

Hidden Veneration Keeps Them Hidden

By Kristina Blazeovski

"Passion can create drama from inert stone." – Le Corbusier

The city has consumed its population. Too many people are missing from Detroit. You can find excreted generations settled in third-ring suburbs. Their dwellings are easily identified by the cul de sac trails, and the consistent ratio of density and size to distance from the city. (The apparent rule for the 'exurbs' is that bigger homes need bigger plots when they are built farther from the source city.) Houses, byproducts of the Fordist efficiency of assembly, were once a promised reward to workers taking advantage of the company's "generosity." Now they are available in a potent hyper-abundance ever more distant from the source city of missing people.

In general, people no longer recognize themselves as necessary agents for providing the city with events and interaction. Yet with so many absent people, the city still inspires and compels adventure for those in the city, and out. The spirit is tenuous, however. The overall lack of ordinary daily life can be resolved simply with a reverse migration back to the source city. Life is thin in the suburbs. By contrast, Detroit's remaining few struggle vehemently to sustain a lived-through reality (1). Urban inhabitants must protect their heritage: history, experience, community and the need for culture and progress. With no limits on those vital perishables, a city can embrace freedom and tolerance, and continue reacting to itself. Detroit will remain a container full of traceable urban elements from a past migration. Recognizing this deeply rooted circumstance can provoke a positive reversal to recapture the lost population. The diapause that accompanies the suburbs will last until the exodus recedes. The city's invitation to restore the population is open to future confrontation between people and their endurance of suburban life

As a civilization, we have by necessity conformed to the natural progression of modernity, evidence of rational beings at work towards a better quality of life. Ecology tells us a species will work for adaptation to its surroundings or continue migration depending on the consumption of resources and resistance to change. The city is an excellent example of how persistent inhabitants work. Dynamic layers of the city form complex arrangements requiring constant

tending to balance. The instrumental methods, which include agriculture, industrialization, automation, (2) and now processors of information, have affected the space, substance and conception of practical lives shifting towards transience. Lumbering and mining (extraction of resources) were the common industries in the nineteenth century. The early twentieth century was an era of the machine and the need for machine operators. For European immigrants, it was also a leap into prosperity. Later, Blacks from the South had a chance to participate in economy. Detroit bloomed with opportunities: chances for an economical advantage in life. However, the city, resistant to change, was not prepared for rapid industrialization and diversity which caused the invagination of fear. Fatal riots of racial intolerances in 1943 and in 1967 scarred the city. Isolation was the best answer for people who could no longer abide existence in a territory of diversity, politics and culture. Emigrants who flocked to Detroit for a reliable automotive job, have left along with the jobs. The residue of automobile manufacturing is very heavy in the city of "sawtooth" skylights and vehicular ramps in leftover factories amidst the diffused houses of lost sustenance.

The dominant, axial roads in the city did not suffice for automobiles produced by motor companies. Consequently, antisocial and inferior paths (expressways) were explicitly stitched into the city on a separate level from the common roads. The intent was for vehicles to be constant, tangential elements of the city and never be fully involved. They leave the supportive, anchoring boulevards and avenues to neglect as they dimly rest, banked with avoidances: buildings that stick to the bones. People displaced themselves by means of the automobile and reluctantly return to the same widowed structures.

Acquiescence between people who left and the environment was mutual. They carry on detached from the city while architecture remains detached from its inhabitants. Exposed buildings can be found breathing in the void of living content and releasing a mute, static form resonating through time. These structures withstand the negation of culture expressed in the suburbs. The components for a city are available: boulevards, sidewalks, parks, an island, tall buildings, and residential units. All of which are venues of interaction. The elements seem romantic but, on the contrary, they are part of a growing gestalt compromise leading to the conditioning and acceptance of the metropolis contraction.

The rush to the suburbs is carried on by accountable narratives: dense notions absorbed outside the city with successful articulation that keep the poor in the city while the wealthier attack new territories for habitation. What remain of this continual narrative are the timeless features of Detroit, often compared to relics. (Relics compel masses to investigate the mystery of truth. Throughout the world, relics are remainders born as object and surviving as proof after the destruction of an event.) The relationship between the object and the event is important to understand the abandonment of relics. Assume A is the object and B is the spirit, or event. Since A was found, it follows that B must be alive or existing. Since a city was found, people must be existing. The found buildings, signs, manhole covers, and sidewalks lined with trees are all objects which indicate continuation of human activity and life. Moreover, reversing the existential quantifier from an object to spirit, to spirit to an object, also holds, that is to say since we found B, then A must exist somewhere, i.e., since the people were found, the city must be existing. The converse shows that people become the relics of the city. For Detroit, they have been concentrically misplaced and need recovery. People are the lost, civil providers of events and spirit to the structured city: an environment where an individual belongs to the sacred urban dichotomy of organization and chaos.

Detroit is often spoken of in terms of its ruins. The city has not been completely abandoned though; architecture has survived. A transportation hub (designed by the same designer of New York City's Grand Central Station), a stadium, an art nouveau auditorium, multiple structures of monumental height and timeless materials, and rigid structures bearing the quintessential window patterns of manufacturing warehouses all can be found as leftovers in Detroit. All the mass, composing the surfaces and enclosing volumes, (buildings) raises questions of unused resources. These are unlike the historical open air farmers market, cultural establishments of various degrees and taste, warehouses converted to residences and working studios, and a riverfront plaza which are all functioning. However, some people have repeatedly ignored them with full awareness, and often they are falsely interpreted.

The critical pieces, the people, have been mislaid outside the city culture of Detroit; they are still alive. People belong to a city; they provide nourishment and extra physiological stimulation, and enough natural procreation to continue inhabitation. Blame the man, not the automobile. He is the caretaker of the body that manifests urban experiences. If Detroit has mislaid the population, then the population is due to return to owner. Was this an accident, a potential effect found in a blind spot of planners and citizens alike? It is apparent that people are committed to new exurban bargains: a house costs less in exchange for

more distance and less "cultural capital." (3) Even distance, fundamentally empirical, has become a virtual factor when trying to understand the spreading population. The collision of hopes, curiosity, creativity and social awareness within the population has been mishandled.

Population scarcity: how do people participate in their own exchange with absence? The persistence in forgetting the city will only keep the people lost. The gradual reverse migration needs proper direction. What this means for Detroit is that population restoration and preservation under a new narration is possible. It needs to be about passive displacement to regain sensual experiences of real-time travel available in Detroit. There is an insoluble trace of urban trust found in the few who are dedicated to the city. Jane Jacobs describes the phenomena of the mundane "as they walk, they occupy themselves with seeing-seeing in windows, seeing buildings, seeing each other." (4) Are we not confident in ourselves? The security of suburbs is working against us. It tightens and suffocates us in all the space of contrived isolation. Now, people are easily lost into the exurbs. The reverse migration is a simple task: convert a mass easily converted.

Meager and everyday catastrophes of the city are no longer appreciated. They are the moments that could never be calculated into specific, plotted trajectories because the variables are incommensurable and susceptible to positive and negative accidents. Value needs to be shifted away from expansion and back to adventurous containment. The new narrative must be a substance of joy, not panic. It will tell people to expose themselves to the city, not to hide. They must recognize the denial and move forward by reversing the circumstance: overcoming emotional indifference to create mindful connections. Contemptuous, dystopian perceptions of Detroit must be discharged and replenished with individuals tolerant to a receptive city. They will be recognized when the suburbs fail to be noticed. For now, Detroit will remain in a "panic quiet," (5) missing its contents.

Kristina Blazevski was born in Detroit where she continues the examination. While studying for her undergraduate degree in architecture (received in 2004), she picked up the habit of writing poetry.

(1) Testimonies are shared in the compilation Robert H. Mast. *Detroit Lives*, Temple University Press, Philadelphia, 1994

(2) David C. Thorns. *Transformation of Cities: Urban Theory and Urban Life*, Palgrave MacMillan, NY, 2002, p. 92

(3) Thorns, op. cit., p. 129

(4) Jane Jacobs. *Death and Life of Great American Cities*, 2nd edn, Random House, 1992 p. 347-348

(5) Detroit is a place for reflection. "Panic quiet" is described "when the church has lost its dynamism, it has one last life as a place of meditation in the urban simulacra. Panic quiet in a culture where noise is a predatory-like parasite invading the social field." Arthur Kroker, et al. *Panic Encyclopedia*, Macmillan Education Ltd., London, 1989, p.192