TOURING DETROIT: RUINS, REPRESENTATION, AND REDEVELOPMENT

by

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THESIS ABSTRACT

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In the face of economic, demographic, and infrastructural decline, Detroit, Michigan has become a destination for tourists interested in viewing the city's iconic ruins. Using data collected through participant observation, interviews, and document analysis, this thesis examines these emerging practices of ruin tourism in order to understand how such tourism operates, how it is related to representations of the city in popular media, and how it contributes to economic redevelopment in Detroit. Situated in literature about ruination and liminality, tourism geography, and critical urban geography, the study contributes to understandings of urban redevelopment in the post-industrial United States.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In the summer of 2012, a man from Clawson, Michigan, named Mark Siwak revealed a proposal to turn a section of Detroit into a zombie theme park called Z World. The plan was to purchase 200 acres of land on which to build an arena of stabilized ruins, where players could simulate the zombie apocalypse in an all-night game. To raise money, Siwak created a campaign on the fundraising website IndieGoGo, which stated:

> The Z World Detroit initiative is a radical rethinking of urban redevelopment and Detroit's well-documented blight and de-population. It turns perceived liabilities into assets that will bring a renewed vitality to a struggling neighborhood. When done right, Z World Detroit would be transformative for part of the city, it would create jobs for Detroiters and become a legitimate destination. (Siwak, 2012)

Although the campaign attracted derision and sharp criticism locally (Cox, 2012), Siwak maintained that it was a creative and productive way to make use of the city's unoccupied buildings. In its call to turn ruins into a tourist destination, the proposal resembles Camilo Jose Vergara's 1996 suggestion to turn a section of downtown Detroit into a park of stabilized ruins. "I propose that as a tonic for our imagination," Vergara wrote in a frequently cited essay about the city, "as a call for renewal, as a place within our national memory, a dozen city blocks of pre-depression skyscrapers should be left standing as ruins: An American Acropolis" (Vergara, 1996, p. 16). Like Siwak, Vergara was surprised when Detroiters rejected his proposal as Romantic, impractical, and insulting (Vergara, 1996).

While Siwak and Vergara's proposals have attracted national attention, nothing has come of their suggestions for the reuse of Detroit's ruins as large-scale tourist destinations. Siwak raised less than $10,000 of his $145,000 goal for Z World on IndieGoGo, while nearly all of the ruin sites Vergara highlights in his 1996 essay have been either demolished or rehabilitated since his proposal was published. Nevertheless, in a less dramatic and more piecemeal way, Detroit's ruins *have* become tourist destinations. No single monument or theme park serves as a focal attraction, but over a dozen small companies and non-profits offer tours that highlight the city's

ruins. From “The Gritty Tour” offered by Segways2u to private tours offered by a company called Detroit Urbex, these organizations take thousands of visitors to see Detroit’s iconic ruins each year.

This thesis attempts to make sense of this emerging set of tourism activities, which I call “ruin tourism” for their attention to sites of abandonment and urban decay. Ruin tourism is a kind of niche cultural tourism that encompasses a range of activities spanning formal, commercial tourism to illegal, guided urban exploration. The ruin sites it features are frequently industrial but also include empty theaters, schools, office buildings, civic buildings, and residential areas. As this thesis makes clear, the market for such tours is particularly strong in Detroit. However, researchers have documented similar practices at modern ruin sites across North America, Europe, and East Asia (Edensor, 2005; Hell and Schönle, 2010; Pendleton, 2011).

In order to understand ruin tourism and its impacts in Detroit, the questions that guide this research are threefold: 1) How does ruin tourism operate, and who are the main actors involved? 2) How is ruin tourism related to media portrayals of Detroit, and how do tour operators navigate their roles in representing the city? 3) Who benefits economically from ruin tourism, and what place does the practice have in redevelopment strategies, with what implications for the industry itself? By examining these questions, my research provides insight into how various actors understand and make use of abandoned infrastructure in Detroit and in post-industrial cities more broadly, at a time when questions about what to do with abandoned and toxic infrastructure grow pressing in many post-industrial places. As a material practice that is also fundamentally about representation, tourism provides an ideal entry point from which to study these issues. Further, I use niche tourism to examine pertinent questions in critical urban geography by exploring the recapitalization of an iconic post-industrial city through the consumptive practices of tourism.

Before continuing, I would like to comment on my use of the term “ruin tourism” itself. While it is important to distinguish ruin tourism from various other kinds of niche cultural

tourism, the term is not without problems. “Ruin” is itself an ambiguous term; to some, it suggests that a site is dangerous or uninhabitable, while to others it suggests the picturesque or the potential for reimagined site uses. The term also resembles “ruin porn”—the name given to contentious representations of ruins in photography and popular media, which I will discuss further below. I use it purposely for this reason to acknowledge the link between tourism and the production of site representations, even as I also recognize the controversy and ambiguity around ruin porn. Practitioners of ruin tours as I define them do not use the term. Many characterize their tours simply as “cultural tours,” or they see no need for classifying the tours they offer with such nomenclature. This, however, is not a reason to drop the term, as it remains useful for describing and analyzing the practices to which it refers. I do not want to suggest that ruin tours are merely voyeuristic celebrations of Detroit’s decline. Rather, I use the term to express the ambiguity of the practices I examine here. The goals of tour operators, the motivations of their customers, and the outcomes of their interactions with one another and with the sites they visit are myriad and escape the control of any individual or set of actors. Keeping in mind these ambiguities, it is nevertheless possible to trace the practices of Detroit’s ruin tourism and to examine their implications for representation and redevelopment.

Background and Context

Metropolitan Detroit is undergoing profound economic, demographic, and infrastructural change. Since the 1950s, the city has steadily lost jobs in automotive manufacturing and related industries due to automation and factory relocation. By 2009, fewer than 100,000 Detroit workers were employed in manufacturing, down from over 338,000 in the late 1940s (Stokan, 2009). As workers have lost jobs and purchasing power, much of the rest of the city’s economy has experienced ripple effects (Sugrue, 1996; Boyle, 2001). Throughout this process of deindustrialization, service sector employment has increased, but not at a rate comparable to the loss of manufacturing jobs (Stokan, 2009). In 2011, unemployment in the city stood at almost 20 percent (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012).

Unsurprisingly, this economic shift has been accompanied by a demographic shift of a similar scale. In the first half of the 20th century, Detroit's population grew rapidly, increasing six-fold to nearly 1.9 million people (Boyle, 2001). However, in the second half of the century, the population contracted by half, and in 2010 the official Census population count was 713,777 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). Much of the outmigration has been to surrounding suburbs. In fact, between 1960 and the early 2000s, the Detroit metropolitan population (including both city and suburbs) grew from 3.9 million to 4.4 million (Gallagher, 2010, p. 8). However, unlike cities such as Portland or Dallas, Detroit lacks the legal authority to annex its suburbs, and the city hasn't added area since the 1920s (Gallagher, 2010, p. 8). As a result, the center city has been largely unable to benefit from suburban growth. Furthermore, most of Detroit's wealthiest suburbs lie in Macomb County rather than in Detroit's Wayne County, meaning that county-level tax revenue—such as property taxes—and related services differ significantly between counties.

Infrastructure constitutes a third major category of Detroit's urban transition. Due to economic disinvestment and population decline, vacancy in both residential and non-residential properties is staggering. Parts of the city have 60 percent housing vacancy rates, and many neighborhoods have a greater than 50 percent ratio of vacant lots to total residential parcels, as dilapidated houses have been torn down and not replaced (Data Driven Detroit, 2010a, 2010b). Detroit is also home to the world's largest abandoned factory, the Packard Automotive Plant, which covers over 40 acres of land on the city's east side (Wright, 2000), along with numerous other abandoned factories, theaters, office buildings, churches, and schools. While some of these are privately owned with plans for redevelopment in process, many pose significant safety hazards and contribute to widespread urban blight.

Detroit's economic, demographic and infrastructural transitions since the 1950s present many challenges. At the same time, the city's symbolic significance as a one-time leading American metropolis and as the birthplace of the automobile and of Motown music give it a lasting attraction, and Detroit has recently been the focus of significant journalistic, popular, and

artistic representations that juxtapose its growth and decline (for example: Stohr, 2003; Temple and Hencken, 2010; Marchand and Meffre, 2010; Whoriskey, 2011). Despite its challenges, city leaders and civic boosters promote Detroit as a city fertile for development. From 2006-2012, private and public groups invested $6 billion in 200 real estate projects in greater downtown (Ali et al. 2013, p. 64). In January 2012, three of the city's largest employers launched a program to encourage their workers to live in the Midtown neighborhood. The program, called Live Midtown, pays employees up to $3,500 over two years to rent an apartment in Midtown. Employees who buy a home in the neighborhood receive $20,000, and existing homeowners can receive $5,000 in matching funds for renovations (Live Midtown, 2012). In the summer of 2012, the program was expanded with Live Downtown, in which five additional employers incentivize their workers to live downtown (Live Downtown, 2012). More significantly, in 2010, the City launched the Detroit Works Project, a strategic planning process that includes short-term actions and long-term planning to encourage economic growth, stabilize neighborhoods, improve city systems and infrastructure, and reform zoning (Detroit Works Project, 2013).

While many local and regional actors praise efforts like the Detroit Works Project, many others are critical, arguing that redevelopment efforts prioritize downtown development while ignoring the city's neighborhoods and poorer residents. Others argue that redevelopment efforts encourage land speculation and gentrification. For instance, in 2012, the Building Movement/Uniting Detroiters Project set out to challenge development discourse about community assets and land control through the creation of a documentary and a people's atlas. The individuals and community organizations involved in the effort argue that actions like the privatization of public assets and services, investor-driven development, and austerity measures reflect "histories of racialized dispossession" in the city and in cities across the world (Uniting Detroiters, 2013). These tensions are heightened by the recent state appointment of an emergency financial manager whose authority supersedes that of the elected city government (Anderson, 2012; Uniting Detroiters, 2013).

It is in this context that ruin tourism has emerged. The city contains countless ruin sites for tourists to explore, and these sites have captured popular imaginations through media representations. However, the fate of these sites—especially those located within the greater downtown area—is uncertain in light of redevelopment efforts, which are contentious in Detroit. As the following chapters reveal, ruin tourism in Detroit both reflects these tensions and contributes to the milieu that creates them. For these reasons, it provides an ideal way to study representation and redevelopment in Detroit.

Literature Review

Ruination and Liminality

Gazing on the ruins of past societies is an old practice. At least as early as the 14th century, Europeans treated Roman and other ruins not only as sources of building materials but as sites to be visited, contemplated, and depicted in writing and art (Woodward, 2001). Today, many ancient ruins are well-established tourist attractions, but more recently produced industrial ruins also attract a growing number of visitors for various purposes (Edensor, 2005; Hell and Schönle, 2010; Pendleton, 2011). Urban exploration, defined as "the discovery and exploration of unseen parts of the built environment, usually with a focus on derelict places" (Garrett 2010, p. 1048), is one such use. Another leisure use is the incorporation of ruins in public parks. From Gas Works Park in Seattle to Landschaftspark Duisburg-North in Germany's Ruhr Valley, industrial ruins have been used as park features in cities across Europe and North America. Here, argues Elizabeth Clemence Chan (2009), ruins are treated as ambiguous monuments whose past functions and socio-economic and environmental implications are hidden. More pragmatically, ruins are also used as sources of scrap metal, as squatting sites, or as locations for more creative pursuits (Edensor, 2005). In Detroit, these multiple uses are not mutually exclusive, and scrappers may be active at a site where photographers and squatters are also present.

Tim Edensor (2005) examines how interpretations of industrial ruins both reflect and differ from those of ancient ruins and suggests that ruins have historically been approached from

either a romantic perspective or a gothic perspective. In the romantic mode, ruingazers approach sites in search of the picturesque and the sublime, while in the gothic mode, the emphasis is on the macabre, on decay and death visible in ruins. Edensor argues that the gothic mode is a more common way of approaching post-industrial ruins (as opposed to classical ruins) because of their suggestion of a dystopian future. Similarly, Julia Hell and Andreas Schönle (2010) argue that modern ruins most frequently represent lost imperial legacies. While this has been a largely European narrative, the nostalgia and melancholy of lost empire is increasingly comprehensible in an American context that is shaped by the September 11 attacks and the 2008 financial crisis. This idea is central to George Steinmetz's (2008) argument that white ex-Detroiters view the city's ruins with nostalgia for the heyday of Fordism but that the majority of Detroit's mainly black residents see ruins as reminders of marginalization rather than as sites of nostalgia. One implication of this for my research is that the narratives that tour guides construct must navigate the racially-colored nostalgia that the ruins often evoke in suburban tourists.

Geographers and other scholars have also explored the contentious ways in which ruins are represented. Detroit's abandoned sites have attracted national media attention in recent years, and the city has become a ground zero for so-called "ruin porn": sets of photographs and other images that depict abandoned buildings as alternately beautiful and repulsive spectacles of past opulence and present failure (Rosenberg, 2011; Millington, 2013). Scholars and other writers have criticized ruin porn for aestheticizing poverty and failing to account for the socio-economic processes that have created Detroit's ruins (Morton 2009; Leary 2011; Millington 2010, 2013). While critical attention to ruin porn itself abounds, relatively little attention has been paid to how such representations are produced. This thesis attempts to better understand ruin tourism as a key mechanism through which ruin porn and other representations of Detroit's abandoned sites are produced. In this effort, it draws on literature about the meanings and uses of industrial ruins to understand ruins as sites of active contestation over both symbol and practice.

I also draw on recent work on ruins and liminality. Liminality refers to an in-between stage in a process of transition. As geographer Emma Fraser (2012) writes, "As a destination that is between place and space, between being and unbecoming, the contemporary ruinscape holds a shifting transience […] this notion considers the inherent possibility of such a space, which at any moment might face demolition, reconstruction or renewal" (p. 138). This understanding of ruins resonates with that put forth by Steinmetz, Edensor, and Garrett and suggests something about the attraction ruins hold for tourists. Tourism also represents a liminal practice in that its impacts on the environment, economy, and culture of tourism destinations create places in transition (Butler, 1980; Su, 2010) and that both tourists and receiving communities experience tourism destinations as in-between places where identities and place-meanings are temporary and in flux (MacCannell, 1976; Ritzer and Liska, 1997). However, I draw on Bjorn Thomassen (2012) to argue that liminality must be understood as a transition from one state to another and not simply as a permanent state of transience. This suggests that ruins and ruin tourism are therefore necessarily processual.

Tourism Geographies

This project also builds on critical studies in the geography of tourism. Research that critiques the tendency for promotional materials to present destinations as blank canvases upon which visitors might do as they please provides context to my study of site representation in chapter two (Aitchison, 2001; Smith and Duffy, 2003; Davis, 2005), while studies on the potential and limitations of niche tourism to contribute to economic development inform my discussion of ruin tourism's economic impacts in chapter three (Britton, 1991; Butcher, 2003; Mowforth and Munt, 2009). Jeffrey Sasha Davis's (2005) article on tourism's role in constructing both real and imagined landscapes helps connect the two chapters. Drawing on Lefebvre's (1991) theory of concrete abstraction, Davis argues that the place-myth of a deserted isle has been applied to Bikini Atoll despite the fact of its inhabitance by the Bikini people. He contends that this myth has been materialized through practices that include tourism development and nuclear

testing, such that the atoll has indeed become deserted, with most of its native inhabitants now living elsewhere. Davis calls this process discursive-material formation, and I use it to argue that the role of ruin tourism in economic development cannot be separated from the representations of Detroit that the practice creates and perpetuates.

Recent work on dark tourism and slum tourism also offers important context to my study of ruin tourism, which is in key ways a similar niche industry. Dark tourism, sometimes called thanatourism, refers to tourism to sites of death or disaster, particularly when such dark events have happened in living memory (Lennon and Foley, 2000; Seaton, 2007; Stone and Sharpley 2008). Lennon and Foley (2000) argue that dark tourism "is an intimation of post-modernity"(p. 11) because of the role that global communication technologies (such as news media and films) play in generating tourist interest in destinations, because commodification accompanies the informative elements of its sites, and particularly because its sites and destinations "appear to introduce anxiety and doubt about the project of modernity" when they showcase industrial scale death at Jewish Holocaust sites or the failure of technological advance in the sinking of the Titanic, for instance (11). Others argue for an understanding of various "shades of dark tourism" (Strange and Kempa, 2003; Stone, 2006). These authors suggest that in some contexts the practice of dark tourism is valorized to suggest that touring dark sites "may be 'gruesome' but it is also 'good'" (Strange and Kempa, 2003, p. 386) in that it prompts political and spiritual reflection in visitors.

Slum tourism also represents an exploration of anxieties about the modern world. As defined by Frenzel, Koens, and Steinbrink (2012), slum tourism is "the touristic valorization of poverty-stricken urban areas of the metropolises in so-called developing or emerging nations, which are visited primarily by tourists from the Global North" (1). In this way, slum tourism explores anxiety about the relations of poverty and privilege engendered by global capital circuits, but like certain forms of dark tourism, it is valorized as an educative and enlightening experience for tourists (Mowforth and Munt, 2009; Frenzel and Koens 2012; Frenzel, Koens and

Steinbrink 2012). There are key differences between slum and ruin tourism: the former visits densely populated sites where people are the primary object of interest, whereas the latter visits sites that are largely empty of inhabitants where landscape and buildings are the primary object. However, researchers of both dark and slum tourism have explored many themes that are relevant to my own study, including questions of whether destinations are represented 'objectively' or are romanticized or dramatized, how confrontations between poverty and privilege are valorized, how urban politics are involved in tourism, and whether tourism can be an urban development tool (Dovey and King, 2012; Dürr, 2012; Frenzel, Koens and Steinbrink, 2012). Like slums and sites of atrocity, sites of abandonment take on a dual role in ruins tourism: they provide perceived authenticity that attracts visitors, but they also represent the city in a way that local governments, residents, and businesses typically do not want to project. My project contributes to understandings of related niche tourisms by examining how local actors navigate this contradiction in ruin tourism in Detroit.

Critical Urban Geography

Underpinning my discussion of representation and redevelopment is Neil Smith's (1996) concept of the new urban frontier. Smith describes how the frontier motif once applied to the American West is used to legitimate and rationalize gentrification, with developers and gentrifying residents portrayed as urban pioneers taming the wild, unruly, and violent inner city to make it safe for settlement. Smith is highly critical of the process of gentrification and of its justification via the frontier myth, which he argues wrenches the meaning of the city from the ways it is historically and geographically constituted. While the processes of gentrification and redevelopment in Detroit are different from those in Manhattan (the site of Smith's analysis), this framework is nonetheless helpful for understanding the representation of Detroit's ruins. Ruin porn can be understood as part of the production of the urban wilderness myth, and as I examine in chapter two, ruin tourism both contributes to and attempts to challenge the portrayal of the city as empty, wild, and in need of civilizing investment.

Also central to my argument is geographic work on the move from cities as places of production to cities as places of consumption. David Harvey (1989) was one of the first to explore how urban governance has shifted from a managerial stance that focuses on service provision to an entrepreneurial stance that focuses on economic development and job growth. In this new framework, workers' significance is tied more to their role as consumers than to their role as producers of value (Harvey, 1989; Zukin, 1991). Sharon Zukin (1991) builds on this by applying it to her study of landscape to argue that the organization of consumption is increasingly overtaking the organization of production in its importance for how landscapes are shaped. Whereas cities used to compete with one another to be centers of manufacturing, they now compete with one another to be centers of consumption (Britton, 1991). As Britton (1991) indicates, tourism can play a key role in this economic restructuring. I build on this literature to argue that ruin tourism represents one way in which Detroit is being recapitalized as a center of consumption in the post-industrial city.

Finally, I draw on subaltern geographies and global urbanism to explore the tension between Detroit as site of vibrant urbanism and Detroit as site of ruination. Recent scholars have used the concept of the subaltern to explore popular agency within spaces of poverty and to challenge understandings of sites like urban slums as apocalyptic or dystopian (Roy, 2011). However, Ananya Roy (2011) argues that subaltern urbanism is easily appropriated by "neoliberal populism" and therefore fails to deliver a coherent or subversive subaltern politics. These ideas underpin my discussions of the role of ruin tourism in valorizing poverty and of the way ruin tourism is appropriated and altered by redevelopment efforts in Detroit. Although most of this literature comes from studies of the Global South, my application of these concepts to the case of Detroit lends support to recent arguments (Robinson, 2006; McLees, 2012; Millington, 2013) that models of urbanism based on cities of the Global North are not only inadequate for understanding Southern cities but may also be increasingly inadequate for understanding post-Fordist cities in the Global North.

Methods

Fieldwork for this project consisted of six weeks in Detroit using a mix of qualitative methods, including participant observation, interviews, and document analysis. Methods of data collection and analysis are described in turn below and in Table 1. As each of the techniques informed the others, I employed all three methods concurrently rather than in distinct phases.

Participant Observation

In order to understand how ruin tourism operates and how guides represent tour sites, I participated in seven tours in Detroit. Participant observation raises concerns about distortions in participants' behavior when they know they are being observed, about the ability of the researcher to be objective when participating in the practices being studied, and about power relations between the researcher and participants (Belsky, 2004; Kearns, 2010). However, it also offers advantages such as allowing for a change of focus as events take place and allowing for in-depth observation of everyday practices (Belsky, 2004).

In my research, tour participation allowed me to directly observe the exchange of information between guides and tour-goers, shedding light on how tourism operates. Tours were selected based on availability and in order to represent a variety of tour styles. I identified myself to tour operators as a researcher in advance and in conversations with fellow tour-goers in the course of my participation. While I avoided asking many questions, the questions I asked on tours were those of a tourist rather than those of a researcher. For instance, I might ask about the architect of a building we visited, but a question about the tour operator's motivations in showcasing the site would be asked in a semi-structured interview at another time. Although I did not conceal that I was taking notes, I did so using a smartphone rather than a pen and paper to minimize distraction to guides and fellow tour-goers. In this way, I attempted to minimize the ways in which my participation as a researcher could disrupt the atmosphere of the tour.

I also participated in the four-day Allied Media Conference held at Wayne State University and in a convening of local scholars and non-profit leaders who were responding to

recent development plans put forward by the City of Detroit. This helped me understand how local actors interpret and respond to representations of Detroit in media and development discourse and was particularly useful in answering my second and third research questions. I contributed to the convening by co-leading a workshop on counter-cartography techniques with a member of one of the non-profit organizations. In both tours and meetings, participant observation yielded photographs and field notes that were later transcribed for analysis.

Semi-structured Interviews

I supplemented participant observation with semi-structured interviews with influential actors involved with tour operations. While participant observation allows for first-hand investigation of everyday practices, interviews allow for a more in-depth discussion of motivations and perceptions and for the collection of information from experts in the field (Dunn, 2010). This method yielded data that helped answer all three research questions.

I conducted 15 one to two-hour interviews with tour guides, tour planners, and business, non-profit, and civic leaders involved with the tourism and hospitality industries in Detroit. The majority of interviews took place in-person, but two were conducted by telephone and one by video chat. Interviews followed a largely open-ended format and included questions about the practical aspects of tour operations, about the motivations for choosing to showcase some sites over others, and about the challenges and opportunities associated with tourism and abandoned infrastructure in Detroit. When I interviewed participants who also led tours in which I participated, I preferred to conduct the interview prior to participating in the tour. This was because the format of the interview—which allowed for an in-depth, one-on-one discussion—fostered a sense of rapport between myself and the research participants that helped maintain the atmosphere of the tour. When participant observation was conducted before the interview, my experience was that tour guides regarded me with a greater sense of suspicion. Interviews were recorded and later transcribed for analysis.

Document Analysis

Analysis of written documents had multiple advantages for my study. Archival material and tax documents provide information that was more precise and detailed than interview informants could supply. Websites and brochures presented official rhetoric about different organizations' goals and priorities, which I compared with data gathered through participant observation and interviews. Document analysis was used in answering all three research questions.

Archival research in the Walter P. Reuther Library of Wayne State University allowed me to trace the development of key tour programs. I analyzed planning and budget documents spanning approximately 1990-2008 from Preservation Wayne (an early provider of cultural tours in the city) along with news articles, brochures, and press releases from Preservation Wayne and tour organizations with which it partnered. This data was particularly helpful for answering the first research question about how ruin tourism operates. Websites and brochures yielded data about how tour operators represent Detroit and helped answer the second research question. I also located tax documents and annual reports from a few key tour operators and their parent organizations in order to trace income and expenditures related to tour operations. This was particularly useful for understanding economic flows associated with ruin tourism to answer the third research question.

Data Analysis

Using the qualitative analysis software ATLAS.ti, I analyzed field notes and interview transcriptions for both descriptive content and discursive themes. I used a recursive coding structure, using both initial codes based on my research questions and the background literature and codes based on themes that emerged in the process of analysis (Cope, 2010). To answer my first research question, I used descriptive content analysis to develop a three-part typology of ruin tourism. This distillation of the diverse practices of ruin tourism provided an organized way to make sense of how ruin tourism operates. To answer the second research questions, I relied on

discourse analysis (Waitt, 2010) to understand how representations of Detroit are produced through ruin tourism and how tour operators perceive their roles in the process. To answer the third question, I used both content and discourse analysis to understand the economic flows associated with ruin tourism and how different actors involved with urban redevelopment enroll ruin tourism in redevelopment practices.

Table 1. Research questions and methods.

Method	Sample size and strategy	Data analysis
Q1: How does ruin tourism operate, and who are the main actors involved?		
Participant observation	*Sample:* 7 tours *Strategy:* Maximum variation sampling of available tours	Content analysis of transcribed field notes
Semi-structured interviews	*Sample:* 15 *Strategy:* Snowball and opportunistic sampling	Content analysis of transcribed interviews
Archival document analysis	*Sample:* 7 folders of planning documents, news articles, meeting minutes *Strategy:* Comprehensive analysis of tour-related material	Content analysis of archival documents
Q2: How is ruin tourism related to media portrayals of Detroit, and how do tour operators navigate their roles in representing the city?		
Participant observation	*Sample:* 7 tours *Strategy:* Maximum variation sampling of available tours	Discourse analysis of transcribed field notes
Semi-structured interviews	*Sample:* 15 *Strategy:* Snowball and opportunistic sampling	Discourse analysis of transcribed interviews
Document analysis	*Sample:* Websites and brochures of 12 tour organizations *Strategy:* Comprehensive analysis of available documents	Discourse analysis of documents
Q3: Who benefits economically from ruin tourism, and what place does the practice have in redevelopment strategies, with what implications for the industry itself?		
Document analysis	*Sample:* Websites of 12 tour organizations; tax documents of 2 tour organizations *Strategy:* Purposive sampling	Content and discourse analysis of websites and tax documents
Semi-structured interviews	*Sample:* 15 *Strategy:* Snowball and opportunistic sampling	Content and discourse analysis of transcribed interviews
Participant observation	*Sample:* 1 conference, 1 convening of scholars and community organizations *Strategy:* Opportunistic sampling	Content and discourse analysis of transcribed field notes

Thesis Structure

In the pages that follow, I detail the results of my research in two chapters. I then conclude with a final chapter that considers the most significant implications of my findings. Chapter two outlines how ruin tourism operates, who is involved, and how tour operators approach site representation. I first trace the development of ruin tourism, examining its roots in urban exploration and considering the role of large-scale events in the development of guided tours. I then outline a three-part typology of ruin tours in order to make sense of the variety of practices comprising ruin tourism in Detroit. The three archetypes I identify include commercial tours, political tours, and trespassing tours. Finally, I consider the relationship between ruin tourism and so-called ruin porn and examine how guides shape tour narratives and itineraries in their attempt to combat negative representations of Detroit in popular and news media.

Chapter three examines who benefits economically from ruin tourism and what place the practice has in recent strategies for urban redevelopment in Detroit. I also consider how the industry itself is changed as it is incorporated in redevelopment strategies. I argue that while tour operators themselves are the primary beneficiaries of tour profits, tax revenue and collaborations with community organizations provide some means of distributing profits more broadly. Related businesses—such as restaurants, retail shops, and accommodation providers—also benefit from Detroit's development as a tourist destination. I then examine two specific case studies to understand the place of ruin tours in urban redevelopment strategies. The case studies suggest that ruins provide an entry into more diverse practices of cultural tourism. In the process, a more formal and professionalized model of operation supplements the homegrown small business model of early ruin tour operations, and ruins are de-emphasized as tourist sites in favor of sites that represent the city in a more unambiguously positive light.

In the fourth and final chapter, I consider the broader implications of my findings. I argue that recent changes in some of the largest ruin tour operations suggest that the industry is broadening to include a wider range of cultural tourism offerings, and I suggest that attention to

ruin tourism as a temporary and liminal practice, rather than as a sustainable practice, may yield important theoretical insights for the study of niche cultural tourism more broadly. Finally, I consider the implications of this study for critical urban geography, and I argue that recent theorizations of cities in the Global South might be also usefully applied to studies of cities in the Global North.

CHAPTER II

TOURING "THE RUINS OF DETROIT"

In 2004, the satirical news organization *The Onion* published a news brief about tourism in Detroit. "The Detroit Tourism Board is scaling back the city-sponsored 'Hidden Detroit' program following the deaths of 24 tourists in the past month," stated the fake report. It quoted a tourism official: "The campaign did draw tourists to historically significant places that usually go unnoticed, […] but ultimately, unfolding the free 'Detroit Off The Beaten Path' maps in the middle of the Purple Gang's old turf was not a good idea." At the time, the idea that Detroit would develop a cultural tour program that took visitors "off the beaten path" seemed an easy joke. After all, even though the bootlegging Purple Gang has been inactive since the end of Prohibition, in 2004 the city had a murder rate more than 3 times the average of cities of comparable size (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2010).[1] By 2013, however, a visitor to the city would have no trouble finding just such a tour. New cultural tours abound, taking tourists by foot, bus, bicycle, or private vehicle to non-traditional tour sites like empty churches and factories that are being actively dismantled for scrap metal. What has happened in Detroit between 2004 and today to account for this change?

This chapter focuses on cultural tours of Detroit that include visits to sites that could be considered ruins, or what I am calling ruin tourism. The following questions guide the chapter: how does such tourism operate, and who are the main actors involved? How is ruin tourism related to media portrayals of Detroit, and how do tour operators navigate their roles in representing the city? The last ten years have seen a significant growth in both the quantity and diversity of the city's ruin tour offerings, and over half of the tours considered here were established within the last three years (see Table 2 below). These tours span a wide range of

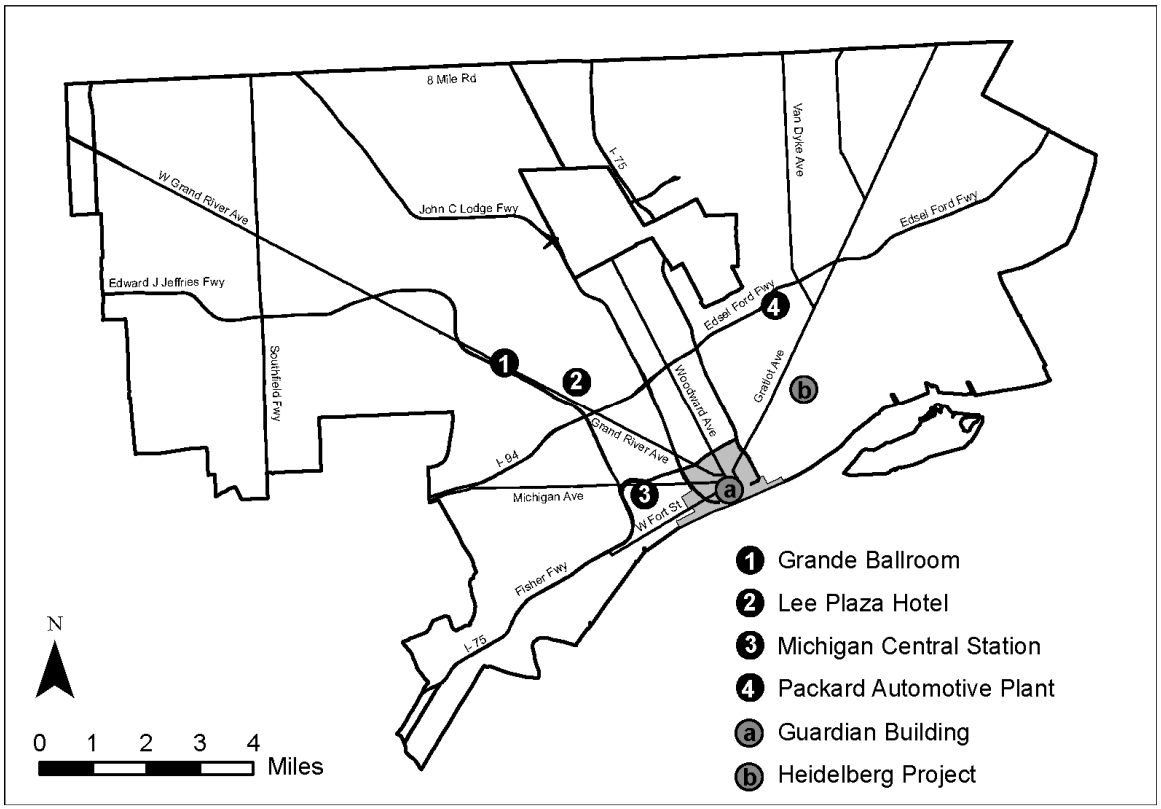
[1] According to the FBI's Uniform Crime Reporting statistics, the Detroit Police Department reported a 42.1 rate (per 100,000 people) for murder and non-negligent manslaughter in 2004. The 2004 average for U.S. cities with populations between 500,000 and 1 million people was 13.1 murders per 100,000 people. Other cities of this size with high murder rates included Baltimore (43.5) and Washington, D.C. (35.8).

thematic foci, target audiences, cost and funding structures, means of transportation, and frequency of operation. In the pages that follow I will present an overview of ruin tourism in Detroit by providing a timeline of tour development and outlining three archetypical tours. I will then examine the industry's relationship to media portrayals of the city and analyze the ways in which tour operators navigate their roles in representing Detroit.

The Origins of Ruin Tourism in Detroit

Visitors and locals have been privately exploring unoccupied buildings in Detroit for nearly as long as the buildings have stood empty, and many of the so-called "ruins of Detroit" have been unoccupied since the 1970s or 80s. One of the most iconic is the Michigan Central Station (see Figure 1), whose 18 stories dominate the skyline in the Corktown neighborhood. The last train left the station in 1988, and while the structure is privately owned by Detroit billionaire

Figure 1. Map of iconic ruin sites. Black dots indicate iconic ruin sites and gray dots indicate other Detroit landmarks. The central business district is identified by the gray polygon.



Matty Moroun and his company Controlled Terminals, Inc., any plans for redevelopment have failed to materialize (Austin and Doerr, 2010, p.114). Other icons of the "ruins circuit" include the Grande Ballroom—which hasn't seen a performance since 1972 (Austin and Doerr, 2010, p. 73)—the Packard Automotive Plant—closed as a factory in 1958 but partially occupied by various other businesses until the late 1990s (Binelli, 2012, p.21)—and the Lee Plaza residential hotel, which has been empty since 1997 (Austin and Doerr, 2010, p.83). Also used for scrapping, raves, and art installations, among other things, these and other buildings in Detroit have become familiar sites of urban exploration.

Urban exploration, or urbex, describes the practice of trespassing into hidden, abandoned, or derelict spaces, and it is common in cities across the industrialized world (Garrett, 2012). Ruins are particularly important sites for urban exploration, and Detroit has accordingly attracted its share of attention in the urbex community. One website dedicated to the practice, urbanartcore.eu, describes Detroit as "a paradise for urban explorers and artists from all over the globe" (Brennenstuhl, 2011). Over the years, urban explorers have become a more obvious part of the city's landscape. "Steve,"[2] a photographer who makes his living guiding visitors on tours of abandoned properties in the city, explains:

> 2008 was the last year you could get away with doing this and nobody really knew what you were up to. They were just like, "what are those white kids doing walking around in the projects?" […] But since 2008, 2009 it's gotten to where for the average Detroiter, regardless of the race, if they see a young white kid walking around with a camera, they know what they're doing, because it's become so common and there are so many people doing it that it's just unavoidable.

Urban explorers have been integral to the development of infrastructure for ruin tourism in the city. Their photographs—easily shareable with online tools like Facebook and Flickr—reach a broad audience and have popularized certain ruin sites. Steve and many others also entertain requests from journalists, scholars, visiting explorers, and others asking for help entering the city's iconic ruins. Even so, explorers are often protective of their knowledge of abandoned sites.

[2] A pseudonym. Research participants who prefer anonymity are referred to by pseudonyms that appear on first reference in quotation marks.

In addition to recreational explorers, another important audience in the early development of niche tours includes academics and other researchers (Frenzel, Koens, and Steinbrink, 2012). In Detroit, the best example of researchers undertaking exploration of the city is Bill Bunge's Detroit Geographical Expedition and Institute (DGEI). Operating from the summer of 1969 to the fall of 1970, the DGEI was an attempt to conduct research firmly situated within the community it studied; citizens, activists, and neighborhood leaders worked alongside academic geographers and cartographers to produce an atlas of Detroit's Fitzgerald neighborhood that explored the dynamics of everyday life for the area's marginalized black residents (Bunge, 1971; Horvath, 1971; Bunge, 1977; Merrifield, 1995). While the DGEI was short-lived, it influenced greater academic exploration of American inner cities and of Detroit in particular in geography and related disciplines (Merrifield, 1995). Bunge's atlas, *Fitzgerald: Geography of a Revolution*, continues to be read in Detroit and was the topic of a session in the 2012 Allied Media Conference at Wayne State University. In the tradition of Bunge, scholars, activists, and other researchers continue to be an important audience for tours that explore the city today.

A third important influence on the development of ruin tourism is a virtual tour of Detroit's ruins launched by Detroit artist Lowell Boileau. Long before Flickr and Facebook, Boileau's "Fabulous Ruins of Detroit" tour first appeared on his website, detroityes.com, in 1997 to much acclaim (Boileau, 1997). The tour includes photographs and brief explanatory text describing dozens of sites, many of which still stand abandoned, while others have been demolished or restored. The website was featured in the *New York Times* and *Wired* magazine the year after it first appeared and was a Yahoo Pick of the Year in 1999. The popularity of the virtual tour was an early catalyst for interest in the city's ruins, and the site sought to make the city's ruins accessible to a much broader audience than the urbex community. In this way, Boileau's virtual tour can be understood as a bridge between the private exploration that has been taking place for decades and the more recent development of guided tours.

Table 2. Timeline of tour development. Non-tour events are italicized. Tour types are explained further in Table 3.

	Tour or event	Type (if applicable)
Precursors	Urban exploration (ongoing); Detroit Geographical Expedition (1969-1970)	
Early 1990s	Preservation Wayne (now Preservation Detroit)	Political
1997	Fabulous Ruins of Detroit	Virtual (online)
2001	Sierra Club-Detroit	Political
2001	*Detroit Tricentennial Celebration*	
2002	*First Annual Tour de Troit*	
2004	Detroit Tour Connections	Commercial
2005	Inside Detroit (now D:hive)	Political
2006	*Super Bowl XL*	
2007	Feet on the Street	Commercial
2008	Wheelhouse Detroit	Commercial
2011	Segways2u	Commercial
2011	Detroit Urbex	Trespassing
2012	Detroit Urban Adventures	Commercial
2012	Show Me Detroit	Commercial
2012	Detroit Music Tour	Political

The Development of Guided Tours

In the early 90s, cultural tour offerings in Detroit were slim. Preservation Wayne, a historic preservation group started by students at Wayne State University in 1975, offered just a few annual tours as a means of promoting preservation efforts. These tours had an audience that consisted primarily of the organization's membership and supporters rather than the general public (Preservation Wayne, 1975-2010). In 1993, the organization decided to grow its tour program, and it developed a number of walking tours that have become a core part of the organization's programming efforts. Now, most of the tour-goers are members of the general public, and the organization cites the tour program as an important tool for member recruitment. Preservation Wayne (renamed Preservation Detroit in 2012) continues to operate an extensive tour program, with at least four different Saturday Heritage Walking Tours, five different monthly tours and at least a half dozen special events scheduled for the 2013 season (Preservation Detroit, 2013). With so many tour offerings, Preservation Detroit remains one of the largest

cultural tour operators in the city. The tours visit a variety of notable architectural sites, including intact and restored sites as well as those in need of restoration or preservation. For instance, the Theatre Tour, an annual tradition whose more than 150 tickets were sold out within 72 hours last year (Nemecek, 2012), includes stops at the restored Fox Theatre as well as the Michigan Theatre, which now functions as a parking garage.

Another of the longer-standing tour operations in the city is the Environmental Justice Tour run by the Detroit office of the Sierra Club. One of the office's staff members has offered the tour on an ad hoc basis for churches, educational groups, and conference attendees since approximately 2001 and estimates that she gives the tour 8-10 times per year. The bus tour was offered in conjunction with East Michigan Environmental Action Council as part of the 2012 Allied Media Conference (AMC) in Detroit, as it has been in the past. The tour visits some of the city's most polluted sites, including the Detroit Incinerator and Zug Island, an industrial park at the confluence of the River Rouge and the Detroit River. Although most of the sites on the tour would not qualify as empty or abandoned, the tour also included stops at the recently closed Southwestern High School, and tour guides pointed out the Michigan Central Station as the bus passed by it between stops. The station was also included in the tour handout, which argued that restoration of the station would be a significant contribution to economic redevelopment in the city. Although the handout maintained a fairly neutral tone, tour guides offered spirited criticism of Moroun, the "jailbird billionaire" who owns the Station and the nearby Ambassador Bridge, North America's busiest international border crossing.

Both Preservation Wayne and the Sierra Club are non-profit organizations whose tours are motivated to a certain extent by hoped-for political outcomes. The tours function as a means of raising awareness and building support for their broader organizational goals. Planning documents from Preservation Wayne explain, "Because of our tour program, we attract new members, enhance awareness of the preservation mission, promote Detroit, create connections with the corporate community and raise funds for other PW programs" (Preservation Wayne,

1975-2010). However, a major turning point in the organization of the cultural tourism industry in Detroit came in the early 2000s when two major events—the city's tricentennial celebration in 2001 and Super Bowl XL in 2006—brought thousands of visitors to the city.

The tricentennial celebration included a week of events in July 2001 that attracted over 500,000 people to the city (Wells-Reid, 2001). Capitalizing on this influx of visitors, Preservation Wayne ran a special round of tours to correspond with the celebration and trained dozens of volunteers to act as tour guides during the event. Likewise, the 2006 Super Bowl in Detroit also provided an impetus for special tour events and tour development. As part of the pre-Super Bowl "The World is Coming…Get in the Game" campaign, a company called DTOURS ran a program that took over 700 participants on bus tours in the year leading up to Super Bowl XL (Preservation Wayne, 1975-2010). Tours cost $20 per person and highlighted downtown developments like Comerica Park, the Wintergarden at the Renaissance Center, and the RiverWalk between the Ren Cen and Joe Louis Arena. DTOURS (which has since gone out of business) was initially affiliated with a branch of the Detroit Metro Convention & Visitors Bureau (DMCVB) and could not be considered a ruin tour program. Rather, it was part of a strategy to improve Detroit's image before the Super Bowl and as such did not include stops at ruin sites. Nevertheless, the long-term impact of large-scale events like the Tricentennial Celebration and Super Bowl XL on cultural tourism is significant. Michael O'Callaghan, executive vice president of DMCVB, notes that the Super Bowl precipitated the establishment of the still-operating Clean Downtown street cleaning program and the construction of Campus Martius Park, a common stop on cultural tours of downtown and a popular attraction for locals and visitors alike.

Interviews with tour operators in the city also suggest that the burst of visitor activity accompanying large-scale events provided inspiration for the later development of ruin tour operations. For instance, one guide who founded his own tour company notes that his volunteer work at the time of the tricentennial was a major influence in his decision to begin leading tours professionally. He had guided family members around the city at a family reunion in 2000 and

then responded to a newspaper ad looking for volunteers for tricentennial guides: "It just so happened that the next year was Detroit's tricentennial in 2001, and this one group was looking for volunteers to be tour guides. So I volunteered, and that changed my life really. Because if I had not volunteered, I would not probably have become a tour guide or […] moved down here or started my tour companies." "Theresa"[3] also began volunteering as a tour guide for Preservation Wayne before starting her own non-profit tour organization. In 2005, she founded Inside Detroit (now D:hive) with a business partner who has since started a for-profit company that operates Segway tours in the city. Although Preservation Wayne likely did not intend to introduce potential competitors to tour guiding in this way, this snowballing pattern of tour development is not uncommon (Kokkenen and Tuohino, 2007).

Likewise, the significance of large events on tourism development in the city fits patterns that tourism scholars have observed in other sectors of the industry and in other locations. For instance, in their study of slum tourism, Frenzel, Koens, and Steinbrink (2012) note that the development of infrastructure for slum tourism is frequently linked to large-scale events. For instance, tours of the Rocinha slum in Rio de Janeiro began with the UN Conference on Environment and Development in the city in 1992 and in the Kibera slum in Kenya with the World Social Forum in 2007 (p. 5, 7). In these instances, tours that were originally taken by activists and journalists attending the meetings were developed after the events as commercial tours for other travelers. Similarly, the Allied Media Conference—though much smaller than either of the meetings cited above—provided an opportunity for a pilot run of the Detroit Music Tour organized by Jocelyn Ninneman of Pont:Productions and Carleton Gholz of the Detroit Sound Conservancy. Ninneman had been working on developing a Detroit music tour since 2003, but it was not until the 2012 AMC that circumstances came together sufficiently to run the pilot.

Another Detroit tour company that traces its roots to a large annual event is Wheelhouse Detroit. Wheelhouse is a bike shop located in Rivard Plaza on the Detroit River waterfront that

[3] A pseudonym.

offers bike rentals and a variety of guided tours. Karen Gage and Kelli Kavanaugh, owners of the Wheelhouse, helped organize the Tour de Troit before they opened the shop. Now 10 years old, Tour de Troit is an annual bike ride in the city that attracted over 5,000 participants in 2012 (Laitner, 2012), and Kavanaugh explained that the growing success of the event in its early years suggested that there was enough cycling interest in the city to sustain a downtown bike shop. Wheelhouse opened in May 2008, and while tours were originally the least formed part of their business plan, tours now make up a quarter of the shop's revenue.

Not all of the city's ruin tours trace their roots to large events, however. More recently founded companies, including Feet on the Street (started in 2007), DetroitUrbex (started in 2011) and Show Me Detroit (started in 2012), developed as their owners saw opportunities in the tourism market for small business development. DetroitUrbex founder Steve explains his entry into the business when he was still living in Ohio:

> Originally it was just, "Hey you live near me. If you can get me up to Detroit because my car is busted, I'll show you around. I'll show you what I know." And, that kind of grew into, "Well, can we pay you for this?" And I was like, "Well, do you really want to? Is this something that's worth paying for?" And, from there it's just kind of slowly developed through word of mouth.

Steve eventually moved to Detroit and began guiding people on trips inside its ruins on a regular basis in 2011. Another company owner explained that her business tried to fill a niche by providing daily van tours for small groups:

> We targeted hotel concierge desks in city and suburban hotels, and that turned out to be an amazing niche of people. All these concierge and front desk people are asked constantly for tours, but there was never a consistent tour group. There's some good ones that do it, but it's more one day here, one day there. […] We'll go out 10 and 2, seven days.

The Tour Experience: Three Archetypes

Ruin tourism in Detroit takes many forms. In some of these tours, ruins are a central focus of the tour itinerary and narrative; in others, ruins are treated as secondary or incidental. Furthermore, the tour programs target varying audiences, utilize different funding structures, include various means of transportation, and operate at different frequencies. However, all the

tours include some narration of ruins, and all of the tour operators I spoke with consider "the ruins of Detroit" to be a significant attraction for their visitors. I have categorized three generalized archetypes based on available information: commercial tours, political tours, and trespassing tours. The clusters are based primarily on their organizational structure: commercial tours are run by for-profit organizations, political tours by non-profits, and trespassing tours by organizations that are not formally incorporated. The three types are explained in turn and in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Tour types.

Tour type	Commercial	Political	Trespassing
Target audience	Leisure tourists; business travelers	School groups; conference groups; church or community groups	Photographers; film-makers; researchers; leisure tourists
Cost	$12-75; individual fee	Free-$10 individual fee; negotiable group fee	$150+ but variable and negotiable
Transportation	Walking, van, bus, customer car, Segway, bike	Walking or bus	Customer car
Duration and frequency	2-3 hours; daily or weekly schedule	2-3 hours; by request or on weekly schedule	Up to 10 hours; by request

Commercial Tours

From the boom years that brought with them the Guardian Building and the Penobscot Building, to the bust years that saw many high-rises left abandoned, this adventure will uncover the real story of this fascinating city and look at where it's heading today after a decade that brought new casinos, new stadiums, new restaurants and bars, and much much more.
- Tour description from detroiturbanadventures.com

Commercial tours are run as for-profit operations by licensed companies. While most are locally owned by a single entrepreneur or pair of business partners, one is run under the auspices of a multinational company called Urban Adventures that operates tours in cities all over the world. The tour operators establish itineraries in advance, although flexibility is sometimes

needed to accommodate for circumstances such as bad weather or customers with mobility challenges. Customers book their tours in advance either online or by phone and choose from regularly scheduled departure times. All of the companies have websites that typically describe their tour offerings, answer frequently asked questions, and provide testimonials or reviews from previous customers. The companies also produce brochures, which are available at the state-run welcome center in the city and at hotels. Customers are typically leisure visitors or business travelers, including out-of-town visitors as well as locals and day-visitors from nearby suburbs. Most commercial operators estimate that one quarter to one third of their customers are international visitors, especially from Canada and Europe, but also from Asia, Latin America, Oceania, and Africa. These tours almost always provide standard experiences, meant to allow visitors to see the city in a way that is comfortable, safe, and pleasant.

Commercial tours are available for a variety of transportation methods. Detroit Urban Adventures offers a walking tour titled “Detroit’s Rise, Fall, and Renewal” guided by a downtown resident who was born in Detroit but grew up mostly in a nearby suburb. The guide also runs his own tour company, which offers walking tours, large bus tours, or private tours in which the customer provides transportation. Wheelhouse offers a wide variety bicycle tours, guided primarily by Kavanaugh, and Show Me Detroit offers a single overview van tour guided by one of its two owners. Like transportation methods, the costs for these tours vary (see Table 3), but they are typically based on a per-individual fee. While certain political tours allow customers to pay online with a credit card, commercial tours are the most likely of the three types to allow credit card payment and the least likely to require cash payment.

Commercial tours are offered the most frequently of the three archetypes. Show Me Detroit runs tours twice a day, seven days a week during the peak tour season. Detroit Urban Adventures offers two different daily tours Tuesday through Saturday, and from April through October, Wheelhouse offers 2-3 tours a week on a rotating schedule of themed tours. By contrast,

political tours and trespassing tours are generally offered only as requested or on a monthly or annual basis, with the exception of two series of weekly walking tours.

With a customer base made up largely of leisure visitors, commercial tours tend to have the least explicit focus on abandoned properties and ruination, although these elements are present in all of the tours. As one guide says, "We call it 'the pretty and the gritty,' and they all want that. We don't go heavy heavy in the gritty, but we show the population loss since 1950 and the Detroit Works Program. […] So we tell them both sides, but the gritty side we just go in a little bit." Comfortably mobile and audibly isolated from action on the street, my fellow tourists on a commercial van tour of the city were curious about the ruins but more eager to learn about entertainment opportunities. When a man dropped a crack pipe on the sidewalk in front of a building whose architectural history was being narrated to us, we all politely ignored it and waited for the van to pull away.

Similarly, UA's "Rise, Fall, and Renewal" tour attempts to discuss both beauty and blight with a narrative arc of redevelopment. The tour showcases empty high-rises like the Book Tower and the Wurlitzer Building as well as restored towers like the Fyfe Building, a 14-story neo-Gothic shoe store completed in 1919 that now primarily consists of residential apartments. The tour does not take visitors inside any of the buildings but includes interior photographs taken by others. However, because the walking tour covers only downtown, which has attracted billions of dollars of property investment in the last decade, the number of ruins seen on the tour is necessarily limited compared to tours that explores the city's neighborhoods.

A common stop on nearly all of these tours is the Guardian Building. Completed in 1929, the 40-story office tower is an impressive Art Deco example of Detroit's extravagance in the heyday of the auto industry. "Everywhere the gaily colored patterns of Pewabic Pottery tiles and rich materials are redolent of the ebullient twenties," states the American Institute of Architects guide to Detroit (Mattingly Meyer and McElroy, 1971, p. 24). Nearly every tour I took in Detroit included a visit to the building's lobby, richly decorated with Namibian marble, detailed mosaics,

and a clock made of Tiffany stained glass. The building's doorman, Christopher Roddy, has become something of a tourist attraction himself since his appearance in Chrysler's 2011 Imported from Detroit Super Bowl commercial. Nicknamed "the temple of finance," the building has been continuously occupied and beautifully maintained. For this reason, tour guides frequently and proudly showcase the building as an example of Detroit's successes.

Political Tours

You know, people from the suburbs may not understand what urban renewal is. They should; it was designed to make their suburbs happy. They went through and ripped out black neighborhoods, working class neighborhoods, Jewish neighborhoods, etc, and they went through and destroyed these places so that people could go to the suburbs. So, it's very troubling and it's really hard to think about, and it implicates all of us. […] It's a little—it's hard not to get that shrill about it, and that's a big turn-off.
- Carleton Gholz, Detroit Sound Conservancy

The second archetypical tour is the political tour. I use this term to imply that these tours are associated with clearly articulated hoped-for outcomes in which tourism is a means of supporting broader organizational goals. The tour organizations that fit in this category are generally non-profits, and include Preservation Detroit, the Sierra Club, D:hive, and the Detroit Music Tour.

Political tours operate with distinct thematic foci. For instance, Preservation Detroit attempts to encourage historic preservation by showcasing its successes and encouraging a general appreciation for Detroit's architecture. The Sierra Club aims to educate tour-goers about environmental racism in the city and calls for political action to protest the area's worst polluters. The Detroit Music Tour, while still in early stages of development, seeks to educate Detroiters and visitors about the city's various music scenes, placing particular emphasis on enabling participants in those scenes to tell their own stories. It attempts this through its griot approach to tour narration, in which musicians and others narrate each stop from personal experience rather than employing a single guide to synthesize this information as a spokesperson. Finally, D:hive hopes to change the negative perceptions visitors and Detroiters alike have about the city,

showcasing economic development and encouraging tour-goers from the region to spend more time downtown or even to move into the city.

Because they hope to encourage sustained action around their thematic goals, political tours attempt to attract local and suburban audiences more than visitors from outside the region. One example is D:hive. Theresa explains, "Our suburbanites don't even think Detroit's worth anything. […] Fuck the suburbanites—Detroiters don't. There's a whole bunch of Detroiters that don't think Detroit is worth anything. My favorite people to talk to are Detroiters." Ninneman also hopes the Detroit Music Tour will reach local audiences. Coming out of Detroit's techno scene, Ninneman has marketed Detroit music abroad and knows that there's an eager audience for Detroit's music and music history among fans outside the region. However, she says, "What's really important to me personally and emotionally is the fact that Detroit doesn't even really respect itself and that Detroiters don't even know just how talented or renowned their own next door neighbors are." A Sierra Club guide also expressed a commitment to local audiences over visitors when she agreed to give a tour on very short notice because it was for a local group of students: "I was asked I think on a Thursday if I could do a tour the coming Monday. But this tour was for students in River Rouge, […] and what I've come to find out is people that grew up in the area know the least about the polluting facilities that they've grown up around." The connection to education is explicit with political tours, and student groups are an important audience, which is not true in the same way for commercial tours or trespassing tours.

While some groups offer walking tours, political tours tend to be geared towards larger groups, and bus transportation is more common. Political tours also tend to focus on broader geographical areas than commercial tours. For instance, although it relies primarily on walking as a means of transportation, Preservation Detroit covers a broad area by providing tours of multiple neighborhoods, offering different Saturday walking tours of Eastern Market, Cultural Center, Downtown, and Midtown. While the wide range of interesting architectural sites makes this possible for Preservation Detroit, music sites and environmental justice sites are more

geographically dispersed and require vehicular transportation, hence the reliance on buses by the Detroit Music Tour and the Sierra Club. The emergence of local charter bus companies in the past few years has further enabled the development bus tours.

With the exception of Preservation Detroit and some of D:hive's large tours, political tours are free to participants and are subsidized in various ways. When D:hive was Inside Detroit, its walking tours cost $10 per person and its bus tours cost $25 per person. Now that the organization is a part of the Downtown Detroit Partnership, however, its public tours are free, although donations are solicited at the end of the tours. The Sierra Club's guide volunteers her services, and while the groups she guides are required to provide the bus for transportation, she does not earn an honorarium. The Detroit Music Tour is still in the pilot phase of its operation, and its tour has thus far been offered only as a part of the Allied Media Conference, with conference registration fees covering the cost of the tour. Preservation Detroit does charge for its tours, and its most regularly offered tours, the Saturday Heritage Walking Tours, cost $10 per person. Political tours tend to run for approximately 2-3 hours, similar to commercial tours but are generally offered less frequently.

Although issues of representation are important in all forms of cultural tourism, for political tour operators, questions about how Detroit is represented and by whom are particularly important. Ninneman, a Detroit native who now lives in New Orleans, notes that these questions are at the heart of the Detroit Music Tour. Watching what she calls the "disaster and devastation tours" that appeared in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina had an important influence on the development of the music tour. She describes residents of badly hit New Orleans neighborhoods in 2005:

> They're just doing whatever it is they need to do on their property, and then there's busloads of people coming down and taking pictures of them, like they're animals at a zoo. Obviously that bothers me. […] It made me think about every little detail of a cultural tour, because as soon as you have a busload of outsiders coming through someone's neighborhood to take pictures and learn about that neighborhood but the people that actually live in that neighborhood are not a part of that tour, that's a problem.

As a result, the music tour relies on griots, or storytellers, who are active in Detroit's music scenes to ride along on the bus and to narrate the sites from personal experience. In this way, Ninneman and co-organizer Gholz attempt to allow members of the communities they visit to shape both the tour narrative and its itinerary.

Another way in which political tours differ from the other archetypes is that they do not attempt to eliminate bias or present "balance" in the way that commercial tours and trespassing tours typically do. D:hive's tours are resoundingly optimistic. Theresa says, "The one liner that I end all tours with, to answer very simply 'why Detroit?', is because Detroit is big enough to matter in the world and small enough that you can matter in it. And that says it all, right there." On the other hand, as the quote from Gholz that opens this section suggests, the Detroit Music Tour provides a predominantly negative perspective of the urban development policies that have shaped Detroit over the last half-century. This is not to say that political tours are only one-sided; D:hive explains how the construction of I-75 demolished the black neighborhood of Paradise Valley in the 1960s, and the Detroit Music Tour celebrates the incredible achievements of Detroit musicians across generations. However, eliminating bias and making tour narratives palatable to tour-goers is not as central a concern as communicating the ideas that promote the organizations' goals.

Trespassing Tours

Ground rules from my tour guide:

1) *Let me do the talking if we run into anyone.*
2) *Don't run from the cops. That just makes them mad.*
3) *Leave me behind. If I tell you to go and leave me behind, do it.*
4) *If something doesn't feel right, no matter what it is, no matter how trivial it may seem, if you get a weird feeling about something, speak up. There are no stupid questions when it comes to this.*

- *Field notes from DetroitUrbex tour, 7/10/2012*

While commercial tours and political tours generally operate above board and within the law, the third archetypical tour regularly takes tourists inside privately owned buildings without the owners' permission, hence my label "trespassing tours." These tours are generally the least

scripted and least formal of the three. For example, the ground rules above were given to me by my tour guide as we navigated underbrush and a steam tunnel at our first site and served as our liability agreement. While very few companies[4] advertise this kind of tour, many Detroit residents give frequent tours of well-known ruin sites. As Mark Binelli (2012) writes in his recent book about Detroit and its people, "Every Detroiter I know who has ever photographed an abandoned building and possesses any kind of web presence has been contacted by strangers from Copenhagen, Rotterdam, Paris or Berlin, asking about the best way to sneak into the train station or offering to pay for a local tour" (p. 274*n*). Indeed, this is a point of irritation for many Detroiters familiar with the city's ruins.

The companies that do exist, including DetroitUrbex and a rumored kayak company that takes customers into the city's sewers,[5] do very little in the way of direct advertising. Detroiturbex.com includes a brief and standard description of the company's tours, but it does not provide a price schedule, reviews from previous customers, or a contact name beyond a generic site administrator email address. Owner Steve says this is deliberate:

> There's a very passive vetting process that comes when somebody contacts me for a tour. It's a little unusual, but the first thing is that I don't immediately give people a name. I almost never give them a name until the day before, the day of, or when we're shaking hands when we meet. That's deliberate. It's not just to protect my privacy. […] It takes a leap of faith, and that weeds out a lot of the voyeurs or gawkers.

Steve estimates that only half of those who contact him for tours make it past this first stage of vetting, and if potential customers insist on seeing only "the bad stuff," he turns them away.

Despite this vetting, Steve makes the majority of his income giving tours. In his first year of operation he gave nearly 40 tours, and by July 2012, he was on track to double that number in his second year of operation. His rates vary, but a typical half-day tour for 1-3 people costs $150,

[4] I use the term "company" colloquially here. DetroitUrbex is not incorporated, and while Steve states that he reports tour income when he files his taxes, he takes payment in cash, check, and—occasionally—baked goods.

[5] While I was not able to confirm the details of this tour, I include its rumored existence to demonstrate the nature of these tours, which are legally dubious and somewhat clothed in secrecy.

while a full day (up to 10 hours) costs $200. Most of Steve's customers are photographers or researchers, including academics like myself, as well as journalists, fiction writers, and documentary filmmakers. Some of his customers have experience with urbex in other cities but want a guide in a new city. While he has customers from all over the world, Steve estimates that the majority of the people he guides are suburbanites from metropolitan Detroit. Most are also white. Recently, he has worked as a scout for film locations. He explains, "The income is a little bit better, and it's a little more challenging. And I do like the challenge. Don't get me wrong, taking total strangers into vacant buildings that are falling down is challenging. I enjoy it, but I do prefer to work with films." As with most custom tour operations, Steve offers tours as requested rather than on a regular schedule. As a result, some weeks he gives a tour every day, while at other times he may go weeks without guiding.

A typical tour with DetroitUrbex is an all-day affair. The guide meets customers for breakfast at Duly's Place in Southwest Detroit, where a plate of eggs, toast, and bacon sells for $2.75, cash only. The customer provides transportation, with the guide riding shotgun to give directions and narrate the scene. Steve tailors tours to the customers' interests, offering options about what sites to visit and making the itinerary flexible and dynamic. While Steve's customers are primarily interested in seeing ruins, his itineraries also include stops that illustrate the more vibrant side of the city. Our tour took us into the fabulous Guardian Building, past the soon-to-reopen Belle Isle Aquarium, and to the sculpture yard near MBAD's African Bead Museum.

My guide's ground rules were largely unnecessary on the day of our tour. We saw few people at the abandoned sites other than scrappers at work in the Packard Plant, a yard crew mowing lawns at an empty high school, and a handful of neighbors who were under no illusions about what we were doing. Nevertheless, stories of people getting mugged for wallets and camera equipment inside of ruins are increasingly common in Detroit, and we decided not to enter one site when a lingering pedestrian kept a close eye on us and waived a bus past the stop where he stood. Entering buildings involved intimate knowledge of many of the sites but was generally not

physically difficult; however, the uneven terrain and frequent necessity to climb over debris does generally limit the DetroitUrbex audience to those who are able-bodied. Nearly every site showed signs of frequent visitors: piles of garbage were common, missing tile or woodwork had been taken for souvenirs or resale, and spray paint covered most vertical surfaces. Many places smelled of recent fires or damp, crumbling plaster.

Steve's narration of the sites was wide-ranging. He discussed the physical processes that contribute to a building's collapse; recited architects' names, ownership histories, and factory production statistics; and recreated a sense of the buildings in their heydays with the help of historic photos on his cell phone and stories from his archival research. In total, the tour lasted about 8 hours, and it left this tourist exhausted. Steve says that this is his goal: "If they don't have any experience with the city, what they see is going to blow their mind. Maybe not for the better, but it's definitely going to challenge the way that they think. My goal is to exhaust people, to fill them with so much information, so much pertinent and relevant information that they're going to go, 'Wow.'"

Ruin Tourism and Ruin Porn

As the preceding sections indicate, the market for ruin tourism in Detroit has grown significantly in recent years. What accounts for this growth? Arguably it stems from a combination of destination development and increased demand. Large-scale events have provided the impetus for key tour developments, while public and private investment in attractions like Campus Martius Park and sports stadiums like Ford Field and Comerica Park draw visitors to the city center. Media has also played a key role in driving visitor interest in the city. This again resembles tourism development in other places. For example, since the phenomenal popularity of the movie *Slumdog Millionaire*, which was set in Mumbai's Dharavi slum, tourism of slums in India has expanded significantly (Frenzel, Koens and Steinbrink, 2012, p. 7). Similarly, the growth of Detroit's ruin tourism industry has corresponded with the proliferation of so-called "ruin porn" in U.S. and European media.

Although popular media have increasingly used ruin porn as the main visual symbol of Detroit (Rubin, 2011; Millington, 2013), the genre is highly criticized within the city on the grounds that it aestheticizes poverty (Leary, 2011; Millington, 2013). Often cited examples of the genre include Yves Marchand and Romain Meffre's 2010 collection of photographs titled *The Ruins of Detroit* and Andrew Moore's 2010 collection *Detroit Disassembled*. The images typically represent Detroit as empty and returning to nature, often drawing comparisons to ancient civilizations or wilderness landscapes. In his exploration of photographs that focus particularly on Detroit's urban nature, Millington (2013) traces the growth of such representations over recent years and argues against treatments of Detroit as Other. Drawing on Robinson's concept of "ordinary cities," Millington writes, "Understanding Detroit as ordinary suggests that we begin to see Detroit's ongoing collapse – and not just its history – as part of processes that are still occurring. Rejecting metaphors of natural reclamation is one step towards seeing Detroit as an ongoing phenomenon rather than a finished product, as many of these representations imply" (p. 290). While he contends that the images he considers "are deeply ambiguous and hard to place politically" (p. 279), Millington ultimately suggests that representations of Detroit that can be labeled "ruin porn" do little to advance just urban politics.

Unsurprisingly, ruin tour operators in the city are well aware of the proliferation of ruin porn, and most see it as a draw for visitors. One guide who offers a private tour of ruins throughout the city says of the customers who take it, "they specifically want to see abandoned buildings and ruins—they mention that word." Another has a similar experience, especially with international visitors. She says, "They see these pictures, and it's not that different from why do people go to Greece? Why do people go to Egypt? It's a civilization, a past civilization basically." Many guides understand visitors' curiosity but nevertheless have a fairly negative view of the attraction to ruins. Ninneman, who participated in the raves that took place in the empty Packard Plant in the 90s, explains:

> I mean, that's how it all started is when we were young we would go into abandoned buildings and explore things and look for things and take photos, and we even threw parties in them. So certainly we see the excitement in going through a bunch of mammoth abandoned buildings that are like these enigmatic ghosts or shells of places, but at this point, it's been so exploited that we're sick of it, and we feel like Detroit has now moved on from being this murder-and-crime capital and failure-of-economy capital to the ruin porn capital, that is, the ruin porn Disnelyand now. […] Yeah we understand that that's cool and we did it too, but it's the stories behind it that we want to resonate with people.

Many guides expressed a similar exhaustion with visitors' eagerness to see the ruins and likewise expressed a desire to tell a more nuanced story about Detroit than that told by the photographs of its ruins.

Tour operators attempt to combat the narratives of ruin porn through both tour itineraries and tour narration. In this way, stops at ruin sites are matched by stops at intact sites like the Guardian Building or at sites like the Heidelberg Project, where artist Tyree Guyton has turned empty houses into a massive outdoor art project. Narrative nuance is typically pursued through two strategies. The first is an attempt to give a sense of a ruin's history: its past greatness as well as the process through which it has fallen into abandonment. In the Packard Plant, therefore, Steve explained how the factory had been reconfigured during World War II to manufacture airplane engines that were critical to the U.S. war effort, while on the Wheelhouse tour of the churches of Poletown, Kavanaugh stood in front of a shuttered St. Stanislaus Catholic Church and pointed out where interstate highways bisected the Polish neighborhoods that once made up its parish. The second strategy is an attempt to highlight what could be called positive stories either of successful redevelopment or of people making a life for themselves despite the city's struggles. Preservation Detroit's stops at successfully preserved sites like the Fox Theatre on its theater tour or other tours' stops at community gardens or the Heidelberg project are examples of this strategy.

However, tour guides cannot ultimately control what representations of Detroit tourists will themselves produce. Many of the guides I spoke with recounted exchanges with journalists or filmmakers in which they felt their nuanced narratives of the city were ignored. For instance,

Theresa remembers giving a tour to a documentarian: “He does this shot of downtown, and it’s got to be dawn on Sunday, you know, where there’s no people in the center of downtown. But it wasn’t the center, it was over on Griswold here, and it was like crickets. And I was like, I took him around for four hours, and that’s what [he shows]?” Leisure visitors, too, share representations of their visits via social media. Guides hope to influence their ideas about the city but cannot control how visitors will represent Detroit. In this way, the Environmental Justice Tour attempted to give tour-goers a sense of the resilience of Detroit’s marginalized communities, but it couldn’t prevent the flutter of camera activity that occurred each time the bus passed a particularly fire-damaged house.

Conclusion

Ruin tourism offerings have increased and diversified since they first appeared in Detroit in the 1990s. Both non-profit and for profit organizations and business have helped develop the city as a destination both in response to rising interest in the city’s ruins and due to the influence of large-scale events that brought significant numbers of visitors to the city. To characterize how the industry operates, I have classified three types of ruin tours: commercial, political, and trespassing tours. The first are for-profit operations that target leisure visitors and business travelers and that provide the most scripted and standard tour experience. The second are non-profit operations that attempt to attract local audiences in order to build support for broader organizational goals or promote education or activism around a particular thematic focus. Finally, the third are the least scripted and most involved of the three types, and such tours generally involve trespassing into privately owned or otherwise off-limits abandoned buildings with a private guide.

At the same time that ruin tour offers have grown, representations of the city’s ruins have proliferated in national and international media. The negative reaction to ruin porn by locals and researchers is mirrored by concern from tour operators about the role cultural tourism can play in representations of the city. However, ruin tourism takes on a dual relationship to ruin porn and its

representation of industrial decline in the city. On one hand, tourism can function as a site of production of ruin porn, as the photographers and filmmakers who produce aestheticized images of the city's ruins hire tour guides to help them gain access to the city's abandoned sites. Furthermore, nothing prevents leisure visitors from uploading images of dereliction to Flickr or Facebook in representations that reinforce media narratives of the city's decline. On the other hand, tour operators and many others in Detroit see tourism as an opportunity to combat the narrative of ruin porn. In the next chapter, I explore this tension in ruin tourism further by analyzing the flows of economic benefits that tourism practices create.

CHAPTER III

REDEVELOPMENT AND TOURISM'S ECONOMIC IMPACTS

Tourism is one of Michigan's largest industries. In 2011, the industry generated $11.7 billion of tourist spending, $995 million in state tax revenue, and 200,000 jobs in the state (Nicholls, 2012, p.1). To encourage continued growth in the industry, the state funds an advertising campaign called Pure Michigan that promotes the state as a vacation destination nationally and internationally. Widely considered a wild success, the campaign has received numerous awards from the United States Travel Association, and its website is the most visited state tourism website in the United States (Nicholls, 2012, p. 14). The sites that Pure Michigan usually promotes in Detroit, however, are mass tourism destinations—casinos, sports stadiums, museums, and theaters. While it is clear that local governments and other influential actors recognize mass tourism as a tool of economic development, tax generation, and employment, it is less clear if ruin tourism has the same benefits as mass tourism.

In light of this, the questions guiding this chapter are: first, who benefits economically from ruin tourism? Second, what place does ruin tourism have in redevelopment strategies, and with what implications for the industry itself? In order to answer these questions, I survey the role of ruin tourism in small business development and collaboration with community organizations before examining two specific case studies: D:hive and Detroit Urban Adventures. I show that tour operators themselves are the primary beneficiaries of tour profits; however, through tax generation and collaborations with community organizations, ruin tourism does benefit the broader Detroit community in small ways. In answering the second question, I argue that ruin tourism helps establish the conditions for more diverse practices of cultural tourism that are employed in redevelopment efforts in Detroit. This is exemplified by the entry into the market of a multinational company and of one of the largest public-private partnerships in the city. In the process, a more formal and professionalized model of operation supplements the homegrown small business model of early ruin tour providers.

Small Business Development

One of the more visible economic benefits of ruin tourism is small business development. The commercial tour operations outlined in chapter 2 represent six small businesses started between 2004 and 2012 that each employ between 1 and 15 people. For some, these small businesses supplement other employment—for instance, one company owner works as a lawyer in the mornings and offers tours in the afternoons and on weekends. However, for others, tour companies provide full time employment. Three of the six companies were started in the last three years, and their longevity has yet to be tested. Overall, however, cultural tour companies have been successful, with all of the tour operators who have been in business for multiple years reporting a moderate but steady increase in business between 2011 and 2012.

In addition to the employment these businesses provide for their owners and other workers, for-profit tourism operations have additional benefits for the tax revenue they generate and for related industries. Under Michigan law, cities can levy income and corporate taxes in addition to those levied by the state. Detroit taxes income for residents at 2.5 percent and for non-residents at 1.25 percent, and it taxes corporations at 2 percent (Detroit Economic Growth Corporation, 2012). Additionally, the State levies a 4.35 percent income tax and a 6 percent corporate tax in addition to its 6 percent sales tax (Detroit Economic Growth Corporation, 2012). City tax revenue funds the City's operations, including the provision of services that benefit residents, and while state revenue is distributed more widely across the state, it too funds operations that benefit Detroiters through education services, infrastructural investment, and more. While its impact may be small scale compared to that of mass tourist activities, the income generated in ruin tourism in this way benefits the Detroit community at large through the tax revenue it generates.

Tour operations also support other businesses in the hospitality and retail industries. The recent influx of younger, less affluent visitors has supported the establishment of Hostel Detroit, a

22-bed independent hostel that rents beds in shared or private rooms for as little as $27 per night. The first manager of the hostel, Michel Soucisse, says about its guests:

> Mostly they're urbanophiles. They'd rather talk about urbanism and architecture than shopping and what happens in other big tourist locations. […] I always say that Detroit sort of filters itself. The people who are looking to have this fabulous, posh spring break story probably aren't looking to Detroit to have a vacation. But the people who are looking to find something more off the beaten path and find something less commercial, less corporate, they sort of pick up on this national, international buzz about Detroit.

The hostel operates as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, and while it currently rents the building it occupies in North Corktown, it is considering buying the property. The hostel opened in April 2011 and has been operating continuously since then. In addition to the manager, three full-time volunteers trade room and board for their work facilitating the hostel's operations.

Ruin tourism also aids small business development in the retail and food industries to an extent. Operators of all three of the tour types outlined in chapter 2 bring tour-goers to locally owned restaurants, cafes, and shops in an effort to build partnerships with those businesses or simply to show visitors some of their favorite places in the city. Many tours begin and/or end at cafes, bars, or restaurants, and customers are encouraged to patronize the businesses. Often tour operators coordinate with the business owners to arrange a discount for tourists. For instance, the ticket for Detroit Urban Adventures' tour includes a free drink at the Detroit Beer Company. One commercial tour operator states, "We will get out somewhere and maybe get an iced tea or a cookie somewhere, maybe at Avalon Breads—we'll stop there a lot—or 14 East, that little coffee shop in Midtown. […] They love that. If there's a shop they heard of or something they want to go by, we don't have any problem with that. This is what makes it nicer, you know." D:hive maintains a checklist of all the bars and restaurants in downtown Detroit and encourages its tour-goers to visit them. Theresa explains, "We don't ask anything from the bars or restaurants. We don't say give us money and we'll put you on the checklist. We might say, 'Hey, we're bringing a group in; give them some drink specials or a free shot or something.'" While it is unlikely that the number of ruin tourists is sufficient to solely sustain retail or restaurant sales at any of these

businesses, tour operators do attempt to foster business growth in related industries by encouraging their tour-goers to patronize local stores.

One way in which ruin tourism generally does not have a direct impact on the city's development is in real estate. With a few exceptions, tour operators do not have storefronts that serve as bases of operation. Rather, owners run their businesses out of their homes and use existing landmarks as the starting and ending points for their tours. Exceptions include D:hive and Wheelhouse Detroit, which operate shops that also serve as the launching point for most of their tours, while larger political organizations like Preservation Detroit and the Sierra Club maintain offices where they conduct their non-tour operations as well as tour-related business.

Collaboration with Community Organizations

Tax revenue generation is one indirect way in which profits from ruin tourism benefit the broader Detroit community, but some ruin tour organizations also have mechanisms for more directly sharing profits with community organizations. This can take various forms, from soliciting donations for community organizations to paying a stipend to an organization that helped develop a tour or provided a guest tour guide.

The Sierra Club's environmental justice tour, for instance, solicits donations for community organizations that serve the neighborhoods its tours visit. Likewise, Wheelhouse Detroit's tour of the Churches of Poletown visited some churches that were still operational or semi-operational where some visitors made small donations. The tour also stopped at the annual Pierogi Festival fundraiser at the Sweetest Heart of Mary Catholic Church. All of the tour-goers purchased food or rummage sale items at the festival, and the profits from the event go directly to the church.

Wheelhouse not only encourages tour-goers to make direct donations in this way, but it also shares profits with community organizations with which it develops tours. Not all of the company's tours are developed in collaboration with community or non-profit organizations, but co-owner Kavanaugh states that Wheelhouse prefers collaborative tour development. For

example, a recently developed mural tour of Southwest Detroit was conceived and designed by Urban Neighborhood Initiatives (UNI). Wheelhouse handles reservations and bike rentals for the tour and leads groups from the Wheelhouse shop on the riverfront to the Southwest neighborhood. Once in Southwest Detroit, UNI's guides take over. "We show up; they get a check; everybody's happy," says Kavanaugh.

The majority of ruin tour operations do not have profit sharing mechanisms like these, however. Tour-goers may feel uncomfortable when donations are solicited on a tour for which they have already paid, while other operators develop tours independently in part in order to keep their costs and prices low. All of the tour organizers interviewed expressed an interest in bettering the communities in which they worked, but direct profit-sharing strategies remain rare. The economic benefits of ruin tourism through small business development and collaboration with community organizations are therefore present but arguably limited. Further, small business development and community collaborations operate on a very local scale. However, redevelopment efforts involving more powerful and widely influential actors have also begun to incorporate ruin tourism and ruin tour operators. To examine how ruin tourism may play a more complex role in Detroit's redevelopment, I now turn to the examples of two tour providers: D:hive and Urban Adventures.

D:hive and Public-Private Urban Redevelopment

D:hive began in 2005 as Inside Detroit, a nonprofit organization. "Our mission was to educate the public about Detroit's history, culture, and community in order to spur economic development," said one of its founders. Tours were always a central part of the organization's operations, but the target market was made up more of local or regional residents than out-of-town visitors. Theresa explained how the organization struggled to articulate its goals when taking business planning classes in their first years of operation:

> [Y]ou always get to a point in business planning stuff where they want you to identify your industry and then look at industry trends and […] look at industry research, and we really kind of hit a brick wall because we didn't know. We'd be like, oh, tourism? Not

> really. Economic development? Kind of, but in a roundabout way. And so, it was this hybrid that it was really difficult to—there wasn't anyone to compare it to. […] And we were trying to be everything. We were trying to be the general tourist welcome center help place, but then we were also trying to attract and retain talent.

The organization eventually settled into the hybrid role it envisioned and grew markedly from 2005 to 2011. The organization offered multiple public tours that ranged in cost from $10 for a walking tour to $25 for a bus tour. Whereas Theresa originally conducted all of the tours herself, Inside Detroit was eventually able to employ 5-10 part-time tour guides. Theresa began working full-time for Inside Detroit in 2008, when the organization opened its Downtown Welcome Center at 1253 Woodward Ave. The welcome center occupies 3500 square feet in the center city and was the only welcome center in Detroit before the State of Michigan opened its welcome center near the Ambassador Bridge later that year.

In 2011, Inside Detroit had an operating budget of approximately $240,000, and nearly 80 percent of its revenue came from tours and sales at the welcome center (Internal Revenue Service, 2011b, p. 9). However, in 2012, the organization went through a significant restructuring. One of the founders left Inside Detroit to begin a for-profit Segway tour company, Segways2U, while Inside Detroit became a part of the Downtown Detroit Partnership (DDP) under a new name, D:hive. DDP is a large public-private partnership whose goals are economic development and physical enhancement of downtown Detroit. Its board of directors comprises corporate and civic leaders, and its revenue in 2011 exceeded $6 million, mostly from donations and grants (Internal Revenue Service, 2011a, p. 9). The organization's main offices are located in the Renaissance Center, a large riverfront complex of skyscrapers that has been criticized for its isolation from the rest of downtown Detroit due to its imposing size and location across busy Jefferson Avenue (Bennett, 1990, p. 85). Theresa suggests that D:hive fills a distinct role in DDP. She says, "Because we're on the ground, we're like the cool, hip, we're like the kid—'Hey mom, you should really check out this song,' you know." D:hive's youthful vibe and its location in the

heart of downtown have arguably been at the center of how the organization has been rebranded in its restructuring.

D:hive's offices remain at the welcome center on Woodward Ave., which is the starting point for its public tours as well as its base of operations. Support from DDP has allowed the group to offer its public tours free of charge, although donations are still encouraged. DDP's support has also allowed D:hive to double its tour guides' wages to $20 per hour. In addition to these changes in the tour program, D:hive has expanded into greater efforts to promote entrepreneurship and encourage creative class workers to settle in Detroit. To this end, it offers eight-week business development classes that have so far graduated approximately 100 people, and it offers talent recruitment and job placement services through its WORK program (D:hive, 2013). Finally, the organization offers "Downtown Living" tours that highlight residential development and encourage tour-goers to move to the center city.

As chapter 2 makes clear, the potential of cultural tourism to provide a more nuanced story about the city is widely agreed upon, even if its success at doing so is unclear. However, public-private redevelopment efforts and programs to attract and retain creative class workers are far more controversial. As the examination of the Detroit Works Project in the introduction indicates, community groups and neighborhood leaders often fiercely contest what they consider private encroachment on public goods and uneven investment in downtown redevelopment at the expense of public spending in Detroit's struggling neighborhoods. Seen in this light, D:hive's incorporation into DDP, with its public-private structure and redevelopment agenda, may be a politically controversial move.

Theresa considers the collaboration with DDP to be fruitful, however. She also considers the growth of her organization to be a mark of its success and believes that D:hive has been effective at encouraging creative class workers to move to Detroit. The organization's growth is arguably due to multiple factors, and Theresa herself is one of them. The owner of another tour company described her as "a legend here," and she is well known and respected in Detroit's civic

and business communities as a young leader. The transformation of Inside Detroit—one of the larger cultural tour operators in the city—into D:hive and the accompanying increase in programming geared more towards economic development than cultural tourism is significant in that it suggests that the radical potential of ruin tourism to upset traditional power narratives in Detroit does not match its potential to contribute to redevelopment efforts influenced by powerful actors like the Downtown Development Partnership.

Urban Adventures and Multinational Involvement

In 2012, the same year that Inside Detroit became D:hive, another established tour provider took his work in a new direction. David,[6] who has offered tours through his own company for many years, began leading tours for Urban Adventures (UA). UA is a multinational tour company that operates in over eighty cities on six continents (Urban Adventures, 2013). David says of the collaboration, "[T]hey're in cities all over the world and wanted to be in more cities, and they contacted me to kind of partner with them in Detroit. So it's kind of I do it and it's under their auspices or guidelines or whatever, but it works. It's a nice partnership." While David handles all local operations, UA handles booking, advertising, and other overhead through its website. Customers can choose from two daily tours—"The D You Must See Tour" or the more ruin-attentive "Detroit's Rise, Fall, and Renewal Tour"—offered Tuesday through Sunday.

Though he offers UA tours six days a week, David continues to offer a wider variety of tours through his own company, including a rotating schedule of Sunday evening walking tours and private tours for small groups or bus groups. The difference in price for David's tours through his company and through UA reflects the larger overhead costs associated with the larger operation: David's Sunday walking tours cost $12 per person, while UA's tours are $26 per person. Urban Adventures also requires participants to accept a 1500-word terms and conditions agreement when booking on-line, while such agreements are far less legalistic or non-existent for the smaller tour operators in the city.

[6] A pseudonym.

Urban Adventures was launched in 2009, and its staff are located in Australia, the United Kingdom, Canada, and Vietnam (Urban Adventures, 2013; WHL Group, 2013). Its parent companies are Intrepid Travel, which is incorporated in Australia, and WHL Group, which is incorporated in Hong Kong. Intrepid was founded in 1989 and now employs over 1,000 people in 22 countries (Intrepid Travel, 2013). Its founders started the adventure travel company after taking a road trip together across sub-Saharan in their 20s, and the company continues to offer more trips to developing parts of the world than developed. Its website indicates that it offers 675 trips in Asia and 365 in Africa but only 275 in Europe and 178 in North America. WHL Group is a collection of travel businesses, the first of which was originally run by the International Finance Corporation (IFC), a member of the World Bank Group that attempts to foster private sector growth in developing countries. That first business, whl.travel, separated from the IFC in 2006, and the group has since grown to include seven travel business with operations across the world. While Intrepid offers multi-day or multi-week small group expeditions and WHL Group specializes in back-end travel logistics, UA offers short day trips in cities across the world.

Urban Adventures and its parent companies use a franchise model to partner with local providers. WHL Group's website explains, "WHL Group companies empower local partners who have practice in experiential and mindful travel, and a local's knack for identifying, explaining and sustaining the distinctive qualities of a place" (WHL Group, 2013). The companies' websites emphasize their global reach and their local awareness as well as their commitment to environmental sustainability and ethical travel. Intrepid, for instance, advertises that it has been carbon neutral since 2010 by purchasing credits to offset its carbon emitting activities (Intrepid Travel, 2013). Both companies are also affiliated with non-profit foundations that aim to promote sustainable development or tourism development in the global South (Intrepid Travel, 2013; WHL Group, 2013).

Urban Adventures' entry into Detroit's tourism market is notable in that it is the only multinational company currently offering tours in the city. It suggests cultural tourism's growing

profitability in the city and the growing market for such tours. The specific history of the company is also significant, however. Urban Adventures is a collaboration between two companies that began their work in the global South: Intrepid Travel as an adventure tour company and WHL as an economic development organization. Their development aims remain prominent in their operations and in their support of affiliated foundations. What are the implications, then, of a development minded company with roots in the global South establishing itself in the Detroit market? The suggestion that Detroit is an underdeveloped market that could benefit from foreign investment will be considered in more detail in the final chapter. However, the capitalist development practices of multinational corporate and charitable institutions have been widely contested, and it is unclear to what extent UA's tourism enterprises benefit the company and to what extent those benefits are shared with local partners. David suggests that the partnership in Detroit has been beneficial to him. Although the cost for UA's tours is higher than those he offers through his company, many customers feel more comfortable with a company that has an established reputation than with one that is known only locally, and he is able to fill tours more frequently with UA than with his company. However, it is less evident that UA's tours benefit Detroit more broadly.

Conclusion

Ruin tourism in Detroit has had certain economic benefits for the region. Although ruin tour operators generate less economic activity and tax revenue than mass tourism in Michigan (such as sporting events, casinos, large museums, or outdoor recreation), ruin tour operators have generated a small number of jobs as well as tax revenue for both the City of Detroit and the State of Michigan. These benefits support not only the tour operators and their employees, but also the citizens who benefit from public goods that are funded by tax revenue. Further, tourist activity supports businesses in related industries, and tour operators actively encourage their customers to patronize food and retail outlets in the city. Finally, a small number of tour operators collaborate with community organizations to share profits or solicit donations. In this way, tour operators

themselves benefit from tourism in Detroit, but to a lesser extent, local governments, community organizations, and those who rely on services from these actors also benefit.

The role of ruin tourism in urban redevelopment in Detroit is complex and dynamic. Recent changes in the structure of some of the older tour operations indicate that ruin tourism is itself a changing practice. Inside Detroit's absorption by the Downtown Development Partnership and its transformation into D:hive suggest that tour operators can play a role in promoting and enacting public-private redevelopment strategies, while Urban Adventures' entry into the Detroit market suggests that ruin tourism may become more mainstream and profitable for tour companies over time. Both D:hive and Urban Adventures promote tourism as a tool of economic development, and the growth of these particular operations suggests that the development function of tourism may be more highly valued by powerful civic and business interests than its function to disrupt dominant narratives about Detroit.

The formalization and professionalization that is evident in the emergence and restructuring of these operations also has significant implications for the practice of ruin tourism itself. As small tour operations grow, particularly if they are absorbed or franchised by larger organizations, concerns about liability and pressure to standardize tour experiences are also likely to increase. This may lead to a gradual de-emphasis on ruin sites in favor of safer, more sanitized destinations. At the same time, as redevelopment efforts and real estate investment in the city increase, the number of ruin sites is likely to decrease. In this way, tourism as tool of economic redevelopment alters the very practices of that tourism, and ruin tourism may give way to more varied forms of cultural tourism.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I set out to understand how ruin tourism operates as both a material and discursive practice. How have tours that feature abandoned sites become an established practice and how does that practice operate? How are such tours related to representations of Detroit in popular media? Further, how do such tours matter economically in a post-industrial city like Detroit? In this final chapter, I revisit the main conclusions of the previous chapters before considering the implications of this study for broader understandings of niche tourism and post-industrial urbanism. In that discussion, I focus on implications for critical urban geography, for the ruin tourism industry itself, and for tourism geography more broadly.

Summary

In chapter two, I outline ruin tourism as an emerging and growing form of cultural practice that reflects fascination with post-industrial decay. It includes a diverse set of practices that coalesce around the exhibition of abandoned or derelict sites through guided tours. The three types of ruin tours I categorize in Detroit include commercial tours, political tours, and trespassing tours. These range from licensed, for-profit tours to non-profit tours meant to encourage community involvement to legally dubious exploration of ruin sites. While the number of ruin tour organizations in Detroit has increased significantly in recent years, the practice has roots in urban exploration that stretches back decades. Large-scale events that attract visitors to the city have played a role in the establishment of many operations, but some of the younger operations were established as their founders saw opportunities in the market for small business development.

The people directly involved in the scene include tour operators, tour-goers, and tour promoters. Most tour organizations are locally owned small businesses or non-profits that range from one-person operations to one with 10 part-time guides. The largest organizations are political tour operators, and tours make up only a portion of these organizations' total operations.

Since 2012, the multinational company Urban Adventures (UA) has also operated a tour in the city, relying on a franchise-model that leaves local operations in the hands of its Detroit-based partner while UA handles most of the overhead. Tour-goers include local, regional, national, and international audiences, including business travelers, leisure visitors, activists, and researchers. Most tour operators estimate that roughly a third of visitors are international tourists. Local and regional audiences are more significant for political tours than for commercial or trespassing tours. While the Detroit Metro Convention and Visitors Bureau (DMCVB) includes some ruin tour operators among its member companies, DMCVB and other tourism boosters focus most of their promotion on mass tourism rather than on the niche tourism represented by ruin tours.

Ruin tourism has a dual relationship to the representation of its sites, and chapter two also explores this tension. On one hand, tours function as a production site for so-called ruin porn and other sensationalized portrayals of the city's abandoned places. On the other hand, tours function as an attempt to combat such representations. The dominant media narrative of Detroit is one of a city that is singularly empty, dangerous, and returning to nature. Tour operators, however, use tour narratives and itineraries to tell more diverse and complicated stories about the city's economic, demographic, and infrastructural challenges. One strategy is for tours to include stops at sites of vibrant urban life in addition to ruin sites. One such site is the Guardian Building downtown, whose Tiffany glass clock and Namibian marble floors suggest the grandeur of a successful, modern city. Other sites include urban gardens, sculpture parks made of found objects, and pop-up music shows on empty lots—sites that might not resemble stereotypes of a thriving metropolis but which nevertheless speak to the life that can be found in Detroit and to the hard work and creativity of the city's people. Likewise, tour narratives contextualize Detroit's ruins by describing the history of sites—the factories that produced plane engines in World War II and the theatres where all the best acts played—and the processes that contributed to the production of ruins, from suburbanization to racial tensions and capital migration.

The stories that the tours tell are diverse. Some tell about racism and environmental injustice; others tell about entrepreneurship and economic opportunity. What they share is a desire to portray the city in a way that contextualizes its challenges and gives depth to its people. However, visitors don't always faithfully retell the stories they hear on tours. By taking visitors past scenic ruins and into struggling neighborhoods, tour guides thus enable tourists to make representations of the city—in blog entries or photos posted to social media—that reinforce stereotypes about Detroit. This paradox lies at the heart of ruin tourism and remains unresolved.

Chapter three examines tourism as a material and economic practice. As a form of niche tourism rather than mass tourism, ruin tourism in Detroit has a relatively small economic impact. The industry employs only a handful of people full-time, although it does support businesses in related industries, such as hotels, shops, and restaurants. Through the generation of tax revenue and collaborations between tour operators and community organizations, profits from ruin tourism benefit the broader Detroit community in certain small ways.

While state and local governments devote significant resources to promoting metro Detroit as a mass tourism destination, niche tourism has also been enrolled in redevelopment efforts. One example of this is the absorption of Inside Detroit by the Downtown Detroit Partnership (DDP). Now called D:hive, the organization has increased its offerings of downtown living tours and bar tours aimed at young professionals and has added programs to promote small business development and entrepreneurship. This suggests a greater effort to attract creative class workers to the city, which aligns with DDP's broader economic development goals. UA's entry into the Detroit market represents a similar shift towards niche tourism as a tool for economic development. With parent companies whose work in the Global South is explicitly developmentalist, UA's website promotes its franchise model as a tool of local development—although this development is not without profits that flow to UA's overseas headquarters.

Along with the emerging emphasis on tourism as a tool of economic development has come a shift toward greater professionalization and formalization of the ruin tour scene itself.

This is exemplified at D:hive by the doubling of tour guides' wages and renovations to the group's website and downtown welcome center that have come since its restructuring. Professionalization is also evident in UA's operations. The large company's professional web presence and sophisticated administration, as exemplified by elements such as its liability agreement and online booking system, suggest a more complicated operation than the home-grown model of older Detroit tour organizations. I argue that this is likely to result in a shift away from ruins as a central tour site, as concerns about liability and standardized tour experience encourage more sanitized itineraries.

Implications

Though Detroit was once a picture of the modern metropolis, the city now faces serious economic and social challenges that do not fit with understandings of the globally dominant Western city. One implication of my research is that it highlights the potential for studying post-industrial cities like Detroit by using urbanisms of the Global South as a reference point. Not only does ruin tourism resemble slum tourism and dark tourism common to the Global South, but, as the example of Urban Adventures in chapter three makes particularly clear, Detroit is being recapitalized through some of the very same development mechanisms that exist in the Global South. Whereas urban geography has traditionally used models and concepts developed in the Global North and exported them to the Global South, post-colonial urban scholars such as Roy have argued that this is highly problematic. These scholars suggest that not only are Western models of urban growth and development inappropriate for Nonwestern contexts, but they are also increasingly inappropriate for understanding the post-industrial Global North. My examination of the ruin tourism industry in Detroit lends weight to these arguments.

My findings also indicate that ruin tourism may indeed practice itself out of existence. As trespassing tours have increased, so has the visibility of urban exploration. In the process, instances of muggings and robberies have increased at certain sites. While this has not yet stopped the urban explorers and trespassing tourists, it has altered the practice, as expensive

photography equipment becomes a liability and certain sites become inaccessible. Also, as chapter three indicates, tourism contributes to on-going processes of urban redevelopment. The demolition and property redevelopment that have been achieved through residential demolition efforts and the recent boom in investment downtown means that the city contains far fewer ruins than it did even a few years ago. One implication of this for the industry is that ruin tour operators may have to adapt, trading ruins for more traditional sites of cultural tourism. The diverse itineraries of existing tours and the flexibility already demonstrated by numerous tour organizations suggests that commercial and political operators will be able to adapt successfully in this way.

There is also a broader implication for the study of tourism geographies, however, when we consider ruin tourism in terms of liminality. In the introduction, I argued that we can understand ruin tourism as liminal in the sense that it both features liminal spaces (ruins) and involves liminal practice (tourism). Certainly, there is a recognition in tourism geography that tourism practices are ephemeral in certain ways: scholars study the impacts on the environment, culture, and economy of destinations and recognize that tourism often dramatically alters these places. But if these impacts are regarded as problematic, the "solution" is sustainability (Mowforth and Munt, 2009). There is an assumption underlying this work that tourism practices are stable and enduring.

My research questions this however. In part because the sites of ruin tourism—ruins—are themselves in transition, ruin tour operators recognize that the entire practice is liminal. Like Steve, the urban explorer who celebrates building demolitions and renovations, or the Sierra Club guide who hopes for the remediation of the toxic sites her tours visit, ruin tour operators understand their work as temporary and in flux. The changes that have come with the entry into the market of Urban Adventures and the Downtown Detroit Partnership suggest that ruin practices are being stabilized, albeit in ways that alter them as ruins are traded for more sanitized cultural sites and more predictable, standardized tour experiences. However, more things are

possible than a stabilized ruin tourism, and greater attention to the processes through which these practices become stable or how they might be disrupted is necessary. A perspective that acknowledges that tour practices might be liminal as opposed to an approach that emphasizes sustainability could be particularly relevant to our understandings of other niche tourisms, such as dark tourism and slum tourism, which should perhaps be theorized with more attention to how they change through time. Greater attention to local actors, as opposed to tourists and their motivations and experiences, will likely aid this endeavor

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