

## I Wish That Factory Was Abandoned! Exploring History and Meaning in Abandoned Buildings

*This article examines the leisure exploration of abandoned buildings, popularly referred to as urban exploring. Using participant observation and interviews in four American cities, I argue that explorers create personalized historical interpretations of buildings in situ. Recently abandoned buildings offer little formal historical record, and as historical sites, both their physical structures and meanings have yet to be reconfigured by place entrepreneurs and knowledge professionals. Instead, the loose regulation of abandoned sites affords the opportunity for people to define their own parameters for meaningful behavior. Explorers use their experiences within a place to generate knowledge claims that extend beyond crumbling buildings to understandings of past social worlds, such as industrial work and psychiatric healthcare. While previous theoretical work has created a foundation for understanding this behavior, this is the first ethnographic study to analyze these processes in the field.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

The built environment in North America contains a large and diverse range of abandoned structures. Deindustrialization has left cities such as Detroit, Michigan and Buffalo, New York with vast expanses of derelict industrial buildings. Similarly, the deinstitutionalization of psychiatric healthcare has resulted in the abandonment of numerous medical campuses. At the local level, small businesses and private residences are abandoned for myriad reasons. These sites are awaiting demolition or redevelopment, or rarely, slated for preservation as museums or heritage sites. Most often, they are deliberately ignored by their owners or sidelined by legal proceedings and left to decay. However, these buildings are not void of human activity. In fact, abandoned buildings play host to several types of visitors with assorted interests and intentions. This study focuses on one type of visiting, the contemporary practice of leisure exploration known as “urban exploring”.

Abandoned sites are often easily accessible with little surveillance. Their loose regulation presents “opportunities for carrying out leisure practices which would be frowned upon in more regulated urban space” (Edensor, 2005:30). Graffiti writing, plundering, squatting, game-playing, and art production all occur in these buildings (ibid, 23-35). Each of these activities has been the focus of some sociological study. However, despite widespread media coverage, the leisure exploration of abandoned buildings has received scant sociological analysis.<sup>1</sup> Previous research is limited to theoretical interpretations of abandonment and socio-historical studies of ruin visitation in previous time periods. Therefore, we know very little about contemporary dimensions of the exploring experience, and what these explorations offer to participants. This is the first ethnographic investigation addressing these questions.

The study is comprised of participant observation and ethnographic interviews in four American cities: Chicago, Cleveland, Philadelphia, and Pittsburgh. I met and observed a range of people (henceforth referred to as explorers) in order to look for patterns in how they interact with buildings. Similarly, I observed exploration in a wide scope of currently abandoned building types. I followed explorers into buildings, interviewed them about their backgrounds, and watched groups interact both online and in the field. My inquiry was guided by two questions which I aim to address in this article: what types of experiences do contemporary explorers have in abandoned buildings, and how do explorers connect the activity to their understandings of the social worlds that once inhabited now abandoned sites.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Prior research relevant to the study of contemporary exploring can be separated into two general categories: analyses of abandoned buildings, and studies of activities that take place in abandoned buildings or similar sites. Analyses of buildings are most prevalent in the field of urban studies. However, the focus is typically limited to discussions of the process of dereliction as a symptom of economic and political influences (Coleman 1982, Jakle and Wilson 1992). Of the few studies that take buildings themselves as objects of study, most focus on the potential link between aesthetic disorder and crime (Spelman 1993, Kelling and Coles 1996). Seldom are the buildings analyzed as sites of leisure practice. A notable exception is the work of Tim Edensor. His book Industrial Ruins (2005) provides auto-ethnographic observations and theoretical interpretations of the leisure use of abandoned industrial buildings in England.

Edensor suggests that interacting with messy, disordered buildings calls attention to how processes of capitalism structure our behavior and ascribe meaning to objects, places, and bodies. His work includes thoughtful and precise micro-theorizing of how these issues might present themselves to a person walking through a building. However, the heavy focus on the relationship between economic processes of capitalism and the production of space is less applicable when considering non-commercial building types available to explorers: residential homes, medical institutions, etc. Still, his emphasis on conveying qualities of both the sensual and psychological environment within an abandoned building provides useful suggestions for observing elements of the exploring experience.

Additional research offers theoretical interpretations of phenomenological and aesthetic elements of abandoned buildings, revealing complex interactions involving

place, meaning, and time. Some authors focus on the contents within buildings, claiming that the decomposition of objects can serve to reconfigure their meanings (DeSilvey 2006, Edensor 2005b). Others suggest that abandoned buildings can influence interpretations of surrounding towns and regions (Goin and Raymon 2001, as cited in Edensor 2005). In addition, building abandonment can affect understandings of current and past time periods and the sense of time (Edensor 2005, Veitch 1997), as well as a person's own sense of memory and self (Stewart 1996). These insights suggest that analyzing the exploring experience requires not only observation of behavior in buildings, but also understanding the personal histories of explorers and the regional historical context surrounding abandoned sites.

Beyond analyses concentrated on abandoned buildings, there has been some research specifically on human activity within buildings. Much of this work has been historical in nature though, and many of these studies rely on interpretations of art and literature to suggest a period's prevailing sentiment on ruins. Rose Macaulay's book Pleasure of Ruins (1953) is the most ambitious of these projects<sup>2</sup>. The book analyzes ruin-themed writings and art from a wide scope of geography and time, including but not limited to Babylon in 700 BC, 7<sup>th</sup> century China, and the European Romantics of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. For the purpose of this project, Macaulay's most useful contribution is the creation of a hyphen based vocabulary of ruins (Ginsberg, 462). Including such terms as ruin-explorer, ruin-destroyer, and ruin-snoobs, Macaulay's ruin-vocabulary suggests elements of the exploration experience that transcend time and place. Her history of ruin sentiment is useful to the extent it provides opportunities to analyze similarities and differences between contemporary exploring and past manifestations of the activity.

Supplementary research serves to contextualize exploring amid general trends in cultural and social practice. Research in the field of tourism studies, particularly, provides useful observations and theoretical work. In recent decades, researchers have documented a move away from traditional mass tourism towards post-modern tourism. Post-modern tourism is unique in its emphasis on highly differentiated, personalized leisure, with a focus on educational and experiential elements (Urry 1990). In addition, post-modern tourists express critical concern over issues of cultural and historical authenticity. MacCannell attributes this quest for authentic experience to anomic alienation produced by modern society, and suggests that modern people project a sense of authenticity onto other cultures and previous time periods (1999). This interest in the past creates a market for heritage entrepreneurs, who selectively resurrect historic imagery and places in the pursuit of profit (see Waitt 2000). A number of scholars have documented tourist interest in heritage sites that involve a sense of loss, such as battle sites, death camps, and prisons. The terms “dark tourism”, “thanotourism”, and “black spots” describe these sites and associated tourist behavior (Lennon and Foley 2000; Seaton 1996; Rojek 93).

It is clear that exploration in abandoned buildings, despite a growing popular interest, is not well understood by sociologists. Previous research offers theoretical blueprints for inquiry, historical data points for comparison, and the cultural context of modern leisure practice, but no contemporary ethnographic analysis. This study, by examining the experiences of explorers in abandoned buildings, attempts to fill this dearth of knowledge. The first goal of this article is to categorize the dimensions of the exploring experience. I describe the physical and psychological components of

exploring, and I argue that the loose regulation of abandoned buildings allows explorers to define their own parameters for meaningful behavior. Second, I examine how people use abandoned buildings as symbolic resources in generating conceptions of the past. In sites with little formal historical record and the absence of place and knowledge professionals, individuals can situate their own knowledge and experience to project meaning onto buildings. Ultimately, I argue that explorers create personalized historical interpretations of buildings in situ, and evaluate the accuracy and authenticity of their knowledge claims on the basis of how the act of exploring feels inside of a building.

## **METHODS**

Visits by explorers to a particular abandoned building can be infrequent. Thus, it was impractical to stake out one physical location in order to solicit potential interviewees. I began searching for groups organized around the activity, but found little until I widened my scope to include internet communities. I joined two internet listserves organized to discuss abandoned building exploration around Chicago, and a web forum with region specific threads. By monitoring these sites, I became aware of the group culture of leisure exploration called “urban exploration”<sup>3</sup>. Individuals who associated with this group culture appeared to be the most actively practicing explorers. The websites that I monitored were the three largest and most active communities for the Chicago area. In addition to providing the majority of contacts for participant observation and interviews, the discussions on the web communities also provided an active source of text data.

Using “observational ethnography” and “informant ethnography” (Williams and Copes 2005; Bainbridge 2000), I followed the list and forum discussions, extracting themes and developing codes through content analysis (Altheide 1996). During the period of observation, from March 2005-March 2006, the listserve had 448 members, and received an average of 50 posts per month, with a range from 5 to 98. As of March 2006, the web forum had over ten thousand registered users.<sup>4</sup> In addition to these resources, I analyzed a number of relevant websites, zines, and books<sup>5</sup>.

Beyond the analysis of text, the majority of my data comes from observations with explorers in the field. Interviews and opportunities for participant observation were gained in three ways. First, I would post open calls for participants on the lists and forum, which explained the project and my identity as a researcher. After one “call for participants” post, a man who I had previously interviewed and who was well known on the forum, vouched for my identity (Weiss: 34, 1994), which greatly facilitated interview offers. Generally though, the explorers were quite willing to be studied and did not appear hesitant or anxious about my presence online or in contact. Second, I would contact people directly. This was more fruitful than the open calls, as it seemed to engage forum members in an active one-to-one dialogue rather than as mere readers of my open call posts. Third, I would ask for referrals and snowballed from these initial contacts and through a convenience sampling of friends and acquaintances.

In generating a sample, I utilized a social world perspective (Strauss 1978), focusing on capturing the conceptually important cases that illustrate the common types of experiences had by explorers (Weiss 1994). The interview and observational data were gathered with the intention of illuminating the range of possible inferences that I

can make about the activity.<sup>6</sup> I did not seek a sample in order to capture a representation of a definable exploring population. Rather, I continued to interview respondents until I felt I was receiving diminishing returns on deductive codes relating to exploring experiences.

In total, I conducted twenty-three formal, open-ended interviews and one group interview with four people. Twenty-one respondents were men, and six were women. Age range was between 18-36, although average age was around 24. Most interviews were conducted in coffee shops or restaurants, with the exception of one conducted at a person's home. Respondents often brought their own photographs to share with me. Interviews lasted between thirty-five minutes and two-and-a-half hours, with most lasting around one hour and fifteen minutes. Most interviews were tape recorded and transcribed by myself or an assistant. When I was not able to tape record, I took notes, jotting down general statements and specific quotes. Most explorers had no problem being tape recorded, and many said they were unconcerned with anonymity. In addition, numerous informal interviews were conducted during participant observation.

Participant observation was conducted around the Chicago and Philadelphia area, but interviews were also conducted in Cleveland and Pittsburgh. Urban exploring outings were organized in a few ways. The majority of outings were planned by one or two people, who in turn would invite a few friends. Sometimes these were planned via a vis the internet, and other times via phone. Outings were casual and usually lasted between two and three hours. As I got to know a number of explorers, we became friends and I was also invited to non-exploring activities such as parties or socializing at a bar. As certain explorers and I became more familiar, I began to suggest outings rather

than waiting to be invited. Group outings and meetings were also organized on the listserv and web forum, and I was able to attend one group outing. During explorations, I kept notes when possible and always typed observations directly after returning from the field. The themes and codes of my observation changed as research developed as per the grounded theory approach (Glaser, 1967; Strauss and Corbin, 1990).

It should be noted that I am a 26-year-old white male doctoral student with a background in exploring, music, photography, and punk culture. These characteristics seemed to facilitate conversation with many participants who had mutual interests and shared similar demographics. Also, as noted by (Edensor:17, 2005), I feel that my age and gender influenced my willingness to enter abandoned buildings alongside respondents. Many female respondents suggested their gender added a second danger to the already treacherous buildings. During outings, I was usually concerned more with the physical danger of the buildings than any social dangers.

### **EXPLORING ABANDONED BUILDINGS**

Outlining the current supply of abandoned buildings is necessary for understanding the contemporary experience of exploration, given that the types of buildings available to explorers are historically unique. Opportunities for leisure exploration are largely determined by the availability of sites in a given place, as most explorers limit their visitation to places within one day's driving distance. Thus, it was common to hear explorers in Philadelphia echoing such sentiments as, "I wish I lived closer to Detroit, there must be so much to explore there!" Although individual cities each have their own unique geography of abandonment, clear patterns among places are observable. In the cities of the Midwest and Northeast, the post-industrial economic

transformation that began in the 1970s is the dominant structuring agent in the current landscape of abandonment. Regions that lost capital and population during this transition were left with an over-supply of industrial and manufacturing sites.<sup>7</sup> Sites associated with production (e.g. mills and factories) are costly to overhaul or demolish. In addition, waning populations lead to a decrease in demand for buildings serving social purposes (e.g. churches, hospitals, train stations). Cities such as Cleveland and Detroit exemplify large-scale configurations of this process, in which vast expanses of both manufacturing and social sites have been left derelict. Philadelphia, Chicago, and Pittsburgh also underwent a post-industrial transition, but were able to more quickly readapt the built environment to changing economic circumstances. Still, localized symptoms of this transition are evident.

Changing patterns in land use have also created similarities in building abandonment between regions. On the outskirts of cities, sprawling sub-divided residential and commercial development has taken the place of large-acre farms and homesteads.<sup>8</sup> These farmhouses will often sit vacant prior to demolition. In addition to economic considerations, social and institutional changes are catalysts of building dereliction. The deinstitutionalization of psychiatric health care has left numerous medical campuses vacant (see Grob, 1995). Besides these large-scale patterns, numerous other types of buildings are left abandoned as the structures' forms no longer adequately serve intended uses (Gieryn, 2002) or maximize potential property value (Logan and Molotch, 1987). Of the four cities in which I conducted research, each contained a variety of abandoned buildings.<sup>9</sup> Some were isolated and completely derelict, while other buildings were abandoned but part of an occupied and active campus or worksite.

While explorers have numerous recent predecessors<sup>10</sup>, contemporary exploration is unique beyond the specificity of the current stock of available buildings. The present time period is also distinctive for the widespread media coverage of the activity, and the largely internet-based organization of exploring activity groups. Many interviewees said that they were introduced to the activity through media coverage or by stumbling upon exploring related websites. During the 1980s and 1990s, a number of exploring “clubs” popped up, with stylized names such as the Australian based Cave Clan. Also during this time, the aesthetic of decay became a popular subject in the fields of photography (both documentary and aesthetic), painting, drawing, cinematography, and literature.<sup>11</sup> In addition, there appeared a number of zines, magazines, and books devoted to the activity of exploring.<sup>12</sup> These publications facilitated the development of a shared vocabulary and the formation of various small group cultures. The term “urban exploring” became popularized, and a range of activities began appearing beside exploration into abandoned buildings, including excursions into caves, steam tunnels, and urban infrastructure.

The development of user-friendly internet browsers and the spread of the internet into the home during the 1990s also increased networking opportunities for explorers. Prior to the internet, explorers had limited local social networks with which to share pictures and stories of their activity. However, via the internet, explorers can quickly and cheaply post photos and reports to an international audience.<sup>13</sup> Chat forums and discussion boards provide explorers a place to safely congregate for anonymous discussion of the legally marginal activity. Given that abandoned buildings are impractical places to wait in the hopes of meeting other explorers, these sites offer a

virtual meeting ground (see Mitra 2001). Nonetheless, despite these recent technological developments, explorers are rather loosely networked.

### **LET'S GO INSIDE!**

During the process of field research, I learned of a paradox common among many explorers. Although they are troubled when an abandoned building becomes demolished, redeveloped, or overly decayed, explorers rarely express the opinion that these places should be preserved or turned into museums. Unlike historical preservationists, who champion the value of buildings, explorers emphasize the preservation of their opportunities for exploration. For explorers, demolition and museumification lead to the same result: one less place to go. Thus, understanding exploring cannot come through theoretical interpretations or value assessments of particular buildings alone. Rather, it is necessary to follow explorers into buildings, observing and capturing what they find valuable in the activity itself. The subsequent sections describe three central dimensions of the exploring experience: navigating a building, interacting with buildings' contents, and exploring style. Each component illustrates how explorers depend on their own knowledge and skills to create their experience of a building. Ultimately, explorers use this activity as a symbolic resource in generating unique understandings of the past social worlds that once inhabited the sites.

### **ON ROOFTOPS AND IN BASEMENTS**

One of the most striking aspects of contemporary exploration is a focus on physically entering abandoned places. Although some people are reluctant to enter buildings and instead prefer to examine structures by walking around their perimeters,

most explorers relish opportunities to enter and walk around the interior of buildings. These interiors offer an environment that can be both disorienting and stimulating. When buildings are left abandoned, there remains an assorted quantity of belongings of past inhabitants. In industrial buildings, floors are covered with machines and tools. Psychiatric buildings contain instruments for patient treatment and drawers full of patient records. Houses contain domestic items of previous tenants, from furniture to food in the kitchen. The buildings themselves can be in various states of decay. Some have been plundered and are nearing total collapse; others show only the beginning stages of rot. The buildings and their contents can oppose the typical ordered aesthetic found in tightly regulated space, instead providing a disorganized, highly sensual experience (Edensor 2005, 84-94). Explorers describe their experience in terms of “knowing a building”, and knowing a building necessitates finding an open door or window and climbing inside.

### **How Can We Get Inside?**

Abandoned buildings vary in their geographic isolation as well as the extent to which they are under active surveillance by police or private security forces. It is common to see greater surveillance efforts at buildings that are actively slated for redevelopment or recently vacated. Property owners and developers, wishing to protect their investment, hire security guards to monitor such sites. Police are more likely to patrol buildings that receive active media coverage or host criminal activity. Finding access into a building, regardless of security level, is an activity that most explorers seem to enjoy. Some treat the task as if it is a military reconnaissance mission, while others are subtle in their movements. Although I frequently heard discussions of the need for things

like repelling gear and tactical clothing for the purpose of gaining access to buildings, it is uncommon to see such equipment in use.

Entering abandoned buildings can be considered criminal trespassing in some States, but explorers seem generally unconcerned with legal consequences of their actions. Explorers were likely to avoid buildings in which they thought this breach of the law<sup>14</sup> had higher potential for ramifications. For example, many explorers discussed their reluctance to visit transportation and military sites after September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001. If a site appears to be heavily patrolled, explorers are likely to revisit the site at a later date or decide against exploration. However, some people find great pleasure in accessing high profile sites. Most explorers told me that they have had relatively few interactions with police or security, and said that in instances that they were confronted they were usually just asked to leave the site. In the over twenty explorations that I observed, I witnessed only one interaction with a police officer. The situation was diffused quite quickly after some general questioning and a request for us to move on our way. Still, a sense of cat-and-mouse permeates most explorations, adding to the overall excitement. Multiple times, I witnessed an event in which a person would call attention to the other people in their group and tell them to hide, having heard what they thought were sirens or sensing that someone was watching. Usually, everyone would crouch quietly for ten or fifteen seconds, then slowly stand up and begin moving again. Jokes and ridicule would then fly at the overly anxious member of the group, and everyone would laugh.

Explorers generally dress in casual, dark clothing such as jeans and hooded sweatshirts. Dark clothes, it is thought, aid in blending in with the shadows when one is forced to hide. On one trip, in which a group of six had parked in a residential

neighborhood and walked to an abandoned drawbridge, an explorer noted that we appeared rather suspicious in our matching black clothes. For this reason, some people go out of the way to dress benignly and “in-place” (Cresswell 1996), wearing a camera around their neck and dressing the part of a law-abiding citizen who has stumbled upon something interesting. Once inside of an abandoned building, explorers have a sense of being somewhere where they are not allowed to be, and this projects immediacy and a novelty which permeates the rest of the exploring experience.

### **This Place is Huge!**

Abandoned sites range in size, previous function, level of decay, and contents. Picking through the remains of a small home shares both similarities and differences when compared to walking around the factory floor of an empty automobile plant. While explorers are willing to enter most any kind of abandoned building, they describe clear preferences in site characteristics. When I asked interviewees about their favorite types of places to explore, many described physical characteristics of buildings rather than categorizing buildings based on the traits previous inhabitants. The two most desired traits are large size and a high volume of contents inside the buildings.

The size of a building impacts the exploring experience in a number of ways. Size affects the amount of time in which an explorer can spend in a building and continue to see new and novel things. As one interviewee said, “In a bigger building, the feeling can last longer.” A number of explorers also said that large buildings offer a more complete feeling of immersion. When entering a large building, it is common to see explorers stop for a moment, or demonstrate physical acts that suggest a sudden awareness of their body and the scale of the building. I saw one man beat his chest and

yell, and another walk slowly forward while moving his arms upwards and towards him as if to indicate, “Bring it on.”

### **Can We Get onto the Roof?**

Upon entering buildings, there is variation in how explorers physically navigate space. Some explorers are slow and methodical, stopping frequently to take photographs and examine contents. Others prefer to move rapidly through a building, conducting a quick cursory inspection of the entire site before revisiting particular places of interest. Some follow hallways and doorways, while others take less traditional routes, climbing through windows and scurrying across catwalks. It is common to see individual explorers exhibit different exploring styles based on the site and the movement of others. Most people said that they like buildings that have multiple levels, a large and diverse number of rooms, lots of stairwells, and access to both the basement and rooftop. The complexity of a building’s layout has a similar effect as that of size, extending the period of novelty and the overall duration of exploration.

Deterioration inside of buildings can demand ingenuity of explorers seeking to enter various rooms. The challenge of finding or creating ways to enter places that appear inaccessible can be quite exciting. One man said that he treated parts of buildings like stages in a video game, claiming that you just have to look around for the “keys” to unlock doors. I watched as he and a friend found a piece of pipe and used it to pry open a bent metal door. Some people approach buildings as if they are obstacle courses, finding opportunities for physical challenge in architectural elements. In buildings, a regular topic of conversation is the observation of unique and possibly dangerous features.

Explorers vary in their willingness to purposefully put themselves in physically demanding and objectively dangerous situations.

In addition to physical stimulation, it is clear that movement through buildings both reflects and shapes physiological understandings of a site. Describing a trip to a steel mill, one informant stated,

If I don't climb that last ladder to the very top of the smokestack, I don't feel like I've been there. I feel like I've got to go and physically experience these places or else it's like they never even existed to me, and if I like them, then I've got to go and see them and experience them fully, see everything around, do it all myself.

Gaining access to rooftops was emphasized in most explorations that I observed.

Rooftops provide a unique experience akin to conquering, symbolizing and fulfilling the quest of experiencing all that a building has to offer. Frequently, explorers sit and talk on a rooftop for up to a few hours, discussions ranging from observations on the building to politics and music.

One group of explorers described having an Oreo cookie and milk party on the roof of an abandoned factory. They subsequently named the place the "The Oreo Building," and visited it many times thereafter. The naming of a building expresses a personal relationship with a building, and explorers create names based on experiences or attributes which they feel capture the essence of their experience within a building. Thus, a group of explorers gave the name "The Bridge House" to a control room to an abandoned drawbridge. Explorers will also use the name of past inhabitants, such as "The XYZ Beer Factory" or "The Greentown Psychiatric Hospital." After numerous visits and personal experiences at a place, explorers tend to express their relationship with

a building as a sense of entitlement. Here, a man describes his attitude about an abandoned beer factory:

We definitely felt like we took ownership over it, and we didn't really want to break things. There was one broken window that we would go through or like we had to break a pad lock to get through a door, but we definitely would not just pick up rocks and throw them through windows. There was definitely an ownership sense, especially when we were first going in there. I was young, and at the time I felt a proprietary sense of like we belong here because we found this and we don't other people to get here and mess it up. We didn't want someone to come in and destroy part of it, so that what we found interesting about it would be gone.

### **IN THE FRIDGE AND BEHIND CLOSED DOORS**

Beyond providing a unique physical environment, abandoned buildings can contain large quantities of things left behind by previous occupants. Explorers spend a great deal of time sifting through these items. The contents in buildings offer snippets of evidence of activities that once occurred in a place. As one explorer stated, "I love buildings with lots of stuff, it adds to the story of what might have happened there." In an abandoned trade school, I saw explorers sift through old textbooks and dig through the drawers of an office desk. On one trip to an abandoned industrial building, an explorer spent a half an hour reading through old job applications. Often, explorers have to encourage companions to leave behind contents so that the group can continue progressing through a building.

### **They Just Picked Up and Left!**

Many abandoned buildings are wildly disorganized, with things strewn haphazardly about floors. Other times, buildings appear largely undisturbed, with contents placed in normatively appropriate context. It was common to see items mixed in bizarre arrangements, such as the head of a baby doll resting on top of a pile of paint cans

on a factory floor. Explorers are quite sensitive to the arrangement of the contents in buildings, and in their observations, make distinctions between disorganization caused by previous inhabitants and natural forces like weather, and disorganization produced by other explorers or vandals. Explorers express interest in finding abandoned buildings that they deem to be relatively untouched by anyone but the previous inhabitants. They refer to these types of buildings as being pure, untouched, or pristine, and these places are held in high regard. One man tells me that the beauty of untouched buildings involves witnessing natural decay. He states, “I enjoy knowing that nature alone created the decomposition, the peeling paint, that nature is taking over the building”. Other people say that the pristine condition more accurately portrays the social world of the previous inhabitants.

Explorers frequently refer to experiencing or desiring to see buildings in which it seems like “time just stopped” or “everyone just picked up and left.” For example, consider this description of an abandoned beer factory:

They had some labor negotiations and then they walked off of the job and that was it. So, that kind of lent a character to the space that it hadn't been cleared out or demolished. When we were in the science labs it looked like people had just stopped working and like they had kind of just left everything in that weird sort of post apocalyptic sort of way that there's like still stuff everywhere, it hadn't been cleaned of artifacts.

Other explorers describe similar observations. About the contents in an abandoned house, one explorer told me, “It was like the family just packed up and left. There was a pot of macaroni and cheese on the oven. We looked in the fridge and there was a rotting gallon of milk, and the freezer was packed with food.” Here, an explorer describes an abandoned farm house:

The windows had been bricked so the place was untouched, and if a house is fresh and new, you can see all kinds of weird stuff, how the family lived and how they left everything. In this one room, everything was gone, cleaned out, except for this hand-carved chest of drawers. The only thing in the chest was a little coupon, a page from a sales flyer that expired in 1983. Then in the garage we found a fully assembled V-10 Jaguar engine. I mean, why would they leave just that?

Not all buildings are in such pristine condition. Many places see frequent visiting by graffiti artists, vandals, scrap-metal plunderers, and other explorers. These sites can take on a dramatic aesthetic, with crumbling graffiti covered walls and stripped ceilings. Some explorers enjoy this aesthetic, saying that it makes for good photographs. Others are more critical, as reflected by an explorer who states, “When a place has been really gutted there is not enough left to really imagine all that went on there.”

### **Come Check This Out!**

As explorers move through a building, they frequently call to one another to solicit a partner in observing an interesting find. If the partner is enthused, other group members may be called over. Sometimes this item involves a unique juxtaposition, such as the previously mentioned baby doll on top of the paint cans. Other times, the item may be a good clue to a building’s past social life, perhaps a dated newspaper, business letterhead, or personal letter. Sections or rooms of buildings that are anomalous or contain spatial arrangements that are unique also garner considerable attention. Consider this description by a female explorer of a room in a psychiatric hospital:

I like to go into a building and see if it gives me a feeling. In the insane asylum, I didn’t feel much until I went into this one room that had four bath tubs. And I don’t know if that’s for therapy, because I know that sometimes, well, the person I was with said “Oh, that’s probably where they took baths.” But I thought it might have been a therapy thing and it disturbed me. And it obviously disturbed somebody there, because all over the walls they wrote parts from a medical

record, like “oh she is like this, she has these tendencies.” It was obviously from somebody’s file. It just disturbed me, those four bathtubs and baths.

In abandoned buildings, there is little that is off limits. On one exploration trip to a psychiatric hospital, explorers walked through the cafeteria, patient rooms, administrative offices, and boiler room. In an empty grocery store, explorers walked down the shopping aisles as if they were shopping consumers. But they also sifted through the employee breakroom and the observation tower above the checkout lines.

Buildings are evaluated on their potential to offer a unique exploring environment. To this extent, buildings that once hosted distinctive social worlds are well regarded, particularly when they contain abundant physical evidence of past use. In recently abandoned buildings, some explorers are fascinated by worlds in which they perceive as being socially distant. For example, consider the notion of class distance in this statement by an explorer.

A lot of the places in my hometown that are abandoned are in really depressing or dirty neighborhoods...a lot of the places there weren't very interesting, like they would just be you know storefronts or an old gas station or crack houses. I didn't really feel like going into any of those places, they don't really have anything unique to offer, they're all just kind of more the same. I don't really like going into normal houses, they're kind of boring. But an abandoned mansion, that's a different story!

Perception of social distance can involve comparisons with the present as well as the past. Evidence of past configurations of work, domestic arrangements, and medical and psychological treatment can all be found in abandoned buildings. As one explorer states, “Going into an abandoned psychiatric hospital is cool, but going into a really old abandoned psychiatric hospital is cooler.” The age of items seems to be exaggerated in the context of abandoned buildings, and I often watched explorers look with fascination and novelty at items that appeared to be only a few years old. Explorers pointed out the

outdated styles of clothing worn by people in photographs, and would flip delicately through textbooks and work documents.

### **What Do You Think This Was?**

In a building, explorers spend a good deal of time speculating aloud about the place's social history. Each explorer will add a comment based on an observation or thought, and the conversation continues until a somewhat cohesive narrative or story emerges. Then, everyone evaluates the story, adding criticism or support. This process continues from room to room. The development and speculation of a place's "story" is the product of inferences made from contents, building layout, and previous knowledge garnered through formal and informal research. The tone of a story can also depend on the mood and personalities of explorers. Stories that I heard at night tended to focus on the scary and spooky aspects of a building, while discussions during the day usually centered on issues of history and architecture.

Explorers vary in the degree to which they undertake research on building sites beyond casual discussion with other explorers. Often, the sites are relatively unremarkable historically, so little recorded information exists. The use of location databases and forums on exploring websites has aided somewhat in dispersing knowledge about buildings, although this information can sometimes be limited to reports and observations from other explorers. Newspapers will occasionally run a story on an abandoned building, and explorers will also search newspaper archives to find coverage of a building conducted while it was occupied. Explorers seem content with their limited knowledge of sites. In fact, having a lack of information about a place can actually be empowering for an explorer.

As explorers navigate a building, there is a sense that they are piecing together a story on their own. People will grab onto machinery, touch and pick-up tools, attempting to figure out previous uses. Explorers try on hard-hats and work clothes in industrial buildings. In the control room for a drawbridge, I saw two explorers talk through the means by which a control switch could have activated the raising and lowering of a bridge. In addition, they took turns trying to yank and move the massive switch, which stands locked in a coat of rust. In a psychiatric hospital, I saw a woman read the piles of patient files, in an effort to figure out what types of ailments were treated in a particular ward. On the top of an abandoned grain elevator, I watched an explorer light a cigarette and act as if he were a worker on a smoke break. In an abandoned school, an explorer stood on top of a desk in the principal's office, playing the role of an irate administrator, only to jump into a small chair and switch into the role of the student receiving the scorn.

Outside of attempts to construct historical narratives of buildings, explorers' remarks and observations can impact the overall mood of a trip. Explorers use commentary to shape and modify the group experience of a place, and the accentuation of scary or bizarre aspects of a site is common. During a trip to an abandoned steel mill, one explorer opened a small door and in a purposefully creepy voice asked, "Is this where they burnt the babies?" The man's statement was a deliberate attempt to shape the mood of the outing, wishing to add fear as an element of the experience. While the possibility that children were killed in a steel mill was improbable, the statement succeeded in shifting the mood and discussion in an eerie direction.

## **TAKING PHOTOGRAPHS AND LEAVING FOOTPRINTS: EXPLORING STYLES**

While group dynamics can impact the understanding of a place, explorers retain unique perspectives on the meaning of their experience. Explorers differ in their knowledge of the history of buildings, as well as their personal interests and taste. Similarly, people have different levels of previous engagement with the social worlds in which they immerse themselves vis-à-vis abandoned sites. For example, one man said he had the opportunity to explore the hospital in which he was born. On the other hand, I walked around a steel mill with five people who had never worked in industrial production. Explorers also vary in education, occupation, age, and gender. A product of these differences is what I term “exploring style”. Exploring style influences and reflects the experience of a person in an abandoned building, as well as opinions about appropriate behavior.

### **Don't You Feel It?**

As explorers move through a building, they tend to follow the basic direction of the group's movement, but will take time alone to investigate a particular room, take a photograph, or enjoy a view. While much of the time in a building involves talking with others, a significant amount of time is spent in quiet reflection. Individual experience in a building can be complex and personal. Consider this statement by a male explorer in Pittsburgh, who describes the feeling of entering a building.

I'm really excited. I'm nervous to see like is there something good there, is there something bad there, am I going to encounter a nest of copperheads or am I going to find old jewelry or an old photobook. It's exciting; it's like opening a present. Each abandoned building is like a present to myself.

Uncertainty is a large part of the exploring experience. The physical soundness, past use, and future of a building are unclear. Without safety certifications by inspectors or tour

guides to point out interesting features, explorers are forced to rely on their own evaluations and judgments in deciding on the viability or value of an experience.

Explorers spend assorted amounts of time in different parts of sites. They may walk quickly through a large room, but remain in a small room for a lengthy period. After leaving a building, explorers usually discuss their favorite parts of a place, and recap amusing or extraordinary moments. Here, it is evident that people have had personal, and often divergent experiences. They describe different elements of the experience: historical appreciation, aesthetic, anecdotal, and physical sensation. In addition, a range of emotions can be attributed to these different components. When discussing how buildings make them feel, these words reoccurred: a sense of loss, sadness, nostalgia, hope, and beauty. For example, here is an account of entering an abandoned funeral home:

We climbed in a window and the first thing we saw was the preparation room. The embalming table was still there, all of the instructional data on how to use chemicals were there, all of the smocks, and there was a measuring device to determine casket size. We went into the other room, and this was something that made me really sad, but there was all of this clothing that people had brought to have their loved-ones buried in, just laying in a pile on the floor, and about to have a bulldozer destroy the whole thing.

While emotions can be projected on buildings and contents, buildings can also lead explorers to reflect on themselves. These feelings can entail a heightened sense of mortality, age, and time. Here, an explorer tells of the impact of buildings on her self-perception:

I think exploring an abandoned building is a way of facing the issue of death, forcing me to change my perspective on life. It's easy to define your life by all the wrong things, like the house you live in, the factory or office where you work, or the mall where you shop. I see how none of these things can be ultimately fulfilling because they're all so easily overtaken by nature.

Explorers also say that abandoned buildings sensitize them to the passage of time and social change. Experiences in the buildings can give a patina to past social practices. For example, the emptiness of an abandoned psychiatric hospital gives an eerie perspective to outdated modes of patient treatment.

Some explorers see abandoned buildings as symbols of malignant elements of current social practices, and use the buildings as talking points for critical assessments of the present. For example, one woman uses an abandoned trade school as an entrée to a critique of development and advanced capitalism:

It's like nobody cares about craftsmanship anymore. All of these yuppie condos being put up in the city are worthless, there's nothing to them. And this building is just sitting empty and then they're going to tear it down. It's sad. People used to learn real skills at this school, and our society doesn't value it anymore.

Furthermore, another man added, "I'm not sad for whatever the space did in the past, I'm more concerned for what it can tell me now." Interestingly, explorers will sometimes see non-vacant buildings and say, "I wish that was abandoned!"

### **Are You Going to Keep That?**

Explorers vary in their views on appropriate exploring behavior. In interactions with other explorers, tensions frequently arise over two issues. First, the matter of vandalizing, damaging, or altering a building is debated. Second, explorers are at odds over the problem of removing items from buildings. Urban exploring websites commonly list a "code of ethics" that provide suggestions for appropriate behavior in buildings. This code shares similarity to the environmentalist mantra, "Take nothing but photographs, leave nothing but footprints." Still, great variation in exploring behavior exists. I witnessed explorers smash windows and spray-paint graffiti, while others were

careful to minimize even the slightest physical impact of their movements. Here, an explorer describes his behavior in buildings:

Most times I'm careful not to change anything, but when we go to a site that doesn't look like its ever been explored, we'll leave a small card with our online screen names, our website, and the date that we were there. We try not to move anything around at all, so we'll usually just slip it in the crack of a locked door or put it on a window ledge. I think doing anything like writing on a chalkboard or a notice board isn't right because it changes how the site was originally left

Explorers take particular issue on the topic of breaking windows and doors as a means to access a building's interior. Some explorers say it is never ok to inflict physical damage when entering a building, while others happily kick down doors or pry open boarded windows.

Generally, explorers tend to group themselves with others who maintain similar codes of conduct. During explorations, if a group's behavioral norm is breached, it is common to hear open criticism and discussion of the issue. For example, I witnessed a group chastise a person after he threw a brick through a window. In such instances, the offending individual is usually challenged to justify their action. Sometimes the offender wins the argument, and continues with the offending behavior. Most often, group pressure prevails and the individual adjusts their behavior to meet group expectations. Some behavioral breaches go beyond actions aimed at buildings. Actions which disrupt a group's mood, such as talking too loud or using cellular telephones, is often criticized. Behavior that can draw attention to a group, such as standing in a window, is also monitored.

Buildings host visitors with varying intentions, and much of a building's appearance can change in only a week's time. New graffiti covers walls, contents are

shifted around and broken, and evidence of squatting or demolition is evident. Some embrace the atmosphere, saying that changes to buildings and contents add to the appeal. In buildings that are severely damaged, and where evidence suggests that the organization of a site has been largely disturbed by other visitors, explorers tend to relax strict codes of behavior. On the other hand, in buildings that appear to be relatively untouched or pure, explorers are much less likely to be physically abusive towards the site. Interestingly, it is in these untouched sites where explorers are most tempted to relax their prohibitions on removing contents.

In untouched sites, there is a sense that contents have been undisturbed since last use. This lends a certain archeological excitement to the discovery of unique finds, and explorers are quick to express emotional connections to found items. For example, I watched as an explorer became wildly excited after opening an employee locker in a factory. Inside there was a coat and hardhat, as well as photographs, presumably of an employee's family. Many explorers refrain from taking objects, wishing to preserve the "time capsule" experience for later visits and other explorers. Nevertheless, explorers remove a wide range of items from buildings, from letterheads and clothing to furniture and tools. A particular emphasis is placed on souvenir items which provide evidence of a building's former inhabitants, as well as items that are aesthetically or technologically outdated. While some explorers remove items regardless of a site's characteristics, others are more selective in their decisions. Consider this statement by an explorer describing his feelings,

I don't think I've taken anything as of yet, but I think if I found something very exceptional, and if I thought it was in danger of being vandalized or destroyed or stolen by someone who might not appreciate it, like maybe someone who is going

to sell it on ebay, then I would probably quote on quote rescue it. But I think that's only for extenuating circumstances. In hospitals, a lot of times I find old patient records, and I'm glad that other explorers have left them there for me to find.

Some explorers ration items, leaving a portion of contents so that other explorers may share in the experience. In these cases, people are more likely to take an item when there are multiple copies, such as old textbooks. Explorers are also more likely to remove contents from a site if it is clear that a building is slated for demolition or if the contents will otherwise be destroyed.

### **UNDERSTANDING THE EXPLORATION OF ABANDONED BUILDINGS**

How can we understand the experience of explorers in abandoned buildings, and how do these experiences congeal to form knowledge claims about the historical meaning of places? First, I argue that exploring involves both physical and psychological dimensions, and the loose regulation of abandoned buildings allows explorers to define their own parameters for meaningful behavior. Secondly, explorers use abandoned buildings as symbolic resources in generating understandings of past and current social practices. In abandoned buildings, people explore not only unique physical structures, but also their self-perception and knowledge of the past and present. In the absence of place and knowledge professionals, explorers depend on themselves and friends to create meaning, ascribing the feelings of the activity onto their conceptions of the past.

Explorers create personalized historical interpretations of buildings in situ, and then evaluate the accuracy and authenticity of their knowledge claims on the basis of how the

physical inhabitation of a building actually feels to them; whether scary, sad, promising, or nostalgic.

### **Choosing Their Own Adventure**

For explorers, experiences in abandoned buildings are highly personal and personalized. Each aspect of the exploring experience, from researching a site to climbing a teetering catwalk, demands independent decision-making. Explorers locate relatively obscure building sites without the aid of advertising or tourist brochures. Then, they confront their respect for the law by engaging in the potentially criminal behavior of trespassing. Once inside of buildings, explorers are free to roam as they please. In unstable and deteriorating structures, explorers choose the level of danger they place themselves in based on where they walk and on what they climb. In the face of collapsed staircases and locked doors, they test their inventiveness in creating new ways to navigate a site. Edensor describes the sensation of being in an abandoned building as a kind of “anti-tourism”, in which the body is freed from the normative paths of motion and sensation that typify movement in commodified space (2005; 79-95). Each explorer picks a unique path through a building based on his or her own preferences for physical experience. These physical paths reflect how explorers are attempting to “know a building”, or to be more clear, the psychological experience they are seeking to create.

In addition, explorers have a psychological freedom to determine their own relationship to a building’s contents. Explorers can break or ruin items, but they can also preserve and rescue them. The discarded contents sensitize explorers to the processes by which meaning is ascribed to items (ibid 108-118), calling attention to their own values and tastes. In addition, in the absence of clear information about the previous use of

places and objects, explorers create a game of figuring these things out. Groups work together to create narratives that generate the story of a place, and this story provides a lens through which contents are understood.

### **I Wish that Place was Abandoned!**

In the absence of place-professionals and heritage entrepreneurs who reconfigure the physical structures of history sites and assert privileged knowledge claims offering particular historical readings of a place, explorers are free to generate their own understandings of abandoned sites. The lack of formal historical records places a primacy on the development of historical knowledge through first-hand experiences occurring inside of buildings (Edensor 2005; 125-164). The character of the experience thus influences the nature of the knowledge claim. These knowledge claims are comprised of understandings of the history of abandoned sites, as well as conceptions of the social worlds which once inhabited the buildings.

Understandings of the histories of abandoned sites are the product of two sources: information known prior to entering buildings and information gathered in buildings. In both cases, the information is dependent on personalized interpretations. Information garnered before entering buildings usually comes from online site reports by other explorers or local folk knowledge based on first-hand experience with a place. In buildings, explorers gather information from objects which are disorganized and recontextualized with ambiguous meanings (Edensor 2005b). Explorers ascribe their own tastes, memories, and feelings onto these objects. The information gleaned from them is unique to each individual. Thus, the foundation for a historical understanding of a place is based largely based on what people can find in buildings. Inside of buildings,

explorers piece together the “story” or “narrative” of a place, and this story can be influenced by the personalities of explorers, group dynamics, and traits of the building the site that have little to do with history and can be variable (e.g. presence of security). Explorers value buildings that appear to be time-capsules in which the organization of contents has been untouched since they were left by previous inhabitants. Explorers champion these types of sites because it facilitates the process of ascribing meaning to objects. If an object or a place has been untouched, it can more clearly symbolize the meaning with which an explorer wants to project onto it.

Once explorers generate the story of a place, they make a knowledge claim that influences how they will frame the rest of their physical and symbolic experiences. In addition, explorers can then use this story to project understandings of the previous social worlds that once inhabited a place. If a building is dark and isolated, it’s likely that an explorer will find the place eerie or scary. If the place happens to be an abandoned psychiatric hospital, then explorers will project this feeling onto their understanding of the history of psychiatry. Granted, explorers also bring emotionally charged understandings into buildings, based on images, histories, and representations produced elsewhere. Once explorers begin projecting their knowledge claim onto understandings of previous social worlds (such as industrial work or psychiatric care), they also create their own basis with which they can evaluate the authenticity of their experience in a place. The process of generating an understanding of a social world through the contents of an abandoned building, and judging the value and authenticity of contents and a place in the light of this new understanding, occurs simultaneously. This simultaneous process is the product of the physical, psychological, and social dimensions that I have described.

As I spent time with explorers, it was common to see them point at non-vacant sites and exclaim, “I wish that was abandoned!” While at first I thought this was peculiar, it became evident that this was quite telling. In wishing for a place to be abandoned, explorers are signaling their desire to create a knowledge claim for a building. In an abandoned building, explorers are free to create their own understanding of a place and social world based on their own preferences for physical activity, tastes and emotional preferences, and knowledge. In addition, after projecting this understanding beyond the boundaries of a building, they are put in the position to judge the validity of their own knowledge claims based solely on what they can find in a place and how the process makes them feel.

## **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, I assert that abandoned buildings should be taken seriously as sites for understanding the relationship between place, time, and meaning. If it follows that, much like tourist sites, these buildings “are an unplanned typology of structure that provide direct access to the modern consciousness (MacCannell 1999:2)”, then understanding the dimensions of leisure exploration can illuminate a great deal about the ways in which people come to ascribe meaning to the places around them and the pasts that these places represent. In the contemporary age, abandoned buildings are appreciated for more than their aesthetic symbolism or the economic value of the land that they occupy. Rather, abandoned buildings stand as unique environments in which people explore the remnants of past worlds, but more importantly, contextualize and understand the past through the lens of their own physical and psychological preferences. Such experiences can be both critical and heuristic in producing historical understandings

that oppose the production of meaning and memory by place and knowledge professionals.

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> For examples of media coverage, see (Jacks 2006; Curtis 2005; Kennedy 2005; Crowley 2001; NPR 2000). For studies of squatting, graffiti, and play see (Cerny 2002, Ferrell 1996; 2002)

<sup>2</sup> See also (Woodward 2001)

<sup>3</sup> Different people who explore abandoned buildings refer to their activity under various names, and group organization and culture are multiplex and porous with respect to personnel, information flow, self-identification, and name reference (Fine and Kleinman 1979). For the sake of limiting a manageable sample for this study, it is comprised mostly of people who refer to their activity as “urban exploring” or “urban exploration”. These two terms are currently the most widespread names that refer to the act of entering abandoned buildings for the sake of exploring in of itself. Terms such as ghost hunting and vading refer to quite similar sets of activities. In addition, many people explore abandoned buildings without having a name for the activity and without knowledge of communities organized around the practice. Since the majority of explorers that I interviewed were met through internet discussion boards, my sample is skewed towards those explorers who are actively connected to other explorers, and their social networks and organization favor the internet as a facilitating force. To be sure, I met some explorers and groups of explorers who identified with and were aware of urban exploring culture, but were not actively networked with other explorers. I also met some people who explore but were unaware of urban exploring culture and opportunities to network with other enthusiasts.

<sup>4</sup> The forum is part of a larger website with a location database, numerous region specific and topic specific forums, a photo gallery, and event listing. Users can post on both public and private forums, as well as send private messages to each other.

<sup>5</sup> See Becker, page 45 for a discussion of the use of this type of resource as data.

<sup>6</sup> While it is not the purpose of this study to generate a summary of the exploring population as a whole, a number of evident patterns are worth mentioning. First, most explorers are relatively young in age. It is uncommon to meet explorers over the age of forty, and the majority of people I interview are between the ages of eighteen and thirty. Many suggest they will continue the activity “until I have kids,” citing the element of danger as the driving motivator for cessation. Older explorers also express concerns about declining physical agility, as well as an increasing reluctance to engage in trespassing. The explorers I met were nearly all white, although both male and female genders and various education levels were represented. Furthermore, overlapping patterns in leisure and consumption patterns are evident. Many explorers express interest in photography, history, and architecture, and it is common to see elements of punk, gothic, and alternative styles in explorers’ musical and aesthetic tastes. I often heard talk of explorations into steam tunnels, hiking and outdoors adventures, and “infiltration”, an activity which involves entering and exploring active buildings such as office towers, hotels, and even prison, while evading police and security. Some people have backgrounds in graffiti and skateboarding. Many of these interests overlap in a concern with marginal and often transgressive spaces, aesthetics, politics, and style.

<sup>7</sup> For a discussion of this process in New England see Bowen, 2006.

<sup>8</sup> See Lewan, 1972 for a geographical study of abandoned farmhouses on the outskirts of a city.

<sup>9</sup> The range of places that I personally visited included: factories, psychiatric hospitals, schools, an amusement park, the control room of a non-working draw bridge, churches, apartment buildings, an oil tank farm, an industrial loft conversion, and numerous houses. In addition, interviewees discussed trips to hospitals, tuberculosis clinics, train stations, military installations, and underground tunnel systems.

<sup>10</sup> In the United States, Walt Whitman described stumbling upon an abandoned train station in Brooklyn in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century (see Christman, 1989). In Europe, the Dadaists organized a walk through an abandoned church, St. Julien le Pauvre, in Paris in 1921 (Breton 2003). In post-world war two Britain, a young man named John Harris photographed adventures into over two hundred abandoned mansions left

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derelict after government requisition (see Harris 1998; 2002). The Situationist movement in France in the 1960s also had an interest in the revolutionary potential of such spaces (see Bonnett 2006).

<sup>11</sup> See (Roth et al. 1997, Vergara 1999)

<sup>12</sup> In 2000, National Public Radio ran a human-interest story on exploring, and from then on media coverage spread quickly and thoroughly across the country. During this time, the term “urban exploring” became the most widely used term to describe the activity. In addition to coverage in the media, explorers began publishing their own zines, books, and websites describing their activities. One zine, titled “Infiltration”, began publication in Toronto in 1996, and the magazine JINX started featuring articles on urban exploring in 1997. Two books were also published by explorers, relaying adventure stories and providing tips and techniques to novices (Deyo and Leibowitz 2003, Ninjalicious 2005) For a more complete history of contemporary exploration see “<http://www.infiltration.org/history-timeline.html>”

<sup>13</sup> As Brian Dillon notes, “The twentieth-century ruin has become the preserve of countless urban explorers and enthusiasts of decaying concrete: the evidence of their obsession is spreading across hundreds of websites devoted to haunted asylums, silent foundries, vacant bunkers, and amputated subway stations. The secret of these places, in short, is out (2006, 59).”

<sup>14</sup> Many explorers described an ambivalence following the logic of usufruct laws, in which trespassing is not tightly regulated if the trespasser does not impart significant damage on the protected property.

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