I, Tamika K. Kramer, hereby submit this original work as part of the requirements for the degree of Master of Architecture in Architecture (Master of).

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Registering Spatial Ruin as Urban Artifact
Plotting OTR Community Yards

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Registering Spatial Ruin
as urban artifact
PLOTTING
OTR Community Yards

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The role of time in the city is additive and revelatory. As time adds age and documentary value to the material of the city, time also reveals the autonomy of the city. In the case of the historic district of Over-the-Rhine, Cincinnati, Ohio the experiential condition today is that of an organized space in ruin condition, here dubbed the *spatial ruin*. Over-the-Rhine’s once rigorously organized space is now a pocked spatial structure generating contiguous voids which interrupt the perceptible order of the gridded urban pattern.

In relation to the city, Over-the-Rhine is offered as a fragment of the past valued for age and cohesive aesthetic in the form of a designated historic district. As a temporal fragment delineated as a spatial whole, Over-the-Rhine has persisted through time as an artifact documenting its own history revealed in the fragmentary quality of its current spatial structure. The material of the city reveals the process of urban history in which architectural tangibles such as materiality and spatiality function as containers for collective memory.

As *spatial ruin*, Over-the-Rhine is revealed as a *locus* that was, inadvertently heightening consciousness of the space and time of the present. Revitalization strategies pursue reconstitution of the original spatial form through infill where the literal line between building lot and streetscape comprise the walls of the public space of the street. Restoration of the old spatial structure challenges the legibility of memory contained in the *spatial ruin*. The archeological aspect of the lived city often contradicts the clarity and idealization of the planned city revealing a conflict between the processes that produce space and the experience of place. This thesis addresses the *spatial ruin* as an architectural site of archeological value to the city as object of the collective.

In the context of ruin, the basis of site itself surfaces for scrutiny. This thesis addresses the role and expression of time in the built environment through the architectural intervention of a garden park: *OTR Community Yards*. Architectural engagement with the *spatial ruin* privileges continuity as seminal to the evocations of place. Through appropriation of the formal properties of the ruin experience, the project aims to design and program continuity in the urban landscape with an architecture of contingency that concretizes the *spatial ruin* in recognition of its historic veracity and an embodied sense of release.
PLAN of CINCINNATI, including all the late additional Subdivisions Engraved for DEJERNE, STATISTICAL VIEW. 1815.
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INTRODUCTION

Over-the-Rhine, Cincinnati, Ohio is a neighborhood developed in the late nineteenth century as a district comprising typical early industrial mixed land-use including many tenement buildings providing housing and community for immigrants of primarily German heritage. Over time, Over-the-Rhine has been home to shifting urban populations while undergoing the material and spatial degradation typical of old neighborhoods in midwestern shrunken urban cores.

While we are future oriented as human beings, we position ourselves for the future based on an interpretation of the past. How the past is interpreted is often revealed through formal processes of planning and preservation, which select aspects of the past for restoration and recollection. In Cincinnati, Ohio emerging preference for pedestrian–oriented environments has bolstered Over-the-Rhine's revitalization where restorative attention to facades and streetscapes attempt to create an image of industrial-era urbanization. Over-the-Rhine is a historic district due to its age and cohesive built fabric. Its historic integrity belongs to both the scale of the district and the scale of individual buildings. In a place with cohesive architectural character the mode of spatial intervention is usually conceptualized as infill so as to reinforce and not detract from the area's intact “historic” visual quality.

Over-the-Rhine’s development in the late nineteenth century was a result of both planned and unplanned spatial organization that began when the Cincinnati basin was settled by the new Americans in 1788. The spatial structure of the district today reveals unplanned spatial intervention in the form of demolitions due to building neglect and disuse. Over the past ninety years, different planning regimes have attempted to address Over-the-Rhine's declining physical condition with minimal effect.
Current revitalization strategies work toward the reconstruction of Over-the-Rhine’s intact spatial structure reminiscent of the late nineteenth century. This thesis argues that Over-the-Rhine's current spatial structure is a spatial ruin that is an artifact of the city's spatial narrative. The notion of ruin rests on formal and material conditions where degradation has progressed beyond the possibility of regaining utility through restorative repair. As the rationale for spatial organization shifted over time, Over-the-Rhine’s dense spatial structure became obsolete for the city’s economically productive forces. Applying the concept of ruin to space reveals a breakdown of conceptualized space where space becomes wasted and marginalized instead of being actively engaged.

The spatial condition interpreted as ruin is derived from Lefebvre’s abstract space, which describes the two-dimensional organizational overlay upon a landform that is the conceptualized space of land use planning and architecture. Historic value in place is accounted for through formalized processes of historic preservation, which admits only certain aspects of the built environment into the preservation dialogue. When environmental conditions, like the spatial ruin, do not conform to the intent of a spatial code, they become problems to be fixed so that any meaning or documentary value becomes obscured. The experience of the spatial ruin can be obliterated by the operations of abstract space. While contemporary space may originate as an abstraction, the effect of the spatial ruin is not abstract. The experience of the ruin condition brings to consciousness the role of abstraction in the environment. The spatial ruin exists amidst the remaining buildings; it is a site that unfolds its own narrative contributing to collective memory. The capacity of the spatial ruin is its ability to facilitate multiple interpretations of space, time, place, history, and purpose. The thesis project aims to engage the
spatial ruin while maintaining its legibility through architectural intervention.

The design methodology of the intervention uses a hermeneutic1 approach through operating concepts borrowed from landscape architecture, Girot’s Trace Concepts. The spatial ruin exists as an artifact of the city and offers an experiential sense of release that creates openings for contemplation. To enhance active engagement with the temporal, the program intervention of a garden park passively and actively engages the notion of time. Gardens facilitate the experience of time registered through environmental change. The program of gardening resonates with the urban because cultivation presupposes and facilitated the urban and evolved in tandem with urbanization. Today’s growing number of community gardens reveals a re-emergence of the practice within urban neighborhoods. The architectural intervention of OTR Community Yards aestheticizes interior and exterior garden conditions to offer an experience of space and time that is discoverable anew to the frequent visitor.

The spatial ruin builds on the decaying urban environment as being in part characterized by infiltrations of vegetation that start small but have the capacity to overwhelm with time. When the built environment becomes disconnected from human agency, nature emerges in unnoticed places; water penetrates cracks in constructed surfaces to yield weeds or other unexpected protrusions. Any notion of landscape hinges on human agency both in the recognition as well as the utility or maintenance of the landscape. In this context, both landscape and building are effectively “cultivated” through

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1 “In hermeneutics truth is interpretation, always a revealing-concealing, never posited absolutely and objectively. Yet hermeneutics is able to account for change, growth, and perhaps even evolution.” Alberto Pérez-Gómez, “Hermeneutics as Discourse in Design,” Design Issues 15, no. 2 (1999), 79.
human agency and are inseparable because together they comprise the built environment.

As weeds in the built environment bring the condition of the built into consciousness through juxtaposition, the *spatial ruin* as site for the neighborhood garden park brings into consciousness the literal space of the *spatial ruin* and the multiple interpretations of time and continuity that it offers. The thesis presents: (Ch. 1) the conflict between the operations of space, which aim to map real estate, and the capacity of place, which builds on collective memory and lived experience; (Ch. 2) the tension between the *spatial ruin* as historic artifact and preservation strategies directed at reconstituting the spatial structure of the old built environment; (Ch. 3) a hermeneutic design methodology borrowed from landscape architecture, Girot's *Trace Concepts*; and (Ch. 4) preliminary design ideas for the garden park.

As a series of agglomerated voids, the architectural site is a *spatial ruin* defined by a prevailing view condition that connects spaces across the organized grid. Instead of the site being delineated only by lot lines, it is determined by how it is perceived and experienced through bodily engagement. In the context of a densely organized spatial system, the project site offers its sense of release as an urban experience.

*OTR Community Yards* is proposed for the largest residential zone of Over-the-Rhine’s future land-use plan. The program will be enriched by adaptive reuse of a derelict tenement building located on the site. Water will be engaged as a fetish of the garden’s environmental operation with the intent of heightening the awareness of place, time, and the process of ongoing renewal. This thesis strives to engage the negotiation of site as a way of participating in an ongoing interpretation of the past.
Fig. 2. Timeline reflects the Cincinnati basin as a known landform plotted against a graph documenting the emergence and devolution of Over-the-Rhine’s building stock.
SPACEx vs. place

“Authentic knowledge of space must address the question of its production.”

Henri Lefebvre, The Production of Space

The Cincinnati basin has been a site of known human engagement for at least two thousand years. The Ohio River has provided sacred, political, and industrial value to different populations over the course of the basin’s history. Recognizing the basin as shifting context for different societies reveals how societies conceptualize or appropriate space. As different social groups occupied the basin landform, they did so through processes of spatial production. Lefebvre’s critique of space is a philosophy of history that integrates the complex meanings of physical, mental, and social space. Lefebvre offers a unitary theory of space that links mental space with physical space so that “each involves, underpins, and presupposes the other.”2 Mental, ideal space and physical, real space are different from each other yet are never separated. Conceptual and real space operate in an oscillating tension.3

Lefebvre also sets space and time in a binary opposition and dependence. “The fact is that space ‘in itself’ is ungraspable, unthinkable, unknowable. Time ‘in itself’, absolute time, is no

less unknowable. But that is the whole point: time is known and actualized in space, becoming a social reality by virtue of a spatial practice. Similarly space is known only in and through time. Unity in difference, the same in the other (and vice versa), are thus made concrete.”

Physical space has the capacity to register time through tangible material and spatial conditions. Ideal or mental space is abstract space, which through the operation of its conceptualization has the capacity to be imposed upon people. While physical space cannot be separated from its conception in mental space, its historic integrity and experiential value can be undermined by the operations or spatial practice of abstract space. Because space is a concept produced by human beings, it does not functionally exist without human intent. Time becomes a part of human experience through its perceived environmental effects in space.

How space comes into being occurs through spatial practice. While abstract space refers to space produced as commodity, absolute space is space appropriated for use by people. Absolute space presupposes abstract space and while there is an original chronological relationship between absolute and abstract space, these two kinds of space co-exist and are accommodated and negotiated within the practice of spatial production.

After space is produced, it becomes inhabited and lived, giving an overlay of use and experiential meaning to space. Lefebvre calls this aspect of space representational space. Once representational space has come into being, it becomes a background condition of life. Contested grounds can emerge from the collision of abstract space and lived space revealing invisible forces affecting spatial structure.

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4 Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 219.
Fig. 3. Diagram showing Cincinnati’s urban form being determined primarily by natural features.
Cincinnati’s Over-the-Rhine neighborhood can be considered an example of contested space. Cincinnati, settled in 1788, joined a narrative of place that involved native inhabitants and their appropriation of the basin landform as a site of engagement for at least two thousand years. Over-the-Rhine is recognized prominently for its German cultural roots because the late nineteenth century German community produced the building stock that exists today. The German community did not confront the ancient context as such because the ancient earthwork monuments sited at the Cincinnati basin were subsumed in the construction of the frontier town that preceded their arrival.

The 1788 settlement took the form of a grid deployed upon the landscape as a typical colonialist strategy for land settlement. While there are concepts about the grid providing utopian value, the grid also offered a means of legibility and immediate organization in an unknown landscape. Where meaning is unknown and unlived the use of abstraction renders the unknown comprehensible to the new. The pre-existing context becomes obscured behind new meanings and spatial practices.

In the organization of space, spatial codes or ideal plans as space-creating devices can operate in the manner of abstract space with a capacity for undermining and obscuring accumulations of time and complex spatial conditions. The process of abstract space involves a powerful re-conceptualization of space that challenges the existential relevance of sense of place.

Sense of place is an intangible quality grounded in tangible moments and things, which add up to place. A place is to some degree a framework for multiple types of infill or layering; the framework has to do with legibility and imageability while the infill or layering speaks to adaptability. “It is important to maintain some great common forms: strong nodes, key paths, or widespread homogeneities. But within
this large framework, there should be a certain plasticity, a richness of possible structures and clues, so that the individual observer can construct his own image.5 A sense of place also participates in a continuum of place as opposed to resting on a static version of itself; it is open to adaptability. “By appearing as a remarkable and well-knit place, the city could provide a ground for the clustering and organization of these meanings and associations. Such a sense of place in itself enhances every human activity that occurs there, and encourages the deposit of memory traces.”6

In the case of Over-the-Rhine, its status as a historic district is based on the perception of the late nineteenth century building stock as being emphatically of the late nineteenth century. Despite the passage of time, buildings in historic districts must maintain visual adherence to the period of its characterization, which may require unusually costly efforts and favor lucrative uses. Historic districts can therefore appear homogenous and reflect the phenomenon of Disneyfication whereby a place is re-imagined into a thematic historic narrative that becomes disconnected from particularities.

The historic narrative of the late nineteenth century American city, often comprised of building stock with prohibitively limiting spatial arrangements, has been somewhat idealized for its pedestrian character. Form-based codes work toward structuring pedestrian environments based on new urbanist spatial principles. While such principles may enhance the environmental experience of new developments, the same principles applied to Over-the-Rhine challenge the opportunities for continuity in the urban landscape that exist in the current porous spatial condition.

Fixing Space

Over-the-Rhine's existence today is in part due to inadequate funding to complete urban renewal planning efforts that would have razed the neighborhood. Different planning paradigms have played out to inadvertently contribute to the current situation. The containing nature of the basin's geography, with hills and a river encircling its flat land, resulted in extremely high density by the turn of the twentieth century. The city, accommodating all the activity of industry and life, was a chaotic and polluted place. The spatial congestion was addressed through planning and policy.

In the early twentieth century Over-the-Rhine was considered a typical American slum with aged buildings, mixed land uses, and mixed peoples located at the edge of the central business district. In 1921 the nascent Cincinnati Planning Commission sought a comprehensive city plan to begin addressing the crowded conditions of the basin. At the time, one third of city's population lived in the basin, which contained eighty percent of the city's tenements and not even five percent of the city's area. The area displayed broad stretches of depressed property values that resulted from the city's expansion into surrounding land eclipsing the need for the tightly packed urban form.

Through the tabula rasa practice of slum clearance, the industrial city of the late nineteenth century was transformed from a place of pedestrian spatiality with mixed land uses to a place accommodating vehicular traffic and segregated land use. Slum clearance in conjunction with zoning codes led to the dominance of office space and parking in the new core. In 1948, the city's comprehensive plan called for the razing of all slums including Over-the-Rhine. Slum clearance facilitated an agenda of ethnic segregation that sought to

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7 Zane Miller and Bruce Tucker, Changing Plans for America's Inner Cities: Cincinnati's Over-The-Rhine and twentieth century urbanism, (Columbus, OH: The Ohio State University Press, 1998), 17
8 Miller and Tucker, Changing Plans for America's Inner Cities, 29
foster social competence, which was considered a necessity for the maintenance of order and sanitation in the urban realm. Over-the-Rhine's chaotic, mixed land uses conflicted with the planning code's agenda of filtering and organizing land uses. Since the beginning of planning practice in Cincinnati, Over-the-Rhine proved difficult to ameliorate through the application of spatial codes.

While lack of funding provides the ultimate reason for the failure of the 1948 demolition scheme, the perception of Over-the-Rhine appeared no different from any other slum contributing to urban blight at that time. In the context of the mid-century American city, Over-the-Rhine was marginal space, a kind of urban frontier allowing land uses or activities that were often denied elsewhere in the city. In 1982 the Cincinnati 2000 Plan: A Comprehensive Development Plan for Downtown referred to Over-the-Rhine not by name but only as a “fringe area on the north which is beginning to emerge from a previously blighted condition.”\(^9\) While Cincinnati 2000 offered development strategies for zones within the central business district and some adjoining areas, the plan did not address development of Over-the-Rhine. The plan advised that historic districts were appropriate for infill projects and small investors. Beginning in the 1980s, historic preservation became a part of the discourse surrounding Over-the-Rhine's development. The neighborhood remained a marginal aspect of the urban realm until value from historic preservation was asserted and employed in the re-imagination of the neighborhood as an upscale residential appendage serving the central business district.

Fig. 4. (left, top) Land Use Plan for Over-the-Rhine.

Fig. 5. (left, bottom) Project site as a landbanked area being prepared for development by the active community development corporation (shaded).

Fig. 6. (above) Project site and neighborhood showing dominant streets for vehicular traffic. Dashed line shows proposed streetcar route.
Fig. 8. Project area figure ground, c2012
In 2012, the city developed *Plan Cincinnati*, the first comprehensive planning initiative in over three decades. The new planning approach privileges pedestrian friendly urban form based on new urbanist spatial principles that champion cohesive community character and face-to-face social value. The emergence of form-based spatial codes across the country reveals a new planning paradigm derived from the unplanned but distinctly pedestrian morphology of the old industrial city.

*Geography as Resource*

Where settlement occurs is often a function of natural resources or geographic features that make a particular place desirable. The Ohio river has been such a resource in the history of Cincinnati. The basin’s urban pattern of north-south streets is perpendicular to the river’s path projecting a prevailing sense of directionality that registers the shape of the riverfront throughout the basin. The significance of the river is captured in the intent of the street pattern, which privileges public access to the river and maintains a sense of the riverfront as communal or public resource.

Major waterways are today nearly irrelevant to the everyday experience of individuals except for the unthought movement of goods and the imminence of catastrophic floods. In Cincinnati, the old Miami-Eerie Canal has persisted in public memory and urban discourse in a strong way. Its memory is reinforced physically through Central Parkway, the major roadway that traces the path of the canal and acts as a border to Over-the-Rhine. As major infrastructure, the canal is a significant act of construction but its use is not autonomous; the canal’s value comes from its connection to natural waterways. The river was highly significant to both the industrial settlers and the ancients. Water is therefore considered relevant to the interpretation of the context.

*Geography as Meaning*

The Cincinnati basin gains importance from the Ohio river and its connection to the larger Mississippi, which besides supporting thriving civilizations in the “New World”, is the
world's fourth longest river serving the world's fourth largest watershed. The terminology of the “longest” and the “largest” is particularly abstract; they offer no obvious human utility and signal meaning derived only from methodologies of abstraction. As a place of meaning long before the development of scientific method, the site facilitates contemplation of space and engages a continuum that fades into the distant past instead of freezing abruptly into images that present the past as discontinuous and separate from the present.

Absolute space, produced for use, is distinctly different from abstract space, often produced as real estate value. In the production of abstract space, absolute space can be easily undermined as in the case of a community garden on “vacant” urban land, where usually absent landowners are awaiting development opportunities based on the real estate market.

The interpretation of place is a combination of space imbued with particular material and symbolic qualities that are related to Lefebvre’s representational space. The memory-based or representational experience of place varies from individual to individual and group to group and reflects the multivalent nature of place; one person’s place is another’s non-place.  

Geographer Edward Relph, like Lefebvre, sees that space and place operate differently. Relph identifies types of spatial experiences that exist in everyday life: that of bodily spatial experience that plays out in the unthought context of the everyday akin to Lefebvre’s representational space, versus abstract space. Relph pursues an interpretive or phenomenological approach to place that integrates the multi-valence of context while maintaining the value of various deciphered meanings existing amidst each other.

10 Sarah Menin, Constructing Place: Mind and Matter (New York: Routlededge, 2003), 1.
Of particular importance to the interpretive exploration of place, is the effect of place on people's identity. A sense of home or belonging framed as *insideness* stands in opposition to *outsideness*, which captures a sense of alienation from the world. In the evolution of the American industrial city, different populations negotiated the space of the city before they were divided through economic access and planning policies. As various populations move in and out of a place, they progress from *outsideness* to *insideness* and in so doing alter and add to the meanings of a place.

Place as a container of lived experience, works through both material and memory. Since place is of the particular then time that is registered in place is particular as well. The specificity of a place is in part due to the specificity of its memories registered through material or stuff. In order for memories to persist for those who were there as *insiders* and registered for *outsiders* and future inhabitants, they must be contained in place.

*Place memory* is a conception of how place supports collective memory: "It is the stabilizing persistence of place as a container of experiences that contributes so powerfully to its intrinsic memorability. An alert and alive memory connects spontaneously with place, finding in it features that favor and parallel its own activities. We might even say that memory is naturally place-oriented or at least place-supported."

The relationship between place and memory depends on the passage of time being registered in place and a recollective function derived from such material registration. The articulation of change in place, with its embedded relationship to time, provides either continuity or discontinuity in the evolution and understanding of a place.

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12 Relph, *Place and Placelessness*, 49.
Revitalization efforts deal simultaneously in representational space and abstract space. Since representational space is about meaning and the lived experience and abstract space is about the motives of conceptualized space, place becomes contested territory in the revitalization process. While revitalization responds to the collective prevailing desire to achieve improved conditions in Over-the-Rhine, it is done without attention to continuity.

Over-the-Rhine’s redevelopment sites are conceived as tabula rasa for new interventions by the local revitalization authority, the community development corporation. Land banking supports the aggregation of small, inconsistently organized parcels, into much larger parcels that become a single site of development. The scale of the intervention responds to the economies of scale required by the dominant processes of space production. Land banking in Over-the-Rhine facilitates the production of abstract space.\textsuperscript{14} Large scale developments attempt to add visual cohesion to the historic district by not being formally or materially distinct from the historic condition. Such design strategies dilute the character of the historic district and challenge the legibility of history.

The spatial practice of abstract space has the capacity to challenge the environmental experience of continuity and the evocation of meaning in place. By recognizing opportunities for architectural contingency, environmental conditions can become design parameters that contribute to the spatial narrative of the urban landscape.

\textsuperscript{14} Contemporary space production occurs through the framework of real estate where the distributive capacity of markets delineates use of space.
“Wherever buildings are broken by the explosion of bombs or artillery shells, by lack of maintenance or repair, by fire or structural collapse, their form must be respected in its integrity, embodying a history that must not be denied.”

Lebbeus Woods, Radical Reconstruction
Fig. 9.  Project site showing derelict tenement building.
“What is contained in place is on its way to being well remembered.”
Edward Casey, *Remembering*

**The Spatial Ruin**

Over-the-Rhine today is a place most visibly characterized by a ruinous condition although it is different from a typical ruin, which exists only as artifact without implications for use. Over-the-Rhine consists of space replete with degraded or erased buildings and consequently a ruinous spatial structure. Revitalization efforts play to the touristic and nostalgic value of intact architectural fabric. The trajectory of current infill strategies suggest a spatial outcome that denies the capacity of the district’s environmental experience as being significant to the spatial narrative of the city. The buildings themselves are considered historic within the context of the historic district but the spatial experience of the district remains unconsidered in preservation discourse. The existence of the *spatial ruin* contributes to the palimpsest of the historic district and bears historic value that is not accounted for in the scheme of values associated with preservation and revitalization agendas.

At the turn of the twentieth century in Europe, Alois Riegl confronted the negotiation of the new with the past. Riegl found that preservation was highly subjective and he sought to grasp and elucidate the invisible forces behind preservation attitudes. “History, he argued, has not only given rise to different kinds of monuments but also exposed them to widely varying appreciation throughout time.”15 Riegl recognized

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that the past was being interpreted by the present and these interpretations build on themselves to obscure the multivalent nature of the actual past. “Underneath the ripples created by fashion, the thrust of history keeps changing the past, blocking one segment from view while raising another from obscurity. Recovery and repression occur in the communicating vessels of contemporary interests. At any moment the historical dynamics involve loss as well as discovery.”

A monument represents an attempt to transcend time. Monuments typically impose spatial and material conditions that convey meaning about the monument event itself as well as the background societal context. Riegl identified two types of monuments: intentional and unintentional. The unintentional monument is particularly relevant to the discussion of architectural preservation in the United States. Some objects become monuments as artifact. In the case of a historic district, aesthetic reverence to a particular time has the effect of “transcending” the present time. Historic districts therefore become unintentional monuments to the past in the context of the generic modern city.

Objects always have a capacity to become monumental in an archeological way. Riegl uses the example of an ancient scrap of paper bearing a trivial note that can be dissected for its artistic and historic meanings. The scrap of paper is not a monument until we know it to be an indispensable artifact of something that has not been formally monumentalized. Riegl’s example reveals that monumentality can be a function of context and perception. To the Germans who built the neighborhood, Cincinnati Music Hall, 1878, is more likely considered a cultural monument than the everyday buildings of their urban life. Today Over-the-Rhine’s late nineteenth century building stock can be considered an artifact of another

time with historic capacity revealing spatial negotiation for the working class of the period.

Whether a monument is intentional or unintentional, its role is commemorative. Intentional and unintentional monuments have very different origins. Unintentional monuments are historical monuments because their meaning comes from the passage of time and history, as opposed to the intent of the original doers of the work. When unintentional monuments emerge, they reveal that history has been interpreted and made relevant or relational to the period. “In the case of the intentional monument, its commemorative value has been determined by the makers, while we have defined the value of the unintentional ones.”

In addition to Riegl’s separation of the intentional and unintentional monument, he offers a third category in which the object or monument has degraded extensively so that the effect of time on the object is the monument itself. Such an object is a ruin that is so degraded that its only remaining purpose is to communicate the extent of its existence and reveal depth of time. “These monuments are nothing more than indispensable catalysts which trigger in the beholder a sense of the life cycle, of the emergence of the particular from the general and its gradual but inevitable dissolution back into the general. This immediate emotional effect depends on neither scholarly knowledge nor historical education for its satisfaction, since it is evoked by mere sensory perception.”

The monument based entirely on age-value therefore denies historic-value as primary and disregards notions of objective meaning in favor of subjective or aesthetic meaning.

18 Riegl, Oppositions, 23.
19 Riegl originated concept of age-value as a basis of commemorative monument unique to the modern experience. Reigl, Oppositions, 24.
J.B. Jackson saw the image of ruin playing a role in the American landscape. Jackson saw American history as dependent on disjuncture, a break in memory that denies continuity in the landscape. The ruin reveals this discontinuity and allows a rediscovery of history through restoration, but such restoration depends on a creative and nostalgic formulation of a past place and is in fact not history at all, only a careful and conscious interpretation of it. Jackson calls this interpretation of history a correction of history, “where we can briefly relive the golden age and be purged of historical guilt … there is no lesson to learn, no covenant to honor; we are charmed into a state of innocence and become part of the environment. History ceases to exist.”

J.B. Jackson recognized America’s enthusiasm for small town restorations as being a combination of pursuing tourism for economic value and sentimentalizing random and obscure aspects of the past. But Jackson also recognizes these acts of restoration as an interpretation of history with relevance to the present similar to Riegl’s unintentional monument. American history becomes culturally recognized and brought into public consciousness through the act of restoration. Small town restorations produce a sense of charm and nostalgia, not unlike the glamour of contemporary downtown historic districts that aim to be chic.

Landscape in American culture is different from the European conception of landscape. Contrary to the place-based or landscape reverence associated with the Greek temple, sited in places deemed sacred by their natural existence and then consecrated with architecture, the American culture has revealed a different relationship to landscape. J.B. Jackson in his discussion on the sacred grove in America, a common religious typology of the early nineteenth century, sees the rationale of the American sacred grove as one that inverts

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the significance of place in the cultural structure of sacredness. “Place in antiquity came first; the deity and his or her shrine came later. In Christendom it was action, human or divine, that sanctified a place. With us, in the beginning was the word – or the deed.” The implication of the American social practice of sanctifying place, as opposed to place revealing its sanctity may be a consequence of outsideness as identified by Relph. America's large population of people seeking insideness without an inherited place as container of collective memory opens up the landscape for radical interpretation and action.

At the turn of the twentieth century where history seemed to be at a pivotal moment marking the separation of the traditional and the modern, understanding preservation as a curatorial historical force was particularly poignant. Riegl wrote about the cult of age-value for which ruins in a state of legible decay are the ultimate form of monument. The cult of age-value privileged the reclamation of manmade objects by nature. In the aesthetic appreciation of the sublime ruin, the ruin should not be altered in any way so as to interfere with its documentary value or aesthetic integrity. While this attitude promises only the ultimate destruction of the ruin, it suggests why the ruin could be more valued in the modern context because of its relationship to time. Preservation movements were the consequence of rapid change in the modern city. The preservation of past material can be accounted for in architectural projects but the ruinous condition of the spatial structure of the historic district remains vulnerable to the erasing capacity of abstract space.

Preservation in the United States has been formalized under the following categories: Cultural Landscape, Urban Preservation, and Architectural Preservation (often referred to as Historic Preservation.) The Cultural Landscape is the most inclusive paradigm for preservation endeavors because

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it rests on the working relationship between the landscape and human beings. While this concept could be expanded to include any type of environment that human beings live and work in, including urban landscapes, it is used primarily in the context of rural landscapes and agricultural practices. Architectural Preservation is an approach specific to buildings and can occur for various reasons or bases of value such as age value, historic value, art value, or use value. Urban Preservation undertakes sociological aspects of preservation and engages with place as it is relevant for the unfolding of a specific narrative; such narratives can be pivotal capturing a broad historic pattern or they can be sub-narratives pertaining to the experience of specific groups in society.

Over-the-Rhine’s historic significance lies in its role as a typical worker housing community in the broad pattern of American urban settlement. Its aesthetic consistency embodies similarities in building type, materials, workmanship, and construction methods that are distinctively period specific and architecturally meager since the builders and residents were not wealthy. The organization and negotiation of land for building is captured in irregularly distributed lot lines and shared walls yielding historic information about the residential occupancy of space in the early industrial city.

Criteria for the evaluation of historic significance in the United States depend on integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. The prevailing mood of Over-the-Rhine today is melancholious. Integrity of feeling should be considered a palimpsest of the German Over-the-Rhine of the late nineteenth century and the historic district of today’s collective memory which is the spatial ruin.

The spatial ruin of Over-the-Rhine occurred over decades but reveals by way of the buildings that remain, a destructive force that was neither an inevitable act of nature nor an overt act of war. Over-the-Rhine’s material and spatial degradation resulted from disinvestment over almost a hundred years.
The area has been continuously inhabited while the decline ensued. Urban decay, the spatial and material decline of the neighborhood, was an everyday lived condition.

Because Over-the-Rhine has been experienced as a decaying a spatial structure in the context of everyday lived experience, its structure as a ruin is not an elucidated condition. The area has sustained the decaying condition for a longer period than that of its growth and height of German occupancy. The ruin condition is apprehended at first because of its uncanny character, which evokes emotions of fear, abandonment, neglect, obsolescence, and time.

Preservation efforts can have a sanitizing effect on time weathered building fabric. Restored building facades often erase the accumulated legibility of time with cheery painting schemes and period specific windows and signage. Such practices deny the traces left by history and time leading to an embalmed or Disneyfied environment. The built environment has an inherent capacity to present itself as palimpsest of urban history where what is registered through materiality and spatiality provide moments of continuity that can be engaged through design. The expression of time and sense of continuity is strengthened by tangible qualities in the built environment. In the case of Over-the-Rhine, preservation efforts strengthen real estate values so that the market underlies what is preserved. The typical outcome of this process is often community displacement.

Over-the-Rhine’s spatial condition is suggestive of trauma. Within the realm of traumatic events, shared memory is most often and most aptly discussed as being characterized by mortal violence but a sense of shared memory is also relevant to the deciphering of meaning in the everyday. That there is a shared understanding of the past comes to the fore by academic use of the terms: collective memory, social memory, popular memory, cultural memory, and public memory. Contemporary consensual academic positioning on memory...
provides the basis for how memory is relevant to the urban architectural project: (1) memory is activated by present concerns, issues, or anxieties; (2) memory narrates shared identities, constructing senses of communal belonging; (3) memory is animated by affect; (4) memory is partial, partisan, and thus often contested; (5) memory relies on material and/or symbolic supports; (6) memory has a history.22

The role of memory in relation to the construction of history is rooted in the present. “The prime function of memory, then, is not to preserve the past but to adapt it so as to enrich and manipulate the present. Far from simply holding on to previous experiences, memory helps us to understand them. Memories are not ready-made reflections of the past, but eclectic, selective reconstructions based on subsequent actions and perceptions and on ever-changing codes by which we delineate, symbolize, and classify the world around us.”23

Experiencing the spatiality of Over-the-Rhine is uncanny. The emergence of the uncanny in the nineteenth century is related to the modern alienation of people in their environments. The uncanny is an experiential consequence that is not attained merely through the physical but is a conflation of the physical with the imagined. “The uncanny is not a property of the space itself nor can it be provoked by any particular spatial conformation; it is, in its aesthetic dimension, a representation of a mental state of projection that precisely elides the boundaries of the real and the unreal in order to provoke a disturbing ambiguity, a slippage between waking and dreaming.”24 The sublime shares fear evoking qualities with the uncanny but in the case of Over-the-Rhine, being a place that

is recognizable as residential, evocation of the uncanny may depend on the context of the observer. For something to be apprehended as uncanny, a certain mental distance must exist between the observer and the observered so Over-the-Rhine offers different experiential qualities to the insider versus the outsider.

If the uncanny is a quality that the spatial structure of Over-the-Rhine evokes, then it is a quality that resides in the background of the lived experience since its apprehension is dependent upon the distance-qualified context of the observer. Where significant building fabric is missing, the fronts and backs of buildings can be seen simultaneously altering the image and space of the streetscape, which is no longer dedicated to the presentation of facades. This is an uncanny thing that was never intended to happen. “The uncanny is something which ought to have remained hidden but has come to light.”25 Where multi-story blank walls occur, they tell that they were shared architectural elements abutted by other similar structures, never anticipating exposure. Legible traces of adjoining buildings, porches, and chimneys remain on the exposed party walls.

Over-the-Rhine has been home to shifting demographics for several generations. There are many constituents and many shared memories that contest each other’s perspectives on place since Over-the-Rhine as container for memory has undergone dramatic physical changes. The German population that built the late nineteenth century version of Over-the-Rhine would hardly recognize the neighborhood today, which became home to Appalachians and African-Americans around the mid-twentieth century. The place as container serves all lived experience; it contains traces, scars, materiality, and spatiality that together tell of the multi-valence of context and reveal the historic depth of the place.

Like place, which can become contested by various constituents, memory can become contested as well. In order for everyday shared memories to surface, it must be confronted or challenged by something else. When unchallenged, shared memories remain covert or unconsciously embedded in the environment or they are not yet gathered as memory because they are still the lived experience. If place is a container for shared memory, then place itself with its qualities of materiality and spatiality is charged with bearing the physical supports for memory.

The interpretation of Over-the-Rhine’s spatial structure as a ruin rests on the degree to which the spatial structure has been compromised by the destruction of buildings. As buildings have been destroyed, the intent of the imposed gridded order has been diminished. If the spatial structure is restored thoroughly, its documentary value will be erased. The indeterminate form of the new spatial structure due to the haphazard nature of “as needed” demolition has the capacity to convey a sense of historical distance, of the time elapsed since its creation and constitutes it historical depth.26 The spatial ruin is legible by way of the irregular boundary conditions it creates offering spatial conditions that respond to bodily engagement with space through movement and vision instead of through the delineations of abstractly produced space. Any intervention that destroys the legibility of the spatial ruin destroys history and instead participates in the authorship of the past.

In addition to Riegl’s thoughts on ruins at the turn of the twentieth century, ruins in the modern context is a topic also taken up by Lebbeus Woods. If the cult of age-value stands in opposition to the cult of preservation because the former opposes any kind of intervention while the latter opposes any

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26 Ideas about documentary value and historical distance are from: Kurt Forster, “Monument/Memory and the Mortality of Architecture,” *Oppositions* 25, Fall (1982), 9.
further degradation, then his approach is in total opposition to both models because he proposes occupying the ruin and intervening architecturally to make use of the ruin. Because the ruins of his projects occur from actual destructive events such as traditional war, economic embargo, and natural disaster; there is no historical or spatial distance for aestheticizing to take place. The ruin is a lived condition produced by swift and destructive forces that claim whole territories at once. In response to destruction, the impetus is to restore and to erase; these are operations of society’s hierarchical structure and its ideologies. Restoration allows claim to the past while erasure followed by “improvement” establishes the claim to the future.27 The ruin condition of Over-the-Rhine is repeated in other old American urban centers and is usually symptomatic of persistent long term disinvestment and economic segregation. Although not swiftly devastating, the accumulated effect over time is a territorial ruin that is a part of the spatial narrative of the city.

Preservation at the district scale becomes a combination of unintentional and intentional monumentality. Since the district was originally created without monumental intent, it is for us an urban artifact of unintentional monumentality left by late nineteenth century immigrants whose way of life featured many unfavorable conditions. Today’s contemporary impetus to revitalize and reconstitute the district can be considered the making of intentional monumentality since preserved objects claim their future state through present preservation commitments. The preserved historic district becomes, for the future, an intentional monument produced out of the unintentional monument of our time.

Existing preservation and planning paradigms do not support the concept of the urban landscape expressing its autonomy as historic artifact in the manner of a cultural

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landscape. In the case of rural environments, the clarity of the relationship between the community and the landscape can make the application of cultural landscape theory pragmatic whereas the complexity of the urban environment is more challenging leaving only building preservation as the agent of continuity in the urban landscape. The spatial ruin, with its integrity and legibility in tact, challenges the historic narrative of revitalization where the image of the past is often attained in a temporal leap instead of through successive acts of continuity that reveal changes over time registered through materiality and spatiality.
A HERMENEUTIC APPROACH TO SITE

“The site is neither pure nor ideal; it is “claimed,” which is to say it is preoccupied, by knowledge, power, and time. The site is a work, a human or social trace. It is comparable to a myth, temple, or city in that it is open to archeological deciphering. The site is a significative system with no singular author. Using nature to convey ideology, the site is a social product.”

Carol Burns, Site Matters

Over-the-Rhine’s high-density spatial structure facilitated extremely narrow buildings with limited access to daylight. Due to their tight spatial configurations and limited amenities these buildings can be difficult to adapt to today’s living standards at a cost that is market sensitive. A desire to develop different types of residential spaces turns parcels consolidated through landbanking into large-scale real estate opportunities. Blocks with majority vacant lots are transformed into single developments. As revitalization strengthens under the current patterns of large-scale infill, the spatial structure of Over-the-Rhine will eventually appear near restored to its late nineteenth century form erasing the spatial wounds that have formed over time. To further erode the experience of Over-the-Rhine as spatial artifact, the aesthetics of infill buildings preferentially tend toward similar visual character, rhythm, and massing as the aged building stock.

The tendency for new construction to mimic the old obscures both the old and the new so that neither is asserted through the juxtaposition. Surface effects reinforce cohesion at the district scale by addressing urban form through regulating
lines. The infill practice of restoring the late nineteenth century urban form’s rigid street edges denies any historic capacity that may exist in the current porous spatial condition. An architectural intervention that is contingent upon the spatial ruin participates in building continuity because it avoids erasing the existing built or void condition and engages both through the architectural intervention. A comprehensive design approach that treats landscape as having capacity for establishing continuity in environmental experience is James Corner’s alternative of hermeneutics. With the intent of nurturing collective memory, cultural orientation, and continuity through attention to the particular, Corner’s design theory offers interpretive reasoning for pursuing a landscape of continuity.

The development of New York's High Line establishes continuity in the urban landscape by appropriating obsolete industrial space already bearing a sense of place defined by derelict industrial character, infiltrating vegetation, and a contemplative atmosphere. The design project recognized the abandoned infrastructure as an architectural site; the elevated rail line was re-imagined as space for pedestrian human occupancy through the application of an interpretive design methodology. The designers developed the urban capacity of the site based on what already existed, particularly its mood, vegetation, and non-frontal building views. The park program is highly restrictive preventing most recreational park activities. The primary experiential program is the spatial narrative of the High Line as urban artifact, a promenade presenting a unique view on the city.

Fig. 11-13. The High Line, New York
Fig. 14-17. A Railroad Artifact, New York 2000
Photographer Joel Sternfeld.

Photographs show the project site of The High Line, New York before the intervention of the park and garden promenade.
Trace Concepts

Girot’s Trace Concepts, is a design methodology, borrowed from landscape architecture, which applies hermeneutics to the design process through the consecutive operating concepts of landing, grounding, finding, and founding. While Corner advocates on a theoretical and historical basis for hermeneutics in design, Girot’s methodology offers a process for situating the designer as outsider in the landscape. The trace concepts cluster around issues of memory: marking, impressing, and founding, responding to gradients of discovery, inquiry, and resolution.29

Landing marks the initial engagement with the site and registers anything that appears to have design relevance. The richness of the initial engagement depends on unfamiliarity so that background conditions can emerge. The interpretation of the narrative occurs through the designer beginning with landing and unfolds over the course of the design process to be concretized in the design intervention or founding. The site’s initial apprehension as uncanny and unstable spatial ruin is considered landing.

Grounding builds on landing by expanding the site investigation to capture invisible conditions in addition to the visible ones discovered through landing. Historic probing and repeated encounters with the site establish a kind of palimpsest of visible and invisible forces that reveal a narrative. Historic accounts expand the meaning of the site to include the near and distant past while repeated site visits establish the current lived meaning of the site. Grounding integrates research with the experiential investigation of place so that the process of landing continues through grounding to create a more informed assessment than that based only on the designer’s initial sensory apprehension and intuition.

Finding is the beginning of the design synthesis that captures the process of searching as well as the outcome. The designer’s interpretation determines the elements of the narrative developed from grounding. In order to facilitate interpretation of the urban landscape as continuous and temporally layered, the declining urban core was considered in the context of shrinking cities. As a site the spatial ruin engages with the generic phenomenon of core shrinkage and spatial degradation by transforming the porous spatial condition that is emblematic of shrinkage into an architectural condition that contributes to the spatial narrative of city.
Founding furthers the synthetic agenda determined through finding. The act of founding speaks to what is provided by the designer through the design project. Throughout the interpretive operations of landing, grounding, and finding the spatial ruin is discovered and interpreted. The garden park is the architectural act of founding that legitimizes the spatial ruin in service of the aestheticized garden program as well as the legibility of time in the urban landscape.

Embedded in the term site are multiple scales of reference from the building to the settlement. A site is recognized only in the present. The history of a setting is only acknowledged if the forces acting upon it have affected its present visible form.30 The term site is derived from verbs stressing action (sinere, meaning to leave, place, or lay; and serere, meaning to sow), a site results from human agency.31 Therefore once humans act upon space, it becomes associated with particular meaning and works as a site. The temporal continuum of the project site extends to a world that existed before settlement in 1788. Such depth of time eludes us as a presence in the environmental experience of Over-the-Rhine because the rigorous spatial structure necessitated by high density, Industrial-era occupation left no conceptual or physical space for any prior meaning of the basin landform. The project site, consisting of agglomerated voids that emerged haphazardly over time, marks one occasion in which abstract space eroded enough to deliver an experiential sense of release and prod contemplation on the nature of the built of environment.

The uncanny experience of simultaneously viewing the public façade and private yard or building rear has documentary value that cannot be retained if the view is obstructed. The tall brick walls revealing traces of formerly abutting structures, once hidden among tightly packed buildings reveal the former

density of the setting. The buildings were dedicated to the production of interior space; they are a kind of economic vernacular, and reflect the negotiation of space amidst the spatial constraints of the industrial city.

At the time of its establishment in the mid nineteenth century, Over-the-Rhine was a German neighborhood developed in response to anti-German sentiments. Over-the-Rhine may represent a spatial response to political strife. In the late nineteenth century, American cities were multi-ethnic centers of production so the prominent emergence of an ethnic enclave spatially reveals the social hierarchy distinguishing groups within the urban realm. The area that became Over-the-Rhine was land on the outskirts defined by industrial infrastructure, the Miami-Eerie canal as a border.

In Over-the-Rhine’s period of strong German community, the canal was already a near obsolete piece of infrastructure due to the development of the railroad. To make building possible, there were twenty six active savings and loans institutions that served the community. They represented a micro-economy of community capital, pooled from labor, which was awarded through lottery for the construction of many of the dwellings and shops with dwellings above. The organization and distribution of capital is relevant as a form of financial archeology that informs the interpretation of buildings and organization of space. Irregular lot lines in the project area suggest negotiated conditions, deviating from the more equitably distributed platted lines. Speculative projects were also undertaken with many tenements constructed.

Fig. 19. Diagram showing the process of urban history challenged by the erasing capacity of formulaic infill. The spatial ruin is considered as an architectural site through a hermeneutic design methodology so that the legibility of its history remains intact as urban artifact.

Fig. 20. (next page) Project site showing derelict tenement building constructed in 1875.
Fig. 21-22. Sample of life and work occurring inside tenements.
Fig. 23. George Bellows, The Lone Tenement, 1909
National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.
Fig. 24. Over-the-Rhine, Cincinnati, 2008
Photographer James Griffioen.

Fig. 25.

Fig. 24-26. Over-the-Rhine, Cincinnati, 2008
Photographer James Griffioen.
In the industrial city, work was plentiful and immigrants supplied labor to meet a growing demand in the production of goods for river export. In addition to dedicated work environments, places of work were also scattered throughout the city absorbed into various typologies of dwellings. Work was practically everywhere. Progress and cultural reinforcement made possible the neighborhood's late nineteenth century building boom that resulted in the consistent brick Italianate building stock that is the primary subject of revitalization efforts.

In a world of distinct immigrant groups like that of the late nineteenth century, ethnic distinctions may have provided the network of associations and common behaviors that gathered the actions of a particular community into acts with collective meaning and collective memory. Successive ethnic groups that occupied the neighborhood may have lacked the kind of developed community ties that the German community benefited from. Successive neighborhood populations also were not able to use the value of the buildings as an effective resource toward better living because they did not own the buildings and faced stymieing conditions affecting the value of labor. Over-the-Rhine reveals through its environmental condition the effects of shifting socio-economic forces.

Over-the-Rhine's existence today is in part due to inadequate funding to complete urban renewal planning efforts that would have razed the neighborhood. Due to the potential economic value of historic districts, the neighborhood is now absorbing two new important forces: the producers of space seeking the market-based economic value of historic districts, and the consumers of place devouring nostalgic representations of town life morphed into revitalized downtown districts with a consumption landscape of novel restaurants, boutiques and crafts shops.

If considered as a refuge, Over-the-Rhine was already a ghetto at the time of its emergence as a thriving German enclave. As the German population moved to more commodious neighborhoods outside of the Cincinnati basin, the neighborhood increasingly tended toward decline in population and material integrity. The early German community was able to use economic and infrastructural mobility to seek out more desirable living environments. Over-the-Rhine was successful as an economic resource to its originators.

In an unthought way, the new always acts upon something that was not new and a site can be “investigated to discover its latent qualities or potential … and motivate the ensuing construction so that the new participates in the existing.”34 The concept of site is not neutral; the site is a work of human agency and in different contexts the concept of site reveals meaning because it is a social product. Though always physical, the site is also an idea either with an abstract or absolute association. A site can be conceived primarily as space of a particular value, as in abstract space or it can be conceived as space for a particular use or appropriation, as in absolute space. The dominant spatial practice of abstract space denies full spatial appropriation but through the architectural project of the garden park, abstract and absolute are revealed in negotiation and add to the contemplative value of the site.

The term “lot” presupposes the site because the operative aspects of the lot such as setback, orientation, view, etc. that will affect design have already been ascribed to the lot and not the site. The lot is a function of conceptualized space, it is the operative unit of abstract space, which projects confidence without any interpretation of site to inform its value. “The lot conveys only boundary and measure; boundary is a function of both legal and economic power; and measure is a function

of knowledge. The seemingly neutral term lot is situated at the intersection of knowledge and power, potent forces preoccupying the architectural site.\textsuperscript{35} Lots are the deployable unit of planning and real estate and represent space as commodity. The form-based codes that have emerged as the next planning paradigm operate with deference to the spatial structure provided by lots.

The “lot” represents a totalizing system of value. A non-positivist notion like place memory is not considered in the practice of space production. But place memory is critical for communication with the future and it represents continuity with the past. If the urban landscape is to be anything but product of abstraction, it must absorb its memories into a palimpsest. Design interventions that privilege contintuity of tangible conditions support the palimpsest environment.

A “plot” is a measured piece of land but the term “plot” carries long held meanings of a small area of planted ground, graphic representation and development of schemes or ideas. Thus the term demarcates the piece of land for a building, represents the land, and conveys the intended plan of action for change: to plot is to scheme is to design. Architectural design is therefore a “plot,” a plan of positive action intending to promote change as a deviation from given reality.\textsuperscript{36}

Over-the-Rhine’s spatial structure has been challenged by the emergence of contiguous voids that creep through the district suggesting that it could be entirely subsumed in the unintended character of melancholy reminiscent of the sublime ruin. These urban clearings offer an unpredictable sense of release and discovery. The irregular boundary tells of the site’s origin as abstract space and reveals its unfolding temporal experience by way of the unplanned clearing amidst the urban context. “A boundary is not that at which

something stops but, as the Greeks recognized, the boundary is that from which something begins its presencing.” 37 The spatial ruin is legible because of its irregular boundary amidst the homogeneity of spatial regularity.

A study of Over-the-Rhine’s demolition pattern revealed that different building typologies survived at different rates and were affected by the traffic speed of the street. 38 Mixed-use buildings, with commercial frontage and residents above, located on north-south streets survived at higher rates when compared with residential-only structures located on east-west streets. Streets that received urban renewal intervention through widening featured the most disruption of building fabric and subsequent changes in building type because orientation to high-speed traffic yielded the highest land use value for property owners.

The central project site is borded to the east by a high traffic street with proposed streetcar route, Race Street. Pleasant Street acts as the western border to the central project area and is a pedestrian scaled street. The boarded-up mixed-use building on Race Street that is contained within the project site dates to 1885 and could be revitalized to restore commercial and residential uses like similar mixed-use structures a few blocks south. A restaurant program with use for outdoor space like a beer garden could activate the Race Street corner of the project site. Both the mixed-use building and St. Paul’s Church across Twelfth Street are oriented to Race Street and are appropriate for commercial or public program as an urban edge to the residential district.

The derelict building on Pleasant Street that is contained within the project site lacks wheather protection. This building was originally constructed as a tenement in 1875.

The tenement typology occurs as large buildings with a conforming façade similar to others on the street; its scale is most apparent in the side view, which features many windows to the south. The opposing north facing wall is solid with traces of formerly adjacent structures. Sanborn fire insurance maps show that the building was connected to a three-story structure with a shop on the ground level. Sanborn maps also reveal the extensive use of wood construction on the interior of the residential urban block; toilets, sheds, and porches would have created a different visual and spatial experience on the interior of the block as opposed to the sense of order created by the consistent facades oriented to the street.

Wooden porches were typical features of many dwellings including tenement buildings. Porches provided access to apartments as well as additional living space. The scale of wooden porches on tenement structures call attention to the tenement typology, which otherwise becomes neutralized in the image of degradation suffered by all of the building types. The tenement typology reveals past spatial accommodation that is a common aspect of urbanization; they capture the negotiation of life and labor in the form of a building typology.

The derelict tenement sets an uncanny mood. Its empty window apertures stand in opposition to the accurately restored windows of revitalized streets; windows are the celebrated feature of American Main Street historic preservation. Adaptive reuse of the derelict tenement building will not attempt to restore its windows but will engage the derelict structure for its value toward the evocation of place memory. The representation of the tenement building as ruin reinforces the contemplative aspect of the spatial experience.

The name Over-the-Rhine represents the world of a German ethnic enclave that lasted only a few generations. Places with geographic reference embedded through naming reinforce the relevance of history concurring with the name. But Over-the-Rhine has existed for a longer period of time as
a place home to Appalachian and African-American residents and is now a palimpsest of German history as well as recent history. Collective memory associated with Over-the-Rhine is diverse and includes material and spatial qualities that emerged after the German community moved out of the neighborhood to settle elsewhere in the city. The reference to the canal as the Rhine suggests either an inside sarcastic joke or a specific slice of the political scene particular to the late nineteenth century. Today’s common reference to Over-the-Rhine through its acronym OTR suggests a new interpretation and claim to place.

In Cincinnati, Life Breathes Anew in Riot-Scarred Area

The renaissance of Over-the-Rhine, a historic neighborhood five minutes from Cincinnati’s downtown, can still be a hit-or-miss process.

Fig. 27.
Fig. 28. Typical porch treatments, Over-the-Rhine. Lawrence Mitchell, c1980.
Fig. 29. Police and horse in alley. 
Photographer Jimmy Heath.

Fig. 30. Sara Williams in Pleasant Street Community Garden. 
Photographer Jimmy Heath.
THE TEMPORAL SPACE OF THE GARDEN

“As water makes it journey through life, it becomes a witness to all of life on earth, becoming itself the flow of life.”
Masaru Emoto, The Secret Life of Water

Over-the-Rhine features infiltrating vegetation as a characteristic of its current derelict state. In the process of revitalization, such infiltrations are rightfully removed to protect building integrity. The design intervention of the garden park aims to interpret the vegetated condition and curate its integration into the urban landscape. As an act of negotiation between the natural and the built, the garden offers an interpretive horizon for considering the role of nature in architecture. “The term garden, which is of Germanic origin, means ‘yard’ or ‘enclosure’ and denotes ways of organizing earth, water, plants and, sometimes, people, animals, and art (sculpture, architecture, theater, music, and poetry), the formal qualities of which are determined as much by pleasure, artistry, or aesthetics as by convenience or necessity. Not all cultures have gardens. For many reasons, anthropologists and garden historians consider most small cultivated plots to be forms of agriculture, as opposed to gardens. Gardens presuppose agriculture but in addition embrace a cultural and psychological distance from agriculture expressed in aesthetics.”

Gardens can occur in any environment and so reveal site specificity. Temperate climates impose seasonal restrictions on gardening. To further engage with the negotiation of

39 Maryanne Cline Horowitz, New Dictionary of the History of Ideas (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons), 857
Fig. 31. Postcard showing a lush environment created by and contained within architectural form.

Fig. 32. Lacaton and Vassal, Latapie House, 1993
The house is a composite of the conservatory typology and the traditional dwelling.
seasons and experience of time, the public experience of the architectural project offers an expansion of the garden typology into its building typology, the greenhouse through the design of a covered walkway enclosed by a greenhouse-like structure.

The urban landscape is home to dichotomous versions of nature: the maintained green space and the infiltration of nature upon the built environment. Many urban green spaces are constructed to appear natural but nature, under this circumstance, is highly restrained rendering urban parks equivalent to architecture as components of the built environment. Aberrant forms of nature such as weeds, insects, puddles, and mud, occur only as such because of the context of the built environment as being distinct from nature and can be referred to as subnature.\(^40\) Over-the-Rhine features overgrowths on walls, lush weeds in crevices, tall grasses in small patches, and tree roots prying into building foundations revealing its infiltrating vegetation as subnature.

Water as subnature is also a part of the environmental experience of Over-the-Rhine. The management of water beneath the urban surface transforms the presence of water on the ground surface into that of subnature. Water can be considered primitive and uncontrollable in its stagnant form but it is aesthetically desirable when moving in a controlled way. Water is elemental; it is a substance that has been the same forever so the water on Earth is the same water that has always been lived. Water remains a finite resource.\(^41\) The hydrological cycle links the built world with the natural and

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\(^40\) David Gissen, Subnature: Architecture’s Other Environments (New York, NY: Princeton Architectural Press, 2009), 21
reveals the dependence and opposition that exists between the two.

The greenhouse as a building typology combines vegetation and water. The conservatory originated in seventeenth century Europe as an attachment to the house intended for growing citrus in cold climates. The conservatory eventually evolved into a glazed extension for the typical house to facilitate growing vulnerable plants. Such extensions to the home became very popular in Britain in the late twentieth century because it was one of the few ways of creating additional enclosed living space without planning permission. Increasingly it became thought of as primarily a place for people to bask in the sun, a sunroom, in which a few plants may also be tolerated. The mutation of the conservatory from being plant-centered to becoming human-centered has been taken up by contemporary architecture revealing new morphologies in innovative house designs that use greenhouse systems to improve domestic building technology and livability throughout the seasons. Nature brought under the purview of architecture is the subject of the architectural project as counterpart to the garden landscape.

Engaging with plants through the seasons is a time-revealing endeavor. The experience of a changing garden heightens the experience of time and offers a poetic alignment with the context of Over-the-Rhine, which bears its own traces of emergence, resplendence, decline, and renewal.

Time in the environment is registered through material weathering and patina. It is also revealed in the passing seasons and the cycle of the day. For Over-the-Rhine as a continuous site, the pocked spatial structure reveals surgical destruction over time in lieu of tabula rasa. The spatial structure of the whole is understood through the blank walls that flank building

sides so that the old whole juxtaposed with the new spatial holes or voids reinforce evidence of the passage of time. The legibility of the spatial ruin establishes the site.

The project site is considered synthetically comprising both vertical built surface and horizontal ground surface. New structures for the site are considered extensions of the landscape. The gardens and landscapes of Carlo Scarpa explore the concept of architecture as extension of landscape so that architecture and landscape together create the separation from the larger exterior condition of untamed nature. The built environment is holistically designed by engaging views assembled in a textural manner. Values of light and dark, foreground and background, and natural and artificially produced color are choreographed with architectural form conspicuously manipulated or interrupted to accomplish compositional intent.43

The aestheticized garden privileges expressions of time and aims to reinforce the legibility of the spatial ruin. The garden as an ancient typology presupposing agriculture has been transformed in tandem with changing settlement patterns. History as a social process binds the urban with the natural, and reveals the relationship with the natural being enveloped by the project of urbanization, of which the urban park is emblematic. The garden park as an architectural project engaging the spatial ruin recognizes that the neo-naturalist representation of nature typical of urban parks is a form of curation similar to historic preservation. To knit the narrative of the spatial ruin into the continuum of urban history, the garden park is inserted as architectural infill revealing the spatial ruin as urban artifact.

PRELIMINARY DESIGN

The project is a garden park that provides architectural form to the site’s experiential sense of release. The garden park is a public garden promenade with a small wellness program of a pool and exercise studio. Public pavilions line the park’s southern edge while planters meet Race Street as benches for passersby. A public lookout tower terminates the north end of the central project site.

The landscape design plots the site’s old lot lines using large-scale sculptural gabion planters made partially of bronze or similar high-value metal and filled with brick rubble. The planters are meant to convey a sense of figures in space and presence the notion of abstraction in the spatial composition of the built environment.

A low lying architectural intervention of a covered walkway occurring on the roof of a proposed bar shaped building accentuates the severe proportions of the site’s blank walls. The soft brick of the exposed party walls receive protective lime wash varied in application to expose traces of earlier buildings where possible. The tenement building is transformed into a lap pool with the insertion of a concrete liner. User facilities and service spaces for the pool are located in the building beneath the covered walkway. The water system serving the pool is elaborated through a water feature that is an experiential component of the exercise studio and public garden promenade.

The garden park is considered a neighborhood park amenity similar to other small parks in the city operated by Cincinnati Parks.
covered walkway made by greenhouse wall, studio below

public porch, pool user facility below

lap pool

lookout tower

gabion planters

public pavilions
The tenement building will be interpreted with its derelict form and uncanny features considered contributing factors to the project’s capacity to address collective memory. In contrast to the typical exuberant revitalized aesthetic, the project aims to intensify the sense of age. The project celebrates surrounding neighborhood elements such as large odd walls and a balance of exposed building rears with street facades that alters the visual monotony and spatial experience of the once rigid streetscape. The historic district today is a palimpsest that includes both traces of the present and late nineteenth century urban form.
Fig. 35. Typical revitalized facades.

Sample of new infill south of the project site.

Saint Paul's German Evangelical Church, 1850.

Pleasant Street

Race Street

Fifteenth Street

Typical revitalized facades.
Fig. 36. Fenestration in red with party walls in white.

Fig. 37. Storefront public access in red with void space open access in white.
Fig. 38. Lots with buildings in white.

Fig. 39. Land use varying from residential (yellow) to mixed (orange) and commercial (red) with contributing historic buildings in white and landmarked buildings in opaque white and black. Non-historic buildings are shown in translucent white and black.
Fig. 40. Pedestrian walkways providing spatial and visual access to yards, shared lots or courts, c.1887.

Fig. 41. Tenement buildings, c.1887.
Fig. 42. Changes in property line layout alter the legibility of spatial use in the historic district.

Fig. 43. Tenement building on project site, 1875.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


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