ibidem*, pp 99

<sup>101</sup> *Ibidem*, pp 95

<sup>102</sup> *Ibidem*, pp 96

<sup>103</sup> *Ibidem*

As spaces which ‘house absence’, ruins are therefore contradictory. For although void in some sense, ruins are also replete with memory. That this memory does not take the form of a coherent narrative does not necessarily make remembering an impossibility, as Trigg seems to suggest; rather, it requires an openness to *alternative* ways of remembering, differently structured narratives. Bradley Garrett, (2011) who has written widely on the practice of urban exploration, argues that exploring ruins “create[s] flashes of confrontation with unexpected material traces that lead to emotionally charged discoveries”<sup>104</sup> and that such practices imitate the archeological survey of surface material, “construct[ing] assemblages of complicated emotional and memorial attachments to abandoned places that meld pluritemporal geographic, historical and experiential imaginations to assay history.”<sup>105</sup> In other words, the memory of ruin takes the form of affective and embodied phenomenological encounters with the material traces of the past in the present. Such traces, Garrett argues, “can be exploited to build alternative associations.”<sup>106</sup> Such associations may be more or less ‘accurate’ in terms of historical truth; to scholars such as Garrett, this doesn’t seem to matter. What matters is the mapping, discovery, documentation and care of places which have been written off by capitalism. Urban exploration, claims Garrett,

gives agency to places with an appreciation for the life of an architectural feature or system that continues after abandonment, with an acknowledgement that, though the capitalist use-life of all places will inevitably end, places do not ‘die’. There seems to be an assertion that there is no wasted space, no nonplaces: there are just places cared for and *remembered in different ways*. Where and how to interpret these post abandonment stories, regardless of who ‘owns’ them in an economic sense or whether they are ‘true’ in an empirical sense, may be guided by the people who are personally invested in these places.<sup>107</sup>

To take Garrett’s perspective is to deny the ‘slide into obscurity’ of the ruin and the erasure of memory it brings. While Trigg sees the ruin as an abstract site of ‘non-memory’, Garrett sees it as a locus of *alternative* memory. Ruins do not lend themselves to order and certainty; such attempts at narrative closure would be futile. Yet this does not make them culturally or socially void. Rather,

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<sup>104</sup> Bradley L. Garrett, *Assaying History: Creating Temporal Junctions through Urban Exploration, Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 2011, Vol. 29, pp 1050, emphasis mine.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>106</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>107</sup> *Ibidem*

they offer instead the opportunity to escape static narratives in exchange for imaginative narrative interventions which re-member, re-trace and re-create space.

This is not the kind of memory prescribed by heritage status; it is a witnessing in which things and places are allowed to continue their inevitable decay, simply experienced and documented in the meantime. There is no drive to impose a singular, all-encompassing interpretation of the past and no attempt to silence or soften traumatic histories. As Dydia Delyser so eloquently puts it, people want more than “a passive past constructed through a scripted narrative”.<sup>108</sup> Such work resists the rigidity of heritage as understood in its commercial sense, insisting that memory is complicated, dispersed, and fragmented. Instead, the subjective and affective practices of storytelling and myth making are embraced, while the notion that there is any such thing as an objective recreation of past events, times and places is rejected. Work such as Hocking’s therefore allows for a personal interpretation of the ruin’s unsettling history, an interpretation not imposed from without but created and documented from within the space itself. These ‘histories’ may not be institutionally sanctioned, consisting of little more than “material and immaterial, functional and fantastical, rational and irrational” stories; yet this is precisely the point. To quote Raphael Samuel, these narratives represent “a social form of knowledge”<sup>109</sup> in which place and landscape is portrayed “through juxtapositions and interpretations of the historical and the contemporary, the political and the poetic, the factual and the fictional, the discursive and the sensual”.<sup>110</sup> Art such as Hocking’s thus represents an attempt to craft alternative stories as a way of participating in the authorship of historical knowledge. This is a form of remembering which is therefore closely allied with the ethics of the spectral: fragmented, dispersed, subjective and ambiguous.

Hocking employs two main narrative strategies in his Mound Project and New Mound City. The first re-traces the history of contemporary sites of ruin as historically sacred sites, through documentary photography; and the second is that of the archaeological dig, in which mundane objects are unearthed, classified and displayed in conventional musealised style as ‘sacred relics’. Both strategies, in evoking the ghosts of the past, also appeal to the spectres of the present: the homeless community who now inhabit these spaces. It is in these images that we recall Derrida’s ‘ethical in-

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<sup>108</sup> Dydia Delyser, 1999, quoted in *ibidem* pp 1051

<sup>109</sup> Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory: Past and Present in Contemporary Culture*, Verso, 1994, pp 8, quoted in *ibidem*

<sup>110</sup> Pearson, Mike and Michael Shanks, 2001, quoted in *ibidem*, pp 307

junction' of the ghost: to attend to the erasures of the past in order to take responsibility for absent others, not only in the past but in the present as well. I will therefore begin by discussing Hocking's documentary photography and archeological digs before ending with a discussion of the ethical call to action his images demand.

### **3.10 Between presence and absence: photography and the spectres of memory**

Photography has long been connected with the workings of memory in scholarly discourse. In his seminal work *Camera Lucida*, (1980), Roland Barthes argued that the photograph is endowed with an "evidentiary power,"<sup>111</sup> appearing to guarantee the truth of the historical record. The photograph and object blur into one another, producing not a copy but "an emanation of past reality: a magic, not an art."<sup>112</sup> When we look at a photograph, argues Mitchell (2008), we come away with the idea that we have borne witness to a memory which is not ours; the photograph is an affective object and itself causes us to form a bond with its subject, even if we have not been party to what the image depicts: remembering "what one has never lived in the present".<sup>113</sup> Hoelscher (2008) quoting Sturken (1999) argues that photographic images "are the technologies of memory, not vessels of memory in which memory passively resides so much as the objects through which memories are shared, produced and given meaning."<sup>114</sup> A similar argument is put forward by Edwards, who claims that photographs are "memory texts"<sup>115</sup> in that they "reinforce networks and identities built on the memory to which they relate, positioning individuals vis a vis the group, linking past, present, and perhaps implying a future". Photographs act as signs, then, tools by which memory is collectively shared. Photographs are thus an essential means of accessing a shared cultural heritage.

Photographic images promise us truthful access to the past. Yet, this eruption from the past comes to us in the present, jarring our linear sense of time. And it is here, in its ability to cause temporal disruption, that photography and the spectral meet. If haunting is about "a fundamental

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<sup>111</sup> Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 1980, quoted in Kate Mitchell, *Ghostly Histories and Embodied Memories: Photography, Spectrality and Historical Fiction*, *Neo-Victorian Studies*, 1:1, 2008, pp 83

<sup>112</sup> *Ibidem*, pp 83

<sup>113</sup> Jacques Derrida: *Echographies of Television: Filmed Interviews*, Polity Press, pp 115

<sup>114</sup> Sturken, (1999, pp 9) quoted in Steven Hoelscher: *Angels of Memory: Photography and Haunting in Guatemala City*, in *GeoJournal*, 73, 2008, pp 197-8

<sup>115</sup> Edwards (1999, pp 233), quoted in Kate Mitchell, *Ghostly Histories and Embodied Memories: Photography, Spectrality and Historical Fiction*, *Neo-Victorian Studies*, 1:1, 2008, pp 101

untimeliness”<sup>116</sup> then photographs, which seem to allow us access to a perfectly frozen past in the present, would appear to be intimately connected to the spectral. Photographs enable memory, but only partially; just like ghosts, who are always only ever partly present. Mitchell (2008), explicitly linking the photograph to the spectre, writes that “Like the spectre, the photograph seems to occupy a strange place between presence and absence, loss and return”.<sup>117</sup> Hoelscher also appeals to this idea of presence-absence to argue that “it is... at the fissures between memory and forgetting, where time and space seem most out of joint, that ghosts perform their most important work.”.<sup>118</sup> If this is the case, then a photography of ruin would seem to present multiple opportunities for ghosts to emerge.

### **Scott Hocking’s *Mound Project*: the return to an absent present**



*Great Mound, then and now*

Hocking’s photographs perfectly encapsulate this paradoxically absent presence, this visible invisibility, confusing us with his photographs which refer simultaneously to what we think are post-industrial wastelands and ancient archaeological sites. His photographs are evidentiary for the absence of a landscape, rather than a testimonial to the presence of ruin. This emphasis on ‘absent presence’, can be interpreted as a means of addressing trauma. This is the claim advanced by Steven Hoelscher (2008), who, in his research on memory work in Guatemala, writes that “ghosts are social figures that help us recognise something that has been ripped from our lives; they are ve-

<sup>116</sup> Esther Peeren et al, *The Spectralities Reader*

<sup>117</sup> Kate Mitchell, *Ghostly Histories and Embodied Memories: Photography, Spectrality and Historical Fiction*, *Neo-Victorian Studies*, 1:1, 2008, pp 92

<sup>118</sup> Steven Hoelscher, *Angels of Memory: Photography and Haunting in Guatemala City*, *Geojournal*, Volume 73, Issue 3, 2008, pp 200



*Davison Fog Mound*

hicles through which societies come to know trauma... ghosts convey an uncanny sense that loss and absence are right around the corner.”<sup>119</sup> Similarly, for Nick Peim, the spectral is “revenant, a past figure that *keeps coming back*, disrupting the smooth logic of time.”<sup>120</sup> The spectral is defined by “repetition with a difference.”<sup>121</sup> In many ways, Hocking’s mounds seem to be just that; the repetition of a historical topography with a difference, erupting into the present, disturbing and unsettling us. His photographs represent a means through which Americans can ‘come to know trauma’. Even where not connected with trauma, however, the ability to take us back in time invests photography with an inevitable poignancy, with the photograph often functioning as a “talisman signalling the possibility of return.”<sup>122</sup> Mitchell, likewise, describes the photographic image as “a tool to combat transience and loss.”<sup>123</sup> Kate Flint, finally, attributes “a poignant hope of impossible endurance”<sup>124</sup> to the photograph. If photography is poignant, then it is because it represents an I’m

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<sup>119</sup> Steven Hoelscher, *Angels of Memory: Photography and Haunting in Guatemala City*, *Geojournal*, Volume 73, Issue 3, 2008, pp 200

<sup>120</sup> Peim, quoted in Kate Mitchell, *Ghostly Histories and Embodied Memories: Photography, Spectrality and Historical Fiction*, *Neo-Victorian Studies*, 1:1, 2008, pp 92

<sup>121</sup> Julian Wolfreys, *Victorian Hauntings: Spectrality, Gothic, The Uncanny and Literature*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2001, pp 19

<sup>122</sup> McQuire, 1998, pp 7, quoted in Kate Mitchell, *Ghostly Histories and Embodied Memories: Photography, Spectrality and Historical Fiction*, *Neo-Victorian Studies*, 1:1, 2008, pp 85

<sup>123</sup> Quoted in *ibidem*.

<sup>124</sup> Kate Flint, quoted in Kate Mitchell, *Ghostly Histories and Embodied Memories: Photography, Spectrality and Historical Fiction*, *Neo-Victorian Studies*, 1:1, 2008, pp 84



*Overpass Mound*

possible attempt to return to a perfectly preserved past. In the case of the ruin photograph, this sense of poignancy is even more powerful. For the ‘past’ Hocking’s photographs attempt to summon is almost invisible in the modern landscape, and the present is crumbling, exposed, as Derrida warns, as unstable and insufficient. This contemporary compulsion to remember is, as Huyssen (2000) argues, directly related to the ‘terror of forgetting’ and, ultimately, “an attempt to anchor ourselves in a world characterised by... the fracturing of lived space.”<sup>125</sup> Redevelopment, being a paradigmatic example of architectural ‘forgetting’ is a primary means through which to secure a sense of spatial wholeness, neutrality, and functionality. Redevelopment allows us to ignore the ghosts who haunt our urban pasts, smoothly cementing over dark, disturbing, hidden and fragmented histories for the sake of ‘progress’. We might therefore read Hocking’s work as a plea to acknowledge the spectres of the postindustrial urban landscape, to preserve the memories, however fragmented, of the ruin’s past- and in doing so, to give a voice to those in the present.

Finally, photography is also a way of revering the ordinary. Barthes, echoing Derrida, describes the photograph as a “celebration of the lit-up gaze”<sup>126</sup> - a demand to look. It is the demand to look at things, at spaces: it bestows an aura of importance on them. As Mitchell (2008) writes, “Photography lends significance to the otherwise unremarkable. It grants permanence to the everyday forget-

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<sup>125</sup> Andreas Huyssen, *Present Pasts: Media, Politics, Amnesia*. *Public Culture*, Vol. 12, No. 1, Winter 2000, pp 28

<sup>126</sup> Jones, 2004, pp 142, quoted in Kate Mitchell, *Ghostly Histories and Embodied Memories: Photography, Spectrality and Historical Fiction*, *Neo-Victorian Studies*, 1:1, 2008, pp 87

table. The act of photographing asserts the significance of the ordinary.”<sup>127</sup> The connection between photography and nostalgia is also telling. For while his investigations of haunted space primarily work to expose historical erasures and injustices, they also serve, willingly or not, to fix the ruin in time and to grant it an aura of significance and interest. It is “a kind of honouring attention”.<sup>128</sup>

This sense of reverence, as well as the attempt to redress the erasures of collective memory, can clearly be seen in Hocking’s second project: *New Mound City*. Here, the spectral again represents a return, but this time a return of objects which attempt to summon the absent present. As with his documentary photography, these objects are confusing and ambiguous: for they are objects that do not ‘truthfully’ correspond to the classifications with which they have been labelled. His fictionalised displays, which mimic the conventions of traditional archaeology, act as a means of defamiliarising objects from the recent past. This playful blurring of temporal boundaries, in which waste from the recent past is exhibited as a collection of valuable ancient relics, both draws attention to the historical erasures of the past and suggests that this type of interpretation is no more untruthful than the archaeological and historical work performed by experts.

### 3.11 The archaeology of the contemporary past

Hocking’s commemorative installations are firmly rooted in what is known as the archaeology of the contemporary past, in which material traces of the recent past are excavated, assembled and interpreted in the present (Buchli & Lucas, 2001). The ‘archaeology of us’, as William Rathje coined the term, “addresses the silent and painful lacunae in our understanding of recent experience”<sup>129</sup> - a remark that immediately reveals its theoretical and ethical affinity with the spectral. The archaeology of the contemporary past is an ‘activist archaeology’, in which the discipline is used not in the service of oppressive, nationalist ideologies and historiography but in the service of the oppressed, the ignored, the historically neglected (Roelstrate, 2013). This is an archaeology that challenges the hegemony of dominant historical narratives in service of the personal, subjective and unacknowledged ‘small stories’ that permeate historical consciousness. The latter is an archaeology of multiple narratives, an ethical project of acknowledging other (absent) voices.

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<sup>127</sup> Quoted in *ibidem*.

<sup>128</sup> Jones, 2004, quoted in *ibidem*.

<sup>129</sup> Victor Buchli & Gavin Lucas, *Archaeology of the Contemporary Past*, Routledge, 2001, pp 15



The archaeology of the contemporary past is inherently suspicious of the mainstream discipline, eschewing grand narratives and empirical accuracy for juxtapositions and fragments instead. In contrast to the discipline, in which heterogeneous material traces are made to conform to classificatory ideals, this type of work instead “encourage[s] us to follow alternative lines of enquiry into the past”.<sup>130</sup> While excavation, classification and display are seen as scientific activities, necessary for the accurate interpretation and thus narrative closure of the past, this type of work is what Till et al term a ‘humanizing archeological gesture’ - “to make trace into testimony and remnant into eyewitness.”<sup>131</sup> In the words of Buchli and Lucas (2001), this type of ethically engaged archaeology is “a creative materialising process, [with] redemptive and therapeutic powers which help individuals and communities cope with painful contradictions that otherwise would remain unarticulated.”<sup>132</sup>

### 3.12 Haunted archaeology: tracing the absent present

This shift in the archaeological perspective, which is distinct from conventional, academic archaeology, has an immediate affinity with the spectral. This type of archaeology, being concerned with ‘the absent present’ is intrinsically haunted, forcing us to attend to ghosts, to absent others and competing histories; as Till et al (2009) put it, to engage with this type of archaeological practice means “To listen to bones, to discover remnants and remains, to revisit the archive- these are acts of mourning, of emplacing memory, *of making the city and the nation a haunt*”.<sup>133</sup> Anthony Vidler, the architectural historian, argues along similar lines that archaeology is intrinsically uncanny, revealing that which should have been kept hidden and as such results in a “doubling, through a simultaneous process of presencing and distancing...”.<sup>134</sup> This doubling creates an ‘absent present’; something which is “there but not there”- in other words, a ghost. Memory work of this kind thus ensures that the apparently inevitable present, instead of being taken for granted- as Derrida warns us against- is probed, questioned and revealed as an outcome of “movements and moments of displacement and dispossession.”<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> Ibidem, pp 307

<sup>131</sup> Ibidem, pp 316

<sup>132</sup> Victor Buchli & Gavin Lucas, *Archaeology of the Contemporary Past*, Routledge, 2001, pp 17

<sup>133</sup> Ibidem, pp 327

<sup>134</sup> Victor Buchli & Gavin Lucas, *Archaeology of the Contemporary Past*, Routledge, 2001, pp 12, paraphrase of argument by Anthony Vidler.

<sup>135</sup> Ibidem, pp 308

Yet, this questioning is fraught with difficulty, for the archaeology of the contemporary past requires that we search for this ‘absent present’ in the here and now, collapsing the temporal distance enjoyed by traditional archeological practice. We are implicated in our objects of study; we are too close to them. There is no distance, no disinterested detachment, which makes this type of memory work both painful and the source of much controversy, as well as therapeutic (Buchli and Lucas, 2001). It is also ambiguous; as Buchli and Lucas (2001) argue, its focus on the material object puts this type of practice *outside* the realm of discourse. It is “not simply the unsaid, but the unsayable”.<sup>136</sup> The archeological artist, in attempting to give voice to the silent, the subaltern, and the dispossessed, thus performs a therapeutic act, ambiguous as its object may be. Like the spectral, this embrace of absent presences, of fragmentation and incoherence, works to clarify rather than obscure meaning. In its embrace of ambiguity, it allows for a ‘creative constitution of that which was previously unconstitutable’ (Buchli and Lucas, 2001). It is, in short, a creative act of interpretation.

This, I will go on to argue, has significant implications for Hocking’s work, for the ruin, as a marginal, ‘traumatised’ space which itself lies outside the realm of discourse, is particularly well suited to memory work of this kind. The inability to narrate, however, does not mean hopelessness. Rather, it requires a creative approach towards such un-narratability, or what Buchli and Lucas describe as “an inherently creative act which constitutes objects for the formation of discourses that did not exist before.”<sup>137</sup> Where Trigg, for example, sees the ruin as a traumatic void, the archeological approach, along with the spectral, allows us to *refuse* the definitive un-narratability of the ruin. Rather than insist on coherence and narrative closure, such a position encourages a more hopeful, therapeutic perspective, an ethical possibility. Not a coherent narrative, but a personal, flawed, fragmented interpretation that works to make the normally invisible visible, and in doing so, create at least the *possibility* to “live better”.<sup>138</sup>

### **3.13 Hocking’s digs: archaeology, truth, and coping with the spectres of ruin**

As is the case with his photography, Hocking’s archaeological digs allow him to engage with the spectral by attending to the haunted material remains of absent others. Hocking’s digs, like almost

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<sup>136</sup> Victor Buchli & Gavin Lucas, *Archaeology of the Contemporary Past*, Routledge, 2001, pp 12

<sup>137</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>138</sup> Paraphrase of Derrida in *Spectres of Marx*, pp xviii

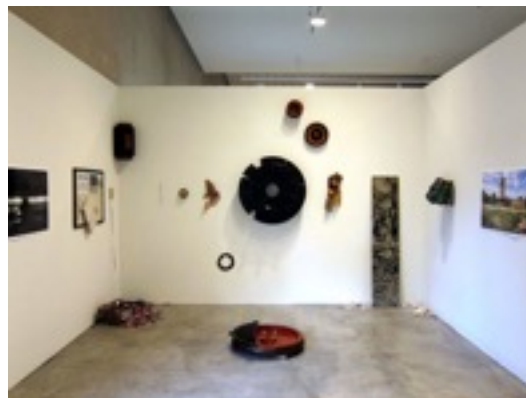
all archeologically inclined art, both replicates and critiques the conventional archeological tropes of excavation, classification, and display, re-presenting the mundane fall-out of urban ruin (gloves, playing cards, fragments of figurines and wooden planks)- as the sorts of sacred relics one might find in a more traditional archeological exhibition. He presents them haphazardly alongside the historical maps of the mound sites and images discussed above. Yet, his work is ambiguous, fittingly for a work which engages with the spectral. There are several themes at work here: i) the fictional labelling of *contemporary* ruin debris as *ancient* sacred relics, in which the use of debris from the recent past to summon the ghosts of pre colonial times creates a temporal instability and sense of confusion; and ii) the archeological compulsion to order and stem decay as a coping mechanism, in which the familiar is made unfamiliar and the un-narratable given a narrative. As with the *Ziggurat*, we see a slightly ambiguous stance towards the ruin: both an embracing of disorder and a compulsion to tame it. His For what is the object of his displays? Whose truths do they purport to illuminate? This playful approach towards the conventions of archaeology will form the remainder of my discussions in this chapter.



*From top left, anticlockwise: Sun God, oracle, petrified hands, and totem*

### 3.14 The ‘truth’ of Hocking’s archaeology: a critique of the discipline

The archaeology of the contemporary past is already temporally ambiguous, as argued by Buchli and Lucas (2001). But Hocking’s work is even more so, as he performs his archeological work using objects from the recent past as fictional traces of a much older, more remote historical era. He also defamiliarises the mundane objects he finds by labelling them as sacred artefacts. A rusty pole becomes a totem; graffiti of a naked woman becomes a reference to a fertility goddess; cards become oracles. Furthermore, he displays his ‘relics’ in a conventional museum exhibition, alongside the documentary photography discussed earlier, further confusing our sense of truth and fiction. For what do these items refer to? To when? To themselves, as objects of ruin? Or to a sacred past? Like the photograph, they are made to seem evidentiary; yet we struggle to place them. In their de-familiarised guise, they appear as poignant relics of a bygone era, rather than mundane items of waste, items we would throw away or ignore rather than view in the privileged space of the museum. These are not items with an archeological worth.



*Left: documentary ‘evidence’; right, sacred relics on display*

Yet this is precisely Hocking’s point. The ‘unreliability’ of the archeological objects reveals the unreliability of conventional archaeology, showing an intense distrust of hegemonic practices and an insistence on authoring the erasures of the past on an individual level, to the extent that traces are used not just as a display item, but are completely rearranged in the form of the artist’s own memorial mounds- a spectral ‘repetition with a difference’. Archaeology is always about personal interpretation; the objects of the past, no matter how remote, always come to us in the present. Add to this the fact that Cahokia as a research site has been manifestly neglected and ignored by mainstream

archeologists and historians, and we begin to see why such an approach, with all its fiction, seems preferable, and more truthful, to the ghosting of the site by so-called experts. Hocking's collections of waste represent an attempt to 'correct' the archive- yet in this case, truth is less important than ownership.



*Glove Mound and Drum Mound*

### **3.15 Controlling the debris, coping with ruin?**

The archeological acts of classification, display, and de-familiarisation are however, significant- no matter how fictional. For if, as Buchli argues, the archeological method is “a domesticating strategy, one essentially aimed at knowledge and control over something over which we have no control,”<sup>139</sup> then do Hocking's displays represent a compulsion to order the too-close objects of ruin as well as to illuminate historical truths? This is intriguing, for it suggests that archeological practice is as much a coping mechanism as it is an academic or social practice, particularly within the context of ruin. As Buchli goes on to argue, archeological ordering and de-familiarisation, in distancing us from our research object, serves to “makes those [research] objects... palatable and sanitised... enabling us adequately to cope with any distress we might feel in the situation”.<sup>140</sup> Archeological classification, like photography, is a form of conservation; and conservation, according to archeological-artist Michael Shanks, “stems loss and decay.”<sup>141</sup> He goes onto argue that “The excremental culture of archaeology, which may wish to avoid the nausea of loss and an absent past, finds gratification in a purifying, perhaps neurotic, desire to hold on and to order.”<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> Ibidem, pp 9

<sup>140</sup> Ibidem, pp 9-10

<sup>141</sup> Michael Shanks, quoted in ibidem, pp 11

<sup>142</sup> Ibidem

When we can identify too closely with an object, a sense of intrusion, of transgression, occurs. The objects of ruin, as entities which are close to us yet over which we have no control, are therefore something uncanny, something to be dealt with, tamed, ordered. Hocking's displays thus mimic the conventions of archaeology and at the same time, also function to as a means of control over the ruined environment.

### 3.16 Conclusion: The ethical injunction of the spectral

Both Hocking's photography and his digs reveal a preoccupation with the ethics of spectrality as outlined by Derrida, in that they expose not only the erasures of the past but also the exclusions of the present. His work acts as a 'memoryscape', a liminal zone or 'threshold' through which, in the words of Karen Till, "citizens can access voices, inheritances and resources that provide for them a language of belonging, even as these phantoms speak of structural exclusions from the city."<sup>143</sup> The sense of belonging such spaces can evoke provide not just an affective link to the past, but a means of re-imagining place in the present- what Till et al call a 'politics of re-inhabiting the postcolonial city'. This strand of thought is clearly present in Hocking's work, in which he portrays the homeless residents of East St Louis as contemporary descendants of the Mississippians of Cahokia. The 'ghosting' of both groups, past and present, implicates them as both there and not there, visible and invisible. As Derrida reminds us, this paradoxical visible invisibility is intimately connected with notion of power and justice. His argument that "Haunting belongs to the structure of every hegemony," and that "the dominance of one group over another... is structured around ghosts",<sup>144</sup> allows us to see just why we try so hard to bury the absent others who haunt us. For, confronting the ghost, as Derrida reminds us, compels us to *action*, or at the very least a response. In acknowledging these absent presences, municipal authorities and the wider public can no longer retain comforting narratives of nationalist ideals and justice, respect and equality before the law. Hocking's photographs demand our attention, issuing us with the ethical injunction described by Derrida: both to attend to the historical erasures of Cahokia and to attend to the absent others who still call these spaces home. Ultimately, Hocking's images, in drawing parallels between these two absences, map "zones of struggle and displacement across and through time and space",<sup>145</sup> prompting reflection on a 're-in-

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<sup>143</sup> Till et al, *ibidem*, pp 307

<sup>144</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Spectres of Marx*, quoted in Peeren et al, *The Spectralities Reader: Ghosts and Haunting in Contemporary Cultural Theory*, Bloomsbury, 2013, pp 376

<sup>145</sup> Till et al, pp 311

habiting' of the city by minority groups. Finally, if *social* hierarchy is structured around ghosts, then presumably so is *spatial* hierarchy. Just as the ghostly traces of Native American history threaten American Nationalism, the ruptures of ruin can be said to present a threat to the rationally ordered spaces of contemporary capitalism. Hocking's images thus work to unsettle not only historical narratives, but spatial and social hierarchies as well.



### *Mississippians*

As in works like the *Ziggurat*, Hocking refuses a reading of the ruin as simply ruin, forcing the viewer to look beyond the superficial exterior of the ruin photograph. In doing so, he imaginatively re-creates the ruin as an important site of cultural and historical value, a 'spectral site of transition' in Till's words, elevating it from its current, marginalised status into a landmark of considerable importance. Such perspectives point to a less darkly pessimistic view of the ruin; or, at least, indicate that the very 'exclusion' and 'disjunction' characterised by the ruin also makes it amenable to other, liberating possibilities. Ruins in which memory work has taken place are not necessarily spaces of stillness and isolation, but spaces of vitality. We need not be 'disoriented', to use Trigg's terminology, by the ruin's refusal to 'grasp the place in its totality'. Artistic re-creations of ruined space allow us to experience the ruin differently. Indeed, if haunting consists of crossing the threshold between past and present, in which the ruin becomes "possessed by a past that cannot be reconstructed in a conventional narrative,"<sup>146</sup> does this necessarily result in the inability to "orient ourselves in [that] environment"?<sup>147</sup> I would argue not; that, on the contrary, it is precisely such haunted spaces that offer the possibility of alternative narrative constructions, imaginative interventions that allow con-

<sup>146</sup> Dylan Trigg, *The Place of Trauma: Memory, Hauntings and the Temporality of Ruins*, *Memory Studies*, 2009, Vol. 1, No. 2, pp 99

<sup>147</sup> *Ibidem*

tact between past and future inhabitants, “where social networks and possible futures can be created, imagined and inhabited.”<sup>148</sup> Such a view endows the ruin, and those inhabiting its margins, with far more hope. Conventional narratives, after all, are often made to serve hegemonic purposes; it is precisely for the jumbled temporalities and fragmented juxtapositions that such spaces, and the memory work performed by artists such as Hocking, are valuable.

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<sup>148</sup> Ibidem, pp 109



### **Chapter three- Ruins as a Liminal Space**

*Liminal (adjective)*- Of or pertaining to the threshold<sup>149</sup>; of, relating to, or being, in an intermediate state, phase, or condition.<sup>150</sup>

#### **4.1 Introduction**

If chapter one explored the dynamics of sacred *space* and chapter two was an investigation of the *temporal* aspects of sacred ruins, then chapter three unites these strands of thought in the concept of liminality. Where chapter one reflects on themes of construction, unity, and existential dwelling, chapter three illuminates the ways in which ruins are passed through, lending themselves to playful performances in which themes of transition and motion are key. In a sense, if Hocking's *Ziggurat* tries to complete the ruin, chapter three shows an openness to the temporal and spatial ambiguity of these spaces. In fact, this ambiguity is embraced as an essential means of cultural critique. We also see echoes of chapter two, in which Hocking alerts us to the ghosts embedded in the histories of urban space; as we shall go on to discuss, the haunted margins of urban space, as well as being potential sites of historical mourning, also act as positive stimuli for transgressive recombinations of cultural roles, spaces and symbols, making them valuable resources for current inhabitants to stake a claim on their city.

This brings us to the third and final case study I will discuss: Scott Hocking's *Egg and Michigan Central Station*, a symbol which I argue represents the ruin as a liminal space. The egg, or cairn, as symbols of transition or journey from one life stage to another, is particularly effective in invoking the *limen*, or threshold. What is liminality, and why is the notion of a border zone or threshold significant within the context of the ruin? What possibilities does the 'loose space' of ruin offer for the critique of existing cultural elements? What does it tell us about the potential of the ruin as a space of *transition* between decay and regeneration rather than as a economic 'dead' zone, a spatial void in stasis? In order to answer these questions, I will first begin by discussing Victor Turner's concept of liminality in some detail before finally discussing Hocking's *Egg/Cairn* sculpture- and why this

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<sup>149</sup> Found in 'Liminal Landscapes: Travel, Experience and Spaces In-Between', edited by Hazel Andrews and Les Roberts, Routledge, 2012, pp 1

<sup>150</sup> Merriam Webster dictionary definition, accessed via <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/liminal>

latter symbol, a symbol of motion, is particularly interesting in the context of a disused space of transit: the train station.

## 4.2 Turner on Liminality

Victor Turner, an early 20th century anthropologist, is generally credited with revitalising the rather forgotten concept of the liminal. The term, resurrected from the writings of Arnold van Gennep's 1909 *Rites de Passage*, was originally intended to apply to personal life transitions, including weddings, births, funerals, adolescence and other such shifts in social status- yet Turner argued it could also be applied to spaces, objects and words as well as rites of passage. Van Gennep described three pivotal stages in such rites: separation, transition, and reincorporation (Turner, 1974). During the period of separation, sacred and profane space and time are clearly delimited; a 'cultural realm' is constructed in which secular symbols are 'reversed' or 'inverted', and 'ritual subjects' are 'detached' from their social roles (Turner, 1974). The middle phase, and the most important for our purposes, is that of transition- the liminal phase, from *limen*, meaning 'threshold' or 'margin'. This is described by Turner as "a period and area of ambiguity, a sort of social limbo".<sup>151</sup> It is "an interval, no matter how brief, of margin or limen, when the past is momentarily negated, suspended or abrogated, and the future has not yet begun, an instant of pure potentiality when everything, as it were, trembles in the balance".<sup>152</sup> The concept of 'threshold' and 'transition', as well as 'margin', all, as Turner points out, carry negative connotations; "no longer the past positive condition nor yet the positive articulated future condition"<sup>153</sup> as he puts it. This brings to mind the discussions of William Viney, who writes widely on the topic of waste, narrativity and temporality. Waste (and by extension, ruin) is no longer, and simultaneously not yet. How to narrate this condition, then, positively, and actively? This state of spatial and temporal detachment and transition, I will argue, is highly pertinent in relation to the ruin, and is expressed by what Turner refers to as *sacra*: visual, oral and written expressions of the liminal in all its diverse forms. I will focus primarily on Hocking's cairn (what Turner would call a *sacra* of 'exhibition'); and the *sacra* of actions, 'what is done'- expressed in the act of urban exploration through the liminal space of the ruin. Before we delve deeper into the transitional stage, however, I will outline the third and final stage discussed by

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<sup>151</sup> Victor Turner, Liminal to Liminoid, in Play, Flow, and Ritual, Rice Institute Pamphlet, Rice University Studies, Vol. 60, No. 3 (1974), pp 57

<sup>152</sup> Lee Rozelle, Resurveying Delillo's 'White Space on Map: Liminality and Communitas in *Underworld*. Studies in the Novel, Vol. 42, No. 4, Winter 2010, pp 443

<sup>153</sup> Ibidem, pp 72

Van Gennep and Turner. The final phase is reincorporation, in which the ritual subject returns to a new, stable social position; they are reincorporated into the hierarchy of roles and statuses. Such rites often serve to elevate their subjects. Social transition is often paralleled by movement through space- for example, across a threshold, or down a passage, along a demanding route of pilgrimage. Social and geographical transition thus go hand in hand, at the same time as social roles, symbols, spaces and meanings are blurred, reversed, and recombined. Subjects are ‘humbled’ before they can be permanently elevated; their roles and status must be obliterated before they are restored back into the social hierarchy.

The removal of ritual subjects from the social sphere and the isolation from the protective shield of norms and values brings with it a great freedom. In their ill-defined social detachment, their temporary ‘non status’, initiates are exempt from social obligations. This allows darker, more cosmic, and more profound forces to come to the fore. I quote Turner here at some length:

In liminality, profane social relations may be discontinued, former rights and obligations are suspended, the social order may seem to have been turned upside down. By way of compensation, cosmological systems... may become of central importance for the novices. They are confronted by the elders, in rite, myth, song, instruction in a secret language, and various non-verbal symbolic gestures (such as dancing, painting, clay-molding, wood carving, masking and the like), with symbolic patterns and structures which amount to teachings about the structure of the cosmos and their culture as part and product of it... Liminality is a complex series of episodes in sacred space-time...<sup>154</sup>

Not only do sacred, mythological and cosmic symbols emerge in liminal spaces, but they do so in confused, inverted and ambiguous ways. Familiar cultural elements are rearranged, often in ‘grotesque’ forms; it is only by encountering defamiliarised elements that we can truly experiment with what Brian Sutton-Smith, quoted by Turner, calls ‘anti-structure’: “the latent system of potential alternatives from which novelty will arise when contingencies in the normative system require it”. He goes on to argue that “We might more correctly call this second system the *proto-structural* system because it is the precursor of innovative normative forms. *It is the source of new culture.*”<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> Ibidem, pp 60

<sup>155</sup> Brian Sutton-Smith, *Games of Order and Disorder*, 1972, quoted in ibidem, pp 60, emphasis mine.

As Turner argues, and indeed, as Tim Edensor has argued directly in relation to ruins, “we have something to *learn* through being disorderly”; and later, that liminality is “the seedbed of cultural creativity.”<sup>156</sup> As Turner sees it, it is where meaning is generated- precisely in the ambiguous interface where “the bizarre becomes the normal.”<sup>157</sup> Novices, as he calls them, are encouraged to play with and rearrange the heretofore taken for granted symbols and elements of culture. Though ‘negative’ in the sense that the liminal occupies a strange ‘in-between’, it is precisely in such interstitial space that culture itself is regenerated. It is a space of potential, chaos and experimentation. What is learned, explored, questioned and challenged is then reincorporated back into the dominant social structure. Such ‘reincorporation’ of the ruin, for example, can be said to occur when such spaces are reused as sites of industrial heritage. To what extent they can then truly serve to question the use of latent space in a capitalist society is open to debate.

### 4.3 Liminal or liminoid?

Turner argues that this understanding of liminality applies only to traditional, cyclical societies rather than industrialised societies, and that this distinction is mandated by the different approaches each takes to the distinctions between ‘leisure’ ‘play’ and ‘work’. The liminal detachment of individuals from a traditional, cyclical society is mandated; it is not a matter of ‘leisure’, but of ‘sacred work’. This work, although experimental, is also circumscribed by strict expectations. Ritual is a social obligation, undertaken to maintain the health of the collective, and although a form of sacred work, also an expression of serious play. In reflecting, manipulating and creating symbolic objects, such play performs the serious work of promoting the ‘cosmic health’ of society. Play, as Turner reminds us, is not only about ‘fun’, but also a form of ‘exercise’, as well as ‘battle’ (Turner, 1974). This echoes Edensor’s argument about the seriousness and importance of play (2005). In industrialised societies, however, communal ritual has all but disappeared. In a capitalist system, individuals utilise their leisure time, strictly separated from work, to indulge in various artistic and creative pursuits. But these are generally understood as trivial, banal. Interesting, meaningful, perhaps, but not something to be taken too seriously. There is no ‘sacred work’ with elements of ‘serious play’, expressed through ritual. There is art, literature, poetry and theatre. These elements can be present; yet they are a matter of individual choice and consumption, rather than a matter of collective experience.

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<sup>156</sup> Ibidem, pp 60

<sup>157</sup> Ibidem

For postindustrial leisure activities, Turner reserves the term *liminoid*. The Liminoid, according to Turner, is industrial society's version of the liminal; an experimentation with symbols outside of work, a creative undertaking which can "generate and store a plurality of alternative models for living... which are capable of influencing the behaviour of those in mainstream social and political roles... in the direction of radical change."<sup>158</sup> In other words, creative endeavours- art, literature, poetry, theatre, film- *can* all function as critical spaces, to question dominant social norms, structures and values. Art is serious play- and can function as a generative force in service of the collective good. Play is, as Turner quotes Jean Piaget, "a kind of free assimilation, without accommodation to spatial conditions or to the significance of the objects."<sup>159</sup> Note that here, play is seen as an intrinsically *serious* activity. It is the "freedom to enter, even to generate, new symbolic worlds of entertainment... It is... freedom to play- with ideas, with fantasies, with words... Leisure is *potentially capable* of releasing powers, individual or communal..."<sup>160</sup> Thus, although not mandated by the collective as in traditional sacred societies, although a matter of free, individual choice, 'leisure' can still perform the serious work of questioning dominant social structures- and perhaps even changing them. Finally, Turner argues that as communal ritual has been erased, the new sacred domain is that of work, rather than the sacred play of traditional societies. This echoes the discussions of chapter one, in which I used Mark Fisher's arguments about the faith in capitalism as a parallel to the sacred institutions of our religious past. In a capitalist society, work is sacred and play is often seen as trivial. In the context of genres such as the ruin photograph, it is clearly the liminoid which is of greatest interest and importance. These are the products of leisure in a non-sacred, optional context.

Yet, Hocking's photographs share many aspects of Turner's sacred liminal. They reflect on and construct cosmic themes and symbols, and seem to be less the product of trivial introspection than community-facing 'work'. They delimit a sacred space, an 'in-between' in which dominant social structures are challenged and subverted. Thus, although they are technically products of liminoid leisure, they do not wholly fit the liminoid status as Turner describes it. While it is necessary and useful to remember Turner's distinction between these terms, it is also important to realise that Hocking's work blurs these boundaries; and that Turner does, in fact acknowledge that both the lim-

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<sup>158</sup> Ibidem, pp 65

<sup>159</sup> Jean Piaget, *Play, Dream and Imitation*, 1962, quoted in ibidem, pp 66

<sup>160</sup> Victor Turner, *Liminal to Liminoid*, in *Play, Flow, and Ritual*, Rice Institute Pamphlet, Rice University Studies, Vol. 60, No. 3 (1974), pp 37

inal and the liminoid “coexist in a sort of cultural pluralism.”<sup>161</sup> For Hocking’s work is predominantly concerned with “social-structural rhythms or with crises in social processes”<sup>162</sup>; it seems to be prompted by a break in the order of things; in the spatial, cosmic and socio-economic order of the city, and to be a matter of ‘serious play’ rather than banal leisure. Likewise, If Turner argues that liminal phenomena are reintegrated back in to the centre, while the liminoid remains a product of the margins, fragmented and experimental, then what are we to make of the genre of contemporary ruin photography in general? Work by artists such as Hocking would seem to encompass both elements: a product of the margins which is soon reincorporated back to the centre of capitalist commodification. A similar point pertains to Turner’s distinction between the liminal as a confrontation of “collective representations... symbols having a common intellectual and emotional meaning for all members of a given group” versus the liminoid, which he argues is “more idiosyncratic or quirky... generated by specific named individuals and in particular groups.”<sup>163</sup>

Again, it is hard to characterise Hocking’s work so neatly in the liminoid alone. For while his work is undoubtedly idiosyncratic, the creative output of an individual, it utilises *universal* symbols of cosmic and mythical significance: cairns, eggs, pyramids, totems, huts, the sun. His is a perfect example of Turner’s liminal ‘reversal’ and ‘inversion’ of a sacred collective representation. His individual take on these powerful collective symbols is their positioning within the space of ruin- another symbol in itself of powerful, collectively shared, and often negative, connotations. Work such as Hocking’s “does not merely recall the past as social cause or aesthetic precedent,” to quote Homi Bhaba; “it renews the past, refiguring it as a contingent ‘in-between’ space, that innovates and interrupts the performance of the present. The ‘past-present’ becomes part of the necessity, not the nostalgia, of living.”<sup>164</sup> Bhaba’s argument, which was widely influential in the field of postcolonial studies, claimed that nations and cultures should be understood as ‘interstitial’ ‘hybrid’ constructions, in which essentialist readings of nationhood are displaced by ‘interrogatory’ discourses of difference and marginality. A focus on the fault lines helps to break hegemonic narratives which only serve to naturalise differences between the cultural identities of colonised and coloniser, black and white, man and woman etc (Bhaba, 1994). This appeal to the incorporation of difference in and

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<sup>161</sup> Ibidem, pp 86

<sup>162</sup> Ibidem, pp 85

<sup>163</sup> Ibidem, pp 85

<sup>164</sup> Homi Bhaba, 2009, The Location of Culture, quoted in Mahesh Sharma, The Liminality of Contemporary Culture, Bodhi, An Interdisciplinary Journal of Culture, Vol 6, No.1, pp 115

through the margins is strikingly reminiscent of the ruin, in which the meaning of marginal space is not understood in static, pre-given terms, but is subject to a process of continual negotiation through performance. We may also recall Turner's notion of 'sacred poverty' here, in which the invisibility, ambiguity and lowly status of the ruin is seen as a vital lifeline and generating force in the present. For this is what the liminal does; it does not mandate permanent separation and therefore isolation, but facilitates a 'loose space' of transcendent otherness in which to reflect, play with and incorporate difference. It works as a revisionary mechanism, and thus acts as an ethical call to action rather than as an excuse for mere spectatorship. How is loose, liminal space generated in the ruin, and who by? Furthermore, what 'call to action' does this re-appropriation of space provoke?

#### **4.4 Loose space and transgression**

The active reshaping of space is characteristic of what Franck and Stevens (2007) refer to as 'loose space'. Loose space occurs when individuals explore and utilise the possibilities of space, ignoring control and emphasising freedom of choice. Loose spaces are the inversion of regulated, designated urban spaces with a particular function; they are ambiguous and indeterminate, much like the liminal itself. Because these spaces are unhinged from any specific use and cannot easily be used to code social status, they become playgrounds of exploration. It remains open to question as to just how useful, or indeed original, such a concept actually is; particularly when viewed against existing perspectives such as Lefebvre's social production of space and de Certeau's 'practiced place' which seem to serve the purpose more than adequately. Lefebvre, for example, wrote about the re-appropriation of spaces through social practice back in 1974, citing the Halles Centrales in Paris, which was transformed from a food market to a 'centre of play' and a 'semi-permanent festival' through disuse. Yet *Loose space* restates these ideas eloquently in a contemporary context and can therefore be of use, particularly as the authors explicitly link their ideas to the concept of the liminal.

Loose space for Franck and Stevens is first and foremost about seizing the opportunities of spatial ambiguity. Loose space- and its inversion, 'tight' or regulated space- is constantly shifting, always in the process of being negotiated. It is appropriated, utilised, and then reincorporated back into the fold of 'productive' urban space. As the authors put it,

Loose space is characterised by an absence or abeyance of the determinacy which is common in place types with assigned and limited functions... The indeterminacy of loose space, along with free access, opens the space to other possibilities... to activities not anticipated, to activities that

have no other place, to activities that benefit from a relative lack of control and economic constraints. Freedom is a prerequisite of loose space for people to be able to pursue possibilities of their choice. Freedom is also a consequence of loose space as people's actions generate more possibilities, possibilities of a political, commercial, or experimental nature.<sup>165</sup>

Loose spaces, like liminal spaces, are about freedom from constraint, the embracing of ambiguity, and the potential to play with and critique social norms. This emphasis on ambiguity and indeterminacy bring to mind Dylan Trigg's description of marginal spaces, in which he argues that "...a margin is created on the border of space in which particular space is categorised. In the city-site, what falls into the margin is the indeterminate realm of the organic and the discarded."<sup>166</sup> This indeterminacy, Trigg argues, is often associated with darkness, danger, and wilderness- which makes it "a threat to the domain of reason."<sup>167</sup> Again, such language closely parallels that of Turner's liminal spaces, in which ambiguous space is often associated with shamanism, death, and the monstrous confusion of categories. The liminal is the dissolute, the decaying, the invisible. These unsettling symbols, emphasising the detachment of such spaces and those who move through them from the rational, centred, ordered space of society, are precisely what enable reflection on concepts of the 'possible', 'desirable', 'acceptable', 'strange', and 'transgressive' (Franck and Stevens, 2007). We cannot question these categories when safely ensconced on the right side of the border. We must cross over, away from the protective stratifications of normative space before we can generate anything new. The "special form of despair...that has everything to do with displacement from one's usual habitat"<sup>168</sup> that Edward Casey refers to is a necessary condition of discovery in liminal spaces. Through acts of spatial and temporal transition, we transition psychically as well (Andrews and Roberts, 2012).

Hence, transgression and even danger are frequently part of appropriating loose space. The concept of transgression is closely related to that of liminality. To transgress has a spatial as well as ethical etymology; to transgress, from the Latin *transgredi*, means to pass through a boundary, to cross

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<sup>165</sup> Karen A. Franck & Quentin Stevens, *Loose Space: Possibility and Diversity in Urban Life*, Routledge, 2007, pp 17

<sup>166</sup> Dylan Trigg, *The Aesthetics of Decay: Nothingness, Nostalgia and the Absence of Reason*, *New Studies in Aesthetics*, Vol. 37, Peter Lang Publishing, 2009, pp 128

<sup>167</sup> *Ibidem*, pp 129

<sup>168</sup> Edward Casey, quoted in *ibidem*, pp 129



over (Westphal, 2007) as well as to violate a moral norm. Thus liminality is always an issue of *motion*. For while liminal objects and spaces recombine cultural elements in playful and critical ways, in order to subvert the dominant social order, this questioning and recombining always takes place in the context of *transition*, of moving away from the centre. Liminality is a passing from one point to another. It is the in-between, an intermediate state of flux. It is both spatial and temporal, connoting process rather than state. And this, again, is why I find it to be a concept so beautifully fitted to the ruin; for the ruin is a perfect encapsulation of the transition between the life of a space and its death, between culture and the reclamation of nature, between the porous boundaries of normative city space and its margins, between, in Hocking's works, the sacred and the profane, between past and future and stasis versus motion. Ruins are mutable spaces; their elements are jumbled and coarse. It is the ability to bear witness to transition which Garrett argues is lacking in polished sites of national 'heritage'; as he puts it, "something is missing when we cannot anticipate transience... We cannot see ourselves written into the futures of these places because we are not allowed to inscribe ourselves there."<sup>169</sup> The ability to inscribe, to witness, reflect on, and actively rearrange the elements of space, are all features of the ruin, and describe the process that occurs in any liminal space: the active reshaping of its elements. This is heritage as *process* and *experience* rather than static *artefact*; as Laura Jane Smith argues, "The idea of heritage is an act of communication and meaning-making".<sup>170</sup> Meaning is assigned to places and objects through practice, not given to us by predetermined value judgements. Bradley Garrett echoes Smith when he argues that we often let ourselves be told what places have meaning and why, rather than ask ourselves the question based on our own experiences. We need to learn, in Garrett's words, to "take the unguided tour".<sup>171</sup> It is exactly this ability, the ability to narrate places through our own agency, our own experience, which is curtailed in the managed heritage site- and a consequence, I would argue, of the ruin's 'reincorporation' as industrial heritage. If heritage dictates our reading of lost places (or precludes the possibility of 'lost' places at all) then "the logic of the liminal... calls for a learned reconciliation with our malignant sites", as Lee Rozelle so beautifully puts it.<sup>172</sup> This is the power of the liminoid practices described in this chapter; they allow us to redefine places on our *own* terms.

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<sup>169</sup> Bradley L. Garrett, *Explore Everything: Place Hacking the City*, Verso, 2014, pp 53

<sup>170</sup> Laura Jane Smith, *Uses of Heritage*. Routledge, 2006, Introduction

<sup>171</sup> Bradley L. Garrett, *Urban Exploration as Heritage Placemaking*, in *Reanimating Industrial Spaces: Conducting Memory Work in Post-Industrial Societies*, Edited by Hilary Orange, Routledge pp 81

<sup>172</sup> Lee Rozelle, 2010.

## 4.5 Urban Exploration and the *Communitas* of Ruin

There is one example of liminoid practice more than any other which embraces the transience of liminal space in order to question social norms, and that, I would argue, is the practice of Urban Exploration. The shrugging off of social status, hierarchy and roles enables individuals in loose or liminal spaces to access what Turner calls *communitas*, or a sense of genuine, spontaneous unity. If society is characterised by normative constraints, then *communitas* is a condition of “free and innovative relationships between individuals,”<sup>173</sup> a “direct, immediate, and total confrontation of human identities.... a mutual understanding on the existential level.”<sup>174</sup> Turner’s ‘normative’ *communitas*, is a “perduring social system,”; a “subculture or group which attempts to foster and maintain relationships of spontaneous *communitas*”<sup>175</sup>, and one typically characterised by freedom and liberation. *Communitas* of all kinds is always defined in relation to the dominant social structure; it is a way of critiquing that structure from a position of detachment, yet ensconced with others- whether physically, normatively, or both. Such descriptions, I argue, readily call to mind descriptions made by scholars such as Bradley Garrett (2014) who I discussed in chapter two and who has written widely on the practice of urban exploration. Garrett argues that explorers are “enraptured by those moments when the seen and unseen, the possible and impossible, *the self and the community*, fuse.”<sup>176</sup> It is in the fractured, marginal, loose space of the ruin that *communitas* is fostered, in which explorers and, by extension, artists such as Hocking express a normative commitment to critiquing and subverting the dominant spatial order. The combination of risk, danger, subversion and darkness mixed with the potential for creative discovery closely match Turner’s descriptions of the liminal/liminoid. It is a challenge to which spaces should be utilised and which are off limits; and it is a plea for the type of *communitas* Turner describes above. As Garrett (2014) later argues,

explorers are recoding people’s normalised relationships to city space... Urban explorers make it clear that the city is not as secure as some may suggest, and that... by undertaking risks to probe

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<sup>173</sup> Ibidem

<sup>174</sup> Ibidem, pp 79

<sup>175</sup> Ibidem, pp 80

<sup>176</sup> Ibidem, pp 15

those boundaries, one can create opportunities for creativity, discovery and friendship, and even uncover the places and histories that those in power would prefer remain hidden.<sup>177</sup>

Explorers and artists who work within abandoned spaces challenge the idea of what is possible versus what is permitted, undermining the spatial order of control, surveillance and distraction through recreational spending and entertainment in pursuit of the spontaneous *communitas* described by Turner. Hocking's practice of working in abandoned spaces closely echoes such a critique of the spatial order, and questions in particular the negative evaluation of ruined space and our tendency to write off the ruin as a dead zone. While explorers subvert these elements of culture through the very act of their entry into abandoned spaces, Hocking literally recombines, rearranges and subverts the elements of ruin in his sculptures crafted from debris. This third and final case study will therefore discuss Hocking's contribution to the critical re-use of the ruin by recourse to the ultimate symbol of liminality and one of his most arresting pieces: the cairn, or *Egg and Michigan Central Station*. In this section, I discuss the sacred meaning of the cairn, and its significance within a space of former transit: the railway station. I argue that Hocking's use of this particular symbol in this particular space functions to transform the 'non-place' of the transit terminal to a sacred, liminal space of creative potential.

#### 4.6 Liminality and the cairn: a symbol of the in-between

Hocking's *Egg* sculpture fits neatly into Turner's classification of 'exhibition sacra', or "evocatory instruments or sacred articles, such as relics... masks, images, figurines and effigies".<sup>178</sup> Such sacred objects are formally simple, yet substantially complex. They are used to teach initiates in matters of theology and the cosmos (Turner, 1964). Often through the formal attributes and playful rearrangement of 'the monstrous' the 'disproportionate' and the 'mysterious', the strangeness of sacred objects and images challenge us "to distinguish clearly between the different factors of reality... Monsters startle neophytes into thinking about objects, persons, relationships, and factors of their environment they have hitherto taken for granted."<sup>179</sup> Familiar elements of culture are reduced

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<sup>177</sup> Ibidem

<sup>178</sup> Victor W. Turner, *Between and Between: The Liminal Period in Rites de Passage*, reprinted from Turner, *The Proceedings of the American Ethnological Society*, 1964, Symposium on New Approaches to the Study of Religion, pp 51

<sup>179</sup> Victor W. Turner, *Between and Between: The Liminal Period in Rites de Passage*, reprinted from Turner, *The Proceedings of the American Ethnological Society*, 1964, Symposium on New Approaches to the Study of Religion, pp 52-53

and recombined in strange ways, making the liminal a “realm of primitive hypothesis”.<sup>180</sup> The expression of sacra, Turner goes on to claim, “presented with a numinous simplicity, stamp into the neophytes the basic assumptions of their culture.”<sup>181</sup> They do so by abstracting and re-presenting various elements of it, in monstrous, absurd, and unsettling ways.

Although Hocking’s breathtaking sculptures could hardly be termed as ‘monstrous’, they are a recombination of the cultural element- rubble- which is itself thought so unsettling. They re-present rubble with a ‘numinous simplicity’, allowing their spectators- the ‘neophytes’ who move through the ruin- to reconsider ‘the basic elements of their culture’. They provoke us to question our assumptions of the liminal, transitory and dark space of ruin, by emphasising such processes of transition and decay as beautiful, necessary and transcendent. They embrace the inherent liminality of the space itself, and cause us to look at rubble and the organic processes which accompany it with fresh eyes.



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<sup>180</sup> Ibidem, pp 53

<sup>181</sup> Ibidem



The particular sculpture I will discuss here is Hocking's *Egg and Michigan Central Station (subtitled AKA Andy Goldsworthy Did Not Invent the Fucking Cairn)*.<sup>182</sup> Described as both an egg and a cairn, which share the same ovoid form, the sculpture was crafted from thousands of marble fragments which once lined the walls of Detroit's central station. Eggs, which represent creation, potential, and primordial matter, share many symbolic similarities with the cairn. Although it is on the latter I will mainly concentrate, the themes of creation and potential are of obvious importance within the context of ruined space. I find the cairn particularly interesting, however, because it has been used for many thousands of years to denote both sacred spaces and spaces of travel or transit. In the context of the disused train station, this is especially fitting. Cairns are acknowledged to have been used at least since Prehistoric times, stretching across a geographical area as widespread as Great Britain, Scandinavia, North Africa, Asia and the Americas.<sup>183</sup> Used to describe a man-made stack or heap of stones, cairns are placed as navigational aids, landmarks, shrines and memorials. As each traveler passes a cairn, they place a stone on the top of the heap, thereby assuring safe passage through difficult landscapes. Cairns thus signify a type of offering in order to ward off dark forces, as well as a way of denoting sacred spaces and thresholds between the sacred and profane worlds.<sup>184</sup>

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<sup>182</sup> Refers to British artist Andy Goldsworthy, who creates site-specific sculptures using natural elements including rain, ice, stones and trees. He is best known for his cairn sculptures, though cairns themselves have been around for many thousands of years. The subtitle appears to be a good-natured dig at the acclaim Goldsworthy's cairns have received, reminding us that Goldsworthy is simply borrowing an ancient structure and claiming it as an 'original'.

<sup>183</sup> New World Encyclopedia, see <http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Cairn>

<sup>184</sup> For more on cairns, see Gary R. Varner, *Menhirs, Dolmen and Circles of Stone: The Folklore and Magic of Sacred Stone*, Algora, 2004

#### 4.7 The cairn and the ‘hermetic’ space of ruin

In Ancient Greece, cairns were a physical symbol of Hermes, the god of travel, messenger to the gods, and guide in and out of the underworld- which is why the early name for ‘cairn’ was ‘herm’, (the Greek for ‘he of the stone heap’ - Brown, 2012). Cairns, or stone heaps, were thus used as markers of transit, journey, and passage; they were boundary stones, demarcating points of difference and the threshold between this world and the next. It is thus fitting that Hocking’s cairn is located in the paradigmatic space of transition: the train station.

Hermes is a fascinating figure by all accounts; he is not only the god of travel, but of commerce, thieves, and highwaymen (Stein, 1999). Hermes is a trickster, a magician- what Stein (1999) refers to as “a shamanic presence”.<sup>185</sup> Crucially, he “stands at the edge, an edge-person, located essentially in liminality.”<sup>186</sup> Hermes is a boundary figure- making him quite fitting for the ruin. If Hestia, his opposite, stands for home, the hearth, the centre, Hermes is outward-facing, exterior and de-centred (Beistagui, 2003). He is the god “of boundaries and boundaries crossed, boundaries between villages, boundaries between people, boundaries between understanding and misunderstanding, boundaries between life and death, and boundaries between consciousness and unconsciousness.”<sup>187</sup> Hermes acts as our guide through such transitional zones; we recognise him by way of the stone heaps that mark unfamiliar spaces. The boundary, of course, provokes anxiety; it is the chaos outside, the unknown realm beyond. Like the ancient Greek *eschatia*<sup>188</sup>, It is the uncivilised periphery, a formless, primordial stew. Yet, it is precisely its chaotic, primordial condition that makes liminal space such fertile ground for creation. As Casey reminds us, “Chaos is a primordial place within which things can happen.”<sup>189</sup> Chaos is “a sense of emerging order”.<sup>190</sup> Chaos calls for the separation, demarcation, and distinction of place- a task achieved by Hocking’s sculptures, I would argue.

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<sup>185</sup> Murray Stein, Hermes and the Creation of Space, Quadrant, Journal of the C.G. Jung Foundation, Vol. 29, No. 2, Summer, accessed via [www.jungatlanta.com/.../Hermes-and-the-Creation-of-Space.pdf](http://www.jungatlanta.com/.../Hermes-and-the-Creation-of-Space.pdf)

<sup>186</sup> Ibidem

<sup>187</sup> Ralph C. Bodor, Hermes and the Trickster: Hermeneutic Exploration in Rural/Remote Communities, University of Calgary, accessed via [old.uarctic.org/Paper\\_by\\_Ralph\\_C.\\_Bodor\\_coNul.pdf.file](http://old.uarctic.org/Paper_by_Ralph_C._Bodor_coNul.pdf.file)

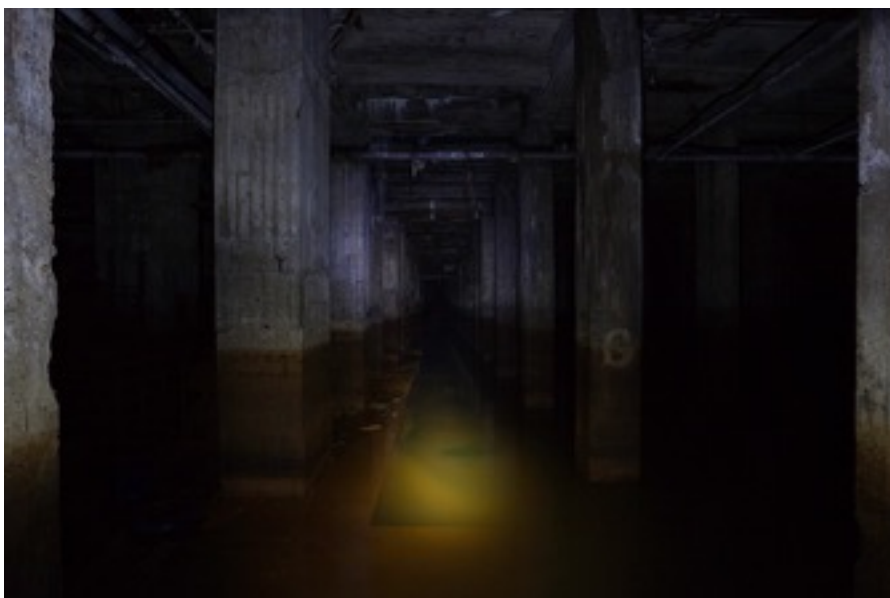
<sup>188</sup> All territory beyond Greek city walls, representing the uncivilised, inhumane, barbarous (Endsjo, 2000)

<sup>189</sup> Edward Casey, The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History, University of California Press, pp 9

<sup>190</sup> Ibidem



If Hocking's ruin is thus a chaotic space in which to demarcate and distinguish place, then what are we to make of the fact that its setting is the paradigmatic Augean 'non-place' - the train station? Non-place, famously defined by Marc Augé in opposition to 'anthropological place', is the embodiment of 'super modernity', devoid of relational, historical features and unconcerned with identity (Augé, 1995). Non-place is not 'symbolised' by times past; history is relegated to specially designated areas in order to allow the smooth exchange of commerce to occur. It does not interweave past and present, it compartmentalises them. It is "a whole institutional and normative mass which cannot be localised" (pp 67). These are generic spaces, with a common code of texts, images, signs and products, providing a reassuring sameness, a bland familiarity and a generic setting that precludes meaningful interaction. Non places are there for the purpose of passing through. They generalise, abstract, and universalise.



Train stations are for Augé paramount examples of this kind of space: temporary, transitory, anonymous and commercial, a place, as Fraser and Spalding describe it, of “conflicted identity, a certain ‘suspended condition’ placed somewhere between here and there, between a place of departure and destination, epitomising the fragmentary, liquid, ever-changing character of both liquid and super modernity”.<sup>191</sup> Train stations thus display some key characteristics of liminal space in the sense that they emphasise transition, ephemerality and fragmentation- but in the bland, generic sense of the non-place, the non-local, the non-historical, the abstract space devoid of identity.

Hocking’s cairn, emplaced with the ruined train station, I argue, emphasises the same elements of transience and fragmentation in ways that transform it from non-place into ‘anthropological’ place. His work presents an image of the ruined train station as imbued with meaningful relations and where the past has an arresting and important role to play. Yet he refuses nostalgia. Instead, he questions notions of the local and the universal by crafting his sculptures from local materials to express universal symbols. He is not interacting with times past so much as invoking the past significance of cosmic symbols in the present, in a setting where a particular, historical past is submerged in a mythical past of sacred forms, beliefs, institutions and rites. His cairn is absolutely local and yet eschews the fetish of the local so common in ruin photography. His ‘place’ is a sacred place- yet this universal, abstracted realm could not be invoked without recourse to, and exploitation of, the local, the particular, the historic product of this particular ruin. His is a place of ambiguity and contradiction, a perfect expression of the liminal itself. We might say then that the process of ruination bestows the quality of ‘anthropological place’ on the ‘non-place’ of the train station, by endowing it with a history and an identity; that where it might have facilitated a certain type of transit beforehand, now enables and celebrates meaningful transition, a true state of liminality with all that this term implies.

Hocking’s transient ruin is full of meaning; its chaotic fragmentation is, to paraphrase Turner, not outside of structure; it is a proto-structure from which all culture is generated. Places proliferate out of chaos, out of the void. Casey argues that the void is a “scene of emergence... Indeed, if chaos can be regarded as predeterminate place, the void is best construed as the scene of emergent place.

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<sup>191</sup> Benjamin Fraser & Steven D. Spalding, *Trains, Culture and Mobility: Riding the Rails*, Lexington Books, 2011, pp 176



Cosmogonical considered, the void is on its way to becoming ever more place-definite. It is the scene of world creation and thus the basis of an increasingly coherent, densely textured place-world.”<sup>192</sup> The void becomes place. This chaotic, uncanny border zone invites creation, exploration and questioning, as Garrett, Edensor and others have so eloquently argued. Stein (1999) puts this beautifully when he remarks that

Archetypally, we can see in the image of Hermes a mythical statement of the psyche’s innate tendency to give definition to perceptual and mental horizons, to mark edges, to define spaces... Hermes... [marks] the limit of consciousness. Beyond the boundary lies the unknown, the uncanny, the dangerous, the unconscious. When markers are created and limits set, however, curiosity [is] also excited and new spaces for exploration and discovery invite the bold and courageous traveler.<sup>193</sup>



*Mushroom growing out of rubble*

Might modern day urban explorers be the “bold and courageous travellers” Stein talks of? Arguably. Hocking’s ‘herm’ or cairn, it seems to me, invites just such boundary exploration of the “zone

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<sup>192</sup> Edward Casey, *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History*, University of California Press, pp 20

<sup>193</sup> Murray Stein, *Hermes and the Creation of Space*, *Quadrant*, Journal of the C.G. Jung Foundation, Vol. 29, No. 2, Summer, accessed via [www.jungatlanta.com/.../Hermes-and-the-Creation-of-Space.pdf](http://www.jungatlanta.com/.../Hermes-and-the-Creation-of-Space.pdf)

where neither...being nor non-being dominate".<sup>194</sup> His cairn honours the liminal space of the ruin, the dark, chaotic unknown, yet acts to assure those who cross the boundary of safe, or at least unthreatening, passage. It invites those who explore it- or view it as a frozen image- to free themselves from the negative connotations of ruined space, challenges us to deconstruct our fixed definitions and beliefs. It approaches the ruin as fertile chaos, rather than cultural void, beginning the task of a re-creation of space. It acknowledges the uncanny disorder- but invites us in anyway, offers up the tantalising possibility of escaping ordered space in order to question its norms, values and constraints. It rejects the rigidity of nature or culture, sacred or profane, public or private. Ambiguity is embraced, revered, even. In the liminal space of the ruin, "Every element may be found severed from its usual context, juxtaposed by its usually mutually exclusive opposite, and assembled into new, totally nonsensical combinations."<sup>195</sup> This is precisely the function of liminal space described by Turner above. It is a space of cultural critique, as liberating as it is darkly unsettling. The ruin, it seems, is a paradigmatic example of 'hermetic' or liminal space, categorically rejecting fixed notions of reality. If, as Vincent Descombes argues, the frontier causes a 'rhetorical disturbance', in which we do not feel at home because we do not understand, then Hocking's cairn eases the hermeneutical burden of ruined space<sup>196</sup>. It renders the space legible. If the Ancient Greek periphery signifies death, the contemporary ruin in Hocking's work is very much its opposite. In appealing to the symbolism not only of the herm, or cairn, but also the egg, Hocking clearly affirms the life of the ruin and views it as a space of potential. It may occupy the status of a cultural and economic 'underworld' at present, but the ruin is simply in a period of gestation, between past certainties and future possibilities, on its way to becoming place. In the transitional period, its affordances as 'loose' space are enjoyed and utilised to create something both unsettling and beautiful.

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<sup>194</sup> Dag Oistein Endsjo, To Lock up Eleusis: A Question of Liminal Space, *Numen*, Vol. 47, No. 4, 2000, pp 244

<sup>195</sup> Dag Oistein Endsjo, To Lock up Eleusis: A Question of Liminal Space, *Numen*, Vol. 47, No. 4, 2000, pp 234

<sup>196</sup> Argument found in Marc Augé, *Non-Places: An Introduction to Supermodernity*, Verso, 1995

## Conclusion

Having explored three of Hocking's works in intimate detail, we can now return to the overarching question of this thesis: how does the artist reconfigure the ruin as a sacred space? I have argued that this is done in three distinct yet interrelated ways: by unifying the fragmented space of the ruin, by retracing its history as a sacred site, and by drawing attention to its liminality, using it as a space to critique socio-cultural norms. Hocking is an inheritor of postmodern uncertainties, simultaneously seduced by and skeptical towards the mirage of the centre. Both Benjamin's emphasis on transience, fragmentation and contingency on the one hand and the romanticist veneration of an eternal, unified, classical ideal on the other are both present in Hocking's photographs, resulting in a strange and unsettling tension. His work is a study in opposites, grappling with the antagonistic forces of remembering and forgetting, monument and waste, unity and fragmentation, the natural and the culturally constructed and the romantic and the postindustrial- all of which are expressed through a rhetoric of the sacred. His is an oeuvre that forces us to question the surface appearances both of language- what is 'real'? 'monument'? 'ruin'?- and space- is this a mundane factory or sacred earthwork we are looking at? In many ways, his photographs are studies in optical and linguistic illusions; what we think we see and comprehend on the surface falls far short of the transcendent reality encrypted within; a reality which, on further inspection, turns out to be as transient as the capitalist 'real' it replaces. Rather than a wholesale rejection of the disintegration of progress or an unquestioning allegiance to the sacred whole, he moves between the two, simultaneously, each (im)possibility haunting the other.

Throughout this thesis, I have shown how ruins in Hocking's work are given a sense of agency and redeemed as culturally, historically and spiritually powerful spaces. The idea that ruins are seen not just as beautiful, but as powerful, is an important point. For as Gerardus van der Leeuw writes, this power is what impels us to *action*; the sacred "always confronts man with some absolute task".<sup>197</sup> The task which Hocking sets us, I would argue, is that of learning to *see*. His work is one of protest; it protests the uncritical denigration of ruined space and reveals it, re-presents it, in extraordinary specificity. By teaching us to look more closely, Hocking's ruins are no longer fetishised symbols known and familiar through relentless overexposure. They refuse a closed, static interpretation and instead become defamiliarised, special, rich, powerful, and significant. They force us to question

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<sup>197</sup> Gerardus van der Leeuw, *Religion in Essence and Manifestation*, Princeton University Press, 2014, pp 49

the categorisations we assign not just to spaces, but to objects, histories and inevitably to people too.

The sacred therefore turns out to be a useful rhetorical convention for this questioning of boundaries, the dissolution of which facilitates access to a space of extraordinary power. This power is always double-edged; as an object of *taboo*, the sacred is that which both draws in and repels, disturbs and fascinates. Whilst the ruin has widely been acknowledged as a space of power, however, this power is often engaged with in negative terms, largely framed within the disparaging context of ‘ruin porn’- a “superficial, one-eyed portrayal of urban decay that ignores its social and political consequences... and which even turns it into something seductive.”<sup>198</sup> Widely seen either as an excuse to indulge in hyper-masculine risk-taking activities (on the part of producers) or as a way of passively mediating the terror of decline from a sanitised distance (on the part of viewers), ruin photography has garnered something of a reputation for selfish voyeurism. Anca Pusca (2010) offers a characteristic attack on the genre when she argues that for ruin photographers,

...the emptied out spaces, the hint of the human presence, and yet the overwhelming lack thereof is appealing, intriguing, and endlessly photogenic. The pictures are ghost-like, with plays of shadow and light, shocking and pleasing at the same time. With the workers gone, the spaces have a life of their own that resembles more a fairytale land, virgin territories claimed back by the forces of nature. Although they play on the element of destruction, the latter does not appear as sad but rather as aesthetically appealing... With the local communities often left out of the camera’s eye, the destruction can be enjoyed.<sup>199</sup>

Ruin photography does not depict a ‘fairytale land’ to the people whose lives have been destroyed by industrial decline; it is simply a painful reminder of loss. Dora Apel (2015) argues that the use of nature in these images leads one to the conclusion that decline is itself natural, and not caused by historically specific factors such as racist housing and employment policies. The causes of decline are obscured by the celebration of the emergence of nature, leading to a passive response of detached pity, rather than active outrage at the neglect of disenfranchised communities. According to

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<sup>198</sup> Pora Petursdottir & Bjornar Olsen, *Imaging Modern Decay: The Aesthetics of Ruin Photography*, *Journal of Contemporary Archaeology*, 1.1, (2014)

<sup>199</sup> Anca Pusca, 2010, pp 248, quoted in Pora Petursdottir & Bjornar Olsen, *Imaging Modern Decay: The Aesthetics of Ruin Photography*, *Journal of Contemporary Archaeology*, 1.1, (2014)

Apel, ruin imagery is seen as so exceptional, so fantastical, that it becomes alien, somebody else's problem; yet simultaneously, it conveys a sense of the natural and the inevitable. Both stances, she argues, obscure capital and human injustice as the real reasons behind decline, removing the need for action. We therefore experience ruin photography such as Hocking's as pleasantly detached from its context, our horror and pity mingled with fascination. Rather than act, we simply gaze. The question then becomes, does Hocking's optimism with regard to ruin matter if such images result in a negative outcome for the communities they portray? What really differentiates his photography from that of say, Yves Marchand and Romain Meffre, or Andrew Moore? Do all these artists not feed parasite-like on the misery of others, spectating without taking any real action? And shouldn't such a stance be condemned, rather than enjoyed?

In many ways, it is difficult not to feel discomfort at protestations from scholars like Pusca. Hocking's photographs are mostly unpeopled, fixating on ghostly, fairytale like structures, seemingly devoid of any social or economic context. Yet, his sculptures by themselves are evidence of presence, if only that of the artist himself. Hocking's sculptures, though temporary, are meant to be encountered by the local communities in which they are placed. In his Mound Project and New Mound City, the local homeless community is an integral part of his images; he frames these individuals as successors to the inhabitants of the sacred land on which their tents now stand. His investigations into the sacred history of ruined space give voice to a group who usually remain all but invisible. Furthermore, Hocking's images of ruins do create a 'fairytale' 'ghostly' atmosphere, in their evocation of sacred symbolism and architecture, much of which could be described in just such terms; the sacred is of another realm, an ephemeral other space. Thus, humans may be obscured in many of his works, but not forgotten; rather, they are given an alternative space, outside the realms of capitalist activity, in which to reflect and explore. Finally, the sacred goes beyond the concerns of historical specificity; historical context is irrelevant to the cyclical movements of birth, death, decay and regeneration. Decay is indeed 'natural', yet *decay* need not mean *decline*. Hocking's take on the genre of ruin photography allows him to escape many of the charges levelled at other ruin photographers, in that his use of the sacred demands an ahistorical, 'ghostly' aesthetic, an aesthetic which is crafted in service of the local community rather than in exploitation of it.

Yet even if one is unconvinced by this, why do scholars so willingly embrace and apply the term of 'ruin porn' in the first place? Doesn't the label itself preclude any discussion of possible redeeming features of the genre? Isn't it simply a way of justifying the wholesale criticism of an entire genre

with little or no explanation? This is the position taken by Petursdottir and Olsen (2014). They argue that while much ruin photography is considered to be superficial, false, selective and ahistorical, criticised as drawing on emotion instead of critical analysis, such critique actually reflects an academic unease with the aesthetic response itself. Instead of viewing delight, pleasure and beauty as a detached, academic response to an object, they argue, we must return the *aesthetic* to its older meaning, which they define as “a reaction triggered by an element or force inherent to the very reality encountered.”<sup>200</sup> This idea of aesthetics as an immediate, emotional response to the encountering of a reality is extremely interesting when considered in relation to the sacred; for, as was discussed in chapter one, this is the exact process by which a sacred space is designated- as a response to the recognition of reality and meaning in particular spaces. Aesthetics, argue Petursdottir and Olsen, should not be feared, and neither should ruin photography. Images are not only a means of representation, they suggest, but a form of interactive engagement with things (and, we might add, spaces) themselves. Images do not passively document, but provide a measure of “the integrity and otherness of that which is encountered.”<sup>201</sup> Furthermore, these images are evidence of our ‘presence’; the image “remembers the very encounter with things, the encounter with otherness, and... also how this otherness was seen in that moment of overt ‘situatedness.’”<sup>202</sup>

Hocking’s images, then, can be viewed in the same way: as evidence of his encounter with the sacred reality of ruin, as evidence of the awe, reverence, and hope with which he encounters these much maligned spaces. When we look at one of Hocking’s photographs, we are witnessing how he sees the otherness of the ruin in a startling and archetypal form. It is therefore necessary to take a more nuanced view of the encounter with ruin, which takes place in multiple media and responds to ruination in myriad ways, illustrating a diversity which is unjustifiably glossed over in the existing research. The narration of ruin is complex, and without paying close attention to its ambiguity, we risk subsuming all representations of it within a simplistic and negative understanding of loss. Loss itself is endowed with its own kind of power, enabling us to generate new narratives of place through a strategy of ‘letting go’. Loss does not address only a lack or an absence. It is, as Rebecca Solnit so eloquently argues, about surrendering control, a process which actually allows us to be present. “To be fully present,” she goes on to write, “is to be capable of being in uncertainty and

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<sup>200</sup> Pora Petursdottir & Bjornar Olsen, *Imaging Modern Decay: The Aesthetics of Ruin Photography*, *Journal of Contemporary Archaeology*, 1.1, (2014), pp 15

<sup>201</sup> *Ibidem*, pp 17

<sup>202</sup> *Ibidem*

mystery. And one does not get lost but loses oneself, with the implication that it is a conscious choice, a chosen surrender, a psychic state achievable through geography. That thing the nature of which is totally unknown to you is usually what you need to find, and finding it is a matter of getting lost.”<sup>203</sup> Loss for Solnit is a means of enlarging the world, a geographical and psychic letting go of the clues which we usually rely on to navigate our spatial and temporal existence.

In many ways, this thesis has attempted to take up the call issued by Petursdottir and Olsen, wanting to engage with both the representation and the embodied practices of postindustrial loss in a manner which accords much deeper significance to the former than has so far been the case. I have been struck whilst writing this thesis by just how easily ruin photography and exploration have been written off by mainstream media, politicians and scholars alike, in their refusal to see these images and practices as meaningful engagements with place and space in a state of change. Wishing to take the discourse of ruin photography and practice beyond that of ‘ruin porn’ as somehow intrinsically unethical, voyeuristic and superficial, I have tried to provide an example, through the work of one artist, of an engagement with ruin which can be analysed in terms far more generous, subtle and productive than that of mere ‘pornography’. Yet, although I have taken care to distinguish Hocking’s work as unique in his manipulation of the material traces of memory rather than, as is more common, its mere photographic representation, perhaps we can and should consider *all* ‘ruin practice’, (including exploration, material reconfiguration *and* photographic representation) as indicative of a far more complex and powerful response to spatial transition. Describing this kind of thoughtful, attentive memory work and the visual reception it provokes as ‘pornographic’ is, as Olsen et al argue, a way of precluding any discussion of its possible value.

It is also, I suggest, a means of reinforcing the notion of postindustrial ruination as *taboo*. The taboo, as was outlined in chapter three, is a dangerous yet seductive anomaly which enables societies to manage and control boundaries.<sup>204</sup> Katherine Shonfield defines it as a spatially enacted set of “rules in society that guard the unclassifiable, the impure and the hybrid”,<sup>205</sup> rules which emerge “from an image of social well-being as synonymous with clearly delineated physical form, a form

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<sup>203</sup> Rebecca Solnit, *A Field Guide to Getting Lost*, Canongate Books, 2006, pp 6

<sup>204</sup> See Van Gennep (1961), Van der Leeuw, (1963) Turner (1974) and more recently, Douglas (1986)

<sup>205</sup> Katherine Shonfield, ‘Glossing with graininess: cross occupations in postwar British film and architecture’, *The Journal of Architecture* 3, no. 4 (1998), p. 356.

which is habitually counterpoised against a sea of potentially threatening and polluting formlessness.”<sup>206</sup> In order to contain its dangerous power, the taboo must be dealt with in one of two ways: either by exclusion or sacralisation. Applying these arguments to spatial theory, Ben Camkin has recently described ruin as a form of architectural ‘dirt’, and argues that Kristeva’s notion of the ‘abject’<sup>207</sup> helps explain not just our repulsion towards, but our ambivalent fascination with derelict spaces. I would like to see these concepts expanded, with practices such as those outlined in this thesis pointing not only to the existence, but the subversion of spatial taboos by acts of sacralisation. How do such practices function not as mere pornographic spectacle but as a means of sacralising that which has been excluded as socially unacceptable? If we return to our definition of the sacred as that which is marked out as special, rich, significant and powerful, then these practices can be seen as rescuing the ruin from its status as a negative taboo, that which is banned, shunned, and forgotten, and restoring it to an object worthy of public attention, memory, reverence and awe. The act of marking out places of collective significance, whether by exploration, art or photography, is essentially a sacred act, the ‘sacred’ not to be confused with a system of religious belief but understood as an affective stance towards particular places and objects.

This affective identification with ruined places can therefore be seen as an intensely ethical act, in which places in transitional states are brought back into the public sphere and repositioned as spaces of ambivalent power, rather than celebratory or shallow spectacles of pornography. Rather than policing responses to ruin and stigmatising the different ways in which loss is performed and negotiated, why not accord such practices legitimacy as valid expressions of bearing witness to places in transition? Transitional states are, interestingly, integral to the taboo, and reflect a deep-seated cultural ambivalence towards the boundary, which is why they must be managed with the appropriate rites of passage. Might such practices deserve to be taken seriously as providing such (counter)rites of passage? Could they be rethought as a means of resolving the conflicts of ambivalence surrounding loss? Does this ambivalence reflect a discomfort towards *attaching* ourselves rather than withdrawing from objects of loss (Baker, 2001)? Attachment theory does not emphasise anxiety, anger or guilt, but instead recognises that the process of mourning requires an ongoing *bond* with the lost object, a bond which serves an adaptive function in the face of loss (Silverman et al, 1992) Taboo, after all, is closely bound to the politics of loss and mourning, a politics which can only be facilitat-

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<sup>206</sup> Ibidem

<sup>207</sup> See Julia Kristeva, 1982



ed by attending properly to what remains (Eng & Kazanjian, 1993). Indeed, it is the *avoidance* of recollection and images of loss rather than our engagement with them which may be considered pathological (Baker, 2001), a sign of ‘absent mourning’ or outright denial. Theories of attachment in the face of loss may help address the unhelpful pathologisation of ruin practice; whilst a focus on the celebratory aesthetic of ruin is important, it risks obscuring its valuable *sacred* function: the management of ambivalence, or taboo surrounding spaces of loss. Such ambivalence can only be negotiated by the productive attention to spatial remains, an attention which is practiced in diverse ways by myriad communities of interest. A greater understanding of taboo, ritual, and the management of spatial ambivalence, as well as the politics of mourning such ambivalence provokes, has much to add to the existing literature on ruination. Although these considerations offer a mere introduction to a more generous perspective on ruins, it is a generosity which I hope to see extended by other scholars in the future.

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