I, Joshua A Kuffner, hereby submit this original work as part of the requirements for the degree of Master of Architecture in Architecture (Master of).

It is entitled: 
Illuminating the Sublime Ruin

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Illuminating the Sublime Ruin

April 2013

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A thesis submitted to the
Graduate School
of the University of Cincinnati
for partial fulfillment for a
Master of Architecture
in the School of Architecture and Interior Design
of the College of Design, Art, Architecture, and Planning

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The feeling of smallness is a disconcerting experience. When one faces the vastness of nature or contemplates the endless progression of time, their sheer incomprehensibility intimidates. But there is also pleasure from such encounters, liberation from conceding to one’s limitations. Since antiquity, a term has been used to signify the origin of these paradoxical experiences: the sublime.

In a site in Cincinnati, a place that embodies the vastness and privations characteristic of the sublime, an architectural investigation was carried forth. The site, once part of a productive industrial corridor, has decayed into ruins following the retreat of industry and the subsequent closure of rail lines. Ruination, in its physical manifestation of temporality, constitutes a sublime concept. Everything turns to dust.

In the post-industrial city, abandoned sites such as this are prevalent, but societally ambiguous. They are marginalized for their lack of defined purpose, islands of void in the urban fabric. The fate of industrial ruins is typically demolition, particularly if the original buildings’ purpose was to accommodate specific processes. As a result, the latent potential of these places to convey the sublime is experienced by few, by urban explorers, by squatters. In order to reincorporate society, these places must be foregrounded.

How does one engage the sublimity inherent to a specific post-industrial ruin, while reintegrating the place with contemporary society?

Through analysis, the sublime elements of the site will be identified and dictate the intervention. The context will inform the program and define its place within society. The site is relatively isolated from the city and yet this detachment provides a setting for contemplation. By implementing various concepts, including site specificity, the terrain vague, and the picturesque, the inherent sublimity of the site will be amplified, and the previously overlooked will be illuminated.
A special thanks to my girlfriend Jen, for her love, support, and patience throughout the long thesis process.

A special thanks to my parents, Stephen and Patricia, for their love and their moral and financial support over the years.

A special thanks to Vincent Sansalone, my research chair, for his advice, approach to the discipline, and for broadening my conception of architecture.
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3 (p. 15) Piranesi, Carceri Plate XV, Ibid., 93.
4 (p. 16) Piranesi, Carceri Plate XII, Ibid., 97.
5 (p. 17) Piranesi, Carceri Plate V, Ibid., 77.
6 (p. 18) Piranesi, Carceri Plate W, Ibid., 85.
7 (p. 19) Piranesi, Carceri Plate XIV, Ibid., 99.
8 (p. 20) Piranesi, Carceri Plate X, Ibid., 91.
9 (p. 21) Piranesi, Carceri Plate VII, Ibid., 87.
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42 (p. 95) Mary Miss, Greenwood Pond, Double Site, http://dailyheadlines.uark.edu/images/Mary_Miss_Des_Moines.jpg.
This thesis did not begin as an attempt to recognize and illuminate the sublimity of a ruined grain elevator. In fact, it was predisposed to the high rise typology for a long time. Eventually, it became evident that the reason skyscrapers held such appeal for me was rooted in their ability to instill awe from their great size, a characteristic of the sublime. Once this realization was made, the sublime became the direction of the thesis: pursuing how architecture could communicate the sublime.

The site was imposed as a means of studying the physicality of the sublime; a resource on how sublimity existed in built form. To tackle this prospect, the site was recorded through a variety of exercises, such as drawing, writing, and making. By investing myself in the site, I became intrigued by the melancholic narratives of the place, and the site became more than a mine for information. The site’s contents dictated a new direction to take this investigation into the sublime. The colossal industrial ruin, despite its formidable aesthetic appeal, was marginalized and isolated from society. Could the sublimity inherent to this vast structure help reintegrate it and the surrounding landscape with the urban fabric, and relevance?

There are four sections, which are ordered with respect to the chronological process of the thesis. First, the origins and some of the relevant philosophical discourse on the sublime will be discussed, particularly ideas that inform the sublime experience. Next, the site will be introduced, providing a brief history of its existence as well as initial documentation which was utilized to gain a further understanding of the space. Included here are several concepts introduced by the site’s aesthetics and nature, specifically, ruination, terrain vague and the picturesque. In the next section, art and architecture precedents related to the aforementioned ideas will be analyzed, with their methodologies informing possibilities for the site in Cincinnati. Finally, the design project will be discussed, from its generative process to the resulting interventions.
Origins
The word sublime originates from the Latin sublimis, which connotes “uplifted, high, lofty.” Sublimis is a composite of sub, up to, and limen, the lintel of a door, a threshold. In this way, the sublime comes to describe that which approaches a boundary or limit, giving insight into its modern definition: the awe-inspiring, the grandiose, that which instills lofty emotion. Expanding upon these ideas, the sublime object is elevated above us, testing the boundaries of our comprehension.

Longinus: The Rhetorical Sublime
The first theoretical analysis of the sublime occurred in Peri Hypsos (On the Sublime) a first century text on rhetoric that is attributed to an anonymous author known as Longinus, a Greek literary critic or a teacher of rhetoric. His text, of which only a fragment survives, provides a guide to oratorical speaking, notably by applying “sublimity” to grand effect in moving an audience.

For it is not to persuasion, but to ecstasy that passages of extraordinary genius carry the hearer: now the marvelous, with its power to amaze, is always stronger than that which seeks to persuade and to please: to be persuaded rests unusually with ourselves, genius brings force sovereign and irresistible to bear upon every hearer, and takes its stand high above him. Again, skill in invention and power of orderly arrangement are not seen from one passage nor from two, but emerge with effort out of the whole context; Sublimity, we know, brought out at the happy moment, parts all the matter this way and that, and like a lightning flash, reveals, at a stroke and in its entirety, the power of the orator.

Here, Longinus asserts that instilling feelings of awe and ecstasy is more effective than simple persuasion in speaking due to its capability to utterly dominate the listener; the manipulation of powerful emotions supplants rational thinking. But how does one convey these grand ideas? In an attempt to answer this, Longinus suggests five sources of the sublime: great conceptions, passion, the proper handling of figures, noble phraseology (diction), and dignified and spirited composition. However, two of these are innate to the speaker, while the others, to the work.

Compounding this question of how, Longinus implies that sublimity is the instinctive knowledge of the elevated individual, or “genius.” Sublimity therefore, is not attainable by means that one would learn rhetorical devices, but it is intrinsic. Its exact nature eludes description.

Longinus, while basing his discussion on the rhetorical applications of the sublime, mentions nature as an extra-linguistic source, in a passage that would speak to the future theorists of the sublime:

So is it that, as by some physical law, we admire, not surely the little streams, transparent though they be, and useful too, but the Nile, or Tiber, or Rhine, and far more than all, Ocean; nor are we awed by the little flame of our
kindling, because it keeps its light clear, more than by those heavenly bodies, often obscured though they be, nor think it more marvelous than the craters of Etna, whose eruptions bear up stones and entire masses, and sometimes pour forth rivers of that Titanic and unalloyed fire. Regardless all such things we may say this, that what is serviceable or perhaps necessary to man, man can procure, what passes his thought wins his wonder.2

It would not be until 1674 that Longinus’ work would again resurface, in the French translation Du Sublime by Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux and later in William Guth’s more widespread English translation in 1739. The content of On the Sublime would influence many British theorists of the time, including Thomas Burnet, John Dennis, Joseph Addison, Anthony Ashley Cooper, the third Earl of Shaltesbury, and John Baillie. However, it was not until 1757 that a truly groundbreaking piece was published on the topic of the sublime, one whose significance would remain to present day: Edmund Burke’s A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful.

Edmund Burke: The Empirical Sublime

Edmund Burke was an Irish philosopher, political theorist, and Whig member of Parliament. His anonymous publication of A Philosophical Enquiry changed the direction that discourse on the sublime had been taking since its inception— it veered away from the sublime object and towards the experience of the viewer. Burke was a loyal empiricist, and so A Philosophical Enquiry is limited to that which can be directly experienced, or inferred from this experience. It also marks the beginning of a dichotomy between the aesthetic categories of the beautiful and the sublime, and in Burke’s case, a trivialization of the beautiful.

Burke begins his discussion on the sublime with a study of pain and pleasure. In this study, he identifies three distinct mental states, those of pleasure, pain, and indifference, and then begins to expand on these, notably on the difference between the removal or diminution of pain, and positive (additive) pleasure. Burke concludes that a respite from pain is related to the idea of self-preservation, and it is the passions of self-preservation, with their ties to pain and death, that constitute the most powerful of all passions. He then goes on to define the sublime in this context:

Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or converging toward being directly subjected to terror, is a source of the sublime; that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling.3

At this point, Burke is careful to note that in order for an experience to be sublime, and not terrifying, actual danger must be kept at bay. This nuance of sublimity relies on viewing that which is great or terrible from afar, as opposed being directly subjected to it. In this way, the passions of self-preservation are heightened, while assurance of safety establishes a check on actual fear. To provide an example, the eruption of a volcano might induce terror by one about to be imolated in hot ash, but for the faraway observer, it is a sublime display for contemplation. Burke terms the feeling brought on by a sublime object astonishment, “that state of the soul in which all its motions are suspended, with some degree of horror.” Following this is the most useful portion of his treatise for the purposes of this thesis, a list of physical qualities which provoke a feeling of the sublime. Some of the more relevant qualities follow:

TERROR
Referring to terror as that feeling which is an apprehension of fear or death, Burke notes, “no passion so effectually robs the mind of all its powers of acting and reasoning as fear.”4 Burke thus declares terror the ruling principle of the sublime, with any object that is terrible also being sublime. Notable here is that despite an object of fear’s size (for example, a venomous spider), it can still retain sublimity by virtue of its ability to incite fear.

OBSCURITY
Burke writes, “When we know the full extent of any danger, when we can accustom our eyes to it, a great deal of the apprehension vanishes.”5 The chief example Burke uses here is darkness, which prevents clear discerning of objects. Any type of veiling, be it physically or conceptually, seems to fit into the category of obscurity, with fear deriving from uncertainty. This lack of clarity also can be used to augment an illusion of infinity, in which Burke deems necessary to render any object great. In line with the theme of obscurity, Burke declares, “A clear idea is therefore another name for a little idea.”6

POWER
“I know of nothing sublime that is not some modification of power.”7 Power, while potentially belonging to either pleasure or pain, privileges pain, since a greater power can force pain without resistance. However, a powerful object may not be sublime if it has no intention (or ability) of using its great strength to cause harm. For example, Burke states that an ox is not sublime since its strength is easily controlled and used producively, whereas a bull is sublime, owing to its wild nature and its destructive, unusable power.

PRIVATE
All absences are terrible and thus sublime, in particular, vacuity, darkness, solitude and silence.8 The inability of a place to sustain life engenders fear; a desert is an example of a place with multiple privations. Darkness also falls under the scope of obscurity.

VASTNESS
“Greatness of dimension is a powerful cause of the sublime.”9 Burke suggests that large dimensions along different axes produce different degrees of sublimity, for example, as long in a horizontal is not as imposing as the height of a tall tower, which is less imposing than a great depth.

INFINITY
While no objects are in and of themselves infinite, a feeling of infinity can be induced from an object where the bounds are unclear, relating it with obscurity (and potentially vastness). Illusions can also be used to create the idea of infinity without actual vastness needing to be present.

SUCCESSION/UNIFORMITY
The concepts of succession and uniformity are related to infinity, and aid creating the illusion of infinity. Succession is based on a large number of objects arrayed over a vast expanse, which overwhelsms the imagination, causing the objects to appear to continue ad infinitum. Uniformity increases rather than distracting from this idea of infinity, since equal placement provides a smooth progression towards “infinity” without the imagination being distracted by irregularity. Burke notes that round or cylindrical objects (here referring to circular rooms or surrounds) can be sublime due to the fact they have no corners or ends and so the object is continuous, leaving the imagination nowhere to rest. Burke also lambasts angles in buildings, such as in cathedrals with Latin cross plans, because the transepts interrupt the progression of successive columns, making the building appear smaller from the exterior.

MAGNITUDE IN BUILDING
This section discusses greatness of scale, as in vastness, but with respect to architecture. Burke holds that in order for a building to be considered sublime, it must have magnitude. When building an immense building is not practical, Burke...
advocates creating the illusion of infinity using succession/uniformity.

**INFINITY IN PLEASING OBJECTS**

Here, Burke uses the logic that if an object that is (or appears) incomplete, for example, an unfinished shed, it is often more pleasing to behold than a completed version. The imagination is entertained by the thought of something more. This idea could be entertained in completed objects of which a portion is obscured.

**DIFFICULTY**

“When any work seems to have required immense force and labour to effect it, the idea is grand.” Burke uses the example of Stonehenge to suggest the amount of force (particularly given the technology of the time) required to move the stone blocks must have been immense, and difficult to exert. The pyramids would be another such example, or the great cathedrals, where centuries of manual labor were devoted to their creation.

**MAGNIFICENCE**

Burke distinguishes magnificence from vastness, infinity, and succession/uniformity by stating that it consists of “a great profusion of things which are splendid or valuable in themselves.” Magnificence requires a large quantity of beautiful objects, such as the stars in the night sky.

**LIGHT IN BUILDING**

Burke notes light as potentially sublime only when it is of an uncommon variety and usually when juxtaposed with shadow, which is a more sublime concept given its potential to obscure, and also by the provocation it demands. The potential for light to evoke the sublime therefore lies in its ability to foster contrast. For example, Burke advocates the entrance sequence of a building transitioning from the brightness of day to a dark vestibule, or vice versa at night.

**COLOR**

As far as color contributes to sublime objects, Burke is a proponent of “fascious” or drab colors, such as black, brown, or deep purple, which impart a more melancholic disposition to their host object than their bright alternatives. With that being said, contrasting colors can be utilized in a similar way to light and shadow.

**SOUND/SUDDENNESS**

While Burke discusses several modes of sound and their applicability to the sublime, suddenness is the most convincing. When a sound suddenly begins or ceases, it rouses the attention and puts one on their guard. This is caused by a natural instinct, anticipating danger, but can nonetheless be employed to a sublime effect, for example, the striking of church bells during the silence of night. It might be worthy to note that the quality of the sound is likely to strongly influence the feeling produced. The sound of the tolling of a large bell, or the blowing of a foghorn, holds a certain sublimity in the perceived power of the sound.

**NOVELTY**

Burke notes earlier in Enquiry that the concept of novelty is essential to the preservation of the sublime object’s influence. It is not sufficient to merely have exposure to an object with some of the aforementioned characteristics; the exposure must be limited if it is to maintain its unique effects and not fall into “stale unafflicting familiarity.” The rationale Burke offers for this requirement springs from the predisposition of human beings to be curious. Curiosity, an emotion which is vital to learning, quickly exhausts itself. For Burke, curiosity is so fundamental to human nature, it must be preserved “in every instrument which works upon the mind.”

Despite the extensive empirical research Burke contributed to the theory of the sublime, the usefulness of his treatise collapses when one begins to venture outside of pure empiricism. Questions regarding the interaction of the mind with matter are not addressed, particularly: is the sublime an intrinsic quality of the object, or is it cultivated by the mind in response to the object? Rather than attempt the metaphysical, Burke makes assumptions that will discredit portions of Enquiry in the future. For example, he suggests that the cause of the sublime feeling with vastness is due to pain from eyestrain as the eye struggles to record the entirety of a vast object, a source of ridicule for later philosophers. Regardless of these shortcomings, Burke’s work was invaluable for its pioneering work on the sublime, and was broadly influential on many theorists that would follow, including the German philosopher Immanuel Kant, who would post answers to some of the questions Burke left unanswered.

**Immanuel Kant: The Power of Reason**

Immanuel Kant, like Edmund Burke before him, was active during the Enlightenment period at the end of the 18th century. He is often credited with the first philosophical treatment of the sublime, Analytic of the Sublime, a subsection in his work Critique of Judgment. However, before this piece was published in 1790, Kant had already chalked up the sublime in a smaller book from 1764, Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime.

Only the first section of Observations is of relevance to this thesis. Here, Kant identifies, like Burke before him, two finer feelings to consider, the sublime, and the beautiful. He makes the distinction between the two based on the objects or rhetoric which incite them, making this work of an empirical nature, much like A Philosophical Enquiry. Kant declares, “The sublime touches, the beautiful charms... The sublime must always be large, the beautiful can also be small. The sublime must be simple, the beautiful can be decorated and ornamented.” Kant agrees with Burke’s classification of the sublime as a negative experience, that the sublime “arouses satisfaction, but with dread.” He also offers examples of objects which are sublime, such as night, snow-covered peaks, and raging storms, and divides the sublime into three categories: the terrifying, the noble, and the magnificent. The terrifying sublime is distinguished by its “feeling of dread or even melancholy,” the noble, “quiet admiration,” and the magnificent, “beauty spread over a sublime prospect.” Kant categorizes deep solitude as terrifying, and also addresses Burke’s question of vastness by stating that great depths and heights are equally sublime, just belonging to different categories: a great depth is terrifying since it provokes shuddering, whereas a great height is noble, since we view it with admiration.

He then provides St. Peter’s Basilica as an example of the magnificent sublime due to its grand but simple geometric form adorned with beautiful objects like sculptures and mosaics (much like Burke’s “magnificence”). For the most part, Kant’s discussion in Observations is in keeping with Burke’s earlier work.

Twenty-five years separate the publications of Observations and Critique of Judgment, but during this intervening time, Kant solidified his positions on aesthetics, establishing views that are still held (or at least respected) amongst contemporary philosophers. In the mode of Burke, Critique of Judgment continues the separation of beauty and sublimity, although the theory for this is expanded. Much like he stated in Observations, Kant describes the characteristic feeling of the sublime as a “movement of the mind,” whereas the beautiful preserves the mind’s state of “restful contemplation.” He notes beauty’s intrinsic relationship to form and thereby limitation, while for the sublime he states: “the sublime is to be found in an object even devoid of form, so far as it immediately involves, or else by its presence provokes, a representation of limitlessness, yet with a super-added thought of its totality.” This “super-added thought” and its implications will be touched on later. Beauty achieves its pleasurable effect through quality, whereas the sublime quantity. Beauty belongs to the faculty of understanding, whereas the sublime, reason:

For the sublime, in the strict sense of the word, cannot be contained in any sensuous form, but rather concerns ideas...
of reason, which, although no adequate presentation of them is possible, may be aroused and called to mind by that very inadequacy itself, which does admit of sensuous presentation.19

At this point, Kant has left the scope of empiricism, and he addresses the question of mind and matter that Burke left unanswered. The object itself is not sublime, but rather, the sublime is an effect of the mind in its struggle to conceive of the object. The sublime is also unpresentable – its cultivation in the mind is suggested by certain objects, but only reason is capable of extrapolating beyond these purely sensual stimuli. Kant moves on to discuss the bipartite nature of the sublime: it falls into two broad modes of categorization: the mathematical, and the dynamical. The mathematically sublime is produced by that which is excessively large in size, while the dynamical sublime, that which is excessively powerful. This new system of dividing the sublime is exclusive from his earlier tripartite division into the terrifying, the noble, and the magnificent sublime, which is assessed based on the viewer’s psychological experience as opposed to the type of excess exhibited by the object. For the purposes of the investigation at hand, only the mathematical sublime will be considered, as it is the only of the two that can be attained realistically through built form.

THE MATHEMATICAL SUBLIME

In this section of Analytic of the Sublime, Kant first brings up relativity in order to demonstrate his earlier point of the sublime resting in the powers of the mind and not innately in the object. Something considered large with respect to the scale of a human may not be considered large with respect to the entirety of the cosmos, while on the other end of the spectrum, something infinitesimally small may not be considered significant by the standards of human scale. However, both of these examples point to ideas of infinity (be it infinitely small or large), and it is in this conception that sublimity lies.

While discussing the mathematically sublime, Kant eventually arrives at a description of how exactly the sublime affects the mind, and the rationale for a seemingly contradictory coupling of pain and pleasure:

The feeling of the sublime is, therefore, at once a feeling of displeasure, arising from the inadequacy of the imagination in the aesthetic estimation of magnitude to attain to its estimation by reason, and a simultaneously awakened pleasure, arising from its very judgment of the inadequacy of the greatest faculty of sense being in accord with ideas of reason, so far as the effort to attain to these is for us a law.20

Basically, the vast object which instills the mathematically sublime overwhelms the imagination, and this is where the “pain” element of the sublime originates. Kant then hypothesizes that after this occurs, reason, the faculty for conceptualizing, acknowledges the shortcomings of the sensible faculties, and nonetheless arrives at a concept of the sublime object, the “super-add ed thought” from earlier in the Analytic of the Sublime. In this way, reason has demonstrated its prowess, conceiving of an abstract idea beyond presentation, and it is from this achievement, that the “pleasure” element of the sublime manifests itself.

A subtlety of the mathematical sublime involves looking more closely at the faculty of imagination. Kant argues that when one is faced with a great quantity, two separate operations take place: apprehension, during which sensorial input is collected, and comprehension, during which the mind processes and attempts to understand the information gathered in the apprehension phase. When an object that incites the mathematically sublime is encountered, Kant offers this explanation: “Apprehension presents no difficulty: for this process can be carried on ad infinitum, but with the advance of apprehension comprehension becomes more difficult, the very step and soon attains its maximum, and this is the aesthetically greatest fundamental measure for the estimation of magnitude.”21 So while the senses are capable of receiving an infinite amount of information, they are only capable of processing a certain quantity, the “limit” implied by that which is sublime.

A particularly useful example follows, not just in its potential to inform architecture, but in how the theories of a 20th century philosopher, Jacques Derrida, can be used to give further insight into the sublime’s nature. Kant employs the accounts of Claude-Etienne Savary, an Egyptologist, to demonstrate the significance of apprehension and comprehension:...in order to get the full emotional effect of the size of the pyramids, we must avoid coming too near as much as remaining too far away. For in the latter case, the representation of the apprehended parts (the tiers of stones) is merely obscure, and produces no effect upon the aesthetic judgment of the subject. In the former, however, it takes the eye some time to complete the apprehension from the base to the summit; but in this interval the first tiers always in part disappear before the imagination has taken in the last, and so the comprehension is never complete.22

Here, it becomes evident that there is a precise alignment required for the mathematically sublime to achieve its full effect, a concept to which Jacques Derrida applies his idea of parergon in his work, _The Truth in Painting_. Parergon can be thought of as a frame, addition, or remainder, without which its binary opposition, or ergon, is not complete. A common example is to consider a framed work of art. What is the art (ergon) without the frame (parergon)? Even the edge of the canvas imposes a type of frame or limit. Basically, limits are required in order for things to be able to be perceived by the imagination. Derrida would argue that since the sublime is limitless, it has no parergon. However, this idea of framing is still valid to the sublime. When one attempts to comprehend a vast object, imagination fails, and reason presents this failure as a limit to our powers of comprehension. The limit of the imagination is bounded, or recognized, by the “unbounded” powers of reason. Derrida concludes that “the ability thus to present our very inability to comprehend”23 is where true sublimity lies. Therefore, for Derrida, the sublime is not pleasing from our ability to transcend a limit, but rather, from the accomplishment of reason to acknowledge this limit in the first place.

This is consistent with the etymology of the sublime, which suggests “up to” or “a limit.” The sublime allows us to perceive the limits of our comprehension.

NOTES

2 Ibid., 66.
3 Edmund Burke, _A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful_ (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 36
4 Ibid., 53.
5 Ibid., 54.
6 Ibid., 66.
7 Ibid., 59.
8 Ibid., 65.
9 Ibid., 66.
10 Ibid., 71.
11 Ibid., 29.
12 Ibid.
13 Ibid.
15 Ibid., 14.
17 Ibid., 76.
18 Ibid., 69.
19 Ibid., 81.
20 Ibid., 88.
21 Ibid., 82.
22 Ibid., 82-83.
The site lies on the western banks of the Mill Creek in Cincinnati, in the impoverished neighborhood of South Cumminsville. It is bounded by the Hoople Street viaduct to the south, the Mill Creek to the east, the manufacturing industries and vacant structures that line Beekman Street to the west, and Mill Creek Road to the north. It is a narrow swath of land that originally served to convey trains on the now-defunct Cincinnati, Hamilton & Dayton Railroad. In the central portion of this spine stands a half-demolished grain elevator, a looming, vacant monolith with a bleak future.

The Grain Elevator

It was the grain elevator that first drew me to the site. The size of the structure called to mind Kant’s mathematical sublime, and its elegiac state of abandonment and ruin served to convey this sublimity more vividly than the manicured heights of any skyscraper. The original facility was a 30-silo array built in 1925 as the Early & Daniel Co-Grain Elevator, as a large grain depository. 125’ in height and over 275’ in length, the structure could hold 1.1 million bushels of grain at any given time. In 1934, a cruciform headhouse tower was added to the south, providing two bucket elevators (called grain legs) to loft grain to the tops of the silos, and storage for an additional 55,000 bushels of grain. In 1970, Consolidated Grain & Barge acquired the grain elevator and added a 20-silo array to the south of the headhouse tower, bringing the capacity of the facility to over 2 million bushels of grain. A steel superstructure with a third grain leg was also added, surmounting the tower’s 200’ roof.
The Mill Creek

If not as striking upon first glance as the grain elevator, the Mill Creek and its banks proved to be vital elements of the site. The troubled past of the Mill Creek solidifies its relevance in a sublime landscape. Once a clear, pastoral stream that provided water and mill power for early settlers, it has since suffered several grotesque transformations. As Cincinnati grew, the forests of the Mill Creek valley were deforested to provide wood for fuel and new construction, and to clear space for cropland. Animal species retreated, and the lack of trees increased flooding. When industrialization sprung up around the creek, it used the watercourse to dispose of toxic effluent. In 1863, the problem intensified when the city lifted its ban on sanitary wastes in storm sewers. The new combined sewer system used Mill Creek as a mode of channeling not only storm water, but human waste to the Ohio River. The stench of the river became unbearable, and so the city began the massive undertaking of constructing an interceptor that would carry the sanitary sewage directly to the Ohio River. At this time in the early 20th century, a quart of every gallon of water at the mouth of the Mill Creek consisted of industrial and sanitary waste. Even when the interceptor system was completed in 1934, the issues remained, for the new pipes had been based on dry season flows, and so overflow points were established wherever the sanitary sewers connected to the interceptor. When there was particularly high rainfall, rather than have the sewage back up in basements or break pipes, devices at each overflow location would redirect the excess into the Mill Creek. One of these locations, consisting of a control switch platform and its corresponding hatch and culvert, resides on the site just north of the grain elevator. Due to the extreme cost of building a larger interceptor, this issue has still not been resolved, despite a reduction in combined sewer overflow (CSO) frequency.

Not only was the creek’s water contaminated, resulting in the extinction of its native aquatic life, but its course was altered and channelized. In response to the devastating 1937 Ohio River flood, which inundated the Mill Creek valley, the Army Corps of Engineers devised a regulatory levee, complete with floodgates and a pumping station, which would permit the water of Mill Creek to still reach the Ohio River in the case of high water levels in the latter. To deal with the issue of Mill Creek itself flooding due to an increase in impervious surfaces and their greater runoff, the entire course of the creek bed was altered in the 1950s, and sections of the banks were modified into concrete or riprap channels that would quickly convey water to the Ohio River. These channelized areas effectively destroyed the historic character of the creek, and most of them remain to this day.

One such channel lies directly to the east of the grain elevator, where grated riprap rises steeply out of the water. Further north, the banks are covered in turf that is regularly mown to prohibit water retention. Further north still, past the Mill Creek Road bridge, is the southern terminus of a bike path that is part of the Mill Creek Greenway plan, which was enacted in 1993 in hopes of reinvigorating the watercourse’s debilitating flora and fauna. With continued funding, this project may extend its bike path and sustainable initiatives along the site in question. However, without implementing a $530 million plan to replace the Mill Creek interceptor, CSOs will continue to impair efforts to restore a stream with a weary past.

Analyzing the Site

The site, while initially perceived as a ground for analyzing the sublime experience directly, eventually became the central element of this thesis. The methodology of this analysis was one that required drawing, writing, and making; it required immersion in physically considering the nature of the site’s materials, and how they might be combined in a manner that presents the essence of the place.
The Glimpse

It was to see the view from the top...

Here lies the remains of the destroyed building, quite proud and tall, a monument to industry. The nearby streets have been capped off with planks, some of which are now set, broken and outlined. The walls are crumpled, once the pillars, now the Spirit of the stone, with the current made by weather. The exposed steel is broken and sagged, the color of rust. The site plate is acceptable, although it seems that it has been largely filled in with gravel and possibly vaporized.

The underground venue was still occasionally exposed, however, by the light of the same light as the previous one. Great obstacles have grown in by the distance and the stones. All forms of plant life spring from these corners like, and growing in the sense, an element of part so impossible to say what strength of the ground beneath you is. By now you could play into the space below.

Having arranged these parts (and occasionally peering into their depths) you find yourself at the foot of the

deserted chamber. The chamber has taken to, set in the massive concrete mound, clock, the gleaming mass of the base, all in the empty concrete mounds, at your

The opening here is a heavy appearance, almost ritualistic. Dead and sunken and yet the feeling of being surrounded is strong. For we are also here in this

LANDFALL

The noise, like waves,
make the ears and heads throb and ring.
The occasional shadow of
children and the hush of
water, and their seeming ways.

The dunes across the hill
are a sense of sound as well.

The mellow sound of the
trees, the soft sound of
the water. The

nothing.

But what is this? Is

We have no hope the dinner is
time of rest.
from the fading light. The theme of water from here, leading to the growing of the rootedness steel appearance. Is one strike the great breath, past the whistle and given just enough, these sounds are more distant, as they travel down hundreds of feet above. In his position, one can see the source of his winning area - on the side wing, maybe - is it far, dense in women position of steel today, like a noted hake. It meets with the heightened burst, striking, striking in the outermost, occasionally changing against the ever-incredible.

The lake where the wisdom once were seem to unload you, the surrounded area. There is a wonder in about the whole place. That is, once you suppose yourrestriction. Is your fantasy wise? What will you find around the bend? Or what? Without it, in his early subside, your mind will fly before you.

Next to the elevated levels, you find the need to look up and you almost topple backward. It’s a reverse-ergo, exalted by the southern reputation of steel bags having the containers, and the clouds stretching by

above. A great tower of solitude, a rock of solitude and powerful shelter.

The sun stretches past the horizon, the steps were on distance finally stood. How can I be here for all of those mentioned wonder基石, this actual quest is so more powerful? And there is again, a look from the up the structure, and there is the sound again, an almost reminds me of placing a road on it, down. The lake of Hill Creek live held another several landscape. At first it seems great cloth of water and sound fall away in the

water - but no, an unclear regard, it is unclear, filled across the underlying water that same rapidly, same inevitable, forever a time, fast backs from the structure, and made and greater you as well. Looking over the steep embankment is the eddy, so another in scale it nearly cause me. Itaddock take into the water below here.

A helicopter needs part. Course from the transport submarine for the grade. A stack call out. Byron reads. The eddy’s cheeks again
Ruination

The derelict grain elevator introduces an important concept to the scope of this thesis: the nature of ruin. Indeed, there is something sublime about ruins, and this connection originates from their relation to temporality. The ruin manifests the passage of time by visibly depicting the deteriorating effects of the elements. This decay reveals the ephemeral natures of manmade constructions in relation to the continuation of the world and its processes. As Denis Diderot commented on the matter, “The ideas ruins evoke in me are grand. Everything comes to nothing, everything perishes, everything passes, only the world remains, only time endures.” Ruins present a sort of mathematical sublime—not from great physical dimensions, but in their recognition of great temporal dimensions, dimensions beyond our grasp. In the same manner that the imagination cannot use the scale of a human body to extrapolate the size of the ocean, it cannot use the timescale of a human life, or even of human existence, to relativize the age of the world.

But how exactly do ruins communicate the sublime? Certainly, it is partially invested in form, as philosopher Georg Simmel attests:

The aesthetic value of the ruin combines the disharmony, the eternal becoming of the soul struggling against itself, with the satisfaction of form, the firm likeness, of the work of art. For this reason, the metaphysical-aesthetic charm of the ruin disappears when not enough remains for us to feel the upward-leading tendency. The stumps of the pillars of the Forum Romanum are simply ugly, though they express the upward-leading tendency. The stumps of the pillars of the Forum Romanum are simply ugly, while asserting the place in the urban fabric. The concept of a ruin recalls our underlying knowledge of its struggle with the elements. This concept in turn provokes a feeling of the sublime by referencing the impermanence of manmade constructions.

Terrain Vague

Besides the clear linkages between the sublime and the concept of a ruin recalls our underlying knowledge of its struggle with the elements, the site is not evoked solely by the grain elevator’s size or condition. The elevator is but a landmark in the post-industrial landscape lining the Mill Creek. The stream itself, long used by industries solely as a conduit for effluent, is kept hidden from view, often in the interstices between infrastructures. It is a sublime landscape by virtue of its privations, a spine of absence in the midst of the city. These characteristics, while negative in the scope of productivity, would need to be preserved in order to maintain the site’s sublimity. An issue arises: how does one preserve the qualities of absence and isolation innate to the site, while asserting the place in the urban fabric?

The Paradox of the Message

Ignasi de Solà-Morales references this issue in his essay, “Terrain Vague.” He utilizes the term terrain vague to signify empty, abandoned, and ignored interstitial spaces in an urban setting. First, to rationalize his terminology, he returns to origins. Terrain, from its French definition connotes an urban plot of land fit for construction. Vague Latin roots in vacuo, which has a double significance of being “empty, unoccupied, yet also free, available.” Vaguey suggests a science-fictional “conjectural” This paradoxical relationship, Solà-Morales asserts, is “fundamental to understanding the evocative potential of the city’s terrains vague.” The Terrain vague is also considered:

in the sense of ‘indeterminate, imprecise, buffered, uncertain.’ Once again the paradox of the message we receive from these indefinite and uneven spaces is not purely negative. While the analogues terms we have noted are generally preceded by negative particles (in-determinate, im-precise, un-certain), this absence of limit precisely contains the expressions of mobility, vagrant roving, free time, liberty.”

So the terrain vague is a place defined by its indefinite quality, duality that relates back to ideas of the sublime. Solà-Morales goes on to attest that architecture, in the traditional sense, cannot engage such places with any degree of success because it innately draws limits and forms, and cannot acknowledge, which is contrary to the nature of the terrain vague. Solà-Morales does suggest that in order for architecture to work successfully in these places, it must respect continuity; “not the continuity of the planned, efficient city, but of the flows, the energies, the rhythms established by the passing of time and the loss of limits.”

The chaotic nature of such places must therefore remain; an antipode to the increasingly regulated, standardized city and a haven for the spontaneous and the creative. Any architectural intervention thus fails as soon as it attempts to resolve the “problematic disorder” of the terrain vague. But what, then, is the role of design in this scenario? Solà-Morales does not elaborate. What seems clear, however, is that this disorder must be embraced.

These marginalized, post-industrial spaces also receive considerable attention from Andrea Tarkovsky’s 1979 film Stalker. Here, the protagonist, a “stalker,” works as a guide for those who wish to visit the Zone, a barricaded, abandoned landscape, in search of a rumored enlightenment. While it is the science-fictional story that suggests that a malevolent, invisible force may be present in the Zone, this is never validated. Regardless, the reports of such dangers have resulted in the surrounding community blocking off the Zone, prohibiting entry, thereby making the stalker’s occupation an illegal one. In this way, the stalker is very much like an urban explorer in the terrain vague. While abandoned space is subjected to mental erasure and even physical barriers like barbed wire and “no trespassing” signage, these hindrances do little to dispel curiosity.

Perhaps the most valuable aspect of Stalker for the present inquiry, however, is the way the abandoned landscape is approached. Since the Zone supposedly possesses dangerous invisible anomalies, the stalker’s services are used to help guide visitors on a trajectory through these obstacles. The method the stalker uses to verify a safe route involves throwing a metal nut with a cloth tied through it, then going to retrieve it and repeating the process. This process consists of a series of stops and reorientations, a method of traversing the landscape that has similarities to the picturesque. In addition, the landscape of the Zone (and the Mill Creek valley alike) is similar in composition to a picturesque garden or painting; ruins set in (what at least appears to be) pastoral nature.

The Picturesque

Picturesque is a term that typically defines that which is well-suited to pictorial representation. In the late 18th century, however, two figures would begin a philosophy of the picturesque, asserting it as an aesthetic in the sublime-beautiful continuum. The first of these was William Gilpin, an artist and priest who wrote on landscape painting. Although often relating to the picturesque by its traditional definition, Gilpin would later assert that the picturesque was a type of beauty that relied on roughness, as opposed to the smoothness customarily attributed to beautiful objects. This roughness was more appealing to the painter for the variety it allowed in light and shadow, and considering subject matter, Gilpin even remarks, “the painter prefers ruins to perfect architecture.” He later expands on this, suggesting that natural forms, in their irregularity, are the source of the picturesque’s appeal.

Critiquing and expanding on Gilpin’s ideas was Sir Uvedale Price, an English landowner and philosopher who revered the theories of Edmund Burke. His writings seek to find the causes and effects of the picturesque, as well as using this information to critique the garden design of the late 18th century. He supports Gilpin’s sources of the picturesque as objects...
possessing roughness, sudden variation, and irregularity. While the effect of beauty is restful contemplation, and that of the sublime, astonishment and awe, Price asserts that “the effect of the picturesque is curiosity.” He further distinguishes the beautiful from the picturesque: “[the beautiful depends] on ideas of youth and freshness, the [picturesque] on those of age, and even of decay.” He suggests that beauty gradually transforms into the picturesque, as time operates on the object in question. This idea has been explored already in the earlier section on ruination—but here, rather than sublime, the word picturesque has been utilized. Price accounts for the difference between these two aesthetics: the picturesque is innately bounded and intricate, whereas the sublime can be found in the boundless and uniform. However, while the aesthetics of beauty and sublimity are incompatible, picturesqueness can lend itself to either aesthetic, a synthesis of the sublime and the beautiful. While the sublime is experienced in instants of astonishment, the picturesque is a characteristic that possesses subdued sublimity that pervades the landscape.

The most applicable idea of Price’s for the furthering of this thesis is his system of “natural” gardening discussed in “An essay on Architecture and Buildings, as Connected with Scenery.” Here, he advocates a “reliance upon what already exists, but is overlooked. These strategies could be used to draw attention to various follies, which are modeled after classical and gothic structures. The follies provoke the visitor’s curiosity; when one approaches a structure, they notice another folly framed in the landscape, beckoning from across the lake, like in the case of the Grotto and the Temple of Apollo. This methodology is how the movement through the landscape in Stalker can be seen as picturesque: stopping, reorienting, and starting off again. Other landscape manipulations are of note at Stourhead, for example in the Shades, a visitor walks through a grove of mature trees, cultivating the illusion of being immersed in a forest. There are also surprises, such as when the path sharply turns out of the trees, and one is confronted by the Pantheon folly, suddenly much nearer than from previous vantage points.

Inciting curiosity, framing, surprise, and narrative are all elements of Stourhead and picturesque planning that can help inform how the Mill Creek landscape could be engaged. However, instead of calling attention to a series of artificial temples in a heavily modified landscape, here, these strategies could be used to draw attention to what already exists, but is overlooked.

**Notes**

Up to this point, the majority of the ideas presented have been theoretical in nature, save those on the picturesque garden. In order to properly inform an architectural intervention on the site, the work of artists and architects whose work supports and expands these theories needs to be considered.

Robert Smithson
The land art of artist Robert Smithson is defined by its site-specificity, temporality, and embracement of entropy. It is thus highly compatible with the ideas of terrain vague and the picturesque that manifest themselves in the site. Smithson’s work does not attempt to dress the wound of a derelict place, but rather, it takes into consideration the essence of the site, and adds an aesthetic dimension to it. His most famous work, the Spiral Jetty, is a 1,500-foot-long, coiling outcropping built of basalt rock in the Great Salt Lake in 1970. The natural processes of the site, coupled with the pollution of nearby industries, have manifested themselves on the spiral, in the forms of pink algae and salt deposits. Completing the entropic nature of the gesture, the piece has been submerged under the lake for much of its existence due to fluctuating water levels. The site in question already displays the effects of entropy, from the crumbling silos, to the rusting railroad tracks, to the verdant plant growth bursting from cracks in the pavement. Rather than dismissing these instances as undesirable, their language will be refined and aestheticized.

Smithson’s reading of landscape architecture theory, particularly that of the picturesque is consistent with the earlier discussion on the matter. In describing the picturesque as the synthesis of the beautiful and the sublime, he sided with Sir Uvedale Price, identifying it as the “introduction of time into one’s experience with the landscape.” He upheld landscape architecture that served as a “dialectic between the sylvan and the industrial,” a useful concept given the site in question.

Smithson also discussed the terms “site” and “non-site.” Non-sites were art pieces he would display in galleries, consisting of debris dredged up from various geologic “sites.” Often, accompanying images of the source site would allow the non-site to transcend the boundaries imposed in a gallery. Smithson has described a non-site as “a three-dimensional map of the site.” Like a map, it unifies of representation and abstraction in one gesture. The Debris Pile site study presents a non-site of sorts, with its accompanying site imagery bridging the gap between the tangible rubble and the source location. This surpassing of a boundary recalls a fundamental aspect of the sublime; the (at least conceptual) transcending of boundaries will find its place in the site design.

Gordon Matta-Clark
The artist Gordon Matta-Clark, and his most famous pieces, “building cuts” constitute a precedent that utilizes site specificity architecturally to evoke feelings of unease, and, in certain conditions, sublimity. To produce a cut, Matta-Clark would physically remove portions of a building, using tools with varying degrees of dexterity, from chain saws to chisels. Building cuts were often executed in blighted neighborhoods, on buildings that were only days from demolition. As such, Matta-Clark’s interventions called to

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attention to marginalized, ambiguous spaces by dramatically transforming them. Matta-Clark’s work, while not explicitly intended to evoke the sublime, does so in a myriad of ways. A good example of this is the work, Day’s End, a building cut made on an abandoned pier in New York. This piece evoked Kant’s mathematical sublime, as can be assumed by these two separate accounts from visitors: “it was dangerous to the viewer. It was large, it had scale,” and: “I was afraid to cross the cut he made in the floor. I’m afraid of heights.” On one hand, the pier evokes a landscape and an urban structure to begin with. On the other, however, opening an abyss in the ground plane to the waters below introduced an excess of scale at the very datum one uses to make determinations of scale. In a spatially contested ground plane, a horizontal register, had been subjected to a terriﬁc vertical escalation. Projects such as Day’s End and Circus, with their cuts through floors and ceilings, prevent the viewer from gaining a ﬁxed point to relativize themselves in a space, rather, they are left dislocated, and grappling with their ability to comprehend—a primary characteristic of the sublime experience. In addition, the cuts literally reveal more visual information than the imagination can process, providing an aesthetic of excess. With regard to a comment of Matta-Clark’s, that his work was in terms of “time as well as scale,” building cuts like Circus and Comical Intersect, while seemingly straightforward in presentation, really could not be described adequately in this manner. Rather, the spaces were purely experiential; one had to experience the destabilization, dislocation, and vertigo as a moving spectator. Matta-Clark explains the reaction one has when they enter the work and experience what he terms ‘real time’: “...an all-consuming gag, an all-consuming quake... which you... can’t understand.”

To speak to this ability, the aesthetic of Matta-Clark’s work to incite the sublime experience will be useful, in particular since it served to call attention to marginalized abandoned buildings. The fact that most of Matta-Clark’s work was temporary (and intentionally so) also upholds the ideas of temporality that Robert Smithson advocates. But perhaps the most applicable aspect of Matta-Clark’s building cuts is their ability to induce sublimity without an extreme amount of space, rather relying on the feelings of dislocation and destabilization that occur when faced with unusual spatial conditions. This seems to indicate that while sublimity may be rooted in the limitations of our comprehension, arriving at these limits can be achieved with methods aside from sheer size alone.

**Mary Miss**

The outdoor constructions of Mary Miss are, like the works of both Robert Smithson and Gordon Matta-Clark, site-specific exercises. However, they are unique in their materiality (often light timber construction) and their goal to establish an inhabitable place, as opposed to an object to be viewed. Miss’ works, such as Perimeters/Pavilions/Decoy and Field Rotation, draw the viewer’s attention with “the promise of something more”—they appeal to the viewer’s curiosity. To amplify this, Miss applies her timber framing construction method, which suggests an incomplete building, to foster expectations and interest from the passerby. For example, in Field Rotation, long lines of poles lead out into a ﬁeld, where a scaffold-like tower rises over what appears to be a berm of earth. Drawn in by curiosity, the viewer discovers that the berm is, in fact, an elaborate sunken room that can be inhabited and in turn used to survey the landscape. This entire schema has similar roots to Burke’s point about “inﬁnity in pleasing objects;” we are interested in the seemingly incomplete, in the curiosity about what it might eventually be. The strategy of “luring” viewers into the landscape certainly has relevance to the site in this thesis, providing a picturesque mode of encouraging the interaction of society.

Miss’s work is informative to this thesis in more ways than one. Her constructions often address the postmodernist conception of memory, where new is transposed on old in an effort for artists to address the postmodernist conception of memory, where new is transposed on old in an effort for artists to address the postmodernist conception of memory, where new is transposed on old in an effort for artists to address the postmodernist conception of memory, where new is transposed on old in an effort for artists to address the postmodernist conception of memory, where new is transposed on old in an effort for artists to address the postmodernist conception of memory, where new is transposed on old in an effort for artists to address the postmodernist conception of memory, where new is transposed on old in an effort for artists to address the postmodernist conception of memory. Perimeters/Pavilions/Decoy and Field Rotation were the Landscape Park (Landscape Park) project in Duisburg-Nord, Germany, due to the myriad of strategies it utilizes to further these ideas. Landschaftspark’s commission was heavily rooted in rapid deindustrialization of 1980s Germany, which resulted in thousands of acres of vacant industrial land. In order to handle this unprecedented inﬂux, the International Building Exhibition Emscher Park was created to remediate these areas and reinvigorate economic development. One such site, the Thyssen Steel Works, a 230-hectare facility in Duisburg-Nord, was the subject of an international design competition that Peter Latz won in 1991. Latz’s proposal was unique amongst his competitors, as it sought to preserve much of the existing structures and land. While the notion of preserving industrial artifacts had been implemented elsewhere, such as in Richard Haag’s Gasworks Park in Seattle, Peter Latz made an important distinction with Landschaftspark. Rather than simply positioning these abandoned structures as objects in the landscape to contemplate, Latz repurposed them as functional and interactive elements.

In order to reprogram the Thyssen Steel Works’ network of blast furnaces, ore bunkers, and rail lines, Latz allowed these structures to serve as the known with the unknown... I am interested in questioning the boundaries—physical, spatial, or emotional—in the landscape, rather, they consist of framing devices that call attention to existing, but overlooked, elements of the built environment. For example, in Broadway: 1000 Steps, a series of mirrors paired with red markers allow the passerby to take note of certain objects in the urban context by seeing their reﬂection in the mirrors (which sometimes bears supplementary text). The red markers, planted near the object in question, make it easier for the viewer to locate the object in the real landscape.

While Miss’s newer framing methodologies can be overly diagrammatic, the potential to use the intention behind them with her earlier techniques are of great value to designing site interventions while retaining the spirit of the terrain. Miss’s operating philosophy even points to sublime ideas: “Something that is consistently compelling me is trying to connect the known with the unknown... I am interested in questioning the boundaries—physical, spatial, or emotional—for this to take place, he ﬁrst had to ascertain the purposes, processes, and ﬂows of the original facility. With this understanding, new uses could be assigned based on the context of existing infrastructure and previous functions to dictate future uses. For this to take place, he ﬁrst had to ascertain the purposes, processes, and ﬂows of the original facility. With this understanding, new uses could be assigned based on the context of existing infrastructure and previous functions to dictate future uses. For this to take place, he ﬁrst had to ascertain the purposes, processes, and ﬂows of the original facility. With this understanding, new uses could be assigned based on the context of existing infrastructure and previous functions to dictate future uses. For this to take place, he ﬁrst had to ascertain the purposes, processes, and ﬂows of the original facility. With this understanding, new uses could be assigned based on the context of existing infrastructure and previous functions to dictate future uses. For this to take place, he ﬁrst had to ascertain the purposes, processes, and ﬂows of the original facility. With this understanding, new uses could be assigned based on the context of existing infrastructure and previous functions to dictate future uses. For this to take place, he ﬁrst had to ascertain the purposes, processes, and ﬂows of the original facility. With this understanding, new uses could be assigned based on the context of existing infrastructure and previous functions to dictate future uses.

**Peter Latz**

Peter Latz, founder of the German landscape architecture ﬁrm Latz + Partner, is, like the previous precedents, interested in engaging entropy and site-speciﬁcity. The ﬁrm repurposes post-industrial landscapes as unique parks, preserving much of the existing infrastructure and reprogramming spaces seamlessly from their original industrial functions. Of particular signiﬁcance is the Landscape Park (Landscape Park) project in Duisburg-Nord, Germany, due to the myriad of strategies it utilizes to further these ideas. The Landscape Park’s commission was heavily rooted in rapid deindustrialization of 1980s Germany, which resulted in thousands of acres of vacant industrial land. In order to handle this unprecedented inﬂux, the International Building Exhibition Emscher Park was created to remediate these areas and reinvigorate economic development. One such site, the Thyssen Steel Works, a 230-hectare facility in Duisburg-Nord, was the subject of an international design competition that Peter Latz won in 1991. Latz’s proposal was unique amongst his competitors, as it sought to preserve much of the existing structures and land. While the notion of preserving industrial artifacts had been implemented elsewhere, such as in Richard Haag’s Gasworks Park in Seattle, Peter Latz made an important distinction with Landschaftspark. Rather than simply positioning these abandoned structures as objects in the landscape to contemplate, Latz repurposed them as functional and interactive elements.
of decay and preserving these qualities. For example, the “Piazza Metallica” a 7x7 matrix of cast iron plates, is not meant to remain intact, but rather to continue rusting away, increasingly overgrown by plantings. Regarding this fixation with decay, Peter Latz says,

The tasks of dealing with run down industrial areas and open cast mines require a new method that accepts their physical qualities, also their destroyed nature and topography. This new vision should not be one of “recultivation,” for this approach negates the qualities that they currently possess and destroys them for a second time.7

While Landschaftspark’s site-specific programming and entropic gestures are the reason it has been selected as a precedent here, these are supplementary elements to its initiative to remediate a heavily contaminated site. Although the site in question does not possess toxicity issues of the same magnitude, the Mill Creek’s polluted state is to become a key element of the narrative due to its proximity to the site, attracting attention to an issue that is usually backgrounded. Here, though, the actual remediating of the Mill Creek is outside of this thesis’s scope. Regarding the Landschaftspark as a setting for the sublime experience, it engages the sublime inadvertently in several ways. The towering blast furnaces are listed as one of the primary reasons to visit the park as opposed to a traditionally planned park, and often are described as “monstrous” or “haunting,” qualities attributable to the terror at the root of the sublime. The contrasting vantage points of Landschaftspark, from soaring catwalks to deep, water filled tanks facilitate instances of the sublime (vertigo, opposition) and create a dynamic experience for the visitor. As a setting that promotes contemplation and recollection, as in the ore bunkers repurposed as intimate gardens, it is also in line with the intentions of this thesis.

Conclusions from a student-conducted visitor survey of Landschaftspark:

- the preserved blast furnaces play an important role as a major attraction
- visits to the park for individual and personal interest and pursuits are uppermost
- the primary motive for a visit to the park is the unique atmosphere8

These answers allude to the underling appeal of the terrain vague and also to vestiges of the sublime in the context of contemplating the ruin.

NOTES

1 Niall Kirkwood, Manufactured Sites: Rethinking the Post-Industrial Landscape (London and New York, Spon Press, 2001), 126.
2 Ibid., 127.
5 Ibid., XX.
7 Niall Kirkwood, Manufactured Sites, 136.
9 Kirkwood, Manufactured Sites, 159.
The precedents and theories explored in the previous chapters have given valuable insight on instigators of the sublime experience in addition to related concepts and strategies for applying them to a site similar to the one in Cincinnati. As per Ignasi de Solà-Morales’ *terrain vague*, preserving the disorder of the place was essential to these sublime readings being effectual. The solemnity of the ruin and the jarring solitude of the site were to remain. In addition, this allowance for disorder would be reconciled with the previous usage of the site as a highly *ordered* place. For this to occur, the new site design and programming would have to mesh seamlessly with the layered spirit of the place.

Considering the trivial nature of many typical architectural programs, the new usage of the site would have to be complimentary to the sublime experience. It is for this reason that the park program has been selected: to provide an unobtrusive setting for the sublime experience. With a park, disorder does not have to be structured to the extent that a traditional building mandates. In the mode of Robert Smithson, the intention is not to impose order on disorder, but rather, to aestheticize the entropy. However, facilitating the interaction of society with the park while maintaining the site’s current isolated quality would require judicious planning.

**Entrances**

The picturesque strategies Mary Miss uses in her site constructions provide a precedent to subtly engaging a site, utilizing curiosity to draw attention, much like the *terrain vague* already does for urban explorers. Using picturesque strategies immediately brings up the ideas of framing and

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curiosity, and it places a high priority on the actual approach to the site. In the design, the site can be entered in three locations, each with its own unique framing strategies.

REFLECTING POOL ENTRANCE

The reflecting pool entrance is where visitors traveling by car can access the site. It is reached by driving down either Mill Creek Road or Beekman Street to the old railroad crossing of the Cincinnati, Hamilton & Dayton mainline. Here, one would encounter a large reflecting pool, through which a pathway has been demarcated by two rows of steel poles. The dynamic surface of the water and the lines of poles draw in passerby, similarly to Mary Miss’ picturesque constructions. Car traffic crosses through a shallow section of the pool marked by the poles, and runs through two sets of rumble strips. These elements manifest a threshold condition, allowing the visitor to physically and audibly experience their transition from the city into someplace “other”. The poles also embody the succession/uniformity aspect of the sublime that is referential to infinity. After passing through the pool, one row of poles continues down a functioning service road for Beekman Street industries, leading incoming traffic to the parking lot, which is a reused lot that has been abandoned for several years. The reflecting pool entrance also has a pedestrian crossing that is set in the abandoned mainline track of the Cincinnati, Hamilton, & Dayton railroad. This pathway continues the entire length of the site, and could serve as the next segment of the Mill Creek Greenway/Bike Path, which currently stops a short distance north on Mill Creek Road.

After arriving in the parking lot, one enters the site via the forest path. The forest path acknowledges the site’s isolation from society by compounding it. First, a visitor is immersed in the forest, second, below grade. Finally, in the manner of a sublime event, one bursts out into daylight at the level of the water in the Mill Creek, reorienting to a distant vista of the grain elevator, a new focus that can be accessed by a network of paths on the banks of the creek.
The viaduct entrance will serve visitors walking on Beekman Street near the site’s southern terminus. It is marked by a serpentine row of steel sheet piling that carves a path out of the land sloping towards the Mill Creek, leading underneath the Hopple Street Viaduct. Here, it joins the southern end of the rail path just referenced. Under the viaduct, visitors will notice an elevated path has been constructed that leads out through the arched openings in the bridge piers. Walking down the path, they are first confronted with the view of a long succession of arched openings leading out over the Mill Creek and across the Queensgate Rail Yards. Once passing the threshold of the pier at the water’s edge, the path diverges. One portion stretches out to engage this initial view, but leaves the long corridor of arches unattainable, much like how the sublime can be found in a representation that fosters the idea of infinity, without itself being infinite. The other section of the walkway angles north towards the grain elevator tower, providing a glimpse of things to come. Then, the walkway returns to the rail path, through the second series of arched openings.

The last entrance to the site is much closer to the center of the site. It is a pedestrian entrance that involves two buildings, 3140 Beekman, an abandoned manufacturing building, and 3090 Beekman, a functioning building supply warehouse. 3140 Beekman, a concrete frame building with brick and glass infills, is entered from Beekman Street via the second floor, due to the steep grade change. This floor has had its infills and existing partitions removed, leaving a hypostyle hall-like condition of columns. Passing through the columns as another extended threshold into the site, one arrives at an overlook of the elevator on the building’s east side. The lower floor of this building will house park support facilities, including an area for storage and maintenance equipment, and also bathrooms. The upper floor will remain intact as a ruin, although
inaccessible, preserving the current state of the site. 3090 Beekman, as a functioning building, will have a fairly unobtrusive entrance. Given the view across the plane of its roof, level with grade at Beekman Street, an elevated walkway will be constructed on-axis with the headhouse tower, surrounded by chain-link fence to protect the building from pedestrians accessing the roof, and providing another corridor condition, with a goal in view, here, the tower. Upon reaching the end of this path, it merges with a connector walkway from 3140, which then steps down to the foot of the grain elevator.

**Focus**

The headhouse tower is the formal focus of the entire site, picturesquely drawing in visitors from the park’s periphery. Prior to the demolition of its stairways, many urban explorers climbed to the upper floors, seeking expansive views, as is evidenced by numerous photographs posted online. Even the first line of the 30 minutes exercise is, “I want to see the view from the top.” Referencing these instincts, the tower will be reprogrammed as an observation platform from which to view the surrounding industrial areas and distant skyline. The precipitous drop from the summit also holds the most latent potential on the site for cultivating the mathematical sublime. The remainder of the elevator will also be capitalized upon, its shadowy interiors providing additional instances of sublimity. First, however, the sheer vertical mass of the elevator requires a contrasting horizontal foreground from which one can acknowledge its extreme size, and this space is the Rail Plaza.

**Rail Plaza**

The Rail Plaza is the main space of the site, over one hundred feet wide and eleven hundred feet long. The rail path runs the length of the plaza, opposite the derelict grain elevator. It is articulated based on its previous usage as rail spurs serving the grain elevator and other industries, while embracing the currently disordered state of these tracks as abandoned piles of ties and rusting rails. The hundreds of railroad ties from around the site will be scattered into a new surface of concrete with exposed aggregate, which will be sourced from the grain elevator debris. Then, recessed plantings will recall the original rail lines, dimensioned to be equal in length to standard hopper railcars. To prevent this gesture from ordering the site too stringently, wherever rail ties cross these planters, they modify their shape, providing a means of aestheticizing the site’s disordered condition.

**Grain Elevator Complex**

From the Rail Plaza, the focal point of the grain elevator is reached. The structure is entered from the north array of silos, of which only basement walls, floor plates, and debris remains. To secure and aestheticize this debris field, the basement’s roof plate will be rebuilt, surmounted by a series of earthen mounds. This gesture superimposes a trace of the original silo locations and simultaneously preserves the haphazard experience of moving through the debris. The tower is entered utilizing the basement walls as a labyrinth, obscuring the certainty of what lies beyond, a sublime concept from its ability to generate unease. Eventually, one passes under the reconstructed roof plate and follows a path originally occupied by one of the elevator’s return conveyors. This leads the visitor into relative darkness, interrupted in two places, one, where the walls to either side are removed, allowing access back up atop the mounds, and two, where an opening has been punched through the roof plate and provides a glimpse of the tower looming above, suddenly much nearer, again per the picturesque strategy of surprise. Eventually, one emerges from this dark, tunnel-like condition into the cavernous base of the headhouse tower, gouged out by the demolition crews. At this point, one can ascend the stairs or take a construction-style elevator to either the top of the tower, or to two bridges to the south silo array. The silo array has been modified to allow the viewer to experience the disorienting vertical spaces of each grain bin, maximizing this dislocation by punching through the silos at their midpoint with an elevated walkway.
This affords more than sixty feet of distance from a viewer to the bottom or top of each silo. Four silos are each given different treatments, from a meditation room where the silo cap has been given a ring-like opening to allow light in, a sound chamber where the walkway hugs the wall and water pours in from above, reverberating about the space, a dark chamber where the silo cap has been left on and the only light comes from demolition damage to the silo’s base from below, the invisible roof far above disconcerting the viewer. The final silo is articulated similar to the viaduct, the path stretches out and engages a continuation of punched openings in the remaining silos, with the last wall not being breached, an inaccessible path to nowhere. Another path then diverges off and leads back to the silo with a circular stair within, permitting access to the tower or the silo roofs. Ascending the remainder of the tower, the top floor is designed with a bridge that leads out a north window of the tower, bringing the visitor first over a cylindrical abyss where one of the elevator’s great scale bins was housed, and then suddenly out into the light of day and a dizzying two hundred foot drop. The roof of the tower is the main observation deck, from which the climax of the site’s narrative is reached. Walkways extend beyond the bounds of the tower, encircling the skeletal structure of one of the grain legs and angling out towards the distant vista of downtown and the vast industrial landscape of the Mill Creek and Queensgate rail yards. From the end of one of these tenuous structures one can look down over two hundred feet to a reflecting pool surrounding the tower’s base, creating the illusion of a four hundred foot drop with nothing else below but sky.

By planning the park with picturesque narratives that culminate at the summit of the headhouse tower, the ambiguous terrain vague of the site will be engaged, but not dispelled. The park will serve as a respite from the ordered city surrounding it, and draw attention to the forgotten post-industrial interstice it occupies. The sublime experience serves thus as a means of interacting with the indeterminate nature of the terrain vague in a way that upholds its indeterminacies.
Bibliography


