Fall 2011

# Mapping the Residual Landscape: Dilapidation, Abandonment, and Ruin in the Built Environment

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## Comments

This is the Author's Accepted Manuscript of the article published in Environment, Space, Place, volume 3, issue 2, Fall 2011, pages 51-81.
Full-text of this article is available from the Philosophy Documentation Center.

# MAPPING THE RESIDUAL LANDSCAPE:

# DILAPIDATION, ABANDONMENT, AND RUIN IN THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT*

*Environment, Space, Place* 3(2): 51-81. 2011.

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## ABSTRACT

This article examines the extent to which spaces are structuring influences on, or targets of, action. Two factors and their interactions are presented: the extent to which a space is 1) maintained and 2) used. As these factors increase in strength, the structural influences of a space increase while agential opportunities are diminished. Conversely, as spaces become dilapidated and abandoned, structural forces are weakened and the potential for creative action heightens. These spaces can be conceptualized as elements of the 'residual landscape': spaces left behind by socio-historical processes and practices. Special cases are considered where the factors are inversely related and issues of structure and agency are complicated. A brief case study serves to illustrate each type of space and the factors which operate therein.

### *Structure, Agency, and Space*

Not so long ago, and sometimes even still today, anyone making the assertion that space[1] matters could expect to have their comment received with skepticism or open hostility (Soja 1989). Lingering objections aside, the old idea that the spatial environment is intimately linked with society (Simmel 1997) is no longer a controversial one. Whether created and ordered by

economic forces or specific users (e.g. Logan and Molotch 1987), space affects us in numerous ways.[2] It can, for example, "create and reproduce social hierarchies and equalities, reinforce or undermine ideologies, and enable and promote some practices over others" (Tickamyer 2000, 806). It can influence interaction (Sennet 1990), reinforce beliefs and norms (Bourdieu 1979, 1990), provide cues for behavior (Rapoport 1982), influence collective memory and interpretations of the past (Boyer 1994, Olick and Robbins 1998), and fix or stabilize social relations in general (Giddens 1994; Simmel 1997). Even in virtual space we are not entirely free of space: we are so accustomed to its influences that these are designed into computer systems so that we can more effectively operate within them (Harrison and Dourish 1996).

Today, fortunately, the major debate has shifted from *whether* space matters, to *how* space matters and how it works. Current theory suggests a reciprocal relationship between space and society: that spatial arrangements are both products and producers of social arrangements (e.g. Lefebvre 1991). Thus, it has been argued that "social structures cannot be *practiced* without spatial structures, and *vice versa*" (Gregory 1978, 121, emphasis in original). Despite such assertions, we are necessarily left with a puzzle: how can this insight be used to improve spatial research and theory? Space may be important, but is that importance to be found in conceptualizing space as a revealing outcome or indicator of social life (e.g. Gans 2000; Giddens 1994), or as a factor that influences social life (Bourdieu 1979, 1990)? In other words, to what extent are spatial arrangements outcomes or causes of social arrangements?

An important step toward answering this question is provided by Gieryn (2002), who suggests a model of spatiality based on concepts borrowed from the sociology of technology. Buildings, and planned space in general, can be compared to machines or other technological objects in that they are designed and built to perform specific tasks (2002). Similar to

technological objects, Gieryn argues that there are three 'moments' to be considered in the life course of a building: 1) design, 2) black boxing, and 3) flexibility.

Buildings do not spring into existence out of nothingness but are carefully planned (moment 1). The initial plan of a building is intended to embody the desired outcomes of those individuals or groups that will be responsible for the building's existence. This is largely a process of creative agency in that the building, at this point, is largely an outcome of intentions (and, of course, whatever influences structure those intentions). Once construction is completed, the building has the tendency to fix or stabilize social relations (moment 2). To some extent this corresponds with the intentions of the builders and "[t]he interests of powerful voices in the design process are etched into the artifact itself" (2002, 42). The completed building takes on the aspect of structure in that it influences the behavior and relations of individuals within it. Users do not see the building 'work' and may or may not be conscious of it working at all. Even when conscious of it, they do not necessarily understand what it is doing, or how, any more than the average person really understands what is going on inside of their microwave or television. Instead, the completed building is comparable to a black box, its internal workings largely out of sight and out of mind, but working nonetheless.

Yet, the power of this structuring influence is "only measurable … not limitless or permanent" (2002, 44). At some time, most likely multiple times or continuously, during the life of a building, individuals may act back upon it (moment 3). Buildings are constantly being reused for other purposes, redesigned, renovated, or redecorated. Efforts of this may have small or large effects on the influence the building has on those within (or without). On the other hand, without making any physical changes to a building, users are constantly reinterpreting what it means and, thus, reworking its symbolic influence on people.

At no time does a building or space[3] necessarily fall entirely into one of these 'moments,' nor will all buildings necessarily experience each moment at all. Some plans never come to fruition. Just as likely, a given building will go through the moments repeatedly. At no moment is either agency or structure entirely absent or contingent. Reciprocal effects are evident throughout the process, with agency or structure appearing to gain the upper hand at various times only to defer to the other at the next moment. Importantly, the argument supplies an adequate model for analyzing how space works inclusive of reciprocal effects.

The model is useful for an analysis of *how* space works because it illustrates how spatial arrangements are *both* consequences *and* causes of social arrangements. Different locations will fall more-or-less into different moments of the model at different times, and the specific moment will guide researchers' interpretations of how a given space matters. Yet, no two locations are identical. As Hirst notes, "[s]paces have characteristics that affect the conditions in which power can be exercised, conflicts pursued and social control attempted" (2005, 3). Keeping this in mind, and with the grounding provided by Gieryn, it is therefore appropriate to seek out additional, basic factors that will modify the agency/structure dynamic by modifying the power of spatial black boxing and the potential for flexibility.

The current article proposes two such factors, and specifically the interactions thereof, that could be profitably applied to the study of specific spatial contexts: 1) the maintenance of space, and 2) the use of space. To the extent that these factors are present in a given space, that space can be considered an intentional 'working' component of the social and physical landscape. Yet many spaces are not maintained, are unused, or both to varying degrees. When this is so, a location can be considered part of the 'residual landscape,'[4] left behind by socio-historical processes and practices. Working spaces are those which, currently, are most vital to

dominant social relationships and therefore those which experience and undergo the most thorough socio-spatial control whereas residual spaces are, to some degree and for some duration, less crucial to that order. As such, they are less thoroughly controlled and present greater opportunities for alternative interpretation or action. It is argued that these factors shed additional light on the role of space as both product and producer of social arrangements and that these factors, in turn, should be investigated to determine their immediate antecedents and the social location of various types of spaces.

### *Upkeep, Dilapidation, and Disorder*

The process of maintenance and repair is germane to all physical and social systems although it is greatly understudied (Graham and Thrift 2007). If buildings and other planned social spaces can be compared to machines in that they are designed and built to perform specific tasks (Gieryn 2002) then, like machines, buildings must be maintained and kept in proper working order if they are to operate correctly and fulfill their purposes. Machines that are neglected, that are not regularly serviced, will begin to fall apart. As this process of decay progresses, it will be accompanied by steady drops in performance until the unit ceases operation entirely. If buildings are designed to control, to give meaning, preserve memory, or simply serve as homes, they must likewise be maintained or, over time, their ability to perform these tasks will be compromised.

Perhaps the best-known literature concerned with the proper maintenance and operation of space is that of the 'broken windows' lineage (Wilson and Kelling 1982). This familiar argument suggests that dilapidated environments indicate that social order has broken-down in a given area; that either nobody is charged with upholding said order or that those so

charged do not care enough to enforce it. Once indicators of disorder are noted (e.g. broken windows, graffiti, litter, etc.) people are more likely to further violate whatever order once held. Neighborhoods will become host to more severe deviance, drug dealers and muggers may use the area to practice their trades under the belief that no one will interfere with these activities. Whether these signs of decaying social order are accurate or not, so the argument goes, is irrelevant. Perception is the important factor and behavior will follow.

There is no need to agree with broken windows theory, however, for one to witness how poorly maintained spaces are poor social machines in purely physical ways. Th ere is certainly no shortage of research available, for example, illustrating that poorly maintained schools make for poor learning environments (e.g. Kozol 1991)**.** Without funding, roofs leak, temperatures may become unbearable in summer and winter, and bathroom facilities may be inadequate. Similarly, dilapidated housing makes for a poor home (Joint Center for Housing Studies 2006). Collapsing supports, inadequate protection against the environment, infestations of vermin, faulty electricity, and general fi lth make for poor living conditions and, following from this, poor quality of life.

Mechanistic metaphors, although useful, may detract from understanding the importance of the maintenance or dilapidation of spaces. Spaces are organized to semiotically convey meanings5 to the viewer or user (Basso 1996; Giddens 1994; Rapoport 1982). Apart from simply keeping ‘spatial machinery’ running, upkeep serves the semiotic purposes of attributing a sense of power and stability to a space. A well-maintained building suggests that whatever social arrangement it embodies is somehow immune or external to the passing of historical or physical time (McAllister 2001). This is the case with Victorian era banks “which are stunning in their use of marble floors, classical columns, spacious banking halls with lofty cupolas and stained

glass" and which "breathe 'security,' 'trust,' 'reliability,' and above all 'prosperity'" (Baldry 1999, 542). This grandeur would convey a very different message to potential clients were the floors filthy, the columns cracked, and the stained-glass windows broken. Similarly, although built structures can serve as mnemonic devices (Olick and Robbins 1998), those which are not maintained will recall only a jumbled and distorted memory that is much more open to idiosyncratic interpretations (Edensor 2005a, 2005b).

Upkeep is a critical factor for the proper operation of spaces, regardless of the type of space or what is considered reasonable maintenance. Clearly the standards and needs will vary by location—most spaces will not require quite the same level of presentation as Victorian banks—but this basic requirement, and the general consequences should it be neglected, cuts across contexts. Poorly maintained space is less potent and influential in terms of its ecological, physical, *and* semiotic influences over individuals.

Having said all this, it is necessary to state that the criteria for what constitutes appropriate upkeep are necessarily relative. Most spaces we are familiar with are in some way linked with modern authority and, as such, must be demarcated clearly, kept clean and uncluttered (Sennett 1990). As discussed above, this allows a certain clarity to the discourse or influences of a space. Yet alternative spaces exist which do not conform to these standards of upkeep. Clark (2004) offers an intriguing look inside a café owned and operated by punk rockers where visitors are confronted with clutter, dirt, odors, walls haphazardly covered with posters and flyers, and overall cramped quarters. The conditions of this space are actually intentional; they are meant as a counter-narrative, and challenge, to modern authority and try to "off end mainstream good taste" (2004, 21). Only kindred spirits would visit, much less frequent,

a space like this. In this cafe, there is an image, a symbolic order under-girding a social order, which must be maintained just as there is in mainstream spaces. The goal of upkeep is the same cross-culturally, even if the criteria for what constitutes upkeep vary.

*Use and Abandonment*

According to Herbert Gans (2002), the most important characteristic of space, that determines its social relevance, is whether or not it is *used*. Gans distinguishes between 'natural space' and 'social space.' The former is merely "air over dirt" (2002, 329), space that exists, but which is not being put to any use: no one lives, works, or plays there. The duty spatial researchers are charged with, Gans contends, is to investigate how natural space is transformed through use into social space (e.g. how space is colonized, occupied, and attributed with meaning). One can argue that the reverse is also interesting, that the process by which used spaces regress into disuse, and the consequences therein, is worthy of research as well: study of the processes, differential interests, or social arrangements that make once-thriving places revert into a 'natural' state of disuse.

Use figures prominently in Jane Jacobs' (1961) monumental study of urban space as the primary factor influencing the working order of cities. The character of cities—whether they are interesting or dull, safe or dangerous, and so forth—is a direct function of the extent to which they are used by people. Other factors, such as formal policing, are at best only secondary in importance. Jacobs saw in bustling city streets a rhythm of largely peaceable relationships among acquaintances and strangers, a sense of generalized, public trust built upon dense networks of interaction. Her study reveals a concern for both the breadth and depth of use: for the number of uses a space is put to as well as the number of users therein. Ideally, both will be present, with

the safest and most pleasant urban environments being those that are bustling with numerous activities at all times of day or night. Variety and quantity of both uses and users contribute to the informal system of checks and balances that ensure a working space. Similar to the material aspects of space described in the previous section, they provide cues, even to strangers unfamiliar with a particular space, regarding proper behavior within the emergent social order. Should cues prove insufficient, the network of informal relations ensures an equally powerful actual enforcement by concerned others—Jacobs' "eyes on the street" (1961, 35). Of course, when use is low or absent, no similar guarantees of order will be forthcoming. Sparsely used spaces are also potentially dangerous spaces, open to violations of social order where few 'eyes' are about to lend a hand should it be needed.

Getting people to use space has become a popular concern. William H. Whyte's (1980, 1988) work with designing public space so that it appeals to and attracts users still stands as an exemplar of this concern, as does the considerable body of work on Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) which builds on the work of researchers like Jacobs and Whyte (e.g. Geason and Wilson 1989). Doubtless such efforts at designing use into built spaces have had laudable results, but design, alone, should not be overemphasized. Even the best laid plans may go awry when natural disasters, economic downturns, and other external factors turn the busiest of designed spaces into abandoned no-man's-lands. Use, no matter what the nature of that use, stands perpetually in the shadow of the threat of transformation from economic redevelopment (Logan and Molotch 1987) and political agendas (Mollenkopf 1983); neighborhoods may be replaced with businesses, parks with neighborhoods, and so on. Similarly, it is certainly possible to become overly optimistic about the concept of use itself in an absolutist sense. Some uses, after all, are not necessarily mutually beneficial to all people within or near a

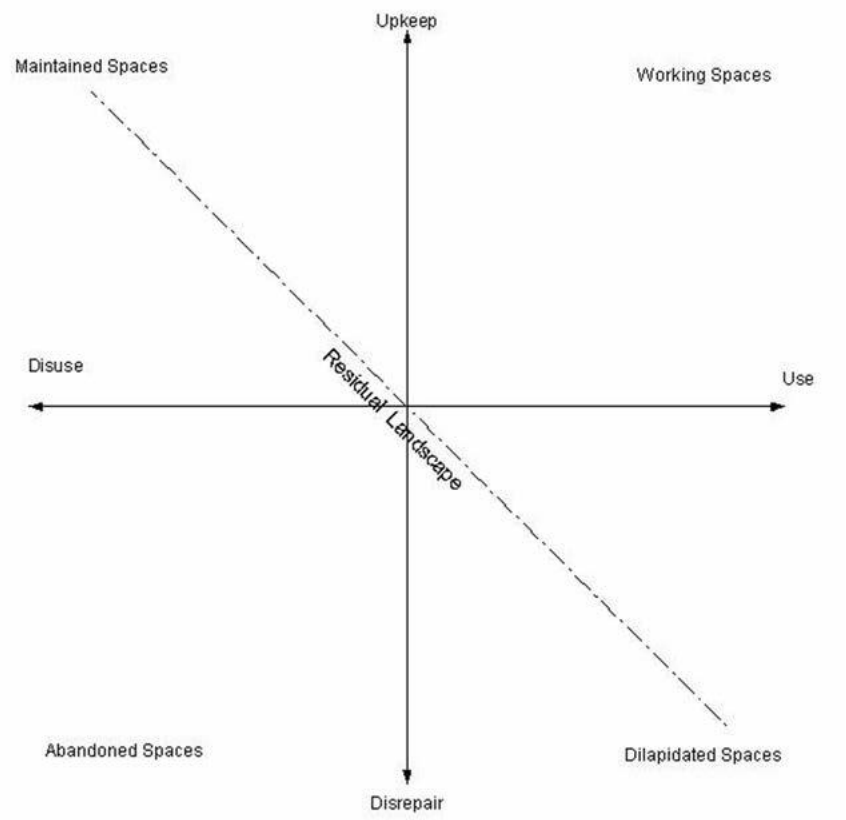
given space. Spaces designed for vehicular use are not as useful for pedestrians (Appleyard 1981; Demerath and Levinger 2003) whereas spaces ideal for pedestrians may also be ideal for the predators who prey upon them (Anderson 1990).

For our purposes, it is not necessary to decide whether specific uses are 'good' or 'bad,' only to illustrate a theoretical consensus that just as space matters, so does use. Well-used spaces are fundamentally and socially different from spaces which experience little use. Social order and meaning, regardless of what specific order or meanings, rely on interaction for their creation, perpetuation, and negotiation (Demerath 2002; Goff man 1959; Mead 1934). Space, in addition to other factors, in turn influences the extent and duration of interaction (Demerath and Levinger 2003; Jacobs 1961; Whyte 1980, 1988) and, therefore, the stability and power of social order (or the lack thereof ) that follows. This in part, explains why it is far easier to commit certain crimes in some spaces than others (Anderson 1990; Geason and Wilson 1989). It is more difficult, though not impossible, for a single space user to define a situation as one of criminal opportunity when too many other users, with contradictory definitions, are present and maintaining another order. At the very least, the *type* of crime committed will by necessity be of the less visible variety. Pickpocketing, for example, is a more typical occurrence in crowded streets than outright robbery. Without dense interaction, social order and meaning, of whatever variety, are at the very least unstable and subject to greater levels of contestation even by actors in isolation—shared expectations are more in flux or lacking. In a less abstract sense, the simple dearth of actors present to impose a given social order, be it formal guards monitoring behavior or simply waiters directing patrons toward particular seats in a restaurant, make it necessary for individuals to make decisions for themselves. As space use decreases, opportunities for agents to act freely multiply.

*The Residual Landscape: A Typology*

As spaces become less maintained or less used, they can increasingly be conceptualized as elements of the residual landscape. That is, as spaces left behind to some extent and for some duration by socio-historical processes and practices. Within such spaces, the chances for creative agency multiply through the mechanisms delineated above: 1) decreasing clarity and potency of ecological stimuli, physical influences, and semiotic cues through dilapidation, and 2) a reduction in enforced or exemplified norms through lack of interacting users. Residual spaces, then, are those spaces most subject to either physical or interpretive transformation. This transformation, in turn, can take any form and result from any agent of change: an abandoned prison may become a child's playground just as easily as an actual playground can be replaced by a fully operational prison. Both factors, upkeep/dilapidation and use/disuse, should be considered in relation to one another, but they are not necessarily linearly associated. Figure 1 presents the possible interactions of these factors, with each quadrant representing different configurations. Each quadrant is intended to represent an ideal type and not an essential reality. Actual spaces should not be expected to conform perfectly to a given type. Indeed, different parts of a given space, or the same spaces at different points in time, are likely to vary in terms of which quadrant best characterizes them. Nevertheless, like all typologies, this typology is intended to provide a useful heuristic for discussion and analysis. Each quadrant, and examples of the types of spaces to be found therein, is discussed below.

**Figure 1:** Typology of Spaces in the Residual Landscape




*Working Spaces*

Well-maintained and thoroughly utilized spaces require little description: neat and tidy homes in idyllic suburban neighborhoods where neighbors greet one-another as they pass, slick businesses bustling with activity, public parks with manicured grounds and a generous supply of both workers and idlers. Spaces are designed and built for specific purposes and, when well-maintained and used, they will largely serve these purposes net of other factors. Working spaces serve as a convenient reference category for spatial analysis. Working factories can be compared to rundown or abandoned factories, a particular office building or shopping mall can be tracked over time to see how its operation has changed along with the extent to which its maintenance and use wax or wane. In all such research scenarios, working spaces represent an ideal type and, perhaps, a condition that planners might aspire to.

Though it is easy to idealize working spaces as harbingers of social order and safety, it should not be forgotten that even the most benevolent of spaces operate through control (Foucault 1975; Markus 1993), through constraining the agency of individuals or groups within. Even more importantly, there is a growing concern for the extent to which spaces, especially urban spaces, are becoming considerably less than benevolent as they are employed to pacify and control entire populations. Davis (1992), for instance, draws a startling portrait of Los Angeles as a city designed to control all levels of social strata. The poor and undesirable are entombed within outdoor internment neighborhoods, while those of means are equally entombed in carefully planned spheres of consumption, and never the twain shall meet.

Working spaces are not part of the residual landscape. They have not been left behind by social forces, but are well-maintained, well-used and functional. To that extent, these spaces present the most unambiguous instances of spatial-structural influences upon space users. Social mechanisms, so firmly intact, leave the fewest and weakest of opportunities, relative to other types of spaces, for independent agency. None of this is to proclaim environmental determinism. Even the most thoroughly entrenched spaces may be, and are, continuously contested and reinterpreted (de Certeau 1984; Gieryn 2002; Lefebvre 1991). Over time, working spaces may also degrade into features of the residual landscape, through lack of upkeep or use, thus opening up new opportunities for creative agency and contestation.

*Dilapidated Spaces*

Some social spaces suffer from no lack of use, but are poorly maintained so that use takes place in a rundown and dilapidated context. So-called slums exemplify this type of space as well as a severe global problem. Originally referring to locations of criminal behavior, the word

‘slum’ came to denote any dilapidated area of a city. Today, its usage also includes spontaneous and informal settlements throughout the world’s cities (UN-HABITAT 2003). Slums result when global economic forces, wars, natural disasters, and other exogenous factors force rural dwellers into the city where there is little eff ort made by officials to accommodate the influx (Davis 2006). Typical conditions include excessive crowding, inadequate housing, lack of access to potable water or proper sanitation, and an overall tenuous existence marked by insecurity of tenure.

Slums are especially illuminating in terms of the interaction of structure and agency. Being characterized in part through an excessively dilapidated and unplanned built environment, slums both allow and require creative agency on the part of their residents. Here, “out of necessity, people turn to self-built shanties, informal rentals, pirate subdivisions, or the sidewalks” simply to establish a place to live (Davis 2006, 17). Slumdwellers often resort to stealing electricity and water and make eff orts to establish informal commercial enterprises like grocery stores, bars, and beauty salons (Neuwirth 2007). Wherever slums are found, creative adaptation of existing built forms is common as well. For example, in a Cairo necropolis, people have taken up residence where they “have adapted the tombs in creative ways to meet the needs of the living. Cenotaphs and grave markers are used as desks, headboards, tables, and shelves. String is hung between gravestones to set laundry to dry” (Nedoroscik 1997, 43, as cited in Davis 2006, 33). The end result of adaptive habitations, multiplied many times over within a slum, is often pandemonium:

> “Their form is dynamic: bricks jutting out at odd angles, partial floors framed in concrete, walls that rise only to end abruptly in a tuft of rebar against the soft blue of the sky….

> Houses seem to twist towards the sun, crowding each other for light and air. From a distance there seem to be no roads, no yards, no restful space of any kind. Just a beehive of human habitation" (Neuwirth 2007).

Examples such as these are indicative of the agential capacity of slum dwellers in modifying aspects of the built environment to their own needs. However slums, despite their apparent chaos are not necessarily devoid of social order precisely because they are measurably high in *use.* As described above, informal organization and networking may emerge via the users within these spaces which in turn introduce constraints. Indeed, describing the social order of slums has yielded many classic studies (e.g. Suttles 1968; Whyte 1955) and squatters have been described as operating like "a quasimilitary campaign" (Mangin 1967, 23). More recent explorations reinforce the extent to which, in the lack of formal regulation, slums are thoroughly organized on an informal level and slum dwellers themselves are embedded in strong social networks where they have access to considerable social capital resources. In Rochinha, a slum in Rio de Janeiro, for example, safety and order are considered by residents to be adequately maintained and enforced by local gangs, voluntary associations are formed wherein individuals share aid in times of economic need, and building chores are shared among informal networks of associates (Neuwirth 2007).

Social order within the slum, while present, is not always so benevolent. Many of the informal networks and organization that arises through use are neither peaceable nor mutually beneficial. Instead, these networks are often highly exploitative. For example, even squatters often have to pay unofficial 'rents' through payoff s to criminal gangs, crooked politicians, land speculators, and other squatters. At another level, praising the adaptations made by slum dwellers

as ‘self-help’ tends to ignore the problem that slums represent. As Davis has argued “praising the praxis of the poor [has become] a smokescreen for reneging upon historic state commitments to relieve poverty and homelessness” (2006, 72). Clearly, there are political and moral implications to excessive valorization of agency within slums.

Again, while social order through use thus exists (whatever the nature of that order), slums and other dilapidated spaces are less regulated and less regulating via material mechanisms and the maintenance of those mechanisms. Whatever structural influences operate, they do not derive primarily from physical aspects of the built environment. Instead, through intensive use and through the creation of the intensive informal network that follows (cf. Jacobs 1961), a sort of ‘grassroots’ structure of expectations is enacted.

*Maintained Spaces*

Degree of use can, of course, vary by the time of day, day of the week, or season of the year. Restaurants close, people leave their homes to go to work, banks may not open on Sundays, and bustling tourist destinations may become veritable ghost towns during the off -season. Nevertheless, these locations are well-preserved, perhaps by a skeleton crew, in ready preparation for when they will come back into use.

Similarly, some sites may receive very little use at all regardless of temporal cycles, in terms of both quantity of users and number of uses, and yet still be maintained. In this case, the space may have a sort of value that is not directly linked to use, but which still requires that the social machine be kept in proper working condition. Unpopular but well-funded memorials exemplify this type of location. Such spaces may derive their value instead from their utility as

features of the ‘memoryscape,’ as spaces which fi x social memories, especially those of the authoritative variety (Boyer 1994; Edensor 2005b; Olick and Robbins 1998). Legal requirements also exemplify maintained but unused spaces. William H. Whyte notes how New York City building code requires some buildings to be set back from the street and how large, unused plazas resulted—even in the middle of bustling Manhattan (1980, 1988). Pedestrians may stop and look at plazas, or other spaces, but unless they enter, linger, and interact, cursory glances cannot be considered true use. Here, in addition to satisfying laws, keeping people away (particularly those of the ‘undesirable’ variety), might in and of itself be viewed as a value well worth the cost of disuse by some stakeholders.

The extent to which structuring influences or agential potential are present in maintained spaces varies by the specific type of space (e.g. a museum, a monument, a closed store, a parking lot after hours, etc.) and according to temporal considerations as they relate to that space (e.g. the time of day). Indeed, given the wrong time, a maintained space may be better classified as a working space if that entails increases in use. Nevertheless, authentic maintained spaces will largely structure or regulate their contents via material mechanisms—ecological, physical, and semiotic devices—rather than through the norms arising from use and interaction or through the actual enforcement of those norms. Thus signs giving directions may be clear, gates oiled and locked, and cameras flashing warningly, but there are likely few people present to actually enforce the signs’ warnings, to catch people scaling the fence, or to monitor the cameras. Threats are present but may be lacking teeth, thus creating opportunities for bold or adventurous agents. If these behavioral cures rely on some degree of comprehension on the part of individuals (Giddens 1994; Rapoport 1982), opportunities for agency are opened even further as it cannot be assumed that all agents will clearly understand the message.

Maintained spaces prompt interesting empirical questions regarding people's behavior when they are uncertain who is watching them. To what extent will spatial structural influences yield conformity even when there is a theoretically strong potential for creativity? Likely, the former will prevail as agents assume supervision and order amid physical cues of such (Foucault 1975; Wilson and Kelling 1982), but other factors may temper this proclivity: comprehension of cues, absence of enforcement of cues, reasons to act contrary to indicated expectations, and so on.

*Abandoned Spaces*

Abandoned spaces are the hallmark of contestable spaces, where agency is highest and structuring influences, due to both a) the lack of clear and forceful ecological, physical, or semiotic cues, and b) absent or weakly enforced and exemplified norms emerging from interaction. In many abandoned spaces, the only form of maintained enforcement present is likely to be little more than a locked gate or a 'no trespassing' sign. There is no guide or staff on hand, there are few other users to emulate (save those also at a loss for proper behavior), ecological influences are weathered and possibly ineffectual, while semiotic cues may be unclear or safely disregarded. Save to the extent that structural influences exist within the individual (Bourdieu 1990), even these lingering cues hold little power to constrain or control movement, behavior, and interaction thus leaving visitors relatively free to do as they please. Of the many varieties of abandoned spaces, ruins6 exemplify the relative dearth of constraints that operate therein well:

> "Without guided pathways or social and physical barriers, large ruins become labyrinthine, permitting the making of a multitude of paths. Similarly, there are no temporal restrictions which determine how long one should loiter in one spot. Crawling through dense undergrowth, scrambling over walls and under fences, leaping over hurdles and across gaps, kicking the debris of various qualities along the floor, throwing rubble at chosen targets, and dancing and sprinting across the stretches of flooring rekindle an awareness of the jouissance of expressive childish movement … signs of playful exercise abound in ruins: rope swings hang over wooden beams, windows are everywhere smashed…. Spaces not designed for bodies or formerly prohibited to all but a few can be entered. Visitors can clamber over machines, slide down chutes, climb up ladders, lounge on the boardroom table, and temporarily dwell in large attics, cupboards, storerooms, and offices" (Edensor 2005b, 838).

Similarly, although ruins are like other buildings in that they are reservoirs of social memory (Boyer 1994; Olick and Robbins 1998) they vary considerably from well-maintained sites in terms of how they convey and present it. If museums or monuments, for example, selectively present a specific memory uncluttered by ambiguity and disguise that memory as science, ruins present a muddled memory, contaminated by ambiguity and conflicting memories, but memory nonetheless (Edensor 2005b). Indeed, this type of memory is possibly more 'authentic' simply because of the lack of purposeful alteration, or because alterations, once a part of the standing structure, now also lays in revealing ruin (2005b). For all of these reasons, just as ruins only poorly constrain behavior, so too are ruins also far more open to purposive or accidental interpretive action and their significance can largely be left to the judgment of agents.

In his essay on ruins, Simmel described architecture as “the only art in which the great struggle between the will of the spirit and the necessity of nature issues into real peace” (1959, 259). Social order, in its eff orts to organize and build, is always at odds with the natural order which, through gravity and the elements, attempts to return all such lofty constructions to so much rubble and dust. According to Simmel, most other arts, like painting and writing, exhibit natural elements only in the medium through which human eff ort is expressed—nature is subjugated in the artistic form. In architecture however, nature is present as an equal partner in the human endeavor. Here, building materials are not subjugated but are used according to their own laws. This delicate harmony, Simmel goes on to say, cannot last. The inevitable victory of nature is never so evident as when a structure has turned into a ruin. The resultant mass represents a period “between the not-yet and the no-longer” (1959, 262). This period has elsewhere been described as a “gap in history” (Lozanovska 2003), that is, a period between a discourse that was and a discourse that might be, each embodied and enforced by a complete structure but absent in the intermediate ruins.

Until the time of Baudelaire, ruins, and decay more generally, evoked only negative feelings and conjecture over the causes of such downfall (Rasch 1982). Since that time, the same image or theme is just as likely to evoke pleasure, hope, and optimism. Decay can evoke a connection with an inevitable process: buildings, like people, are born and differentiated from others of their kind before an inevitable decline and decay that, ultimately, will return them to an undifferentiated mass of earth from which new forms will someday arise. Thus, although abandoned spaces like ruins represent the ‘purest’ instantiation of the residual landscape, and

thus the weakest spatial-structural influences, the potential for agency is no more absolute than is the hegemony of structure in working spaces. Ruins, and other spaces of infrequent use and poor upkeep, *because* of their inability to influence or maintain themselves, are those spaces most easily subject to actual reconstruction and redevelopment in addition to reinterpretation (Vergara 1999). The spatial form that follows, the ensuing 'moment' planned and built, will likely introduce constraints and controls along with use and maintenance.

Ruins, of course, are not the only abandoned spaces receiving little upkeep and use and, therefore, are not the only spaces which are particularly conducive to reconstruction and reinterpretation. The wilderness is perhaps the vastest instance of this case and, as environmentalists and ecologists often warn, it is particularly prone to development and devastation. Although, properly speaking, describing the wilderness as 'residual' may be problematic, it likely acts very similarly to ruins in terms of its lack of structuring influences and the freedom of action it allows. Moreover, cities themselves are full of largely abandoned and perhaps only partially maintained spaces that may also be conceptualized as similar to ruins: culverts, alleys, vacant lots, and so forth (Ford 2000). Such liminal spaces may provide a wide range of opportunities for creative agents.

*A Walk Down High Street: An Illustrative Sketch*

Columbus is the largest city in the state of Ohio as well as its capital. High Street, runs north and south through the center of the city and serves as one of its main commercial thoroughfares. There is nothing particularly unique about this street and, indeed, that is why it is of interest here: to give concrete examples to the argument above. A trip down a few blocks of its length, like a trip down nearly any city street anywhere in the world, reveals a variety of diff

erent sights and sounds—a variety of spaces. Some of these are working spaces, some residual, and some are more ambiguous, straddling the gap between that which constrains and that which off ers opportunities for creative agency.

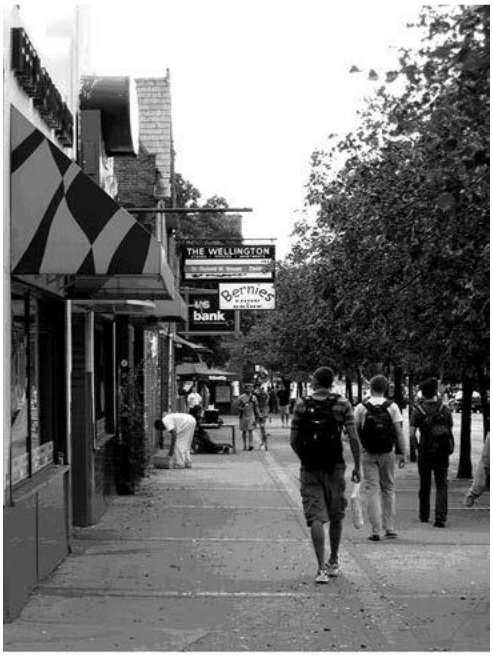
**Figure 2:** The Gateway Center


We begin our trip at the Gateway Center (see Figure 2). This complex of buildings was an attempt to revitalize part of a busy, but rundown, mixed commercial and residential area near the Ohio State University campus (Campus Partners 2002). Older buildings were torn down and replaced by a stylish new complex consisting of stores, restaurants, bars, a movie theater, apartments, and a parking garage. All of these, in design and price, are relatively upscale considering the area and the similar businesses which they displaced. The complex is imposing. It towers high above the surrounding buildings, remnants from an earlier era, and dazzles

with its cleanliness and well-kept construction. Day or night, crowds of people frequent the area: patrons and residents using the many facilities available, workers going to and from their places of employment, and police monitoring the whole affair.

This space is characterized by both high upkeep and high use—it is primarily a 'working' space. The clean, well-ordered buildings and landscaping provide clear cues that nothing here is neglected. The constant crowds assure that all of the intended uses are met at any given time—predominantly consumption uses—and provide cues for what proper behavior is. Due to its thorough upkeep and use, it is rare to see any creative use of the area, to see activity of any sort not in keeping with the original design. Customers contently shop, patrons eat and drink, residents go home for the night. There is little vandalism, only occasional crime considering the number of potential criminals, and generally little out of the ordinary.

**Figure 3:** High Street



Contrast this scene to one just a short walking distance up the same street. Here there is another area of mixed commercial and residential use. This space is perhaps just as busy at any time of day, but it is considerably more rundown and less thoroughly planned (see Figure 3). This section of the street is very similar to that which the Gateway Center was designed to replace: a jumble of shabby stores, restaurants, and apartments representing a cacophony of different designs and historical pedigrees. Some of these buildings are tall while some are short. Some abut closely to the sidewalk and street while others are set further back. The buildings are in various states of disrepair, as are the sidewalks and alleys, and not entirely clean. Through its heavy use and lack of maintenance, this area constitutes a 'dilapidated' space.

For the most part, people take their cues from one another here as well. The predominant activities are the same as those of the Gateway Center, but there is more room for creativity here. The physical space is more chaotic. There are more places that have been adapted by space users as areas to lounge or relax, and no cues as to how long is too long to do so. Vendors, both licensed and unlicensed, can be encountered as well, as they identify similar places of pause and use them for their commercial ventures. Stores may display their wares all the way out onto the sidewalk. Various sorts of street art are also common. Some are examples of vandalism, but others are murals commissioned by business owners themselves to draw attention to their particular property. Political activists, working of their own volition or on behalf of an organization, have identified this as a convenient spot to raise awareness for a variety of issues. Flyers for concerts and clubs are hung on every available surface and handbills dispersed with apparent abandon. Skateboarders and bicyclists speed through or perform stunts on irregular surfaces. While activities like these may not constitute *radical* acts of agency, they display the

greater ability of space users to decide what is appropriate for behavior in this place. This section of the street lapses somewhat into the residual. It may be high in use, but it is low in upkeep, and a profusion of creativity is apparent. Yet, a good deal of social order still exists, as this brief illustration suggests, and the creative acts tend to stay within the ordinary.

**Figure 4:** The Park

Moving further north up the street, we encounter a location that provides a very different experience: a small park. The park is fairly well-maintained, but experiences little use compared to the two areas described above—it is a 'maintained' space. The park is little more than a grouping of benches, tables, and some trees adjacent to the main street (see Figure 4). Again, the upkeep in this area is quite good: the trees are trimmed, litter is managed, and furniture is in good repair as are the stairs and pavement. Full rubbish bins are the only true sign that upkeep could be improved. It is clearly designed to be a welcoming pause amid the busy mixed commercial and residential use areas nearby. In observing the space, sometimes the typical park

uses are evident: people relaxing or eating lunch for example. However, there are rarely very many people using this space at any given time. While the park is clean and maintained and some indicators of proper behavior are evident (e.g. the picnic tables which invite one to sit and eat), the absence of other users provides greater liberties for those few who do visit the park to do with it is as they please. Some creative uses are evident in addition to the more traditional uses of a park. It is popular among the city's homeless as a place to sleep or ask for money. Police calls to the park are also not uncommon, as fights, drinking, and drug use sometimes occur there. The park may be welcoming to people, but its semiotic cues are not powerful enough to dependably control what people are supposed to do once they are there. The park represents how complicated liminal areas—those neither entirely working nor entirely residual—can be. While it provides, or suggests, some constraints on behavior through its built environment, it also allows a certain amount of creativity among its users.

We will make one last stop a few meters to the north of the park, but further below—underground. Here, a drainage tunnel serves to facilitate the flow of water under High Street to the nearby Olentangy River. It is a large tunnel, wide and running a considerable distance under the street and buildings above. Throughout most of its length, one can walk upright, or nearly so, but it is also impossible to see without a flashlight or lantern once passing a short distance beyond the entrances on either side of the street. Different parts of the tunnel represent different eras of its construction and extensions over the years, but all are clearly neglected. The portions which are concrete culverts are crumbling, and the exposed rebar is covered in rust. In the older, hewn-stone portions of the tunnel, large blocks—too big to carry—have fallen from the walls and a thick, mysterious mucous hangs overhead to catch on the heads of the unwary. Nowhere

are there gates or signs present to convey that visitors are not unwelcome, nor any indication that one might be under observation.

In addition to its dilapidation, few people pass through this tunnel; it is an 'abandoned' space. When one does pass through, they are likely to be the only person present. The lack of users makes it difficult to observe, first-hand, all the activities that occur here. However, physical evidence left behind and never cleaned up, allows these activities to be noted (Webb et al. 1973) and allows us to see how agents have acted freely to define the space on their own terms. Graffiti, apparently having accumulated over many years, is most apparent (see Figure 5). From the time one steps into the tunnel, to the time they step out the other side, they are accompanied by all manner of specimens. Some of this graffiti refers to drug use that apparently occurs in the tunnel. This possibility is confirmed by the occasional spotting of paraphernalia among the detritus. Drinking is also common in the tunnel, as evidenced by broken bottles and crushed cans. The tunnel, and the area around it, is also used by squatters. Sometimes tents, sleeping bags, or other reminders of their presence can be found, particularly in seasons when the water is low or absent. Yet, perhaps the most typical activity here, like in many similar spaces, is "playful exercise" (Edensor 2005b, 838). The people most commonly encountered here are 'urban explorers,' people who make a game out of adventuring in a city's liminal locations (Ninjalicious 2005), ghost hunters, and other innovative adventurers. Skateboarders and rollerbladers can also be found playing here, particularly at the tunnel's eastern terminus, where they have found that the concrete embankment walls make an excellent, impromptu half pipe.

**Figure 5:** "The Gates of Hell"

This place was never intended for use by anything other than flowing water. However, the lack of physical cues and the absence of others to set examples or enforce norms have made this residual space open to interpretation by those who wish to visit it nonetheless. While it has no known official name for its few users to apply to it, these same users have collectively come up with two names of their own for the space: the ‘Bloody Bowl’ and the ‘Gates of Hell.’ This fact alone stands in marked contrast to the Gateway Center, the name of which was planned, formalized, and handed down to users who have failed to develop their own name for it.

*Discussion and Conclusions*

The working landscape consists of those spaces that (a) are most vital to dominant social organization, (b) experience the most thorough sociospatial control, and c) are least likely to undergo physical or interpretive reconstruction through the volition of individual or collective agents. These are the spaces most likely to fall into Gieryn’s (2002) ‘black box’ moment, opaquely serving their purposes, structurally imposing their order, and least likely to experience

much agential flexibility. However, some spaces are unused, poorly maintained, or both, and can be considered part of the 'residual landscape.' Residual spaces are (a) less important to dominant social organization on average, (b) less thoroughly controlled, and (c) present greater opportunities for alternative interpretation or action (Gieryn's flexibility moment). Each of the spaces we have explored, in the illustrative sketch above, seems to exert a different level of constraint over the behaviors of those within them. Each, in turn, offers different opportunities for creative agency. The Gateway Center certainly offers the fewest of agential opportunities. The tunnel called the 'Gates of Hell,' the most unambiguous example of a residual space, offers the most opportunities.

The two remaining spaces—the rundown area of High Street and the park—are more complex. In their own ways, each offers a mix of constraint and opportunity through, respectively, either lack of upkeep or lack or users. Many spaces thus exhibit both working and residual characteristics (e.g. dilapidated spaces, maintained spaces), and considerably complicate the generalizations above. Cities and other areas are full of such liminal spaces that fall somewhere in between the extremes of working and abandoned spaces. These spaces can be especially interesting for analyses of the ways that space shapes social organization and is shaped by it. They represent a special case or complication of the 'flexibility' moment that needs to be better understood. This understanding, in turn, requires understanding other factors that might explain why some spaces are predominantly abandoned instead of altered or adapted. So far we have only explored the outcomes of residual or working landscapes, but paid little attention to these antecedents.

Why are some spaces nearly abandoned while others are well-maintained and prosperous? One possibility has to do with the interaction of disuse and dilapidation. Although

they are not necessarily related in all contexts, these factors may reinforce one another just as they might influence individuals: dilapidation may lead to disuse or *vice versa*. For example, failure to maintain a clean and tidy restaurant may lead to it being abandoned by patrons. However, even the most fastidious of owners will only be able to perform so much maintenance and cleaning if there are no customers, no users, and thus no income with which to fund the task.

Another explanation lies beyond the nature of space itself: the characteristics of society. Features of the residual landscape are not neutral, they do not necessarily reflect a natural process of decay and abandonment but speak to the socioeconomic conditions within which they are situated. The residual landscape is the *other* face of the working landscape. It is not distinct in that it is not a part of the same socio-spatial system, but because it consists of very different parts of that *same* system. Ruins, and other spaces both largely abandoned and dilapidated, once served some definite purpose but now little, if any, at least in terms of the dominant order that created them. Spaces that have attributes of both the working landscape and the residual landscape are more complex. Slums, and other poorly maintained but thoroughly used spaces, are still vital parts of the dominant system in that, for example, they may be used to control and house essential labor reserves (Mandel 1976) even as they provide opportunities to act back upon that order. In short, uneven development and investment, so essential to the survival of capitalism (Mandel 1975; Soja 1989), help explain why some spaces are 'working' while others are 'residual' and why, even among the latter, there is considerable variability to the extent that they are so. Being a part of this system also helps to explain why working or residual status is ephemeral, why investment and disinvestment or demolition and reconstruction may quickly appear and disappear like restless phantoms, as there is "a perpetual struggle in which capital builds a physical landscape appropriate to its own condition at a particular moment

in time, only to have to destroy it" as that condition changes (Harvey 1978, 124). Destruction, as we have seen, is not always quick, rarely complete, and never permanent.

While the argument presented here offers potential answers to these and related questions, empirical research is needed to more fully explore these issues and to move beyond the general to the specific. Echoing the concerns of Gans (2000) and Gieryn (2000), studies should not focus on space at the expense of excluding all other factors, as this practice would serve only to simplify social life in the same way that studies which neglect spatial factors entirely, or deny their relevance, have done for many years (Soja 1989). The direct effects of space while measurable (Gieryn 2002), may not be especially powerful on their own once other factors are accounted for but are significant nevertheless. Another reason for caution is the fact that, although physical features of space are important in their own right, people also react to their *interpretations* of space. The same physical feature may invoke very different responses or no response at all, from different individuals. Run-down, abandoned buildings may be avoided by some people even as they attract others (e.g. Gotham and Brumley 2002), and people living within the same area may have very different ideas about where their neighborhood begins and ends (e.g. Modan 2007).

Understanding the importance of space, of what space can do, also requires understanding what it cannot do, and what can be done to it in turn. Space is neither passive nor deterministic, but is nonetheless an undeniably crucial component of social life which we are just beginning to truly understand after decades of neglect.

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**Endnotes**

1. ‘Space’ and similar terms are used throughout this article to refer to two related but distinct concepts: space and place. ‘Space’ is the physical aspect of an environment whereas ’place’ refers to the culturally-relative, subjective meanings associated with an environment (Tuan 2001). Both concepts are important and although both are considered in the current article, that consideration is not made explicit but rendered secondary to the goal of illuminating the residual landscape as socially and theoretically important.

2. See Gieryn (2000) for a review of the sociological literature on space and place, Lawrence and Low (1990) for a review of the anthropological literature of built environment studies, and Marston (2000) for a review of the geographical literature on space and scale.

3. A similar model can be applied to space at other levels. Rather than examine a building, as Gieryn does, we can analyze spatiality at other scales: how an entire neighborhood is drastically altered through urban renewal (e.g. Logan and Molotch 1987) for instance, or how its meanings are constantly contested through everyday action and discourse (e.g. Gotham and Brumley 2002; Modan 2007).

4. This term is also used by Burtynsky (2001), in a different sense, to describe his photographic work—landscapes transformed by industrial activity.

5. Doubtless the same is true of machines, but here specific spatial examples may stretch the metaphor to a point beyond rhetorical utility.

6. In this case, the term ‘ruin’ refers only to those ruins which are truly abandoned and not maintained. It is not meant, for example, to refer to classical ruins which are typically regulated and popular tourist sites. This latter sort of ruin is better conceptualized as being more akin to maintained or working spaces, depending on the specific site in question, as they are still important parts of social systems and by no means left behind regardless of their often considerable age. Moreover, ruination may be inevitable, but it is not only a ‘natural’ process. Buildings and entire landscapes can be reduced to rubble by time and ‘acts of god’ like cyclones and earthquakes, but this can also result from bureaucratic planning decisions (Read 1996), war (Lozanovska 2003), class conflict (Benjamin 1978), and colonialism (Healy 1997). Today in the US, it is economic development which creates the most ruins. Temporarily Obsolete, Abandoned, Derelict Sites (TOADS), are strewn across the nation (Greenberg, Popper, and West 1990): factories, mining sites, storefronts, and housing complexes left to decay because they are no longer economically profitable.

7. Full rubbish bins are the only true sign that upkeep could be improved, but the litter is in its place rather than scattered. This cue, more importantly, reinforces the relative absence in the number and variety of park users. Although clearly someone must have been present at some point to deposit the trash, clearly park workers do not visit here very often to remove it.