

Press Package (March 15 2005)

# DETROIT: RUIN OF A CITY

a documentary road movie  
about Detroit and the automobile industry

By Michael Chanan and George Steinmetz

UK/USA, 92mins, DV

Written and Produced by  
George Steinmetz and Michael Chanan

Filmed and edited by  
Michael Chanan

Music by  
Michael Nyman

Directed by  
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Sound Design and Additional Music: Andy Keenan

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**A · H · R · B**  
arts and humanities research board

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**Bristol**  
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Film website:

<http://humanities.uwe.ac.uk/bristoldocs/detroit>

## Synopsis

Metropolitan Detroit, widely known as the Motor City, once the fourth largest city in the United States, the home of the Ford Motor Company, General Motors and, once upon a time, many other automobile manufacturers, is nowadays a city in serious decline, which has lost more than half its population in the past four decades and much of its real estate. Between the 1950s, when the city's population peaked at almost 2 million people, and 2000, about 50 people have moved out of the city *every day*, on average, while the population of the surrounding suburbs has continued to grow.<sup>1</sup> The city of Detroit has lost over half its jobs in the past three decades. In 1989 the Detroit Free Press counted 15,215 vacant structures (including homes, apartment buildings, and businesses), and by 2000 officials said the city owned more than 40,000 lots.<sup>2</sup> Every year since 1983, on October 29-31, the city of Detroit braces itself for the annual ritual of burning property and vehicles known as 'Devil's Night,' which has only recently been brought under control through a massive annual anti-arson campaign.<sup>3</sup> Houses, factories, stores, office blocks, theatres, the old baseball stadium, and even the central railway station, stand in ruins or have disappeared altogether, leaving vast empty spaces that have returned to nature. The home of Motown music and techno, Detroit is also the most segregated major city in the United States and one of the poorest, struggling to provide public services for its needy inhabitants.

The film "Detroit: Ruin of a City" looks back over the history of the city in the twentieth century: reconstructing the rise and fall of the social system identified by social theorists as "Fordism"; the way the city was shaped by the automobile; and its decline following the deindustrialization that set in during the 1950s, leaving the city itself ill-adapted to the post-Fordist society of the epoch of globalization.

With the participation of Detroit artist Tyree Guyton, French sociologist Loïc Wacquant, Detroit-born writer Dan Georgakas, Detroit photographer Lowell Boileau, and a variety of local residents, the story is traced through a rich variety of archive footage – of the Ford plants, mass protests of the Depression years, Diego Rivera painting his famous mural 'Detroit Industry', the struggle for trade

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<sup>1</sup> Since the 2000 census the city has continued to lose a net of about 35 people a day, and "more than 33,000 young adults ages 25-34 left Metro Detroit between 2000 and 2002," which was the biggest loss of that age group in the country." Christopher M. Singer, "'Cool' cities may defy planning; Leaders believe new image could boost state economy," *Detroit News*, October 9, 2003.

<sup>2</sup> See "Statistical Data: Detroit," in *Shrinking Cities: Working Papers*, pp. III/7-8, at [http://www.shrinkingcities.com/fileadmin/shrink/downloads/pdfs/WP-Band\\_III\\_Detroit.pdf](http://www.shrinkingcities.com/fileadmin/shrink/downloads/pdfs/WP-Band_III_Detroit.pdf); Peter Gavrilovich and Bill McGraw, *The Detroit Almanac: 300 years of Life in the Motor City* (Detroit, Mich.: Detroit Free Press, 2001), p. 295. For technical help with this essay we would like to thank Rick Smoke.

<sup>3</sup> Toni Mocer, "Devil's Night," in *Shrinking Cities: Working Papers* (op cit), pp. III/71-84.

union rights, and the riots of 1943 and 1967. Through this footage the film charts the battle over the image of the city, its industry, and its people, a battle that began when the Ford Motor Company started making its own films in 1913 and is perpetuated by the dystopic Hollywood representations of Detroit in films like "Robocop" (1987), "The Crow" (1993), and "Assault on Precinct 13" (2005).

# Drive-By Shooting: Filming Detroit

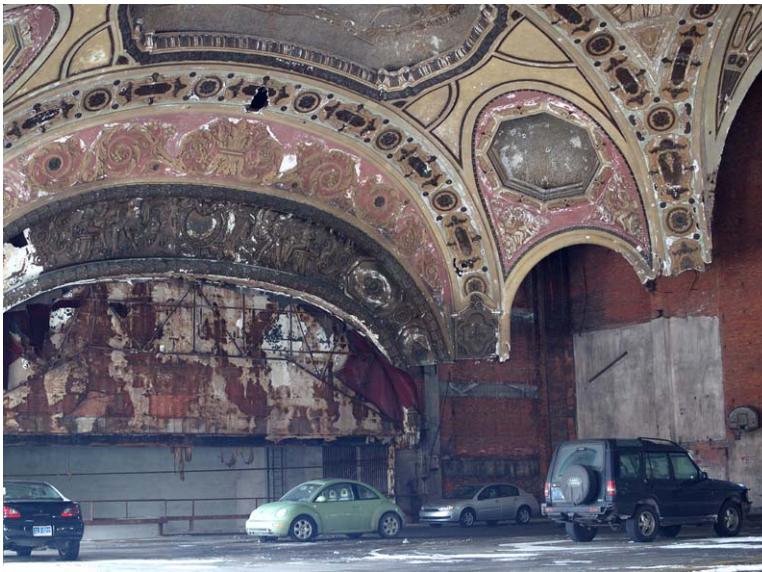
## Interviews with the Filmmakers

### I. Talking to Michael Chanan

*Michael Chanan is a seasoned filmmaker, beginning with documentaries on contemporary music for BBC television in the early 1970s, and a number of films on Latin America for Channel Four Television in the 1980s. He has written books on various aspects of cinema and on the social history of music. He was appointed Professor of Cultural Studies at the University of the West of England in Bristol in 2001.*

First of all, I have always been deeply fascinated by cities, ever since a trip I made as a young man which took me in the space of a few weeks to Mexico City, then New York, back through London to Bucharest and finally Tel Aviv, the only one I'd visited before. Detroit makes a very unusual visual impact, because it has so many open spaces – empty lots in various degrees of neglect. The only other city like that I know is Managua, where it's the result of huge earthquake damage. Detroit's earthquake was man-made, however, and lasted much longer.

What confronts you visually is the disintegration of an urban landscape: streets and avenues interspersed with vacant lots and visually studded by extraordinary ruins, which display their own strange and bitter beauty. Ruins which speak of a lost history and a seemingly hopeless present, of abandonment and suppressed anger. Some are the result of the annual ritual known as Devil's Night, on the eve of Halloween, which has tailed off in recent years but not entirely disappeared, when the anger boils over and people go out on the streets and set fire to buildings and automobiles, which we show in the film's opening



sequence. Others are the results of the city's inexorable decline, the loss of jobs, the resulting disuse of often the most magnificent buildings. The Michigan Theater transmogrified into a multi-storey parking lot, the proscenium at one end, projection booth high up at the other, and traffic entering and leaving, as of old, through a once-majestic lobby.

But the film really began to take shape when our research uncovered the wealth of archive footage about Detroit and the motor industry. Then we realized that we could use this footage to deconstruct some of the myths which have

grown up about Detroit. Because Detroit is a mythical kind of place: the Motor City, home of Henry Ford and the giants of the US automobile industry, but also of “the brown bomber” Joe Louis, and of Motown and Eminem – all of them emblems of urban culture.

In short, we thought that we could use these elements to create the portrait of a city, Detroit, which is both typical and untypical of the modern city, which represents the forces that made the modern city what it now is, but in the process has itself been left behind, reduced to a shadow of its former glory.

*Why do you call this film a documentary road movie?*

We’ve called it a documentary road movie because if you go to Detroit, you can only get around by car, which is true of many US cities; but in Detroit it becomes symbolic because this is Motor City, so it seemed right that we should film in and from the cars we traveled around in. And in fact the very first thing we filmed, which gave us the idea, was Lowell Boileau’s tour of “The Fabulous Ruins of Detroit,” which became one of the linking strands in the film.

*How do you paint the portrait of a city on film?*

Answers to this question go back to the city films of the 1920s – Ruttmann’s Berlin, Vertov’s composite Soviet metropolis, Ivens’ Amsterdam, Cavalcanti’s Paris, Vigo’s Nice. This is one of the original genres of documentary cinema, and these are the films which are always cited in the film histories. We discovered that you can add Henry Ford’s Detroit – Ford as the intellectual author, like a film of 1921 called ‘Dynamic Detroit’, made by the Ford Motor Company and issued as part of the Ford Educational Library.

The city films of the 20s are all very different, not only because they each have their own style or aesthetic strategy, but also because the cities are different, and the scenario of a city film must arise from the chosen city itself. This means, of course, that it makes a fundamental difference whether you live in the city you’re filming or not, but either way has its advantages and disadvantages. In each case, the film-maker has to create a cognitive map of the city on the screen, a way of moving around it, which makes sense of it whether the viewer knows the city or not. We chose the point of view of the automobile, and then we circle around the city in a kind of spiral.

The biggest difference between making a city film in the 1920s and making one now is not just the benefits of digital video as against silent 35mm film cameras, but also that eighty years later, there are now, for so many cities, audio-visual archives covering several decades of history, and in the case of Detroit, these archives are especially extensive.

Historical images of Detroit are rolled up in thousands of feet of film to be found, first of all, in the national film archives in Washington, where they were deposited by the Ford Motor Company. They’re also found in a number of films held in collections like those of MOMA in New York and the Walter Reuther Library in Detroit itself; including a 1932 newsreel about the hunger march on Ford’s River Rouge plant made by the Workers Film and Photo League, and then seven years later, a film by the Auto Workers Union on the great strike of 1939

against General Motors. Then important bits of the city's post-war history are filed away in television newsreel libraries like ITN in London. We've used all these sources. There are also other films for which we couldn't find room, or in some cases we couldn't get the rights.

Bringing these together, as we've done here, one of the stories they tell is that of a battle of representation which began when Ford instructed his advertising department to start making films before the US entered the First World War, encouraged by his friend Thomas Edison. The battle extends far beyond the material we've included, to the Hollywood movies discussed in our film by Dan Georgakas, a writer returning to visit the city where he grew up. But we didn't include clips from these films – *Blue Collar*, *Robocop*, *Eight Mile* – because our budget was much too small. The great thing about the Ford films is that being in the public domain, there are no huge rights to pay. We are extremely grateful to some of the other sources who kept their charges very low to allow the film to get made.

*How much did the film cost, and how long did it take to make it?*

Above-the-line costs, what you actually have to shell out in cash, were no more than about \$20,000. The funding came from both sides of the Atlantic: the AHRB in England and the ASA/NSF in the States, plus some small contributions from the University of Michigan. My home university also contributed to below-the-line costs by giving me research leave and administering the grant.

I think this is an interesting model, which shows that low-cost digital video production from within an academic base is a very good way of making a kind of documentary that has been abandoned by television, and to take it in new directions. In this film, the intention is to forge a new kind of collaboration between the documentarist or videographer and the academic inquirer, in which authorship is fully shared, but there are many ways to do this sort of thing.

As for how long, it was two years in the making. My first visit was in January 2003, then we looked for the main funding and I went back in October 2004 and a third time for new year 2005. In between, we did archive research and George filmed a few scenes without me.

*Your collaborator, George Steinmetz, is present in front of the camera, but you're not. Why not?*

First of all, because I'm behind the camera. We sometimes filmed with two cameras, because when George wasn't in front of the camera he was often also filming, but he wasn't filming me; he was filming the same things I was but from a different angle. Second, because we decided to record our conversations so that I'd be present on the soundtrack, so that instead of a commentary, you get this conversation between us. Third, because when I met Loïc Wacquant, I found that his perspective as a European coincided with my own, and at times, while I was editing the film, I felt that he became my surrogate. Indeed, he frequently expressed my own responses from the first time I visited Detroit, but which I didn't articulate verbally because I was filming. If once or twice this seems to give the camera a voice, then speaking as a Londoner who has usually felt more

European than English, I'm perfectly happy that the camera should speak English with a French accent.

*How did Michael Nyman get involved?*

Michael and I are old friends, going back to when we were young music critics together at the end of the 1960s. I have followed his career and admired both his chamber operas and his film music (though I didn't always like the films themselves). Then about the time I was starting out on this project, I heard his new score for *Man with a Movie Camera* which he was performing live. I found it delightful, and asked him if he'd like to work on a documentary with me, adding that I wouldn't be able to pay his usual fee! He was intrigued and said yes. From that point on I knew I didn't have to worry about picking and choosing bits of music in the way I'd always done in the past, but instead could design a film that would maximise the opportunities for a score which would be integral to the film's argument. Hence the various montage sequences that break up the inevitable flow of words, and which allow the music to take over the narration of the film.

## **II. Talking to George Steinmetz**

*George Steinmetz moved to Michigan in 1997 after teaching at the University of Chicago for a ten years and living on the south side of Chicago. He teaches Sociology and German Cultural Studies at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, and is the author of books on the welfare state, the colonial state, and social science methods as well as numerous articles on social theory and social movements.*

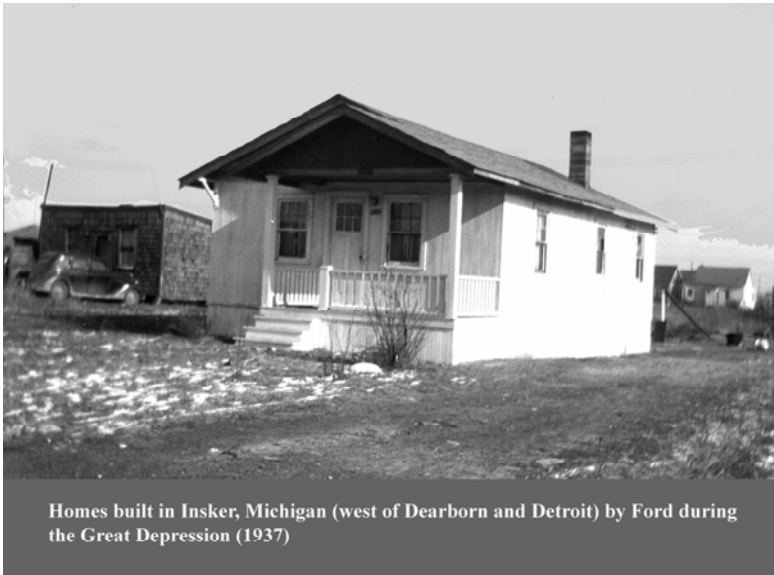
*What sparked your interest in Detroit?*

I first visited Detroit in the early 1980s, then again in the early 1990s, and in 1997 I moved to Michigan and began visiting the city frequently. My interest in Detroit has several sources:

The first was social theory. As a sociology student during the 1980s I studied the neo-Marxist "theory of regulation" which analyzes postwar capitalist societies in Western Europe and North America using the category of *Fordism*. Within this framework, Fordism is understood as a stabilized system of steadily increasing mass production, balanced or combined with rising mass consumption of standardized consumer goods. Within Fordism wages were pegged to increases in productivity and profits and labor relations were stabilized and relatively peaceful. This social contract between capital and labor was buttressed by a welfare state and Keynesian fiscal policies that buffered workers during cyclical downturns in the economy, while propping up aggregate demand. Fordism was also linked to a permeation of social life by mass culture. Although the theorists of Fordism rarely referred to its origins, they were influenced by an essay from Antonio Gramsci, who traced Fordism in the interwar period to the specific model of social relations developed by Henry Ford in Detroit and its close

suburbs (especially Highland Park, Dearborn, and Inkster) during the first third of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Although some of the elements of postwar Fordism originated elsewhere, with Keynesian economics and Hollywood, the core component—the linkage of mass production and mass consumption—was attributed to Ford, as suggested by the model's name.

So the first reason to focus on Detroit was to see it as a sort of microcosm of the dominant mode of organizing capitalist society in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The \$5.00 daily wage offered by Henry Ford to workers at his Highland Park factory in January 1914 marked the beginning of a model in which industrial workers consumed their own products rather than being paid only enough for food, shelter, and other bare necessities. Ford's elaborate system of worker selection and surveillance, implemented by his "Sociological Department," seemed like a microcosm of the disciplinary welfare state introduced in the New Deal and coming to full fruition after 1945. Ford provided loans to his



Homes built in Insker, Michigan (west of Dearborn and Detroit) by Ford during the Great Depression (1937)

unemployed workers to remove them from the relief rolls during the Depression. His famous "rescue" of the suburb of Inkster, home to many African-Americans working at the River Rouge Factory in Dearborn, exemplified an approach to social policy that was paradigmatically "recommodifying." A special self-help program for home improvement was

created within Ford's sociological department, which offered interest-free loans and direct assistance in construction to workers who wanted to turn ramshackle shelters into respectable wooden houses, on the condition that the loans would be paid back later via payroll deductions. According to at least one contemporary Ford's relief program "became the model for Harry Hopkin's WPA [works projects administration] in President Roosevelt's New Deal recovery program."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Josephine Gomon, "The Poor Mr. Ford," unpublished book MS, Bentley Historical Library, Gomon Papers, box 10, p. 34. Gomon was executive secretary to Mayor Frank Murphy, 1930-33 and later director of the Detroit Housing Commission. See also Charles J. Wartman, "Ford Rehabilitates Village of Inkster, for Negro Workers," *Michigan Chronicle*, August 22, 1953, pp. 1,4. Ford also created commissaries in Dearborn, Inkster and several other suburbs so that workers could buy food and goods at low prices and avoid the "Jewish middlemen" whom Ford so distrusted and despised. See Howard O'Dell Lindsey, "Fields to Fords, Feds to Franchise: African American Empowerment in Inkster, Michigan," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan,



Detroit had been “on the cutting edge of national prosperity” during the first three decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and its exemplary status continued after 1945. Auto “sales crested at 8 million” in 1955; highway construction and “urban renewal” in the 1950s radically transformed the city of Detroit; suburban homebuilding continued at breakneck speed; and “the fact that the nation’s wealthiest industry was concentrated in Detroit made hefty wage increases possible.”<sup>5</sup> The Federal Highway Act of 1956 “set up a fund that paid for up to 90% of highway construction costs in order to build a national system to move goods and people.”<sup>6</sup> The UAW gained non-wage benefits for workers that had previously been given only to executives and white-collar professionals, including company-financed pensions and health plans, paid vacations, supplemental unemployment benefits that rose to 95% of take-home pay for up to 52 weeks of coverage, and most significantly, Cost of Living Adjustments, first offered by General Motors in 1948, to head off labor disputes.



Trolley cars bringing baseball fans to Navin Field, home of Detroit Tigers, 1930



Shoppers on Woodward Ave., downtown Detroit, 1950s

Daniel Bell, writing in *Forbes*, dubbed the 1950 contract the “Treaty of Detroit,” in which “GM may have paid a billion for peace but it got a bargain” by consolidating its “control of crucial managerial functions” and compelling

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1993, p. 108. In 1990, Inkster had the second highest percentage of African-Americans of any Detroit suburb; the highest (92.8%) was in Highland Park.

<sup>5</sup> Babson, *Working Detroit*, p. 131. The center of black culture in Detroit, Hastings Street, was razed in order to make room for Chrysler Freeway (I-75), which was just one of a whole network on new postwar highways that hastened flight to the suburbs. See Detroit (Mich.), City Plan Commission, *The Detroit Master Plan; the official comprehensive plan for the development and improvement of Detroit as approved by the Mayor and the Common Council* (Detroit, 1951).

<sup>6</sup> Jason Booza and Kurt Metzger, “On some Socio-economic Aspects of Detroit,” *Shrinking Cities: Working Papers* (op cit), p. III/46.

recognition of “the existing distribution of income between wages and profits as ‘normal’ if not as ‘fair’.”<sup>7</sup> Moreover, no other American city suffered the same “severe dislocations which were the lot of Detroit,” since much of the actual automotive production was already outside the city proper.<sup>8</sup>

By the end of the 1970s, Fordism was already a historical phenomenon, not a category for describing the present. The 1980s marked the beginning of the continuing rollback of policies from the New Deal (and of comparable policies in west European countries), the weakening of labor unions, a spiraling increase in economic inequalities, the concomitant development of niche markets, rising interest among employers in “just in time” production as an alternative to mass production, and a shift away from heavy industry in the advanced countries.

Detroit had always been “more highly specialized than other large cities” in the U.S., however, and had never become “a dominant center for trade, financial services, higher education, entertainment, or government.”<sup>9</sup> So in addition to the historical question about the emergence of Fordism, a second question was how all the post-1970s restructuring would play out in a city so completely identified with a now obsolete mode of regulation. Commentators and social scientists in the 1980s focused on the abandonment of the higher-wage urban industrial “rustbelt” of the Northeast and Midwest, and Detroit seemed especially likely to fall victim to this trend, given its reputation as a union town with a combative African-American mayor (more on that below). The cutting edge of the challenge to Fordist America at the time was Japanese automobile production. Would the “capital of Fordism” be able to map itself into the emerging “post-Fordist” economy, or would it instead become an abandoned backwater?

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<sup>7</sup> Bruce Nelson. “The Triumph and ‘Tragedy’ of Walter Reuther,” *Reviews in American History*, pp. 488-494; and Nelson Lichtenstein. *The Most Dangerous Man in Detroit: Walter Reuther and the Fate of American Labor* (New York: Basic Books, 1995).

<sup>8</sup> B.J. Widick, *Detroit: City of Race and Class Violence* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1989), p. 137 and passim.

<sup>9</sup> Reynolds Farley, Sheldon Danziger, and Harry J. Holzer, *Detroit Divided* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2000), p. 6.

I have already alluded to the second reason for my interest in Detroit: It is a mythic city for the American labor movement, the site of a highly organized working class. Detroit was the headquarters of a powerful and non-corrupt labor union, the UAW, which had been extremely militant during the 1930s and 1940s



and then concluded a classically "Fordist" pact with management in the 1950s. The union movement still has a more powerful political and cultural presence in Detroit than in other American cities. General Motor's riverfront corporate headquarters in the Renaissance Center is flanked by the UAW's international

headquarters and the recently unveiled "Labor Legacy" monument. The Detroit Institute of Arts, a classic modern US urban art museum with an extensive collection of European art, is anchored by Diego Rivera's "Detroit Industry" frescos. The Walter Reuther library and archive is located at the center of Wayne State campus and directly across from the main branch of the Detroit Public Library. Some of the key events in 20<sup>th</sup> century US labor history were associated with Detroit and its environs: the 1932 "Hunger March" of the Detroit Unemployed Councils in which five demonstrators were killed by Ford guards and policemen from the Ford-dominated city of Dearborn; the flood of unrest in 1936 and 1937 in Detroit and Flint in which the "sit down" strike was invented; the massive recruitment of women workers into defense production during World War II, epitomized by the Willow Run bomber plant; the election of a left-leaning New Deal era mayor, Frank Murphy, who believed that the US would have to "substitute a socialistic sense for this individualistic sense" by regulating the economy.<sup>10</sup> Detroit recruited wave after wave of migrants seeking factory work. One result was an unusually skewed gender balance, with a larger percentage of men than women. Hauntingly, some of the homeless and underemployed men

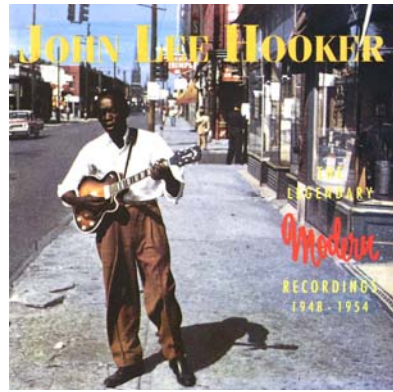
<sup>10</sup> Quoted in Babson, *Working Detroit*, p. 55.

we encountered while filming in Detroit were wearing shirts with the UAW logo on them. This could now stand for “used to be an auto worker.”

A third attraction of Detroit is its mythic status within African-American history, culture, and politics. Although the number and proportion of blacks in Detroit was still tiny in 1900 (4,111, or 1.4%), by 1980 the majority (63%, or 758,939) of the city’s population of 1,203,339 was African-American (and in 2000, 81.55% of the city’s population of 951,270 was black). At the same time, Detroit has always been a highly segregated city. Blacks were informally restricted to the east side ghetto, Paradise Valley, and to a few other neighborhoods through informal pressure and restrictive covenants.<sup>11</sup> Detroit’s east side ghetto was the first area targeted by urban renewal after World War Two; the neighborhood was razed, its inhabitants scattered, and a massive highway driven through the area, along with lower density housing projects such as Lafayette Park (image on the left, below), which was and remains a racially integrated island in the inner city.<sup>12</sup>



Mies van der Rohe's Lafayette Park  
(present day)



John Lee Hooker on Hastings  
Street (ca. 1950)

According to the US census in 2000, the Detroit metropolitan area was the most segregated in the country.<sup>13</sup> In 1990 it was also the poorest city in the U.S., with

<sup>11</sup> See Ernest H. Borden, *Detroit's Paradise Valley* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia, 2003) and Thomas Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996).

<sup>12</sup> Charles Waldheim, ed., *CASE: Hilberseimer/Mies van der Rohe, Lafayette Park Detroit* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Graduate School of Design, 2004).

<sup>13</sup> See <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/housing/ressseg/tab5-4.html>. Detroit ranks first in terms of the “Dissimilarity index,” the most widely used measure of the evenness of the spatial distribution of different groups among units in a metropolitan area. “Segregation is smallest when majority and minority populations are evenly distributed....Conceptually, dissimilarity measures the percentage of a group's population that would have to change residence for each neighborhood to have the same percentage of that group as the metropolitan area overall. The index ranges from 0.0 (complete integration) to 1.0 (complete segregation).” See also Farley, Danziger, and Holzer, whose “isolation index” was highest in Detroit of all major U.S. cities in

a third of its residents living below the poverty line; this improved somewhat in the 1990s, but has deteriorated again in the past 5 years.<sup>14</sup>

Despite the city's many problems, African Americans also have seen Detroit as the first major U.S. city in which blacks were able to reinvent urban life in a post-Jim Crow, post-apartheid fashion. Detroit was a major station in the Underground Railroad and a crossing point into Canada for escaped slaves. In 1973 Detroit became the first major American city to elect a black mayor, Coleman Young, a former Ford worker, UAW organizer, and civil rights activist.<sup>15</sup> Detroit was the city that gave rise, in the 1960s, to a melding of the Black Power movement with the labor movement, in the guise of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers.<sup>16</sup> Other groups were active, including the Republic of New Africa, the Black Panthers, and the group around the black Trotskyist James Boggs, an ally of C.L.R. James. Detroit was a mecca for black music, including Motown and techno, which originated there, the eccentric blues of John Lee Hooker, and gospel music. More recently, Eminem's fame has shed light on the black Detroit hip hop milieu he came out of, including his original band, D12.

Finally, Detroit has been a somewhat mythic city in terms of early and mid-20<sup>th</sup> century modernism. The most striking examples of this are Diego Rivera's "Detroit Industry" frescos, Lafayette Park by Ludwig Hilbersheimer and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, and the industrial buildings designed by Albert Kahn, Henry Ford's architect, which bear witness to the monolithic spatial imagination of Fordism, and exhibit a bravura anti-traditionalism. Kahn was as comfortable giving a speech on the virtues of reinforced concrete as he was arguing that "purity of style in modern work is ... of secondary importance."<sup>17</sup> Eero Saarinen's Crankbrook Institute of Architecture and Design north of Detroit is another

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1990, at 92% for whites, "meaning that the typical white lived in a neighborhood where 92 percent of the other residents were white" (*Detroit Divided*, p. 163).

<sup>14</sup> Farley, Danziger, and Holzer, *Detroit Divided*, p. 1; Alan Berube and William H. Frey, "[A Decade of Mixed Blessings: Urban and Suburban Poverty in Census 2000](#)," Washington DC: Brookings Institution Center on Urban & Metropolitan Policy (August, 2002), table 2.

<sup>15</sup> As an Air Force officer in World War II, Coleman Young was arrested for refusing to leave a whites-only officers club; he was part of the left caucus inside the UAW-CIO in the late 1940s that was defeated by the more conservative faction led by Walter Reuther; and in 1961 he became a Michigan state Senator.

<sup>16</sup> James A. Geschwender, *Class, race, and worker insurgency: The League of Revolutionary Black Workers* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1977); Dan Georgakas, *Detroit: I do Mind Dying* (Cambridge, Mass.: South End Press, 1998); see also the documentary film, "Finally got the news" by Black Star Productions with the cooperation of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers.

<sup>17</sup> Albert Kahn, October 28, 1927, Speech read at Teachers Convention, p. 7, in Bentley Historical Library, Kahn papers. On Kahn see especially Federico Bucci, *Albert Kahn: Architect of Ford* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1993); on Detroit and modernism see Terry E. Smith, *Making the Modern: Industry, Art, and Design in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

striking example. The terminus of Detroit-based Fordist modernism, however, was located not in Detroit but in New York: the World Trade Center was designed by Minoru Yamasaki, a metropolitan-Detroit based architect. Both Motown and techno music can also be considered in this context. The former was organized explicitly according to an assembly line process and aesthetic. Berry Gordy, Motown's founder, claimed to have learned from working at Ford "how production can be efficiently organized and automated for the highest quality" and for a "highly consistent product." The singers and session musicians were configured as production workers, as opposed to the songwriters and producers who designed the final product.<sup>18</sup> Founders of Detroit techno like Juan Atkins are quite explicit about the music's relationship to mechanized mass production; Atkins' grandfather was a Ford worker and he has attributed his own ability to engage "European" musical styles to the relative working class prosperity that resulted.

Popular culture and especially music in Detroit has exhibited another important feature in Detroit that can be summed up as *transculturation*.<sup>19</sup> This is exemplified by Diego Rivera's Detroit murals with their blending of folk and modern art, the "indigenous" and the "European," but not in the sense of early 20<sup>th</sup> century "primitivist" appropriations of the non-western. Thematically, this is expressed in Diego's inclusion of four figures overlooking the main murals on the North and South walls that represent the four supposed "races" of man. The positioning of these figures above the scene of industry can be interpreted in various ways, but at the very least it suggests that "Detroit Industry" involves a productive mixing of the elements. Similarly, the successive waves of musical innovation that have poured out of Detroit often ignore racial boundaries that tend to rigorously policed in America. It is perhaps paradoxical that such a segregated city could give rise to musicians like Eminem who seem to move beyond mimicry of black culture into a more complex stance that both refuses racial categorization (musically) and addresses it explicitly (in songs like "White America" and "My Band," with D12). The embrace of the pioneering German electronic band Kraftwerk by African American electronic musicians in the late 1970s and early shows a similarly oblique relationship to dominant racial schemas, as do contemporary bands like the Dirtbombs or the Detroit Cobras.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Sicko, *Techno Rebels*, p. 27; Gerald Lyn Early, *One Nation Under A Groove: Motown And American Culture* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004), p. 53.

<sup>19</sup> See Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes. Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992).

<sup>20</sup> Juan Atkins did remark that many of his black middle class friends became Europhiles in an attempt "to distance themselves from the kids that were coming up in the projects, the ghetto"; quoted in Simon Reynolds, *generation ecstasy* (New York: Routledge, 1998), p. 15. See also the interesting article by Michael J. Kramer, "'Can't Forget the Motor City,': *Creem* Magazine, Rock Music, Detroit Industry, Mass Consumerism, and the Counterculture," *Michigan Historical Review* 28:2 (2002), pp. 43-77. Kramer applies the thesis of Detroit's cultural exceptionalism to the white rock music scene of the 1960s and '70s. Juan Atkins remarked that many of his black middle class friends became Europhiles in an attempt "to distance themselves from the kids that were coming up in the projects, the ghetto. This sort of "tough" image is shared by punk and ganster rap, but in Detroit it seems to apply across the board. Other interesting examples include the



A little like West Berlin in the 1980s before unification, Detroit's cultural productivity is unusual and self-generating partly because of the city's isolation. It is so far off the radar of mainstream artistic developments that the official art world can only process Tyree Guyton by labeling him an "outsider artist." This reminds me of the way that the official art world considers Berlin to be vastly superior now that it is integrated into the international art circuits, as compared to the earlier period, arguing that Berlin at that time "was an island, and like all islands there was a kind of tedium that eventually infected everything."<sup>21</sup> This is wilfull rewriting of history: West Berlin in the late 1970s and early 1980s saw the emergence of a return to figurative painting that is now being rediscovered (in the work of the "Neue Wilden"), not to mention the city's seething political and musical experimentation at that time.<sup>22</sup>

Despite all of these attractions, I was frustrated to find that Ann Arbor was so distant culturally from Detroit, even though in many respects it was objectively one of Detroit's suburbs. (I found out, for example, that Albert Kahn had given a speech in 1921, when there was a great discussion of creating a subway in Detroit, in which he said that "we're going to have a subway system as sure as we're living" and that "rapid transit will make ... Ann Arbor .. [a] mere suburb[s] of Detroit."<sup>23</sup>).

### **Why the focus on ruins?**

My interest in ruins was sparked above all by Julia Hell, who has written and taught about modern ruins as a theoretical and aesthetic concept.<sup>24</sup> I was also struck by visiting the industrial sites in Europe that have been turned into monuments and parks and seeing how they resonate with the preservation of the ancient ruins in Rome and elsewhere. Although there are certainly problems with the commercialized "heritage industry," I found that this way of dealing with the recent past was much more provocative than simply razing the sites and building on top of them (as with Detroit's Hastings Street and Paradise Valley in the 1950s). The entire "dream factory" of American society during the mid-20<sup>th</sup>

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electronic band Underground Resistance and DJ Assault, a pioneer of "accelerated funk"-a pornographic brand of techno. See <http://www.djassault.com/>.

<sup>21</sup> Richard Woodward, "For Young Artists, All Roads Now Lead to a Happening Berlin," *New York Times* March 13 2005, national edition, section 5, p. 9.

<sup>22</sup> The parallels are interesting, though they should not be overstressed. Like Detroit, where raves and art shows take place in ruins, Berlin in the 1980s had a bar called "the ruin" (located in a single room that was all that remained of a former structure), and at the end of the 1980s techno and artists moved into ruins like the Tacheles building in the Oranienburgerstrasse and the world famous techno club Tresor, located in the vaults in the old Wertheim department store.

<sup>23</sup> "What will the Detroit of the future be like?," typewritten speech, given Sept 1921, to the Vortex Club in Detroit by Albert Kahn. In Kahn papers, Bentley Historical Library.

<sup>24</sup> See her article "At the Threshold of the Visible: Orphic Journeys through Germany's Ruins," paper prepared for her conference "Ruins of Modernity," University of Michigan, March 17-29 2005.

century was oriented towards a restless forward movement and celebration of progress and a turning away from history. This legacy and the dominant forms of collective memory make it especially difficult to rethink the remains of what had once been a relentlessly future-oriented project through the category of the ruin. The main tendency is simply to demolish abandoned structures. The city of Detroit has an entire office devoted demolitions, and this activity has figured prominently in recent mayoral campaigns. The weekly *Metro Times* runs a regular feature on urban ruins. An additional complicating factor in Detroit is the fact that the majority of the abandoned buildings are single-family houses, due to the peculiar nature American and especially Detroit urbanization; these “undistinguished” structures do not correspond to the inherited image of the picturesque ruin.<sup>25</sup> Add to this the tendency of abandoned buildings to house squatters or criminal activities and we can begin to understand the lack of resonance of the category of the ruin. There is also a widespread resistance in the U.S. to acknowledging the extent to which American society is generative of such misery. Refusal of the idea of the modern urban ruin is thus partly a form of disavowal.

Nonetheless, Detroit is objectively in near ruins. As Detroit techno founder Juan Atkins observed, “in any other city you have a buzzing, thriving downtown,”<sup>26</sup> but in Detroit we have prairie grass and landscapes reminiscent of southern Georgia (to quote one of the participants in our film). Foregrounding the category of the ruin emphasizes the destructive sides of a history that still tends to be seen as progressive. Walter Benjamin once noted that “we begin to recognize the monuments of the bourgeoisie as ruins even before they have crumbled” in the “convulsions of the commodity economy.” What he did not seem to recognize was the existence of additional logics of decay. Detroit’s extreme abandonment is a function of racism as much as profit-driven “location decisions.”



The Baroque and Romantic movements led to an aestheticization of ancient ruins that is still with us today. But the new ruins of the industrial era “have not yet acquired the weathered patina of age” and are “still stark and bare,” smelling “of fire and mortality.”<sup>27</sup> If it seems inappropriate to *aestheticize* these recent ruins, a less objectionable approach has been to turn them into memorials. Some of the best known are from World War Two: the bombed cathedral in Coventry recalls the attacks

<sup>25</sup> See Christopher Woodward, *In Ruins* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2001).

<sup>26</sup> Sicko, *Techno Rebels*, p. 62.

<sup>27</sup> Dame Rose Macaulay, *Pleasure of Ruins* (London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1953), p. 453.



of the *Luftwaffe*; the ruined Anhalt train station and the Memorial Church (*Gedächtniskirche*) in Berlin recall the fighting and bombings of WWII, while the “Topography of Terror” site is located atop the remains of the Gestapo headquarters and prison; the preserved martyred village of Ouradour-sur-Glane in France reminds visitors of the Nazi massacre and occupation; the ruins of the erstwhile Hiroshima Prefecture Industrial Promotion Hall, near Ground Zero, have been preserved as a reminder of the bombing. A distinctly modern ruin in Beijing, the tumbled remains of the Imperial Garden (*Yuanming Yuan*), recalls the imperialist looting by Anglo-French troops in 1861.<sup>28</sup> Modern industrial sites have also been preserved, beginning with the 1970s Gas Works Park in Seattle, which was built around the rusted remains of an abandoned coal and oil processing plant.<sup>29</sup> A more recent example is the *Landschaftspark* in Duisburg, Germany, constructed around three abandoned blast furnaces from a former Thyssen plant. But this approach to modern ruins is still pretty foreign to American culture, where unwanted and unused buildings are not supposed to be reused or preserved. A proposal by photographer Camilo Vergara to make the abandoned skyscrapers of Detroit into a museum of urban modernity on the scale of the Roman Forum was met with derision and accusations of insensitivity.<sup>30</sup> Some of the opposition to preserving old buildings is motivated by the fact that “much of Detroit’s past is infected with the cancer of racism,” leading people to ask why they should preserve “symbols of that painful, unjust past.” The old Tiger Stadium, for instance, had a “segregated past so recent that it still hurts some black Detroiters just to look at it.”<sup>31</sup> Yet that baseball field, replaced by a new one several years ago, has now joined the ranks of the hulking and crumbling ruins that loom over Detroit’s lowrise skyline.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> See Young-tsu Wong, *Paradise Lost: The Imperial Garden Yuanming Yuan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2001); Sarah Bennett Farmer, *Martyred Village: Commemorating the 1944 Massacre at Oradour-sur-Glane* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

<sup>29</sup> See <http://www.cityofseattle.net/parks/parkspaces/GASWORKS.htm>.

<sup>30</sup> See Gavrilovich and McGraw, *The Detroit Almanac*, p. 295; Vergara, *American Ruins* (New York: Monacelli Press, 1999).

<sup>31</sup> Michael Betzold, *Queen of diamonds: The Tiger Stadium story* (West Bloomfield, Mich.: Northmont Pub. Co., 1997), p. 125. According to Betzold (private communication), African Americans had to sit in the outfield. Walter Briggs, the vehemently anti-labor owner of a factory on Detroit’s east side that made auto bodies for Ford, bought the team in 1935 and expanded the stadium. Briggs built an extremely modern stadium and became popular by giving away free tickets to children, cultivating new generations of fans. Detroit had the first big Jewish baseball star in Hank Greenberg. But “in Detroit’s large and growing black community in the 1950s, the Briggs name was synonymous with racism (p. 71). This meant that fewer Negro League games played in his stadium than in other big city ballparks (p. 62), that the Tigers were the last major team to hire a black player (in 1958), and that black fans were segregated in the bleachers. Even in 1980 the proportion of black players was much smaller in Detroit than in other major league teams around the country – in a city whose population now had a black majority. Discussions of a new stadium began in the 1960s, and after the team was sold in 1983 to Tom Monaghan, Domino’s Pizza owner and conservative Catholic activist these plans quickly became more concrete (Ibid., p. 8).

In our film we try to steer clear of two dangers that face any use of the category concept of ruins. One is the seduction of *Ruinenlust* (pleasure in ruins). Without look away from the strange beauty of cities like Detroit, the film format allows us to continually return to the social processes that produced this shattered landscape. A second danger is falling into the more popular tropes of the voyeuristic pathologization of the city that are typically found in crime reporting and Hollywood's urban dystopias. Here the city's ruination bleeds metonymically into a discourse about "human ruins" who are blamed either implicitly or directly for the damaged condition of their environment.<sup>33</sup> There are several strategies for avoiding these two kinds of slippage. Without downplaying the horrors of urban abandonment or indulging in a naïve celebration of the human spirit, we avoid topics like crime, gangster rap, and drug use and focus on participants in the city's struggling cultural scene. A second strategy for counteracting the pathologization of the cities' inhabitants without ignoring their decaying environment involves systematic *historicization*. We use historical documentation to trace the rise and fall of Detroit and the shifting public representations of the city.

### **Why did this project have to be a film, rather than a book?**

This had to be a film for two primary reasons:

First of all, most Americans are simply not aware of the fact that cities like Detroit exist, or else they have a distorted picture of their genesis. The majority of Americans live in suburbs nowadays; white schoolchildren in Detroit's suburbs are routinely taught to stay out of the city. And the devastation caused by deindustrialization and racism has to be seen to be believed.

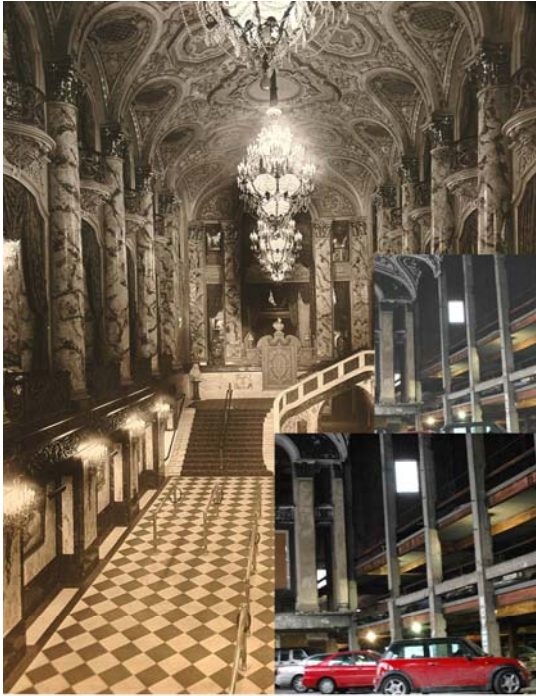
Second, Detroit has been demonized in Hollywood and in the nightly news. Detroit has made the *New York Times* only a few times during the past year—to report on the city's "fiscal nightmare" and shrinking population (Feb 2, 2005) or its controversial "Africa Town" initiative to "lend city money to entrepreneurs, but only if they are black" (October 13, 2004). Hollywood films depict Detroit as the ultimate urban dystopia ("Robocop," "The Crow") and as the home of the "most lethal criminals" ("Assault on Precinct 13" [2004]). With a few exceptions, like Stephen Soderbergh's "Out of Sight" (1998), films allegedly set in Detroit have no recognizable local landmarks, suggesting that Hollywood is using "Detroit" as a metaphor for all that is debased and evil, and that it assumes that actual filmgoers will not recognize the difference. Indeed, this is perhaps not unreasonable, since the city is *terra incognita*. Most Detroit residents will be unable to see these films until they are shown on television, since this city of a million people has only a single commercial movie house located on the farthest northern border at Eight Mile Road. This stands in stark contrast to earlier decades in which most Detroiters could walk or take an electric trolley to

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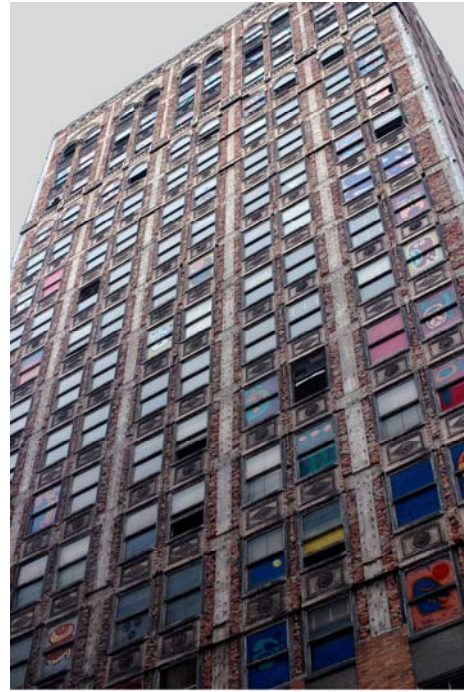
<sup>32</sup> Brad Heath, "Old Tiger Stadium slowly slips into ruin," *The Detroit News*, August 22, 2002.

<sup>33</sup> An explicit version of this is offered by a white supremacist website (<http://www.white-history.com/UScities.htm>), which has a section called "the Ruins of Detroit".

numerous movie theaters, and when a cluster of exquisitely ornate theaters graced the center of downtown.



**The Michigan Theater, then and now**



**United Artists Building, Detroit**

The recent remake of “Assault on Precinct 13” is set in a Detroit inner city police station located next to an immense pine forest, where the final chase sequence takes place. Even in Michael Moore’s films centered on Flint, Detroit features as a sort of black hole: in “Bowling for Columbine” (2002), for example, Detroit figures only as the site of a furtive drug deal. In filmic and ideological terms, Detroit has lost control of the way it is depicted. We counter the barrage of stereotypical images with the polyphony of visual signatures that characterized the early and middle decades of the 20th century.

### **What is the division of labor between the two of you?**

Although this is a team project in every sense of the word, Michael is the experienced filmmaker and I am the archival historian. I first got to know Michael when he came to visit Ann Arbor a little over two years ago to show one of his films. At the time, the idea of doing something visual about Detroit was already percolating, and I had been creating a large archive of photographs of the city, but I did not really know what to do with them. My contributions have included the theoretical and historical framing, seeking out visual documents and archival sources, and shooting some of the moving sequences and all of the still photographs used in the film.



### **Is there a problem with the fact that you are two white guys making a film about a city that is predominantly black?**

We are certainly conscious of this issue, and we address it directly in several ways. First, the film is not just about the city but also about metropolitan Detroit. Indeed, the polarization between the suburbs and the predominantly black city needs to be directly thematized and explained. But in Hollywood culture we get representations of the inner city as a realm of hypercriminality into which suburbanites venture at great peril. A movie like “Judgment Night” (1993, dir. Emilio Estevez) develops this set of stereotypes explicitly. So we drive into the city, like the “white guys” in “Judgment Night,” but rather than being mugged we encounter people who are eager to interact with us. Rather than disavowing the fact that our perspective is largely an outside one, we confront it head on by staging the film as a “road movie” in which we are continually entering the city from the suburbs, outside, haplessly losing our way, asking naïve questions, learning as we go, and changing our view of the city. In a sense the film recapitulates the experience of the suburbanite venturing back into the city and also reverses the direction of flow of postwar suburbanization, while making that very process a central topic of inquiry.

We also disagree with the epistemological argument that only an *insider* can generate knowledge about social conditions. More to the point, while the condition of being dominated or victimized may well yield unique opportunities for knowledge, there is no guarantee that the person in question will be able to seize those opportunities.<sup>34</sup> Certainly there are some subjective elements of experience that are unavailable to us as outsiders. But the film is not an ethnographic film in the proper sense of the term. Instead it is a structural film, a film-essay, a historical genealogy of the present. It is a road movie, an exercise in “*drive by shooting*.”

This leads to the final point, which is that a “road movie” (much of it filmed from inside a car) is an appropriate perspective in many ways for a city that was built around the automobile and by the automobile industry. But the fact that the Motor City also has hundreds of thousands of inhabitants who are too poor to own their own cars and do not have a good public transportation system (the electric train and trolley system having been dismantled in the postwar decades) means that we have to “get out of the car” in many of the scenes.

### **How is the film structured?**

The film interweaves of several separate strands:

- The first is a portrait of the city in the present. This is the section in which the viewer is presented with a panorama of urban abandonment and ruination, juxtaposed against suburban wealth, and with a series of current interviews with residents of the city.

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<sup>34</sup> Caroline New, “Realism, Deconstruction and the Feminist Standpoint,” *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour* 28(4):349-72. This is one reason why the philosopher Georg Lukacs, in *History and Class Consciousness*, distinguished between *imputed* and *empirical* class consciousness, although one cannot accept his argument in other respects.

- A second strand is explicitly theoretical, analyzing the city through the lens of the concepts of Fordism and post-Fordism.
- A third strand is historical: the film moves from the city's beginnings through to the present, focusing almost entirely on the 20<sup>th</sup> century.
- Within this historical reconstruction we introduce an array of contending filmic visions of the same object, Detroit, starting with the celebratory films made by the Ford Motion Picture Laboratories, moving to the polemical vision of the Film and Photo League, then on to the dramatic modernism of the UAW film on the 1939 strike "United Action Means Victory." As we move closer to the present, this heterogeneity is radically diminished; the city loses control of its own image. Our film's opening sequence on Devil's Night underscores this. The narrowing of filmic languages corresponds to the city's loss of control over the way it is represented.<sup>35</sup>
- Finally, this is a self-reflexive road movie in which the filmmakers relinquish their omniscient standpoints and acknowledge that their film is simply one in a long series of entries.

### **What role does music play in the film?**

Michael Nyman and his assistant Andy Keenan composed an original soundtrack for this film. Music plays a strong narrative role, telling part of the story. There was also a conscious decision not to use extant Detroit music. There are a few inter-musical references, however, to Detroit traditions, including the use of a Motown style Hammond organ as well as an electronic sequence that summons up some of the experimental forms of techno that were born in Detroit.<sup>36</sup> But the music also serves to break up the entrenched, habitual associations that viewers bring to this topic.

### **How does "Detroit: Ruin of a City" differ from other films on Detroit?**

We have found very few other films that deal with the history of the city and the greater metropolitan area. There are some good PBS documentaries like "The Rouge" (dir. John Owens); "A Job at Ford's" (dir. Jon Else); and "Finally Got the News" (dir. Stewart Bird) that deal with specific periods in Detroit history, as well as the short documentary features by director Gary Glaser on topics like "The Hudson's Building," "Train Station," and Eight Mile Road. There is a nostalgia-drenched film called "Detroit Remember When; Motor City Memories and Hometown Traditions" (dir. Jim Woods) and a snapshot of Dearborn Arab-Americans, "Tales from Arab Detroit" (dir. Joan Mandell). A recent film, "High Tech Soul: The Creation of Techno Music" (dir. Gary Bredow and Jason Simon) examines that important musical chapter, complementing "Standing in the

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<sup>35</sup> The fact that we cannot introduce Hollywood images is due entirely to our budget constraints. If we were ever to find a distributor for the film we would like to introduce a brief sequence with bits from films like "Robocop," "The Crow, Assault of Precinct 13, Eight Mile, and other popular films, illustrating the extreme dystopic vision of the city.

<sup>36</sup> On the role of the electric Hammond Organ in Motown and black culture see Early, *One Nation Under A Groove*



Shadows of Motown” (dir. Paul Justman). But to our knowledge there has not yet been a panoramic view of the city’s 20<sup>th</sup> century history or of the historical “origins of the urban crisis.”<sup>37</sup>

### **Does this film bash Detroit?**

The simple answer is no. The film traces the historical processes that led to the current crisis of economics and self-interpretation. Some people, seeing the title, may think that this is another attempt to blame the city’s residents or its political leadership for the its dire state. But the film actually stops at the end of the 1960s because we believe that the main causes of the urban crisis – disinvestment, depopulation, and racism – were already firmly in place by that time – as the current mayor, Kwame Kilpatrick says, these forces were already in place before he was born.

What can be done to save Detroit?

As my friend and *Michigan Today* editor John Woodford recently put it, the only thing that could save Detroit would be something like a new Marshall Plan for America’s cities.<sup>38</sup> I doubt that “market forces,” left to their own devices, will ever lead to reinvestment on a sufficient scale to bring the city back to its former glory. But they are the best we can hope for. Another thing that Detroit can do is to seize control of the ways in which its ruined and abandoned monuments to the era of industrial prosperity are presented, preserved, and documented. The old Tiger Stadium and the train station, for example, could become sites in which all Detroiters can participate in recording their own memories of that site, whether glorious or dolorous. Camilo Vergara’s proposal to rope off the abandoned high rise office buildings in 12 square blocks in downtown Detroit and preserve them as modern Roman ruins, a “skyscraper ruins park,” an “American Acropolis,” should be seriously discussed.<sup>39</sup> Other plans have been proposed by the authors of *Stalking Detroit* and the City Planning Commission, by members of the Taubman College of Architecture and Urban Planning in their annual urban design charettes, and by non-profit groups like Motor City Blight Busters (see <http://www.blightbusters.org/>) and the urban farming initiatives like Adamah in Detroit (see <http://www.adamah.org/urban-agriculture/>). New housing is going up in various neighborhoods, although some of it is flimsy and subject to the same processes of decay inflicting older housing. There is hope for the riverfront

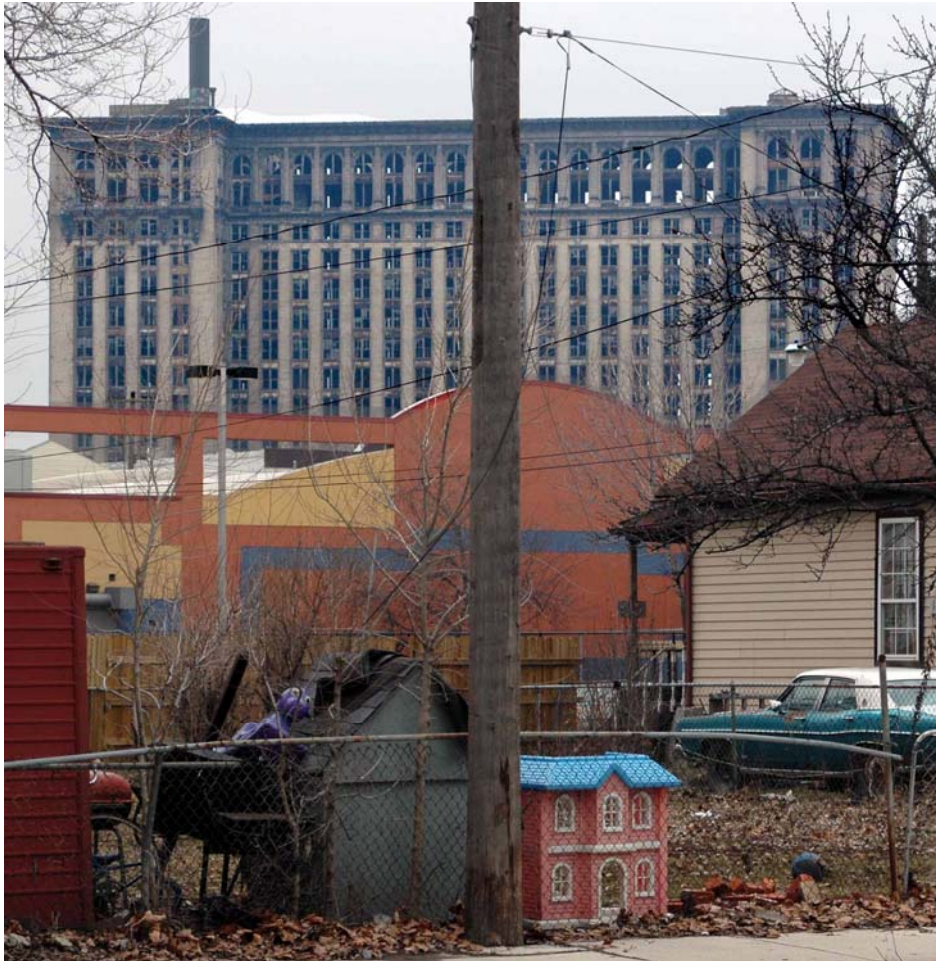
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<sup>37</sup> Although there are several excellent histories, most recently Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996).

<sup>38</sup> In a discussion of the presentation by Lars Graebner, “*Detroit: Living Concepts for a Fragmented City*,” January 24 2005, at the University of Michigan’s Institute for the Humanities.

<sup>39</sup> But see the superb collection Georgia Daskalakis, Charles Waldheim, and Jason Young, eds., *Stalking Detroit* (Barcelona: Actar, 2001). See also Michael Haggarty, “Ruins and Redemption,” in *Metro Times* (Detroit), September 2, 2000.

development.<sup>40</sup> But the bottom line remains: Detroit lost 51,883 residents between the 2000 census and 2005, and it has the lowest median income (\$26,157) among the nation's largest 15 cities.<sup>41</sup> In recent weeks, further cuts have been announced in city services, including the closing of the Belle Isle Aquarium and night bus lines. Without some sort of massive influx of investment money (or some other completely unpredictable change), the downward spiral is likely to continue.



Abandoned train station in the backyard, southwest Detroit

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<sup>40</sup> [http://www.gm.com/company/gmability/environment/plants/brownsfield\\_redev/study\\_detroitriverfront.html](http://www.gm.com/company/gmability/environment/plants/brownsfield_redev/study_detroitriverfront.html).

<sup>41</sup> Kathleen Gray and Marisol Bello, "City is near top of list of spenders," *Detroit Free Press*, March 22, 2005.



Corner of Shelby and Michigan, downtown Detroit;  
Abandoned office buildings



Detroit's Michigan  
Theater Interior



Ruined house, Brush  
Park, Detroit



Detroit Renaissance  
Center with ruin

## Photograph Sources

Pages 3, 9, 15, 19, 23 by George Steinmetz and Michael Chanan

Page 1: University of Michigan Map Library, Aerial Photographs from South East Michigan (p. 1); White Star Line: Toledo, Detroit, St. Clair Flats, Tashmoo, Port Huron, *Excursion*. 1900 (p. 1); Wayne County Economic Development Commission, *About Ecorse* (1966); SmithGroup, Detroit.

p. 7: Benson Ford Archive.

p. 8 left: *Home, sweet home: memories of Tiger Stadium: from the archives of the Detroit news* (Champaign, Ill.: Sports Pub., 1999).

p. 8 right: from Detroit Public Library, Burton collection.

p. 10: *Detroit Free Press*

p. 11, right: Modern Records.

p. 15: "Blick vom Alter Markt auf den Dom 1945" (Cologne), August Sander.

p. 18 (background, left): Detroit Public Library, Burton collection

p. 18 (bottom): "Robocop"

p. 25: by Loïc Wacquant



## Screenings

18 March 2005

PREMIERE

Ann Arbor, Michigan - [The Ruins of Modernity](#) Conference, University of Michigan

7 April 2005

University of Michigan, Dearborn Campus, College of Arts, Sciences and Letters

4pm. [See map](#)

23 April 2005

Leeds City Art Gallery, 2pm. See [www.leedsfilm.com](http://www.leedsfilm.com)

18 May 2005

DocHouse screening at the ICA, London (in a double bill with "Stalin's Skyscraper")

13-16 August 2005

American Sociological Association, Philadelphia. See

<http://www.asanet.org/convention/2005/index.html>

4 November, 2005

Social Science History Association meetings, Portland, Oregon (together with screening of "The Take" by Avi Lewis, written by Naomi Klein).

For other screenings see film website:

<http://humanities.uwe.ac.uk/bristoldocs/detroit>



## The Filmmakers

Michael Chanan (left)  
and George Steinmetz  
(right)

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