Industrial Ruins

Spaces, Aesthetics and Materiality

Tim Edensor

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Introduction

As a young boy on long summer visits to my grandparents' cottage in Scotland, a particular ruin exerted a magnetic attraction for me. At the top of the steep, tree-lined country lane which led away from the cottage lay an area of extensive beech woodland. Nestling amidst the trees was a building known locally as the Haunted House, an imposing building designed in the Scottish baronial style that had lain derelict for years and was now the domain of owls, jackdaws and rabbits. It was crumbling and unstable, but I and my siblings ignored the barbed wire and the notices that warned of danger, and explored the remnants of parlour and dining hall that were now strewn with rubble. There was not much left of the building, few nooks and crannies or spaces that were not open to the sky, but at the back of the dwelling was a sumptuous wood with a collection of ornamental gateposts and a well; a wood that was the occasional venue for youths from the nearby village to carve their names on trees and drink cans of beer. The haunted house was part of a large estate that had been developed by a hugely wealthy rubber baron in the early years of the twentieth century. If you followed the road that skirted the wood, you came to the gatehouse, no modest lodge but itself a grand and exotic building which was the only inhabited part of the estate. Here lived an ancient woman who took it upon herself to maintain the estate to some degree and try to ensure that, as the signs warned, trespassers would indeed be prosecuted. With her dogs and a particularly vicious goose, she patrolled the estate in an archaic automobile, whistle at the ready to summon help and frighten intruders, especially children.

The wood adjacent to the haunted house was our way into the estate, and more importantly, to the gigantic mansion that lay in the middle of the policies. The rubber baron had gone bankrupt as his estate neared completion, and whilst the haunted house and gatehouse had been completed, the big house had not been finished inside and was bereft of plaster and furnishings, remaining thus for decades. It was this mansion that drew me towards it on most of those holiday days, despite the added fear of capture by the elderly crone or perhaps also partly because of that. A half-mile walk through the woods led to a steep decline through thick

woodland and undergrowth where the big house lay. The mogul had built extensive ornamental gardens surrounding the house which, together with the buildings and stone furniture, were designed to appear far older than was the case. A walled garden contained a fountain guarded on four sides by stone lions, and grass grew in its bowl, although if the spring was especially wet, frogspawn would collect in the murky water trapped there. The fountain was etched with rather morbid inscriptions: 'Yesterday returneth not'. Tomorrow perchance, cometh not'. 'Today is thine, misuse it not'. Occasionally, exotic blooms would force their way through the dense undergrowth and provide a splash of bright colour. At one corner of the walled garden was a favourite haunt, a gazebo, which acted as a hide from which deer, woodpeckers and other wildlife could often be seen, for the estate had become an unofficial nature reserve. From this point, a stone balustrade led to the woodland paths, paved but largely covered now with moss and a thick mulch of pine needles. The paths had been bordered with yew and pine hedges but in the decades following the laying of the garden, these had grown and formed an

umbrella of dense foliage to create magical tunnels through the woods, which shut out much light and sound. In the woodland to the side of these tunnels, barely discernible through the undergrowth, were a few statues of strange lions and peculiar humanoid figures now covered in lichens.

Despite the freedom of movement available in the gardens, the house was thoroughly barricaded against intrusion unless one broke in through a window, and any smashed windows were quickly boarded up. One day, however, after many years contentedly exploring and playing in the gardens, I arrived at the house to find that a large window on the ground floor was wide open and it offered an opportunity to squeeze through to the never-inhabited house inside, an invitation that was, of course, impossible to resist. The gloomy rooms of the house, shrouded as it was by overgrown trees, gave up a number of extraordinary sights. The oddest was the display case inexplicably containing a stuffed, two-headed calf, perhaps a treasure from an age when freakishness and curiosities were desired. In a basement room, cinema seats from the early years of film were stacked in rows, together with slot machines and games which presumably had entertained the cinema-goers. And in an upstairs room with grand bay windows, littering the floor were the skeletons of hundreds of pigeons and song-birds who had found their way into the building through a small hole but had been unable to escape. After witnessing this macabre scene, and because the creaks of the building were heightened in the general silence, I didn't want to hang around as my imagination veered towards the uncanny and the horrifying. I left the house and went homewards to disclose my exciting adventure, and although I later regretted exploring only a small part of the mansion's interior, there was never another opportunity to gain access.

These powerful childhood experiences have remained in my memory since that time, but distressingly, for me, the ruined gardens and house have been transformed. For the property was converted into a country park but, following the failure of this venture, presently serves as a guarded, private estate where the mansion and surrounding buildings have been adapted into expensive flats. Accompanying these developments have been the renovation of the house and the transformation of the gardens so that they more closely resemble the original plans. The lawns are neatly manicured and the stonework of the fountains, walls, balustrades and gazebo has been cleansed of foliage and blasted clean of grime. Most strikingly, the tree tunnels in the woods have been disciplined into the shape of the hedged walkways they originally served as, replacing the unique with the commonplace.

As the above account indicates, I have been drawn towards derelict and abandoned buildings since my childhood. This is partly because of the local geographies I have been familiar with but was also stimulated, I think, because the promise of extraordinary sights and mysterious experiences is built into the popular culture of children with its myriad tales of adventures in secret gardens,

magical labyrinths and dense, enchanted forests. For me, however mundane they may seem, ruins still contain this promise of the unexpected. Since the original uses of ruined buildings has passed, there are limitless possibilities for encounters with the weird, with inscrutable legends inscribed on notice boards and signs, and with peculiar things and curious spaces which allow wide scope for imaginative interpretation, unencumbered by the assumptions which weigh heavily on highly encoded, regulated space. Bereft of these codings of the normative – the arrangements of things in place, the performance of regulated actions, the display of goods lined up as commodities or for show – ruined space is ripe with transgressive and transcendent possibilities. Ruins offer spaces in which the interpretation and practice of the city becomes liberated from the everyday constraints which determine what should be done and where, and which encode the city with meanings. Accordingly, they offer opportunities for challenging and deconstructing the imprint of power on the city. For as Henri Lefebvre declares, for a progressive urban politics to be effective, 'the most important thing is to multiply the readings of the city' (1996: 159).

Ruins litter the industrial landscapes of the West although their prevalence varies enormously. For instance, in Britain, there are far more ruins to be found in northern and central England than in the more prosperous south. The production of spaces of ruination and dereliction are an inevitable result of capitalist development and the relentless search for profit. The quest for more profitable products, expanded markets and cheaper ways of manufacturing things, together with the inexorable quest for producing new goods and services, produces periodic crises of accumulation where surplus labour and capital drive down prices and profits. One response to such crises is to suddenly drop less profitable elements of the production process, often simultaneously moving production from one area or country to another, and then to devalue them so they can later be redeveloped. Those buildings disposed of in this fashion are thus temporarily or permanently rendered useless for industrial enterprise.

Ruins do not take one shape but are manifold in form, fashioned by the era in which they were constructed, their architectural style and their industrial function, and also partly depending upon the strategies mobilised by firms towards them after abandonment. Some are left to linger and decay for decades, turning into heaps of rubble over the years, whilst others stay for a while until the first signs of decay take hold and then are demolished, and some are eradicated shortly after abandonment. Often a ruined space is marked only by a vast expanse of concrete flooring, in which tiles, concrete and the traces of floor partitions are found. What might be at first a neat expanse of white, shimmering floor, is gradually taken over by plants, which seek out the cracks, burst through erupting concrete and gradually turn the flat surface to powder. The rate of decay also depends upon the constituent materials of the building and upon local industrial strategies. Authorities

in cities that are able to attract inward investment are more likely to demolish derelict structures taking up space that might be used for new enterprises, whereas in cities which fail to attract new investment, there tends to be a greater prevalence of ruins. Abandoned buildings tend to be rapidly stripped of valuable assets and where this includes vital protective material such as doors, windows and tiles, the building is rendered less able to withstand the elements. Similarly, the intrusions of youth who enjoy smashing up windows, doors and walls erodes the ability of the building to remain insulated against the weather. The extent to which such damage is perpetrated depends upon accessibility to those who would pluck its saleable or useful contents and destroy its fixtures.

At present, there are not as many ruins as there were during the 1980s when landscapes of industrial ruination dominated whole areas of cities, as swathes of manufacturing suddenly became obsolete under economic restructuring. Several of the photographs in this book are from that era, the golden age of industrial ruination. At the end of the 1970s and through the 1980s, the right-wing Conservative government allowed 'market forces' greater rein than had been the case during the long era of 'consensus politics', in which governments of both major political parties adopted a somewhat protectionist response to the effects of industrial crisis. With the privatisation of nationalised industries and the scrapping of protectionist legislation, a pitiless restructuring of the economy rearranged the landscape of industrial

zones across Britain, as old, heavy industries sited in brick-built and stone-clad Victorian and Edwardian factories fell into disuse, the demolition of large chimneys being the most spectacular sign of this replacing of one industrial template by another. The economy geared up to welcome softer industries which required different kinds of industrial structures, such as airy offices, retail warehouses and single-storey buildings which could be left behind or dis-assembled according to strategic contingency. In contradistinction, these lighter, cheaper buildings, often more comfortable for workers and staff, produced more flexible entrepreneurial spaces than those characteristic of the more immovable edifices of brick and stone-built factories. Simultaneously, an orgy of real estate speculation took off which asset-stripped buildings occupied by 'uneconomic' enterprises or left them vacant, awaiting an economic upturn which would render such properties more valuable. Yet despite the large scale of industrial ruination through which industries and buildings were consigned to obsolescence, this was an uneven process. Many industries housed in old factories remained active, and some structures were effaced whilst others subsided into disuse, lingering on in the urban landscape but bypassed by other flows of money, people and energy.

Although they are currently fewer in number, a journey around the old industrial districts of most British cities continues to turn up derelict and abandoned buildings. These areas of the city, typically adjacent to railway lines and canals, amongst the huddle of buildings surrounding harbours, or amidst the scattered remnants of industry marooned within swathes of terraced housing and tenements, have often not been redeveloped to the point of total transformation. Indeed, the evolution of such areas has often been decidedly piecemeal and so they remain a part of the urban palimpsest featuring the industrial buildings of successive industrial eras, with the strong imprint of Victorian Britain still enduring. Although they are not as common as they were fifteen years ago, industrial ruins are still being produced out of the restructuring processes that were largely initiated under Thatcherism, and they are often structures of quite recent origin.

This book has evolved out of my enthusiasm for visiting industrial ruins, and spans three decades, primarily focusing upon the traditional manufacturing areas of north and central England and Central Scotland. The ruins I have explored and which feature here belong to Manchester, Stockport, Liverpool, Glossop, Stalybridge, Oldham, Blackburn, Burnley, Bolton, Birmingham, Stoke-on-Trent, Derby, Nottingham, Leicester, Grangemouth, Falkirk, Leith, Stranraer, Brynmawr, Luton, Southampton, Hull, Sheffield, Huddersfield, Newcastle, Sunderland and Hartlepool. This is the last time I shall refer to their location, for the arguments of the book would be less pertinent if they were accompanied by this superfluous geographical information, as I will shortly explain. As far as I was able to gather, I have toured ruins which used to be crushing mills, motor factories, garages, goods yards and depots, locomotive works, boatyards and chandlers, textile mills, tile factories and potbanks, chain manufacturers, foundries and steelworks, engineering workshops, rubber factories, dye producers and glass works, as well as numerous other indeterminate small workshops and warehouses.

One of the major objectives of this book is to contest the notion that ruins are spaces of waste, that contain nothing, or nothing of value, and that they are saturated with negativity as spaces of danger, delinquency, ugliness and disorder. I argue that such assignations point to wider social conventions through which space is endowed with meaning and function, something I have already discussed in terms of the political contexts which render spaces 'useless'. Such common sense depictions mask the social, political and economic processes through which decisions about space and value are reached.

In a conventional reading of the urban landscape, dereliction and ruin is a sign of waste and for local politicians and entrepreneurs, tends to provide stark evidence of an area's lack, that simultaneously signifies a vanished prosperity and by contrast, an uncertain future. According to such a conception, formerly productive spaces become rubbish, are no longer of any use, or have been used up. Clearly, the increasing rate at which ruins have been produced across the urban landscape of Britain is testament to the effects of faster modes of capital accumulation and the disembedding impacts of global capital flows, dynamic processes through

which space is purchased, cleared and reassembled, deterritorialised and reterritorialised, producing practices which destroy urban space ever faster and more efficiently.

The dynamic colonisation of space by capital infers that all space has the potential to become lucrative, whether now or in the future. All space can be transformed from useless to prosperous and back again through investment and disinvestment. Ruins thus serve as a temporary rebuke to the notion that all space is abstract, the site of current or future production (Lefebvre, 1991), can be divided up, quantified and apportioned as property and exploited for profit. Accordingly, for those for whom space must have an evident function as productive or as property, such a purposive idea means that ruined space is understood as somewhere in which nothing happens and there is nothing. This kind of vision matches the concerns of property speculators. If spaces are conceived as disturbingly non-functional, they must be replaced and filled in – turned into abstract space – to remove these signs of unproductive and unfunctional blankness. Frequently, they are asset-stripped and then cleared to encourage property speculation because dereliction appears as a scar on the landscape composed of matter out of place, which must be erased and then filled in with something more 'useful'. Where local economies are depressed however, this may take the form of leaving ruined sites alone, until a time coincident with economic upturn when their redevelopment might be more advantageous. The ruins featured in this book are situated within this period of varying duration, between abandonment and potential future redevelopment. As Doron maintains, wasteland and spaces of ruination 'are created by suspension of new plans for an area' a suspension which is commonly represented on maps as a blank area (2000: 260–1), an impossible designation of space as *terra nullius*, which suggests they are spaces of and for nothing. However, such indeterminate inscriptions open up possibilities for their non-entrepreneurial use in the often lengthy period between abandonment and development or erasure.

The understanding of space as abstract which emerges out of dominant, capitalist modes through which it is appropriated and produced, is underscored by similar conceptions utilised by bureaucratic, governmental and planning operations, whose personnel usually come to similar conclusions about the nature of derelict space. For instance, the 'shell-ridden terrain' of former industrial sites, according to the Civic Trust, evokes 'a sense of lost vitality' (1988: 8). These negative impressions are compounded by perceptions about the uses which focus upon derelict space. It is a 'locus horribilus' (Grunenberg, 1997: 195) in which a range of deviant acts take place, activities carried out by people commonly identified as undesirable, and which promote fears of disorder and crime. But these assumptions about what ruined space is used for are not merely concerned with identifying cultural practices deemed to be 'anti-social' and thus consolidating ideas about the respectable uses of the city. They are also charged with aesthetic
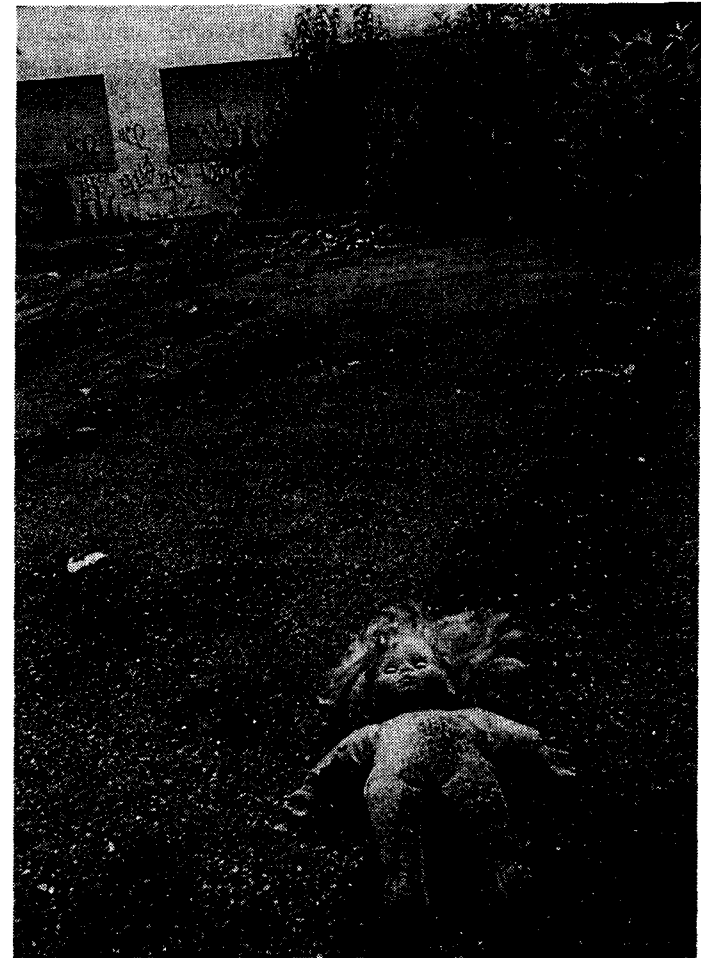
evaluations: 'neglected land not only looks depressing. It also tends to attract fly tipping, graffiti and fly posting, all of which "uglify" the environment' (Civic Trust, 1988: 7).

The consignment of ruins to the common category of 'wasteland' necessarily obliterates the wide divergencies which exist between the characteristics of such spaces. According to such notions, wasteland is devoid of positive social, material, aesthetic qualities, or is purely an abstracted and quantitative entity technically identified by the assumed absence of activity or function. Yet ruins housed a wide range of distinctive industries, were and are sites upon which varied forms of dense sociality occur, possess rich histories, differ according to size, materiality

and their state of disrepair, vary with regard to the uses which are made of them by humans and other life forms and the ghosts which haunt them.

Thus in 2003, the latest report by CABE (the government-sponsored Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment), for instance, presents derelict land as a quantifiable entity that can be identified as inherently problematic (www.wastedspace.org.uk). The report declares that there are up to 70,000 acres of derelict land across Britain, including 5,000 hectares containing derelict buildings. With the ostensibly progressive intention of increasing the amount of parkland, playgrounds and other forms of public space available in communities, the celebrity-led campaign invites members of the public to nominate their grimmest piece of derelict land in Britain so that design-led initiatives and the 'efficient' management of space can reclaim and transform these areas. There is an explicit determination to minimise the effects of 'anti-social' activities in these 'blighted' areas, confirming that derelict land is identified with crime and 'deviancy', is again construed as ugly and is, moreover, indicative of a wider urban cultural malaise. It is particularly ironic that the multiple uses of ruins and derelict land as spaces of play are nowhere alluded to in the light of the avowed aim to build playgrounds since, as I will show, they serve as alternative play spaces for children and adults.

The negative notions of industrial ruination infer aesthetic judgements which widely diverge from the tradition of compiling celebratory accounts of non-industrial ruins. Highly aestheticised 'picturesque' representations derived from romantic writing on ruins, but rather than industrial ruins, these

accounts have typically focused on classical or archaic ruins, crumbling medieval townships and castles, decrepit stately homes and the 'fake' ruins erected on eighteenth-century estates, and rural tumbledown cottages and farmsteads. These themes linger in contemporary depictions of these specific ruined forms so as to sustain an iconography of dereliction which largely bypasses contemporary urban ruins. Often the subject of poetic description and artistic endeavours, certain tropes resound through these representations, but these romantic themes are wholly unsuitable for accounting for the industrial ruins featured in this book.

According to the romantic aesthetic, the ideal ruin had to be 'well enough preserved (while retaining the proper amounts of picturesque irregularity) to produce the desired mix of emotions in the beholder' (Roth, 1997: 5). Thus the recently vacated building or the pile of debris do not qualify for such aesthetic appraisal. During the late eighteenth century, like many appreciations of 'nature', the representation of ruins in art conformed to specific aesthetic 'picturesque' conventions about which features should be foregrounded. Ideally, such representations should stress 'variety and contrast of forms, lively light and dark interplay, rough textures, and above all, rather busy foregrounds with assorted irregular trees or rambling shrubbery in one or both corners of the picture, between which a few figures and/or animals appear' (Hawes, 1988: 6). In paintings and engravings, this picturesque was also frequently conjoined by a conjuring up of the sublime, with stormy clouds and looming edifices depicting the requisite atmosphere of awe, or with an apprehension of the magical forces that remain unseen (see Jackson, 1988, for an in-depth discussion of these artistic tropes and Janowitz, 1990, for an exploration of ruin poetry).

These encodings emphasising the picturesque – and particularly the sublime – were allied to a sense of melancholia which saw ruins as emblematic of the cycle of life and death, symbolic of the inevitability of life passing, of a future in which obsolescence was certain and the inexorable processes of nature dispassionately took their toll of all things. And for humans, the natural world was that home to which our bodies and our buildings would ultimately return, despite any pretensions to immortality we might possess. Such a melancholic aesthetic tempered the optimism of modern industrial development, for ruins signified the transience of all earthly things despite the utopian promises of endless social advancement. The debris of the past – the ruined castles, abbeys, cottages and farmsteads – which littered the landscape of a newly industrialising Britain and was partly caused by rapid rural depopulation, displayed the brevity of existence and seemed to mock the claims of progress in the face of the inevitability of death and decay. Besides these local sites, as the classical ruins of ancient Greece and Rome became better known through the grand tour and the rise of classical scholarship, they revealed the seemingly inevitable demise of empires, a notion which pertinently quashed the hope that the spreading British Empire might establish perpetual rule over its dominions. Instead, these ruins seemed to prefigure imminent degeneration and
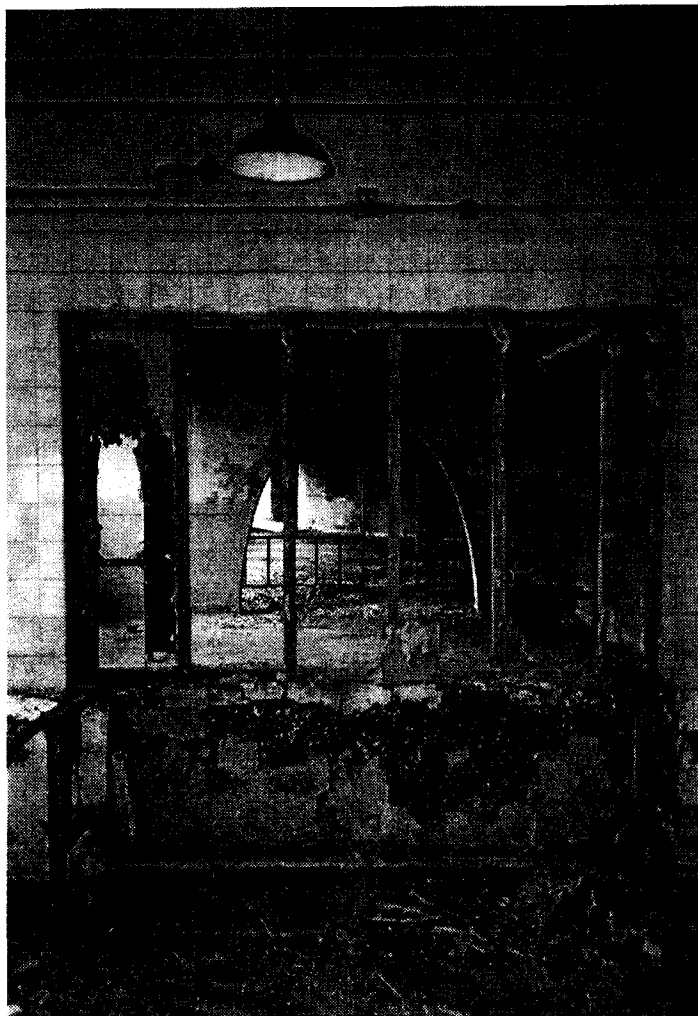
collapse. In a context in which vast sums were being made by industrialists, such concerns were tinged with a moralism which warned of the futility of amassing riches and power. A 'vain and obscure remembrance' was all that remained of the great 'classical' civilisations and the question was posed by Comte de Volney in 1791, '(W)ho... can assure me that their present desolation will not one day be the lot of our country' (cited in Hawes, 1988: 5).

The rise of industrialism and the rapid social change which it brought produced an intensified nostalgia for the past, and signs that revealed it became

revered. Accordingly, ruins could be saturated with a host of imaginary romantic associations that testified to a bucolic past populated by charming characters. So profound was the cult of ruins that eighteenth-century wealthy estate owners created their own ruins as media for the remembrance 'of departed grandeur and of the transience and fragility of that which in appearance was indestructible; tangible warning to the living of the impermanence of stone and flesh' (Zucker, 1968: 198). In addition, these rural tumbledowns and archaic monuments served a nationalistic ideological purpose and they continue to be 'presented as iconic of British "heritage"' (Janowitz, 1990: 2). The visible remnants of the past which littered the British countryside could be reclaimed as 'the physical trace of historical event' which succoured the production of the imagined community of the nation. They seemed to materially testify to the ideological construction that Englishness/Britishness was immemorial, most specifically because they picturesquely blended in with the supposedly 'natural' rural realm as an expression of culture merging with the land (ibid.: 4–5). Yet again, underlying this celebration of the enduring lineage of Britain, doubts about the future of the nation crept in, since it simultaneously challenged 'the structure of the present, and threatens to eradicate eradicate temporal difference, swallowing up the present into an unforeseeable yet inevitable repetition of the past' (ibid.: 10).

Interestingly, Janowitz goes on to make an explicit comparison between these romantically apprehended ruins and contemporary sites of dereliction, contending that the 'twentieth century intention to ruinate has irrefragably changed that peculiar pleasure of ruin which comes from the contemplation of the absolute pastness of the past within the aesthetically controlled shape of temporal transience' (ibid: 1). This 'aesthetical control' through which such ruins are contextualised within an environment, so as to convey certain preferred sentiments and lessons is indeed not a feature of the industrial ruins discussed in this book. Neither is the contemplative impulse necessarily induced through wandering amidst contemporary ruins; rather there is an unpredictable immanence of impression and sensation. Yet intimations of transience are far from absent. Instead, the influences of the past emerge from a rather less controlled environment, one that is not devised to transmit ideological effects.

Rather than this romantic aesthetic, contemporary industrial ruins are more likely to epitomise a sort of modern gothic, part of a wider sentiment which emerges out of a 'post-industrial nostalgia' which focuses on 'dark urban nightscapes, abandoned parking lots, factories, warehouses and other remnants of post-industrial culture' (Grunenberg, 1997: 176). For a gothic sensibility, ruins possess the attraction of decay and death, and to enter them is to venture into darkness and the possibilities of confronting that which is repressed. These pleasures are of a vicarious engagement with fear and a confrontation with the unspeakable and one's own vulnerability and mortality, a diversion which is also a way of
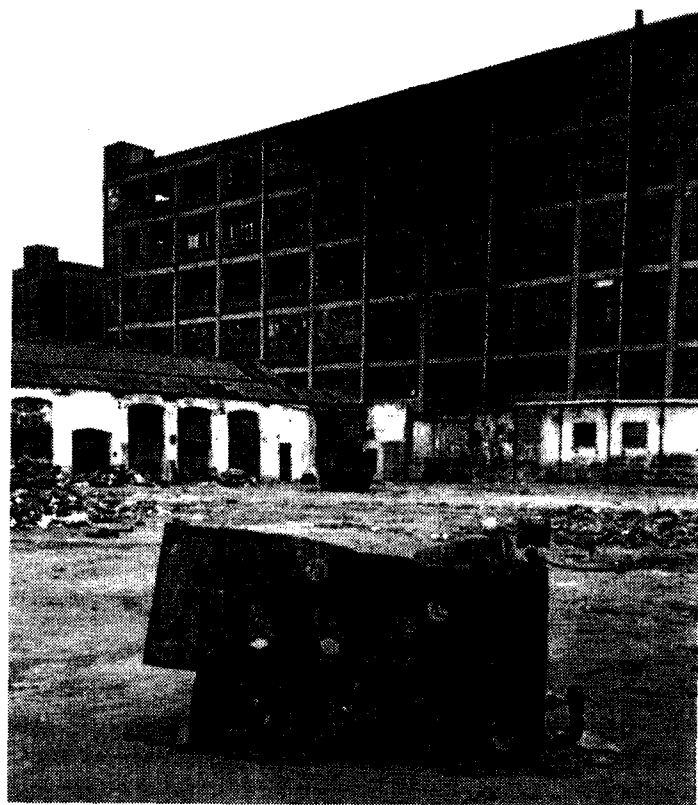
confronting death and danger and imagining it in order to disarm it, to name and articulate it in order to deal with it. Representations of dereliction echo through resurgent popular gothic cultural forms which espouse the idea that the structures of the modern world are falling down, a notion which extends to an envisioning of the city as a disaster zone. Fuelled by millennial fears of apocalypse and the belief that a new medieval era is upon us, sentiments perhaps fuelled by folk memories and cruelties perpetrated in earlier eras, industrial ruins similarly question the persistent myth of progress. This impending decadence can be envisioned amidst a ruin where it is read as a macabre sign of what is to come, a symbolic space of darkness which prefigures future degeneration. As we will see, this topography of dismal decay courses through popular cultural forms, most notably in cinema where ruins frequently symbolise dystopian portrayals of a gloomy urban future.

While my reading of ruins is very different to these dark, pessimistic fantasies, gothic interpretations usefully foreground continuities with the romantic tradition in which ruins rebuke scenarios of endless progress, a notion that I will also

explore, though as more of a critical appraisal which understands industrial ruins as symbols through which ideologically loaded versions of progress, embedded within cultures of consumption and industrial progress, can be critiqued. In addition, a gothic aesthetic 'revels in ruins, whether it be architectural, moral, biological, ontological or psychic' (McGrath, 1997: 154) in the sense that ruins epitomise transgression and the collapse of boundaries. For while it may veer towards the macabre and bleak, the gothic 'marks a peculiarly modern preoccupation with boundaries and their collapse' (Halberstam, in Toth, 1997: 89); it is concerned with the disintegration of the ordered. The gothic 'brings into shadow that which had been brightly lit, and brings into the light that which had been repressed' (McGrath, 1997: 156). Notions about disorder and hybridity are central to this book, although these are qualities which are celebrated for reasons at variance to the kind of dystopian pleasure which lovers of the gothic take in signs of decay.

While notions of a post-industrial gothic certainly captures some of the hybridities and transgressive spatialities of ruins, they can never escape connotations of gloominess and darkness, and tend to involve a wallowing in melancholia and sense of foreboding. It is my aim to acknowledge the blurrings of boundaries, and also the inevitability of death and decay. But I want to position this in a celebratory fashion, so that ruins are free from the gloomy constraints of a melancholic imagination, and can equally represent the fecund. They are sites in which the becomings of new forms, orderings and aesthetics can emerge rather than belonging to a 'sinister, crepuscular world' of death and stasis (Zucker, 1968: 195). While ruins always constitute an allegorical embodiment of a past, while they perform a physical remembering of that which has vanished, they also gesture towards the present and the future as temporal frames which can be read as both dystopian and utopian, and they help to conjure up critiques of present arrangements and potential futures.

This book is concerned with exploring the effects and uses of industrial ruins in a particular fashion. There are many alternative ways in which an account of ruins could be shaped. There could, for instance, have been a rigorous historical enquiry into the factories and warehouses visited, including details of production, industrial relations and perhaps a selection of oral histories from ex-workers and managers. Such an approach would no doubt have been interesting. However, I have not chosen such a course because I want to move away from specific forms of disciplinary knowledge and enquire about what ruins can tell us about wider social and cultural processes across urban space. In addition, I want to capture something of the sensual immanence of the experience of travelling through a ruin and my usual uncertainty about what went on within these abandoned buildings. The particular geographical locations of the ruins featured here are therefore not important to this endeavour, for assumptions about their embeddedness in imaginary geographies are likely to provide unwelcome interference with the more generic

points I wish to make. That is why none of the photographs are labelled, for it is my wish that they evoke individual responses amongst readers without their being contextualised by surplus information. In addition, I hope that some of the photographs strike chords with the theoretical themes of the book – although not in any obviously illustrative fashion – but they may be utilised as an alternative source of information independent from the text.

Whilst some may point out that the themes of the book never foreground the visual as a means of apprehending and interpreting ruins, and there is therefore something of a contradiction in the provision of so many photographs, my response is to argue that photographs are never merely visual but in fact conjure up synaesthetic and kinaesthetic effects, for the visual provokes other sensory responses. The textures and tactilities, smells, atmospheres and sounds of ruined spaces, together with the signs and objects they accommodate, can be empathetically conjured up by visual material in the absence of any realistic way of conveying these sensations, other than through words and images. Photographs of ruins are also particularly valuable because whilst derelict sites are in a fluid state of material becoming, they can reveal the stages and temporalities of decay. As Roth observes 'by fixing ruins on photographic paper, we ... have the illusion of reclaiming them from the further effects of nature and time – that is, from death' (1997: 17). Most photographs in this book along with many more can be found on my website (2002).

Two final points need to be made before I provide an outline of the organisation of this book. Firstly, in writing about ruins, it would be insensitive to ignore the
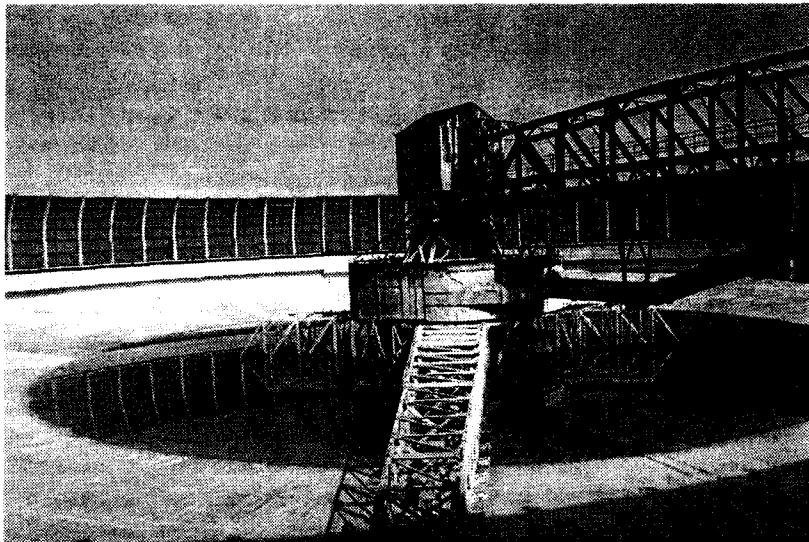
images of ruination which accompany war and it is indeed a sobering thought that the twentieth century has produced more ruins than ever before. As Roth asserts, twentieth-century wars 'have shaken our framing of ruins' (1997: 20). The most enduring recent image of ruination has, of course, been the remnants of New York's World Trade Centre following the attacks of September 11, 2001. I will not however, be discussing the ruins produced by warfare in this book, concentrating instead on the depredations wrought by cycles of capitalist reconstruction which either obliterate buildings or render their contents and the activities which they house instantaneously obsolete, turning solid things and places into air. Together with the effects of war, this vast scale of devastation reveals the 'enormity of our capacity for ruination' (ibid.).

Secondly, my travels around ruins are, to me, not particularly fraught with danger. One has to be aware of perilous structures and unsound flooring and rickety stairs, and numerous small scratches are incurred through trying to gain entry. However, I must acknowledge that for many, ruins would seem to be dangerous places, and the fear related to such concerns preclude many from entering them. Thus my gender and age are pertinent factors in making spectres of violence and predation absent from my imagination and from assumptions about what I might confront in derelict space. These factors have effectively rendered ruins accessible places for me to explore.

The organisation of the book is determined by its preoccupations. I am interested in re-evaluating industrial ruins in order to critique the negative connotations with which they are associated in official and common sense thought. Thus I am concerned to highlight the possibilities, effects and experiences which they can provide. Moreover, this reclaiming of industrial ruins from negative depiction is allied to a concern to show how they are exemplary spaces which can be used to critique ways in which urban space is produced and reproduced. Accordingly, Chapter 2 will examine the ways in which ruins are used to show that assumptions about their social uselessness, derived from assignations based on economic value and utilitarian notions of order, are groundless. I will detail the ways in which they are used as spaces for accommodation, ecological practice, adventure, play, recreation and creativity; look at how they circulate as symbolic spaces through popular cultural forms, especially cinema; and examine how they are used by non-human forms of life. Chapter 3 moves on to show how ruins, as particular spaces of disorder, can critique the highly regulated urban spaces which surround them. My argument is not that spatial order is unnecessary, but that the disciplinary, performative, aestheticised urban praxis demanded by commercial and bureaucratic regimes which are refashioning cities into realms of surveillance, consumption, and dwelling – characterised by an increase in single-purpose spaces – is becoming too dominant. These orderings are violated in the ruin which, once an exemplary space of regulation, has become deliciously
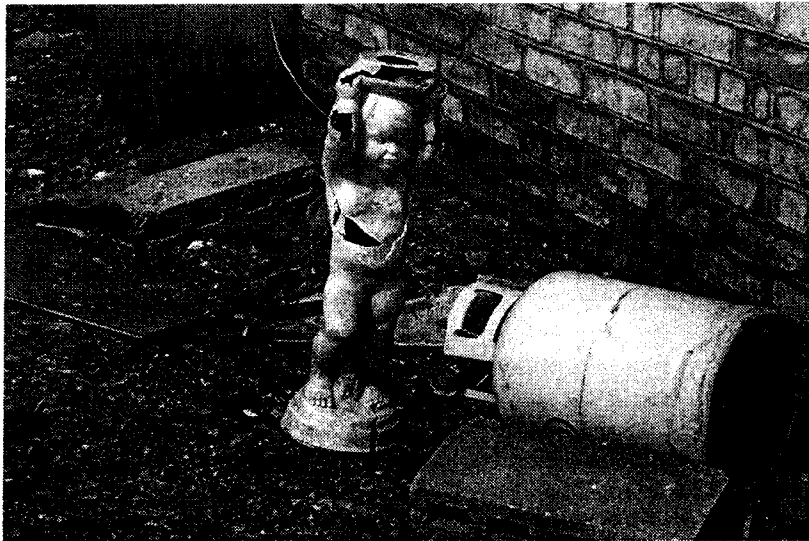
disordered. Ruins confound the normative spacings of things, practices and people. They open up possibilities for regulated urban bodies to escape their shackles in expressive pursuits and sensual experience, foreground alternative aesthetics about where and how things should be situated, and transgress boundaries between outside and inside, and between human and non-human spaces. Accordingly, ruins act as spaces which address the power embodied in ordering space. Chapter 4 specifically examines the ways in which ruins can assist us in questioning normative materialities. Continuing to explore the spacing of objects, I look at how ruins are emblematic of that which is assigned as waste, and the attendant assumptions about what kind of matter is surplus or integral to the city. I will discuss the effects of the material excess which is confronted in the ruin, and how the aesthetic and sensual charge of this excess can decentre the idea that objects are necessarily discrete, especially when they are assigned commodity status. Finally, Chapter 5 is expressly concerned with the spatialisation of memory in the contemporary city, maintaining that characteristically, memory is increasingly disembedded from its immediate social context though commodification and expertise, most notably through the production of heritage. The fixings that emerge from these processes are powerfully challenged by the sorts of memories that ruins offer. Ruins are already allegories of memory, but in addition, the involuntary memories which ruins provoke and the ways in which they are haunted by numerous ghosts foreground experiences of memory which are contingent, frequently inarticulate, sensual and immune from attempts to codify and record them.

More generally, this project is concerned with opening out the ways in which the city is used and interpreted. It mobilises a dynamic ontology in opposition to an ontology of fixed, immutable forms. The spatial aporias which surround us are neglected at a cost, fuelling monological readings of the city and restricting the diversity of practices and experiences, as well as constraining the ways in which forms of otherness are confronted. Concerned with a politics of urban becoming which appreciates the mysteries of the world, I want to highlight how the contingent, ineffable, unrepresentable, uncoded, sensual, heterogeneous possibilities of contemporary cities are particularly evident in their industrial ruins

The Contemporary Uses of Industrial Ruins

As the contemporary city becomes increasingly subject to regimes of regulation and demarcation, space tends to be divided up and assigned for specific kinds of activities, whether for shopping, playing, living or working. Challenges to these boundaries are policed so that, for instance, it is deemed inapposite to dance in shopping malls or to live or sell goods on the side of the street. Within this authoritative spatialisation, as I have argued, certain spaces are deemed suitable for nothing, are fenced off from those who would carry out activities within them, although it is understood that their functionless presence is only temporary, pending redevelopment. Industrial ruins belong to this assignation, and are, in official parlance, 'scars on the landscape' or 'wastelands' whose use-value has disappeared. Formerly hubs of dense activity within the city from and through which flows of people, matter and energy coursed from far and near, such ruins might appear quiescent and useless by comparison to their former state. Yet despite this redesignation of formerly industrial sites as spaces of waste, ruins are the site of numerous activities and very quickly become enmeshed within new social contexts, whether as part of the neighbourhood to which they belong or as sites that draw people from further afield. Ruins may become spaces for leisure, adventure, cultivation, acquisition, shelter and creativity. And as spaces that have been identified as waste, as well as 'dangerous' and 'unsightly', ruins also provide spaces where forms of alternative public life may occur, activities characterised by an active and improvisational creativity, a casting off of self-consciousness conditioned by the prying gaze of CCTV cameras and fellow citizens, and by the pursuit of illicit and frowned-upon practices. These uses contrast with the preferred forms of urban activity in over-designed and themed space: the consumption of commodities and staged events, a toned down, self-contained ambling, and a distracted gazing upon urban spectacle. Under-determined by the usually over-prescribed 'official' or 'appropriate' uses, the looseness of ruined space permits a wide range of practices. Doron (2000) shows how in a multitude of sites assigned the status of 'derelict' and 'void', or labelled 'dead zones' by architects and planners, space is

produced in diverse yet unprescribed ways by 'transgressive' practitioners who hold 'raves', have sex, garden or dwell, expanding the possibilities and meanings of such realms. In this chapter, I will explore the varied uses of industrial ruins, focusing upon how they are sources of useful materials, temporarily occupied as a home, serve as spaces of adventure and play, and serve more mundane purposes. I will then go on to discuss how they are utilised by artists and film-makers and, finally, look at their use by non-human forms of life.

Before I look at the practices which surround these contemporary ruins, I want to consider briefly the use-value of such spaces by looking at a recent account of an iconic ruin of classical civilisation in Rome in order to identify the spatial characteristics which render ruins suitable for a particular range of activities, and also to look forward to the next chapter where I will discuss the ordering and dis-ordering of space. Christopher Woodward (2001) draws upon the compellingly rich and diverse evocations of Rome's famous Coliseum by writers and artists over many centuries, portrayals which highlighted the numerous uses to which the site was put. The Coliseum did not appear as it does today, but was a far more unkempt and unpoliced site. Travellers were drawn to the peculiarities and sur-prises which lay within the undisciplined, overgrown, underdetermined space it had become, a space in which people, animals and plants lived, and in which humans played and preached. As a result of these activities, the vibrant sensory space that was produced, together with the historical associations of the building, provoked a rich experience of fantasy and reverie. The Coliseum crumbled in this way for centuries, colonised by plants and plundered for building materials, but nevertheless was a significant attraction for these early travellers, partly because of this disarray. With the rise of Italian nationalism and a need to draw upon the glories of ancient Rome as part of the nation-building project, the antique site was reclaimed by the nascent Italian state in 1870 and interpreted according to the emerging rational, scientific norms of modern archaeological and historical cod-ifications. All extraneous material was expunged – plants, accoutrements, dwellings and other agglomerations that made it a place of life and evolution – and it became, according to Woodward, 'the most monumental bathos in Europe: a bald, dead and bare circle of stones ... (with) no shadows, no sands, no echoes', a highly regulated space that came to function solely as a tourist, historical mon-ument (2001: 30). Tellingly, he concludes that despite the welter of painting, prose and poetry that focused upon the Coliseum before this conversion, in 1870, he has been unable to find any comparable artistic works that have been inspired by the monument in the same way. The one exception he cites is Hitler, to whom it was a symbol and a monument of enduring power, testifying to the magnifi-cence of Rome, and thus could stimulate the Führer's own fantasy of achieving immortality through leaving a similar architectural legacy through the endeavours of the Third Reich. Woodward concludes, 'poets and painters like ruins, and

dictators like monuments', and while this might be a somewhat hyperbolic state-ment, it eloquently identifies the ways in which use has become synonymous with organised function and the modern spatial ordering which sustains 'appropriate' practices.

Using Ruined Space

Plundering

Typically, shortly after they have been closed down and condemned as useless, derelict factories are asset-stripped so that most of the machines, furnishings and other surplus material identified as valuable are recycled through other industrial
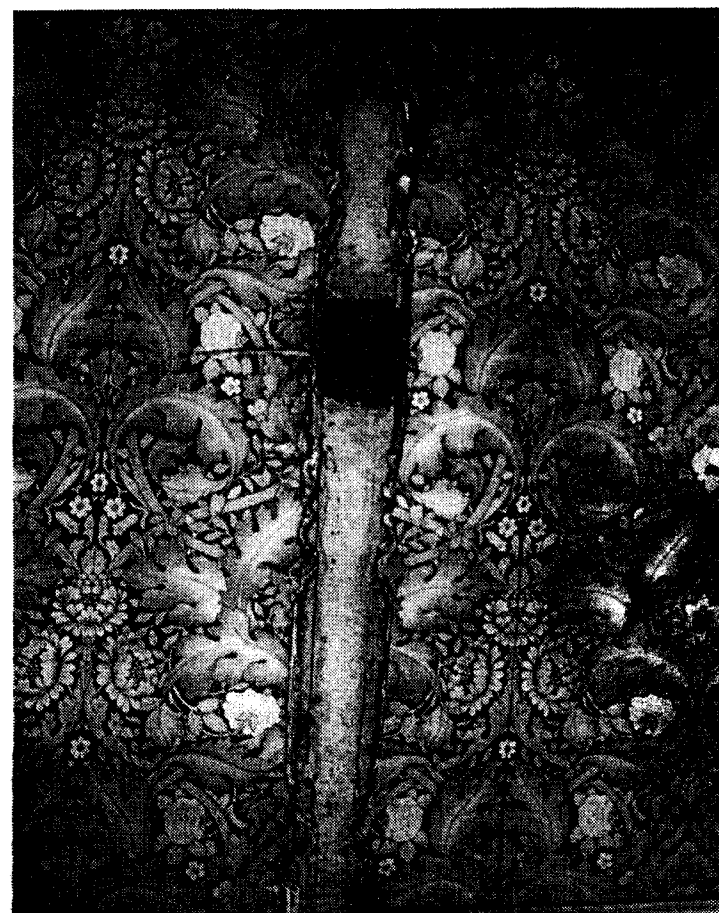
plants or are sold. Such renderings usually do not affect the structure of the building, which remains insulated against rain and wind for a time, at least until entry is forced, windows broken and access thus becomes available for others. At this point, the denizens of the informal economy circle the building, checking out times when it is unsurveilled so they can engage in the silent work of plucking the tasty bits – any lead, stained glass, pieces of furniture, tiles, windows and doors and other treasures that lurk in basements, attics and boarded up rooms. Thus the ruin provides a temporary treasure trove for low-level entrepreneurs to exploit anything that can be recycled and sold on to junkyards, second-hand furniture stores and scrap metal yards.

This starts the process by which buildings get picked clean and start to disintegrate, contributing to the speed and process of decay. Simultaneously occurring with this illicit plunder, and taking place after it has been accomplished, other, less organised individuals enter the ruin and collect pieces of what remains, finding new uses for old bits of machinery, souvenirs that might be pinned to walls, artefacts and all sorts of found objects to decorate the home and garden. I have collected patents from the early years of the twentieth century, old posters instructing workers in the art of safety or pin-ups of mid-century celebrities and sporting heroes, cigarette cards, a winter jacket and cap from the Baltic states, rubber stamps embossed with illustrations of parts of machinery for sale, records of employment and letters of complaint from customers, and a brick bearing the label 'Utopia', as well as a host of bits and pieces of pleasing machine parts. In Stoke-on-Trent, I met a local man who had systematically plundered a large derelict pottery. First of all, he had gone looking into cellars and lofts and boarded-up cupboards and had discovered some prototypes of pottery designs, some of which were antique, with which he decorated his home and 'made a few bob'. Following this, he systematically appropriated fallen tiles, planks, bricks and sections of collapsed window frame in order to build a shed and a garage on his property. In addition, around autumn, many ruins are full of children collecting materials for bonfire night, often erecting large piles of timber on adjacent land (see Goin and Raymond, 2001, for American examples of similar uses of derelict industrial landscapes).

Home-making

In the 1980s, the processes of deindustrialisation coincided with the large increase in homelessness in Britain. The subsequent production of numerous ruins created places which could serve as temporary places of shelter and abode. The persistence of numbers of homeless people means that ruins continue to be utilised as a resource for temporary shelter, depending upon their state of dilapidation, by individuals and groups. Peremptory attempts are made to accommodate bodies in smaller spaces within the vastness of extensive shop floors. Planks and boards screen off spaces in which to sleep. Sheets of tarpaulin and bits of old sofas are

arranged to create temporary homeliness, crates and boxes serve as tables or footstools, strips of cardboard become carpeting, and impromptu curtains are erected to curtail light and draughts. Nevertheless, given the likely short-term inhabitation, few attempts are made to provide decoration or an aesthetically modulated environment and accordingly, frequently surrounding those fixtures which accommodate sleeping or resting bodies is a ring of debris evincing that which has been consumed in this temporary home: newspapers, fast food takeaway containers, cigarette packets, empty drink bottles. A hunkering down in ruined space thus requires a different use of space to the normative modes of inhabitation in that here, space is marked out by debris and heterogeneous materials assembled to afford shelter and comfort, gathered around the body, together with clothing food and drink. Since this is a ruin, the necessity to keep things clean and orderly is not required, so fires may be lit on the floors for warmth and when a sleeping place gets too cluttered or messy, it is of little cost to move to a new site. Yet despite the contingent nature of this kind of dwelling, the need to mark and claim space is important and occasionally these inhabitants come over all proprietal, defending their residential space and reclaiming the notion of trespass for their own purposes. In most cases however, other users of ruins give these people a wide berth out of respect for their need for privacy and space. The unkempt and indeterminate space of the ruin, if it contains sufficient land bordering the factory, also means that it may offer the possibility for colonisation by gypsies.

Adventurous Play

Ruins are spaces of defamiliarisation which disorder the veneer of local appearances, rebuking the purposes to which the buildings were originally put. For many, ruins serve as an uncanny space amidst a familiar realm. But precisely because they are regarded as forbidden or dangerous spaces, they can become spaces of fantasy, places in which unspeakable and illicit acts occur, places of unhindered adventure. Ruins possess an allure for those who want to escape the increasing official surveillance in urban areas and the watchful gaze of neighbours and parents. For instance, they can serve as erotic realms where sex can take place beyond prying eyes, but by virtue of their proximity to settled urbanity, these endeavours may also be charged with the frisson of forbidden practice or fraught with the danger of being found out.

For children, industrial ruins contain the elements for all manner of playful activities, despite containing real dangers which anxious parents are likely to warn against. Many derelict factories are vast centres for exploration containing lengthy corridors to run along, stairs to scamper up, windows to climb through, trap doors, pulleys and channels to negotiate. Vast floor space and roofing are surfaces that enable the performance of spectacular and dangerous adventures, and numerous cupboards, cellars and offices provide confined felicitous spaces that serve as dens,

hidey-holes which may be fortified and furnished by the monstrous excess of debris. Feats of balance, agility and bravery may be accomplished in these extemporary playgrounds which, full of risk, clash with the insulated, smooth and regulated recreational spaces produced by official and commercial minds. Away from the regulatory instincts of parents and other adults, children may make their own rules and give full rein to their imagination, unchecked by the behavioural conventions imposed by their elders. So it is that the sheds and offices of ruins serve as dens for children's gangs, territories marked with signs of belonging – 'Keep Out' – and slogans of subcultural allegiance and tags. Car seats and sofas are organised into homely formations and rooms may be decorated with drawings and pictures from magazines. Objects from the outside world or found within the confines of the ruin contribute to the arbitrary placing of objects and the uncanny presence of things out of place. From the centre of the den, a place to chat, smoke and lounge, the ruin can be explored, a large unsurveilled space for play.

I was a victim of this unregulated activity in an enormous shell of a great rubber factory in South Wales, whose size engenders a sense of smallness and solitude in the visitor. Wandering across the vast shop floor during a particularly quiet part of the day, I became aware of a scurrying sound on the span of the spreading concrete roof, of footsteps and whisperings and stifled laughter. Every now and again, from

above, a small cascade of particles descended from one of the large, ovoid, open skylights, falling close to me, followed by the audible patter of feet, but with no visible human trace. After some time, the attacks grew bolder. Rather than pebbles and twigs, the plummeting objects were large concrete chunks or bricks. The danger of the situation was apparent for with no-one else around, the gang of kids above, knowing their territory well, were able to subject me to unhindered assault, forcing me to retreat from the building.

Besides offering spaces for childish play, derelict spaces are also playgrounds for more adult pursuits, or those engaged in by both adults and children. Most evidently, ruins are places where people are able to drink alcohol and take drugs without being subject to surveillance. Used bags of glue, empty beer cans and bottles of spirits, roaches from cannabis joints, and the needles and silver paper of heroin users litter parts of many ruins. Whilst such spaces provide unguarded spaces for addicts to indulge their requirements, ruins also offer refuges for others wishing to hold disorganised parties and take illegal substances. In fact, derelict and empty industrial sites were ideal locations for the secret illegal raves that were held across Britain in the late 1980s to escape the constraints of zealous policing. Likewise, sex workers are able to use ruins as venues for their clients and under-age and other illicit forms of sexual adventure are enabled within the extensive spaces they provide.

These activities, frowned upon by respectable notions about what constitutes rational and suitable forms of recreation, are accompanied by another group of activities that may be regarded as tending towards the carnivalesque, those associated with destruction and vandalism. For spaces which are disordered, unkempt and unpoliced lend themselves to activities that may appear to be dystopian signs of an anti-authoritarian, to constitute a nihilistic rebuke to conventions of civil order and responsibility, but can alternatively be considered as entirely pleasurable adventures typified by a liminal letting go of the restraints which organise social life. The sheer pleasure in smashing things up is a sensation that can hardly be acknowledged in a highly materialistic culture, but this radical engagement with the material world, a desire to fracture and fragment, and to enjoy the delicious destruction of a variety of shaped matter is surely more than merely anti-social behaviour. In ruins, porcelain fitments are sent skittering across the floor to shatter upon contact with walls, boxes and sinks are hurled onto concrete so that they will spectacularly splinter, fragments bouncing across the floor. Larger structures, brick walls and plaster ceilings can provoke a challenge to the amateur demolition worker who must work out what techniques and forces must be assembled to produce their destruction, whereas lighter partitions of plasterboard can be ripped asunder with gratifying ease. Overturning stable objects, tumbling things downstairs or dropping them down lift shafts, spilling out lubricants or piercing water tanks so that liquids course down the storeys of a building; all are pleasurable activities which are usually forbidden but allow a spectacular engagement with the materiality of the world. There

are rarely any windows in a ruin which remain intact and this testifies to the universal enjoyment of shattering glass by throwing projectiles, the gratification of the shattering sound and the pleasing spraying out of the formerly whole material. And this is also the case with the urinals and toilets where attack with bricks or metal objects leads to an easy fracturing. Alternatively, the specific targeting of placed objects or windows can be considered as games of skill. There is then, a pleasure in this kind of destruction, a visceral, sensuous demolition of space and fixtures that will likely be subject to the wrecking ball in any case. The satisfaction gained through creating explosions of noise and dismembering a variety of objects in different ways take place in a context where orderly maintenance and preservation are irrelevant. There is sensual pleasure in watching the slimy oozings of tipped over industrial substances, in seeing how plastic coagulates and bubbles when set alight, in making *ad hoc* piles of materials to knock over and in smearing messages and designs across crumbling walls with industrial residues. The joy reaped from being able to act out of control can be an irresistible inducement to corporeally engage with matter in this way, especially since such stuff is usually protected by surveillance and convention. The materiality and status of the ruin as waste mean that it is constituted to accommodate these spectacular deviant acts.

I watched a group of teenage boys doggedly trying to puncture a large cylindrical vat containing thick oil. Using a variety of implements, they finally found out that by erecting an assembly of planks, they were able to send very heavy objects rolling down at the tank so as to weaken its increasingly indented surface. The final stages of the operation required attack by a series of metal poles and as the sides of the container finally split, a continuous gush of oil flowed down to a hollow in the ground nearby where it formed a black pool, the mid-afternoon sun reflected in its still and even surface as the thick flow oozed out, draining the receptacle. This pool itself acquired purity in its sleek, perfect surface, and quickly became the new focus of attention, as the boys hurled objects into it, causing slow ripples and small splashes. The oily mere was filled with plastic toys, sacks, boulders, pipes and other debris, and came to resemble a tar pit in which the preserved forms of extinct life lingered.

These frowned-upon practices are complemented by other lawless pursuits. Ruins are ideal places to empty the contents of stolen handbags and safes. More evidently, they are sites to which stolen cars and motorbikes can be taken. At once, the goods yards and factory floors provide an environment where cars can be driven and the layout of obstacles can serve as improvised circuits for adventurous forms of joyriding. Wooden doors can be driven through in emulation of spectacular actions from television and cinema, adjacent objects can be collided with and sent flying, and vehicles can be skidded, turned over, set alight and detonated.

These affordances that make driving in ruined space so pleasurable – long stretches of concrete flooring or tarmac, wooden stairs, chutes, kerbs and other

props and obstacles – also make ruins a rich playground for skating, skateboarding, motorcycle scrambling and mountain biking as will be discussed later. Outside the prohibited public realms and the organised half-pipes and skateparks, the ruin offers a range of obstacles and surfaces which can be negotiated at speed. Besides the insides of the derelict factory, the gardens outside, replete with rubble and mounds, provide challenging contours to surmount and race around, a practice ground for the development of skills. Climbers too, use the walls of the ruin to build up competencies for further ventures. These more evident pursuits are also complemented by the rather less purposive forms of exploration that take place by urban inhabitants who are drawn to the marginal spaces in their locale, a form of non-spectacular tourism that roams across uncultivated commons and a range of urban areas that are supposedly unattractive (for instance, see Halgreen, 2004). On a more organised scale are groups of urban explorers who, attracted to active as well as derelict buildings, are drawn towards ventilation shafts, disused tunnels, towers, drains, sewers, bridges, underground complexes, mines, disused quarries, churches, prisons, military sites, old hospitals and asylums. According to the accounts compiled by participants, the motivations for such explorations vary from those attracted to architecture and history, the sensual dimensions of such places, the subversive, anti-authoritarian nature of such pursuits, the adventuresome physicality of such endeavours, and the thrill of the risk entailed. In the case

of the latter motivation, urban exploration is akin to the expansion of adventure sports which seek out thrills and 'peak' experiences at variance to an over-regulated and usually quiescent life. Informed by an ethics which takes a dim view of vandalism and the right to transgress regulatory regimes, and equipped with torches, hardhats, climbing equipment, face masks and goggles they enter these often forbidden zones, usually at night, frequently with the aim of exploring the least accessible parts of the complex. Taking photographs and writing accounts that record their adventures, these groups communicate and encourage their practices through invisible networks of association, typically via the numerous websites dedicated to the subject (for instance, see http:/www.geocities.com/urbexers; http:/www.infiltration.org; http:/www.urbex.org.uk).

So the ruin is marked as a site where a host of playful, adventurous activities are carried out. By virtue of the affordances of derelict factories and the loose ways in which they are regulated, they present opportunities for carrying out leisure practices which would be frowned upon in more regulated urban space, activities characteristically based around physical expressiveness, the transgression of normative relations between people, space and things, and around affective collective endeavours that tend towards the carnivalesque. Like other demarcations of spatial activity, these are generally consigned to private and marginal spaces (Shields, 1991), but they reinscribe the carnivalesque in an increasingly smoothed-over urban environment.

Mundane Leisure Practices/Ruins as Exemplary Sites

Despite the attractions of ruins for a range of carnivalesque and playful pursuits, it would be neglectful to ignore the numerous mundane uses of ruined space by people as part of their everyday practice, habitual and unspectacular activities which sew space into routines and perhaps are part of what might be identified as 'practical' leisure, pursuits conventionally regarded as 'rational' recreation and which contrast with the activities identified in the above section. Again, ruins provide unpoliced, extra space where such everyday pastimes are carried out. Most obviously, ruins are simply spaces which are incorporated into the walks of urbanites, supplementing the myriad tracks which flow across the city. Despite the fact that it is an officially reviled space, the ruin continues to be woven together with the rest of the city through these pathmaking exercises, whether as part of contingent travels or as part of a regular route along which to walk a dog. Wasteland also provides space for people to tether grazing ponies and erect jumps for horses. The shortage of land in the city mean that tracts of overgrown flower beds or landscaped lawns can now serve as alternative allotments for gardeners, who may grow vegetables and fruit; and ruined land is often used to cultivate marijuana plants which, fostered on land which seemingly belongs to nobody, makes criminality difficult to identify. As I will shortly discuss, wasteland and rubble are quickly colonised by

flora and fauna and thus attract birdwatchers and botanists. In addition, ruins serve as extemporary, free car parks and as places to dump rubbish since they cannot be 'spoilt' more than they already are. These creative uses of local space are part of the mundane and habitual practices through which people engage with ruined sites, opportunistically utilising that which seems to be temporarily underused, and entwining that space into regular quotidian or weekly rituals, in which situated practice becomes unremarkable, perhaps unreflexively performed.

This creative, rational use of derelict space for leisure practices, along with the more carnivalesque forms of play discussed above, highlights the dearth of communal areas in many urban realms as space becomes divided up into functional spaces, turned into private property and surveilled to guard against inappropriate pursuits, diminishing the availability of common land. These appropriations show that ruined buildings and land can act as exemplary spaces in which alternative urban practices can be performed. And more conscious, political projects can utilise wasted space. In 1996, thirteen acres of derelict land on the site of a demolished Guinness distillery in Wandsworth, London, were occupied by some 500 protestors in a bid to provide a prototypical, exemplary eco-centric urban community as a means to protest about dominant forms of land use, the pre-eminence of property ownership, planning priorities and urban development and thus more generally to imagine urban life and culture otherwise. The occupation lasted for five months until the protestors were evicted and the whole site bulldozed. Wittily given the name 'Pure Genius' after a Guinness advert, the site was described by the occupants as 'Wandsworth Eco-Village' and 'London's first permaculture visitors' centre'. In addition to using the site to experiment in carrying out small-scale, environmentally sensitive agricultural practices, the community aimed to show that derelict sites could be used for co-operatively run, sustainable and low cost urban housing, a model that was counterposed to the profit-seeking extension of high-cost private housing in rural areas.

A motley collection of dwellings and other buildings – yurts, domes, pyramids, tepees, benders and adapted vehicles, greenhouses, a community 'roundhouse' – were assembled on the site, constructed from a range of scrap materials. Similarly, gardens were rapidly developed and planted to serve as a food supply and as a location for creative horticultural design. The site became a venue for a host of social and cultural activities and the learning of skills, including story-telling, circus stunts, the creation of murals, painting and sculpture, drama and music. Equally important was the party ethic which informed the production of the site as a space for expressive cultural practices through which identity was expressed, a carnivalesque realm in which affective engagement and the pursuit of pleasure was given full rein (Halfacree, 1999). Accordingly, the project was able to advertise how 'enterprise', 'creativity' and 'self-help' could be charged with alternative meanings to those inscribed in consumer and business culture. Moreover, these
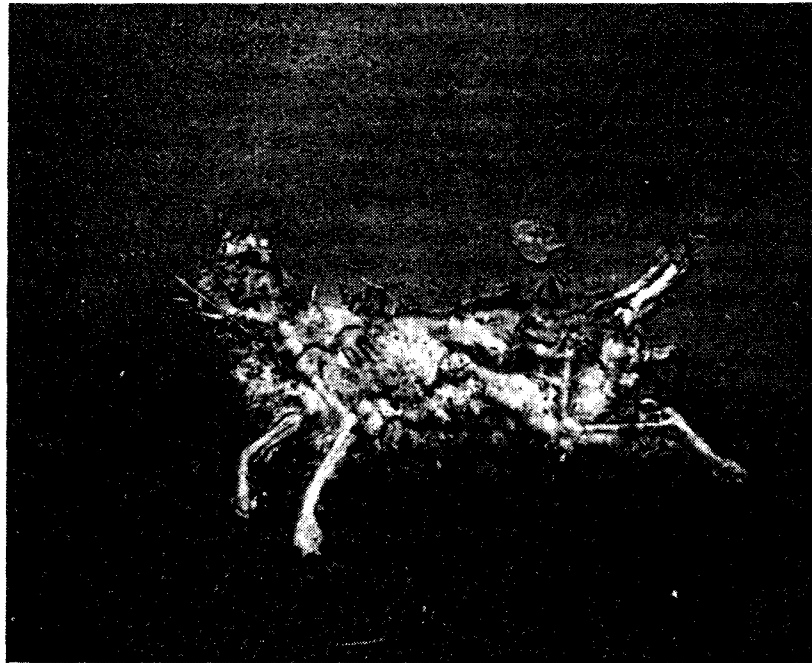
aims were furthered by co-operation and collaboration between various 'tribes' (Maffesoli, 1996) possessing disparate political beliefs to produce experimental modes of social organisation. And in addition to drawing all these different groups together, attempts were made to reach out and involve local people in the project so that the site could be brought into local politics and relationships.

Pure Genius served to provide an innovative way of exploring the possibilities of direct action by achieving a distance from normative urban space, where a collective could 'begin to expand its own agenda rather than being fixed within the imaginative structure provided by the opposition' (Featherstone, 2003). Moreover, because of this distance, the project could 'suggest ways in which in which the broad green movement can engage with urban politics linking environmental and social justice issues' (ibid.). An autonomous space was created and temporarily controlled by a heterodox selection of 'alternative' groups, and this facilitated the forging of networks and associations between them, and the production of a symbolic challenge to hegemonic ways of ordering the world. Because of the great media attention that the Wandsworth experiment attracted, there was considerable success in broadcasting the aims and achievements of the project, so that it became educative and exemplary. Yet despite this moderate success, as it became widely known, the openness of the site meant that it became a magnet for the homeless,

alcoholics and drug addicts, some of whom rendered the environment potentially violent and crime-ridden, and sapped the energy of participants who were not familiar with the skills required to absorb such people into the transient community. Such a dilemma can be seen to result from the dearth of public spaces available for experimentation and alternative practices and forms of sociality.

The above discussion has served to show that ruins are potential sites for a range of social activities which differ from those usually accorded preferential status in the city, for they are not regarded as 'respectable' and 'appropriate' in the inscription of urban norms of conduct. Moreover, such activities contrast with those practices which sustained forms of sociality and social relations grounded in the previous spatial order at these sites, namely those organised around industrial production. Instead of being directed by compulsion and the internalisation of rules of comportment, practice and social engagement, the relations with space described above are forged through affective and enthusiastic desires rather than through the compulsions of urban and industrial order. Furthermore, social bonds may be locally constituted and consolidated by the coming together of adolescent gangs and homeless citizens, by dog walkers and gardeners, or they may be formed through more extensive networks, for instance by loose collectives of 'urban explorers'. All these practices constitute alternative communal uses for urban space which stitch ruins back into localities, broaching their mooted separation from smoothed-over space.

Art Space

Ruins are unpoliced spaces in which a host of artistic endeavours may take place, blurring the distinctions between practices deemed transgressive and rational. Most obviously, they provide a extensive area of vertical surfaces for the inscriptions of graffiti artists, for graffiti is an almost ubiquitous presence in those ruins in which access is easy. Especially when these are concentrated on the internal walls of the derelict building where they cannot be seen by neighbouring residents, there is little sanction against graffiti, since it makes little difference to a site already identified as unsightly and excessive. In these favoured sites, graffiti ranges from the wall-to-ceiling coverage of all planes in a riot of colour, turning buildings immersed in the grey and brown hues of dereliction to spaces adorned with multi-coloured effusions of names and cartoons, to the crude daubing of football and music slogans and gang names; and from the humdrum inscriptions of obscure tags and monikers to the detailed, complex works of graffiti 'artists'. Occasionally, the embellishments of extensive multi-coloured illustrations blend with the fractured roofs, large puddles and intrusive plants to create scenes extremely rich in texture and hue. Ruins thus provide unsurveilled urban spaces for graffiti artists to develop their alternative aesthetics and skills, for where graffiti

has been largely regarded as 'out of place' in the more regulated spaces of the city (Cresswell, 1996), its presence is more ambivalent in spaces of dereliction.

In addition to graffiti, ruins are used for all sorts of impromptu artistic endeavours. In the next chapter, I will discuss the profusion of unusual juxtapositions contained by ruins, where things usually kept apart mingle and stand on top or next to each other. Whilst these assortments may be arbitrary, it appears as if certain arrangements must have been fabricated and carefully organised. The opportunity to play with objects and other forms of matter unselfconsciously is afforded by the lack of any surveillance and other onlookers and by the range of material that is often to hand. Accordingly, improvisatory sculptures suggest that they have been wrought by visitors at play. It is not surprising that such works are made, since twentieth-century artists have loosened ideas about the constituents of art works, making liberal use of waste materials. Drawn to its varied textures and forms, and its symbolic qualities, the aesthetics of rubbish are familiar through the work of such artists as Robert Rauschenberg, Kurt Schwitters, Joseph Beuys, Tony Cragg and David Mach who have used waste in rich, divesre ways (Hauser, 2002). These enthusiasms extend to art made by members of the sustainable art movement, which champions the ethical use of industrial by-products and debris into art. Such artistic usages of waste matter create 'an alternative economy' and encourage observers to question processes of '(de)valuation and exclusion' (Assman, 2002: 72).

Sometimes ruined industrial spaces are utilised as part of larger schemes of artistic display. One recent exhibition, Radioactive, organised by the Sozo Collective as part of a bigger project entitled Re:location, took over a substantial ruin in Smethwick, Birmingham, which had previously been an x-ray factory and earlier had been a workshop for an automobile manufacturer (http://www.re-loca-tion.org.uk). After spending three months partially renovating the building, turning rooms into exhibition spaces and living quarters, and simultaneously producing art works for display, the collective organised the two-week exhibition. This ambitious and experimental event attempted to recontextualise and give renewed purpose to the building through a number of creative strategies reflected in the art. Works tried to convey the physicalities and social relations embedded in the working conditions of previous workers, they utilised found materials to forge sculptures and pictures, and they created works that dramatically clashed with the ruined industrial space: a Japanese garden in a corner of a large goods yard incorporated the already growing plants that had colonised the buildings. In addition, a large collection of photographic plates found *in situ* were curated as part of the exhibition, vestiges of graffiti and posters left by workers were retained and highlighted, and the site simply served as a different kind of gallery space for hanging painting and installations. The multiplicities of the ruin were creatively explored by these artists to collectively produce a multi-faceted exhibition which explicitly drew upon the

materialities, spatialities and histories of a site to provide a dramatic contrast to conventional kinds of display and the venues in which they occur.

In a different vein, one fascinating use of an abandoned industrial landscape is Emscher Park in the northern Ruhr, Germany, where a collection of architects, artists, gardeners, scientists and planners have created what they term an 'imaginative landscape out of industrial dereliction' (Latz and Latz, 2001: 73), on the site of a vast iron and coal complex. Out of the coke plants, blast furnaces, ore bunkers and manganese depots, they have created a heterogeneous landscape. Some areas have been allowed to decay and others have been re-presented as giant sculptural forms. The collective decree of the producers is that rather than possessing instrumental values which inhere in industrial spaces, 'fantasy should allow us to use the abstraction of the existing structures in new ways, and so adapt the present system of organization to the appearance of chaos' (ibid.: 74). In addition to these aesthetic innovations, recreational uses have been created, so that large edifices have been turned into climbing walls, huge bunkers and a gasometer have become venues for diving, and other spaces have been designated as a location for parties, an adventure playground, and the display of art and exhibitions. Accessibility has been enabled by the construction of walkways which criss-cross the whole structure. By allowing the reclamation of ruined space by plants and animals to simply occur in certain areas, by decontaminating blighted spots, and through the deliberate fabrication of ponds, meadows and spectacular gardens, the designers have created a hybrid melange in which some places have been creatively transformed whilst others have been left alone.

Representing Ruin

In the romantic era, painting and poetry were the preferred media of representation for enthusiasts of classical and medieval ruination. In present times, a different cast of explorers and artists are attracted to industrial ruins. Despite the notion that they are useless and undesirable spaces, and despite their apparent marginalisation, ruins find their way back into economies of popular representation, circulating through television programmes, films, advertisements and pop videos. Besides my own website, several photographers have established engaging websites furnished with images of industrial decay (see the list of websites in references). Most evidently, commercial film makers are particularly drawn to ruined factories and warehouses as appropriate settings for a predictable range of dramatised events. The representation of industrial ruins in films exposes, and is imbricated within, certain cultural assumptions about the negative qualities of contemporary cities and urban processes, particularly proffering dystopian visions of a bleak future. Yet simultaneously these derelict realms may be conceived as a refuge from the relentless corruption and surveillance of these unhappy worlds. I

will now outline four tropes through which ruins are represented in contemporary cinema.

First of all, industrial ruins provide a suitable backdrop for spectacular action. The costs of enacting explosions and extravagant forms of destruction need not generally concern film-makers, since the ruin has already been marked as wasteland and damage to property is thus inconsequential. Moreover, ruins possess a host of fixtures around which action sequences may be choreographed, gunfire may resound and physical fights can be played out across various vertical and horizontal levels. Various characters do battle in these scenes of ruination, consolidating the symbolic associations of ruins with forms of deviance and danger. They provide lairs for criminals and deviant gangs who commit illegal acts within these refuges and are often subsequently hunted down and confronted in these same

spaces. They also act as ersatz sites for military conflict, connoting the destruction wreaked in war. In a recent cinematic version of Shakespeare's *Richard the Third* (1995), the final shoot-out scene was filmed around the burnt-out shell of a 1920s power station in London. And in the Vietnam war film, *Full Metal Jacket* (1985), Becton, an abandoned 1930s gasworks adjacent to the River Thames was used as the Vietnamese city of Hue, since director Stanley Kubrick thought that the 1930s functionalist architecture of the gasworks was similar to that city's buildings. Further detailed ruination of the site to simulate war damage was carried out but the suitability of the pre-existent three-dimensional rubble and what Kubrick referred to as 'those twisted bits of reinforcement' saved the producers millions of pounds. Abandoned buildings similarly feature as sites where criminals hide and police pursue them in television serials such as *The Bill*. But they may also be identified as safe spaces in which the persecuted may hide.

Enemy of the State (1998) tells the story of an ordinary but successful lawyer who is unwittingly drawn into attempts to reveal the complicity of senior political figures with a scandalous political crime. The scene is created for the production of a climate of fear and paranoia, created through the hyper-surveillance of a government intelligence agency out of control and with the usual rogue elements. Super-efficient spy satellites, which are able to locate and identify their human
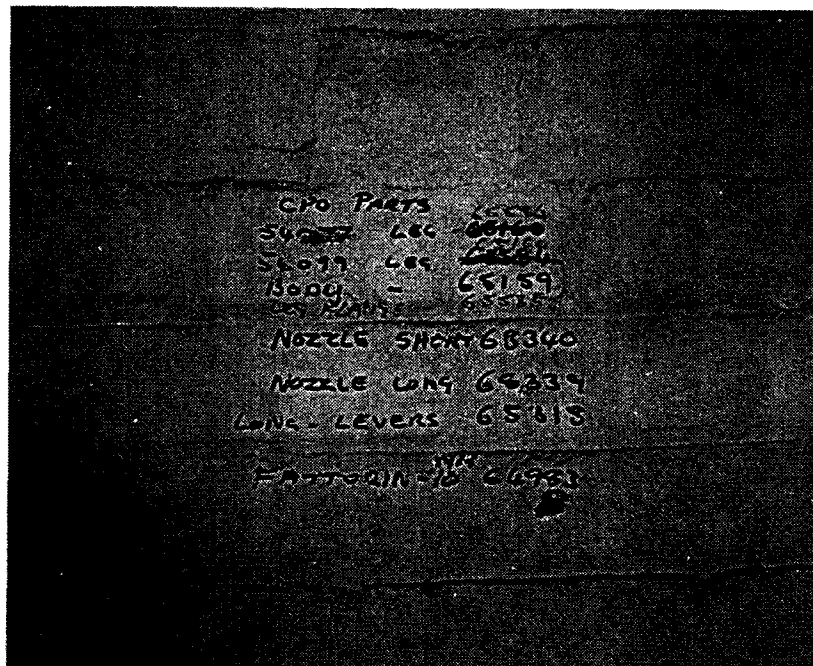
quarries from space, are able to penetrate most urban space via visual technology and listening devices. The renegade scientist, Brill, offers to help the protagonist in his attempt to escape the misplaced charges against him and bring corrupt politicians and the agency to book. Crucially, the susceptibility of most urban environs to penetration by surveillance technologies is contrasted with Brill's hideout, a ruined warehouse and undetectable home which he calls 'the Jar'. Outside the normal pathways of city life, the Jar is an ideal place for the patriotic but maverick scientific genius to hide in. The building was actually the rather iconic original Dr. Pepper plant in Baltimore, a concrete building in an industrial area of town surrounded by warehouses and truck stops, and it was demolished as part of the plot.

Secondly, often also containing extended action sequences, many contemporary science fiction movies feature ruins to signify an imaginary future of decadence and dystopia, which signify social breakdown or the aftermath of a global war, a landscape containing the remnants of civilisation evocative of the gloomy gothic aesthetic referred to in the previous chapter. Such venues are host to a range of denizens including Dr Whos, replicants, stalkers, demolition men, outlaws, visionaries, techno-geniuses, cyber-punks and spectacular gangs. One of the best examples of this sort of film is *Robocop* (1987), which depicts a future crime-ridden Detroit, where huge corporations have taken over most social functions and are

driven by a desire to maximise profit at all costs. Like many other recent science fiction and horror films tinged with this contemporary aesthetic, the film is 'driven by both despair over the disintegration of traditional production processes and post-industrial nostalgia for the recent past with its illusory promise of stable and homogeneous social structure' (Grunenberg, 1997: 196). Omni Consumer-Products (OCP) controls the distribution of products, and even the embattled police force. Murphy, a distinguished and dedicated police officer is killed in the line of duty, but OCP integrates his brain and a few remaining features with state-of-the-art technology to form Robocop, designed to revolutionise law enforcement. In the course of his battles with criminal gangs, Murphy rediscovers his humanity as he unearths corporate corruption and abuses of power, and he endeavours to bring justice to Detroit outside the remit of programmed goals. The scene in which Murphy is killed prior to his rebirth as a cyborg, as well as the climactic shoot-out, were filmed in the abandoned steel mills of Monessau, Pennsylvania. Utilising the setting as a spectacular stage upon which violent action can proceed, the derelict ruin metaphorically accentuates the breakdown of an imperilled society but, as with *Enemy of the State*, it is also a refuge from the corporate world of surveillance.

Thirdly, we can identify those films which sometimes nostalgically lament the passing of the industrial landscape and way of life, particularly in British northern cities. Realist accounts such as *Brassed Off* (1996), about the struggles faced by former workers and their families in such typically depressed, post-industrial settings, feature the now deserted factories as symbols of former vitality in contrast to the quiescent present. In *The Full Monty* (1997), the abandoned iron forges and smelters of Sheffield are used to echo the uselessness of male labour habituated to a working life in a steel industry which has drastically trimmed its workforce or relocated. Following a kitsch and relentlessly optimistic promotional film about 1970s Sheffield which champions the steel industry that underpins the city's present and future prosperity, the first 'present-day' scene ironically depicts the unemployed protagonists unsuccessfully attempting to smuggle out a steel girder from one such empty factory in the now depressed locale. Within this wasteland topography of the declining steel town, inscribed by the casual wanderings, enforced leisure pursuits and schemes of the unemployed men to 'get by', ruins provide resources for the characters. As large, uninhabited stages, they serve as safe venues in which the men can practice their stripping routines without fear of ridicule or sanction, and thus help them to restore some dignity to their quest for meaningful labour, adapt to changing gender roles, and make a few quid in the process.

Finally, ruins also serve as sites which – by virtue of their place on the margin – are locations for more celebrated subjects and their activities, identities and practices which are conventionally regarded as 'deviant' but are positively

reclaimed. Through such representations, ruins may be aestheticised, even eroti-cised. *My Own Private Idaho* (1991) features derelict property reclaimed by a sub-culture and used to accommodate an alternative, gay lifestyle; and Derek Jarman's *Jubilee* (1977) likewise shows carnivalesque sex and violence in a decaying England. These themes perhaps reach their apogee in Jarman's impressionistic *The Last of England* (1987), in which England is portrayed as a blighted urban waste-land. In the context of the radical industrial restructuring presided over by the Thatcher government, the derelict spaces and ruined industrial complexes of East London metaphorically conjure up social devastation and decay. And whilst this

backdrop conjures up a bleak vision of England characterised by excessive greed, terrorism, and homophobic and racial violence, these ruined scenes are also the site for alternative cultural identities and practices, the home of squatters and punk rock tribes, and are eroticised as sites for transgressive homosexual acts. These kinds of depictions also resonate with a contemporary gothic aesthetic.

Such gothic resonances are also prevalent in particular kinds of popular music, most obviously in that which is characterised as 'Goth' and in disparate kinds of post-punk 'industrial' music (for instance, in the work of Pere Ubu, Bauhaus, Nine Inch Nails, Throbbing Gristle, Einstürzende Neubauten and Test Department). In terms of lyrical imagery, album cover art and the very sounds created, such music conjures 'the post-industrial disappearance of the labouring body against the back-drop of vacant factory yards, deserted farms, bleak downtowns, a polluted envi-ronment and ever-present TV screens', a dismal topography within which 'boundaries between the "normal" and the pathologized "other" collapse' (Toth, 1997: 89–8). 'Emanating from the ruins of the urban-industrial space of the West' (ibid.: 88), together with gothic forms of film and literature and comic illustration, such sounds evoke a geography of despair, of 'growing up in manufacturing ghost towns' (ibid.). For instance, according to Hannaham, 'many Joy Division songs sound as if they were recorded in the deserted school buildings, abandoned facto-

ries and under the lonely buildings of Manchester' (1997: 94). Alternatively, the uses of industrial tools such as acetylene torches and electric saws as instruments which created sound through being applied to scrap metal and other waste materials were utilised to reimagine the now absent 'labouring body juxtaposed with the haunted ruins of industry' (Toth: 1997: 86).

In romantic times, artistic forms based on rural and classical ruins were typically represented by painters and poets. The imagery and aesthetics of the contemporary industrial ruin are mainly exploited through the cinema and in some of the marginal realms of popular music, although ruins are also used by contemporary painters, photographers and sculptors, and in some contemporary writing (for instance, in the work of Bertholt Bluel, 1998 and W.G. Sebald, 2002). Thus although ruins are frequently vilified spaces, they are not as neglected as these negative assignations might suggest, for derelict spaces continue to circulate through popular representations and other artistic forms. Whilst I have shown that there are a limited range of themes through which ruins serve as metaphoric backdrops for cinematic stories, their physical qualities can be transmitted through the screen, and their textures, atmospheres and aesthetics can potentially undermine their incidental positioning as spectacular, visually apprehended stage sets.

Nature Reserves

Besides the numerous social and representative practices through which ruins are utilised, they are also sites which teem with non-human forms of life, highlighting what Simmel refers to as the 'vitality of opposing tendencies' in that they are simulaneously 'sinking from life' and 'settings of life' (1965). As Roth proclaims 'as things fall apart, out of their remains emerge new forms of growth' (1997: 2). As spaces that have become unpoliced and are no longer regularly cleansed to minimise non-human intrusions, plants and animals show their adaptability to the opportunities which arise in the city as they quickly seek out cracks in which they may prosper, finding nesting spaces, food sources and territories. This rapid colonisation testifies to the scale of ongoing human attempts to banish from urban settings all but the most favoured companion plants and animals from their midst. And it also showcases the agency of insects, birds, mammals, fungi, shrubs, flowering plants and trees (Cloke and Jones, 2002) in the constitution of the urban, despite their wrongly assumed absence.

As far as plants are concerned, the rate and the nature of their colonisation of derelict space is contingent upon specific regional ecologies. The nature of growth depends upon factors such as soil acidity or alkalinity, on whether land is contaminated by metal or ash, on whether the factory was brick-built or fashioned out of particular kinds of stone, on the nature of rubble and on the surrounding geology. Plant ecology also depends upon which particular plants move in to take advan-

tage of their favoured chemical and climatic conditions, for such plant-scapes are also determined by chance. Nevertheless, several species have particularly adapted to urban environments and are suited to move into ruined spaces, namely those fast-growing plants with intricate root systems which produce large numbers of seeds able to germinate quickly. So it is that a familiar sight of derelict space is of the silken seeds of the rosebay willow herb breeze-borne, parachuting through the wasteland and beyond where the seeds will land and send out runners into any surrounding soil. Other, equally ubiquitous plants include buddleia which becomes especially noticeable when it attracts crowds of butterflies and bees in summer. A hotch-potch of green blankets the outer grounds of ruins, gradually creeping into spaces where light and space permit growth, progressively blurring the distinctions between inside and outside. Fat Hen, dock, nettles, brambles, sorrel, horsetail, ferns, groundsel, chickweed, thistles, knotweed, ivy, the dense blanket of convolvulus leaves interspersed with its white trumpet flowers, and plantain and other grasses create this often dense mat of green, composed of varied shades, textures and shapes of leaves and stem. Rising above the undergrowth appear taller forms of vegetation: elder, willow and silver birch trees, hawthorn bushes and the much-feared giant hogweed. The mantle of green is complemented by splashes of different colours: the purples, blues and pinks of the intrusive Himalayan balsam, forget-me-not, foxglove and willow herb, the crimson of poppies, the strong yellows of ragwort, dandelion, celandine, coltsfoot, buttercup, evening primrose and stray rape plants, the gleaming white of michaelmas daisy and cow parsley, as well as multi-coloured lupins. Inside the ruin and on its outer walls, mosses, lichens and liverworts start to cloak the building and shaggy caps, puffballs and less edible fungi nestling amongst undergrowth or on rotting wood also colonise the outside and interiors. These verdant scenes are supplemented by escapees from nearby domestic gardens and the remnants of ornamental shrubs and rose bushes which bordered the buildings of factories and were designed to pleased the eye of visitors and the office workers in adjacent offices.

The botanical colonisation of derelict land and buildings is not a static process but changes over time depending upon the longevity of the abandoned site. Gilbert (1989) has identified successive stages in which particular plants predominate. First of all, grasses and quickly colonising plants move in (what he calls the 'Oxford ragwort stage'), and these initial colonisers prepare the ground for larger and taller perennial plants (the 'tall-herb stage'), and if the land is left for several years, these in turn give way to grass (the 'grassland stage'). Finally, the ecology becomes more stable and typically becomes home to trees and shrubs (the 'scrub woodland stage'). These phases of plant colonisation also influence the kinds of animals that live there. For instance, grass cover encourages the presence of large numbers of voles and mice, thus attracting their predators, whereas shrubs and trees provide shelter for nesting birds. This evolution of particular successive plant

ecologies introduces distinct forms of temporality into ruined space. Formerly a realm regulated to retain fixity, to ensure reproduction of the same order, ruined industrial space is now subject to ecological temporalities – at least until redevelopment of the site occurs – far removed from the temporal routines which used to characterise factory production. One might say that factories, which were devoted to the transformation of nature in the form of 'raw materials' into manufactured goods, when ruined return to nature once more, and are subject to its temporalities as the illusion of permanence dissolves.

Ruined spaces are equally hospitable to animals. It is evident that insect life is abundantly provided for with the decay of matter. Woodlice burrow into expanses of rotting wood, spiders weave their webs across ceilings and corners unhindered by dusters and vacuum cleaners, and ants lay claim to any neglected surface. Birds also quickly colonise ruins. Highly adaptable scavengers who are unfussy about where
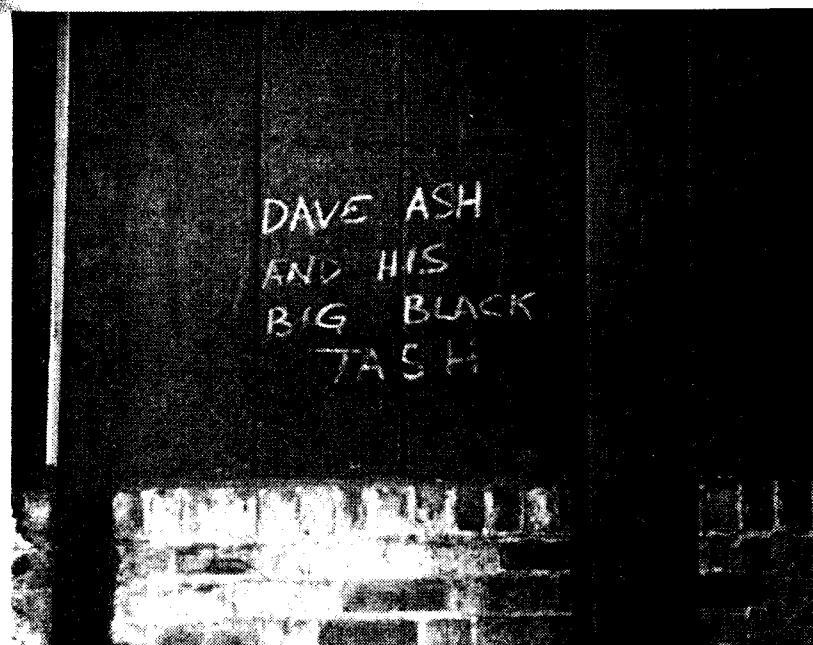
they live and what they eat, pigeons take advantage of the openings presented by shattered windows to build nests in attics and roost along shelves and beams, ledges akin to the cliffs they frequent elsewhere. Other large birds such as magpies and jackdaws, already present throughout cities, take advantage of the chance to dwell in derelict space and the vegetation which surrounds it, as do wrens, blackbirds, starlings and sparrows, kestrels, gulls, house martins and swallows. Certain birds prefer rubble, such as the black redstart, a rare migrant to Britain, which proliferated after it made its home amongst the post-war bombsites of London. When redevelopment covered over these vacant sites, the redstart moved home to the weird surroundings of nuclear power stations, where a similar wasteland environment could be found within their perimeters. Other animals lay claim to ruins as well. Mice and rats abound. Foxes quickly colonise adjacent areas of land dense with undergrowth and lose their fear of entering buildings, hedgehogs move in and bats hang in ruined lofts until they swarm out into the evening air.

A prevalent desire for a controlled urban nature leads many of the plants found in ruins to be labelled 'weeds', 'the botanical equivalent of dirt ... plants out of place' (Cresswell, 1997a: 335), assignations that metaphorically chime with conventional conceptions of ruins as blots on the landscape and ridicule the prevailing botanic order imposed by landscapers and gardeners. Often considered exotic and desirable blooms in Victorian times, certain plants which inhabit ruins,

such as hogweed, rhododendron, Japanese knotweed and Himalayan balsam are now viewed as pestilential and tough adversaries in the battle against excessive vegetation, and have been recoded as weeds. Such views are consolidated by the ways in which some plants make human progress through ruined space difficult, announcing that they have taken over use of space. Nettles and thistles sting, robin round-the-hedge and brambles snag and pull at trouser bottoms and roots and tendrils trip up bodies if they move too fast. These troublesome weeds are symptoms of an unruly nature in the same way as animal 'pests', who become evident presences as they move out of their ruined refuge through more cultivated domestic and public urban space, transgressing their assigned marginal or rural


locations. The feared threat posed by these beasts reveals that nature penetrates urban existence, and foreshadows what might happen if is not controlled.

The succour provided by ruins to animals and plants and the ever-ready tendency of species to move out from their confines violates the rural-urban dichotomy. Unlike the tamed and pruned nature that is found in parks, gardens, landscaped areas and is embodied by domesticated animals, wild species do not respect normative patterns of urban order established to keep wildness at bay. And as far as animals are concerned, it is their retention of a 'constitutive wildness', genetically and physically unshaped by deliberate human fashioning (Palmer, 2003b: 51), that is connoted by their encroachment on purified space, as they move outward to steal food from dustbins and create litter, spread disease, prey on domestic animals, eat plants in gardens, shit on pavements and drives, and frighten urban inhabitants. Plants also invade and seed manicured areas as spores float across the city, colonising prized flower beds. The return of the agency of the wild, the role of plants and animals in producing space, becomes evident, transgressing the assignation of nature and underlining the threat posed by the ruin, for as Whatmore and Hinchcliffe declare, '(t)he fecund world of creatures and plants as active agents in the making of environments remains firmly outside the city limits, and those feral spaces in the city that most sustain them are cast as "wastelands" ripe for development' (2003: 42).

Yet these versions of a bounded urban space ignore the ways in which the urban is always a 'complex articulation of multiple networks connecting cities to other sites and trajectories through the comings and goings of materials, organisms and elements as well as people' (ibid: 44; also see Massey, 1993). For within the city there are a host of other sites which accommodate forms of wildlife, such as cemeteries, gardens and allotments, railway sidings and road verges, back gardens, parks, golf courses and river banks. Ironically this may be because as plants and animals seek refuge from an intensively policed countryside and forms of agricultural production which flood terrain with pesticides and herbicides to eradicate their presence, the less regulated areas of the city become refuges for forms of life displaced from the rural. Animals and plants in the city are thus always enmeshed within a network of relationships that extend into the 'rural', that space which is conceived as the opposite of the 'urban' and usually considered to be the realm of the 'natural', the place *for* non-domesticated animals. These biotic flows between the urban and the rural through which life-forms endlessly move foregrounds the presence of wildlife corridors criss-crossing the city, the largely invisible tracks along which animals mark territory and forge hunting and scavenging routes, and plants extend roots and seeds, often utilising channels which have been fabricated by humans, such as sewers and railway lines.

Needless to say, as they become 'swallowed up by the urban', animals must adapt their lives 'to deal with increased human control over, and presence in' the places
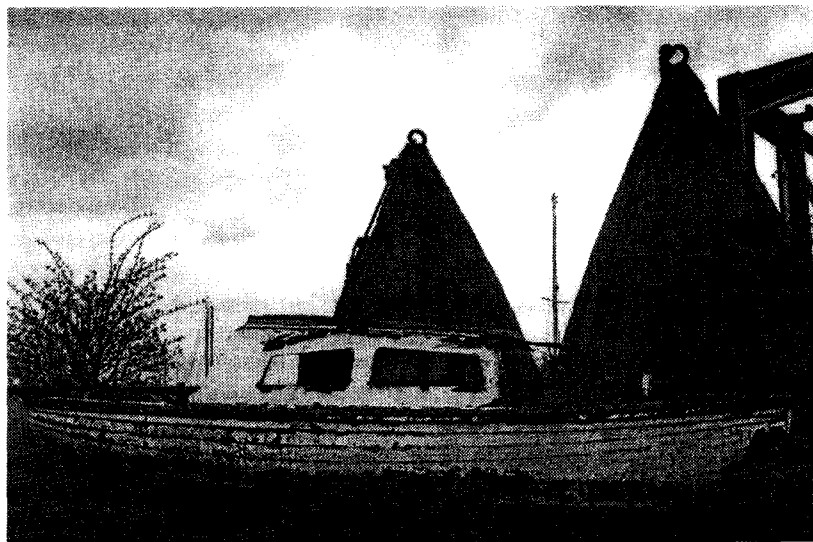
they inhabit (Palmer, 2003a: 66). They must negotiate hazards ranging from 'traffic, domesticated animals, lack of food supply, pollution, increasingly intensified urbanisation' (ibid.) and the presence of other creatures who have also adapted to the urban, whether feral animals or those which have developed symbiotic relationships with people. Thus, for instance, derelict land may provide good cover in which rodents may prosper, in turn affording ideal hunting territory for kestrels and other birds of prey, but this food supply is also likely to serve the activities of domesticated cats. Just as humans impinge upon non-human environments, animals and plants are rarely in any sense purely organisms belonging to the non-human realm of the 'wild' but are continually shaped by the constitution of historical, social (including both non-human and human socialities) and geographical processes.

I have argued that the intrusions of plants and animals into spatial contexts where they are 'out of place', through which creatures exercise 'unbidden, improvised, and sometimes disruptive energies in the ordering of urban space' (Whatmore and Hinchcliffe, 2003: 43), threatens the conventional orderings of rural and urban. The city is considered suitable for domestic pets but not for livestock and feral animals, and only for certain wild species. Zoning delimits the presence of plants and animals, consigning them to specific places on the edge of cities or in wildlife 'reserves' within the urban or rural, yet in derelict space, such zoning policies are rebuked by the multifarious forms of life which prosper in spite of decisions that consign them to be out of place. Yet the desire to see certain forms of wildlife – although not others – in cities highlights the numerous moral ambiguities and contradictions that surround the place of animals and plants and
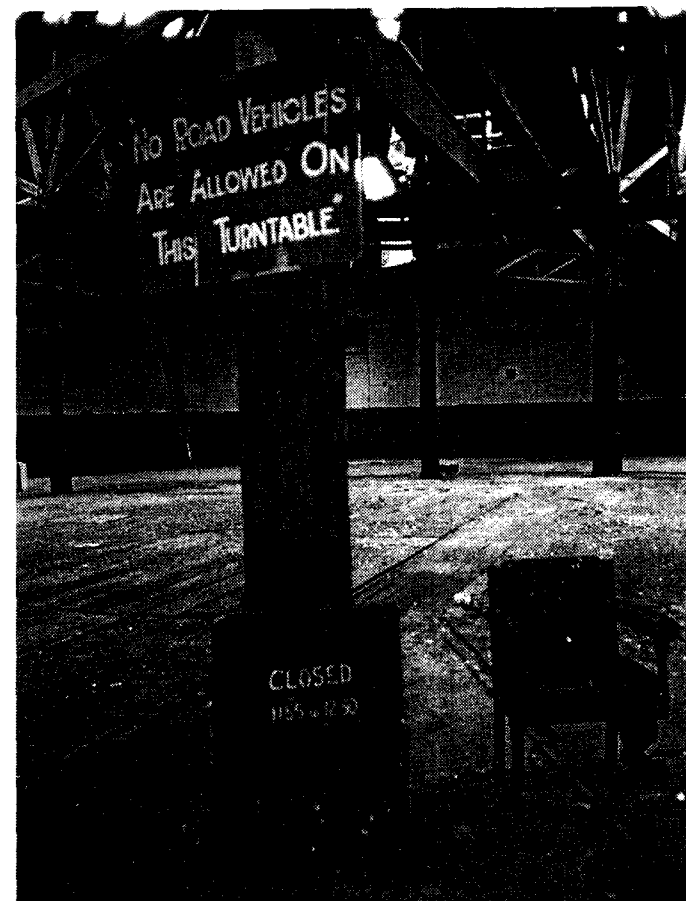
challenge us to think about how cities might become a 'zoopolis – a place of habitation for both people and animals' (Wolch, 2002: 734). For instance, Griffiths, Poulter and Sibley (2000) reveal the ambivalence felt towards feral cats in Hull. For some, their inhabitation of derelict sites is conceived as disorderly, but for others, it feeds desires that look for and celebrate signs of nature, and in the case of these feral cats, they are conceived as wilder and closer to their 'true' nature than their domesticated cousins. The same might be said of the pleasures many urbanites gain from sighting foxes in their streets and gardens, and from coming across the vibrant colours of poppies, willow herb and Himalayan balsam along with other plants attracted to derelict sites.

More strikingly, because they are no longer subject to the application of weedkillers, pesticides and fertilisers, as well as rural methods of extermination, insects

and slugs, nesting birds, rodents and foxes find a home in the increasingly thick undergrowth of ruined space, and thus the ecological value of such sites within the urban can be high. An apparently blighted landscape in Canvey Island in Essex, hemmed in by a superstore and a derelict oil terminal, an 'oasis in a landscape of oil refineries, new housing, massive roundabouts and drive-through McDonald's' (Vidal, 2003), a terrain replete with industrial and household debris, might be described as wasteland. However, it has been described as 'England's little rainforest' because of the density of its rare wildlife population, notably of insects and moths. Created by the debris dredged up as silt and laid down over the land, lacking the features valued as 'beautiful' by conventional aesthetic adjudications of the rural, and subsequently used by children who have burnt grass and cycled and thereby restricted overwhelming tree colonisation, this post-industrial landscape does not at first sight seem to conform to notions of what is ecologically valuable. In the same fashion, assignations of ruined and derelict land – which host large populations of beasts and plants – as wasteland, and as 'useless', are highly partial for they neglect the uses made of such sites by non-humans and their role in diversifying urban ecology.

This interpenetration of the urban and the rural, or of the social and the 'natural' reveal the arbitrary divisions that create such binaries and their spatial mappings. The ways in which animals and plants, as well as humans, produce urban space, most conspicuously at sites such as ruins, call for what Whatmore and Hinchcliffe describe as a 'recombinant ecology', a concept which acknowledges the dynamic reconfiguration of urban ecologies through the ongoing relationships between people, animals and plants (2003: 39). Since the impact of erasing large numbers of ruins at once would be considerable in terms of diminishing the richness of urban ecology, it seems particularly inapt to identify ruins as dead spaces, conceived, in true colonial fashion, as *terra nullius*, devoid of value, purpose and life. For like all forms of urban and rural space, ruins are heterogeneously co-produced by humans and non-humans (Murdoch, 2003) which are connected to the site by numerous flows, routes and networks of association. Nature is thus not in any sense pure and distinct from the humans but part of the hybrid environments to which both belong, which they both create, and which constrain and enable their activities.

Conclusion

This chapter has been concerned to show that far from vacant, waste spaces in which 'nothing happens', industrial ruins are thickly woven into local leisure practices ranging from the carnivalesque to the mundane, and have been utilised as exemplary, experimental spaces from which to broadcast possible alternative eco-centric, artistic and social futures in the city. Representations of industrial ruins are

woven into popular culture, typically serving as stage sets for cinematic portrayals of dystopian futures, spectacular action, dissident identities and nostalgia for the demise of socialities based around heavy industries; all forms of depiction which testify to popular conjectures about the characteristics of the contemporary city and its future. Finally, in expanding ideas about sociality to include the non-human use of ruins, we can identify the ways in which many derelict sites serve as excellent urban nature reserves, helping to confound the binaries between urban-human and rural-'natural'. All these practical uses are at variance to conventional notions about what urban space ought to be used for, and they are enabled by lack of surveillance and regulation, by the under-determined characteristics of ruined space. There are few surveillant cameras and little of the disciplinary gaze of others, few preferred routes along which bodies are channelled, and little semblance of material and spatial order to suggest that bodies should engage with space in preferred ways. In addition, the impact of the unruly affordances of ruins on bodies, and the subsequent coercion of people into entanglements and performances which disrupt normative understandings about what to do, promote scope for reflexive improvisation. Accordingly, the practices identified above hint at the disorderly effects of ruins, and their performance further contributes to assumptions about this perceived disorder. In focusing more tightly on the characteristics of ruined space, the next chapter explores these notions of urban order and disorder in greater critical depth.

transformative recognition' (ibid.: 8). The knowledge that emerges out of the confrontation with these phantoms is not empiricist, didactic or intellectual but empathetic and sensual, understood at an intuitive and affective level.

The necessity to supplement commodified, official and expert memories and interrogate the principles which underpin their construction, and to imagine beyond these limits backwards and forwards, is not merely accomplished through the fabrication of subaltern accounts which rely on similar principles of 'historical truth' and evidence; it also requires that we 'make things up in the interstices of the factual and the fabulous, the place where the shadow and the act converge' (ibid.: 196–7); in places like ruins. This kind of remembering and storytelling implies an ethics about confronting and understanding otherness which is tactile, imaginative and involuntary. It cannot pretend to be imperialistic because it must be aware of its own contingent sense-making capacities, and because it allows external interruption and sensory invasion, is porous and refuses fixity. Becoming in the ruin involves a politics of producing, representing and imagining space which undertakes a continual enfolding of fragments: bits of ideas, things and sensations that draw up a temporary field of affect that connects with memories and half-understood myths. The objects, spaces and traces found in ruins highlight the radical undecidability of the past, its mystery, but they simultaneously invoke a need to tell stories about it. The difference in the kinds of stories narrated in ruins is that they do not masquerade as seamless or posit sequentiality and causality. Instead, they implicitly acknowledge their own suppositions, fantasies, desires and conjectures. Such reconfigurings of the past may 'implode into the present in ways that unsettle fundamental social imaginary significations' (Landzelius, 2003: 196).

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Conclusion

(The form of ruins) 'must be respected as integrity, embodying a history that must not be denied. In their damaged states they suggest new forms of thought and comprehension, and suggest new conceptions of space that confirm the potential of the human to integrate itself, to be whole and free outside of any predetermined totalising system. There is an ethical and moral commitment in such an existence and therefore a basis for community'

Woods, *War and Architecture*

Throughout this book, I have argued that industrial ruins are an integral part of capitalist expansion, are being produced more rapidly as global production and commodification speeds up, as new products are insistently sought and new markets and more profitable production processes are relentlessly hunted. Whilst they testify to the unevenness of capitalist expansion, revealing sudden local economic recessions within a broader global dynamism which creates grateful recipients of capital flow elsewhere, ruins also signify the sheer waste and inefficiency of using up places, materials and people. Moreover, as glaring signs of instability, ruins deride the pretensions of governments and local authorities to maintain economic prosperity and hence social stability, and give the lie to those myths of endless progress which sustain the heightened form of neo-liberal philosophy through which a globalising capitalist modernity extends. Instead, ruins demonstrate that these processes are inexorably cyclical, whereby the new is rapidly and inevitably transformed into the archaic; what was vibrant is suddenly inert, and all subsides into rubbish in the production of vast quantities of waste.

The ruin marks an end, a sudden fatality, which can be a shock if – like other buildings habitually passed by as part of daily routes – they seem to be enduring fixtures in the landscape. They are thus timely reminders that buildings never last for ever, highlighting the fluidity of the material world. They bring to mind new buildings, constructed to promise future prosperity as they enrol new energies and flows into their orbit, but these too will crumble and decay when they are no longer

deemed economically useful. Perhaps, though, the kinds of new structures that tend to be erected in the contemporary city – the retail sheds and assembly-kit industrial units – will simply be taken apart and reassembled elsewhere, creating an instant gap and erasing any trace of their existence.

To mask this wasting process, the suddenly obsolete, whether space or commodity, is often quickly consigned to history and eradicated from memory, for where this is not the case, the resulting signs of waste – ruins – stand as an alarming rebuke to the visions of progress which insist that all space is ripe for utilisation. Ruins and other forms of 'wasteland' are thus tarnished by their association with economic decline and the failure to quickly replace them with something more contemporary. They cannot be accommodated into the currently preferred flows and planning regimes of the city. Apparently dangerous, ugly and function-less, they are further characterised as spaces for 'deviant' social practices, and as blots on the landscape. Yet I have shown that although they signify the depredations wrought by a destructive capitalism and despite the dystopian prognoses of bureaucrats and planners, there is much of value that can be reclaimed from industrial ruins. For through their very allegorical presence, ruins can cause us to question the normative ways of organising the city and urban life, and they contain within them stimuli for imagining things otherwise. Hidden in ruins are

forgotten forms of collectivity and solidarity, lost skills, ways of behaving and feeling, traces of arcane language, and neglected historical and contemporary forms of social enterprise.

Partly this work has been a celebration of ruins as a contribution to studies which foreground a politics of pleasure and sensuality. My interpretation of ruins is informed by different preoccupations to those articulated by earlier celebrants of classical and rural ruins, who mobilised an aesthetic grounded in romanticism and an ethics in which the overwhelming power of God or nature endured, whilst the puny, prideful attempts of humans to achieve immortality disappeared into ruin and oblivion. Although I have taken some critical cues from the gothic perspectives which constitute the most prevalent contemporary appreciation of ruins, I veer away from their dystopian tributes to gloominess and decay: instead concentrating upon the vitality, seething possibilities and manifold forms of life (and past life) which dwell within ruins. And my approach is certainly in opposition to the official, negative designations of ruins as spaces of absence, desuetude and waste.

Ruins stand in rather glaring contrast to the reinvented fabric of much contemporary urban space. For absent in their disordered realms are the usual sheen of aesthetic order, the surveillance of people and non-human life, the placing of things and humans in specific spaces, and the self-conscious awareness that limits
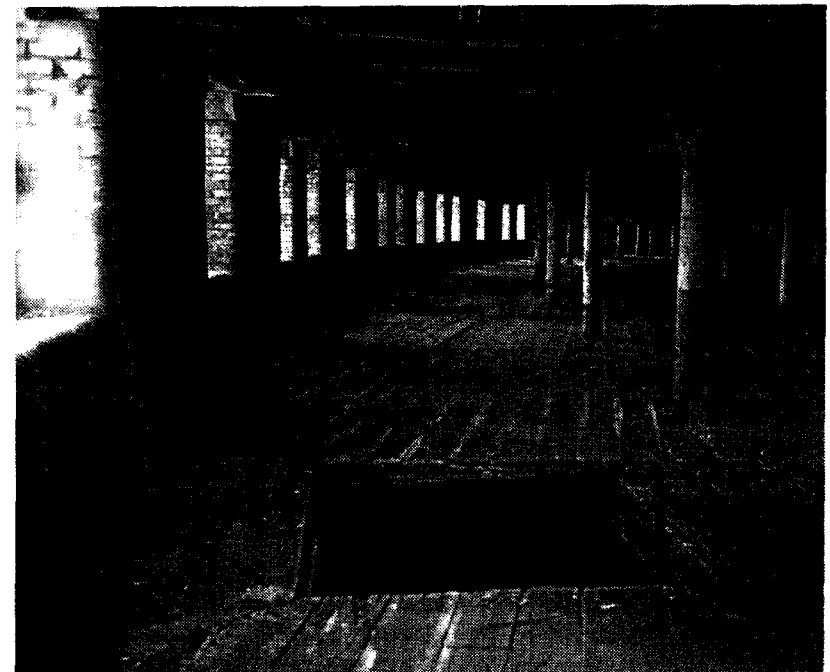
corporeal expression in the midst of others. My contention is not that these processes of ordering and regulating space are unnecessary, or that total disorder should spread across the city. Disordered space can have no value if it is the norm. My point is that these regulatory processes, driven by the extension of commodification, disciplinary cultures, the prevalence of themed and single purpose space, the purification of so many urban spaces, the expulsion of what is superfluous to designed and encoded places, have become too dominant. Urban modernity has been characterised by a tension between the disorder brought by continual change and the flux of urban life with its infinite variety and multiple, incommensurable identities, and the rationalising impulse to classify and rationalise space. In western cities, these latter processes are marginalising the carnivalesque and reducing the degree of interaction with spatial and social diversity. Or else they produce spatial formations in which difference is commodified and contained, and thereby make it difficult to identify the innumerable ambiguities which occur in all social space. Industrial ruins stand as material critiques of these processes, rebuke the shiny images through which the city is marketed, the preferred urban lifestyles and activities. They reveal that the city is not constituted out of an organised web of interconnected, discrete spaces. Instead it includes spaces incommensurable with such containment. For besides ruins, cities also contain scruffy areas behind advertising hoardings, rubbish dumps, undeveloped brownfield sites, culverts and canals, land underneath motorway flyovers, the surroundings of rail lines, junk and scrap yards, and many species of scrubland.

I have attempted to critique these regulatory processes and the urban spaces they produce in three main ways. First of all, I want to contradict common-sense notions that ruins are places of uselessness and emptiness. I have shown how assumptions about the place of plants and animals in the city are interrogated by the rich ecological possibilities of ruins, and the wealth of animal and plant life that can inhabit derelict space. This abundance of nature reveals that the city is never solely a human realm but is criss-crossed by spores, hunting trails and territories, despite eradication programmes. With distinctions between urban and rural consequently becoming blurred, ruins suggest that city space might be produced to accommodate plant and animal life, particularly as the countryside itself becomes increasingly sterile and threatening. In addition, I have discussed how ruins provide unsupervised play spaces for adults and children in which a range of adventurous, carnivalesque activities can be pursued, permitting an engaged sensuous interaction with the materiality of the city and a liberation of the body from urban constraints. Besides these practices, ruins also offer a site for more 'respectable' forms of recreation, including dog-walking and gardening, uses which reveal the dearth of public space in some urban areas, and they can also function as spaces for accommodation and car parking. Furthermore, ruins are utilised for artistic practice, ranging from their casual use by graffiti artists to more

organised schemes which utilise them as temporary galleries. And despite their vilification as spaces of danger, film-makers make wide use of ruins as stage sets for a range of purposes; through the stories they purvey, images of ruins circulate through popular culture where they metaphorically articulate particular contemporary themes. Rather than spaces which contain nothing and are useless, it is apparent that ruins contain a host of unregulated activities which are marginalised or forbidden elsewhere. They provide an outlet for social practices and forms of life which are subject to intense scrutiny in other places. Ruins are thus enrolled into a host of networks which sew them back into the city in new ways.

Secondly, I have shown that in ruins, the normative assignations of people, things, animals and plants to distinct spaces in which they are supposed to behave according to prescribed ways, are entirely violated. This shows up the systematic contextualisation of objects in space, through which they become commodities and are enrolled into technologies of display. Cities are thus replete with such orderings, but in ruins, the lack of order can produce insights into how such regimes operate and foreground alternative ways of placing, suggesting alternative aesthetics and interactions. In ruins, instead of pre-arranged spectacles, the visual scene beheld is usually composed of no evident focal point but an array of apparently unrelated things. There are extraordinary and incomprehensible objects which are not commodities, indecipherable scrawls, obscure functions and sensations to assimilate. This decentring of visual order contrasts with the dominant aesthetic order of the city, for the smooth surfaces and tidy consignment of things to maintain preferred notions of attractiveness are absent in ruins. Through this aesthetic divergence, the disarray of ruins can promote an awareness of the constructedness of normative visual encodings and suggest that there are alternative ways of looking at space. Other senses are similarly disrupted: the tactilities, smells and sounds usually experienced are absent and replaced by a sensual order which initially overwhelms but again acts to critique the expunging of sensual affordances from the city and foregrounds other, pleasurable ways of sensing the world. As a further consequence of this sensual disordering, the perfomative conventions of the city must be discarded in the ruin. Given the potential dangers and the affordances of surfaces, movement can rarely be seamless and out of such disruptions, and an unreflexive awareness of sensual corporeality may emerge. Such sensual confrontations point towards an openness towards difference and discomfort which engenders a critical perspective towards deeply entrenched bodily enactions and the regulated space which contains them and suggests ways in which the city might be ordered otherwise. They foster imaginative apprehensions of urban space, alternative modes of moving through the city and ways of encountering otherness which involve dialogue, creativity and improvisation. Such responses to difference are at variance to the individualistic consumption-oriented practices which pervade the commodified, regulated, spectacular city

Thirdly, I have looked at how social remembering is inscribed upon the city through the commodification of memory, expertise and mediatisation, processes which act to fix memory and externalise the ways in which people, events, practices and places are remembered. Deeply etched with the power to shape what is forgotten and remembered – a power marked by class, gender and expertise – certain forms of commemoration, notably the increasing production of heritage sites, dominates the imprinting and performance of memory on urban space. I have suggested that industrial ruins are places from which counter-memories can be experienced, although unlike the carefully staged, hegemonic inscriptions of memory upon space, these memories are incommunicable although extremely powerful. Ruins offer different ways of remembering the past. They are already material allegories of the imperfect way in which the past is remembered, replete with loss and confusion. Also, they provoke sensual and involuntary ways of remembering, which gesture towards those impressions and half-remembered bits of knowledge which are just beyond grasp although they may or may not once have been familiar. As such, they cannot be effectively written down and described and therefore contrast with the official and commodified attempts to fix memory, although their propensity to shock us back into a vague past is not inconsiderable. Finally, ruins are inhabited by numerous ghosts, absent presences in the traces of life and work, inarticulate forces which again only offer a hint of the past and

require us to fill in the blanks but give a profound impression of the seething life which surrounded industrial spaces and has largely been forgotten.

In sum, the themes of this book have been organised to offer a broader critique of urban life in a period in which strategies for arranging urban space seem insufficiently nuanced and notions of civic order are gaining a stranglehold which threatens to choke much of the life out of cities. This work is concerned to offer other ways for using and reading the city, for making space in individual ways, creating paths and performing otherwise, sensing, fantasising and desiring in the city, contacting the ghosts and being possessed by them as a means to decentre propriety. Rather than those spaces of ordered disorder, in which the carnivalesque is manufactured and the preferred disposition is a controlled decontrol of the emotions, ruins are spaces in which alternative emotions, senses, socialities, desires, and forms of expressiveness and speculation are provoked by their disorder and affordances.

Putting forward practical suggestions to ameliorate the vilification of ruins and to moderate the excesses of papering over the city and theming space is difficult. The accidental state of ruins is not something that can be legislated for and it

seems cranky to argue that decay should be succoured. Nevertheless, the pleasures of ruins indicate that too much urban space is impoverished through prescriptions about which social activities may take place, and it is tainted by the homogeneity of aesthetic encodings which endow space with pre-ordained meaning. Idiosyncrasies and contingencies are an affront to such schemes. The intensity of regulation impedes the occurrence of accidents and things which do not fit in. Ultimately, then, there needs to be a radical overhaul of the urban design process so as to allow difference, oddness and incongruous juxtapositions. A host of alternative forms of public space – in which people may play, mingle, linger and mix with non-humans – are called for, spaces full of objects that are not commodities, spaces whose function is open to interpretation and inarticulate spaces which contain a range of dissident planes, perspectives and textures.

As far as ruins are concerned, there is a case for a politics which allows them to remain, to crumble at their own pace, to ultimately form a gap which reveals where something was in contradistinction to spaces of memorialisation, perhaps somewhat akin to the remnants of spaces retained as wounds which radiate loss in the architecture of Daniel Libeskind (see Merewether, 1997: 37). Such a politics would problematise social memory from the start for it is only through confronting absence, identifying change and acknowledging disappeared potentialities that the rigidities of official forms of commemoration and heritage can be recognised and critiqued. In this fashion, 'the city itself becomes an archival form constituted from the fragments and shards of memory traces' (ibid.) rather than a stage for fixing preferred memories.

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