

**MUSEUMS OF THE PRESENT DAY:  
CONTEMPORARY ABANDONED SPACES**

by

Natalie Elizabeth Wright

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of the University of Delaware in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in American Material Culture

Spring 2015

© 2015 Natalie Elizabeth Wright  
All Rights Reserved

ProQuest Number: 1596911

All rights reserved

INFORMATION TO ALL USERS

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.



ProQuest 1596911

Published by ProQuest LLC (2015). Copyright of the Dissertation is held by the Author.

All rights reserved.

This work is protected against unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code  
Microform Edition © ProQuest LLC.

ProQuest LLC.  
789 East Eisenhower Parkway  
P.O. Box 1346  
Ann Arbor, MI 48106 - 1346

**MUSEUMS OF THE PRESENT DAY:  
CONTEMPORARY ABANDONED SPACES**

by

Natalie Elizabeth Wright

Approved: \_\_\_\_\_  
Sandy Isenstadt, Ph.D.  
Professor in charge of thesis on behalf of the Advisory Committee

Approved: \_\_\_\_\_  
J. Ritchie Garrison, Ph.D.  
Director of the Winterthur Program in American Material Culture

Approved: \_\_\_\_\_  
George H. Watson, Ph.D.  
Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences

Approved: \_\_\_\_\_  
James G. Richards, Ph.D.  
Vice Provost for Graduate and Professional Education

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This thesis truly would not have been possible without the overwhelming generosity of many individuals, all of whom gave their time and advice as I worked through logistical and theoretical issues. I was extremely lucky to have worked with the brilliant Sandy Isenstadt. As my thesis advisor, Sandy went above and beyond the call of duty by close-reading each of my drafts and giving detailed comments. I benefitted from Sandy's inspiring critical thinking skills, writing skills, and willingness to push me to be better at every stage. This thesis would not be what it is without his guidance.

At Winterthur, I must thank J. Ritchie Garrison for helping me to venture into the world of contemporary material culture. His thoughtful mentoring and support have benefitted my thesis enormously. At the formative stages of this thesis, Rosemary Krill was an invaluable resource as she assisted me in developing the project's core ideas and scale. Throughout the entirety of the project, Emily Guthrie played a crucial role as she mined her encyclopedic knowledge of material culture to suggest new and different angles of analysis. Emily was also one of several individuals, including Jeff Groff, Maggie Lidz, Peter Woodall, Matthew Christopher, and Jim Hall, who recommended abandoned sites to visit, as well as contacts.

The logistical issues relating to this thesis, that is, entering abandoned spaces to examine abandoned objects, necessitated a team of supporters who were willing to go to bat for me. My access to each abandoned site was the result of boundless support and trust. At Winterthur, John Castle took time out of his schedule to bring me to the

Creamery and Cottages. John was kind enough to stay with me as I explored these spaces at length on a very cold and rainy day. At Eastern State Penitentiary, Erica Harman also took me through the site's abandoned collections on two chilly winter days, even as both excursions required Tyvek suits and air filtration masks. Matt Schultz also took the time to give me a personal tour of the Lansdowne Theatre.

I extend a special thank you to my interviewees, Matt Schultz, Zhenya Grinshteyn, Christopher Payne, Conrad Benner, Sean Kelley, and Lauren Zalut. Their enthusiasm for this topic and the ideas it generates went well beyond our interviews. All of these individuals were extremely generous with their time, providing endlessly rich insights that created the bones for this thesis.

I also owe many thanks to the generous support of Coco Kim. Her scholarship allowed me to travel to many of the key sites for this project as well as take specialty tours. With her scholarship, I was also able to purchase the camera necessary to document these sites and their objects.

Finally, I owe all the thanks in the world to my friends and family. To my classmates, especially those with whom I live, I extend an enormous thank you. You supported me throughout this process with jokes and hugs, and for that I am extremely grateful. I cannot overstate how much my partner in crime, Alex Mann, helped me through this project. He kept me afloat, while simultaneously pushing me to do my best. I simply could not have done this without him. The same is absolutely true for my parents and my brother Nicholas. My family has supported me with unconditional love and trust. Their wisdom and patience got me through the toughest times, while their love heightened the highest joys. They have always pushed me to make my projects truly 'me.' 'Me' always includes 'them.'

## **DEDICATION**

*To my family, and all future contemporary material culture scholars.*

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES .....	viii
ABSTRACT .....	xiv
Chapter	
1 INTRODUCTION .....	1
The Contemporary Turn to Ruins.....	1
Definitions & Methodology .....	2
Summary of Conclusions .....	9
So What? .....	12
2 RUIN HISTORY & THE CONTEMPORARY RUIN .....	26
Ruin History .....	26
The Contemporary Ruin.....	28
3 SENSES & SOUVENIRS .....	40
Ruin Sensoryscapes .....	40
Ruin Souvenirs .....	51
4 MATERIAL MEMORY IN ABANDONED SPACES .....	70
Material Memory Defined.....	70
The Body, Remembered.....	76
Involuntary Memories .....	83
5 RUINS AS EMOTIONAL LANDSCAPES .....	103
Emotional Objects & Spaces.....	103
Emotional Object-Person Relationships.....	110
6 GHOSTS IN RUINS .....	123
Haunted Sensoryscapes .....	124
Ghosts & the Materiality of Ruins.....	129
Ghosts as the Material Culture of Absence .....	134

7	RUINS AND MUSEUMS.....	142
	Ruins as Museums.....	144
	How Museums Exorcise Ghosts.....	148
	Bottom-Up Interpretation.....	157
	Ruins Outside the Heritage Sphere.....	165
	Ruins Inside the Heritage Sphere.....	168
8	CONCLUSION.....	179
	REFERENCES.....	184
Appendix		
A	THE MATERIAL CULTURE OF EMOTION: A LITERATURE REVIEW	193
B	IMAGES FROM THE ADVENTURES: A SELECTION OF IMAGES TAKEN DURING SITE VISITS.....	203
C	IRB ETHICS COMMITTEE ACCEPTANCE LETTER.....	227
D	IMAGE PERMISSIONS.....	229



## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1	The Guardian’s top three most popular online articles.....	16
Figure 2	Google searches for the term "abandoned places".....	16
Figure 3	Google searches for the term “abandoned” .....	17
Figure 4	The number of Instagram tags for “urbex” .....	18
Figure 5	Hawthorne Hall's stage .....	19
Figure 6	One of Philadelphia’s abandoned banks.....	19
Figure 7	Abandoned hospital building on Ellis Island.....	20
Figure 8	A group behind a gated porch.....	20
Figure 9	An unrestored piano in Ellis Island’s “Silent Voices” show .....	21
Figure 10	A section of abandoned cell blocks in Eastern State Penitentiary.....	21
Figure 11	Objects in Eastern State Penitentiary’s abandoned collection .....	22
Figure 12	The laundry facility in ‘the Creamery’ .....	23
Figure 13	The interior of an abandoned cottage at the Winterthur Museum.....	24
Figure 14	Interior of the abandoned Lansdowne Theatre .....	24
Figure 15	A map showing the areas where the term “abandoned places” was searched the most on Google.....	25
Figure 16	One of the laundry units at Ellis Island .....	36
Figure 17	One of the laundry units at Winterthur’s creamery .....	36
Figure 18	The rounded ceiling at Winterthur’s creamery.....	37
Figure 19	The rounded ceiling at Ellis Island.....	37

Figure 20	The sliding door at Winterthur’s creamery .....	38
Figure 21	The sliding door in the elevator operating room at the abandoned bank	38
Figure 22	The meat cuts posters in Winterthur’s creamery .....	39
Figure 23	Ruin sightscape: the entrance to the abandoned bank .....	61
Figure 24	Detail of peeling paint .....	62
Figure 25	A rusted hand towel dispenser and peeling wallpaper behind it .....	62
Figure 26	Natural light pours in from the elevator shaft to reveal debris that has come down from crumbling walls .....	63
Figure 27	Materialization of time passing: detail of disintegrating carpet .....	64
Figure 28	An otherworldly scene: a tree growing out of crumbling debris .....	65
Figure 29	An otherworldly scene: stalactites fall from the ceiling .....	66
Figure 30	Leafing through books: a book I found in Winterthur’s creamery .....	66
Figure 31	Broken things: a smashed toilet seat .....	67
Figure 32	Being alone: the empty Lansdowne theatre .....	67
Figure 33	An otherworldly scene: a ceiling has fallen down to reveal its structure beneath .....	68
Figure 34	The basement of the abandoned cottage at Winterthur .....	68
Figure 35	My souvenir: a piece of coal from Winterthur’s cottage .....	69
Figure 36	Time simultaneously staying still and passing: evaporated drinks .....	89
Figure 37	A thick layer of grey dust covers the shelving units in Ellis Island’s morgue .....	90
Figure 38	Dust and momentary memories: an explorer’s footprint .....	90
Figure 39	Feet and routinized memories: the toe of a sock in Eastern State’s abandoned collection .....	91

Figure 40	Feet and routinized memories: the body of a sock in Eastern State’s abandoned collection .....	91
Figure 41	Feet and routinized memories: a shoe from Eastern State’s abandoned collection .....	92
Figure 42	Feet and routinized memories: the original carpet at the Lansdowne Theatre.....	92
Figure 43	Dust and momentary memories: Ellis Island’s hallways .....	93
Figure 44	Buttocks, backs, arms, and routinized memories: Ellis Island's chairs ...	94
Figure 45	Fragmentary memories: a shirt in Eastern State Penitentiary .....	94
Figure 46	Hands and routinized memories: buttons .....	95
Figure 47	Hands and routinized memories: Lansdowne Theatre power switch .....	95
Figure 48	Dust and momentary memories: the red color filter.....	96
Figure 49	Dust and momentary memories: an unused door at Ellis Island .....	97
Figure 50	Dust and momentary memories: a pain of glass at Ellis Island.....	98
Figure 51	Writing as material memory: a magazine in Eastern State Penitentiary .	99
Figure 52	Writing as material memory: an annotated bible .....	99
Figure 53	Material memories of objects: the fountain in the Lansdowne Theatre	100
Figure 54	Material memories of objects: a door at Eastern State Penitentiary.....	101
Figure 55	Material memories of objects: tape witness marks.....	101
Figure 56	Recognizing involuntary memories: a ruined bottle of Tiger Balm.....	102
Figure 57	Recognizing involuntary memories: my own bottle of Tiger Balm.....	102
Figure 58	Emotions as private: personal belongings in Tiger Balm jar .....	117
Figure 59	Emotions as private: underside of the Tiger Balm jar .....	117
Figure 60	Emotions as private: inside the Tiger Balm jar .....	118
Figure 61	Emotions as private: the Tiger Balm jar as it was found.....	118

Figure 62	Emotions as social: a humorous portrait: ‘Clay’ etched in the bathroom stall in Winterthur’s creamery.....	119
Figure 63	Emotions as social: ‘Clay’: a clearer outline of the etched figure and name I drew over the original image.....	120
Figure 64	Engaging with objects with touch: the keys I found still hanging in Winterthur’s creamery.....	121
Figure 65	Engaging with objects with touch: film reels.....	122
Figure 66	Ellis Island’s ghosts: family looking at the Statue of Liberty.....	136
Figure 67	Interacting with Ellis Island’s ghosts: a group looks at me as I walk through the hall and peak through the doorway.....	137
Figure 68	Interacting with Ellis Island’s ghosts: a group of surgeons and medical staff turn to me as they get ready for another procedure.....	138
Figure 69	Interacting with Ellis Island’s ghosts: one man makes particularly strong eye contact as he sits among a group.....	138
Figure 70	Ghosts in walls: pasting photographs around tiles.....	139
Figure 71	Fragmentary memories: a woman walks along with her family, but her face and torso are missing.....	140
Figure 72	Fragmentary memories: a small child looks on, making eye contact with the visitor.....	141
Figure 73	Self-excavation: the deterioration of upholstered walls in the Lansdowne theatre, revealing the layers beneath.....	175
Figure 74	Self-excavation: the deterioration of an upholstered chair in Eastern State Penitentiary, revealing the layers beneath.....	176
Figure 75	Self-excavation: peeling paint in Eastern State Penitentiary.....	177
Figure 76	Museums using the ruin’s critical voice as a frame: “the Big Graph” ..	178
Figure 77	Winterthur’s creamery: dust and debris fall on the sink and soap holder.....	203
Figure 78	Inside the dry-cleaning room in Winterthur’s creamery.....	204

Figure 79	The texture of abandonment in Winterthur’s creamery .....	204
Figure 80	Stumbling upon a desk as we try and find our way through the dark basement in Winterthur’s creamery.....	205
Figure 81	Going through the basement in Winterthur’s creamery: we find an empty box atop a floor of leaves .....	205
Figure 82	Empty and open drawers in the apartment sections of Winterthur’s creamery .....	206
Figure 83	Life’s leftovers: packets of Heinz ketchup and relish remain in one of Winterthur’s abandoned cottages .....	206
Figure 84	An unused water fountain is surrounded by peeling paint in Winterthur’s creamery.....	207
Figure 85	Where clothes once hung: a segment of the dry-cleaning units in Winterthur’s creamery.....	208
Figure 86	The outside of Eastern State Penitentiary.....	209
Figure 87	A bathroom floor peeks through dust and debris .....	209
Figure 88	A paper cup holds playing cards cut in half by inmates in Eastern State Penitentiary.....	210
Figure 89	Playing cards cut in half in Eastern State Penitentiary.....	210
Figure 90	The inside of a tobacco pouch, found attached to a piece of concrete, that once belonged to an inmate at Eastern State Penitentiary .....	211
Figure 91	A ball made by a prison inmate out of cut fabric/rags .....	211
Figure 92	The cuts of a homemade boat once belonging to a prison inmate.....	212
Figure 93	A rusted and faded shipping tag for Eastern State Penitentiary .....	212
Figure 94	A close-up of the operating lamp in Eastern State Penitentiary .....	213
Figure 95	A pillow resting on a stool expunges its stuffing on either side of itself, housed in an abandoned cell.....	213
Figure 96	A cell block in Eastern State Penitentiary showing where wind has blown leaves into the hall, a familiar sight in abandoned spaces.....	214

Figure 97	The stenciled and painted ceiling in the Lansdowne Theatre with the lights turned on.....	215
Figure 98	A detail of the theatre’s dust-covered chandeliers .....	215
Figure 99	The Lansdowne Theatre’s projection unit.....	216
Figure 100	The film reel storage room in the Lansdowne Theatre.....	216
Figure 101	The original curtains from the Lansdowne Theatre’s opening in 1927.	217
Figure 102	Behind the curtains: the Lansdowne Theatre sign awaits its use again.	218
Figure 103	What was once the women’s bathroom in the Lansdowne Theatre now houses extra chairs and seats. Under the seats on the left, one can see the blue sofa that was a part of this bathroom.....	219
Figure 104	More Lansdowne lettering in storage rooms within the theatre .....	220
Figure 105	Abandoned objects behind glass in the Ellis Island show “Silent Voices” .....	220
Figure 106	Abandoned objects behind glass in the Ellis Island show “Silent Voices” .....	221
Figure 107	Children looking towards the visitor: one of JR’s pastings in his show through the abandoned sections of Ellis Island .....	221
Figure 108	The autopsy room in Ellis Island’s abandoned isolation hospitals. This is the only room in which JR did not paste .....	222
Figure 109	A pasting of a larger than life woman in which JR used the wall and the set of drawers in front of it .....	222
Figure 110	A pasting done by JR in Ellis Island’s abandoned isolation hospitals ..	223
Figure 111	The entrance to a building on the abandoned south side of Ellis Island – an area that houses health facilities and isolation hospitals .....	224
Figure 112	A tall gothic revival chair is engulfed in peeling paint and debris in Philadelphia’s abandoned Hawthorne Hall .....	225
Figure 113	Party confetti mixes with dust to cover part of the floor in Philadelphia’s abandoned Hawthorne Hall .....	226

## ABSTRACT

Contemporary abandoned spaces house a unique material landscape in which the process of ruination has at once frozen time as well as materialized its passing. Objects are preserved, though fragmented, despite their position outside of societal remembrance strategies. Without being interpreted into a linear historical narrative, abandoned objects embody involuntary memories and enable the visitor to engage in a bottom-up interpretation model where objects speak for themselves. Forgotten objects, persons, and histories transform the ruin into a melancholic landscape in which material memories and emotions come alive. The materiality of memory and emotion evoke vivid imaginings of unknown past persons and past sensoriscapes as they emphasize the materiality of absence. The ruin allows for visitors to feel close to these imagined persons by encouraging visitors to engage with objects in intimate ways. The engagement with these sites and objects is the result of a contemporary turn to ruins. These ruins have been conceived of as alternative museums where traditionally marginalized persons and histories are remembered, and multiple and competing narratives are highlighted – characteristics that have driven the parallel turn to ruins in the museum sphere.

The methodology of this study is two-pronged. First, I visited abandoned spaces throughout Delaware, Pennsylvania, and New York to analyze the materiality of abandonment. Second, I conducted interviews with persons who have engaged this materiality. This approach allowed me to define the specific nature of the materiality of abandonment and the affective responses it demands. This study adds to a growing

collection of works that explore the material culture of contemporary ruins. By applying material culture theory to my conclusions, I enrich these works by forging new avenues in material culture theory as I investigate the materiality of absence, memory, emotion, souvenirs, and marginalized histories, as well as more precisely define concepts such as object agency and material memory. Though the huge numbers of people that have turned their attention to contemporary ruins validates the study of these spaces and their objects, their study is truly justified by the limitless lenses abandoned spaces and objects provide to push material culture scholarship forward.



## Chapter 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### The Contemporary Turn to Ruins

On April 27, 2014, The Guardian newspaper published a list of its most popular online articles since 2010.<sup>1</sup> In third place, with three million, seven hundred and nine thousand, five hundred and sixty-seven views, is the article, “Detroit in Ruins,” in which viewers can scroll through Yves Marchand and Romain Meffre’s photography of Detroit’s abandoned structures.<sup>2</sup> In the last fifteen years, there has been what many have referred to as a ‘turn to ruins.’<sup>3</sup> Rather than the ruins prized during previous ruin crazes, such as in the Victorian period, these ruins are contemporary to today, having been abandoned sometime between the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.<sup>4</sup> Unlike their older counterparts, the general public has largely

---

<sup>1</sup> Ami Sedghi, George Arnett, and Chris Moran, “The Guardian’s Top 100: Which Articles Have Been Most Popular?” *The Guardian*, April 17, 2014, accessed April 5, 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/news/datablog/2014/apr/17/the-guardians-top-100-which-articles-have-been-most-popular>.

<sup>2</sup> “Detroit in Ruins,” last modified January 1, 2011, <http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/gallery/2011/jan/02/photography-detroit>.

<sup>3</sup> Bjørnar Olsen and Póra Pétursdóttir, “Introduction: An Archaeology of Ruins,” in *Ruin Memories: Materialities, Aesthetics and the Archaeology of the Recent Past*, edited by Bjørnar Olsen and Póra Pétursdóttir (New York: Routledge, 2014), 3-5.

<sup>4</sup> Michael S. Roth, Claire Lyons, and Charles Merewether, *Irresistible Decay: Ruins Reclaimed* (Los Angeles: The Getty Research Institute, 1997), 3-5.

perceived contemporary ruins as blight, associating them with economic hardship and negative histories.<sup>5</sup> But, between 2000 and 2015, a surge of interest has collected around these sites, prompting the creation of the term “urban explorer,” an individual who explores abandoned spaces, and “urbex,” a type of photography that results from urban exploring. The actions of urban explorers - finding and documenting contemporary abandoned structures and the objects therein - has led to hundreds of websites dedicated to urban explorer networks, countless groups dedicated to tracking these abandoned sites, thousands of Instagram accounts, and an eruption of tremendously popular news articles reporting the discovery and documentation of contemporary abandoned spaces [fig. 1-4]. The unique materiality in these sites, that is, the objects that these sites house and the material quality of these sites and objects, has generated a huge following by capturing the imaginations of many. The materiality of abandonment and the affective responses it demands are the focus of this thesis.

### **Definitions & Methodology**

In this thesis, I will examine two facets of the contemporary ruin: the materiality of abandonment, and the affective responses experienced by those who engage this materiality. Here, the definitions of the materiality of abandonment and the affective responses it produces are co-constitutive, as the responses work to more precisely define the materiality that produces them. The core of my methodology involves examining object-person interactions, that is, the ways in which individuals and objects interact and the relationships that these interactions produce. To do this, I

---

<sup>5</sup> Olsen and Pétursdóttir, “Introduction,” 4.

have visited a variety of abandoned spaces as well as collections that house abandoned objects, and have interviewed a sample of individuals that have experienced the materiality of abandonment. These individuals include urban explorers, photographers, owners of abandoned spaces, and museum professionals who work with abandoned spaces and/or objects.

To begin, it is necessary to define the term ‘abandoned.’ The slippery nature of this term requires that I determine its parameters. As I note above, I have included owners of abandoned spaces in my sample group of interviewees. If abandoned spaces, and by extension the objects inside these spaces, can be owned, what, then, makes a space and its objects abandoned? For the purposes of this thesis, an abandoned space or object is defined as one that has ceased to perform its original function, has been left vacant or unused (with the exception of homeless persons and urban explorers) and has been taken over by the ruining process. Here, abandonment and ruining are two different things, though they are inextricably linked.

Abandonment is the act of leaving a site and the objects therein, whereas ruining, the verb to ruin, is a sites or objects aging process as the forces of time and nature take control after abandonment.<sup>6</sup> While abandonment is an immediate action, ruining is a process, and in this process objects or sites can be at varying stages. Thus, the verb to ruin relates to the notion of an object or site being in a state of ruin, which describes the level of decay an object has experienced at the hands of time and nature. Because the ruining process relies on the site and its objects to be abandoned, the two concepts are inextricably linked. As such, I use the term ‘materiality of abandonment’ to refer

---

<sup>6</sup> See Olsen and Pétursdóttir, “Introduction,” 6-8, for a detailed description of the ruining process and how ruining may be conceived of as a verb.

to the specific material qualities objects and sites exhibit when the ruining process takes hold. It is this transformation in materiality, when a site and its objects are abandoned and thrown into the ruining process, which resides at the core of this thesis. Finally, I use the term ‘ruin’ interchangeably with the term ‘abandoned space,’ though ruin typically denotes abandoned structures across all time periods, while abandoned spaces are more contemporary.

Using these definitions, I analyzed abandoned objects at eight sites, all within the Pennsylvania (PA), Delaware (DE), and New York (NY) region. The first site I visited was Hawthorne Hall, an abandoned community center in Philadelphia, PA [fig. 5]. In this instance, I was exploring the site with a group associated with the company Hidden City Philadelphia, an organization that opens up otherwise inaccessible spaces to the public. I then made my way into one of Philadelphia’s abandoned banks with a group of urban explorers. This was an event set up by one of Philadelphia’s urban explorer networks [fig. 6]. After that, I was able to tour the abandoned sections of Ellis Island, which included the island’s isolation hospitals that were once used to quarantine immigrants with infectious diseases [fig. 7]. While not normally accessible to the public, the space was opened up to show the artist JR’s recent installation around the site, in which he pasted photographs of immigrants and health care workers onto the site’s walls and objects [fig. 8]. What’s more, during my visit to Ellis Island, I came across the exhibit “Silent Voices” in the official Ellis Island museum on the restored, north end of the island. In this exhibit, curators explored what the island was like during its period of complete abandonment, showcasing photographs from this time, statements by photographers who captured this abandonment, and vignettes of abandoned objects from the now restored areas [fig. 9]. I have utilized each of these

sites and exhibits at Ellis Island as case studies throughout my thesis. Following these experiences, I visited Philadelphia's Eastern State Penitentiary Museum, a previously abandoned prison that was converted into a stabilized ruin [fig. 10]. During this first visit, I explored the site and its various exhibits, and in a second visit, I examined and analyzed objects from their abandoned collection, that is, the objects that museum staff found in the ruin that will not be restored [fig. 11]. Next, I was able to examine two abandoned spaces on the grounds of the Winterthur Museum and Garden in Delaware. The first was a meat and dairy processing space that Winterthur staff refer to as 'the Creamery' [fig. 12]. This space was in use during the time that Henry Francis du Pont lived at the estate (early to mid twentieth century), and had a variety of different uses ranging from a meat cutting room, a dry-cleaning room, and apartments upstairs. Many objects remained from these previous uses. The second space was one of the museum's cottages, in which objects remain in the kitchen and basement [fig. 13]. Finally, I explored the Lansdowne Theatre with owner Matt Schultz, one of my interviewees. Built in 1927, the theatre was abandoned in 1987 until Schultz created the Historic Lansdowne Theatre Corporation to purchase the site in 2007 [fig. 14]. This site was originally a silent movie theatre, and has many of the original objects from its opening in 1927. With Schultz, I explored the theatre, the stage, the projection room, and the entrance hallways.

As these sites attest, the geographic region that comprises Pennsylvania, Delaware, and New York, houses a plethora of abandoned spaces. These spaces have all shared a similar life cycle: construction and use, redundancy and abandonment, and now, a contemporary revival as ruin [figure 15]. However, they vary tremendously in type and age. Abandoned sites in this region include ruins in cities such as

Philadelphia, ruins just outside of cities, such as Ellis Island, and ruins in the countryside, such as those on the Winterthur Museum and Garden's estate in Delaware. The different sites I visited also fell at different points along a spectrum of ruination, as some were abandoned for longer than others. Further, these sites fell at different points along a spectrum of interpretation, as some were entirely abandoned and vacant, while others allowed public access, and others were transformed into museums. Despite these spectra, each site can be described as existing in a ruined state, and because of these spectra, a rich comparison can be made between the sites, their materiality, and the object-person interactions they facilitate.

I chose my group of interviewees based on the abandoned sites that I was able to visit, as well as on their experience with abandoned spaces. In total, I conducted nine interviews with six interviewees, with each interview ranging from one to two hours. The bulk of my interviewees were photographers who seek out abandoned spaces to explore and document, making up half of my interviewee pool. The first, Christopher Payne, is the author of photography books *New York's Forgotten Substations: the Power Behind the Subway*, *Asylum: Inside the Closed World of State Mental Hospitals*, and most recently, *North Brother Island: The Last Unknown Place in New York City*.<sup>7</sup> Over the course of many years, Payne has traveled to an extraordinary number of abandoned spaces across the United States, including many in my own geographic region of focus. My second interviewee was Conrad Benner, creator of

---

<sup>7</sup> Christopher Payne, *Asylum: Inside the Closed World of State Mental Hospitals* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2009); Christopher Payne, *New York's Forgotten Substations: The Power Behind the Subway* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2002); Christopher Payne, *North Brother Island: The Last Unknown Place in New York City* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014).

Philadelphia-based blog Streets Dept., a blog that focuses on street art and abandoned spaces in and around the Philadelphia area.<sup>8</sup> Benner regularly explores abandoned spaces, and has been at the forefront of documenting Philadelphia's newly abandoned structures.<sup>9</sup> The third photographer I interviewed was Zhenya Grinshteyn, an entrepreneur and photographer who splits his time between New York and Philadelphia, seeking out abandoned sites in both areas. Grinshteyn regularly posts his photographs onto his blog, "Local Everywhere," and contributes to online journalism about abandoned spaces for organizations such as Benner's Streets Dept.<sup>10</sup> The fourth interviewee, Matt Schultz, introduced above, is the owner of the Lansdowne Theatre. Schultz is working on restoring the theatre, as his background is in historic preservation. As the owner of an abandoned site, Schultz was able to provide detailed information on his experiences with this particular space. Lastly, I interviewed two representatives from Philadelphia's Eastern State Penitentiary museum: Sean Kelley, Director of Public Programming, and Lauren Zalut, Associate Director for Tour Programs. As Kelley worked with Eastern State from its time as a complete ruin until its transformation into a museum, he could speak to its evolution over time, and as Zalut works with visitors on a regular basis, she could speak to visitor interactions with the site and its objects.

---

<sup>8</sup> "Streets Dept," last updated April 8, 2015, <http://streetsdept.com>.

<sup>9</sup> Conrad Benner, "Exploring the Ruins of Philadelphia's Public School System: Inside 3 Recently Abandoned Philly Public High Schools with Austin Hodges," *Streets Dept*, February 3, 2014, accessed April 1, 2015, <http://bit.ly/1GM4fVt>.

<sup>10</sup> "Local Everywhere," last modified November 21, 2014, <http://zhenya.gr>; Conrad Benner, "Inside the Beury Building (AKA The 'Boner Forever' Building) with Zhenya Grinshteyn," *Streets Dept*, November 4, 2013, accessed January 15, 2015, <http://bit.ly/1CgUQ3n>.

While the sample of interviewees is skewed towards photographers, this is a reflection of the individuals who are drawn to abandoned spaces. Though the contemporary turn to ruins shows how these spaces and their objects have captured the imagination of many, the majority of this engagement takes place online and is the result of content produced by photographers who visit these sites. As such, comparably few people experience these spaces in person. As the boundaries of this thesis do not allow for a discussion of online object-person interactions, I focused on finding individuals who had experienced these sites in person. The majority of these individuals were photographers. This thesis focuses on the materiality of abandonment, and the specific object-person interactions it produces, rather than the specific object-person interactions fostered by photography that take place between the photographer and the object they capture, or online object-person interactions.<sup>11</sup>

My methodology is thus three-pronged: analyzing abandoned objects, noting my own reactions to these objects, and mining interviews for insights on the nature of the materiality of abandonment and the object-person interactions it facilitates.<sup>12</sup> I then contextualized these findings within material culture theory. Coupling these methodologies of analysis, and locating the intersections between my findings and

---

<sup>11</sup> For an in depth discussion on the specific type of object-person interactions that take place between the ruin photographer and the objects they capture, see: Póra Pétursdóttir and Bjørnar Olsen, “Imaging Modern Decay: The Aesthetics of Ruin Photography,” *Journal of Contemporary Archaeology* 1 (2014): 7-56.

<sup>12</sup> The methodology I employ in this thesis, coupling object analysis with interviews, may be unorthodox, but was very useful to examine object-person interactions. Applying object analysis methodologies was integral to understanding the materiality of abandonment and abandoned objects, while conducting interviews was necessary to understand the affective response this materiality demands.



material culture theory, has enabled me to discuss topics that further material culture scholarship ranging from the materiality of absence to the material culture of souvenirs. The sheer variety of angles that abandoned spaces provide through which to examine material culture, is, I believe, a testament to their potential as sources for furthering material culture scholarship and theory.

### **Summary of Conclusions**

In the first section of this thesis, I compare historic ruins to contemporary ruins, and use this comparison as a basis to explore societal remembrance and forgetting practices. Where contemporary ruins fall outside of societal remembrance practices, having necessarily been forgotten in order to be abandoned, these spaces and their objects possess a critical voice of society's remembrance practices such as its heritage and museum sectors. This turn to ruins can in part be seen as a product of the turn to marginalized histories with the rise of post-colonialist scholarship, and can thus add to this scholarship.

Being forgotten has allowed the ruining process to transform the materiality of abandoned sites and the objects therein, and this transformation pushes urban explorers to feel as though they are in another world. In my second chapter, "Senses and Souvenirs," I use these ideas to explore the affect that the materiality of abandonment has on visitors' senses, that is, the sensoryscape that the material of abandonment produces, and how this can lead to collecting practices similar to souvenirs. Ruins engage the visitor's senses in very different ways from the material landscape of their everyday routines, thus heightening the visitor's senses a great deal. The visitor's view of the ruin as otherworldly is materialized in the practice of collecting and displaying ruin souvenirs. Ruin souvenirs share some parallels with

tourist souvenirs and souvenir practices, but the unique situation out of which they are found and collected adds to scholarship on the material culture of the souvenir.

Further, the ruin souvenir is similar to a specific type of tourist souvenir, enabling this section of the thesis to act as a case study for this souvenir type, including how it is collected and displayed. This section also illuminates a specific niche in contemporary collecting practices.

The materiality in ruins that fosters this sense of otherworldliness also pushes visitors to recognize material memories, that is, physical traces of past users in the objects that are left. In Chapter 3, “Material Memory in Abandoned Spaces,” I examine the definition of material memories, and how these are found in contemporary abandoned spaces. The specific types of material memories my interviewees and I encountered in ruins allowed me to create a typology of material memories, thus making the definition of this occurrence more precise.

Examining the topic of material memory in contemporary abandoned spaces also allowed for a discussion of involuntary memories, that is, objects and their associated memories that have not been employed to create a narrative about the past. This in turn enabled a discussion of abandoned objects’ ability to encourage visitors to imagine the abandoned site’s past inhabitants, abandoned objects’ past users, and the site’s past sensoryscape. Rather than picking up on the ‘true’ memories associated with objects, visitors create imaginings that are a product of the objects a visitor encounters, and the ways in which the visitor experiences these objects based on their personal background. These imaginings are then projected onto the ruin’s material landscape.

The process of imaginatively projecting past persons and past sensoryscapes onto the ruin's material landscape is heavily associated with the ruin's ability to foster emotional, one-on-one connections between the visitor and the abandoned object – a topic I explore in Chapter 5, "Ruins as Emotional Landscapes." Where the ruining process attunes the visitor to material memories, this same process attunes the visitor to an object's or site's emotional content. What's more, these emotional objects can be engaged with in the most personal and emotional manner: touch. In allowing visitors to handle objects, ruins thus enable emotional relationships between the visitor and the objects they encounter, and by extension, the past persons the visitor imagines as connected to these objects. Abandoned spaces are thus strongly related to the material culture of emotion. Examining ruins as a case study for the material culture of emotion allowed me to determine what objects and spaces interviewees found more or less emotional, adding to current debates on how objects and sites can be mined for emotions of the past.

The imaginings that the materiality of abandonment evokes, and that visitors in turn construct, are sometimes so intense that the visitor interprets these imaginings as reality in the form of ghost encounters. Working on the shoulders of other material culture scholars and ruin scholars who examined the topic of ghosts, I have studied the imaginings that lead to ghost encounters as an example of the material culture of absence, a burgeoning sub-field of material culture studies. Here, the material culture of absence can be defined as the study of objects that are not in existence, but that persons treat as in existence. In some cases, such as the imaginings that take place in ruins, the material culture of absence can take over the material culture of presence.

Finally, I examined the ways in which my interviewees compared and contrasted contemporary abandoned spaces to museums. In this section, I explored how interviewees use language associated with museums to describe their unique experiences in abandoned spaces, thus pointing towards ruins and museums being similar. I then analyzed the key differences interviewees point out between the two spaces, and how these differences position ruins outside of the traditional heritage sphere. Thus, ruins become alternative museums and heritage sites. These ideas provided the foundation for me to examine the contemporary turn to ruins in the museum sphere, where abandoned sites are being turned into museums and ruined objects are being presented in exhibits. This, I hope, will better define the nature of the materiality of abandonment, and will also be the first time ruins and museums have been compared in a formal manner.

### **So What?**

The significance of this study is, in part, backed by numbers. With the contemporary turn to ruins, the materiality of abandonment has captured the imaginations of huge numbers of people. While these audiences are created out of content that is disseminating online in the form of ruin photographs and news stories, studying the nature of the materiality of abandonment gives some clues as to why so many people find these objects and sites so intensely engaging. The transformation of a site's materiality during the ruining process results in its ability to demand visitors' time and attention. The fact that so many will give abandoned objects and sites so much time and attention when they are in this ruined state points to the importance of understanding this ruined state, how it transforms objects and spaces, and how it affects the individual engaging with these materials.

Better understanding what causes this level of engagement puts forth some answers to current questions in the field of material culture, namely, how objects become charged with memory and emotion. That is, how objects come to materialize memory and emotion, and how they then convey this memory and emotion. In this thesis, the materiality of emotion and memory are highly linked, and provide much of the reasoning behind why individuals find abandoned sites and objects emotive and moving. It is the materiality of abandonment that attunes visitors to material memories, and invites them to think about an object's emotional content. This encourages individuals visiting abandoned sites and engaging with abandoned objects to imagine past persons, as well as past sensoryscapes.

In many ways, this thesis is about how individuals feel close to other individuals through objects. It is about how, when, and why objects become portals to access past persons. It is about how a past person's physicality is remembered in objects via material memories, why these material memories come alive through abandonment, and how contemporary visitors to abandoned spaces engage with these objects, and by extension, the objects' past user(s). It is about why abandonment cues visitors to think about a past person's emotions, and how emotions are materialized in different types of objects. It is, above all else, about how visitors to abandoned spaces imagine the physicality, emotional life, and everyday life, of the site's past inhabitants and objects' past users. It is about how engaging with abandoned objects leads individuals to connect with the past users they imagine on both physical and emotional levels.

This thesis also explores when and why certain situations enable particularly strong connections between individuals and objects, and by extension the persons

behind these objects, as well as what types of objects invite such connections. While ruins enable visitors to be alone with objects, and to engage them with more personal senses such as touch, the objects that are the conduits for these relationships are also the objects that are seen to materialize memory and emotion.

This thesis is also, fundamentally, about how individuals can engage with, and feel close to, persons they do not know, through objects. In contemporary abandoned spaces, visitors interact with objects that relate to persons they do not know in a very intimate and personal way. As such, these abandoned spaces facilitate one-on-one relationships between visitors and unknown past persons. This thesis therefore speaks to ideas regarding how objects act as conduits between, and facilitate connections between, an individual and ‘the other.’ While much work has been done on the ways in which objects become extensions of, and points of access to, loved ones, comparatively little has been done on the ways in which objects connect individuals who are not familiar with each other.<sup>13</sup> This thesis will also examine the potential issues with imagining unknown past persons, and how these issues relate to the problems with misrepresenting past persons.

Where the materiality of abandonment evokes imaginings of past persons and sensoryscapes, this thesis can be conceived of as a case study for the material culture of absence. As such, this thesis addresses the question of when and why certain

---

<sup>13</sup> See the section “The Body, Remembered,” in Chapter 4 of this thesis. Additionally, for a definitive work on the ways objects become embodiments of loved ones, see: Peter Stallybrass, “Worn Worlds: Clothes, Mourning, and the Life of Things,” in *Cultural Memory and the Construction of Identity*, edited by Dan Ben-Amos and Liliane Weissberg (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1999), 27-44.

material landscapes or objects make absent materials or persons *more* potent than materials in the present.

This thesis can also be seen as a case study for how objects are interpreted by individuals when the objects have not been previously interpreted. Where abandoned spaces do not have any interpretation, I have explored how objects ‘speak for themselves.’ As such, I examined the different types of meanings and interpretations visitors to abandoned spaces created, and explored how visitors perceived objects as communicating information.

As abandoned spaces and abandoned objects embody persons and histories that have been forgotten, this thesis explores the material culture of the forgotten, including what types of objects and spaces are more susceptible to being forgotten, and why contemporary individuals might be interested in forgotten materials, histories, and persons. In this vein, this thesis also examines how individuals view contemporary abandoned sites as being similar to, or different to, institutions within traditional remembrance strategies, that is, museums.

Finally, in this thesis I have examined ideas relating to the material culture of the recent past, and how contemporary individuals relate to materials of the recent past. In doing so, I hope to have illuminated some of the ways in which object-person relations function in the contemporary world, what material culture theories might underpin these relations, and what types of methodologies can be used to uncover the structure and meaning of these relations.

Top 100 position ▼	Web headline	Web publication date	Page Views	Web url
1	Edward Snowden: the whistleblower behind the NSA surveillance revelations	09/06/2013	3,911,445	<a href="http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/jun/09/whistleblower-surveillance">http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/jun/09/whistleblower-surveillance</a>
2	Top five regrets of the dying	30/01/2012	3,749,612	<a href="http://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2012/fe/dying">http://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2012/fe/dying</a>
3	Detroit in ruins	31/12/2010	3,709,567	<a href="http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/galler/detroit">http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/galler/detroit</a>

Figure 1 The Guardian’s top three most popular online articles since 2010, with the article “Detroit in Ruins,” in third place. Ami Sedghi, George Arnett, and Chris Moran, “The Guardian’s Top 100: Which Articles Have Been Most Popular?” *The Guardian*, April 17, 2014, accessed April 5, 2015, <http://bit.ly/1itfR46>.

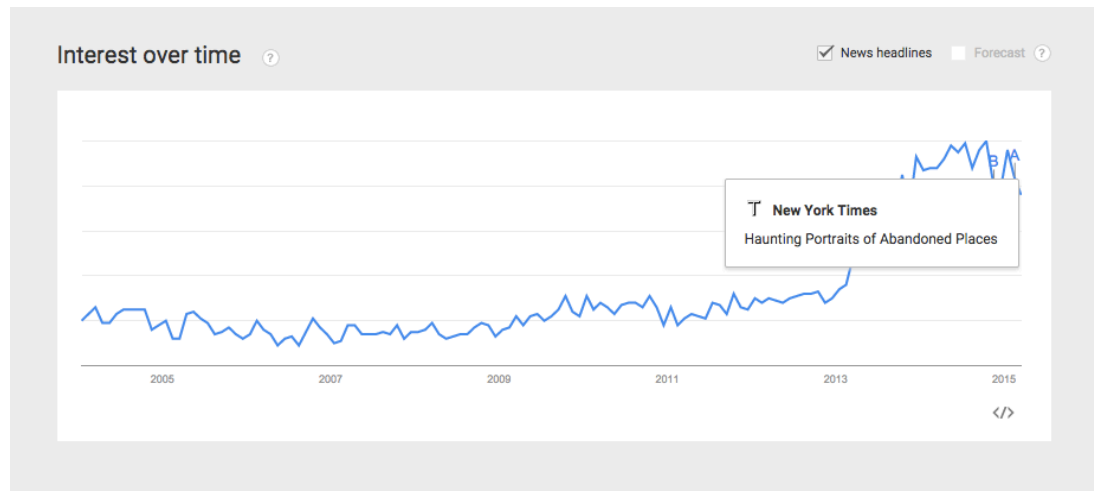


Figure 2 The popularity of Google searches for the term ‘abandoned places’ between 2004-2015. The graph shows how the number of searches skyrocket between 2011 and 2015, and indicates that one of the articles linked to these searches was one published by the New York Times on “Haunting Portraits of Abandoned Places.” Google Trends, “Explore: Abandoned Places,” accessed April 1, 2015, <http://bit.ly/1GusIQx>.



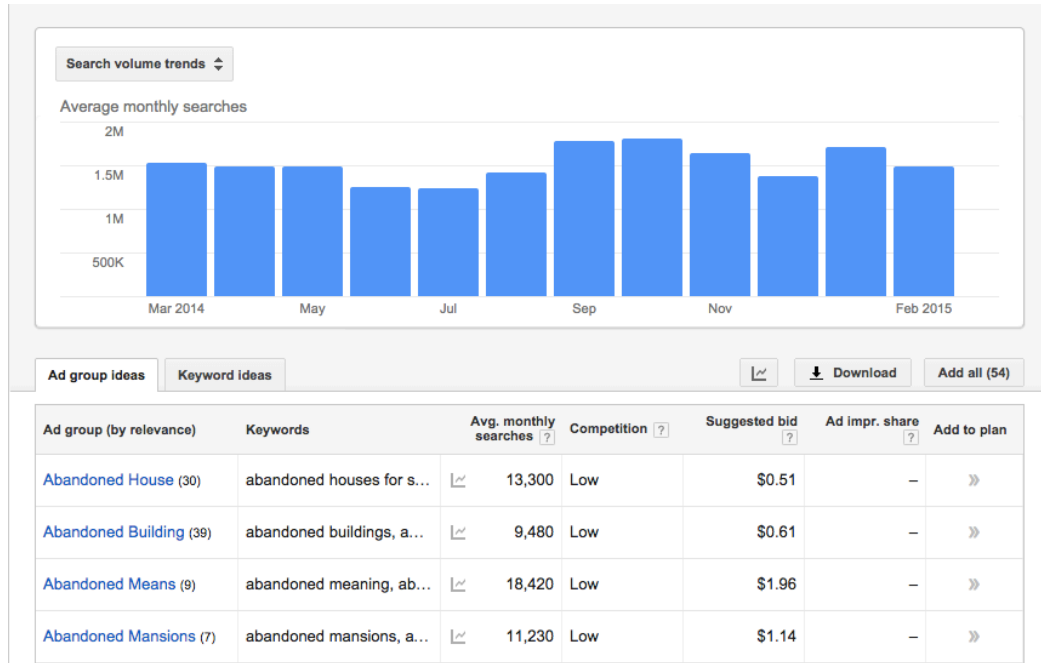


Figure 3 Average monthly Google searches for the term “abandoned,” between March 2015 and February 2015, and the terms that are most often associated with that search. Google Adwords, “Keyword Planner,” accessed April 1, 2015, <http://bit.ly/1Ed8Uj6>.

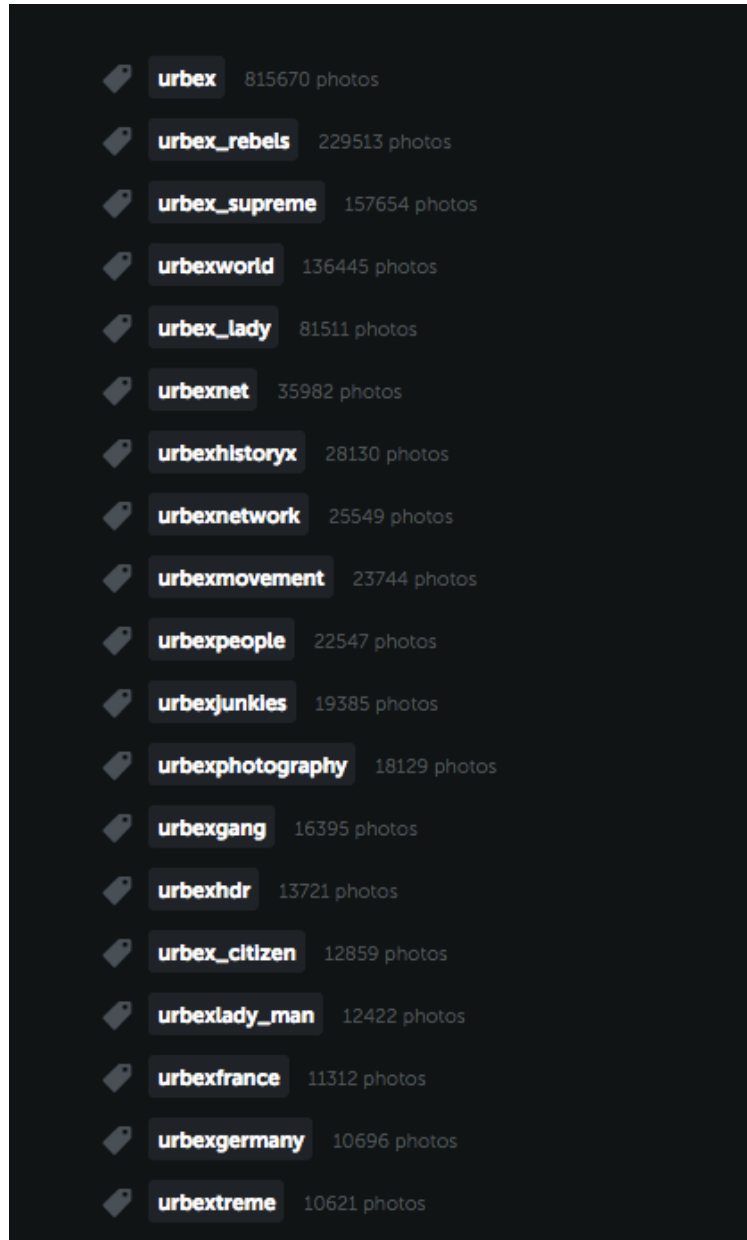


Figure 4 The number of tags for “urbex,” the act of urban exploring and taking photos of your adventures, on the photo sharing site Instagram. Iconosquare, “Results for Urbex,” accessed April 1, 2015, <http://iconosquare.com/search/urbex>.



Figure 5 Hawthorne Hall, an abandoned community center in Philadelphia. This image shows the site's interior and the stage that used to house theatre productions and boxing matches. Photo by Natalie Wright.



Figure 6 One of Philadelphia's abandoned banks. This image shows the scale of the building. Photo by Natalie Wright.



Figure 7 One of the structures making up Ellis Island's abandoned hospital complex. The entire south side of the island is abandoned. Photo by Natalie Wright.



Figure 8 An example of one of JR's installations around the abandoned south side of Ellis Island. JR achieved this by finding photographs of immigrants and medical workers at Ellis Island, enlarging them to life size or larger, and pasting them around buildings. Photo by Natalie Wright.



Figure 9 An unrestored piano sits behind glass in Ellis Island's exhibit "Silent Voices," in which vignettes of abandoned objects fill the room. Photo by Natalie Wright. Courtesy of the National Park Service, Statue of Liberty National Monument and Ellis Island.



Figure 10 A section of abandoned cell blocks in Eastern State Penitentiary, a now stabilized ruin and museum. Photo by Natalie Wright. Eastern State Penitentiary, Philadelphia, PA.



Figure 11 Objects in Eastern State Penitentiary's abandoned collection. These objects will not be conserved, but will remain in their ruined state. Photo by Natalie Wright. Eastern State Penitentiary, Philadelphia, PA.



Figure 12 The laundry facility in ‘the Creamery,’ an abandoned industrial space on the grounds at the Winterthur Museum and Garden. Photo by Natalie Wright.



Figure 13 The interior of an abandoned cottage on the grounds at the Winterthur Museum and Garden. Photo by Natalie Wright.



Figure 14 The abandoned Lansdowne Theatre, in Lansdowne PA. Photo by Natalie Wright.



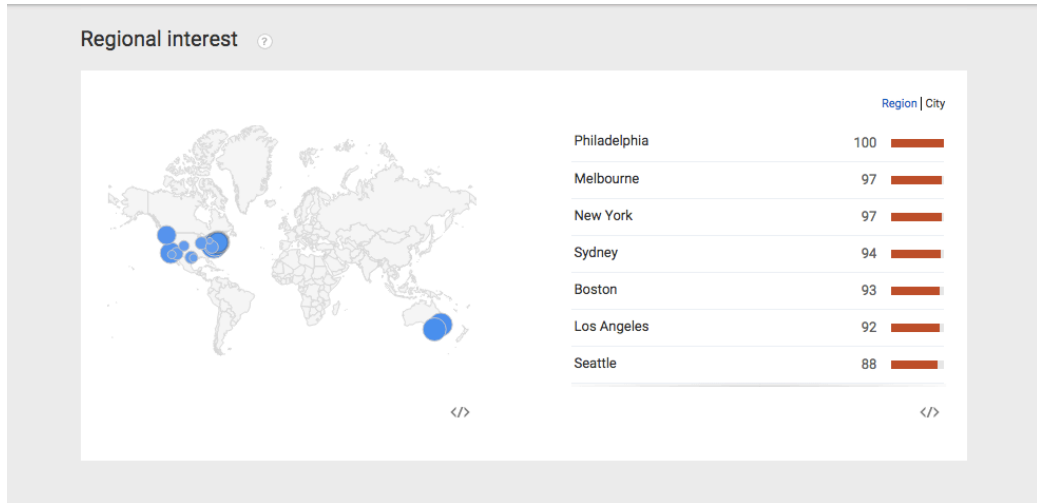


Figure 15 A map showing the areas where the term “abandoned places” was searched the most on Google between 2004-2015. Coming in first is Philadelphia, and in third, New York – both areas that fall within my study’s geographic region. Google Trends, “Explore: Abandoned Places,” accessed April 1, 2015, <http://bit.ly/1GusIQx>.

## Chapter 2

### RUIN HISTORY & THE CONTEMPORARY RUIN

#### Ruin History

In this chapter, I will be examining the history of the fascination with ruins, and will specifically be focusing on how the contemporary ruin is both similar and different to its historical counterparts. To do this, I will analyze how the ‘ideal ruin’ has changed over time, and what form the ideal ruin takes for ruin enthusiasts today. By comparing and contrasting historical ruins with contemporary ruins, I will contextualize the contemporary ruin and today’s ruin enthusiasts, while more precisely defining the nature of these ruins and their enthusiasts.

The fascination with ruins reaches back to antiquity, with periods of intense interest in the eighteenth century and the Victorian era.<sup>14</sup> With the explosion of popularity for elites to attend the Grand Tour throughout the long eighteenth century, the popularity of ruins followed. The ruins these tourists focused on were Greco-Roman, and were from, or purported to be from, antiquity. Artists such as William Kent and Giovanni Battista Piranesi created prints of ruins, while elites collected and brought home pieces of ruins. As the inspiration for prints, poetry, books, paintings, and architectural and decorative arts styles, the influence that these ruins achieved was far reaching.

---

<sup>14</sup> Michael S. Roth, Claire Lyons, and Charles Merewether explain the eighteenth century ideal ruin in their exhibit and accompanying publication *Irresistible Decay: Ruins Reclaimed* (Los Angeles: The Getty Research Institute, 1997)

Shortly thereafter, the famous Victorian craze for ruins took hold. Similarly to the eighteenth century craze, the Victorian craze was an elite phenomenon. Classical and gothic ruins provided the foundation for philosophical discussions, and “served as instruments of contemplative and aesthetic pleasure.”<sup>15</sup> The elite wanted to harness ruins’ intellectual potential, beauty, and contemplative nature, so recreated them *ex novo* in their own back yards as garden follies. By giving owners charge over how they wanted to create the ruins, these follies provide unique insight into the definition of the ideal ruin.

The Victorian ideal ruin could be either gothic or classical, and aged gracefully over time. The ability to age gracefully is dependent on the materials used in the site’s construction, with the most graceful ageing material being stone.<sup>16</sup> The amount of deterioration had to be specified as well, with the perfect level of ruination being when a building still has a recognizable form, but nature and time have taken over such that it is no longer functional. Often, this results in the shell of the building remaining, perhaps without a roof, but now with a grass carpet and vines creeping up surfaces. In these ruins, objects are not left behind. Rather, the building’s skeleton communicates the site’s past use, thereby making the ideal ruin one in which just enough remains to communicate information about the site, while also communicating the time in which the site has survived. As these sites deteriorate at a slow rate over long periods of time, they are seen as inert, giving the impression that they are finished ruining. Finally, where nature has taken over, natural features blend with the stone to create a seamless landscape.

---

<sup>15</sup> Olsen and Pétursdóttir, “Introduction,” 5.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, 5-7.

## The Contemporary Ruin

Contemporary ruins, by nature, are not old; they are from the recent past, that is, they date from the twentieth century to the present day. Without as much time to deteriorate, they are structures that are still in the ruining process.<sup>17</sup> Similarly to the decomposition of the human body, the ancient ruin is akin to a skeleton, while the contemporary ruin is akin to the decaying body.<sup>18</sup> This means that contemporary ruins do not signify graceful aging – a quality that is compounded by the materials used in contemporary building – metal and concrete. Rather than fitting in seamlessly with a bucolic landscape, contemporary ruins are often perceived as blight, a problem that needs to be rectified in order to restore a pristine landscape.

Patterns of abandonment show what types of sites are more likely to be abandoned than others. Contemporary ruins are often the product of creative destruction, the process in which old technologies are replaced by new technologies, and the infrastructure for old technologies is abandoned.<sup>19</sup> By visiting numerous abandoned structures over the course of this thesis, I began to notice types of technologies that were frequently abandoned. In New York's Ellis Island for example, the abandoned isolation hospitals have the exact same industrial laundry units as the Winterthur Museum's abandoned creamery [fig. 16-17]. While the two units had distinctly different clientele (Ellis Island's units were made to wash migrants' clothing

---

<sup>17</sup> See Olsen and Pétursdóttir, "Introduction," 7-8, for a comprehensive explanation of the differences between ancient and contemporary ruins.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 7.

<sup>19</sup> See chapter 7 of Joseph Schumpeter's *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 81-6.

and Winterthur's units were made to wash meat processing workers' uniforms), when examining the two units side by side, they are almost identical. These buildings share another characteristic: rounded ceilings – a tactic used in twentieth century industrial spaces in order to make cleaning and dusting easier [fig. 18-19].<sup>20</sup> Winterthur's creamery also shared technologies with another abandoned space, the elevator operating room in Philadelphia's abandoned bank. Both sites featured sliding doors [fig. 20-21]. Comparing my own experiences with my interviewees' observations, I found another similarity between Winterthur's creamery and the kitchen of an abandoned asylum that photographer Christopher Payne described in our interview: posters mapping out cuts of meat on animals [fig. 22].<sup>21</sup> These spaces all share a common property: they are all functional and industrial, thus relating to the working class. These spaces showcase the behind-the-scenes work of manual labor. In their construction, decisions were made for function, rather than aesthetics, such as the rounded ceilings in Ellis Island and Winterthur's creamery. These spaces, and the objects found within them, are necessary, rather than decorative. In my small sample of abandoned spaces, functional, industrial, twentieth century spaces are more likely to be abandoned.

Analyzing the nature of buildings in this sample reveals yet another pattern: unhappy or negative histories inside buildings are more likely to make the site susceptible to abandonment. Abandoned spaces are often embodiments of marginalized persons and histories. These ruins take the form of abandoned prisons,

---

<sup>20</sup> Tour guide, "Hard Hat Tour of Ellis Island," Ellis Island, October 15, 2014.

<sup>21</sup> Christopher Payne, interviewed by Natalie Wright, December 15, 2014.

mental health institutions, hospitals, drug rehabilitation facilities, and other sites meant to isolate and contain members of society labeled abnormal or dangerous. The sites that I visited that fall under this category include Eastern State Penitentiary, and Ellis Island's isolation hospitals and morgue – a space that was later reused as a detention center for enemy aliens during World War Two.<sup>22</sup> When interviewing photographer Christopher Payne about his project documenting America's abandoned asylums, I asked Payne about whether or not the stigmatization of the asylum patients translated into the stigmatization of the site. He responded, "Totally. There are physical limitations to reuse, I get that, but I really think that the stigma has been passed onto the building...I think the stigma definitely is one of the reasons why they have been so easily dismissed."<sup>23</sup> Similarly, when speaking about the abandonment of Ellis Island's isolation mental health hospitals, Payne stated, "mental health is so misunderstood and there's no money in it, and it's such an internal thing – it doesn't fit neatly into the story of the immigrant, and people don't like to talk about it, so there you go."<sup>24</sup> Payne's observations are echoed in the publication *Changing Places: ReMaking Institutional Buildings*, in which the editors write,

"the assignment of type [of building] is not a value-free process. We attribute 'goodness' to some types; others we find fearful. This is evident in the stigmatization of those places and institutions which have housed marginal populations (ill, insane, criminal). Because the place

---

<sup>22</sup> "Silent Voices," Ellis Island, October 15, 2014.

<sup>23</sup> Christopher Payne, interviewed by Natalie Wright, December 15, 2014.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

has been something we have feared, it is difficult to transform our perceptions of it.”<sup>25</sup>

The stigma experienced by these buildings’ past residents has been transferred to these sites, making them susceptible to abandonment, and by extension, forgetting practices.

Materials that are saved or restored can be seen as associated with collective memory, while abandoned sites and objects are connected to collective forgetting. Where the Western World subscribes to the Aristotlean conception of memory in which objects stand in for memory, decaying or destroyed objects imply forgetting.<sup>26</sup> In this material notion of remembrance and loss, contemporary ruins are the product of decisions that reflect value systems which define what should be remembered or forgotten. Selective remembering and forgetting is done with the intention of forming a collective narrative, and this narrative is the basis for collective identity, making the value system underpinning the selection process definitive of group identity. The fact that ruins fall under the ‘forget’ category means that the persons and stories that these spaces embody are not important to the collective narrative, or that they contend the group’s established and/or aspirational identity.<sup>27</sup> This positioning gives ruins a critical voice that they might not otherwise have if they were part of the ‘remembering’ category.

---

<sup>25</sup> Lynda H. Schneekloth, Marcia F. Feuerstein, Barbara A. Campagna, editors, *Changing Places: ReMaking Institutional Buildings* (Fredonia: White Pine Press, 1992), 205.

<sup>26</sup> Adrian Forty, “Introduction” in *The Art of Forgetting*, edited by Adrian Forty and Susanne Küchler, 1-18 (New York: Berg, 2001), 4.

<sup>27</sup> For a comprehensive text on collective memory and societal/national narratives, turn to Daniel Francis, *National Dreams: Myth, Memory, and Canadian History* (Toronto: Arsenal Pulp Press, 1997).

For individuals who practice ruin lust today, the ruin's characteristics that made it susceptible to abandonment also make it attractive. For these individuals, the ideal ruin is one that challenges canonical histories. This turn to contemporary ruins dovetails with the contemporary turn to marginalized histories – a movement that is trying to produce more democratic and equitable histories. With the rise of post-colonial studies and a greater self-awareness of 'othered' histories, there is a growing feeling that white, male, Anglo-Saxon and protestant histories are not the only important histories. Abandoned spaces thus appeal to this critical voice – an idea Bjørnar Olsen and Pora Pétursdóttir explicate when they write, "...if we understand their agenda correctly it is not one of domestication or normalization, but one of resistance and opposition. In fact, subjecting them to sameness would easily bring their own critical voices to silence."<sup>28</sup> One of the key characteristics of the ideal contemporary ruin is thus its critical voice and its ability to counter the value system employed to categorize the site as worthy of abandonment and forgetting.

Individuals and groups that practice contemporary ruin lust could thus be interested in seeing hegemonic histories be criticized and questioned. This means that in contrast to their older counterparts, contemporary ruin enthusiasts are often not in the group that these hegemonic histories represent. However, similarly to their older counterparts, contemporary ruins can be aestheticized. The aestheticization of contemporary ruins has been labeled ruin porn – a term with negative connotations that refers to urban explorers' aestheticization of the ruin that reflects economic

---

<sup>28</sup> Olsen and Pétursdóttir, "Introduction," 8.



hardship and poverty.<sup>29</sup> Individuals who participate in this type of ruin lust are often not connected to the sites that they visit or photograph, such that they do not feel a personal loss with its demise. Many of my interviewees described their ideal ruin in aesthetic terms, and it is to these descriptions that I now turn.

The aesthetic ingredients for the ideal contemporary ruin are remarkably similar to the Victorian conception of the ideal ruin: a perfect blend between decay and survival.<sup>30</sup> However, the definitions of these ratios differ. For today's ruin enthusiasts, ideal Victorian ruins would be considered too far into the decaying process. In contrast, contemporary ruins should be more intact, and this includes the survival of objects. If possible, a large portion of the site's objects should remain, and these objects should be found in their original context. Instead of crumbling walls and grass carpets, the decay found in contemporary ruins should take the form of peeling paint or wallpaper, a layer of dust, and the minor disintegration or fading of materials such as textiles. During our interview, photographer and urban explorer Zhenya Grinshteyn details his version of the ideal contemporary ruin, stating,

“I love the spaces that look as close as possible to when they were left, but I also really like it when people come in and do graffiti...I like a little bit of destruction because if I walked into a place that looks pristine then it would be like ‘Hey, I’m walking into, say, a hospital taking a picture of this room.’ I like the look of someone coming and flipping a space over and there are windows smashed and vines growing...So there’s sort of a fine mix, I like it to look decrepit and run down but I don’t want it to be so much so that it sort of takes the emotion and the spirit of the place out, cause when it’s totally gutted, it

---

<sup>29</sup> Bjørnar Olsen and Póra Pétursdóttir, “Imaging Modern Decay: The Aesthetics of Ruin Photography,” *Journal of Contemporary Archaeology* 1(2014): 7-23.

<sup>30</sup> Roth, Lyons, and Merewether, *Irresistible Decay*.

can be anything. But when they leave remnants of what it was like and what people could have been possibly doing in here, I think it turns out good – it sort of also gives it that horror movie vibe feel and I like that. I like a mixture of that – I don't like it too clean but I don't like it completely trashed.”<sup>31</sup>

Photographer Christopher Payne also described his perfect ruin in our interview, stating,

“There's a certain amount of dust that you want, but not too much, because dust turns to...plaster dust falls off the walls, and things start to rust, and then after a while you don't know what you're looking at. And then you think 'has this been abandoned for ten or fifty years?' and it starts to obscure what you're trying to study. So there's a fine line of how much dust you want. The things that had the most impact on me were the spaces like the projection room where you open it up and there's just a thin layer of dust because the room has been sealed.”<sup>32</sup>

As these interviewees show, there is perfect blend of decay and survival that allows the visitor to understand both the past use of the site, ideally in detail, but also the time passed between its abandonment and the time of the visit. The scenarios in which these two elements have come together have created some of the most publicized instances of urban exploring, such as the recently discovered Paris time capsule apartment and the French soldier's bedroom.<sup>33</sup> Similarly to the scene described by Payne in which he finds a projection room that was sealed off with only a thin layer of

---

<sup>31</sup> Zhenya Grinshteyn, interview by Natalie Wright, September 23, 2014.

<sup>32</sup> Christopher Payne, interviewed by Natalie Wright, December 16, 2014.

<sup>33</sup> MessyNessy, “The Paris Time Capsule Apartment,” *MessyNessy Chic*, May 9, 2012, accessed September 5, 2014, <http://www.messynessychic.com/2012/05/09/the-paris-time-capsule-apartment/>; Kim Willsher, “French Town Tries to Save First World War Soldier's Room for Posterity,” *The Guardian*, December 28, 2014, accessed January 1, 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/dec/28/french-town-belabre-first-world-war-soldier-hubert-rocherau>.

dust, these contemporary ruins are akin to entering a tomb where all of the objects have remained since the area was closed. In these instances, the visitor feels s/he is the first to discover and enter the space, and thus feels the objects are in their original context, while simultaneously comprehending the passage of time with signifiers of decay such as dust.

By comparing and contrasting past and contemporary ideal ruins, I hope to have more precisely defined the contemporary ruin, including what buildings are more likely to be abandoned, and who is currently engaging in ruin lust. This definition should contextualize the research I present in the following chapters showing the ways in which visitors engage with the material landscape found at these sites.



Figure 16 One of the laundry units at Ellis Island. Photo by Natalie Wright.



Figure 17 One of the laundry units at Winterthur's creamery. Photo by Natalie Wright.



Figure 18 The rounded ceiling at Winterthur's creamery. Photo by Natalie Wright.



Figure 19 The rounded ceiling at Ellis Island. Photo by Natalie Wright.



Figure 20 The sliding door at Winterthur's creamery. Photo by Natalie Wright.



Figure 21 The sliding door in the elevator operating room at the abandoned bank. Photo by Natalie Wright.



Figure 22 The meat cuts posters in Winterthur's creamery. These posters match the exact description of posters that one of my interviewees, Christopher Payne, found in a kitchen at an abandoned mental health facility. Photo by Natalie Wright.

**Chapter 3**  
**SENSES & SOUVENIRS**

**Ruin Sensoryscapes**

The unique material landscape that characterizes contemporary abandoned spaces creates an equally unique sensoryscape, that is, the senses that emerge from interacting with this environment. Interviewees and secondary sources describe the senses that this environment produces, and how these senses further determine their interactions with the objects they encounter. Where senses and object interactions are co-constitutive, examining the senses that abandoned spaces invoke will be the first step in my exploration of object interactions in this unique environment.

This chapter will begin by examining how interviewees enter abandoned buildings and how this leads interviewees to perceive these spaces as a different world. I will then explore how this perception of being in a different world is heightened by the abandoned sensoryscape and the resulting soundscapes, smellscapes, sightscapes, and touchscapes. Finally, I will address the phenomenon of visitors taking ‘souvenirs’ from abandoned spaces, and will explore how this phenomenon is connected to visitors’ perceptions of the abandoned space as exotic and unfamiliar. The examples given by interviewees will provide the context for a more in depth analysis of object-interactions in abandoned spaces for the coming chapters.



For visitors to abandoned spaces, the process of traveling to, and approaching, the space, positions the space as “a world apart.”<sup>34</sup> This is particularly the case for abandoned spaces that are outside of the city. One of my interviewees, Photographer Christopher Payne, introduces this topic in an interview with Metro Focus about his work documenting New York City’s abandoned North Brother Island. Payne explains the process of getting to the island, stating,

“When you first step on the island, you realize that you’re completely alone. It’s actually a very transformative experience, because one minute, you’re in a city – you’re amongst people, you hear the sites and the sounds of the city, and then you get on a boat, and just being on the water, in a small rowboat, is a very transformative, meditative experience. And you see this island getting closer and closer and it becomes less and less of a mirage and it begins to become more real.”<sup>35</sup>

In this statement, Payne at once describes the sensoryscape of the city – its sights and sounds and the spatial environment defined by large groups of people – and frames the abandoned island as separate from this. By describing the boat ride to North Brother Island as transformative, Payne is positing that the city and the island are different worlds and that a transition must occur to leave one world and enter another. Ruin photographer Zhenya Grinshteyn also explained the experience of approaching an abandoned space in our interview, stating,

“...when you go to these places, even when you walk into a lot of these places – like Pennhurst was set in these woods so you walk in through these woods where there’s nothing around you and that already helps to create the emotion and the buildings are all old and you can see the

---

<sup>34</sup> Christopher Payne, interviewed by Natalie Wright, December 16, 2014.

<sup>35</sup> “Christopher Payne’s Story of Deserted North Brother Island,” last modified July 24, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gqwmNapO6lM>.

wood slats and you can sort of relate to how life would have been here in the 1960s.”<sup>36</sup>

As Grinshteyn explains, the process of getting to these spaces creates “the emotion” that becomes the context for which the interior of the space is understood. In both Payne and Grinshteyn’s accounts, the experience of approaching an abandoned space can be understood as crossing a border between one world and another. Passing through this permeable boundary is a transformative experience, and provides the visitor with context for what they can expect upon entering the abandoned space.

Where approaching abandoned buildings away from the city works to foster a feeling of other worldliness, entering abandoned spaces within cities creates this same feeling. In our interview, Zhenya Grinshteyn described the process of entering one of Philadelphia’s abandoned power plants, explaining that he had to step over the Delaware bridge fence, and scale down the bridge wall above the Delaware River in order to get to the only open window. All the while, he had to balance his camera equipment on his back.<sup>37</sup> One of my own experiences mimicked Grinshteyn’s example, wherein I had to climb down an open vent shaft via a ladder to enter the unused building. Philadelphia photographer and blogger Conrad Benner explained the significance of these unorthodox entries when he compared them to his experience of entering an abandoned space that was opened for the public. He remembered, “...you walk in and someone is handing you a pamphlet and asking for your e-mail address, and it’s all those little steps that form your thoughts and push your emotions one way

---

<sup>36</sup> Zhenya Grinshteyn, interview by Natalie Wright, September 23, 2014.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

or another.”<sup>38</sup> Similarly to Grinshteyn’s conception of the approach to an abandoned building shaping “the emotion” of the space, Benner states that the entrance to a building greatly shapes thoughts and emotions via little steps. What’s more, entering an abandoned building via appropriate means, such as going through an open door, produces a drastically different set of thoughts and emotions when compared to those produced from unorthodox entries more typical to urban exploring.

Upon entering abandoned spaces, visitors are most frequently met with absolute darkness, thereby bringing the sightscape, or lack thereof, to the fore [fig. 23]. As Conrad Benner points out in our interview, visitors to abandoned spaces often enter below ground. Without any source of natural or artificial light, the visitor is plunged into total darkness. Benner described this feeling when detailing his visit to Philadelphia’s Divine Lorraine Hotel. He states, “When I went in, the first floor was totally pitch black – you can’t see anything. And a lot of these spaces the first floor is pitch black and you have to crawl over to this staircase and the staircase is just falling apart...”<sup>39</sup> Zhenya Grinshteyn also brought up darkness in our interview when describing his exploration of Pennhurst Asylum in Pennsylvania. He notes, “I don’t know if it’s just from being in the dark and sensory deprivation for so long...but for a split second I saw someone staring at me and then they would just vanish.”<sup>40</sup> As Benner and Grinshteyn explain, these spaces can be incredibly dark, and it is impossible to experience light again until the visitor “crawls over” to a staircase to reach upper floors.

---

<sup>38</sup> Conrad Benner, interview by Natalie Wright, October 18, 2014.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Zhenya Grinshteyn, interview by Natalie Wright, September 23, 2014.

On upper floors, the building's windows illuminate the unique textures of the material landscape produced by abandonment. As a visitor, my eyes were immediately drawn to peeling paint, peeling wallpaper, rusted metals, the omnipresent quality of dust and dirt, molded and crumbling walls, and disintegrating carpets [fig. 24-7]. The surfaces one views in abandoned spaces all show the effect of time and weather, as well as the intrusion of the natural world. Trees grow out of disintegrated building materials, mold creeps down walls, and stalactites hang from concrete ceilings [fig. 28-9]. Without the regimented cleaning schedules meant to keep the natural world at bay, nature quickly invades and in doing so, transforms the material landscape and its associated sightscape.

The intrusion of the natural world, as well as the transformation of materials over time, creates a particular smellscape unique to ruins. Depending on the extent to which the space has been sealed off throughout its time in abandonment, and what climate the ruining process occurs, the smellscape can be characterized by stale air, dust, damp air, and mould. These conditions effect the ways in which the materials left in the building transform, defining the smellscape made by molded clothing, industrial products, or even food. Photographer Andre Govia discusses the different smellscapes he has encountered in ruins in a PBS article about his work where he states, "You can kind of tell where a place is if you know what your decay is. I rather enjoy it — the different decay and different smells."<sup>41</sup> Olivier Choppin-Janvry and Anna McWilliams speak to this as well, as Choppin-Janvry opened the sealed Paris time capsule flat and

---

<sup>41</sup> Victoria Fleischer, "Urban Explorer Reveals an Abandoned World, Frozen in Time," *PBS Newshour*, February 20, 2015, accessed March 1, 2015, <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/art/photos-enter-an-abandoned-world-frozen-in-time/>.

remembered the overwhelming smell of dust, while McWilliams encountered the smell of mold and damp air when visiting ruined Czech Republic border guard stations.<sup>4243</sup> While ruins can differ in their respective smellscapes, these smellscapes share a fundamental characteristic: their overpowering nature.

For interviewees, the lack of restrictions regarding what can be touched, handled, or broken, in ruins makes these spaces highly tactile. In Winterthur's abandoned creamery for example, I found a number of books that I was able to pick up and flip through [fig. 30]. I could examine any objects that drew my attention. Some visitors take advantage of this fact by engaging with the material in another way: breaking it. Broken windows, toilet seats, and sinks are extremely common in these spaces [fig. 31]. What's more, open barriers such as broken windows leave air free to flow around a space, changing the temperature of the area drastically and periodically touching with visitor with breeze. I certainly experienced this throughout my research, as I felt a summer breeze throughout Philadelphia's abandoned bank, and had to seek out warmth when exploring through the winter months. The broken glass that determines these temperatures also creates a different tactile experience: stepping on the broken glass that now covers the floors. This is the most cited tactile experience in ruins, that is, the feeling of ruined materials underfoot. The experience of broken glass underfoot is also heavily connected to another sensescape: soundscapes.

---

<sup>42</sup> MessyNessy, "The Paris Time Capsule Apartment."

<sup>43</sup> Anna McWilliams, "Borders In Ruin," in *Ruin Memories: Materialities, Aesthetics, and the Archaeology of the Recent Past*, ed. by Bjørnar Olsen and Póra Pétursdóttir (New York: Routledge, 2014) 390.

For every interviewee, stepping on broken glass and the crackling sound that emanates throughout the space, brings the ruin's soundscape to the fore. The main characteristic of the ruin soundscape is silence. Stepping on glass is jarring and memorable because the resulting loud sound cuts through the surrounding silence. Olivier Choppin-Janvry describes the silence he experience in the Paris time capsule apartment as "overwhelming."<sup>44</sup> When this silence is broken it can be quite a shocking experience. In a short film by Jon Sevik about Philadelphia's urban explorers, Sevik interviews an explorer who explains how stepping on glass scared the birds in the building into flight, which in turn scared him. He states,

"I made a step and a piece of glass cracked, and I swear, every bird flew off at the same time – I had no idea what was going on, if something was collapsing or what because there was so much noise. After a while it calmed down, and that's when I realized that I was there by myself. Just nobody else."<sup>45</sup>

As this explorer explains, the silence broken by his step and the sound of the birds' wings notified him of the revelation that he was entirely alone in a very large space. In the explorer's statement above, he connects the soundscape of ruins to the sense of being alone, and by extension, being alone in such a large space.

Where urban explorers are often the only people present in an abandoned space, the scale of the space becomes much larger, and this large scale has an effect on the resulting sensoryscape and the visitor's body. My meeting with Matt Schultz, owner of Philadelphia's Lansdowne Theatre, touched on these ideas. As we stood at

---

<sup>44</sup> MessyNessy, "The Paris Time Capsule Apartment."

<sup>45</sup> "'Abandoned Philadelphia:' A Short Film by Jon Sevik," last modified December 3, 2013, <http://streetsdept.com/2013/12/03/abandoned-philadelphia-a-short-film-by-jon-sevik/>.

the front of the stage, Schultz explained the space's acoustics to me. Suddenly stomping one foot onto the ground, the sound of his footstep reverberated around the entire room, echoing five or six times. Without people to fill the seats, Schultz explained, the sound is not absorbed and thus bounces off the walls. Being alone thus impacts the soundscape of a given space.

Being alone in an abandoned building also changes the perceived scale of the space. In this same conversation with Schultz, he described how different the scale felt when the seats were filled with visitors [fig. 32]. When guests entered the theatre, the space got much smaller. This phenomenon also takes place in much larger spaces, such as abandoned factories and power plants, where the scale of the space is enlarged exponentially when a visitor is alone. Zhenya Grinshteyn explains this in our interview when describing his adventures in the Delaware Generating System, stating,

“...that thing [the main chamber] is eight stories tall and easily a football field across and you can stand from the bottom and look up or you can climb the whole building and stand on this really narrow service walkway on the eighth story and look down onto these massive craters.”<sup>46</sup>

As Grinshteyn shows, the body occupies a comparably tiny space in comparison to the scale of the building. While the body is made to feel smaller, Grinshteyn expresses a kind of excitement about the massive space that he can claim for himself. Here, Grinshteyn may feel something akin to the sublime, where the abandoned space creates great vistas of the space that only he occupies.

Finally, all of these senses are heightened by an awareness of danger. Googling urban exploration will bring up any number of news articles that detail stories of urban

---

<sup>46</sup> Zhenya Grinshteyn, interview by Natalie Wright, September 23, 2014.

explorers who have fallen through roofs or floors and have subsequently faced terrible injuries or death.<sup>47</sup> The process of entering and exploring abandoned spaces is always a risk. As such, explorers have to be extremely careful about their movements – a state that requires explorers to heighten their senses. Photographer and blogger Conrad Benner synthesized this concept well in our interview when he stated,

“...you’re so aware of your surroundings – danger is sort of everywhere because there could be a crazy homeless person or the floor could give out. And you also do want to walk without your friends cause you’re all looking for different stuff, but you want to know where they are and think ‘OK she’s over there and he’s over there, so I could go and get them in a second.’ Your senses are so heightened – you’re experiencing everything on a different level.”<sup>48</sup>

All of these sensory experiences work together to produce the belief that abandoned spaces are otherworldly. As Chris Payne explained in his interview about New York City’s abandoned North Brother Island, the process of getting to the island showed him how the city’s sensoryscape differed from the island’s sensoryscape.<sup>49</sup>

Contemporary ruin scholars such as Tim Edensor posit that ruins engage senses in such different ways because they fall outside of modern city planning, which works towards controlling sensory experiences and keeping the natural world at bay.<sup>50</sup> While

---

<sup>47</sup> Jennifer Lin, “Plunge Inside Divine Lorraine Teaches Temple Daredevil a Hard Lesson,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, December 5, 2012, accessed April 5, 2015, [http://articles.philly.com/2012-12-05/news/35597229\\_1\\_divine-lorraine-brian-jerome-rainy-night](http://articles.philly.com/2012-12-05/news/35597229_1_divine-lorraine-brian-jerome-rainy-night).

<sup>48</sup> Conrad Benner, interview by Natalie Wright, October 18, 2014.

<sup>49</sup> “Christopher Payne’s Story of Deserted North Brother Island,” last modified July 24, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gqwmNapO6IM>.

<sup>50</sup> Tim Edensor, *Industrial Ruins: Space, Aesthetics, and Materiality* (New York: Berg, 2005) 84-5.



this theory may be part of it, especially with regards to keeping persons safe, I believe that ruins also fall outside of material landscapes of routine. Individuals encounter very similar material worlds in their day-to-day actions, such as going to work and going home. Where ruins fall outside of this expected material landscape, their experience can be likened to that of traveling [fig. 33]. For all of my interviewees, the different sensoryscape they experience in ruins results in their senses being heightened and the overall feeling of escape.

In our interview, Conrad Benner spoke of how visiting ruins engendered a feeling of escape. He states, “I think of this as why you go to graveyards to hang out with your friends as kids, so there’s this sense of escape – you’re not in the city, you’re not in a café, you’re not in a business, you’re not at home – you’re somewhere that’s open and that in itself is inspiring...”<sup>51</sup> Similarly, in my interview with Christopher Payne, he describes abandoned spaces as a kind of “dream world.”<sup>52</sup>

Yet, the “real world,” the modern sensoryscape, asserts itself into the abandoned space’s dream world in interesting ways. This more frequently occurs with abandoned spaces in or close to cities. Because sound can travel, some interviewees report hearing noise from the cityscape, but feeling as though they are outside of it. In our interview, Christopher Payne explained this in relation to his visits to North Brother Island, stating,

“...part of what made it so contemplative was that transition, that transformation from being in a city one minute and then being on this island the next. And being in these woods. I think maybe if you were in

---

<sup>51</sup> Conrad Benner, interview by Natalie Wright, October 18, 2014.

<sup>52</sup> Christopher Payne, interviewed by Natalie Wright, December 16, 2014.

a different place, if North Brother was out in the country, it would just be kind of typical, but the fact that it was in the city – that’s what made it so you stop and look around because you still heard the city but your eyes were telling you the different story.”<sup>53</sup>

Payne elaborates on this idea in his interview with the BBC, in which he explains that he heard the sounds of New York in the form of the Mister Frosty [ice cream] Truck.<sup>54</sup>

Conrad Benner reports a very similar story when he describes his exploration of Philadelphia’s abandoned subway stations, stating that “...you’re a good twenty minutes from any exit...and you can hear the trains. And the thing about a lot of these spaces is that they give you a sense of escape, same as if you go to a park or a cemetery.”<sup>55</sup> In these examples, the trains and the Mr. Frosty Truck are the sound of the real world just outside of Payne and Benner’s sightscape. I had a similar experience at one of Philadelphia’s abandoned banks, yet for me the real world interjected via my sightscape. As I was walking through the building’s corridors on the ground floor, I was walking parallel to pedestrians walking down the street. While I could see them, they were less likely to look in and see me. Christopher Payne described a similar experience in our interview when he spoke about his work documenting New York’s abandoned subway stations, explaining, “There were buildings that would be right on the sidewalk and I could see out but because it was dark inside people couldn’t necessarily look in. You feel like you’re in a different time than the world that is just a few feet away. That’s just something that one doesn’t

---

<sup>53</sup> Christopher Payne, interviewed by Natalie Wright, December 16, 2014.

<sup>54</sup> “New York’s Abandoned Island,” last modified May 24, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sPOz5cfR5IE>.

<sup>55</sup> Conrad Benner, interview by Natalie Wright, October 18, 2014.

experience very often.”<sup>56</sup> The routine, everyday world thus inserts itself into the ruin sensoryscape in different ways. Where there is a border between the real world and the dream world of ruins, sounds travel across this border into the ruin’s sensoryscape. However, the modern sightscape acts to reaffirm this border, showing the visitor that they are a world apart.

### **Ruin Souvenirs**

One fascinating phenomenon associated with the perception of ruins as being a world apart is the popularity of visitors taking souvenirs. To discuss this, I will be using Danielle M. Lasusa’s definition of “souvenir,” which is “anything that acts as a token of one’s experience, whether it is bought in a shop or not. It is any physical object that can be taken away from a place of experience that acts to represent that place or experience...”<sup>57</sup> I will examine two facets of the souvenir collecting process: the act of collecting items, and their presentation in interviewees’ homes after this collection. I will apply Danielle Lasusa and Beverly Gordon’s theories on the nature of the souvenir to interviewees’ souvenir collecting practices, as well as my own, to find out more about the material engagement that produces these collecting practices and object presentation habits.

In her article, “The Souvenir: Messenger of the Extraordinary,” Beverly Gordon writes, “People feel the need to bring things home with them from the sacred, extraordinary time or space, for home is equated with ordinary, mundane time and

---

<sup>56</sup> Christopher Payne, interviewed by Natalie Wright, December 16, 2014.

<sup>57</sup> Danielle M. Lasusa, “Eiffel Tower Key Chains and Other Pieces of Reality: The Philosophy of Souvenirs,” *The Philosophical Forum* 38 (2007): 274.

space,”<sup>58</sup> and later, “As artifacts saved as reminders of a particular heightened reality, souvenirs have a great deal to tell us about the way that reality was experienced.”<sup>59</sup> Gordon’s statements about the ordinary nature of everyday life, the extraordinary nature of spaces outside the everyday, and the way the extraordinary heightens senses, strongly echoes my interviewees’ experiences. Further, Lasusa points out that souvenirs are products of tourism, where the word tourism implies that the tourist travels to the extraordinary and then returns to the ordinary.<sup>60</sup> This is certainly the case for ruins, as a typical trip length to explore an abandoned space lasts six to eight hours, taking the visitor out of the ordinary sensoryscape for less than a day. Ruins can thus be conceived of as similar spaces to regions abroad. What’s more, the people who once inhabited these ruins can be thought of as individuals from another culture – the culture of the recent past. Given the parallels between abandoned spaces and tourist practices, my interviewees’ collection of ruin souvenirs can be contextualized by theories of collecting souvenirs via travel.

Where there are many different types of souvenirs tourists can collect or purchase, the nature of abandoned spaces limits these types made possible by urban exploration. Unlike tourist destinations, ruins are not associated with an economy of production and consumption of souvenirs. That is, the souvenirs that urban explorers

---

<sup>58</sup> Beverly Gordon, “The Souvenir: Messenger of the Extraordinary,” *Journal of Popular Culture* 20 (1986): 136.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid*, 144-5.

<sup>60</sup> Lasusa, “Eiffel Tower Key Chains and Other Pieces of Reality,” 272.

collect are never in a commodity phase, and thus never have a monetary value.<sup>61</sup> Rather, their value is based on the context in which they are found, and the associations urban explorers have with that context. Without this economy of production and consumption of commodities, the type of souvenir gathered at abandoned spaces is very specific: what Gordon calls “piece-of-the-rock” souvenirs.<sup>62</sup> This category of souvenirs includes objects that are gathered, rather than purchased, and is the result of foraging for, or stumbling across, objects.<sup>63</sup> The specificity of the type of souvenir made possible by ruins allows for an in depth case study of this souvenir category, and how it is collected and displayed.

Interviewees frequently explain that the souvenirs they collect have no monetary value, but that the object’s value is rooted in sentimentality, and that this sentimentality is the product of a personal connection they experienced with the object. Zhenya Grinshteyn explained this in our interview when he said, “The only other time [I took a souvenir] was when I grabbed the book from the school that had special meaning to me...”<sup>64</sup> Christopher Payne also referenced these ideas when he stated,

---

<sup>61</sup> See Arjun Appadurai’s introduction for *The Social Life of Things*, for a detailed description on how objects travel in and out of the commodity phase. Arjun Appadurai, “Introduction,” in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, edited by Arjun Appadurai, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 3-63.

<sup>62</sup> Gordon, “The Souvenir,” 141-2.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid, 141-2.

<sup>64</sup> Zhenya Grinshteyn, interview by Natalie Wright, September 23, 2014.

“...so you have to try to take certain things along the way that makes you feel better, in a way, when you establish a connection. The artifacts are a way of bringing a little piece of it with you, something that you can just, it’s just a little treasure – it doesn’t have any monetary value, it’s sentimental.”<sup>65</sup>

Ruin souvenirs are thus often chosen for their role in a personal relationship felt by the urban explorer – a relationship that is made even stronger by the act of finding and collecting the item.<sup>66</sup> Rather than purchasing an item or receiving the found item from someone else, the process of finding and taking an item strengthens that individual’s relationship with the object. In this way, these souvenirs capture the context of the collection process and the memories associated with these actions.

Visitors to abandoned spaces also frequently take objects that are specific to the place they explore, or encapsulate the experience of that place well. For example, Christopher Payne frequently collects items that have an institution’s name on them, including lab beakers, an industrial fan, as well as maps showing the property’s scale and specificities. Similarly to other types of tourism souvenirs that have a place’s name on them, these objects directly refer to the space in which Payne found them and collected them.<sup>67</sup> In this way, they work to embody that specific space. In “The Souvenir,” Gordon refers to souvenirs that have place names on them as sign souvenirs. The fact that ruin souvenirs can at once be “piece-of-the-rock” souvenirs

---

<sup>65</sup> Christopher Payne, interviewed by Natalie Wright, December 15, 2014.

<sup>66</sup> Gordon theorizes that piece-of-the-rock souvenirs might have more meaning if the individual who owns the souvenir is also the person who found it, but Gordon cannot take a stance on this as she does not have an example to draw from. Gordon, “The Souvenir,” 141.

<sup>67</sup> Gordon speaks about the types of souvenirs that have a geographic name inscribed on them, and categorizes them as sign souvenirs. See: Gordon, “The Souvenir,” 139.

and “sign” souvenirs points to the fact that the categories Gordon has created can be mixed and matched, as some objects inhabit multiple categories. While ruin souvenirs are always “piece-of-the-rock” souvenirs, they can simultaneously inhabit other souvenir categories, too.

The embodiment of specific spaces becomes especially potent when objects represent buildings that have been razed – a frequently occurring phenomenon for abandoned buildings. Similarly to an ephemeral trip abroad, visitors perceive the ability to explore abandoned spaces as ephemeral based on the knowledge that someday it will either be renovated or razed. This ephemerality is a strong motivational factor for urban explorers to collect. Christopher Payne explained this in our interview, saying,

“I’ve taken a lot of things from the hospitals – little souvenirs. Things that mean a lot to me, not because I’m a treasure hunter – it’s almost like I feel like I’m rescuing them...I’ve kind of extracted what I wanted but the buildings are still there and they’re going to be destroyed and the artifacts are going to be destroyed. And so you have to try to take certain things along the way that makes you feel better... there is that experience of touching things and reclamation – giving it a new life.”<sup>68</sup>

Though Payne insists he is not a collector, he uses language and reasoning that echoes many collectors. Very frequently, collectors justify their purchases by claiming that they are saving the object and giving it a new life.<sup>69</sup> What’s more, Payne describes his actions as “collecting.” Later in the interview, Payne expresses another aspect of the

---

<sup>68</sup> Christopher Payne, interviewed by Natalie Wright, December 15, 2014.

<sup>69</sup> For a source on the psychology of collecting, see Roger Cardinal and J. Elsner’s interview with lifelong collector Robert Opie: Roger Cardinal and J. Elsner, “‘Unless you do these crazy things...’ An Interview with Robert Opie,” in *The Cultures of Collecting*, edited by R. Cardinal and J. Elsner (London: Reaktion Books, 1994), 25-48.

collector's psyche: connoisseurship, that is, the ability to discern objects based on their material character.

After visiting hundreds of America's abandoned asylums, Payne became a connoisseur of the material culture found in these institutions, and employed this in his collecting practices. He states,

“In terms of discriminating...when you do this for a living, you go to these places with expectations of what they could be, because you know what they looked like originally and you know all the stuff they had in them, and so you're always looking for the relics, and they're very few and far between. Most of the stuff is just trashed or rusted,” and later, “The objects that I would look for would either be medically related, or have some kind of beauty in industrial design. Or it would be unique to that hospital, or would really shed light on the way they functioned.”<sup>70</sup>

Thus, Payne is utilizing a discerning eye that he has developed over many visits to abandoned hospitals and interactions with the materials therein.

Where the discerning eye allows Payne to determine what he should or should not collect, another set of rules control what explorers should or should not take: the informal code of conduct that explorers follow when they visit a space. Despite the fact that every interviewee collected souvenirs, they all began the description of their collecting practices by stating that they do not normally collect souvenirs. Apart from the illegality of taking objects out of these abandoned spaces, interviewees more often cite the moral implications of taking away items. This is because abandoned spaces are finite resources of objects. My interviewees' main concern about collecting ruin souvenirs is that taking the objects away for themselves will spoil the experience that they were afforded for others. In saying this, the interviewees reveal more about the

---

<sup>70</sup> Christopher Payne, interviewed by Natalie Wright, December 16, 2014.



code of behavior regarding what items are OK to take and what items are not. As Zhenya Grinshteyn stated in our interview, “I usually don’t like to [take objects] because that sort of goes with the fact that I don’t want to disturb the space for other people who come through and also it’s already bad enough that I’m in there so I also don’t want to take anything with me.”<sup>71</sup> Andre Govia takes an even firmer stance on collecting in the PBS article about his ruin photography, stating, “We don’t damage anything. We don’t break into a building ... We never remove items from a building, never deface a building... If somebody is found to have removed an item or someone is found to have damaged a property to gain entry, then they are very much frowned upon and often outcast.”<sup>72</sup> However, my interviewees are more flexible about these rules than Govia. In our discussion, Christopher Payne denounced the practice of taking objects, but only in certain areas, such as an abandoned museum within one of the hospitals he documented – an area that prompted him to say, “I would *never* take any of that stuff.”<sup>73</sup> In defining what objects are OK or not to take, it seems my interviewees always avoid objects that seem integral to the space. Instead, the items that they take are viewed as less significant, which often translates into taking small objects, or objects that are found in multiples.

As a researcher, I could not take anything out of buildings myself, but I was once given an item by the caregiver of one of Winterthur’s abandoned cottages. My souvenir was a piece of coal from the building’s basement where there was once a

---

<sup>71</sup> Zhenya Grinshteyn, interview by Natalie Wright, September 23, 2014.

<sup>72</sup> Fleischer, “Urban Explorer Reveals an Abandoned World, Frozen in Time.”

<sup>73</sup> Christopher Payne, interviewed by Natalie Wright, December 16, 2014.

functional coal furnace [fig. 34-5]. In this case, I believe the caretaker felt it appropriate to give me this small memento because there were so many other pieces of coal that littered the ground and filled the furnace. Zhenya Grinshteyn expressed similar views on the subject of taking other things that are seemingly insignificant, saying, "...there have been times when I've taken a trinket or two, like when I was at the hospital I took a calling card from the hospital that I'm sure no one would miss..."<sup>74</sup> In a previous statement, Grinshteyn described the hospital he visited as being filled with patient information, making this calling card a tiny portion of the ruin's material landscape. Similarly to the piece of coal, the calling card is a diminutive object, as Grinshteyn alludes to in his use of the adjective "trinket." Photographer Marisa Scheinfeld also collected miniature items in her documentary project capturing the abandoned Catskills resorts. In the New York Times article written about her photography show, "Echoes of the Borscht Belt," Edward Rothstein writes, "Hints of that life can also be glimpsed in a nearby display case featuring souvenirs, many of them from Ms. Scheinfeld's personal collection: matchbooks, napkins, menus, poolside photographs and images of the swankier hotels' performers: Sammy Davis Jr., Eddie Cantor, Duke Ellington."<sup>75</sup> Smaller items are less likely to define a space, and on a practical level, they are easier to travel with as the visitor explores extraordinary spaces and then returns to ordinary spaces. This same reasoning can be applied to ordinary tourist souvenirs, such as miniature Eiffel Towers.

---

<sup>74</sup> Zhenya Grinshteyn, interview by Natalie Wright, September 23, 2014.

<sup>75</sup> Edward Rothstein, "Punch Lines, Reverberating in the Ruins," *New York Times*, September 25, 2014, accessed September 27, 2014, <http://nyti.ms/1AzBvvt>.

The items that explorers acquire are displayed or contained in interesting ways in the collectors' homes. In Gordon's article, she poses questions for further research, including, "What happens when the souvenir is brought home? Is it more likely to be displayed or put away somewhere, out of sight? Does the likelihood of its being displayed increase with a particular souvenir category, or with its associational value?"<sup>76</sup> Some of these questions can be answered for souvenirs collected during visits to abandoned buildings, specifically relating to Gordon's conception of the "piece-of-the-rock" souvenir.

When asked whether or not he displays his collected items, Christopher Payne responded,

"Some of them – the operating light is the first thing you see. There's a sign from a bowling alley that's right above the front door, so yeah – where I can. A lot of it is in a display case, but I don't get it and think about how I'm going to display it, but it's nice to share them."<sup>77</sup>

In his interview Payne explains how he understands many of these objects to be both art and personal mementos, and displays them as such. When displayed, these objects transform into art objects, such as the operating lamp that is the first thing that visitors see, which Payne collected for its unique industrial design. Though this lamp is still operational, and thus utilitarian, Payne ascribes its value in aesthetic rather than functional terms.<sup>78</sup> Zhenya Grinshteyn also reflected on how souvenirs could become

---

<sup>76</sup> Gordon, "The Souvenir," 144.

<sup>77</sup> Christopher Payne, interviewed by Natalie Wright, December 16, 2014.

<sup>78</sup> Lasusa speaks about the transformation souvenirs go through when they reach their owner's home, as they are no longer used for their intended purpose and are instead shelved for display. Lasusa, "Eiffel Tower Key Chains and Other Pieces of Reality," 275.

art in our interview when he stated, “Yeah, I do show that stuff. There’s a sign I have that says ‘Confined space, entry by permit only,’ and other small things that are usually room decorations that become art to me.”<sup>79</sup> The process of transforming these items into art for display purposes is similar to the aestheticization of ruins that has created the term ruin porn. Seeing these spaces in aesthetic terms translates into seeing the objects that they contain in the same light.

While some tourists display souvenirs as proof that they traveled in an effort to increase their perceived cultural capital, interviewees describe the presentation of these objects as a means to share objects of personal significance. Where ruin souvenirs are often a product of a personal connection with an object, compounded by the personal nature of the object’s acquisition, the meaning behind the ways in which these objects are displayed is more strongly connected to the display of sentimental objects. As Payne stated, he wished to share these objects, and in doing so, the memories he has accrued by visiting these sites.

The personal nature of these objects also comes to the fore when interviewees describe containing and protecting ruin souvenirs away from the public eye. Interviewees such as Zhenya Grinshteyn render these personal items more private by boxing them up and only taking them out on occasion. He explains, “The smaller stuff I keep in a box, like a memo I have from the Tastycake factory, and procedures for feeding psychiatric patients in the hospital.”<sup>80</sup> The hidden nature of these objects signifies their private nature, and once again reinforces the nature of the connections visitors feel to certain objects in abandoned spaces.

---

<sup>79</sup> Zhenya Grinshteyn, interview by Natalie Wright, September 23, 2014.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

Souvenirs are just one example of how urban explorers perceive abandoned spaces as a world apart from their everyday experiences. Where abandoned spaces foster extraordinary sensoryscapes, and thus heighten senses, they are seen as a means to escape the mundane. Yet, the modern sensoryscape inserts itself into the abandoned space in different ways, either transgressing or reinforcing borders separating the “dream world” from the “real world.” The unique material landscape in ruins creates equally unique sensory experiences, and these sensory experiences then lead to particular engagements with the material landscape. While the collection and display of souvenirs is one of these engagements, I will be exploring many more throughout the course of this thesis.



Figure 23 Ruin Sightscape: the entrance to the abandoned bank. On the left, natural light comes in from a ventilation shaft, and on the right, the basement is pitch black. Photo by Natalie Wright.



Figure 24 Detail of peeling paint. Photo by Natalie Wright.



Figure 25 A rusted hand towel dispenser, and peeling wallpaper behind it. Photo by Natalie Wright.



Figure 26 Natural light pours in from the elevator shaft to reveal debris that has come down from crumbling walls. Photo by Natalie Wright.



Figure 27 Materialization of time passing: Detail of disintegrating carpet. Photo by Natalie Wright.





Figure 28 An otherworldly scene: A tree growing out of crumbling debris. Outside the window are shops below. Photo by Natalie Wright.



Figure 29 An otherworldly scene: Stalactites fall from the ceiling, as minerals from the concrete drip down over time. Photo by Natalie Wright.



Figure 30 Leafing through books: A book I found in Winterthur's creamery about how to correctly make injections into animals. Photo by Natalie Wright.



Figure 31 Broken things: a smashed toilet seat. Photo taken by Natalie Wright.



Figure 32 Being alone: The empty Lansdowne theatre. The space seems vast when there is no one else there. Photo by Natalie Wright.



Figure 33 An otherworldly scene: a ceiling has fallen down to reveal its structure beneath. Photo by Natalie Wright.



Figure 34 The basement of the abandoned cottage at Winterthur: pieces of coal litter the ground around the building's furnace. Photo by Natalie Wright.



Figure 35 My souvenir: a piece of coal from Winterthur's cottage, given to me by the site's caretaker. Photo by Natalie Wright.

## Chapter 4

### MATERIAL MEMORY IN ABANDONED SPACES

#### Material Memory Defined

In this chapter, I will examine the ways in which objects in abandoned spaces ‘remember’ their past users in the form of material memory. In contrast to the mental faculty of memory, material memory refers to the marks left on objects by their users, marks one of my interviewees calls “witness marks.”<sup>81</sup> As individuals physically interact with material objects, these interactions sometimes leave witness marks. Such marks reflect the agency the user and object have exerted on one another. In this case, agency refers to the ability to act. Objects exert a particular kind of agency by their ability to exert influence over their users on a physical and emotional level.<sup>82</sup> On one hand, the object’s physical properties determine the user’s physical engagement with the object, such as a chair influencing its user’s position. On the other hand, these same properties affect the user’s emotions via their understanding of the object and the associations they make with these properties. While the individual user can be seen as having full agency in his or her ability to act, within the confines of his or her mental and physical abilities, the object influences the user’s agency when the user engages

---

<sup>81</sup> Sean Kelley, interviewed by Natalie Wright, November 21, 2014.

<sup>82</sup> See: Daniel Miller, “Materiality: an Introduction,” in *Materiality*, edited by Daniel Miller (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005) 1-50, for a compilation of different theorists on the subject of object and human agency, specifically pages 11 through 15.

the object. The object influences the user by changing physical movements and thought patterns. Witness marks are thus the material traces of an interaction between the human body and the object, in which a negotiation occurred between two agents exerting different kinds of agency.

Witness marks can also result from interactions between objects, whereby the agency objects exert influence the physicality of other objects. Thus, when objects interact, witness marks trace how these objects have engaged with one another. A textile that has rested atop a metal hook, for example, may result in the textile memorializing this interaction with a rust stain.

Witness marks can be broken down into two categories: routinized material memory and momentary material memories. Routinized material memory refers to witness marks that result from long-term interactions between people and objects. These long-term interactions are based out of routines characterized by frequently distracted actions such as walking on a carpet or shifting around in a chair. Over time, these repeated actions create wear on the object, and these wear patterns are indicative of the body that created them. The way that different materials wear in different ways shows how objects ‘take the body in.’<sup>83</sup> Clothing, for example, takes the body in by molding to the wearer’s shape over time, as well as taking in aspect’s of the user’s character such as their scent.<sup>84</sup> Routinized memories also highlight the particular

---

<sup>83</sup> See: Peter Stallybrass, “Worn Worlds: Clothes, Mourning, and the Life of Things,” in *Cultural Memory and the Construction of Identity*, edited by Dan Ben-Amos and Liliane Weissberg, 27-44 (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1999), for an incredible work on the meaning of clothes and the idea of material memory.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

portions of the user's body that engaged the objects to leave such memories, such as feet, hands, fingers, torsos, and the like.

Momentary memories, on the other hand, are created by an ephemeral engagement between an individual and an object. In these instances, the individual's body has touched an object and this singular action has been memorialized in a witness mark. This could take the form of a footprint, fingerprint, handwriting, and the like.

When the individuals who leave these witness marks are no longer there, the objects become a portal to access their missing physical body. This effect does not take place when someone leaves temporarily, for example if they go to work. Instead, it happens when an individual feels melancholic or nostalgic about this person being gone.<sup>85</sup> This effect often occurs when an individual passes away, and their loved ones go through the possessions that the deceased individual has left behind.<sup>86</sup> Shirts that carry the individual's perfume suddenly become shells of the individual who can no longer be accessed. Nostalgia and melancholia are often experienced in abandoned spaces because their material landscape invites visitors to reflect on time passing, forgotten spaces and the people that once inhabited them, as well as how these spaces and people have been moved into the category of history. These feelings of melancholia then push the visitor's emotions towards thoughts about objects and their

---

<sup>85</sup> See: Stallybrass, "Worn Worlds," for an in-depth explanation on the transformation of meaning that clothing undergoes when its wearer passes away.

<sup>86</sup> See: Hein B. Bjerck, "My Father's Things," in *Ruin Memories: Materialities, Aesthetics, and the Archaeology of the Recent Past*, edited by Bjørnar Olsen and Póra Pétursdóttir (New York: Routledge, 2014), 109-127, for a case study on going through a deceased parent's objects.



witness marks as points to access past memories and personalities. What's more, past memories and personalities can take the form of witness marks from the space's past users as well as more recent visitors such as urban explorers. While interviewees often perceive witness marks from older past users as more meaningful, more recent witness marks also provide access points to an unknown, past material encounter.<sup>87</sup> Whether the witness marks are older or newer, the materials memorialize a person who is now absent.

The melancholia and nostalgia visitors feel in abandoned spaces can in part be explained by the ways in which the materiality of abandonment communicates time at once passing and staying still. The act of abandonment, the moment at which users leave and these spaces and their objects become frozen, is seen as immediate, rather than gradual. Matt Schultz, the owner of Philadelphia's Lansdowne theatre, elaborated on this during our interview when he stated, "...think about it – one day, you go from the space being filled on July 3 1987, filled with people who are going to the movie theatre, then the next day (snap), it's just over."<sup>88</sup> The act of abandonment is sudden, such as closing and locking a door for the last time. This immediacy makes visitors think that the objects that remain inside such spaces today have been frozen in time, and have remained in their position since the moment that the space was abandoned. After a space has been abandoned, time is perceived to stand still. This has resulted in a lexicon surrounding abandoned spaces to describe them as 'time capsule' spaces, such as the recently discovered "Paris time capsule flat."<sup>89</sup> Similarly, when a

---

<sup>87</sup> Christopher Payne, interviewed by Natalie Wright, December 15, 2014.

<sup>88</sup> Matt Schultz, interviewed by Natalie Wright, February 5, 2015.

<sup>89</sup> MessyNessy, "The Paris Time Capsule Apartment."

gentleman recently discovered a World War One soldier's bedroom, he reported that, "When you walk into it it's as if time has stood still."<sup>90</sup> I also experienced this in my own research when I visited Philadelphia's abandoned community center, Hawthorne Hall, in which a dinner table remained set, and glasses that once contained a colored drink now hold the evaporated content [fig. 36]. While these objects are seen as being frozen in time, the ruining process, the space's decay, takes place over time and thus signifies time passing.

When urban explorers enter contemporary abandoned spaces, they are met with a multitude of signifiers of time passing. These signifiers work to categorize the space and the objects therein as historical. Dust is the most immediate of these signifiers, often covering every surface in the abandoned space with a thick, opaque, grey patina [fig. 37].<sup>91</sup> Similarly to dust, other materials build up or break down over time, themselves materializing time passing by embodying a process that takes time to occur. Liquids evaporate, mold and vines creep up walls, carpets and seat coverings disintegrate, and colors fade. Yet, these signifiers of time passing could not take place were the space in active use. Layers of dust, for example, gather over time because of the stillness that abandonment creates. What's more, materializations of time passing such as dust also memorialize instantaneous moments in time in the form of

---

<sup>90</sup> Kim Willsher, "French Town Tries to Save First World War Soldier's Room for Posterity."

<sup>91</sup> See: Kathleen Stewart, *A Space on the Side of the Road: Cultural Politics in an "Other" America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), in which Stewart writes about the ways in which time materializes in ruins, writing, "Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movement of time, plot, and history," pg. 93.

momentary memories, such as footprints or fingerprints in dust. In these abandoned spaces, material signifiers of time stopping and passing are inextricably linked.

The ruin's ability to mix perceptions of time being frozen while simultaneously passing distorts the visitor's perception of time. Chris Payne explained this in our interview when he described his experiences documenting New York City's abandoned North Brother Island. He remembers,

“North Brother happened over many years, seeing the seasons change, and each trip was six, sometimes eight hours easy. And through that time the weather might change or it might get dark, so there was a sense of time passing while it stood still. While you're kind of in this space and things are seemingly inert, you are very much aware of the light as a photographer, so you're always aware that there are other things that are changing and yet what you're looking at is quite still.”<sup>92</sup>

As Payne states, time passes around the abandoned North Brother Island, but the objects themselves are frozen. This experience prompted Payne to state in another interview, “It's nice to know that in a city that's always changing, North Brother Island is kind of moving along at its own pace.”<sup>93</sup> The mixture between change and stillness that ruins embody has engaged Payne in such a way that he perceives ruins as inhabiting a space where time functions differently. The perception of time in ruins, and how it categorizes objects and spaces as historical, encourages visitors to think about abandoned spaces and objects in melancholic terms. This frame transforms objects into a portal with which to access past persons whose physicality is remembered via witness marks.

---

<sup>92</sup> Christopher Payne, interviewed by Natalie Wright, December 15, 2014.

<sup>93</sup> “Christopher Payne's Story of Deserted North Brother Island,” last modified July 24, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gqwmNapO6lM>.

## **The Body, Remembered**

In my own research visiting abandoned spaces, I found many witness marks embodying the absent past users. Where each witness mark remembered different parts of the user's body, I encountered past individuals' fingers, hands, feet, toes, arms, torsos, legs, and buttocks. All of these encounters pushed me to project my imagined constructions of past users onto the objects.

I first encountered past individuals' feet in a momentary memory in one of Philadelphia's abandoned banks, where I found a footprint captured in a mixture of dust and debris [fig. 38]. The shoe, likely a skateboard shoe based on the pattern on the sole, probably belonged to another explorer given that they visited the space after the dust and debris collected. I also found a very similar footstep memorialized in Eastern State Penitentiary, a space that also held a number of objects embodying past individuals' feet in their 'abandoned collection.' This collection houses items that have been preserved in their found, abandoned state. A sock I examined, for example, was likely worn by one of the prison's inmates and showed considerable wear via routinized material memories where the user's feet stretched out the sock to fit their foot width and toe sizing [fig. 39]. The sock also showed a considerable amount of sweat staining around the arch of the foot, potentially relating to the wearer's fitness habits in the prison's exercise yard. Equally, color transfer at the toe of the sock indicates where the wearer's big toe met the black shoes that enclosed the sock. Viewed on its side, the sock appears to be covering a foot that has just vanished [fig. 40]. Similar observations can be made about the leftover shoes found in the prison [fig. 41]. Above all, these shoes embody the gait of the past wearer. Examining the insole of the shoe, one can see markings left by toes as well as the ball of the foot from

continually rubbing against the fabric. Further, turning the shoe over also reveals the wearer's gait, as communicated through wear marks across the outer sole.

While these instances of routinized and momentary material memory evoke single users, I encountered other objects that captured the feet of many users. In the Lansdowne Theatre, for example, I walked over the entrance hall's heavily worn carpet [fig. 41]. As the theatre's original carpet from 1927, this floor covering has experienced the soles of visitors until the theatre's last day in 1987. Over time, shoes have rubbed away the outer, colorful pattern of the textile, revealing the carpet's sturdy ground below. With wear patterns that are particularly strong around the carpet's edge, this may be indicative of patterns of movement entering and exiting the theatre in large groups. Such routinized material memories conjure groups of visitors entering and exiting the theatre across generations, rather than a single individual. Similarly, at Ellis Island's abandoned isolation hospitals, I saw many individuals' footsteps frozen in momentary material memories. With a thin layer of dust covering the concrete floors, I saw the footprints of those who walked down the halls, evoking imaginings of many individuals passing through the space at different times [fig. 43].

Moving up the body, I encountered routinized material memories of past users' legs, buttocks, backs, and arms in the form of worn down chairs. While stainless steel or other metal chairs did not take in the human body in the form of wear marks, painted and wooden chairs, or chairs with textile coverings, certainly did. Two wooden armchairs that I viewed at Ellis Island exhibit this very well [fig. 44]. Both painted white, the viewer can easily see wear marks by examining where the paint has come off – namely, across the chair's stretchers, at the front of the arms, and on the chair's seat. The wearing of the wood matches the wearing of the paint, particularly

where the stretchers have been worn down over time. These wear patterns are logical, as feet naturally come up off the ground to rest on stretchers, buttocks shift around the seat, and elbows and hands rest against and grasp the chair's arms. It is likely that multiple users negotiated these physical compromises with the chairs over time. What's more, abandoned chairs such as those at Ellis Island are seen as particularly evocative of the past user's physical form – an evocation that is heightened by the aforementioned wear marks. Conrad Benner emphasized this in our interview, stating, "I think there's a photographer who only ever does empty chairs in doorways. Chairs are a good one because it helps the viewer sit themselves down into the photo. It helps add a human element to the photo."<sup>94</sup> With their form fitting seats and rounded backs, chairs quickly symbolize the individual who habitually filled them. Wear marks enhance this evocation, as the human body changes the chair over time, making the past user's presence more strongly felt.

Memorialized torsos, backs, and shoulders also made themselves known in Eastern State Penitentiary's abandoned collection via a prisoner's shirt I was able to handle. This plain, white, cotton t-shirt looked to have been part of the prisoner's uniform, and showcases routinized material memories around the underarms and collar. Similarly to the chairs at Ellis Island, the shirt's form conveyed the physicality of its user via its design to fit the human body. While this shirt communicates material memory, it also captures material memory loss in its deeply ruined state [fig 45]. Despite it being in a museum collection, Eastern State Penitentiary's abandoned collection has only been minimally stabilized, and its objects have thus been able to

---

<sup>94</sup> Conrad Benner, interview by Natalie Wright, October 18, 2014.

continue ruining in many ways. The shirt I handled was folded very tightly into a small opened plastic Ziploc bag, and when I unfolded it, I realized the ruining process made much of this shirt disappear. Large moth holes, water stains, mold, and an overwhelming smell of rot had taken over the shirt. After I laid the shirt down, I recognized the human form it represented and imagined its previous user, but the shirt's decomposition triggered images of the decomposition of the human body.<sup>95</sup> This brought the ruin's process of decay to the fore. It reminded me that these items are ruining, rather than their older ruined counterparts, and that the ruining process can both preserve and erase memory when memory is imbued in objects. In this way, the modern ruin can simultaneously retain, highlight, obscure, or erase material memories.

In other ruining spaces, another part of the body comes to the fore: fingers and hands. I found this most frequently in work spaces in which employees' hands played a key role in their jobs, such as in one of Philadelphia's abandoned banks, and in the Lansdowne Theatre's project room. As Tim Edensor explains in his work *Industrial Ruins: Space, Aesthetics, and Materiality*, work routines embed the material landscape of industrial ruins with a specific type of material memory.<sup>96</sup> For Edensor, these routines, or 'taskscape' result in muscle memory in the body, and particular wear marks on machinery.<sup>97</sup> The idea of the 'taskscape' assists in explaining patterns of routinized material memory I found in work spaces, such as in a panel box enclosing

---

<sup>95</sup> See Olsen and Pétursdóttir's introduction in *Ruin Memories*, pages 7-8, in which Olsen and Pétursdóttir compare contemporary ruins' ruining state to a decomposing body in unfinished disposal.

<sup>96</sup> Edensor, *Industrial Ruins*, 158.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

buttons in Philadelphia's abandoned bank. In this instance, marks of hands and fingers can be seen on buttons used to control the movement of an unknown piece of equipment [fig. 46]. Behind a small door lay two panels, one labeled 'in,' and the other labeled, 'out,' each with the buttons 'up,' 'down,' and 'stop.' It is the 'out' panel's buttons that are much more worn down, with the letters reading 'up' nearly faded out, 'down' faded an intermediate amount, and 'stop' faded only a small amount. By comparison, the 'in' panel's buttons seem untouched. These wear patterns are indicative of daily routines that were likely memorized by the worker who completed them. Similar working patterns are found in the Lansdowne theatre's projection room. Painted levers on the main control panel are worn down from hands pulling and pushing, while main switches for projectors are missing their surrounding paint from knuckles and thumbs rubbing over time [fig. 47]. Here, hands and fingers are key to the routines of daily working life, as specialized machinery required a knowledgeable operator and fostered muscle memory – memory that equally became embedded in the objects being operated.

The projection room in the Lansdowne Theatre also gives shape to fingers and hands of past individuals in a different way: momentary material memories. Dusty projection equipment indicates where fingers once touched and pulled across surfaces with material memories in the form of fingerprints. One of the projection mechanisms in particular, the color filter, showed how fingers once rubbed across the red color filter, likely in an effort to switch colors [fig. 48].<sup>98</sup> I found similar fingerprints at Ellis

---

<sup>98</sup> Interestingly, N. C. Wyeth chose to focus his attention on, and study, this effect in his piece *The Dusty Bottle*, 1924, in which the main figure is a dusty bottle with a hand mark across its body.



Island's isolation hospitals, where a door in one of the doctor's homes has numerous fingerprints around its edges, as well as hand marks across the bottom panel [fig. 49]. In this same room, someone else has used this effect to write in the dust, choosing a window panel in a door to say 'Boo! Help!' [fig. 50]. In this way, dust was intentionally used to create a momentary material memory in the form of writing, another type of witness mark that interviewees cite as indicative of a past individual's body.

Words conceived of as material traces can also evidence the body interacting with the material world.<sup>99</sup> With its unique characteristics individual to each person, handwriting is similar to a fingerprint, and equally as physical. As the writer's hand controls the writing implement and the hand touches the writing surface, visitors like myself view writing as another portal to give shape to imaginings of the individual who once wrote those words. Christopher Payne reflected on these ideas in our interview, as he believes writing communicates memory better than other types of objects. He remarks,

---

<sup>99</sup> In the introductory remarks to the University of Delaware's recent symposium, "Survivor Objects," Sandy Isenstadt eloquently explained how words can be conceived as material, stating, "[A pen is] a material thing that's designed, produced, transported, displayed, purchased, used, misused, maintained, carried, brandished, chewed on, neglected, lost, and forgotten. Whether contemplated by a philosopher, or discarded unthinkingly, it had a material life. The words traced by that pencil? They're material too. They were fixed in matter, wispy traces of graphite but matter nonetheless. They rested on a piece of paper, flimsy, sure, but no less material than a rock, or the water that swallows a rock when it's tossed, or the ripples that swell outward into diminishing rings. And like those rings, even words have material affects." Sandy Isenstadt, "Introductory Remarks," *Survivor Objects*, November 14, 2014.

“I would say anything with handwriting [communicates memory] – something that you could do today. So with the construction lines I found on the columns in the archaeological dig, that’s something that if you were making that column today, you would do the same thing. The graffiti on North Brother Island, too...”<sup>100</sup>

When exploring the abandoned collections at Eastern State Penitentiary, I experienced similar encounters with memory held in prisoners’ annotated books. Bibles, in particular, contained hundreds of personal annotations as well as longer entries at the front and back of the books [fig. 51-52]. Though writing necessitates a mediating object, such as a pen or pencil, between the body and the material traces it leaves, writing is still seen as a potent memory of the physicality and individuality of past persons.

Lastly, the witness marks that visitors encounter in abandoned spaces can sometimes allude to absent objects, as well as absent persons. Rather than embodying momentary object-object interactions, these material memories embody long-term interactions between objects. I found evidence of absent objects at almost all of the sites I visited. At the Lansdowne Theatre, for example, two fountains greet the visitor in the entrance hall, and both have water stains running down where water would have once flowed and pooled [fig. 53]. These witness marks evoke the past material landscape, including the sensoryscape it would have created, such as the sound of running water. In Eastern State Penitentiary, I encountered witness marks alerting me to absent door hardware and decorations [fig. 54]. The prison’s synagogue door, for instance, is missing its two Stars of David, though numerous paint jobs over time made the absent stars even more noticeable when they were taken off. Finally,

---

<sup>100</sup> Christopher Payne, interviewed by Natalie Wright, December 15, 2014.

throughout each of my site visits I saw witness marks for tape that once held up signs that would have directed a space's flow and the movements of its past inhabitants [fig. 55]. All of these witness marks bring imaginings of the past material landscape to the fore by highlighting absent objects that once made up this landscape.

### **Involuntary Memories**

When visitors encounter these material memories, they imaginatively construct narratives about the space's past material landscape and the people who once inhabited it. These constructions differ from memory in that they are not recollections from the visitor's own past, but are creations by the visitor's imagination based on the materials they encounter and their understanding of these materials. Tim Edensor refers to these imaginative creations as involuntary memories.<sup>101</sup> Rather than the visitor choosing to recall an event or persons by engaging an object, abandoned spaces enable the visitor to encounter unknown individuals, events, and spaces.<sup>102</sup> The defining characteristic of involuntary memories is that they are not remembered. Involuntary memories exist despite the fact that no work is being done to remember them. In this case, involuntary memories are materialized in the form of abandoned spaces and objects, as they have been forgotten but continue to exist. By falling

---

<sup>101</sup> Edensor, *Industrial Ruins*, 142-5; Tim Edensor, "The Ghosts of Industrial Ruins: Ordering and Disordering Memory in Excessive Space," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 23 (2005) 829-849.

<sup>102</sup> On the uncategorized nature of involuntary memories, Edensor writes in "The Ghosts of Industrial Ruins," "Unlike recorded memories, organized and stored individually or collectively, involuntary memories surge with vigor but are not categorizable precisely because they were never subject to deliberate compilation," 837.

outside of remembering practices, the objects that inhabit ruins have not been employed to create a meaningful historical narrative. Instead, objects in these spaces simply exist with no interpretation.

While visitors do not choose to recall, or imagine, the past persons linked to abandoned spaces and objects, visitors feel they have discovered the objects they encounter, or that the objects they encounter have discovered them. In these spaces, objects and their associated involuntary memories confront visitors, rather than visitors knowingly approaching the objects.

Involuntary memories in contemporary ruins are fragmentary, powerful, and ineffable. Often when exploring abandoned spaces, interviewees felt that the space and objects communicated that things happened there, and that people moved through there, but exact memories are out of reach. As Conrad Benner explained in our interview, “You can sort of *feel* that this is where thousands of people came and worked everyday if it was a factory, where they created things, fought with their bosses, took a lunch break, or if it’s a school, came to learn, or whatever it is.”<sup>103</sup> The sense of being surrounded by past events and individuals is a powerful one, as visitors feel a physical reaction to being surrounded by the past. Further, the physicality of material memories, giving shape to absent bodies and objects, enables a sense of physical connection to this past. Yet, these feelings are grounded in imaginings conjured from objects that tell bits and pieces of stories, an effect made possible by the ways in which decay erases or transforms objects, as well as the unfamiliarity of the memories visitors encounter. As Tim Edensor writes, objects in abandoned spaces

---

<sup>103</sup> Conrad Benner, interview by Natalie Wright, October 18, 2014.

speak in halting sentences, only ever giving partial clues.<sup>104</sup> Every object is seen as a container of memories that relate to past experiences and past persons' characters. Every object is a clue that must be examined closely to illuminate the past that surrounds the visitor. Combined, these effects make abandoned spaces containers of excess memory.<sup>105</sup>

The narratives interviewees constructed out of encounters with unfamiliar objects are a result of their associations with these objects. In our interview, Conrad Benner, for example, reported that his imaginings in Philadelphia's abandoned Tastykake factory came from interactions he had with his family members who worked in factory settings.<sup>106</sup> Most notably, he thought of an aunt who recently lost her factory job, making her an appropriate figure for Benner to imagine moving through the Tastykake factory and creating the material memories he encountered. What's more, Benner used his aunt's experience of being laid off to imagine other Tastykake employees' experiences relating to the ruptures associated with closed factories and their subsequent abandonment.<sup>107</sup> In this way, the imaginings produced by abandoned spaces and the objects therein are dynamic, as they are created in part by the objects and in part by the visitors. Ruins thus evoke the memory of imagined

---

<sup>104</sup> Edensor, "The Ghosts of Industrial Ruins," 846.

<sup>105</sup> See Edensor's chapter "Materiality in the Ruin: Waste, Excess, and Sensuality," in *Industrial Ruins*, 97-124, for a discussion on "excess" in contemporary abandoned spaces.

<sup>106</sup> Conrad Benner, interview by Natalie Wright, October 18, 2014.

<sup>107</sup> In Edensor, "The Ghosts of Industrial Ruins," Edensor writes, "For me, walking around a ruined factory surprisingly conjures up memories of relatives and acquaintances who have experienced factory work and told stories about it," 839.

individuals – imaginings specific to the objects found, but individual to the visitor experiencing the objects.

On some rare occasions, visitors to abandoned spaces will encounter objects that they recognize. These encounters can take the form of objects that are personally significant to the visitor, are related to someone they know, or were even once their own. In my own explorations through abandoned spaces, I found one such object in Eastern State Penitentiary's abandoned collection. In this instance, I found a bottle of Tiger Balm pain-relieving ointment. The bottle I found no longer had ointment in it, but was used by one of the prisoner's to contain personal possessions such as a bank note, paper with writing on it, and a watch face. The container's metal lid was rusted to the point that I did not initially recognize it, but when I did, I realized that I have the exact same container in my own home [fig. 56-7]. This experience evoked thoughts of how I will be remembered after my passing, and what objects of mine will remain, decay, or disappear. An even more personal encounter occurred for a visitor to Ellis Island's abandoned isolation hospitals, when this individual went to visit JR's recent art installation. Where JR's installation involved pasting life-size photos of migrants and health care workers onto the site's walls, this visitor ran into her grandfather as she stepped into a room in which his photograph was pasted onto the wall.<sup>108</sup> Several of my interviewees experienced encounters similar to these, such as Christopher Payne, who found some of his own belongings in an abandoned building he explored for his *Asylum* photography book. He remembers this instance well, stating,

---

<sup>108</sup> "Save Ellis Island: Facebook Timeline Photo," last modified January 14, 2015, <https://www.facebook.com/saveellisland/photos/pb.120373733715.-2207520000.1427854995./10152668003453716/?type=1>.

“I went back to one of the hospitals and I found my film wrappers, my Polaroid wrappers, and they already had this layer of dust on them, so after a certain time I feel like I look at my own snap shots from ten years ago and I start to realize what I was doing then, just off the cuff, that’s sort of historic now, because it has this patina to it and I can sort of romanticize about it. When you start seeing things with dust on them, it comes back to this feeling about your mortality, time passing...whereas before I felt a little bit like an outsider looking at these buildings, now I feel like I’ve become a part of them. I feel like I’m part of this bigger story and you begin to feel like a part of history... And I looked at them and I would be reminded about what I was thinking that day, what I had for lunch, the shot, and it really jogged my memory and took me right back. But it’s times like those that you feel like you’re becoming part of that space, when you yourself leave objects behind.”<sup>109</sup>

As Payne shows, signifiers of time passing such as dust build up and colors fading have now been applied to his own objects, relegating his past self into the category of the historical.<sup>110</sup> What’s more, these signs of time passing are heightened because they point towards an individual’s aging process and the entropic nature of time. Seeing the self as a part of the ruin intensifies feelings of nostalgia and melancholia, as that individual is invited to think about their past self, how they have changed, and how they have stayed the same. Encounters with past selves bring up interesting questions regarding their category as involuntary memories. In Payne’s case in particular, the memories that these abandoned objects conjure are known to him, such as what he was thinking and doing on the day that he left his objects behind. But, the objects still confront him in a manner similar to objects representing unknown histories. Visitors

---

<sup>109</sup> Christopher Payne, interviewed by Natalie Wright, December 16, 2014.

<sup>110</sup> See Edensor, “The Ghosts of Industrial Ruins,” page 843, for a discussion on finding objects in abandoned spaces that you recognize from your own lifetime, and how it feels to have parts of one’s life be categorized as ‘historical.’

certainly do not expect to find these traces of themselves or loved ones. While these objects do not present an access point to unknown persons, and are not fragmentary in nature, they are perhaps more powerful in their ability to conjure thoughts of time passing and notions of ‘the historical.’

Contemporary abandoned spaces thus ‘remember’ through different types of material memories. These material memories, or witness marks, come alive via the ruin’s ability to simultaneously materialize time standing still and passing. This distortion of time results in visitors feeling nostalgic and melancholic. Where the material memories housed in abandoned spaces give shape to past users’ bodies, visitors to these spaces can feel a physical connection to past persons. Material memories left by past persons and objects enable visitors to imagine these absent individuals and material landscapes. These imaginings are rooted in material encounters with abandoned objects and the visitor’s own past experiences. Material encounters within abandoned spaces result in visitors being confronted by involuntary memories, even if the objects these visitors find are their own. The unique material environment in contemporary abandoned spaces thus fosters intense, ineffable and fragmented relations between visitors, the objects they find, and the imagined pasts these visitors create.





Figure 36 Time simultaneously staying still and passing: Glasses that once held a colored drink have remained in Hawthorne Hall. The fact that the glasses have remained signals that time has stood still, but the evaporation of their contents signals time passing. Photo by Natalie Wright.



Figure 37 A thick layer of grey dust covers the shelving units in Ellis Island's morgue. Photo by Natalie Wright.



Figure 38 Dust and momentary memories: The dust and debris in the abandoned bank has created this momentary memory of an explorer's footprint. Photo by Natalie Wright.



Figure 39 Feet and routinized memories: A sock in Eastern State’s abandoned collection displays routinized material memories around the toe where the user’s foot rubbed the sock against their shoe as they walked. Photo by Natalie Wright. Eastern State Penitentiary, Philadelphia, PA.



Figure 40 Feet and routinized memories: A sock in Eastern State’s abandoned collection, when laid on its side, evokes the shape of the wearer’s foot. Photo by Natalie Wright. Eastern State Penitentiary, Philadelphia, PA.



Figure 41 Feet and routinized memories: A shoe from Eastern State's abandoned collection shows routinized material memories where the wearer's gait shaped the sole of the shoe. Photo by Natalie Wright. Eastern State Penitentiary, Philadelphia, PA.



Figure 42 Feet and routinized memories: The original carpet at the Lansdowne Theatre displays routinized material memories where visitors' shoes have rubbed down certain sections all the way to the carpet's ground. Photo by Natalie Wright.



Figure 43 Dust and momentary memories: The dust in Ellis Island's hallways has allowed for multiple persons' steps to be memorialized in momentary material memories. Similarly to the carpet at the Lansdowne Theatre, this hallway evokes imaginings of multiple past persons. Photo by Natalie Wright.



Figure 44 Buttocks, backs, arms, and routinized Memories: wooden and painted chairs at Ellis Island show routinized material memories in the form of wear marks around the seat, arms, backs, and stiles.



Figure 45 Fragmentary memories: A shirt from Eastern State's abandoned collection shows how the ruining process can at once erase and highlight memories. Photo by Natalie Wright. Eastern State Penitentiary, Philadelphia, PA.



Figure 46 Hands and routinized memories: The buttons in this photo showcase routinized material memories, as the buttons on the right panel have been worn down much more than the buttons on the left. These buttons relate to Edensor's conception of 'taskscape.' Photo by Natalie Wright.



Figure 47 Hands and Routinized Memories: The power switch on the Lansdowne Theater's projector show where fingers and knuckles have rubbed the black paint off around the switch from years of turning the projector on and off. Photo by Natalie Wright.

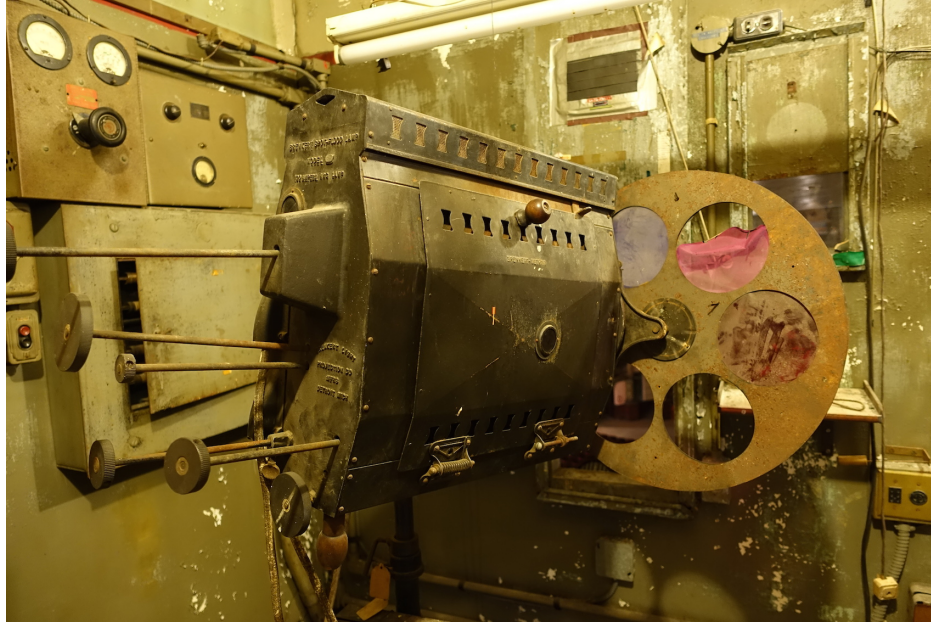


Figure 48 Dust and momentary memories: On the red color filter, it is possible to see where fingers have disturbed the dust, creating momentary material memories out of fingers and hands that have touched the mechanism. Photo by Natalie Wright.





Figure 49 Dust and momentary memories: An unused door at Ellis Island has gathered dust over time, and has memorialized the finger prints and hand movements of past persons. Photo by Natalie Wright.



Figure 50 Dust and momentary memories: A pane of glass on a door at Ellis Island has gathered dust, and someone has used this dust to write 'Boo! Help!' This relates to another form of momentary memory: writing. Photo by Natalie Wright.



Figure 51 Writing as material memory: a magazine in Eastern State's abandoned collection was annotated by a former inmate who wrote, 'hurt,' 'plase,' 'plese,' 'pleses,' 'F,' 'Please,' 'Plaese.' Photo by Natalie Wright. Eastern State Penitentiary, Philadelphia, PA.

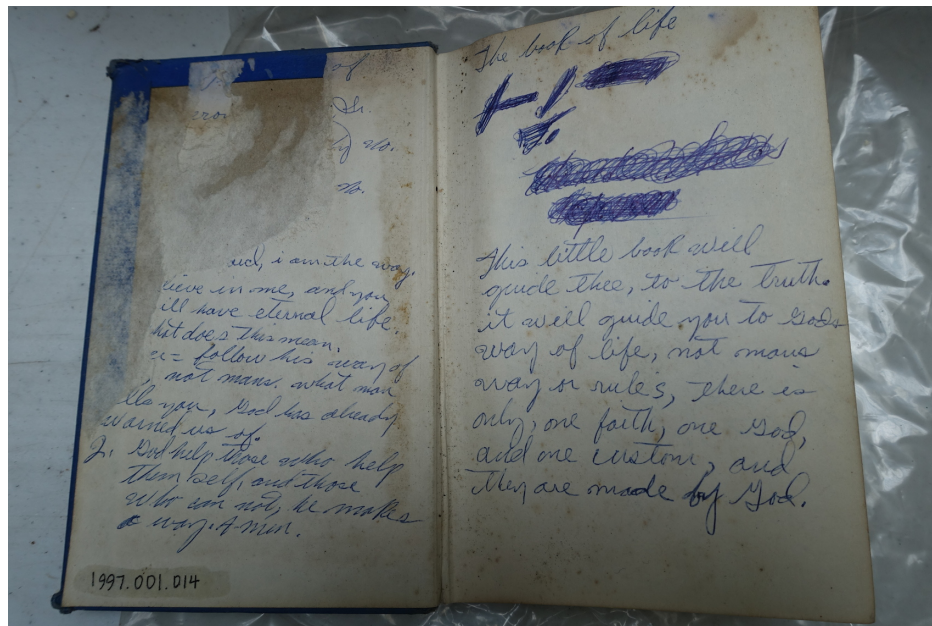


Figure 52 Writing as material memory: an annotated bible from Eastern State's abandoned collection. Photo by Natalie Wright. Eastern State Penitentiary, Philadelphia, PA.



Figure 53 Material memories of objects: the unused fountain in the Lansdowne Theatre exhibits water stains where the water used to flow down and collect. Photo by Natalie Wright.



Figure 54 Material memories of objects: a door at Eastern State Penitentiary shows where the number '2' used to be. Photo by Natalie Wright. Eastern State Penitentiary, Philadelphia, PA.



Figure 55 Material memories of objects: an example of tape witness marks, where the tape's glue has left a residue indicating where other objects, such as signs, may have been. Photo by Natalie Wright.



Figure 56 Recognizing involuntary memories: a bottle of Tiger Balm from Eastern State's abandoned collection. The inmate who owned this object used it as a container for personal possessions and mementos. Photo by Natalie Wright. Eastern State Penitentiary, Philadelphia, PA.



Figure 57 Recognizing involuntary memories: my own bottle of Tiger Balm, and what the bottle looks like before the ruining process takes over. Photo by Natalie Wright.

## **Chapter 5**

### **RUINS AS EMOTIONAL LANDSCAPES**

#### **Emotional Objects & Spaces**

In this chapter, I will examine why interviewees view contemporary ruins as emotional, that is, why visitors to abandoned spaces feel they can pick up on past inhabitants' emotions, and why this in turn triggers their own emotional reaction. As my interviewees indicate, contemporary abandoned spaces are perceived as emotional landscapes, containing cues relating to other peoples' emotional states. Within these landscapes, interviewees report that certain spaces and objects can be more emotional than others, revealing a typology of objects and spaces that are particularly suited to materializing and conveying emotions. These spaces and objects include highly social items that convey relationships, highly private and personal items, and objects that act as containers, such as walls. A thread of similarity runs through these categories. Interviewees find everyday objects and spaces emotional, as they convey how individuals engaged in meaning-making strategies to make their everyday life more meaningful. When engaging with these emotional spaces and objects, interviewees ultimately feel intimately connected to the past persons these materials evoke.

Similarly to the ways in which abandoned spaces attune the visitor to material memories, the nostalgic and melancholic nature of ruins attune the visitor to emotions in objects. Where material memory becomes an access point to an imaged absent person, abandoned objects become an access point to an imagined past person's emotions. Christopher Payne explained this in our interview when he stated, "The evocativeness comes from the abandonment of it, because when they were in use they

weren't evocative. They've taken on an added layer of meaning that gets exaggerated in terms of the drama of it."<sup>111</sup> As Payne points out, the abandonment of a space and the subsequent ruining process makes these spaces, their previous inhabitants, and the events that took place there, dramatic. Abandonment and ruining increase the emotional content of a space and the objects it contains.

Though emotions are key to everyday life, playing a role in the material life of objects through their creation and use, emotions are frustratingly difficult to access from objects. Unlike material memories which give shape to a past user's physicality, the ways in which emotions are materialized are less clear, even for contemporary material culture scholars [see Appendix A: the Material Culture of Emotion: A Literature Review]. As of yet, there is no consensus on how objects become infused with emotion, or what methodologies can be used to access this emotion.<sup>112</sup> Rather, scholars have stated how integral emotions are to material culture, but have cautioned against projecting contemporary notions of emotion onto the past.<sup>113</sup> However, this act of projection, while colonizing the past with notions of the present, provides a unique

---

<sup>111</sup> Christopher Payne, interviewed by Natalie Wright, December 15, 2014.

<sup>112</sup> See: Sarah Tarlow, "Emotion in Archaeology," *Current Anthropology* 41 (2000): 713-30; Chris Gosden, "Aesthetics, Intelligence, and Emotions: Implications for Archaeology," in *Rethinking Materiality: The Engagement of Mind with the Material World*, ed. by Elizabeth DeMarrais et al. (Cambridge: McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research, 2004), 33-40; Oliver J. T. Harris and Tim Flohr Sørensen, "Rethinking Emotion and Material Culture," *Archaeological Dialogues* 17 (2010) 145-163; Jeremy Meredith, "The Aesthetic Artifact: An Exploration of Emotional Response and Taste in Archaeology," *Archaeological Review From Cambridge* 9 (1990) 208-217.

<sup>113</sup> Sarah Tarlow, "Emotion in Archaeology," *Current Anthropology* 41 (2000): 723.



vantage point from which to study contemporary conceptions of emotion and its connections to material culture.

When examining interviewees' comments on emotional objects and spaces together, along with my own experiences in abandoned spaces, several types of emotional objects and spaces came together. One of these types was the personal and private space and object. In my own exploration of abandoned objects and spaces, some of the most emotional objects I encountered were personal belongings from Eastern State Penitentiary's abandoned collection. There, I engaged objects that once belonged to prisoners, such as the Tiger Balm jar I spoke about in Chapter Four. In this jar, I found a crumpled bank note (possibly Korean), a piece of paper with writing on it, and a watch face [fig. 58-61]. This container's closed character, its hidden contents, and the memento-like objects inside, all signaled to me that it captures the emotional life of its past user. The objects inside seem to have been kept for personal reasons, and were not meant to be shared with others. The diminutive size of this object could have made it possible to withhold from prison guards, while its ability to close enabled the owner to signal a barrier that denotes privacy.<sup>114</sup> Some of these same properties can be found in personal and private spaces.

In other abandoned spaces, my interviewees and I felt that some spaces were more emotional than others, namely, bedrooms. Where dwellings can be divided into

---

<sup>114</sup> Though it deals with eighteenth century object-person interactions, see: Amanda Vickery, "Thresholds and Boundaries at Home," in *Behind Closed Doors: At Home in Georgian England* 25-48 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), for research on how privacy relates to the material world, and how individuals use the material world to assert boundaries in order to create privacy, even in the most difficult circumstances.

social or private spaces, bedrooms are the most private space. Christopher Payne reflected on the emotive nature of bedrooms in our interview when he spoke about a set of abandoned bedrooms that once housed nurses working in the Vietnam War era. In their abandonment, these bedrooms preserved the nurse's decorations including political posters and newspaper clippings. On this topic, Payne stated, "Just to find a wall like that intact was so personal too, because anything they put up there was so personal, it meant something to them."<sup>115</sup> In this instance, Payne perceived the act of putting up decorations in the bedroom as meaningful, perhaps because the private nature of the bedroom means that anything material in this space reflects the user's character and emotional life.<sup>116</sup>

This pattern of viewing private and personal objects and spaces as emotional makes more sense when contextualized by Western thought traditions on emotions. It has been a long-standing tradition in the Western World to view emotions as internal, with the true self existing within the individual, and the false self presented outside the individual as the external self.<sup>117</sup> While this thought pattern has led to the notion that emotions are immaterial while the social self is material, the pattern of viewing private

---

<sup>115</sup> Christopher Payne, interviewed by Natalie Wright, December 15, 2014.

<sup>116</sup> Anna McWilliams also explores the emotional character of bedrooms in abandoned spaces in her work "Borders in Ruin," where she analyzes the material landscape of abandoned border guard stations in the Czech Republic. For McWilliams, the emotional content of these spaces came to light when she found once hidden graffiti messages and photos that were previously blocked by furniture. See: Anna McWilliams, "Borders In Ruin," in *Ruin Memories: Materialities, Aesthetics, and the Archaeology of the Recent Past*, ed. by Bjørnar Olsen and Póra Pétursdóttir (New York: Routledge, 2014) 397-8.

<sup>117</sup> Tarlow, "Emotion in Archaeology," 714.

objects as emotional refutes this. Rather, the innermost self is materialized in private and personal spaces, that is, private spaces within structures such as bedrooms, and private objects such as diminutive personal items that can close and lock to prevent others from accessing the innermost self.

Yet, my interviewees and I also found certain social spaces and objects emotional, combating the dichotomy stating that the innermost self is emotional while the external, social self is not. These social spaces and objects were those that reflected past users' relationships. I first encountered this when I visited the Winterthur Museum's abandoned creamery – an industrial building in which workers used to cut meat and process the property's dairy production. When examining the building's bathrooms, I found etched graffiti in the stalls in which past employees wrote jokes about one another. One piece in particular required more artistic skill, as the individual rendered a stick figure of another individual, drawing him with a large farmer's hat, wide pants, and boots, labeling the individual 'Clay' [fig. 62-3]. Though I am not in on the joke, I recognized the banter that this drawing may represent, and how it speaks to relationships between co-workers.<sup>118</sup> In this instance, I viewed relationships as inherently emotional as they produce, are produced by, and are negotiated by, emotion.<sup>119</sup> Conrad Benner echoed these ideas in our interview when

---

<sup>118</sup> Anna McWilliams also explores the materiality of friendship and banter in the abandoned guard stations she studied in the Czech Republic. In her case, she focused on a scorecard tracking a game played between two different guard stations. See: McWilliams, "Borders in Ruin," 399.

<sup>119</sup> Chris Gosden emphasizes the social nature of emotion in his chapter "Aesthetics, Intelligence, and Emotions: Implications for Archaeology," when he writes, "At the heart of our social lives lie the emotions. Our reactions to others are primarily emotional [...] Emotions are (often) experienced individually but are always created through relations." See: Gosden, "Aesthetics, Intelligence, and Emotions," 34, 36.

he reflected on his reactions to different spaces and objects in Philadelphia's abandoned Tastykake factory. He remembers, "...when you're in a space like the Tastykake factory for example and you go into the break room and you see chairs and wrappers, it's hard not to imagine 'This is where they took their break...I wonder what they did, I wonder who they fought with, who that manager was, if they liked working here, if they were happy, how they lost their job.'"<sup>120</sup> In this quote, Benner identifies the break room, and its contents, as being emotional for its ability to cue involuntary memories relating to relationships. For Benner, the materials he encountered are evocative of emotions as products of relationships such as friendship and tension. Where emotions are products of relationships, objects that reflect the nature of relationships such as their creation, maintenance, or ending, are viewed as emotional as well.

Whether private or social in nature, a similarity runs through the objects and spaces that are perceived as emotional: these objects reflect past individuals' meaning-making strategies in everyday life. The objects and spaces that my interviewees and I found to convey past individuals' emotional lives were those that showed how these individuals made their everyday life meaningful. The strategies individuals employ to make life meaningful, such as creating and maintaining relationships, or collecting personal items and rendering them private, showed how the individuals behind these items were working within the boundaries of their life situation, whether that was working at Winterthur's meat and dairy processing building or living in one of

---

<sup>120</sup> Conrad Benner, interview by Natalie Wright, October 18, 2014.

Philadelphia's prisons.<sup>121</sup> All of these individuals were working within the confines of their life circumstances to make their everyday life meaningful. Christopher Payne spoke to this in our interview when he described how he felt when coming across a Christmas calendar in an abandoned mental health institution, explaining, "...[The Christmas calendar] had this Holiday booklet that they printed with all the schedules and all the little events that they had going on and it was so *heartbreaking* to see what the patients were eating, what the festivities were..."<sup>122</sup> While Payne is in part referring to his emotional reaction to patients staying in the facility over the Christmas Holidays, I believe he is also reacting to the types of strategies that were used in this facility to make patients' lives meaningful. Here, emotion and meaning are co-constitutive, and meaning-making strategies are inherently emotional.

Finally, throughout interviewees' accounts, one object was mentioned as being particularly open to, and capable of communicating, past users' emotions: walls. When speaking about how past users' remain in abandoned spaces in different ways, Zhenya Grinshteyn stated, "I don't necessarily believe in ghosts, but I do think that we somehow let out a physical energy that then becomes trapped in those walls somehow and just reverberates back."<sup>123</sup> In this case, a portion of the past user's self becomes trapped in the walls of the abandoned space, reverberating back to contemporary

---

<sup>121</sup> Anna McWilliams also speaks to the emotional character of the everyday objects left behind by border guards during her study of abandoned guard stations, writing, "...the sites and the objects that speak the loudest are the leftovers of the mundane, the everyday life." See McWilliams, "Borders in Ruin," 409.

<sup>122</sup> Christopher Payne, interviewed by Natalie Wright, December 15, 2014.

<sup>123</sup> Zhenya Grinshteyn, interview by Natalie Wright, September 23, 2014.

visitors. JR, the artist who recently created an installation throughout the abandoned sections of Ellis Island, described a similar process when speaking about how he experienced the island's past inhabitants' emotions, stating, "...only the tears got stuck in between the walls, that's what I always feel when I'm here."<sup>124</sup> Walls may be particularly suited to taking in emotions because of their role as an omnipresent witness to everyday events. What's more, walls provide protection for objects and individuals on the inside, and keep the outside world, outside.<sup>125</sup> It seems this same logic is applied to emotion, as walls extend their enclosing and protecting role to emotions. Additionally, rather than taking in and communicating one individual's emotion, walls are perceived as containers of many individuals' emotions. Similarly to the ways in which the Lansdowne Theatre's carpet and Ellis Island's halls embody memories of large numbers of people over time, walls convey the emotions of many.

### **Emotional Object-Person Relationships**

As my interviewees and I found, engaging with objects that are perceived to contain and express emotions of past individuals results in feeling connected to those past persons. Where visitors feel as though they have found an access point to another person's emotional life, they feel as though they know that other person intimately. In abandoned spaces, this process occurs in tandem with the creation of imagined past

---

<sup>124</sup> "Street Artist JR Tours Abandoned Ellis Island Hospital," last modified November 13, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4nfYK3DD-xE>.

<sup>125</sup> For a case study on the materiality of borders in the home and the significance of boundaries and openings, see: Amanda Vickery, "Thresholds and Boundaries at Home," in *Behind Closed Doors: At Home in Georgian England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009) 26-28, 30-31.

persons. Thus, it is the imaginatively projected person, or persons, that visitors feel connected to.

Engaging with any abandoned object perceived to contain emotion results in visitors feeling an emotional connection to the past person or persons they imagine. However, interviewees report that engaging with objects that they perceive to embody an individual's, rather than a group's, emotional life results in even stronger emotional connections.<sup>126</sup> This is because an engagement with an object that seemingly relates to a single person provides a direct connection to that person. A relationship is then built between the individual engaging with that object and the individual they imaginatively construct and project onto that object. Contemporary abandoned spaces are particularly good at fostering this type of intimate, emotional connection between a visitor and the past individuals they imagine.

One way that ruins foster this relationship is through the sense of discovery that they enable. Christopher Payne spoke extensively about the sense of discovery in ruins during our interview, emphasizing that the most emotional encounters he experienced were with objects that others had not seen.<sup>127</sup> For him, the most obviously emotionally loaded objects he encountered, such as toothbrushes with names of past asylum patients on them, or rooms filled with unclaimed cremation urns, were often sought out by many other photographers, thereby diluting their meaning. Rather, it was the objects that he felt he had discovered that he found the most moving. A sense of discovery implies that the person who does the discovering is the only one who has

---

<sup>126</sup> Christopher Payne, interviewed by Natalie Wright, December 15, 2014.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

encountered these objects since their abandonment, and thus the past individuals associated with these objects, making the relationship consist of two parties: the discoverer and the discovered. Payne described such encounters in our interview, stating,

“So many of the more touching moments in Asylum were in areas that hadn’t been touched, and so it’s really opening up a time capsule. Like finding a Christmas calendar that I found in Harrisburg that the maintenance guy didn’t want anyone else to see so he locked it up in the projection room,” and later, “...objects that have meaning aren’t always the flashy ones, it’s the ones you experience in the most personal way – they’re all very serendipitous, unexpected moments.”<sup>128</sup>

For Payne, ruins help create these intimate connections by providing ‘time capsule spaces’ that have only been seen by a select few. JR, the artist who recently created an installation throughout Ellis Island’s abandoned hospitals, also spoke about the sense of discovery he felt in the abandoned sections of the island. In an interview he gave to *M Culture*, JR stated, “What’s incredible about these columns, about this abandoned hospital, is that I get the impression that my feet are the first to enter here, and I feel like everyone else who visits here feels the same way.”<sup>129</sup> Here, JR puts forward that even if others have visited the site, the material landscape of the ruin makes visitors feel as though they are discovering it anew. The sense of discovery that abandoned spaces enable work to make the visitor think that they are engaging in a one-on-one connection with imagined past inhabitants of the space.

---

<sup>128</sup> Christopher Payne, interviewed by Natalie Wright, December 15, 2014.

<sup>129</sup> “C’est incroyable, en colonnes, dans ces hôpitals abandonnées, j’ai l’impression d’être le premier de mettre mes pieds dedans, et j’ai l’impression que c’est la même chose pour chaque personne qui vient, qui visite.” “L’artiste français JR redonne vie à l’hôpital new-yorkais d’Ellis Island,” last modified November 17, 2014, <http://bit.ly/1Khebg9>.



The feeling that visitors are alone in abandoned spaces strengthens this one-on-one relationship. As I explained in Chapter Two, “Senses & Souvenirs,” visitors to abandoned spaces are often alone in large spaces. Even if individuals go to abandoned spaces in groups, they often break off in order to experience spaces and objects on their own. During our interview, Christopher Payne explained how being alone effects object-person relationships in abandoned spaces, stating,

“I felt the same way about not only the smaller rooms but also one of the gazebos that was in a locked area in a hospital in New Hampshire. It has two little enclosed gardens, and you couldn’t get there through the outside, you had to go through a locked door and then all of a sudden you’re in a garden...you feel the connection because you feel as though it’s your own and it’s private.”<sup>130</sup>

As Payne states, being alone fosters a connection between himself and past users of the space. Going back to one of Payne’s previous quotes, the most meaningful objects he found were those he experienced in ‘the most personal way.’<sup>131</sup> As Payne explains in the quote above, the spaces that enable this type of personal connection are those that are not visited by the general public, as well as small rooms in which only a few people can comfortably fit. This provides more information about what spaces enable emotional connections with objects. In the case of this thesis, abandoned spaces foster personal connections by providing spaces in which visitors can escape the general public and can be alone with the imagined past individuals that abandoned objects evoke. Where discovery enables a one-on-one relationship with past individuals, being alone intensifies the intimacy of this connection.

---

<sup>130</sup> Christopher Payne, interviewed by Natalie Wright, December 15, 2014.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

Finally, ruins enable emotional relationships between the visitor and the objects they contain by allowing visitors to engage objects with the most emotional sense: touch. The connection between touch and establishing personal relationships to objects and persons takes shape when examining theories of proxemics, the study of people, their use of space, and how this use is an extension of culture. Edward T. Hall first popularized this study with his work *The Hidden Dimension* in which he established four zones of interaction: the intimate distance (0-18 inches), the personal distance (1.5-4 feet), the social distance (4-12 feet), and the public distance (12 feet – end of visual range).<sup>132</sup> Applied to Western culture, Hall analyzed the meaning of the zones as follows: the intimate distance is the emotional zone and is where tactile senses are both engaged and heightened, leading the person to feel unmistakably involved with the other person or object; the personal distance still involves tactile sensory engagements but these are limited – instead, the visual is much more emphasized and is where personal conversations are meant to take place; the social distance is entirely reliant on the visual sense, and impersonal conversations take place; lastly, the public distance is the least emotional as interactions become formalized, and public speeches take place in this zone.<sup>133</sup> Applied to the object-person interactions in abandoned spaces, ruins enable visitors to engage with objects

---

<sup>132</sup> Edward T. Hall, *The Hidden Dimension* (New York: Anchor Books, 1990).

<sup>133</sup> Hall's theories were previously applied to a material culture study by Beverly Gordon in her chapter "Intimacy and Objects: A Proxemic Analysis of Gender-based Response to the Material World." In this work, Gordon uses proxemic analysis to explore gender differences in objects and reactions to them. See Beverly Gordon, "Intimacy and Objects: A Proxemic Analysis of Gender-based Response to the Material World," in *The Material Culture of Gender, the Gender of Material Culture*, edited by Katharine Martinez and Kenneth L. Ames, 237- 252 (Winterthur, Delaware: The Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum, 1997).

in the intimate and personal zones. Without any restrictions on what objects visitors can touch, explorers in abandoned spaces are free to pick up and examine any object that speaks to them. What's more, in some instances they can take these objects home in the form of souvenirs, continuing this relationship ad infinitum. In my own explorations, I held keys and flipped through books in Winterthur's abandoned creamery, ran my fingers across the etching in the creamery's bathroom, and picked up film reels in the Lansdowne Theatre [fig. 64-5]. All of these interactions made me feel a physical connection to the individuals I imagined to be behind the use of these objects, and sometimes, the creation of their witness marks. While all of my interviewees emphasized the power of touch in abandoned spaces, Christopher Payne spoke about how it leads to a sense of connectedness, referring to a set of bowling shoes he worked with for his project *Asylum*. He states,

“You know the shot I got of the bowling shoes? Those are actually in a closet in a bowling alley, and I had to bring out a dolly to move out that whole little shelf and bring it into a space where I could set up the camera, and in a way, those mean more to me because I actually had to work with them. So it's just getting back to that experience of what's your level of involvement and what's your vested interest in something? Can you make it yours?”<sup>134</sup>

The shot that Payne describes required him to move the shelving units and the bowling shoes in order to photograph them in natural light. By moving the shoes and the shelving units, Payne established a particularly strong relationship with these items. He engaged with them on a different level. It was in the physical contact that this relationship emerged. Engaging with objects in the intimate and personal zones thus fosters emotional connections with objects, heightening the perceived emotional

---

<sup>134</sup> Christopher Payne, interviewed by Natalie Wright, December 15, 2014.

content of an object. Abandoned spaces allow for these connections to occur by enabling visitors to touch any and all objects, and even to take these objects home in the form of souvenirs to extend and memorialize the connections visitors experience within the abandoned space.

Contemporary abandoned spaces thus render objects emotional, as well as foster emotional relationships between visitors, objects, and the past individuals visitors imagine. In the process of abandonment and ruination, objects and spaces are transformed into access points to understand the emotional lives of past inhabitants. But, some objects and spaces are seen as more emotional than others. These are private and personal spaces and objects, social spaces and objects, walls, and more broadly, objects that indicate how past individuals engaged in meaning-making strategies. What's more, abandoned spaces foster emotional connections to objects by enabling one-on-one relationships between the visitor and the object, and by extension, the person or persons that the visitor imagines. Abandoned spaces accomplish this by enabling a sense of discovery, providing visitors with spaces that are away from the general public, and allowing visitors to engage with the ruin's material environment with the most intimate of senses: touch.

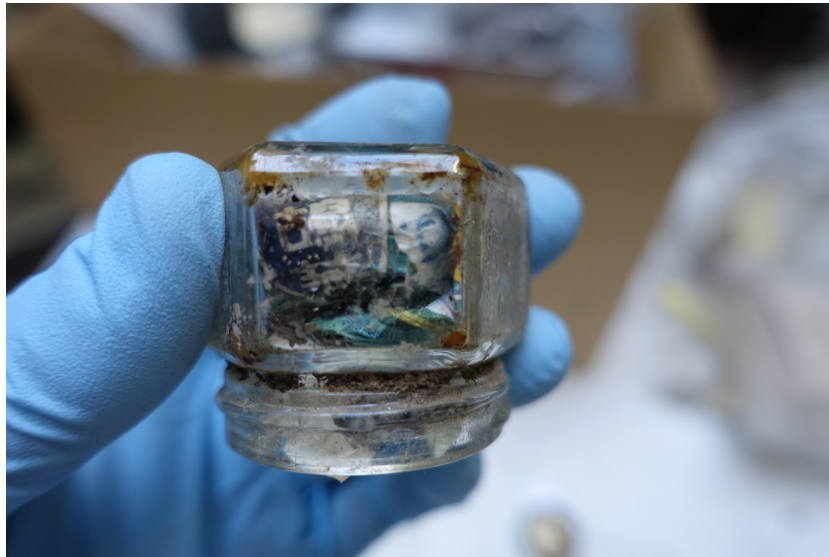


Figure 58 Emotions as private: the contents of a prior inmate's personal belongings in a Tiger Balm jar he used as a container. Photo by Natalie Wright. Eastern State Penitentiary, Philadelphia, PA.



Figure 59 Emotions as private: the underside of the Tiger Balm jar that holds a prior inmate's belongings. One can see a paper with writing on it, and what looks to be an East Asian bill. Photo by Natalie Wright. Eastern State Penitentiary, Philadelphia, PA.



Figure 60 Emotions as private: a look inside the Tiger Balm jar that holds a prior inmate's personal belongings. Photo by Natalie Wright. Eastern State Penitentiary, Philadelphia, PA.



Figure 61 Emotions as private: the Tiger Balm jar as it was found when I first unscrewed its top, showing another one of the inmate's personal belongings: a watch face. Photo by Natalie Wright. Eastern State Penitentiary, Philadelphia, PA.



Figure 62 Emotions as social: a humorous portrait: 'Clay' etched in the bathroom stall in Winterthur's creamery. Photo by Natalie Wright.



Figure 63 Emotions as social: 'Clay': a clearer outline of the etched figure and name I drew over the original image. Photo by Natalie Wright.





Figure 64 Engaging with objects with touch: the keys I found still hanging in Winterthur's creamery. Photo by Natalie Wright.



Figure 65 Engaging with objects with touch: the film reels I found in the Lansdowne Theatre's projection room, which I brought up to the light to examine more closely. Photo by Natalie Wright.

## Chapter 6

### GHOSTS IN RUINS

As I have shown in previous chapters, the material landscape in ruins invites visitors to imagine past persons, past material landscapes, and past sensoryscapes. In some cases, these imagined pasts are so potent that they are interpreted as reality and explained as ghosts. These could include seeing the person that a visitor imagines, or experiencing senses such as smells and sounds that make up a visitor's imagined past sensoryscape. In this section, I will examine what types of 'ghost' encounters contemporary ruins foster, how visitors explain these encounters, and why visitors feel ruins encourage such encounters. Rather than denouncing these experiences as superstitious and silly, I believe that they can be treated as the result of visitors' encounters with the materiality of an abandoned site.<sup>135</sup> Where visitors report being able to pick up on memory and emotion of past individuals, ghosts can be viewed as evidence of the intensity of these memories, emotions, and the subsequent narratives that visitors construct, imagine, and project onto the ruin's material landscape.

It is important to note that interviewees and other primary sources use the terms 'ghost' and 'presence' to refer to the same idea – an individual that has left the

---

<sup>135</sup> For other scholarly work on ghosts and hauntings, specifically related to material culture, see: Daniel Miller, *Stuff* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010) 93-5, and Michel de Certeau and Luce Giard "Ghosts in the city," in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Volume 2: Living and Cooking, edited by M de Certeau, L Giard, and P Mayol, 133-143, (Minnesota University Press: Minneapolis, 1998).

ruined site in physical terms but has remained in other ways. Though, some individuals use the term ‘presence’ to describe the feeling of another person’s company, such as the feeling of their gaze, in comparison to a more fully formed ‘ghost.’ What’s more, sometimes visitors use language associated with ghosts, or ‘ghostly language,’ in order to describe the potency of their imaginings, rather than actually experiencing these ghosts or past sensoryscapes as reality. Throughout this chapter, I will attempt to differentiate these different categories, though, as it will become clear, visitors’ accounts often blur the lines between imagination and reality.

### **Haunted Sensoryscapes**

Out of all of the senses, visitors most frequently report being able to imagine and experience past soundscapes. This results in visitors hearing voices of past individuals. Rather than fully formed words or sentences, visitors describe hearing the *sound* of voices, such as whispers and murmurs.<sup>136</sup> An exhibit at Ellis Island’s museum, aptly named “Silent Voices,” explores this idea extensively. Where the exhibit features photography of the island during its period of total abandonment, as well as unrestored objects from that time, the exhibit walls are lined with statements by individuals who experienced the island in this state. Many describe hearing the voices of generations of people who passed through the space. Eleni Mylonas explains, “Disturbed only by the sound of a pigeon’s wings, I heard the voices of the millions of people who came through here, building a temple with their highest joys

---

<sup>136</sup> Edensor uses this kind of language to show how abandoned objects speak in ‘bits of sentences,’ and ‘halting speech’ which ‘trails away into silence’ in his article “The Ghosts of Industrial Ruins,” 846.

and deepest sorrows.”<sup>137</sup> Shirley C. Burden reiterates a very similar experience by stating, “The peace and quiet that was everywhere made it easier for me to hear my ghost friends.”<sup>138</sup> As Burden and Mylonas both express, the intensity of the silence in these spaces invites a different kind of hearing, attuning the visitor’s ear to the soundscape of the past. The organization Hidden City Philadelphia, an online journalism group that promotes conversations about Philadelphia’s urban planning and the use of its abandoned spaces, also speaks to these ideas in their most recent Indiegogo Campaign video. In this film, a young man sits in one of Philadelphia’s abandoned Synagogues and states, “It’s so quiet in here, you can hear the walls whispering, memories, mystery, prayers of the past, listen to the neighborhood outside, and to feel the energy of the past meeting the present...”<sup>139</sup> Evidence of this soundscape can also be found in Marisa Scheinfeld’s 2014 photography exhibit at Yeshiva University. Scheinfeld captured the decay of New York’s Catskills resorts, a vacation spot frequented by Jewish families, and called the exhibit “Echoes of the Borscht Belt.”<sup>140</sup> Further, Edward Rothstein’s exhibit review in the New York Times is titled, “Punch Lines, Reverberating in the Ruins.”<sup>141</sup> In Scheinfeld’s exhibit and Rothstein’s review, ghostly language is employed to indicate the evocativeness of the ruins’ material landscapes and the strength of the imaginings they encourage. While

---

<sup>137</sup> Eleni Mylonas, “Silent Voices,” Ellis Island, October 15, 2014.

<sup>138</sup> Shirley C. Burden, “Silent Voices,” Ellis Island, October 15, 2014.

<sup>139</sup> “Your Key to the City,” last updated December 9, 2014, <https://www.indiegogo.com/projects/your-key-to-the-city>.

<sup>140</sup> Edward Rothstein, “Punch Lines, Reverberating in the Ruins.”

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

Rothstein and Scheinfeld use ghostly language, the accounts from Ellis Island's abandonment and Philadelphia's abandoned Synagogue blur the line between imagination and reality. Whether these individuals actually heard the sounds of voices, or if they are simply describing their imaginings, remains unclear.

Matt Schultz, the owner of Philadelphia's Lansdowne Theatre, was the only one of my interviewees to experience the smells of the past. He remembers this occasion very well, explaining,

“When I would come into the theatre, I had some strange experiences coming in at 7 o'clock which is when the movies used to start on weeknights, and one night, I opened the front doors and I swear I could smell fresh popcorn. It didn't happen before that, it didn't happen after that. It was very strange.”<sup>142</sup>

After reaffirming that he does not believe in ghosts, Schultz emphasized that he truly could smell the popcorn. In Schultz's case, his imaginings of the theatre's past sensoryscape spilled into reality, pushing him to question his perception of this reality.

While ruins foster the sense of being alone, they also foster a sense of being amongst individuals of the past. Where visitors imagine an abandoned space's past inhabitants and abandoned objects' past users, these imaginings sometimes lead to visitors feeling as though these past individuals are watching them. In an interview I conducted with Zhenya Grinshteyn, he described one instance in which he sensed someone was watching him. Grinshteyn explains,

“There was one time that really took me by surprise – most of these buildings to me are just empty, sometimes you hear a noise but it's never a ghost...except one time in an abandoned psychiatric hospital, I believe we were in Pennhurst which is somewhere outside of

---

<sup>142</sup> Matt Schultz, interviewed by Natalie Wright, February 5, 2015.

Philadelphia...I genuinely thought that place was haunted...I could *feel* eyes searing into me, and at one point...I don't know if it's just from being in the dark and sensory deprivation for so long...but for a split second I saw someone staring at me and then they would just vanish. And I felt that presence the rest of that day that we were walking around, and it only lasted while we were in the children's ward and as soon as we got out, even to the different ward it felt much better."<sup>143</sup>

Similarly to Schultz's experience with the smell of popcorn in the Lansdowne Theatre, Grinshteyn's imagining of Pennhurst's past inhabitants made him question whether or not he was experiencing his imagined projections onto the material landscape, or if he was in fact experiencing reality. The individuals who penned statements for Ellis Island's "Silent Voices" show also spoke of presences that inhabited the island during its abandonment. On this topic, Wilton S. Tifft stated, "There was, when I began photographing Ellis Island, a 'presence.' The souls of the past were here as witnesses and caretakers..."<sup>144</sup> Shirley C. Burden encountered similar experiences, explaining, "I could open doors and walk in dark places without a twinge, but every set-up I made I looked over my shoulder to see who was watching me. I never saw anybody, but I'm sure people were there."<sup>145</sup> All of these individuals seem to have experienced their imaginings and projections as reality.

Contemporary artist JR took the idea of presences and their gaze to the next level by materializing Ellis Island's ghosts in the form of photographic pastes which he placed around the abandoned sections of the island. To do this, JR went through Ellis Island's archives to find photos of immigrants and the island's staff members.

---

<sup>143</sup> Zhenya Grinshteyn, interview by Natalie Wright, September 23, 2014.

<sup>144</sup> Wilton S. Tifft, "Silent Voices," Ellis Island, October 15, 2014.

<sup>145</sup> Shirley C. Burden, "Silent Voices."

After blowing these images up to life size, JR pasted the figures back into the space in which they were photographed [fig. 66]. As I walked through this incredible installation, suddenly figures would jump out at me when I turned a corner or opened a door. When I peeked through a doorway, all of a sudden I was with a gang of laughing men, and when I walked into a small room, I was met by a group of surgeons and nurses getting ready for their next procedure [fig. 67-9]. As involuntary memories, these figures made themselves known at unexpected times and places. Further, because each figure was originally a photograph, the persons in these photos were focusing their gaze on the camera lens. However, now that JR has rendered them life size, the figures direct their eye contact toward the viewer, in this case, me. Meeting the gaze of past individuals, whether it was jovial, earnest, sad, or indifferent, made me feel as though these individuals were not only watching me, but also engaging me.

In interviews with the press and myself, both JR and Matt Schultz spoke about interacting with ghosts in Ellis Island and the Lansdowne Theatre, respectively. During our interview, Schultz explained that he feels the building, and the presences within it, are happy or sad depending on his actions. For Schultz, the building and its residents are happiest when the space is performing its original function as a theatre and when it is filled with people. But, when he is alone, the space does not feel at peace. In one instance, Schultz allowed ghost hunters to survey the space, and at that time he believed the ghosts were unhappy, stating, "...for the next few weeks the hair would stand up on the back of my neck almost as if we had either awakened the spirits, or the spirits were angry like, 'The deal is with you, not with people who are going to come in and harass us.'"<sup>146</sup> Schultz's interactions with these individuals may

---

<sup>146</sup> Matt Schultz, interviewed by Natalie Wright, February 5, 2015.



point to ways in which individuals conceive of the past inhabitants' personalities, as well as how these persons interact with the present. JR expresses a similar sentiment, but focuses on how Ellis Island's ghosts interact with his work. When reflecting on the process of pasting, JR stated, "I was really anxious before my first pasting," thinking of those souls who "might encounter their own image."<sup>147</sup> By worrying about the ghosts having a possible existential crisis over their own image and state of being, JR is also projecting his own understanding of past individuals and showing how he thinks they might interact with the present. By indicating how they think past individuals interact with the present, Schultz and JR touch on how they think the past more broadly, in all of its materiality, stories, and persons, interacts with the present.

### **Ghosts & the Materiality of Ruins**

For some interviewees and other primary sources, certain objects within the abandoned material landscape are seen as more susceptible to haunting. Just as walls are seen as containers of emotion, some sources also view them as containers of ghosts. JR's work at Ellis Island communicates this clearly. When pasting the figures of past migrants and health workers back in situ, JR utilized the character of the walls and the ruining process to great effect. Where tiles were coming off of walls, JR pasted individuals under the tiles [fig. 70]. To the viewer, this technique makes it look as though past individuals are slowly being revealed as tiles fall off. In this way, the ruining process is seen to reveal the individuals and stories that the walls contain. A

---

<sup>147</sup> Milena Ryzic, "Shadows Return to Ellis Island: JR Brings Ellis Island's Abandoned Hospitals to Life," *New York Times*, September 24, 2014, accessed September 24, 2014, <http://nyti.ms/1AzE4O4>.

similar case was brought to light with Kara Walker's recent public art installation in New York City's abandoned Domino Sugar Factory. When describing how her work interacts with the factory, she stated, "I really love the idea of [my] figures melting and dripping. They are very much like the interior of the Domino Sugar Factory which is also still dripping, still producing molasses from its interior, still sort of weeping this substance."<sup>148</sup> In the process of ruination, structures reveal layers of the stories they contain, and visitors to these structures view stories as being particularly present in walls. Photographer and interviewee Zhenya Grinshteyn expresses this sentiment as well, believing that walls take in prior residents' energies and slowly reverberate it back outwards.<sup>149</sup> In contemporary abandoned spaces, visitors experience energies, substances, and figures gradually emerging out of walls.

Though, as I have discussed in previous chapters, the process of ruination both reveals and erases. JR's work highlights the latter just as strongly as the former. By using the architecture of windows to his advantage, JR pasted figures around the windows' broken glass, leaving the person in his chosen photographs with gaping holes or cracks [fig. 71-2]. Whole faces and torsos are missing, requiring the visitor's imagination to fill the physical blanks.

JR's strategy of showcasing how past persons are both being revealed and broken apart via the ruining process leaves the viewer feeling as though these figures have aged with the building. As JR states, "You can sense in this place, you can feel there are stuck souls," and later, "I really tried to respect the way everything was and

---

<sup>148</sup> "Kara Walker: A subtlety, or the Marvelous Sugar Baby," last modified May 23, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sRkP5rcXtys>.

<sup>149</sup> Zhenya Grinshteyn, interview by Natalie Wright, September 23, 2014.

not just come in and paste – it needs to feel as though it has always been here, that’s the way it has to be, and so I came here many, many times.”<sup>150</sup> Because the figures seem to have been present when the window broke or cracked, or when the tiles fell off, they appear to have never left Ellis Island. In doing so, JR highlights how persons are perceived to stay on within abandoned spaces at infinitum after their abandonment.

Above and beyond the ruin’s ability to evoke intense imaginings of past persons and sensoryscapes, interviewees and other primary sources hint at why abandoned spaces might invite visitors to think about ghosts. During our interview, Matt Schultz spoke about why visitors might perceive persons and emotions to stay on within abandoned spaces, explaining,

“Maybe it’s that those kinds of places [theatres and mental health institutions] evoke strong emotions for people who are alive and ghost hunters because they believe that a person’s feelings continue beyond their presence in the building. Because think about it – one day, you go from the space being filled on July 3 1987, filled with people who are going to the movie theatre, then the next day [snaps], it’s just over.”<sup>151</sup>

Here, Schultz emphasizes that the abrupt nature of abandonment causes visitors to perceive past emotions and persons to remain in the building and its objects. For visitors, as long as the building and its objects remain, so too do the memories of these past persons and their emotions. But the abruptness of abandonment also renders objects and persons unfinished. In Schultz’s description of sudden abandonment, the end of a site’s original function is similar to a sudden death. This abrupt end to a site’s purpose renders objects seemingly unfinished. I experienced this at Philadelphia’s

---

<sup>150</sup> “Street Artist JR Tours Abandoned Ellis Island Hospital,” last updated November 3, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4nfYK3DD-xE>.

<sup>151</sup> Matt Schultz, interviewed by Natalie Wright, February 5, 2015.

Hawthorne Hall, for example, where I found a table set for a dinner that was never eaten. In their unfinished state, these objects seem to be waiting patiently to fulfill their roles.<sup>152</sup> What's more, these unfinished objects direct the visitor's thoughts toward the absent persons who would have fulfilled the objects' roles, inviting the visitor to think that those missing persons' lives, at least in this space, are unfinished as well. The objects in contemporary abandoned spaces act as a metaphor for the site's unfinished life and the seemingly unfinished lives it holds. These characteristics transform the abandoned site and its objects into a state of 'unfinished disposal.'<sup>153</sup>

This state of unfinished disposal causes abandoned spaces to be likened to ghosts in and of themselves. Rather than dying and disappearing, these sites and their objects have died but they are still present. This state is reflected in the language used to describe some of these spaces. Most notably, the term 'ghost station' has been created and used to describe abandoned subway stations. In an article by the Guardian on "The Weird Afterlife of the World's Subterranean 'Ghost Stations,'" Tom Moran, editor of the website 'Urban Ghosts,' stated, "So, while many surface buildings often meet the wrecking ball, ghost stations live on in a sort of weird afterlife, out of sight and out of mind (of most people, at least) but very much in existence."<sup>154</sup> The sites

---

<sup>152</sup> Tim Edensor speaks to this when he observes that contemporary industrial ruins are filled with unfinished objects, waiting to be assembled. See: Tim Edensor, "The Ghosts of Industrial Ruins," 844.

<sup>153</sup> For a definition of unfinished disposal and how this relates to the material culture of ghosts, see: Kevin Heatherington and M. Degen, "Guest Editorial: Hauntings," *Space and Culture* 5 (2012): 1-6.

<sup>154</sup> Drew Reed, "The Weird Afterlife of the World's Subterranean 'Ghost Stations,'" *The Guardian*, September 25, 2014, accessed September 27, 2014, <http://bit.ly/ZSWFXS>.

and the objects explored in this thesis can therefore be seen as a type of ghost, existing in a state of purgatory. These buildings and their remaining objects haunt the present with their material existence.<sup>155</sup>

The idea of persons living on through objects, and why contemporary abandoned spaces imbue objects with their past users, can be pushed further. Grant McCracken's theory of divestment rituals gets closer to how Schultz and other interviewees conceive of people living on through objects. In his chapter "Meaning Manufacture and Movement in the World of Goods," McCracken theorizes about instruments of meaning transfer between the world of meaning to goods, and from goods to consumer.<sup>156</sup> In this second category, McCracken explains what he calls exchange rituals, possession rituals, grooming rituals, and divestment rituals.<sup>157</sup> These processes deal with gift giving, the ways in which consumers extract meaning out of objects, how this extraction needs to be repeated for the objects' ephemeral meaning to continue to transfer to the consumer, and the cleansing of objects to erase a consumer's personalization before passing them forward, respectively. Where McCracken shows how individuals invest objects with meaning, thus effectively personalizing them, McCracken goes on to say that this meaning must be wiped out of

---

<sup>155</sup> As Edensor states in "The Ghosts of Industrial Ruins," "...because of imperatives to bury the past too swiftly in search of the new, modernity is haunted in a particularly urgent fashion by that which has been consigned to irrelevance but which demands recognition of its historical impact," 829.

<sup>156</sup> Grant McCracken, "Meaning Manufacture and Movement in the World of Goods," in *Culture & Consumption*, by Grant McCracken (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988), 71-89.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid*, 84-7.

an object if it is going to be given to someone else, or if a second hand good is bought or received.<sup>158</sup> A clear example of this is how individuals clean their houses in the process of moving, and how new house owners clean that house once more upon moving in. This process is also evident when buying second hand clothes. New owners often feel the need to clean these clothes, while new owners encounter past owners via objects left in pockets, or the particular fit of an item. As McCracken posits, this results in the new owner experiencing a (sometimes uncomfortable) merging of identities as s/he feels as though s/he is intimately engaging with a stranger.<sup>159</sup> Ruins are spaces where traces of past users are not wiped, but are heightened. Further, these traces are experienced in a similarly intimate setting. Ruins can therefore be seen as a site that acts to merge identities with strangers.

### **Ghosts as the Material Culture of Absence**

The traces of strangers that enable this intimate merging of identities are not only heightened by the senses of nostalgia and melancholia in abandoned spaces, but also what has been termed the material culture of absence. Mikkel Bille, Frida Hastrup, and Tim Flohr Sørensen examine this concept in their groundbreaking introduction to *An Anthropology of Absence*.<sup>160</sup> For these scholars, the absent is just as material as the present, and should be treated as such. Using the examples of phantom

---

<sup>158</sup> McCracken, "Meaning Manufacture and Movement in the World of Goods," 87.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid, 87.

<sup>160</sup> Mikkel Bille, Frida Hastrup, and Tim Flohr Sørensen, "Introduction: An Anthropology of Absence," in *An Anthropology of Absence: Materializations of Transcendence and Loss*, edited by Mikkel Bille, Frida Hastrup, and Tim Flohr Sørensen, 3-22 (New York: Springer, 2010).

limbs and New York City's missing twin towers, Bille et al. show how absent objects can be more powerful than objects in existence.<sup>161</sup> In the case of contemporary ruins, I believe the absent is also more powerful than the present, as the present objects point towards the absent objects and persons. As ruins both reveal and erase memories, the holes that are left necessitate filling. This hole results in the visitors focusing on the absent. Missing objects thus gain a stronger presence than the items that are actually present. In this definition of absent objects being material, ghosts and past sensoryscapes may thus be seen as a *type of object* that is encountered in the material and sensual ruin landscape. Interviewees and other visitors to contemporary abandoned spaces reveal how the absent can be treated as material by interacting with it as such. This is most strongly evidenced by their mental and physical interactions with the absent in the form of imagined sensoryscapes and persons. In contemporary abandoned spaces, the material culture of the absent is just as important to examine as the material culture of the present, as it, too, produces object-person interactions.

The unique materiality of contemporary ruins engages visitors in such a way that the line between imagination and reality is blurred. This blurring produces sights, sounds, and smells of the past that question the visitor's logic. The ways in which visitors to abandoned spaces interact with the past persons and sensoryscapes they imagine provides an integral lens with which to study how these visitors engage with ruins' materiality in its present and absent forms.

---

<sup>161</sup> Bille, Hastrup, and Sørensen, "Introduction," 3.



Figure 66 Ellis Island's ghosts: the artist JR worked with archival photos to put immigrants and medical workers back into their original positions at Ellis Island. In this photo, the family was looking at the Statue of Liberty, so JR put them in this window facing the Statue of Liberty. Photo by Natalie Wright.





Figure 67 Interacting with Ellis Island's ghosts: a group looks at me as I walk through the hall and peek through the doorway at Ellis Island. Photo by Natalie Wright.



Figure 68 Interacting with Ellis Island's ghosts: a group of surgeons and medical staff turn to me as they get ready for another procedure. Photo by Natalie Wright.



Figure 69 Interacting with Ellis Island's ghosts: one man makes particularly strong eye contact as he sits among a group. Photo by Natalie Wright.



Figure 70 Ghosts in walls: by pasting the photographs around the tiles in this room, JR has made it seem as though the figures are coming out of the walls, slowly revealing themselves over time. Of note, the surgeon on the right is the individual a visitor knew to be her grandfather – an instance of recognizing an involuntary memory that I spoke about in Chapter 4. Photo by Natalie Wright.



Figure 71 Fragmentary memories: a woman walks along with her family, but her face and torso are missing. By pasting the photographs around broken windows, JR has made it seem as though the individuals in the photographs have always been there, and that their memories are at once being preserved and destroyed through the ruining process. Photo by Natalie Wright.



Figure 72 Fragmentary memories: A small child looks on, making eye contact with the visitor. By pasting the photographs around broken windows, JR has made it seem as though the individuals in the photographs have always been there, and that their memories are at once being preserved and destroyed through the ruining process. Photo by Natalie Wright.

## Chapter 7

### RUINS AND MUSEUMS

When speaking about visits to contemporary ruins, every interviewee compared their experiences with abandoned spaces and objects to those of museum spaces and objects. Interviewees also spoke at length about how ruins would change if they were to become museums. Comparisons between ruins and museums were made even more apparent by the language interviewees employed to describe their interactions with abandoned spaces and objects. This chapter will explore how interviewees and other sources compare object-person interactions in these two spaces. To do so, I will examine how ruins and museums engage layers of history, display multi-vocal or uni-vocal histories, highlight marginalized histories, engage emotions, intelligence, and different senses, and how each space affects the body in different ways. As it will become clear, these sites and their respective objects are not polar opposites of one another. Rather, they are on a continuum, sharing some characteristics and differing on others. These distinctions become even more blurred when examining abandoned spaces that have been turned into museums, as well as abandoned objects that are displayed in museums. Examining each of these types of sites and the objects they contain, as well as the reactions they elicit from visitors, works to more clearly define the nature of abandoned sites and objects.

In this section, I use Eileen Hooper-Greenhill's conception of the modernist museum from her work *Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture* to define

the term “museum.”<sup>162</sup> Hooper-Greenhill divides the museum into two types: the modernist museum and the post-museum.<sup>163</sup> While the post-museum is now becoming the norm amongst newly created museums, the modernist museum is conceptualized as the ‘traditional’ museum. For Hooper-Greenhill, the modernist museum is an institution borne out of enlightenment ideals based on creating exhibits where objects are displayed to show naturalized and unquestioned truths.<sup>164</sup> In this case, the voice of the curator and the institution are authoritative. As Hooper-Greenhill posits, this approach towards objects, exhibits, and museums, has been, and largely continues to be, the institution model that comes to mind when the general public is asked to envision a museum. As she states, “It [the modernist museum] has remained the idea of what a museum is for most of the twentieth century, and is still today, at the dawn of the twenty-first, what springs to mind when the word “museum” is used.”<sup>165</sup> As my interviewees make clear in their comparisons between ruins and museums, they conceive of the museum as the modernist museum. It is only when prompted to speak about contemporary museums, such as those that utilize stabilized ruins or abandoned objects, that interviewees change their definition of the museum to the post-museum. Here, Hooper-Greenhill defines the post-museum as a site where visitors can engage objects in both an intellectual and emotional manner, and can influence the

---

<sup>162</sup> Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2000).

<sup>163</sup> Ibid, 8.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid, 17-8.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid, 151.

interpretation of objects, thereby rendering the curator's and institution's voice less definitive.<sup>166</sup> What's more, these sites allow for multiple and competing narratives. As it will become clear, my interviewees implicitly define 'the museum' as the modernist museum model, and 'the contemporary ruin' as the post-museum model.

### **Ruins as Museums**

When describing their experiences in abandoned spaces, several of my interviewees used language associated with museums to communicate their interactions with these sites and their objects. In many cases, museums were used to create metaphors and similes to better describe ruins. In our interview, photographer Zhenya Grinshteyn did just this when he stated, "To me it [an abandoned space] is a museum..."<sup>167</sup> Thus, museums are viewed as a close enough parallel to ruins that they can be used to explain and convey experiences in said ruins.

Grinshteyn then went on to explain why he used museums as a metaphor for ruins, providing a large amount of information about the similarities between the two settings. He explicated,

"To me it is a museum, because there is so much stuff on the floor. I try and walk around it and keep quiet so whoever is around me, if they step on the floor on a piece of glass it's just like 'Shhh! Don't you know where we are? Be quiet, there is a lot of reverence here.' Mainly when I go with other people I try to keep quiet and examine everything and everyone focuses on different things. For example my friends like to take pictures of the peeling paint on the walls or the different colors – we all start at one end and walk together slowly as if it's one of those tours through a museum or something else. It's more than reverence,

---

<sup>166</sup> Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture*, 152-3.

<sup>167</sup> Zhenya Grinshteyn, interview by Natalie Wright, September 23, 2014.



we all just keep quiet and see what it is that we can piece together. It's not so much 'Hey let's party in this abandoned space.'"<sup>168</sup>

In this statement, Grinshteyn begins by explaining how ruins and museums are materially similar in the number of objects they present to the visitor. In this case, one of the reasons individuals visit abandoned spaces is similar to the purpose of visiting a museum: to see the objects these sites contain. For Grinshteyn, these objects and the space that contains them commands a similar sense of reverence and respect to museums and their objects. Where visitors to abandoned spaces imagine and engage with the past persons and stories that are connected to these objects, Grinshteyn's comments allude to a sense of reverence and respect toward these past persons and stories. This sense of reverence and respect plays a large role in determining Grinshteyn's movements within ruins. As Grinshteyn states, when exploring abandoned spaces he walks carefully around the objects that he encounters, trying to step around them, doing his best to preserve them.<sup>169</sup> Grinshteyn and other urban explorers communicate this ethic of preservation when speaking about their unease, and sometimes anger, with individuals who either take or break objects in abandoned spaces, as these individuals are perceived to have ruined the experience for others.<sup>170</sup> A similar argument can be seen in museums, as objects and works of art are preserved

---

<sup>168</sup> Zhenya Grinshteyn, interview by Natalie Wright, September 23, 2014.

<sup>169</sup> These findings contradict those put forward by Edensor in "The Ghosts of Industrial Ruins," in which he states that bodies can move freely in ruins, which invites visitors to abandoned spaces to move their bodies in more relaxed and less strict ways. Instead, Grinshteyn seems to react similarly to the ways in which he moves through a museum – in a highly controlled manner. Edensor, "Industrial Ruins," 832.

<sup>170</sup> Zhenya Grinshteyn, interview by Natalie Wright, September 23, 2014. See also: Victoria Fleischer, "Urban Explorer Reveals an Abandoned World, Frozen in Time."

for generations to come. And, when they are destroyed, future individuals who were not able to experience these objects are perceived as victims.

The careful pattern of movement that Grinshteyn describes can also be seen in museums, where visitors are taught to enact slow and controlled movements in order to protect the objects that museums house. The controlled actions Grinshteyn describes in ruins extend to his voice control, as Grinshteyn explains how he lowers his voice and limits the noises himself and his friends make while walking. What's more, if one of Grinshteyn's fellow explorers makes a loud sound, such as stepping on glass, Grinshteyn implores them to recognize the importance of the setting they are in and how it must be respected. This respect takes the form of remaining silent. Rather than making loud noises and talking over the ruin, Grinshteyn insinuates that the silence allows visitors to experience the full power of the ruin and its objects. For Grinshteyn, silence accomplishes this by enabling visitors to focus on these objects and spaces, by allowing objects and the overall site to speak to the visitors, and by inviting visitors to effectively listen. Similarly, museums attempt to foster a silent sensoryscape in order to allow visitors to effectively focus on objects. As such, both ruins and museums are spaces where visitors silently engage with objects. Rather than conversing with others, both sites encourage visitors to be with their own thoughts as they examine objects. Randolph Langebach makes much the same observation in his chapter "The Good and The Evil" in which he describes a group of visitors exploring Ellis Island during its period of complete abandonment. Langenbach remarks, "Each tour group passed through [Ellis Island] it as if they would through a church in silent

communion with their own thoughts...”<sup>171</sup> In this way, museums and ruins are both perceived as contemplative spaces. This is most strongly evidenced by visitors’ physical reactions to the space in their controlled movements, and their silent engagement with objects.

Finally, Grinshteyn describes his group’s movement throughout the abandoned space as akin to a tour going through a museum. As Grinshteyn explains, members of his group walk through the space together, but each person focuses on different objects. This is similar to the ways in which groups are led through museum exhibits and how individuals take time to examine different objects that catch their eye. In other accounts given by different interviewees, these individuals emphasize how groups frequently break up in abandoned spaces, as the impetus is to experience items and spaces by oneself.<sup>172</sup> This can also be likened to a museum experience, in which groups begin together, go to different exhibits, and then meet together again at the end.

As Grinshteyn shows, visitors to contemporary abandoned spaces view the museum experience as the closest likeness to the exploration of abandoned sites. As such, visitors use ideas associated with museums, and actions conducted in museums, as ways to explain the experiences accrued in abandoned spaces. Where members of the general public are much more likely to visit museums than abandoned spaces,

---

<sup>171</sup> Randolph Langenbach, “The Good and the Evil : the Preservation of Places with a Negative Symbolic Image,” in *Changing Places: ReMaking Institutional Buildings*, edited by Lynda H. Schneckloth, Marcia F. Feuerstein, Barbara A. Campagna, (Fredonia: White Pine Press, 1992), 190.

<sup>172</sup> Conrad Benner, interview by Natalie Wright, October 18, 2014.

museums provide the perfect metaphor to convey memories of experiences in abandoned spaces.

### **How Museums Exorcise Ghosts**

Shortly after describing the similarities between museums and ruins, Zhenya Grinshteyn went on to say, “[That’s where] I think the similarities end.”<sup>173</sup> For Grinshteyn and many of my other interviewees, one of the main differences they voiced was that they could not experience ghosts in museums in the same way that they could in ruins. Though, as some interviewees share, certain spaces within museums are more likely to allow for the type of imagining that provokes ghostly experiences. Where ghosts can be understood as the product of intense imaginings of past persons and past sensoryscapes as evoked by the ruin’s material landscape and melancholic nature, the inability to experience ghosts in museums is both significant and multi-layered. In this section, I will examine why visitors feel they cannot experience ghosts in most museums, and will explore what spaces within museums are more likely to foster similar imaginings to ruins.

Going back to why visitors are able to imagine ghosts in ruins, it is possible to use these reasons to examine why visitors might be less likely to imagine ghosts in museums. One such reason is that ruins focus the visitor’s attention on the persons associated with the objects, rather than the objects themselves. Ruins achieve this via their melancholic and nostalgic nature. As I have shown in previous chapters, this cue encourages visitors to abandoned spaces to perceive material memories as an access point to past persons, and certain objects and spaces as a window into past persons’

---

<sup>173</sup> Zhenya Grinshteyn, interview by Natalie Wright, September 23, 2014.

emotions. Museums, on the other hand, do not present objects in the same melancholic and nostalgic light. Where ruins materialize the entropic nature of time passing via layers of dust and the deterioration or fading of different materials, objects in museums are often presented as clean and stabilized, having defied aging via conservation efforts. These objects have been saved and have thus migrated from the category of societal forgetting into the category of societal remembering. As such, objects in museums do not elicit the same reaction as forgotten objects and persons. In doing so, museums end up emphasizing the object, rather than the person(s) behind that object. Christopher Payne spoke about this in our interview, in which he said, “Well, museums are a sanitized environment. So really it’s just about the object.”<sup>174</sup>

Museums might also dissuade visitors from imagining past persons and past sensoryscapes in another way: filling in the gaps for visitors. Ruins highlight and emphasize the materiality of absence by providing the visitor with fragments of clues regarding the site’s past and its previous inhabitants. Visitors’ imaginations then jump to fill in these gaps, creating vivid imagined persons and sensoryscapes. Sean Kelley, head of interpretation at Eastern State Penitentiary, spoke about the results of focusing on objects versus persons at length during our interview. Kelley explained some of the rationales behind the institution’s decisions to keep the site in its abandoned state, rather than cleaning it up to become more museum-like, stating,

“If we fixed up every cell in the building and picked a date, say 1970 – the year the building closed – so we’d say we are going to return the building to its appearance on January 1, 1970, we’re going to put fake food in the kitchen and clothes hanging on the backs of the doors. Lets say we made it perfect – nailed every last detail so that it looked

---

<sup>174</sup> Christopher Payne, interview by Natalie Wright, December 15, 2014.

exactly the way it looked on January 1, 1970. There would be no people in it, and that's really the defining characteristic of a prison is that the people are there, and having a huge empty building looking exactly the way it looked, it would still be missing that final step which is really the most important step – getting the voices and the people back into it, and it's not as much about getting every last detail right. I think that's a bit silly. I think at some point trying to obsess over the stuff is silly when there's a larger discussion about the experience.”<sup>175</sup>

In this statement, Kelley shows how focusing on objects to recreate the past works to erase the presence of past persons from the objects and the site. By taking away the materiality of abandonment, the site highlights the material culture of the present rather than the material culture of the absent. As Kelley explains, this results in the erasure of the site's past inhabitants.

Another way that ruins facilitate the imagining of past persons is to enable a one-on-one relationship between the visitor and the object, and by extension, the imagined past person the object evokes. As I explained in Chapter Five, “Ruins as Emotional Landscapes,” ruins foster this one-on-one relationship in part by allowing visitors to engage with objects on a personal and emotional level through touch. Returning to Edward T. Hall's notion of proxemics, touch is the most intimate sense and vision is the most impersonal sense.<sup>176</sup> Save specific installations, or institutions such as Philadelphia's Please Touch Museum, museums generally do not allow the visitor to touch the objects on display. Rather, visitors interact with objects behind stanchions at the social and public distances. As Hall posits, these zones are suitable

---

<sup>175</sup> Sean Kelley, interview by Natalie Wright, November 21, 2014.

<sup>176</sup> Hall, *The Hidden Dimension*, and Gordon, “Intimacy and Objects.”

for impersonal conversations or public speaking, rather than private conversations.<sup>177</sup> Museums may do this for two reasons: to protect the objects from being handled as a form of preventative conservation, or to emphasize an intellectual relationship with the object.<sup>178</sup> The presentation of objects to highlight the visual is at once a vestige of the modernist museum in which the curator prized the intellectual and objective above all else, and a practical solution to contemporary public access policies. Whether intentional or not, the practicalities of preventative conservation result in the visitor engaging with objects in a visual, and thus intellectual, manner. The type of emotional connection that visitors to abandoned spaces experience is more difficult to find in museums.

Ruins also facilitates a one-on-one relationship between the visitor and the imagined past person by making visitors feel alone. Ruins accomplish this by being a site that the general public does not visit, and by enabling visitors to believe that they

---

<sup>177</sup> Hall's proxemic zones are best laid out in Gordon's work in which she has created a table showing the different zones of engagement and their significance. See: Gordon, "Intimacy and Objects," 240.

<sup>178</sup> Hooper-Greenhill explains how museums strategically created exhibits to engage the visitor's visual senses in order to position the visitor as rational and objective. She writes, "During the modern period, sight was to be deployed as objectively as possible; subjectivity was to be repressed so that the disembodied eye acted only as a conduit to the brain. Emotions and the more intimate sensations of touch and smell were eradicated as far as possible in the search for a more systematic and universally accurate scientific knowledge. In effect, attempts were made to dislocate the mind from the body and its unreliable responses. Sight is the least personal of the senses... The deployment of sight requires a certain focal length, a distance, from its target, otherwise it is out of focus. The other senses, on the other hand, require proximity. Touching, tasting, and smelling need us to be close to things, and are in that way senses which require intimacy and which enable familiarity." See: Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture*, 112-113.

are the first to discover the site and its objects. Contemporary abandoned spaces therefore generate a specific type of being alone – a type that becomes clearer when comparing and contrasting being alone in museums and ruins.

When objects are brought into museums, they transition into the category of societal remembering and thereafter convey that they have been discovered. Further, when these objects are on display in a museum, they are there for public access, that is, they are there to be experienced by as many people as possible. This alerts the visitor to the fact that they are not the only one to engage an object, and by extension, the object's imagined past user(s). Visitors can certainly establish a relationship with that object and past person(s), but the public nature of the museum object means that that relationship will not be one-on-one. Sean Kelley spoke about this idea in relation to Eastern State Penitentiary during our interview, in which he explained how some members of the original preservation group were hesitant about opening the ruining prison to the public. Kelley remembers,

“[If you don't enable public access] it's a club with only 20 people in it who have the keys to Eastern State, and it's really really cool! There were a lot of people on that early team who, in their hearts, really didn't want to let people into the building. Letting people in was going to change the nature of the building.”<sup>179</sup>

As Kelley expresses, before Eastern State was open to the public there was a 'club' of people who could visit the ruin as their own private space away from the public. Enabling public access made these individuals share their one-on-one relationships with the site and its objects. Other urban explorers express a similar view to the members of Eastern State's club, as many of my interviewees voiced anxiety about

---

<sup>179</sup> Sean Kelley, interview by Natalie Wright, November 21, 2014.



revealing the locations of the sites they visited on public forums out of fear that many others would visit the site.<sup>180</sup> Where ruins foster a one-on-one relationship with objects because these objects are away from the general public in the category of societal forgetting, museum objects are necessarily in the public sphere and are meant to establish relationships with a large number of people.

Zhenya Grinshteyn elaborated on this during our interview when he spoke about the ways in which the presence of other people affected his perception of objects in museums, stating,

“...it [the museum] has also been so sanitized and when you’re surrounded by so many people all of their mental energies are mixing and they’re sort of overriding or negating the other energies that are there [from the objects or the building itself] because whenever we’ve been in these buildings [ruins] there can only be a few of us, whereas in a museum you’re packed in and there are hundreds of people. So you’re also getting everyone else’s experiences and emotions, like there could be someone who finds a picture hilarious and they get a group of people laughing or like everyone sort of doesn’t like it, and the emotions sort of travel and spread out, whereas when you’re more alone in smaller groups, you get to feel more of what the actual building is doing.”<sup>181</sup>

As Grinshteyn explains, the presence of other people in museums affects his ability to connect with the site and the objects on display. While one can have a personal connection with an object in a museum, and can focus on it entirely to block the presence of others out, the visitor is always aware that there are other people in the

---

<sup>180</sup> Conrad Benner spoke about this in our interview, in which he explained that he often refuses to post the locations of his photography shoots on his blog Streets Dept. for fear that other urban explorers will be angry that he has revealed a site to the public. Conrad Benner, interview by Natalie Wright, October 18, 2014.

<sup>181</sup> Zhenya Grinshteyn, interview by Natalie Wright, September 23, 2014.

museum. In contrast, ruins allow its visitors the unique sensation that comes with the belief that there is no one else around the site. Interviewees often associate this sensation with the shock they experience if they run into someone else at these sites, such as a homeless person.<sup>182</sup> Rather, visitors explore abandoned spaces with the assumption that there is no one else there. As Grinshteyn states in his quote above, the presence of others overrides the presence of the objects and/or the site, stopping the objects and site from ‘speaking’ and the visitor from ‘listening.’ Conrad Benner emphasized these ideas in our interview when he explained that in abandoned spaces, “...you don’t think about what’s going to be there and think about being surrounded by people who are talking about the artist, the art and gentrification and ‘Did you hear about this new café?’ It’s a very personal experience that is unexpected.”<sup>183</sup> For Benner, the sensation of being alone in abandoned spaces allows the visitor to shed their self-conscious thoughts and to lose themselves in the objects and the experience of the site. In contrast, Benner’s conception of a museum or gallery involves the visitor being in a state of heightened self-consciousness, paying attention to how he or she is perceived by others. As Benner and Grinshteyn explain, being surrounded by other people creates a barrier between the visitor and the objects on display.

However, in this same interview, Benner described one space in a museum that was similar to an abandoned space: a smaller room. In his words, Benner stated,

---

<sup>182</sup> In the context of ghosts in ruins, Christopher Payne stated that he was not scared of presences or ghosts, but of people who “weren’t supposed to be there,” emphasizing the shock he felt whenever he encountered another individual at an abandoned site. Christopher Payne, interview by Natalie Wright, December 15, 2014.

<sup>183</sup> Conrad Benner, interview by Natalie Wright, October 18, 2014.

“...there was that smaller room that actually *was* a little more private, you could just stick your head in and then there were these rooms where you had to go down some stairs and you were more or less alone.”<sup>184</sup> Similarly to abandoned spaces, smaller rooms foster the feeling of being alone by physically disabling many people from being in the same space. Christopher Payne also spoke to this in our interview when he stated, “I felt that way about not only the smaller rooms but also one of the gazebos that I found that was in a locked area in a hospital in New Hampshire...you feel the connection because you feel as though it’s your own and it’s private.”<sup>185</sup> Smaller rooms thus spatially allow for a private and intimate connection between the visitors and the objects.

Another barrier that interviewees report as forming between themselves and objects, as well as the individuals they imagine as connected to these objects, is the curator. This topic comes to the fore when interviewees explain how the emotions and views of the curator can overshadow the objects’ ‘original emotions.’<sup>186</sup> That is, the interpretations of the curator can stop the object from speaking for itself. Zhenya Grinshteyn commented on this during our interview when he explained,

“I think the similarities [between ruins and museums] end because the museum is a very curated experience, even when you go to the art museum and they have a showing of 19th century art, that’s very curated and is presented in such a way where the curator wants you to have a certain emotion and a certain feel of the space, whereas when

---

<sup>184</sup> Conrad Benner, interview by Natalie Wright, October 18, 2014.

<sup>185</sup> Christopher Payne, interview by Natalie Wright, December 15, 2014.

<sup>186</sup> Zhenya Grinshteyn, interview by Natalie Wright, September 23, 2014.

you walk into these spaces [ruins] the curation is done in any way you choose.”<sup>187</sup>

In museums, it is the curator’s emotions and thoughts that Grinshteyn picks up on, rather than the objects’ emotions and thoughts. Grinshteyn emphasizes this point further when he claims, “I think that it’s a very third person experience to be in a museum because you’re viewing something that someone has put in front of you...it’s hard to evoke those sorts of original emotions.”<sup>188</sup> The original emotions to which Grinshteyn refers are those emanating from the objects – the original emotions of the past users. As Grinshteyn shows, ruins are spaces in which unmediated connections between visitors and objects, and by extension past users, may take place.

Finally, many of my interviewees explained their inability to experience ghosts in museums as a product of the museum taking objects out of their original contexts.

Zhenya Grinshteyn spoke to this topic most directly, stating,

“I don’t think museums are really tailored for it [ghost experiences]...for example I went to a show to see medieval armor, and they take these relics but they take them out of context – I’m viewing them in this marbled room and no knight would be walking around this marble room filled with sunshine and this type of dress. They might have something on to see the queen or something like that but there’s no way that they’d been in full armor with their armored horse right behind them. So I think it’s what they say, it’s set and setting and I don’t think that the set that they’ve provided is very good, so I don’t think you can have that sort of connection to what you’re experiencing.”<sup>189</sup>

---

<sup>187</sup> Zhenya Grinshteyn, interview by Natalie Wright, September 23, 2014.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid.

Others speak about the effect of taking objects out of their original context, such as Matt Schultz from the Lansdowne Theatre, who stated that, “[objects in museums] are disembodied parts of an experience. It is sanitized.”<sup>190</sup> Photographer Christopher Payne also spoke to this idea in our interview when describing how he traveled to shoot unclaimed cremation urns from an abandoned asylum. He explained, “I flew out there just to take that picture. I spent a day in that room, but the urns had been moved to a little building so that wasn’t their original location. In and of themselves they were amazing, but it wasn’t one of my top ten moments...”<sup>191</sup> Randolph Langenbach argues many of the same points in his article “The Good and the Evil,” in which he states, “No reading of histories can replace the impact of standing on the actual spot where the events took place. It is akin to a religious experience. This is possible only if the site has preserved vestiges of the actual historical scene in some meaningful way.”<sup>192</sup> Langenbach, much like my interviewees, expresses the power of interacting with objects in their original context. For these individuals, interacting with “disembodied” objects takes away their ability to conjure images of past users and inhibits them from projecting imaginings onto these objects.

### **Bottom-Up Interpretation**

Another critical difference between museums and abandoned spaces that interviewees point out is the contrasting interpretation methods that each site enables.

---

<sup>190</sup> Matt Schultz, interview by Natalie Wright, February 5, 2015.

<sup>191</sup> Christopher Payne, interview by Natalie Wright, December 15, 2014.

<sup>192</sup> Langenbach, “The Good and the Evil,” 173.

In museums, a top-down interpretation method is often employed, where the curator tells the visitor how to interpret an object. This is done through text panels, and the physical set up of the exhibit to create associations between objects as well as an overall narrative. Abandoned spaces, on the other hand, are sites where visitors interact with objects that have not been interpreted. This pushes visitors to engage in bottom-up interpretation. In this model, the visitor must work to find meaning in the objects they encounter. This requires visitors to create their own narratives.

One way that abandoned spaces allow for bottom-up interpretation is their lack of definitive path. As I explained above, curating uses objects to tell a narrative, and this narrative is partially expressed through the physical set up of the exhibit. Abandoned spaces are not this deterministic. Oftentimes, the only barrier stopping visitors from exploring different areas is safety. This differs dramatically from museums where stanchions and signs are set up to stop visitors from entering areas, and exhibits are set up to bring visitors step by step through the curator's argument. In ruins, there is no argument to follow or obvious path. It is up to the visitor to create their own experience. Zhenya Grinshteyn explained this in our interview when he stated,

“And so the pictures I take highlight the space vastly differently from how someone else would see it. When my friends go together, the pictures that each of us takes are vastly different from each others’. So everyone sort of sees it in a different way, whereas in a museum...you go to see some new piece, you can say ‘here is me next to the Kaws exhibit at PAFA [Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts]’ so it’s always the same picture because the point of attention is one thing. Whereas, when you go into these museums [ruins], the point of attention is whatever you want it to be and it’s what you get out of it. So it’s much more free form, you don’t have to follow a certain hallway because this is where the exhibit goes, you can choose to follow your own adventure,” and later, “The other thing is that you don’t have a map,

you don't know which exhibit is where...And part of that is the discovery."<sup>193</sup>

For Grinshteyn, ruins enable a multiplicity of paths, and within each of these paths, any number of objects can catch the visitor's eye. Interestingly, earlier in our interview Grinshteyn used an example of his friends exploring an abandoned space and focusing on different objects to describe the similarities between museums and ruins. Yet, here, Grinshteyn describes the same scenario to emphasize how museums and ruins differ. As Grinshteyn unwittingly showed in our interview, museums and ruins may be similar in their ability to foster multiple interpretations. Museum visitors do focus on different objects, and their reactions to these objects will differ based on their background. However, by positing that museums and ruins differ in this respect, Grinshteyn may be highlighting the extent to which ruins enable multiple interpretations. Rather than saying that museums only allow singular interpretations and ruins only allow multiple interpretations, Grinshteyn positions both institutions as able to foster multiple interpretations. But, on this continuum, the ruin is on the extreme end as it seemingly fosters many more interpretations than museums. For Grinshteyn, ruins enable the highest number of interpretations possible, and in his case, these interpretations are materialized in the different objects that his friends engage and photograph.

As Grinshteyn expresses in his statement above, he believes that museums limit the number of possible object interpretations by isolating, and thus highlighting, certain objects. In contrast, ruins do not highlight objects in any particular way. Sean Kelley echoed these ideas in our interview when he spoke about setting up an exhibit

---

<sup>193</sup> Zhenya Grinshteyn, interview by Natalie Wright, September 23, 2014.

in one of the only restored areas in Eastern State Penitentiary. Kelley explained that in order to keep an object safe, in this case the prison's original Synagogue door, he needed to put it behind glass and light it appropriately. When commenting about how this changed the way the door would be perceived, he explained, "So in the end, we took the synagogue door and displayed it like a museum object – it's got its own little pedestal and a spot light is hitting it like 'that's the door!' It's very kind of 'museum-y.'"<sup>194</sup> Similarly to the ways that exhibits control movement in order to create linear narratives, exhibits also highlight certain objects. This highlighting works to direct and control the visitor's attention.

Another way ruins foster bottom-up interpretation is by the absence of any interpretation of the site or the objects therein. In this way, the objects speak for themselves. Hooper-Greenhill addresses the idea of objects speaking for themselves in her work *Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture* during her discussion of the 'transmission model' and its role in the modernist museum.<sup>195</sup> Hooper-Greenhill explains that the modernist museum communicates via the transmission model, a one-way form of communication in which the sender is active and the receiver is passive. In this model, objects are displayed without any explanation, as this model assumes that objects embody one singular meaning and that this meaning can speak for itself through the object. Visitors to abandoned spaces encounter objects in much the same way as the transmission model. Yet, both provide very different results: the former produces top-down, authoritative meanings, while the latter produces multiple,

---

<sup>194</sup> Sean Kelley, interview by Natalie Wright, November 21, 2014.

<sup>195</sup> Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture*, 133.



bottom-up meanings. Explaining how de-contextualized objects became part of the transmission model, Hooper-Greenhill states,

“It is an old but persistent museum fallacy that objects speak for themselves, and that the task of the curator is limited to presenting the object in as aesthetic, tasteful, and ideologically neutral a fashion as possible for visitors to interpret the objects for themselves. Objects are thought to ‘communicate perfectly by being what they are.’ Behind this lies the idea that objects have a unified, stable, and unchanging meaning and natural positions which are self-evident within ‘a universal view of man’s achievement or knowledge.’”<sup>196</sup>

While objects presented through the transmission model are seen to inhabit one identity as defined by the museum, abandoned objects are similarly presented yet they take on multiple identities that combat such an authoritative source.<sup>197</sup> In his recent show at Ellis Island, French artist JR pasted his work without any interpretation in the hopes of achieving this exact effect, that is, for his work to take on multiple meanings and combat an authoritative stance. In a statement to the press, JR said, “It took me a while to think about which image could go on it [the building], and I just chose the face and let it speak for itself.”<sup>198</sup> In contrast to the frame of the museum, the context of ruins allows objects to speak for themselves in an entirely different way.

---

<sup>196</sup> Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture*, 49.

<sup>197</sup> In *Ruin Memories*, Olsen and Pétursdóttir explain how the materiality of abandonment enables abandoned objects to speak on their own, using this notion as a platform to call for more scholars to listen to the information that objects convey. Olsen writes, “...it is about seeing and acknowledging things also as they are or express themselves on encounter, and not merely as conventionally explained, historically construed, or otherwise made meaningful and useful for us.” See: Olsen and Pétursdóttir, *Ruin Memories*, 18.

<sup>198</sup> “Street Artist JR Tours Abandoned Ellis Island Hospital,” last updated November 3, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4nfYK3DD-xE>.

As visitors are forced to create their own interpretations and narratives from the objects they encounter in abandoned spaces, the resulting interpretations and narratives are personalized, and the visitor is positioned in an active role of meaning-making. JR addressed both of these points in his statement to the press, in which he said,

“I’ve always given a lot of thought to how people would, depending on where they’re from and what’s their own story, interpret the work. I think for me, it’s a different way to communicate history and that works better for me than walking in a museum where everything is framed and we tell you what to think and what happened...I like that you have to do the first step, and so that’s why I hope it attracted a different crowd.”<sup>199</sup>

In this way, requiring visitors to make “the first step” of interpretation renders the meaning of abandoned objects hyper-dynamic, changing depending on the individual who encounters them. As several of my interviewees point out, this process of making the first step towards interpretation also gets the visitor much more involved in their surroundings, thus making them more active visitors. Conrad Benner explained this in our interview when he stated, “The answer’s not right there in front of you, you have to do a little guessing work for yourself. Or, yeah, make it up in your head. I’m making up two co-workers fighting [in Philadelphia’s abandoned Tastykake factory]. But it does put you into it more.”<sup>200</sup> As Benner states, the process of having to create an interpretation “puts you into it more,” thus pushing the visitor to engage with the material on another level.

---

<sup>199</sup> “Street Artist JR Tours Abandoned Ellis Island Hospital,” last updated November 3, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4nfYK3DD-xE>.

<sup>200</sup> Conrad Benner, interview by Natalie Wright, October 18, 2014.

Involuntary memories in abandoned spaces and their connection to feelings of discovery also force the visitor into an active role of meaning making. This is because involuntary memories engage visitors to abandoned spaces in such a way that the visitor is made active. Where voluntary memories are known, categorized, and employed to create a narrative about the past, present, and future, involuntary memories are not known, categorized, or employed. In our interview, Conrad Benner likened encountering objects in abandoned spaces to finding graffiti on the street, explaining, “The one thing I really love about graffiti on the street is that you’ll be walking to work and it sort of discovers you, and then surprise you’ve found something.”<sup>201</sup> In this comment, Benner explains how encountering objects in ruins enables a sense of discovery by simultaneously making the visitor think that they have discovered something, but also that they themselves have been discovered. Objects in abandoned spaces confront, enabling the visitor to feel two types of discovery. Later in our interview Benner explained the physical reaction he experiences when discovering an object or graffiti artwork in abandoned spaces, stating,

“When you discovery art on the street or in an abandoned building, there’s this sense that you’ve discovered something and all these things happen in your brain and the blood goes rushing to your head. But when you go to a museum or art gallery, you’re expecting those things, so that level of excitement doesn’t happen.”<sup>202</sup>

As I explained in Chapter Three, “Senses and Souvenirs,” the unique material landscape in abandoned spaces results in visitors’ senses being heightened. This, combined with the feeling of discovery that ruins foster, enables the physical reaction

---

<sup>201</sup> Conrad Benner, interview by Natalie Wright, October 18, 2014.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid.

of excitement, amazement, and engagement that Benner describes. While discovery is certainly possible in museums, as one can never know all of the objects or artwork one is going to encounter, museums do not facilitate the same kinds of discovery made possible by involuntary memories. Objects in ruins foster a level of engagement that is key to bottom-up interpretation.

Finally, interviewees measure and explain their level of engagement with abandoned spaces and objects with the number of hours they spend at a given site. Conrad Benner hinted at the amount of time he spends at each site during our interview when he stated, “It’s never like you’re popping into these spaces for five seconds, you’re usually there for hours.”<sup>203</sup> Zhenya Grinshteyn made a very similar comment in our interview, saying, “we spent hours in there, and the only reason we left is because the sun had started setting and it was just impossible to see,” and later, “we spend countless, countless hours going through there and I still don’t think I’ve seen the whole thing but there’s all kinds of hidden gems.”<sup>204</sup> Asylum photographer Christopher Payne similarly reported this idea in our interview, explaining,

“I think one can’t help being contemplative because if you have time to spend in a place like this that’s what you do. And I don’t think people can just pass through, you have to stay, you can’t go through these spaces quickly, you’re so overpowered by what you see and your expectations, you have to slow down and think.”<sup>205</sup>

Later, Payne gave a numeric value to the time he would spend in these sites, stating, “I would visit substations for 8 hours on end, possibly a dozen times over, and [the North

---

<sup>203</sup> Conrad Benner, interview by Natalie Wright, October 18, 2014.

<sup>204</sup> Zhenya Grinshteyn, interview by Natalie Wright, September 23, 2014.

<sup>205</sup> Christopher Payne, interview by Natalie Wright, December 16, 2014.

Brother Island project] happened over many years, seeing the seasons change, and each trip was six, sometimes eight hours easy.”<sup>206</sup> As these interviewees explain, they will spend “countless” hours at these sites, and will often make repeat trips to experience them again. Though my visits to abandoned spaces were for research purposes, and thus my research questions played a role in determining the length of time I spent at each given site, I similarly felt as though I could stay at each site for hours on end. I too was so intensely engaged with the material I experienced at these sites that I had to “slow down and think.” Each of my own visits would last between seven to eight hours. I was hyper-engaged and was actively trying to interpret meaning everywhere I could.

### **Ruins Outside the Heritage Sphere**

While abandoned spaces and objects necessarily fall outside of societal remembrance strategies such as heritage sites and museums in order to be abandoned, interviewees perceive contemporary ruins as a type of alternative museum. The aforementioned similarities between ruins and museums invite interviewees to conceive of ruins as museums. Yet, the differences between museums and ruins position ruins as a different type of museum altogether. Jon Sevik’s recent film about Philadelphia’s abandoned spaces and their explorers expresses this idea well when Sevik concludes the film by saying, “It takes guts to get into an abandoned area...but if you’re not up for it, you can always go see the Liberty Bell.”<sup>207</sup> Sevik’s statement

---

<sup>206</sup> Christopher Payne, interview by Natalie Wright, December 16, 2014.

<sup>207</sup> “‘Abandoned Philadelphia:’ A Short Film by Jon Sevik,” last updated December 3, 2013, <http://streetsdept.com/2013/12/03/abandoned-philadelphia-a-short-film-by-jon-sevik/>.

places abandoned spaces in the same general category as the Liberty Bell, heritage, but positions abandoned spaces as an alternative site to the more traditional and ‘safe’ Liberty Bell. Where the Liberty Bell highlights well-remembered and celebrated histories, abandoned spaces are distinctly *not that*. Rather, they represent forgotten and uncelebrated histories and heritages.

One of the main reasons that interviewees perceive abandoned spaces as existing outside of the heritage sphere is their ability to critique society’s remembrance strategies regarding what is of value and what is not. By being forgotten, abandoned sites and objects are in a unique position to question what, and who, should be remembered and valued. For my interviewees, ruins highlight the selective nature of societal remembrance practices, and the ways in which sites, objects, and persons are selectively chosen to be a part of a societal narrative and identity or not. Ruins are thus the perfect sites to examine the history and material culture of marginalized persons and histories, as they show the material effect of falling outside of the aspirational societal identity.

One of the ways that ruins oppose societal remembrance practices is to showcase multiple, competing narratives, rather than being interpreted into a linear historical narrative. Not being interpreted into a linear narrative is, as I explain in Chapter 4, what makes abandoned sites and objects embody involuntary memories. Christopher Payne spoke about the ways in which ruins highlight multiple and competing narratives extensively in our interview, specifically in relation to the history of mental health institutions in the United States – a topic he explored intensely in his work *Asylum: Inside the Closed World of State Mental Hospitals*.<sup>208</sup> In

---

<sup>208</sup> Payne, *Asylum*.

our interview, Payne emphasized the ruin's presentation of competing positive and negative narratives, stating,

“...with the asylums, the thing that really blew me away was the whole self sufficiency aspect...Long after I got sick of photographing the wards, I saw all the utility spaces with instructions and there's nothing evil or sinister about those – and yet the wards were always like ‘that's where they did the electric shock.’ So once you show the other side – the more complex you make the work, the more people have to discuss it. And the more open ended it becomes...and then making those stereotypes gets harder. It's harder to see things more one dimensionally.”<sup>209</sup>

Without being cleaned up to show one perspective, abandoned spaces show multiple and competing perspectives.<sup>210</sup>

Ruins accomplish the presentation of multiple narratives by highlighting multiple layers of materiality. As objects deteriorate in the ruining process, layers of materials become evident to the visitor, a process Olsen and Pétursdóttir call ‘self-excavation’ [fig. 73-4].<sup>211</sup> If materials are understood to embody persons, perspectives, and narratives, the ruining process highlights a multiplicity of persons,

---

<sup>209</sup> Christopher Payne, interview by Natalie Wright, December 16, 2014.

<sup>210</sup> In her work *Lost America*, Constance Greiff expresses the idea that in the past, restoring and cleaning up a place often resulted in the presentation of positive histories and the erasure of negative histories. She states, “Williamsburg represents upper-class WASP history. The streets are clean; the slave cabins and out-houses have been suppressed. It is history without depth and without continuity. The clock has stopped and the past has been enshrined behind glass...having put history in its niche, one can admire and forget it. There is no spillover of history or art as a living presence able to enrich our lives.” Constance Greiff, *Lost America: From the Mississippi to the Pacific* (Princeton: The Pyne Press, 1971), 7.

<sup>211</sup> Olsen and Pétursdóttir, “Introduction,” 11-12.

perspectives, and narratives. What's more, the ruining process encourages the visitor to see these materials and the ideas they represent as coexisting. Where peeling paint showcases colors that existed before it, for example, the peeling paint uncovers and emphasizes various layers of decision-making processes, as well as layers of histories, personalities, and perspectives [fig. 75]. In doing so, the materiality of abandonment invites the visitor to think about different perspectives and how they can co-exist in a given space and its objects.

The ruin's ability to challenge canonical histories, to highlight marginalized histories, to present competing narratives, to provide the visitor with a direct connection to past persons, to enable the visitor to engage in bottom-up meaning making, to foster personal and emotional connections with past persons, positions ruins as museums that fall outside of the traditional remembrance sectors. Their position outside of this traditional sphere, and indeed their critical voice towards this traditional sphere, is part of their attraction – an attraction that has brought contemporary ruins into the very remembrance sphere that they oppose.

### **Ruins Inside the Heritage Sphere**

Within the museum field, there has been a veritable turn to ruins, as well. In recent years, more and more institutions have harnessed abandoned spaces for all of the reasons mentioned throughout this thesis: their ability to heighten senses, to facilitate close connections between objects and persons, to ignite a visitor's imagination and direct their attention to the materiality of absence and emotion, and to challenge societal remembrance practices. More than any other reason, museum professionals cite the ruin's ability to critique societal remembrance practices as the



reason they employ the materiality of abandonment.<sup>212</sup> I have seen museums employ the materiality of abandonment in three ways: museums as stabilized ruins, such as Eastern State Penitentiary, museums showing abandoned objects, such as Ellis Island’s “Silent Voices” exhibit, and museums opening up abandoned spaces for tours, such as JR’s art installation throughout the south side of Ellis Island. Interviewees and other primary sources speak about the benefits and anxieties surrounding the absorption of abandoned sites or abandoned objects into the museum sphere.

In their chapter, “Introduction: An Archaeology of Ruins,” Olsen and Pétursdóttir write,

“Through [ruins’] very immediate and affecting presence, they are actively part of an alternative discourse about the past, about heritage, and about aesthetics. And moreover, if we understand their agenda correctly it is not one of domestication or normalization, but one of resistance and opposition. In fact, subjecting them to sameness would easily bring down their critical voices to silence.”<sup>213</sup>

For Olsen and Pétursdóttir, bringing the abandoned space, and by extension the abandoned object, into the heritage/museum sphere “easily brings down their critical voices to silence.” But, contemporary institutions such as Eastern State Penitentiary, Save Ellis Island, and New York City’s Lower East Side Tenement Museum, all harness the ruin’s critical voice and use it as a platform to speak about issues regarding marginalized histories and persons. At Eastern State Penitentiary for example, the ruin’s critical voice provides a frame for exhibits which largely explore contemporary injustices in the United States justice system. An outdoor installation called “The Big

---

<sup>212</sup> “Tenement Museum,” last modified January 22, 2014, <http://www.c-span.org/video/?318401-1/american-artifacts-tenement-museum>.

<sup>213</sup> Olsen and Pétursdóttir, “Introduction,” 8.

Graph,” for instance, shows how the number of incarcerated African Americans has skyrocketed over time [fig. 76]. Another installation explores the experience of trans persons in the justice system and their abuse in prisons. At Ellis Island, the organization Save Ellis Island utilized the ruins of the island’s isolation hospitals to speak about the lesser-known stories of immigrants with perceived mental or physical illnesses, and how they lived in a liminal space at the American border. Finally, the Lower East Side Tenement Museum in New York City also uses abandonment to speak about marginalized persons and histories. As one of the first American house museums dedicated to non-elite persons and families, the site was found as an abandoned space in the Lower East Side and was transformed into a partially stabilized ruin.<sup>214</sup> The abandoned section of the museum is now used as a springboard to speak about the history of immigration in New York, and the state of the American immigration system today. Matt Schultz spoke about his positive experiences at the Tenement Museum during our interview, in which he cited the benefits of its concentration outside of elite American history. He stated,

“My favorite museum is the Tenement Museum in New York, because that was the experience of most Americans, it was certainly the experience of most of my family. So I could connect. There’s my great grandfather in that setting. That’s not fine art, but it speaks to me, whereas a static museum doesn’t.”<sup>215</sup>

While Olsen and Pétursdóttir state that abandoned sites and objects would lose their critical voice were they to be absorbed into the realm of societal remembering, it

---

<sup>214</sup> Andrew S. Dolkhart, *Biography of a Tenement House in New York City: An Architectural History of 97 Orchard* (Chicago: The Center for American Places at Columbia College Chicago, 2012), 104.

<sup>215</sup> Matt Schultz, interview by Natalie Wright, February 5, 2015.

seems contemporary heritage institutions are using the ruin's critical voice as a platform to discuss and critique contemporary issues. Rather than silencing the ruin's critical voice, contemporary heritage institutions are attempting to amplify it.

One of the ways that these institutions accomplish this amplification is to preserve the layers from self excavation in abandoned structures in order to showcase their multiple and competing narratives. Kira Garcia, Director of the Tenement Museum, confirms this sentiment in an online interview in which she explains the aims of the museum.<sup>216</sup> Garcia explains the reasoning behind leaving some portions of the museum in their ruinous state, stating,

“We leave some of these apartments as we found them to show the layers of change that happened to the building over time... Part of why we do not do that [restore everything] is because there are clues left behind in some of these apartments that show us how people lived here, what they were doing, what they were thinking...how they changed the building over time.”<sup>217</sup>

Andrew S. Dolkhart echoes this in his work *Biography of a Tenement House in New York City* when he states,

“[In devising a restoration plan] It was also imperative that a strategy be devised to protect the layers of physical history evident within the building, since one of the aspects that makes this building such a powerful historical statement is the clear evidence of successive residents and alterations, with layers of paint and wallpaper, peeling plaster, bulging walls, abandoned sinks, and other features providing evidence of the lives of the thousands who moved through this structure and similar buildings across the city.”<sup>218</sup>

---

<sup>216</sup> “Tenement Museum,” last modified January 22, 2014, <http://www.c-span.org/video/?318401-1/american-artifacts-tenement-museum>.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid.

<sup>218</sup> Dolkhart, *Biography of a Tenement House in New York City*, 104.

By allowing different persons and time periods to coexist in that space, the Tenement Museum has highlighted the ruin's ability to showcase multiple voices and narratives. Christopher Payne spoke to this in our interview when he responded to the question of whether or not aspects of a ruin are lost when it is turned into a museum. Payne responded,

“I think it depends on how much is preserved and how much is presented. So in *Asylum* I was trying to present multiple narratives – to contrast the good with the bad. I often fear that I was coming across as an advocate, and in a way I was, I was advocating the type of self sustaining way of life and the architecture – I wasn't advocating for the treatment of people like that. But those are multiple, competing narratives. I think it's easy to present all of that, in a way, if the places are still there – if its just one room then you're limited on what you can tell, but I think a lot of places do it pretty well. The Holocaust does it pretty well, as does Ellis Island. Where you're presented with all sorts of different viewpoints. Those are perfect examples.”<sup>219</sup>

For Payne, the successful museums are those that present as many narratives as possible in the same fashion as contemporary ruins.

While harnessing the materiality of abandonment leads to the aforementioned benefits for institutions, it also leads to anxieties for museum professionals regarding the process of bottom-up interpretation. At Eastern State Penitentiary, for example, bottom-up interpretation is enabled by its comparatively low emphasis on interpretation via text panels. Visitors are free to wander, though some sections of the site are blocked off. In this way, objects speak for themselves, and visitors can imaginatively construct their own interpretations. But, Sean Kelley, Director of Public Programming at Eastern State, worries about this sometimes.<sup>220</sup> His anxieties arise

---

<sup>219</sup> Christopher Payne, interview by Natalie Wright, December 16, 2014.

<sup>220</sup> Sean Kelley, interview by Natalie Wright, November 21, 2014.

from the fact that visitors' imaginings could incorrectly represent past prison inmates and could thus propagate harmful stereotypes. Where contemporary ruins embody marginalized histories and persons, in this case, prisoners, Kelley worries that visitors' imaginings will take away the voices of past prisoners – voices that have already been traditionally silenced in remembrance practices. Though objects speak for themselves, visitors project their interpretations of these objects onto the ruin's material landscape, and this projection could act to silence past persons. On this topic, Kelley stated,

“One of things that's interesting about these old spaces, I'm sure you've made the same observation, is that they kind of tell their own stories, but they lie. They don't tell you...they mislead you. So if people walk in...there's like this film reel that's playing and it's a combination of Oz and Shawshank Redemption and Orange is the New Black and a whole set of assumptions about what people who committed crimes must be like.”<sup>221</sup>

When I asked about how to correct these assumptions, Kelley stated, “There's not any great secret to it, it's trying to get the voices of the people who were here back into the space.”<sup>222</sup> As Kelley shows, the evocativeness of the materiality of abandonment ignites the visitor's imagination, but the accuracy of those imaginings is crucial, as they determine representations of past persons.<sup>223</sup> Christopher Payne shared many of

---

<sup>221</sup> Sean Kelley, interview by Natalie Wright, November 21, 2014.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid.

<sup>223</sup> Anna McWilliams also speaks about the dangers of imagining past persons and sensoryscapes incorrectly, and how contemporary ruins can sometimes lead to incorrect imaginings. In her chapter “Borders in Ruin,” she writes, “But in a way the ruins also seduce us. We get swept up in our own senses and reactions to these ruins. In contrast to archaeological remains for earlier periods, these places, although in a state of decay but fully comprehensible, require little from our imagination to mentally transform them into the places we think they once were. But they only provide one part of the story.” See: McWilliams, “Borders in Ruin,” 407.

these same concerns in our interview, in which he spoke about his anxieties relating to imagining past persons incorrectly. Reflecting on this, Payne stated,

“The evocativeness comes from the abandonment of it, because when they were in use they weren’t as evocative...they’ve taken on an added layer of meaning that gets exaggerated in terms of the drama of it. It can, as I said, portray the institutions in the wrong light, and the people in the wrong light...”<sup>224</sup>

For Payne, the corrective measure that he employs is to inform his imaginings with research in the form of archival searches.<sup>225</sup> Otherwise, as Payne and Kelley have put forward, the visitor risks imagining past persons “in the wrong light,” and in ways that are harmful for those past persons. Though visitors often feel strongly connected to the past persons they imagine, especially when encountering material memories or emotional objects/spaces, these imaginings could be wrong. That is, they might not align with the true experience of the past person(s) who inhabited the abandoned site and used the abandoned objects. While objects speak for themselves, the multitude of interpretations that abandoned objects allow that is so key to bottom-up interpretation renders the meaning of abandoned objects highly dynamic. These imaginings are, above all, a projection onto the ruin’s material landscape. Though these projections have been ideal for this thesis to better understand the affective responses visitors experience when interacting with contemporary abandoned spaces and objects, these projections can also work to incorrectly represent the past and past persons [for further information on this issue, see: Appendix A: The Material Culture of Emotion: A Literature Review].

---

<sup>224</sup> Christopher Payne, interview by Natalie Wright, December 16, 2014.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid.

Contemporary ruins can be conceived of as a type of alternative museum. This alternative museum is critical of traditional remembering practices, enables intimate and personal connections between the visitor, the object, and the imagined person behind the object, and fosters free form, bottom-up interpretation. For all of these reasons, contemporary ruins have been brought into the traditional museum sphere, with institutions specifically using them as a platform to speak critically about marginalized histories and contemporary issues. Though, this adoption into the traditional museum sphere is not without anxieties, as interviewees highlight the dangers associated with imagining inaccurate portrayals of past persons, and how this could take voices away from already marginalized populations.



Figure 73 Self-excavation: the deterioration of upholstered walls in the Lansdowne theatre, revealing the layers beneath. Photo by Natalie Wright



Figure 74 Self-excavation: the deterioration of an upholstered chair in Eastern State Penitentiary, revealing the layers beneath. Photo by Natalie Wright. Eastern State Penitentiary, Philadelphia, PA.





Figure 75 Self-excavation: the ruining process has made the paint peel in Eastern State Penitentiary, revealing different layers of paint colors that existed at different times, but are now showcased together. In this way, the different paint colors highlight different layers of history and how they coexist today. Photo by Natalie Wright. Eastern State Penitentiary, Philadelphia, PA.



Figure 76 Museums using the ruin's critical voice as a frame: "the Big Graph": this outdoor installation in Eastern State Penitentiary very vocally criticizes the contemporary justice system in the United States, showing how the number of incarcerated African Americans has skyrocketed over time. Eastern State Penitentiary, Philadelphia, PA.

## **Chapter 8**

### **CONCLUSION**

As I have aimed to show in this thesis, the materiality of abandonment, and the ways in which visitors affectively react to this materiality, can be mined for new angles and approaches toward a large number of topics within material culture. By combining object analysis of abandoned sites and objects with interviews I conducted with others who have experienced such sites and objects, I have attempted to describe the exact nature of contemporary abandonment, how it transforms objects, and how it affects individuals on a physical and emotional level. By applying these conclusions to material culture theory, I hope to have engaged and furthered theories relating to the materiality of souvenirs, memory, emotion, absence, and marginalized histories.

To embody the materiality of abandonment, contemporary abandoned spaces and their objects fall outside of societal remembrance practices. In many cases, these sites and objects are abandoned because they contest societal narratives of progress, often falling prey to abandonment for their associations with negative, and now marginalized, histories. In these forgotten spaces, forgotten objects continue to exist, and continue to tell fragmented stories about past persons and the past material landscape that once existed when these objects were in use. Falling outside of linear interpretations of history, these sites and their objects embody involuntary memories.

After the immediacy of their abandonment, these spaces act as time capsules, at once freezing time and keeping the abandoned objects in situ, while also materializing time passing with the build up of dust, the fading of colours, the invasion of nature, and the deterioration of materials. The way that these sites distort the

visitor's conception of time, embodying a time past that continues to exist in the present, and the way that abandoned sites and objects materialize forgotten stories and persons, all render the abandoned space melancholic and nostalgic.

The melancholic and nostalgic response that the materiality of abandonment produces results in another reaction: to focus on, and imagine, the material culture of absence. The process of ruination leaves objects fragmented, telling bits and pieces of stories. The visitor is invited to fill in the blanks, and this results in vivid imaginings of past persons and landscapes. These imaginings can be so potent that the visitor uses ghost language to describe them, or, truly experiences these imaginings as reality and explains them as ghosts. But, visitors are imagining persons who they do not know. These imaginings are the result of abandoned objects being involuntary memories. By falling outside of societal remembrance, abandoned objects are not organized or made sense of in any way. Instead, they speak for themselves. A bottom-up model of interpretation results from encounters with involuntary memories, rendering the meaning of an object highly dynamic. The imaginings that visitors construct are a combination of information they interpret from the objects they encounter, and their own personal associations with that information. Visitors then project these imaginings onto the material landscape of the ruin.

The information that visitors pick up from objects is very frequently associated with the object's material memories and its perceived emotional content. The melancholic and nostalgic nature of contemporary ruins directs the visitor's eye to the ways in which abandoned objects took in the body of their users and memorialized their physicality, as well as the ways in which objects became imbued with a past user's emotion. Here, material memories give shape to the physicality of a past user in

the form of routinized and momentary memories. Where objects and persons enact different kinds of agency on one another, objects in ruins remember object-person interactions and the negotiation of these differing agencies, thereby remembering the body of the past person. Wear marks on objects materialize long-term engagement between objects and persons, while the build up of dust, itself a materialization of time passing, enables the remembrance of momentary engagements between objects and persons. Absent objects are also imagined by the visitor, as object-object interactions are equally memorialized in material memories. Similarly to absent persons, absent objects are also imagined, though in the form of imagined past sensoryscapes.

At the same time, the materiality of abandonment pushes the visitor to examine the emotional content of an object, shedding light onto a burgeoning sub-field of material culture: the material culture of emotion. While the materiality of abandonment transforms objects into vessels that contain the emotional lives of past users, the abandoned site also enables visitors to engage with these objects in an emotional way. The ruin allows the visitor to interact with the objects in the most private and personal zones, through touch. What's more, the ruin's ability to make visitors feel alone, and feel as though they have discovered the objects they engage, transforms the connection the visitor feels into a one-on-one relationship. Engaging with these objects thus makes the visitor feel a physical as well as emotional connection to the past person(s) they imagine. This connection between the visitor and the imagined past person is made even stronger by the ways in which this relationship can be extended at infinitum when the visitor collects an object and brings it home in the form of a souvenir. This is not only a testament to the strength of the connection

that visitors feel to the objects they encounter, but also the otherworldly nature of the sensoryscape produced by abandonment and ruination.

The type of object-person interactions, connections, and relationships that the materiality of abandonment facilitates is rendered even clearer when juxtaposing them with the interactions, connections, and relationships visitors feel in museums.

Museums provide a close enough parallel to abandoned spaces that my interviewees very frequently use language associated with museums to describe unique experiences in abandoned spaces. But, these individuals describe key differences between the two sites - differences that assist in defining the precise nature of the materiality of abandonment. Differences such as the ruin's embodiment of forgotten, and thus marginalized, objects and persons, as well as the ruin's ability to highlight the coexistence of competing perspectives, positions abandoned spaces as a type of museum that explores alternative histories and heritages. For these reasons, ruins and the materiality of abandonment have been co-opted by the mainstream museum and heritage spheres. This has often been done to highlight the ruin's critical voice toward societal remembering practices and the importance of historically marginalized voices. The result of this co-opting reveals further insights about the materiality of ruins. More specifically, it illuminates some of the anxieties with the act of imagining past persons, and how bottom-up interpretation may lead to incorrect and potentially harmful representations of past persons.

While the sheer popularity of these sites points toward why they might be important for material culture scholars to examine, I hope to have proven their value as a research topic by exploring how they connect to, and further, so many material culture topics and theories. As I have shown, contemporary ruins shed light on such

topics as object agency, material memory, the materiality of absence and emotion, involuntary memories, bottom-up interpretation, marginalized histories and alternative spheres of heritage, and finally, the material culture of souvenirs. Where museums have already begun a turn to ruins by utilizing the materiality of abandonment, these topics will only become more relevant with time.

In completing this thesis, I hope to have created a source for individuals to turn to when examining contemporary material culture theory, and methodologies to access new ideas from the research of contemporary object-person interactions. Finally, I hope to have created a platform for individuals to discuss the power of the object to capture and ignite the imagination, and the ways in which objects can transform into a portal for individuals to feel deeply connected to others.

## REFERENCES

### Notes on Sources:

A small number of my sources are in French. These sources are interviews that the French artist JR conducted about his photographic installation throughout Ellis Island's abandoned sections. Where I have quoted these interviews in the body of the thesis, I have included the original French text in the footnote. All translations are my own.

Where I have quoted statements made by interviewees, I have edited some quotes to take out such filler words as 'um,' 'uh,' and 'like.' Interviews were pre-approved by the University of Delaware's IRB ethics committee. All transcriptions are my own.

Appadurai, Arjun. "Introduction." In *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, edited by Arjun Appadurai, 3-63. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986.

Art 21. "Kara Walker: A subtlety, or the Marvelous Sugar Baby." Last modified May 23, 2014. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sRkP5rcXtys>.

Artnet. "Street Artist JR Tours Abandoned Ellis Island Hospital." Last Modified November 13, 2014. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4nfYK3DD-xE>.

BBC News. "New York's Abandoned Island." Last modified May 24, 2014. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sPOz5cfR5IE>.

BBC Travel. "Abandoned New York City." Last updated April 11, 2014. <http://www.bbc.com/travel/feature/20140327-abandoned-new-york?ocid=fbtvlbbc#FBM360445>.

Benner, Conrad. "Exploring the Ruins of Philadelphia's Public School System: Inside 3 Recently Abandoned Philly Public High Schools with Austin Hodges." *Streets Dept*, February 3, 2014. Accessed April 1, 2015. <http://bit.ly/1GM4fVt>.



- Benner, Conrad. "Inside the Beury Building (AKA The 'Boner Forever' Building) with Zhenya Grinshteyn." *Streets Dept.*, November 4, 2013. Accessed January 15, 2015. <http://bit.ly/1CgUQ3n>.
- Benner, Conrad. Interview by Natalie Wright. October 18, 2014.
- Berggren, Åsa. "Emotional Aspects of a Fen." *Archaeological Dialogues* 17 (2010) 164-7.
- Bille, Mikkel, Frida Hastrup, and Tim Flohr Sørensen. "Introduction: An Anthropology of Absence." In *An Anthropology of Absence: Materializations of Transcendence and Loss*, edited by Mikkel Bille, Frida Hastrup, and Tim Flohr Sørensen, 3-22. New York: Springer, 2010.
- Bjerck, Hein B. "My Father's Things." In *Ruin Memories: Materialities, Aesthetics, and the Archaeologist of the Recent Past*, edited by Bjørnar Olsen and Póra Pétursdóttir, 109-127. New York: Routledge, 2014.
- Brück, Joanna. "Experiencing the Past?: The Development of a Phenomenological Archaeology in British Prehistory." *Archaeological Dialogues* 12 (2005) 45-72.
- Burden, Shirley C. "Silent Voices." Ellis Island. October 15, 2014.
- Cardinal, Roger and J. Elsner. "'Unless you do these crazy things...': An Interview with Robert Opie." In *The Cultures of Collecting*, edited by R. Cardinal and J. Elsner, 25-48. London: Reaktion Books, 1994.
- C-Span. "Tenement Museum." Last modified January 22, 2014. <http://www.c-span.org/video/?318401-1/american-artifacts-tenement-museum>.
- de Certeau, Michel, and Luce Giard "Ghosts in the city." In *The Practice of Everyday Life, Volume 2: Living and Cooking*, edited by M de Certeau, L Giard, and P Mayol, 133-143. Minnesota University Press: Minneapolis, 1998.
- de Certeau, Michel. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011.
- DeLyser, Dydia. "Authenticity on the Ground: Engaging the Past in a California Ghost Town." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 89 (1999): 602-632.

- Dolkhart, Andrew S. *Biography of a Tenement House in New York City: An Architectural History of 97 Orchard*. Chicago: The Center for American Places at Columbia College Chicago, 2012.
- Domus. "The Fragmentation of Urban Exploration: How an Unlikely Mix of Media Attention and Marketing Exploitation Threatens To Polarize an Otherwise Apolitical Practice." Last updated June 1, 2011.  
<http://www.domusweb.it/en/op-ed/2011/06/01/the-fragmentation-of-urban-exploration.html>.
- Edensor, Tim. *Industrial Ruins: Space, Aesthetics, and Materiality*. New York: Berg, 2005.
- Edensor, Tim. "Sensing The Ruin." *Senses and Society* 2 (2007): 217-232.
- Edensor, Tim. "The Ghosts of Industrial Ruins: Ordering and Disordering Memory in Excessive Space." *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 23 (2005): 829-849.
- Edensor, Tim. "Waste Matter: The Debris of Industrial Ruins and the Disordering of the Material World." *Journal of Material Culture* 10 (2005): 311-332.
- Facebook. "Save Ellis Island: Facebook Timeline Photo." Last modified January 14, 2015. <https://www.facebook.com/saveellisland/photos/pb.120373733715.-2207520000.1427854995./10152668003453716/?type=1>.
- Fleischer, Victoria. "Urban Explorer Reveals an Abandoned World, Frozen in Time." *PBS Newshour*, February 20, 2015. Accessed March 1, 2015.  
<http://www.pbs.org/newshour/art/photos-enter-an-abandoned-world-frozen-in-time/>.
- Friesinger, Gunther et al., eds. *Urban Hacking: Cultural Jamming Strategies in the Risky Space of Modernity*. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2010.
- Forty, Adrian. "Introduction." In *The Art of Forgetting*, edited by Adrian Forty and Susanne Küchler, 1-18. New York: Berg, 2001.
- Forty, Adrian. *Objects of Desire: Design and Society Since 1970*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1986.
- Francis, Daniel. *National Dreams: Myth, Memory, and Canadian History*. Toronto: Arsenal Pulp Press, 1997.

- Gordon, Beverly. "Intimacy and Objects: A Proxemic Analysis of Gender-based Response to the Material World." In *The Material Culture of Gender, the Gender of Material Culture*, edited by Katharine Martinez and Kenneth L. Ames, 237- 252. Winterthur, Delaware: The Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum, 1997.
- Gordon, Beverly. "The Souvenir: Messenger of the Extraordinary." *Journal of Popular Culture* 20 (1986): 135-146.
- Gosden, Chris. "Aesthetics, Intelligence, and Emotions: Implications for Archaeology." In *Rethinking Materiality: The Engagement of Mind with the Material World*, edited by Elizabeth DeMarrais, Chris Gosden, and Coline Renfrew, 33-40. Cambridge: McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research, 2004.
- Greiff, Constance. *Lost America: From the Mississippi to the Pacific*. Princeton: The Pyne Press, 1971.
- Grinshteyn, Zhenya. Interview by Natalie Wright. September 23, 2014.
- Hall, Edward T. *The Hidden Dimension*. New York: Anchor Books, 1990.
- Harris, Oliver J. T., and Tim Flohr Sørensen. "Rethinking Emotion and Material Culture." *Archaeological Dialogues* 17 (2010) 145-163.
- Heatherington, Kevin, and M. Degen. "Guest Editorial: Hauntings." *Space and Culture* 5 (2012): 1-6.
- Hell, Julia, and Adreas Schönle, eds. *Ruins of Modernity*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2010.
- Hooper-Greenhill, Eilean. *Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture*. New York: Routledge, 2000.
- Indiegogo. "Your Key to the City." Last updated December 9, 2014. <https://www.indiegogo.com/projects/your-key-to-the-city>.
- Isenstadt, Sandy. "Introductory Remarks." *Survivor Objects*. November 14, 2014.
- Jackson, J. B. *The Necessity for Ruins and Other Topics*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1980.
- Jon Crispin's Notebook. "Willard Suitcases." Last updated April 3, 2014. <http://joncrispinposts.com/tag/willard-suitcases/>.

- Jorgensen, Anna, and Richard Keenan, ed. *Urban Wildscapes*. New York: Routledge, 2012.
- Jorion, Thomas. *Timeless Islands*. Tokyo: Place M, 2011.
- Kelley, Sean. Interview by Natalie Wright. November 21, 2014.
- Langenbach, Randolph. "The Good and the Evil: the Preservation of Places with a Negative Symbolic Image." In *Changing Places: ReMaking Institutional Buildings*, edited by Lynda H. Schneekloth, Marcia F. Feuerstein, Barbara A. Campagna, 159-198. Fredonia: White Pine Press, 1992.
- Lasusa, Danielle M. "Eiffel Tower Key Chains and Other Pieces of Reality: The Philosophy of Souvenirs." *The Philosophical Forum* 38 (2007): 271-288.
- Lin, Jennifer. "Plunge Inside Divine Lorraine Teaches Temple Daredevil a Hard Lesson." *Philadelphia Inquirer*, December 5, 2012. Accessed April 5, 2015. [http://articles.philly.com/2012-12-05/news/35597229\\_1\\_divine-lorraine-brian-jerome-rainy-night](http://articles.philly.com/2012-12-05/news/35597229_1_divine-lorraine-brian-jerome-rainy-night).
- Local Everywhere. Last modified November 21, 2014. <http://zhenya.gr>
- Lohud. "Relics of NYC Worlds Fair: Eyesores or Icons?" Last updated April 4, 2014. <http://www.lohud.com/story/news/local/new-york/2014/04/04/relics-nyc-worlds-fair-eyesores-icons/7294037/>.
- Marchand, Yves, and Romain Meffre. *The Ruins of Detroit*. Göttingen: Steidl, 2010.
- McCracken, Grant. "Meaning Manufacture and Movement in the World of Goods." In *Culture & Consumption*, by Grant McCracken, 71-89. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988.
- M Culture. "L'artiste français JR redone vie à l'hôpital new-yorkais d'Ellis Island." Last modified November 17, 2014. [http://www.lemonde.fr/culture/video/2014/10/17/new-york-l-artiste-francais-jr-redonne-vie-a-ellis-island\\_4508196\\_3246.html#meter\\_toaster](http://www.lemonde.fr/culture/video/2014/10/17/new-york-l-artiste-francais-jr-redonne-vie-a-ellis-island_4508196_3246.html#meter_toaster).
- McWilliams, Anna. "Borders In Ruin." In *Ruin Memories: Materialities, Aesthetics, and the Archaeology of the Recent Past*, edited by Bjørnar Olsen and Póra Pétursdóttir, 390-410. New York: Routledge, 2014.
- Meredith, Jeremy. "The Aesthetic Artifact: An Exploration of Emotional Response and Taste in Archaeology." *Archaeological Review From Cambridge* 9 (1990) 208-217.

- MessyNessy. "The Paris Time Capsule Apartment." *MessyNessy Chic*, May 9, 2012. Accessed September 5, 2014. <http://www.messynessychic.com/2012/05/09/the-paris-time-capsule-apartment/>.
- Miller, Daniel. *A Theory of Shopping*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005.
- Miller, Daniel. "Materiality: an Introduction." In *Materiality*, edited by Daniel Miller, 1-50. Durham: Duke University Press, 2005.
- Miller, Daniel. *Stuff*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010.
- Miller, Daniel. *The Comfort of Things*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008.
- Millington, Nate. "Post-Industrial Imaginaries: Nature, Representation and Ruin in Detroit, Michigan." *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 37 (2013): 279-96.
- Mylonas, Meleni. "Silent Voices." Ellis Island. October 15, 2014.
- New Republic. "The Case Against Economic Disaster Porn." Last updated January 22, 2011. <http://www.newrepublic.com/article/metro-policy/81954/Detroit-economic-disaster-porn>.
- Nora, Pierre. "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire." *Representations* 26 (1989): 7-24.
- Olsen, Bjørnar, and Póra Pétursdóttir. "Introduction: An Archaeology of Ruins." In *Ruin Memories: Materialities, Aesthetics and the Archaeology of the Recent Past*, edited by Bjørnar Olsen and Póra Pétursdóttir, 3-29. New York: Routledge, 2014.
- Olsen, Bjørnar, and Póra Pétursdóttir, ed. *Ruin Memories: Materialities, Aesthetics and the Archaeology of the Recent Past*. New York: Routledge, 2014.
- Payne, Christopher. *Asylum: Inside the Closed World of State Mental Hospitals*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2009.
- Payne, Christopher. Interview by Natalie Wright, December 15, 2014.
- Payne, Christopher. Interview by Natalie Wright, December 16, 2014.
- Payne, Christopher. *New York's Forgotten Substations: The Power Behind the Subway*. New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2002.

- Payne, Christopher. *North Brother Island: The Last Unknown Place in New York City*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2014.
- PBS. "Christopher Payne's Story of Deserted North Brother Island." Last modified July 24, 2014. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gqwmNapO6IM>.
- Pétursdóttir, Póra, and Bjørnar Olsen. "Imaging Modern Decay: The Aesthetics of Ruin Photography." *Journal of Contemporary Archaeology* 1 (2014): 7-56.
- Reed, Drew. "The Weird Afterlife of the World's Subterranean 'Ghost Stations.'" *The Guardian*, September 25, 2014. Accessed September 27, 2014. <http://bit.ly/ZSWFXS>.
- Roth, Michael S., Claire Lyons, and Charles Merewether. *Irresistible Decay: Ruins Reclaimed*. Los Angeles: The Getty Research Institute, 1997.
- Rothstein, Edward. "Punch Lines, Reverberating in the Ruins." *New York Times*, September 25, 2014. Accessed September 27, 2014. <http://nyti.ms/1AzBvvt>.
- Rowdower, Zap. "Fresh Rot: Urban Exploration and the Preservation of Decay." *Manitoba Anthropology* 29 (2011): 1-15.
- Ryzic, Milena. "Shadows Return to Ellis Island: JR Brings Ellis Island's Abandoned Hospitals to Life." *New York Times*, September 24, 2014. Accessed September 24, 2014. <http://nyti.ms/1AzE4O4>.
- Schneekloth, Lynda H., Marcia F. Feuerstein, Barbara A. Campagna, ed. *Changing Places: ReMaking Institutional Buildings*. Fredonia: White Pine Press, 1992.
- Schultz, Matt. Interviewed by Natalie Wright. February 5, 2015.
- Schumpeter, Joseph. *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy*. New York: Routledge, 2013.
- Sedghi, Ami, George Arnett, and Chris Moran. "The Guardian's Top 100: Which Articles Have Been Most Popular?" *The Guardian*, April 17, 2014. Accessed April 5, 2015. <http://www.theguardian.com/news/datablog/2014/apr/17/the-guardians-top-100-which-articles-have-been-most-popular>.
- Sheinman, Mort, ed. *A Tenement Story: The History of 97 Orchard and the Lower East Side Tenement Museum*. New York: Lower East Side Tenement Museum, 2014.
- "Silent Voices." Ellis Island. October 15, 2014.

- Stallybrass, Peter. "Worn Worlds: Clothes, Mourning, and the Life of Things." In *Cultural Memory and the Construction of Identity*, edited by Dan Ben-Amos and Liliane Weissberg, 27-44. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1999.
- Stewart, Kathleen. *A Space on the Side of the Road: Cultural Politics in an "Other" America*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996.
- Streets Dept. "'Abandoned Philadelphia:' A Short Film by Jon Sevik." Last modified December 3, 2013. <http://streetsdept.com/2013/12/03/abandoned-philadelphia-a-short-film-by-jon-sevik/>.
- Streets Dept. Last updated April 8, 2015. <http://streetsdept.com>.
- Tarlow, Sarah. *Bereavement and Commemoration: An Archaeology of Mortality*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999.
- Tarlow, Sarah. "Emotion in Archaeology." *Current Anthropology* 41 (2000): 713-30.
- The Guardian. "Detroit in Ruins." Last modified January 1, 2011. <http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/gallery/2011/jan/02/photography-detroit>.
- The Guardian. "Ruin Lust: Our Love Affair With Decaying Buildings." Last updated February 17, 2012. <http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2012/feb/17/ruins-love-affair-decayed-buildings>.
- The Guardian Camera Eye. "The Utopian Estate That's Been Left To Die." Last updated March 5, 2014. [http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/the-camera-eye/2014/mar/05/park-hill-sheffield-utopian-estate-left-to-die?CMP=fb\\_gu](http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/the-camera-eye/2014/mar/05/park-hill-sheffield-utopian-estate-left-to-die?CMP=fb_gu).
- The New York Times. "Worlds Fair Relic Deemed a 'Treasure.'" Last updated April 22, 2014. [http://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/23/nyregion/worlds-fair-pavilion-is-named-a-national-treasure.html?smid=fb-nytimes&WT.z\\_sma=NY\\_WFR\\_20140423&bicmp=AD&bicmlukp=WT.mc\\_id&bicmst=1388552400000&bicmet=1420088400000&\\_r=2](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/23/nyregion/worlds-fair-pavilion-is-named-a-national-treasure.html?smid=fb-nytimes&WT.z_sma=NY_WFR_20140423&bicmp=AD&bicmlukp=WT.mc_id&bicmst=1388552400000&bicmet=1420088400000&_r=2).
- Tifft, Wilton S. "Silent Voices." Ellis Island. October 15, 2014.
- Tilley, Christopher. *A Phenomenology of Landscape: Places, Paths, and Monuments*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 1997.
- Tour guide. "Hard Hat Tour of Ellis Island." Ellis Island. October 15, 2014.

Vickery, Amanda. "Thresholds and Boundaries at Home." In *Behind Closed Doors: At Home in Georgian England*, by Amanda Vickery, 25-48. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009.

Willsher, Kim. "French Town Tries to Save First World War Soldier's Room for Posterity." *The Guardian*, December 28, 2014. Accessed January 1, 2015. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/dec/28/french-town-belabre-first-world-war-soldier-hubert-rocherau>.

Zalut, Lauren. Interview by Natalie Wright. November 21, 2014.



## Appendix A

### THE MATERIAL CULTURE OF EMOTION: A LITERATURE REVIEW

Material culture scholars have long explored the connections between objects and emotion, as well as how objects become infused with emotion. In 1988, Michel de Certeau examined these topics in *The Practice of Everyday Life*.<sup>226</sup> In this work, de Certeau posits that daily routines work to individuate and personalize commodities.<sup>227</sup> Grant McCracken argues much the same thing in his chapter “Meaning Manufacture and Movement in the World of Goods,” where he theorizes about instruments of meaning transfer in two categories: from world to good, and from good to consumer.<sup>228</sup> In this second category, McCracken explains what he calls exchange rituals, possession rituals, grooming rituals, and divestment rituals.<sup>229</sup> Each of these categories function similarly to de Certeau’s personalization mechanisms, whereby the consumer of an object extracts meaning from an object and makes it their own, and in doing so, also imparts meaning onto the object. Adrian Forty also explores these

---

<sup>226</sup> Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).

<sup>227</sup> Grant McCracken, “Meaning Manufacture and Movement in the World of Good,” in *Culture & Consumption*, by Grant McCracken, 71-89 (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988).

<sup>228</sup> Ibid, 84-7.

<sup>229</sup> Ibid, 85-6.

notions in his work *Objects of Desire: Design and Society Since 1970*, in which Forty explains how mundane objects can become charged with emotional value, thus transforming into ‘objects of desire.’<sup>230</sup> More Recently, Daniel Miller has contributed to these theories in his publications *A Theory of Shopping*, and *The Comfort of Things*. In his chapter “Making Love in Supermarkets,” Miller explores grocery-shopping practices in British families and concludes that grocery shopping can be a practice that infuses food with love.<sup>231</sup> Similarly, in almost all case studies in *The Comfort of Things*, Miller explores how objects are treated as extensions of relationships with others, how emotions are key to these relationships, and how engagement with these objects indicates contemporary meaning-making strategies.<sup>232</sup> In all of his work, Miller breaks down the dichotomy of the true, internal self and the false, social self. In doing so, he emphasizes that relations with objects indicate that the self is just as social and material as it is internal and immaterial. Archaeologists have highlighted this a great deal in their efforts to mine objects for the emotions of an object’s past maker(s) and user(s). The practice of examining objects for emotions has been a burgeoning sub-field of archaeology since the early 1990s. Sarah Tarlow was one of the first to study the emotions of the past when she investigated the effect of gravestones on her own emotions.<sup>233</sup> Further studies have attempted to create ever

---

<sup>230</sup> Adrian Forty, *Objects of Desire: Design and Society Since 1970* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986).

<sup>231</sup> Daniel Miller, “Making Love in Supermarkets,” in *A Theory of Shopping*, by Daniel Miller, 15-72 (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005).

<sup>232</sup> Daniel Miller, *The Comfort of Things* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008).

<sup>233</sup> Sarah Tarlow, *Bereavement and Commemoration: An Archaeology of Mortality* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999).

more precise methodologies with which to uncover past emotions and how they are evidenced in materials. All of these works, as well as their critics, are in agreement that emotions can be embodied in material culture, and that emotions have to be included in any portrait painted of the past. Without it, historians run the risk of depicting past individuals as robotic and their actions as deterministic. In Tarlow's later work, "Emotion in Archaeology," she expresses this sentiment loudly, stating that emotions are central to the human experience, emotions are involved in the ways society structures itself, and emotions deeply shape actions and motivations.<sup>234</sup> In his chapter "Aesthetics, Intelligence and Emotions: Implications for Archaeology," Chris Gosden agrees with Tarlow and explicates that, "[Emotions] are hard to put into words, but are often knowable through the body and its performances. The body, of course, does not exist in a vacuum, but through links to the material world."<sup>235</sup> Gosden concludes that, "...emotions are materially constituted and material culture is emotionally constituted."<sup>236</sup> Further, archaeology scholars are in agreement that emotions can no longer be seen as an internal and immaterial phenomenon. As Oliver J. T. Harris and Tim Flohr Sørensen state in their article, "Rethinking Emotion and Material Culture," "emotion in archaeology is moving beyond the notion that emotion is an immaterial internal phenomenon," and, "emotions are not produced on the inside,

---

<sup>234</sup> Sarah Tarlow, "Emotion in Archaeology," *Current Anthropology* 41 (2000): 713-30.

<sup>235</sup> Chris Gosden, "Aesthetics, Intelligence, and Emotions: Implications for Archaeology," in *Rethinking Materiality: The Engagement of Mind with the Material World*, ed. by Elizabeth DeMarrais et al. (Cambridge: McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research, 2004) 36.

<sup>236</sup> *Ibid*, 39.

they are made by engaging with the material world.”<sup>237</sup> Where emotions dictate our physicality in the world and our bodily performances, these performances dictate how we interact with our material world, thereby making emotions shape the material world.

Most recently, Harris and Sørensen were the first to put forward a methodology to uncover emotions from objects.<sup>238</sup> This methodology is based on the understanding that emotions and material culture are mutually constitutive, and is rooted in the definition of emotion as a combination of a mental state and bodily reaction (sadness and crying, for example). Harris and Sørensen define three terms for analysis: affective field, attunement, and atmosphere.<sup>239</sup> Here, an affective field is the product of a relationship of meaning. It is the emotional response that is generated from someone or something based on the meaning ascribed to these persons or things. Affective fields are dynamic because the meaning ascribed to objects or persons is subjective and culturally determined. Attunement is defined as how people recognize moods and emotions in themselves and others – it is how the world reveals itself. It can be understood as the bodily movements, or material characteristics, that disclose, and thus produce, emotional states. Lastly, atmosphere is the product of objects and people coming together to create a tempered space. Unlike affective fields that can exist without attunement, atmospheres have to be noticed in order to exist, thereby

---

<sup>237</sup> Oliver J. T. Harris and Tim Flohr Sørensen, “Rethinking Emotion and Material Culture,” *Archaeological Dialogues* 17 (2010): 145, 147.

<sup>238</sup> Ibid.

<sup>239</sup> Ibid, 153.

making them in part a product of the observer. After defining these terms, Harris and Sørensen show how to use this methodology by applying it to a Neolithic ritual site in England.

Though this methodology was widely applauded as the first attempt to create analytical tools for examining the materiality of emotion, the most frequent critique of its application was that the authors chose an inherently emotional space, as rituals require participants to heighten their emotions. Rather, many respondents, such as Åsa Berggren, would like to see more mundane archaeologies mined for emotion, such as settlements more explicitly linked to everyday life.<sup>240</sup> These scholars therefore believe that certain spaces and objects are more emotional than others. Here, we may turn to Jeremy Meredith's article "The Aesthetic Artifact: An Exploration of Emotional Response and Taste in Archaeology," where he posits that objects fall on a scale of low to high affective presence – the intensity of emotion that an object elicits.<sup>241</sup>

A second criticism of Harris and Sørensen's methodology applies to a great deal of research on the materiality of emotion: the emotions of the researcher may be colonizing the emotions of the past. That is, when interpreting objects for material traces of emotion – the researcher may impart their own understanding of emotion onto the object and its past users. The question arises: how can one truly understand the emotions of another, especially when the other is a part of a different culture – the past? Interpreting emotions of the past either requires the assumption of a universal

---

<sup>240</sup> Åsa Berggren, "Emotional Aspects of a Fen," *Archaeological Dialogues* 17 (2010): 164.

<sup>241</sup> Jeremy Meredith, "The Aesthetic Artifact: An Exploration of Emotional Response and Taste in Archaeology," *Archaeological Review From Cambridge* 9 (1990): 208.

mind and body, or it requires research on how individuals in the past made sense of their material world as well as how they understood and embodied emotion. Additionally, the latter method of research neglects the idiosyncrasies between individuals in groups based on life experiences. Though understanding emotion is critical to understanding past individuals, and though emotion is certainly intertwined with objects, accessing past experiences of emotion through their material traces is frustratingly complex.

This same logic can be applied to the study of phenomenology – a second methodology to examine the emotions of others. Joanna Brück explains and criticizes phenomenology in her article “Experiencing the past?: The development of a phenomenological archaeology in British prehistory.”<sup>242</sup> While there are several different types of phenomenology, the definition employed here is the act of moving through a landscape in order to understand how past individuals experienced that space and the materials therein.<sup>243</sup> Researchers often use this methodology to understand the effect of scale of architecture on the human body, as well as how landscape affects the senses. Christopher Tilley, for example, uses phenomenology to examine the bodily experience of topographic features such as rocky ground, steep slopes, and marshy areas, in his book *A Phenomenology of Landscape*.<sup>244</sup> Tilley argues that recording his own bodily experiences of these materials provides insight

---

<sup>242</sup> Joanna Brück, “Experiencing the Past?: The Development of a Phenomenological Archaeology in British Prehistory,” *Archaeological Dialogues* 12 (2005): 45-72.

<sup>243</sup> *Ibid*, 46.

<sup>244</sup> Christopher Tilley, *A Phenomenology of Landscape: Places, Paths, and Monuments* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 1997).

into how past peoples experienced the same objects, positing that the landscape has remained the same, and that the same human body mediates the way these objects and landscapes are understood. Re-creating the actions of past peoples is therefore seen to give the researcher a deeper understanding of the lived realities of these individuals and thus give these actions a stronger potency. Interacting with the material world has also been used as a way to shed light on emotions of past individuals. Where Gosden explains that emotions are physically experienced and performed, attempting to recreate these physical movements and performances could lead to insights regarding emotions.<sup>245</sup> Brück applauds phenomenology for its ability to push researchers to think creatively about the implications of spatial layout, but is weary that it may fall prey to the same pitfalls described in the Harris and Sørensen's response papers.<sup>246</sup> Namely, Brück worries that even if the landscape does stay the same (though she warns there is always inevitable change in geographies and objects), phenomenology assumes a universal human body that experiences environmental stimuli in similar ways – an assumption Brück believes to be dangerous.<sup>247</sup>

In her recently published chapter, "Borders in Ruin," Anna McWilliams uses the phenomenological approach to mine ruins as sources of information for past

---

<sup>245</sup> Gosden, "Aesthetics, Intelligence, and Emotions," 36.

<sup>246</sup> Brück, "Experiencing the Past?," 59.

<sup>247</sup> *Ibid*, 59.

emotional landscapes.<sup>248</sup> Speaking about her decision to use this methodology to study the materiality of emotion she states,

“Our bodies are our most powerful tool as archaeologists. Although I cannot through my own experiences in the places that I investigate reach the thoughts of others who have walked in these places before me, I can reach out and touch and sense the materials that have been left behind and I can appreciate how they affect me.”<sup>249</sup>

In applying this method, McWilliams remains confident that past emotions (in this case, the recent past) can be understood through the body, thereby disregarding critics who believe that senses are culturally and experientially determined, and that the past is a different culture. By extension, McWilliams is taking the position that these spaces are not very different from when they were in use. Yet, McWilliams acknowledges that the invasion of nature has transformed the leftover objects and spaces - changing the smells from freshly made food to mould, and spreading the once smooth floor with debris.<sup>250</sup> But, she believes the material remnants can be interpreted through the senses to good effect nonetheless.

My own research engages these theories in new ways. As I show in chapter 5, “Ruins as Emotional Landscapes,” everyday spaces and objects in abandoned spaces are perceived as highly emotional, as visitors imagine how past individuals made meaning in everyday life. This contradicts Åsa Berggren’s position that Harris and

---

<sup>248</sup> Anna McWilliams, “Borders In Ruin,” in *Ruin Memories: Materialities, Aesthetics, and the Archaeology of the Recent Past*, ed. by Bjørnar Olsen and Póra Pétursdóttir (New York: Routledge, 2014) 390-410.

<sup>249</sup> McWilliams, “Borders in Ruin,” 409.

<sup>250</sup> *Ibid*, 39-1.



Sørensen chose overly emotional spaces such as ritual sites to mine for the emotions of the past. Rather, defining spaces as emotional or not must be more nuanced. My findings indicate that ruins are themselves an emotional space, rendering objects emotional as well as the connection between the visitor and these objects. What's more, specific objects and spaces *within* these sites are seen as more or less emotional, rendering the definition of an entire site as emotional or not more complex.

By showing that my interviewees and I find spaces and objects emotional, my conclusions concur with many of the theories mentioned above which posit that emotions are material, rather than immaterial. Further, my interviewees and I found both private and social spaces and objects to be emotional, breaking the tradition of Western thought that defines emotions as strictly internal and personal, rather than external and social. Instead, the most emotional spaces and objects were those that spoke to an individual's or group's meaning-making strategies within the boundaries of their life circumstances.

Finally, my interviewees often explained how they envisioned past material landscapes and persons by walking through abandoned spaces and interacting with their material environments in a method similar to phenomenology. It is likely that contemporary abandoned spaces encourage the phenomenological approach by keeping so much of the material environment of the past intact, and by embodying the recent past. Combined, these two factors allow the visitor to believe that they are experiencing the space in much the same way individuals in the past would have. As McWilliams states,

“But in a way the ruins also seduce us. We get swept up in our own senses and reactions to these ruins. In contrast to archaeological remains for earlier periods, these places, although in a state of decay but fully comprehensible, require little from our imagination to

mentally transform them into the places we think they once were. But they only provide one part of the story.”<sup>251</sup>

Similarly to McWilliams, many of my interviewees were very aware that this form of imagining was also a form of projection onto the past, and that their imaginings stemmed from their own socialization. Christopher Payne spoke to this directly in our interview, stating, “One can’t help but project who these people were....What you’re finding – it could be anything. Who knows who it belonged to? Who knows why they were doing it...”<sup>252</sup> As I explain in Chapter 7, this projection becomes problematic when examining how such imaginings can misrepresent past persons and take their voices away, particularly in cases of marginalized past persons and histories that ruins so often embody. In my case, however, my interviewees’ imaginative projections were not a problem, but were a window into the ways in which today’s visitors to contemporary abandoned spaces experience these sites as emotional landscapes.

---

<sup>251</sup> McWilliams, “Borders in Ruin,” 407.

<sup>252</sup> Christopher Payne, interview by Natalie Wright, December 16, 2014.

## Appendix B

### IMAGES FROM THE ADVENTURES: A SELECTION OF IMAGES TAKEN DURING SITE VISITS



Figure 77 Winterthur's Creamery: dust and debris fall on the sink and soap holder. Photo by Natalie Wright.



Figure 78 Inside the dry-cleaning room in Winterthur's creamery. Photo by Natalie Wright.



Figure 79 The texture of abandonment in Winterthur's creamery. Photo taken by Natalie Wright.



Figure 80 Stumbling upon a desk as we try and find our way through the dark basement in Winterthur's creamery. Photo by Natalie Wright.



Figure 81 Going through the basement in Winterthur's creamery: we find an empty box atop a floor of leaves. Photo by Natalie Wright.



Figure 82 Empty and open drawers in the apartment sections of Winterthur's creamery. Photo by Natalie Wright.



Figure 83 Life's leftovers: packets of Heinz ketchup and relish remain in one of Winterthur's abandoned cottages. Photo by Natalie Wright.



Figure 84 An unused water fountain is surrounded by peeling paint in Winterthur's creamery. Photo by Natalie Wright.



Figure 85 Where clothes once hung: a segment of the dry-cleaning units in Winterthur's creamery. Photo by Natalie Wright.





Figure 86 The outside of Eastern State Penitentiary. Photo by Natalie Wright. Eastern State Penitentiary, Philadelphia, PA.



Figure 87 A bathroom floor peeks through dust and debris. Photo by Natalie Wright. Eastern State Penitentiary, Philadelphia, PA.



Figure 88 A paper cup holds playing cards cut in half by inmates in Eastern State Penitentiary. Photo by Natalie Wright. Eastern State Penitentiary, Philadelphia, PA.



Figure 89 Playing cards cut in half, therefore doubling the deck, in Eastern State Penitentiary. Photo by Natalie Wright. Eastern State Penitentiary, Philadelphia, PA.



Figure 90 The inside of a tobacco pouch, found attached to a piece of concrete, that once belonged to an inmate at Eastern State Penitentiary. Photo by Natalie Wright. Eastern State Penitentiary, Philadelphia, PA.



Figure 91 A ball made by a prison inmate out of cut fabric/rags. Photo by Natalie Wright. Eastern State Penitentiary, Philadelphia, PA.



Figure 92 The cuts of a homemade boat once belonging to a prison inmate. Photo by Natalie Wright. Eastern State Penitentiary, Philadelphia, PA.



Figure 93 A rusted and faded shipping tag for Eastern State Penitentiary. Photo by Natalie Wright. Eastern State Penitentiary, Philadelphia, PA.



Figure 94 A close-up of the operating lamp in Eastern State Penitentiary. Photo by Natalie Wright. Eastern State Penitentiary, Philadelphia, PA.



Figure 95 Housed in an abandoned cell, a pillow rests on a stool having expunged its stuffing on either side of itself. Photo by Natalie Wright. Eastern State Penitentiary, Philadelphia, PA.

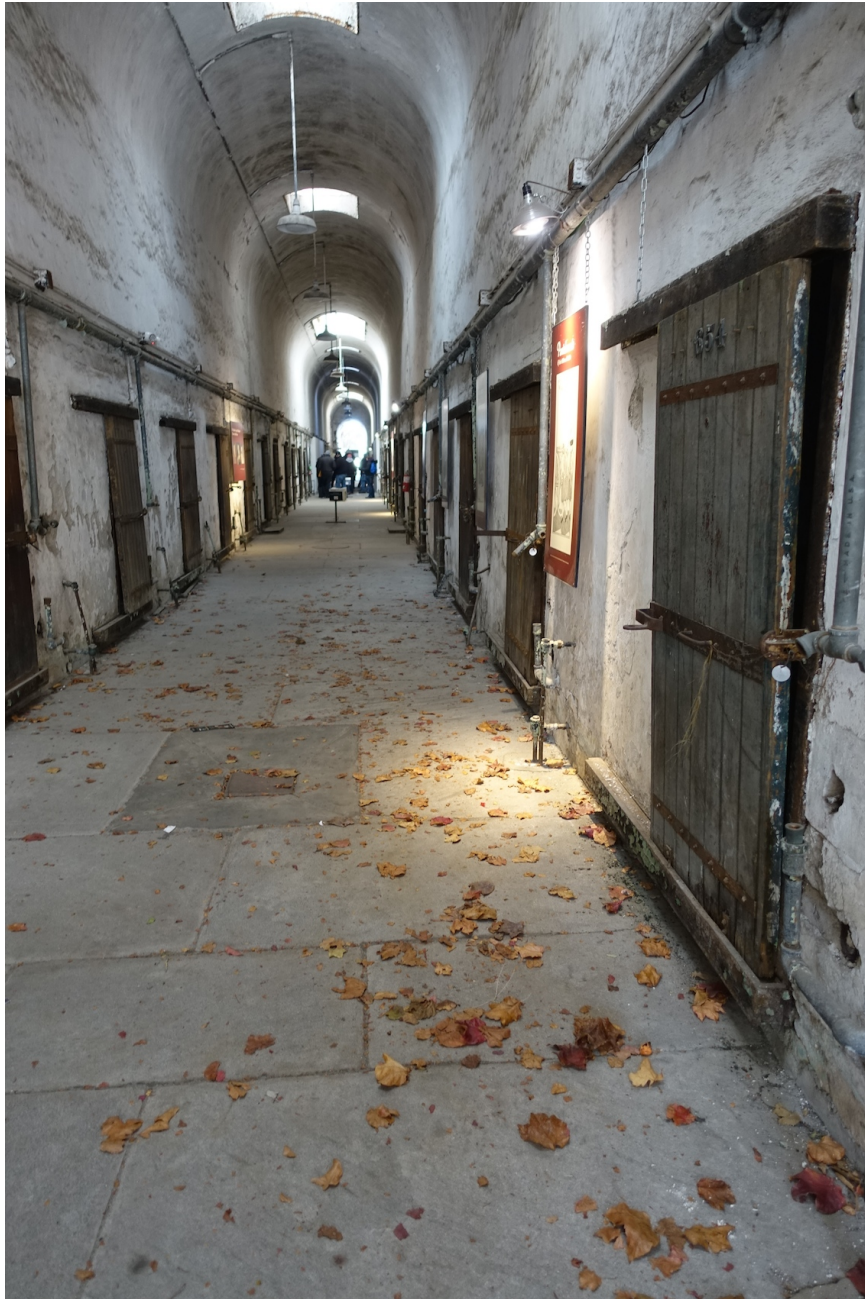


Figure 96 A cell block in Eastern State Penitentiary showing where wind has blown leaves into the hall, a familiar sight in abandoned spaces. Photo by Natalie Wright. Eastern State Penitentiary, Philadelphia, PA.



Figure 97 The stenciled and painted ceiling in the Lansdowne Theatre with the lights turned on. Photo by Natalie Wright.



Figure 98 A detail of the theatre's dust-covered chandeliers. Photo by Natalie Wright.



Figure 99 The Lansdowne Theatre's projection unit. Photo by Natalie Wright.

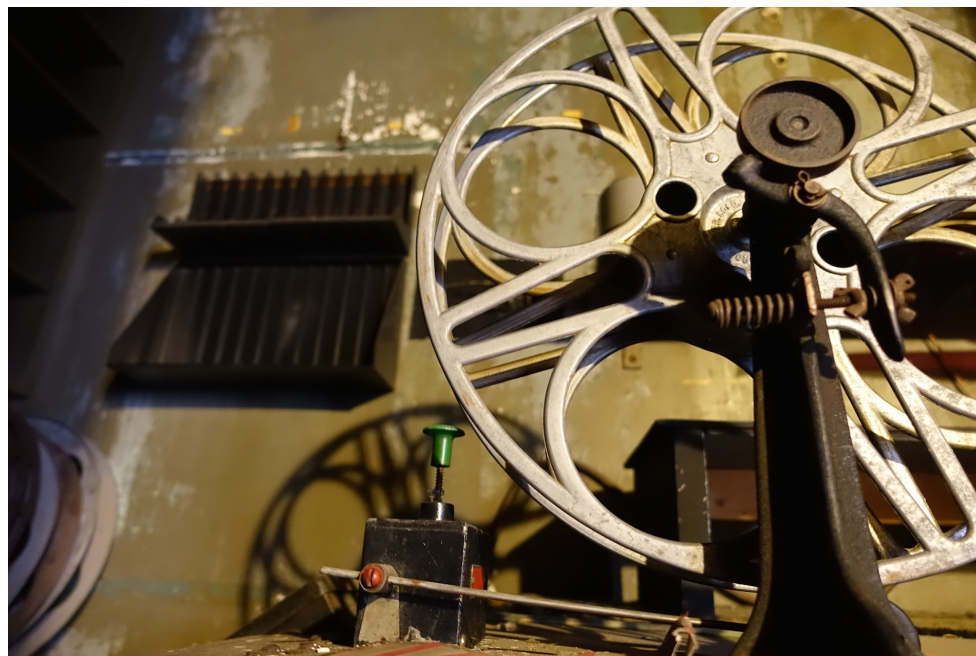


Figure 100 The film reel storage room in the Lansdowne Theatre. Photo by Natalie Wright.





Figure 101 The original curtains from the Lansdowne Theatre's opening in 1927.  
Photo by Natalie Wright.



Figure 102 Behind the curtains: the Lansdowne Theatre sign awaits its use again.  
Photo by Natalie Wright.



Figure 103 What was once the women's bathroom in the Lansdowne Theatre now houses extra chairs and seats. Under the seats on the left, one can see the blue sofa that was a part of this bathroom. Photo by Natalie Wright.



Figure 104 More Lansdowne lettering in storage rooms within the theatre. Photo by Natalie Wright.



Figure 105 Abandoned objects behind glass in the Ellis Island show “Silent Voices.” Photo by Natalie Wright. Courtesy of the National Park Service, Statue of Liberty National Monument and Ellis Island.



Figure 106 Abandoned objects behind glass in the Ellis Island show “Silent Voices.” Photo by Natalie Wright. Courtesy of the National Park Service, Statue of Liberty National Monument and Ellis Island.



Figure 107 Children looking towards the visitor: one of JR’s pastings in his show through the abandoned sections of Ellis Island. Photo by Natalie Wright.



Figure 108 The autopsy room in Ellis Island's abandoned isolation hospitals. This is the only room in which JR did not paste. Photo by Natalie Wright.



Figure 109 A pasting of a larger than life woman in which JR used the wall and the set of drawers in front of it. Photo by Natalie Wright.



Figure 110 A pasting done by JR in Ellis Island's abandoned isolation hospitals.  
Photo by Natalie Wright.



Figure 111 The entrance to a building on the abandoned south side of Ellis Island – an area that houses health facilities and isolation hospitals. Photo by Natalie Wright.





Figure 112 A tall gothic revival chair is engulfed in peeling paint and debris in Philadelphia's abandoned Hawthorne Hall. Photo by Natalie Wright.



Figure 113 Party confetti mixes with dust to cover part of the floor in Philadelphia's abandoned Hawthorne Hall. Photo by Natalie Wright.

## Appendix C

### IRB ETHICS COMMITTEE ACCEPTANCE LETTER



RESEARCH OFFICE

210 HULLIHEN HALL  
UNIVERSITY OF DELAWARE  
NEWARK, DELAWARE 19716-1551  
PH: 302/831-2136  
FAX: 302/831-2828

DATE: July 22, 2014

TO: Natalie Wright  
FROM: University of Delaware IRB

STUDY TITLE: [634279-1] Abandoned Spaces in Urban Places: Contemporary Urban Ruins in Philadelphia

SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project

ACTION: APPROVED  
APPROVAL DATE: July 22, 2014  
EXPIRATION DATE: July 21, 2015  
REVIEW TYPE: Expedited Review

REVIEW CATEGORY: Expedited review category # (6,7)

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this research study. The University of Delaware IRB has APPROVED your submission. This approval is based on an appropriate risk/benefit ratio and a study design wherein the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

This submission has received Expedited Review based on the applicable federal regulation.

Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the study and insurance of participant understanding followed by a signed consent form. Informed consent must continue throughout the study via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require each participant receive a copy of the signed consent document.

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by this office prior to initiation. Please use the appropriate revision forms for this procedure.

All SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported to this office. Please use the appropriate adverse event forms for this procedure. All sponsor reporting requirements should also be followed.

Please report all NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this study to this office.

Please note that all research records must be retained for a minimum of three years.

Based on the risks, this project requires Continuing Review by this office on an annual basis. Please use the appropriate renewal forms for this procedure.

If you have any questions, please contact Nicole Farnese-McFarlane at (302) 831-1119 or [nicolefm@udel.edu](mailto:nicolefm@udel.edu). Please include your study title and reference number in all correspondence with this office.

## Appendix D

### IMAGE PERMISSIONS

With the exception of those noted here, use of images in this study did not require special permissions. Those requiring fees or permission are recorded here.

#### **Permission to use images from Eastern State Penitentiary, both from my site visit and from my time examining the abandoned collection:**

---

Hi, Natalie,

Any photos you take of the site itself are yours to do what with as you wish as long as they don't include any copyrighted material (e.g. Photos on signs). We ask that you use the location credit "Eastern State Penitentiary, Philadelphia, PA" in all uses of penitentiary photos in print, on the web, in broadcast, and in any other public medium.

Here's the link the link with our photo policies:  
<http://www.easternstate.org/general-policies-all-photographers>

I look forward to seeing your final thesis!

Thank you for your interest in Eastern State,

---

Erica Harman  
Manager, Archives and Records

Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site  
2027 Fairmount Avenue  
Philadelphia, PA 19130

#### **Permission to use images from the Lansdowne Theatre:**

---

**Matt Schultz**

To: Natalie Wright

RE: Winterthur Museum MA Thesis: Lansdowne Query: Image Permissions

April 2, 2015 at 1:14 PM

[Hide Details](#)

4

Natalie: No need to reintroduce yourself. I remember you and our conversation. Are the photos in question ones that you took? If yes, there is no need to credit the theater. If I sent you photos remind me which I sent and I'll provide the names of the photographers.

Thanks for posting the photos of my chair. Not sure if my hunch that it is Admiral Dewey is correct.

Hope you will share the thesis with me when it's done.

Matt

## Permission to use images from the Winterthur Museum and Garden grounds, including the creamery and the cottage:

**From:** Onie Rollins  
**Sent:** Thursday, April 02, 2015 2:05 PM  
**To:** Susan Newton  
**Subject:** RE: question from culture fellow

Hi Susan:  
No permission needed.

Onie

---

**From:** Susan Newton  
**Sent:** Thursday, April 02, 2015 11:41 AM  
**To:** Onie Rollins  
**Subject:** question from culture fellow

Hi, I just had a call from our second year culture fellow Natalie Wright who is working on her thesis. She has taken several images of buildings here on the estate: buildings formerly used as the creamery and cottages. She wants to include them in her Winterthur thesis and wonders if she needs a permission letter from Winterthur.

Normally I give people permission for images that have been taken by the Winterthur photographers (or staff members)

Since she is the photographer, would she just need to include a credit line such as:

Photograph taken by Natalie Wright of Winterthur Estate

Would a formal permission letter be required?

I wanted to ask you for your take on this situation.

## Permission to use images from Hawthorne Hall:

☆ **Kevin Musselman**  
To: Natalie Wright  
RE: ATTN: Kevin Musselman

April 2, 2015 at 3:24 PM

[Hide Details](#)

1



Hi Natalie,

Thanks for reaching out. People's Emergency Center Community Development Corporation holds the deed to Hawthorne Hall (3847 Hamilton Street and 3849 Lancaster Avenue). You're more than welcome to use any images of this property in your master's thesis.

Kevin

[See More from Natalie Wright](#)

Kevin Musselman | Manager, Neighborhood and Resource Planning

People's Emergency Center | 325 N. 39th Street | Philadelphia, PA 19104

## Permission to use images from JR's art instillation at Ellis Island:

**Marc Azoulay**

To: Natalie Wright

Re: JR ART permission

April 17, 2015 at 12:40 PM

[Hide Details](#)

[Inbox - Gmail](#) **2**



Of course Natalie!  
And please send us a copy of the thesis?  
Congratulations  
Looking forward to reading this

## Permission to use images from Ellis Island's "Silent Voices" exhibit:

**Giuriceo, Judy**

To: Natalie Wright

Re: Image permissions

April 20, 2015 at 8:36 AM

[Hide Details](#)

**2**

Dear Natalie,

As you may know, I am a graduate of the Winterthur Program (then called Early American Culture). I enjoyed my years there so much!

You may use the photographs of the abandoned objects and the exhibit "Silent Voices" in your thesis. The items are part of the Statue of Liberty National Monument and Ellis Island's "field collection" and are in the public domain. The credit line would be:

Courtesy of the National Park Service, Statue of Liberty National Monument and Ellis Island

The only images that would require separate permission are the photographs taken by individual photographers. Those photos are not in our collection and we do not have copyright. Please let me know if you need information about any of these.

If you will be in New York this summer, you should definitely visit Ellis Island again and take the new "Hard Hat" tour of the unrestored hospital buildings on the south side. There is an art exhibit by the French artist, J.R., which includes pastings of large format photos (using archivally safe reversible paste!) in the abandoned spaces.

Please let me know if you will be visiting and we can arrange for a tour of the south side. I would love to hear more about your thesis.

Good luck with the end of your semester! I remember well those last days pulling together all the bits and pieces for the final thesis presentation!

Judy Giuriceo  
Curator of Exhibits & Media  
Statue of Liberty National Monument and Ellis Island