

Paradise Lost

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Preface

Brett Steele

It is no coincidence that modern architecture arrived at the same time as the modern photograph. After all, wasn't the ambition of modern architecture only ever the picturing, and disseminating, of a new and better world? 'Everyone', Walter Benjamin wrote in 1931, 'will have noticed how much easier it is to get hold of a painting, more particularly a sculpture, and especially architecture, in a photograph than in reality'.

The photograph has long played a role in shaping the thinking of the modern architect, and looking back, it is possible to see just how much of an image modern architecture was, even before it was built. Figures like Mies van der Rohe saw the arrival of commercial photography as a way of not just depicting architecture but representing the future. Though never built, his entry for the 1921 Berlin Friedrichstrasse Skyscraper Competition – a photomontage inspired by the image of American skyscrapers then under construction – accurately projected what lay ahead, with the reflective glass walls of a crystal tower looming above an ageing Berlin, illuminating the darkened street below.

If modern architecture pictured a future built on the dream of industrial mass production, then what follows is what happens when, as Mark Campbell suggests, the picture fades and paradise is lost. Over the past four years Campbell and his students have travelled across the United States to photograph modern architecture in the twenty-first century. The landscapes they have captured are far more eroded than the perfect images modernity once sought to deliver. Somewhat startlingly, the relative age of these towns, structures and industrial wastelands is roughly equal to that of the medium of photography itself. How astonishing, then, to have as a laboratory an architectural terrain that is lived in and depicted by roughly parallel time frames. *Paradise Lost* records places fading as if they are photographs themselves.

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The Most Photographed Barn in America

In his novel *White Noise* (1985), Don DeLillo describes a visit by two academics to one of the US's most pictured locations. The pair travel through miles of bucolic countryside, passing meadows, rolling fields, apple orchards, picket fences and other indicators of the pastoral ideal as they journey deeper into the landscape, towards the 'most photographed barn in America'.¹ On arrival they discover a makeshift parking lot, filled to capacity with the cars and tour buses that had made it there before them. Climbing to the spot advertising the best view, they are transfixed by the spectacle of people busily photographing the building, rather than looking at it with their own eyes: 'No one sees the barn', one academic excitedly notes. 'Once you've seen the signs about the barn, it becomes impossible to see the barn.'

DeLillo's account of this visit – the expectant miles before arrival, the moment of photographic consecration – suggests a kind of vernacular pilgrimage, a journey that not only traverses the physical landscape but travels back in time to evoke the soothing pastoralism Leo Marx read as the American response to the advent of modernity. Beginning with the nineteenth-century transcendentalists Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau, the relationship between nature and architecture was typically framed by the image of a humble vernacular building set in an idealised landscape. As DeLillo's satirical tone indicates, the approach to the 'most photographed barn' is a fantasy, a constructed image that attempts to resist contemporary forces but at the same time enacts a kind of desultory, unsustainable nostalgia. We see how precarious these illusions are when the novel's central character retreats to a small Midwestern town, seeking to escape 'the path of history and its contaminations', only to be engulfed by an 'airborne toxic event', a 'deadly cloud of chemicals' comprising the gaseous by-products of an insecticide used on the surrounding farmland. This toxic concoction drifts across the novel, illustrating the porous territorial boundaries

1. Don DeLillo, *White Noise* (London: Picador Press, 2002).

and sprawling contamination that characterise the post-industrial landscape.

The obscuring of the barn by the indicators of pastoralism also suggests architecture's capacity to be subsumed by other, more abstracted, representational forms. For Susan Sontag, the tourist's photographic endeavours are a means of 'certifying presence' that not only confers an undue significance on the object but also – through the distancing of the image from the place and moment of its capture – allows the photograph to become the experience itself. In this way, the touristic experience depends on 'a search for the photogenic', with the photographed object representing a consensual, transmissible version of what might be considered beautiful.² 'An aesthetic enacted by repetition and convention. We see only what the others see', one of DeLillo's academics notes: 'The thousands who were here in the past, those who will come in the future. We've agreed to be part of a collective perception.'

This collective search for affirmation in the image is something that DeLillo – a former advertising copywriter whose work acknowledges the duplicitous power of the American pictorial – considers to be a formative characteristic of the nation. The parallel development of the United States and the technology of photography fostered the nation's familiarity with its own photographic representation. For example, the images associated with the country's nineteenth-century expansion facilitated the 'west of the imagination', allowing Americans to mentally shape and control the vast uncharted terrain to the west of the Mississippi River, completing the territorial acquisition of the continental United States. But what the images of these landscapes reveal are the irreconcilable contradictions between the two forces driving the nation's progress. On the one hand, an agrarian idealism which held that the wild landscape could be transformed into a civilised and productive garden, on the other a belief that the use of technology – the 'machine in the garden', to employ Marx's term –

would ensure a harmonious exploitation of the west. Such contradictions meant that the potential for enterprise, together with the terms of its compromise, or failure, would be included in the same image. As Alan Trachtenberg noted, 'American photographs are not simple depictions but constructions, the history they show is inseparable from the history they enact'.³ By 'taking pictures of taking pictures', DeLillo's tourists ignore these tensions, turning instead to Jean Baudrillard's postmodernist conception of the simulacrum – the 'copy without original', in which the image bears no relation to reality but assumes a life of its own. ('When the real is no longer what it was, nostalgia assumes its full meaning', he concludes.) Given this transference, DeLillo feels no obligation to describe the building. The barn remains unseen, anonymous in detail. Its scale, form and materiality do not require elucidation – merely a willingness to adhere to pictorial convention. In this way, the barn is a perfect vernacular trope – anonymous yet familiar enough to be suggested rather than represented. 'We're not here to capture an image, we're here to maintain one', one academic says with evident self-satisfaction. 'Every photograph reinforces the aura.'

With this, DeLillo is making an oblique reference to the idea of aura articulated by Walter Benjamin, who noted how 'the unique value of the work of art always has its basis in ritual' – expressed here through the 'incessant clicking of shutter release buttons, the rustling crank of levers that advanced the film'. Realised through a series of mechanical devices, photography evinces the innate technical reproducibility of the image, the multitude of photographic images undermining the illusionary aura of the artwork or architectural object, questioning its singular authenticity. At the same time, the photographic image embodies the radical possibility of unleashing the 'optical unconscious', as Benjamin described the image's capacity to render details – unseen at the moment of capture, but exposed at the moment of development – that could illuminate meaning. (A critical and

2. Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1973) 9, 11, 24. Given this convergence, for Sontag 'everything now exists to be photographed'.

3. Alan J Trachtenberg, *Reading American Photographs: Images as History, Mathew Brady to Walker Evans* (New York, NY: Hill and Wang, 1989).

at times obscene illumination unique to photography.) From an 'opaque mass of facts', to use Siegfried Kracauer's memorable phrase, emerges a multitude of readings.

The affinity between the photographic image and the architectural object – at times critical, at others complicit – has frequently been questioned. As Antoine Picon recently suggested, however, photography remains the most relevant means for examining contemporary landscapes 'saturated by man's technological endeavours', its aesthetic and conceptual openness providing a 'capacity for instability' that resonates with such limitless landscapes and the dissolute architectures they contain. It is worth recalling that Picon made this suggestion while circling in a holding pattern around Newark Airport. Through a cloud of carcinogenic fumes emanating from the New Jersey Shores industrial plants, he sees a 'sort of purgatory' sprawled below: 'cranes, immense bridges spanning platforms lined with containers, refineries and factories between which are creeping swamps, everything in poor condition and rusted out, as though irreparably polluted yet somehow endowed with a strange beauty'.⁴ This endowment tells of both the complexity of these entropic landscapes and the residual capacity of architecture to register the continued presence of elements in decline, such as power, commerce, governance, society. Other proofs of this strange endowment, explored through their illustration in a provisional photographic history, constitute the subject of this small book.

4. Antoine Picon, 'Anxious Landscapes: From the Ruin to Rust', Karen Bates trans, *Grey Room* 01 (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000) 69, 72. Other recent discussions of the relationship between architecture and photographer include: Mary N Woods, *Beyond the Architect's Eye: Photographs and the American Built Environment* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009); and Alona Pardo and Elias Redstone eds, *Constructing Worlds: Photography and Architecture in the Modern Age* (London: Prestel, 2014).

Point Blank

The City of Greenville lies on the Mississippi River, midway between the ports of Memphis, Tennessee and New Orleans on the Gulf of Mexico. Despite styling itself the 'Queen City of the Delta', Greenville was until recently the third most dangerous city in the United States, with a homicide rate rivalling the nation's largest cities and a population almost entirely reliant on social welfare. Flooding, racism, urban flight, crime and substance addiction have all left their mark. If the Mississippi once held a mythical place in the American consciousness, any oneiric associations with the river are now invariably tempered by blunt reality, in the form of the increased industrialisation of waterborne traffic and its associated infrastructure, and the mechanisation of the river itself, with the Army Corps of Engineers' elaborate flood-control measures and concreted river sections. Given these contusions, the hastened, muddied waters of the Mississippi are perhaps an apt analogy for the contemporary American condition, conjuring up the opposite view – in terms of transcendent clarity and potential – to the image of the nation read by Thoreau in the waters of Walden Pond.

River aside, Greenville typifies the nation's progress from the conflicted agrarianism of its founding years, through the labours of industrialisation and leisures of postwar prosperity, on to the contemporary post-Fordist era, marked by the closure of industry and collapse of the sub-prime property markets. While the US can rightly be considered the twentieth century's most influential global force – political, economic, military, technological and cultural – the perceived decline of this influence has generated a sense of anxiety that has been exaggerated and exploited by internecine politics and ideological disputes. At their most extreme, these narratives of decline assume near-apocalyptic consequences: from motor of the world, the United States is reduced to a state of unplanned obsolescence.

As the negation of function, the concept of architectural obsolescence – which considers the building's passage from use into redundancy – was encoded into modernist formulations of progress. Early-modernist discourse, written around the turn of the twentieth century, as America was rapidly industrialising,

considered how scheduled – planned – obsolescence could accommodate the teleological advance beloved of modernist narratives of production and civilisation. In contrast to this anticipated, even desired, architectural redundancy, the obsolescence described in the architectures that follow is largely accidental – indicative of less conscious, unplanned or incidental historical forces. Such markers are visible in the built artefacts associated with the US’s now defunct industries – the plantation-era agriculture of the Delta, the vast post-industrial wastelands of New Jersey or the rotting corpses of manufacturing giants, characterised by the frequently pictured demise of Detroit, Michigan.

For Andreas Huyssen, the contemporary fascination with modern ‘industrial ruins’ is related to the sense that they ‘hold a promise that has vanished from our own age: the promise of an alternative future’.⁵ While such notions of ruin suggest the possibilities of a return to nature, together with an aesthetic reclamation of architecture, these peripheral landscapes are so man-altered as to resist this reunification, inspiring only anxiety in their entropic indeterminacy. Indexes of decline can also be read in the ancillary architectures that augmented these stilled forms of production. Perhaps with even greater poignancy than monumental ruins – the blast furnaces and stilled production lines of past industries – the presence of these more anonymous built residues poses the question of what happens to an architecture that has been defined by work when that mode of production is no longer viable.

The architecture of downtown Greenville is a stark expression of that absolute redundancy, both in the literal sense that the buildings lining its streets have been emptied and abandoned, and conceptually, in that there is no purposeful reason for their continued existence, aside from the obdurateness of architecture. Many of the vacant store windows along Washington Avenue remain uncovered, exposing dust-cloaked shelving and

5. Andreas Huyssen, ‘Nostalgia for Ruins,’ *Grey Room* 23 (Spring 2006) 6–21. On the relationship between the architectural discourses of progress and obsolescence, see Daniel M Abramson, *Obsolescence: An Architectural History* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2016).

displays. The shopfronts that have been boarded over have been covered less, it seems, to protect any contents from looting than to shield Greenville’s remaining residents from the emptiness within. The vacancy of these buildings is exaggerated by the defunct signs signalling their previous use – ‘Rapid Finance Loans’, ‘Fine Vines Inc (Manufacturers of Quality Jeans)’, ‘Delta Teaching Supplies’, ‘Paramount Music Theater’. (Eventually these give way to the lawn signs advertising bankruptcy lawyers in the sporadically inhabited suburbs east of North Harvey Street.) Familiar in their vernacular associations, these signs assume, to paraphrase Robert Smithson, a chain of dull adjectives disguised as buildings, each term leading inexorably on to the next.⁶

This abandoned stretch of the Queen City of the Delta, where the signs have come to constitute the architecture, offers a perverse counter to the argument put forward by Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown and Steven Izenour in *Learning from Las Vegas* (1972) regarding the productivity of the contemporary vernacular, in which architectural signage – exemplified in the ‘electronic exhibitionism’ of the ‘Strip’ – becomes an obvious indicator of the intentions within. But if the neon signage of Las Vegas illustrates the nation’s capacity for perpetual reinvention and belief in economic benefit, then the sun-bleached signage along Washington Avenue indicates a more abject sense of progress. The sense of futility that illustrates this obscene form of vernacular is particularly evident in the Paramount Music Theater (see page 53), whose utilitarian form betrays its origins as the Kress Five & Dime, a convenience store that operated from the 1940s to the 1970s, while also suggesting – in scale, proportion and materiality – a recognisably American architecture, born of the unadorned prosaicness of use. When the original convenience store went out of business, the building remained unoccupied until it was refitted as a music venue in the early 2000s. After less than six months of withering turnover, the Paramount Music Theater closed its doors for good.

6. In his ‘Tour of the Monuments of Passaic’, Smithson noted how ‘Passaic Center loomed like a dull adjective. Each store in it was an “adjective” unto the next, a chain of adjectives disguised as stores.’ Robert Smithson, ‘The Monuments of Passaic’, *Artforum* (December 1967) 55.

While the sign for the Paramount neatly divides the elevation into two, the panels that make up this sign are visibly delaminating. One is obviously missing. Several others have separated from the structure, with one column of panels slumping to rest on the flashing below.⁷ In contrast to the building's formal cohesion, the imminent loss of this sign – inferred, but not realised, in this image – will strip the theatre of any last vestige of function.

As the Paramount Music Theater suggests, architectural signage has an ambivalent, frequently duplicitous role, not only indicating the building's function – locating it within a modernist lexicon in which the legibility of function is vital – but also alluding to larger patterns of consumption and the building's impending obsolescence. In many of the photographs taken by Walker Evans during the Great Depression for the Farm Security Administration, the inclusion of signage appears both as a temporal, vernacular register and as a guarantee against the anonymity of contemporary architecture. In this way 'F M Pointer: The Old Reliable House Mover', 'Lincoln Market', 'N E Sauls Grocery Sandwich Stop' and 'Cherokee Parts Store' ascribe an obvious function to what might otherwise be read as nondescript or functionally indeterminate buildings. As David Campany has suggested, Evans understood photography, architecture and signage as interrelated aesthetic systems, with many of his images – such as 'Damaged' (1929) or 'Frame Houses and a Billboard, Atlanta, Georgia, 1936' – constituting 'found montages' that evidence the conditions and tensions inherent in 1930s America and, by extension, modernity itself.⁸ As Evans discovered through his 'Victorian Architecture' series (1930–31), developed with the literary critic Lincoln Kirstein, photographing architecture afforded an understanding of how the



Walker Evans, Church, Southeastern United States, 1936

7. A subsequent visit to Greenville confirmed that the entire sign for the Paramount Music Theater has been removed – not as a precursor to future development, but to protect passing pedestrians.
 8. David Campany, 'Architecture as Photography: Document, Publicity, Commentary, Art', *Constructing Worlds: Photography and Architecture in the Modern Age* (London: Prestel, 2014) 29. On the work of Evans see also: Alan J Trachtenberg, 'A Book Nearly Anonymous', *Reading American Photographs* op cit, 231–86; Lewis Baltz, 'The Most American

Photographer', *Texts* (Göttingen: Steidl, 2002) 23–32; 'Recalcitrant Intervention: Walker Evans's Pages', Patrizia Di Bello, Colette Wilson, Zamir Shamon eds, *The Photobook: from Talbot to Ruscha and Beyond* (London: IB Tauris, 2012); and David Campany, *Walker Evans: the magazine work* (Göttingen: Steidl, 2014). Evans' work is also part of a general concern during the 1930s that sought to locate and contextualise American culture. See Warren Susman, *Culture as History: The Transformation of American Society in the Twentieth Century* (New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 1984)



Walker Evans, Church of the Nazarene, Tennessee, 1936

historic registers of the image – its detail, materiality and style, as well as its economic, social and political imperatives – could also express a distinctly American idiom.

While the apparent simplicity of Evans' images suggests an unproblematic convergence of a 1930s vernacular and landscape, on closer examination they describe an architecture that is already archaic at the moment of its inscription, passed over in the unrelenting progression of the commercialised modern world. This archaeology of the present not only considered the photographic representation of architecture essential as a historic register, but also acknowledged the transitory, dissipative forces arrested in the image. These tensions are evident in the juxtaposition of two examples from one of the photographer's preferred architectural typologies – churches, simple monofunctional buildings that illustrate both the nation's adherence to the social conventions of religion and an apparent contrast to the crass forms of mass-leisure and consumption he also recorded. In one typical example of this practice, 'Church, Southeastern United States, 1936', Evans depicts a crudely built timber church lit with the softened shadow of a tree. In order to accentuate the cheapness of construction, an equally basic timber ladder leans against the clapboards, suggesting a more obviously vernacular derivation of the Victorian buildings Evans had photographed earlier in the decade. However, unlike those buildings, which were set in an urban context, the autonomy of the church suggests a pastoral ideal separate from the agricultural labours of the surrounding fields. The most basic function of religion, the image implies, is to provide respite from work.

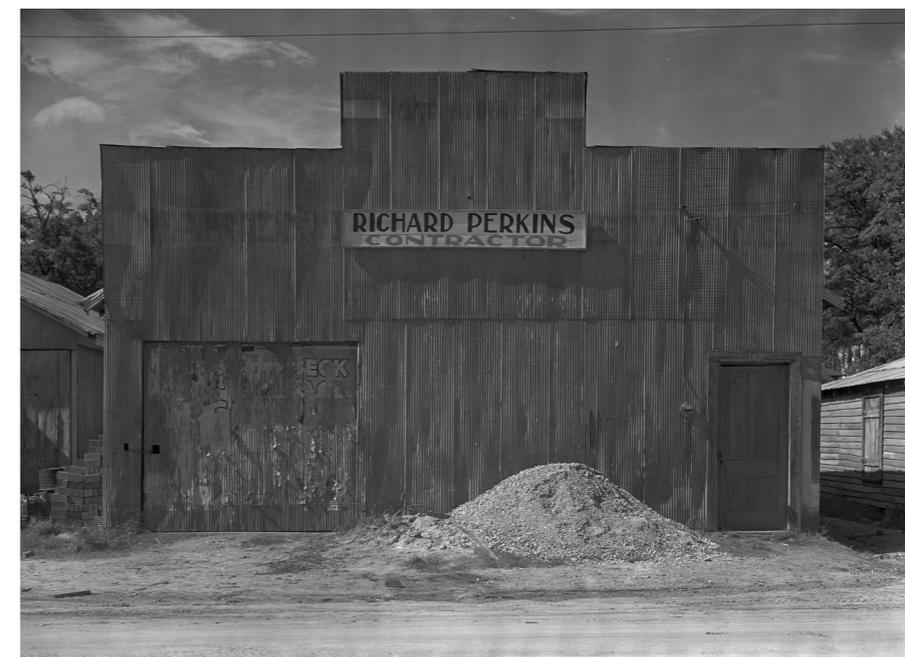
In contrast to the obvious vernacular of 'Church, Southeastern United States', in which function is made evident through built form, the only indication of religious intent in 'Church of the Nazarene, Tennessee, 1936' is a hand-painted sign tacked onto an otherwise nondescript structure. Set back from a dirt road, the impoverished form of this clapboard building – rendered in great detail through the rigour of Evans' photographic practice – betrays its previous use as a store, now fallen into a state of disrepair, with broken, displaced and papered-over windowpanes. Inexplicably, the church has only been whitewashed to two-thirds of its height, the line of demarcation appearing to visually support

the sign that names the purpose of the building and offers a concessionary, almost apologetic, 'welcome' to the congregation.

The visual acuity of these images points to visual precedents such as the acknowledged influence of the French photographer Eugène Atget, who was well aware of the role of photography in preserving a memory of a place, and mindful of the importance of recognising what lay forgotten, unremarked on, remaindered. Crucially, it also suggests the extent to which Evans' frame of operation was always informed by language.

Evans had originally planned to be a writer and his desire to create a 'literature of images' is apparent in his attempts to invest his photographs with the sensibilities of the modernist authors he admired – Hart Crane, John Dos Passos, William Carlos Williams – and not only their intellectual sensitivities but their graphic construction of words and image.⁹ For Evans, the image, or what it illustrated, constituted a visual puzzle that had, he recognised, no definitive solution.¹⁰ He constantly reworked his images, producing multiple versions that varied slightly in terms of camera position or cropping, in addition to cutting and montaging printed copies. In particular, his photographic practice suggests an awareness of how the fragment of language or the individual image (as a 'fraction of reality') could elucidate the fragmentary experience of modernity by operating in relation to a larger sequence of images.¹¹

The sophistication of this visual literacy becomes fully apparent in 'Tin Building, Moundville, Alabama, Summer 1936'. Although the majority of the buildings Evans photographed remain recognisably architectural, in this case the severe utilitarianism encourages us to read the building as an abstraction. The blankness of the facade is accentuated by the vertical striations and horizontal



Walker Evans, Tin Building, Moundville, Alabama, Summer 1936

9. Alan J Trachtenberg, *Reading American Photographs*, op cit, 235.

10. Evans 'was rarely satisfied by a single attempt ... he worked hard to make pictures that show deceptively simple facts'. Jerry L Thompson, *Walker Evans at Work* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1984) 10.

11. Alan J Trachtenberg, *Reading American Photographs*, op cit, 240, 233. Similarly, Lewis Baltz noted that 'Photography, for Evans, was neither document nor art, but a kind of novel, a way of creating a literature of images, using facts to construct fictions that revealed truths. It was a huge ambition, and his use of photography, or photographic images, was similar to the use of images in narrative cinema'. Lewis Baltz, 'The Most American Photographer', *Texts*, op cit, 27–28.

joints of its cladding of corrugated tin panels, which have buckled under the harsh sun and become indented with use. Typically the power lines – indicators of modernity and connectivity – form a critical part of the visual composition. Construction materials – evidence of function – are stacked beside and in front of the building. A mound of earth completes the compositional balance of the image, establishing a visual pun that echoes the name of the town. The absolute frontality of this image deprives the building of its three-dimensional quality as an architectural object, reducing it to a two-dimensional semblance, an image in which the only apparent depth is formed of the clearly delineated space between the camera lens and the vertical surface of the facade. The technical refinement of this lucid, critically resonant photograph focuses attention on the surface, offering a point-blank registration of detail. As Kirstein noted in the epilogue to *American Photographs*, a catalogue accompanying a 1938 exhibition of Evans' work, it was this concern with 'indiscriminate surfaces, textures, patterns and promiscuous abstract or concrete objects' that gave Evans' photography the capacity to reveal how the surface of things, rather than their substance, could register the paradoxes of modernity.¹²

One significant but easily overlooked detail – the deliberateness of the sign, 'Richard Perkins: Contractor' – is at odds with the architectural prosaicness of the tin building. Appearing to be professionally written – a rarity among Evans' oeuvre – it forms a stark contrast with the largely unreadable, but still clearly discernible, markings of the previous occupants, whose hand-painted sign extends in a strip across the full elevation of the building, registering a history of use – cycles of productivity and

12. The construction of this image required an optically shifted camera perspective and the use of a long, focal-length lens that flattened the photographic depth of field, concentrating attention on the surface detail. Kirstein writes that Evans' work replaced the photography of objects (a reference to the pictorial qualities of Stieglitz and Group f/64) with the capture of 'indiscriminate surfaces, textures, patterns and promiscuous abstract or concrete objects'. Lincoln Kirstein, 'Photographs of America: Walker Evans', *American Photographs* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1938) 192–93.

commercial failure – further encoded in the relatively disposable, fragile materials from which the building is constructed. The corrugated tin of the garage door bears the traces of torn layers of advertisements. While also largely illegible, the fragments of letters recall other images Evans captured around Moundville that summer, advertising 'Downie Bros Wild Animal Circus', an exotic diversion from the abject rural poverty of the sharecropping families he was then documenting with the writer James Agee and which the pair later published in 1941 as their scathing critique of Depression-era America, *Now Let Us Praise Famous Men*.

Such images illustrate the capacity of photography to render, in cruel detail, the coincidence of the mundane and historic, illuminating the ambivalence of modernity while offering little recourse to truthfulness or explanation.

In a late interview published in 1971, Evans remarked on the 'documentary style' of his photography, acknowledging its relativism as well as the aesthetic efforts required to make these deceptively simple-looking photographs appear to 'illustrate facts'.¹³ The malleability of these 'facts' and the strategic detachment he adopted in recording these images afforded the photographer an appropriate position from which to view a nation in constant flux. Evans sought an anonymity in the image, both in terms of the absence of an obvious aesthetic – a negation of what he saw as the overbearing 'artfulness' of the work of Alfred Stieglitz and the Photo-Secessionists – and in his choice of impersonal subject matter, such as 'Tin Building' or the sharecroppers of Hale County, Alabama, which reflected the democratic equivalence of the nation. These images evince a more fundamental anonymity, however, naming those forces resident within a 'landscape in which waste and ruin appear as nameless artists of the commonplace and

13. Evans' most coherent definition of the 'documentary style' appears in an interview with *Art in America*. Questioned whether photographs can be forms of documentary, he replied: 'Documentary? That's a very sophisticated and misleading word. And not really clear ... The term should be *documentary style*. Art is never a document, though it can certainly adopt that style.' Leslie Katz, interview with Walker Evans, *Art in America* (1971) 82–89.

the everyday'.¹⁴ For Kirstein, the 'clear, hideous detail and pitiful grandeur' of Evans' *American Photographs* are records of the moment before an 'imminent collapse', testifying to the 'symptoms of waste and selfishness' that have caused the ruin of a nation.¹⁵

In an introductory note intended for the 1961 reissue of *American Photographs* (but never published), Evans described his 'interest in what any present time may look like as the past'.¹⁶ As his images attest, photography provides a way of enacting this temporal interment and illustrating those architectural elements central to the index of history – decay, corrosion, waste. ('Death', Roland Barthes famously concluded, 'is the *eidōs* of photography'.) Within this implied finality, Evans' photographs act as agents of preservation, stilling the deleterious forces they harbour, while simultaneously prefiguring an imminent degradation into obsolescence.

The Fall

Completed in 1928, Ford Motor Company's River Rouge Complex in Dearborn, Michigan was the largest and most sophisticated industrial facility in the world. Designed by the Detroit-based architect Albert Kahn, this enormous complex covered 1.5 million square metres and employed 120,000 workers. Its 90+ buildings included power plants, coke ovens, blast furnaces, mills, forges, rollers, saws and presses, all employed to transform energy and raw materials into a single industrial product – the automobile. The significance of the complex lay less in its astonishing scale than in the technocratic sophistication of its operation, which was based on the interchangeability of parts and the synchronisation of movement. The plant was the culmination of a modern obsession with industrial efficiency and vertically integrated production.

The larger cultural significance of River Rouge was also immediately recognised. The facility's complex, automated aesthetic inspired the communist artist Diego Rivera to celebrate the synthesis of labour and production in his *Detroit Industry Murals* for the Detroit Institute of Arts between 1932 and 1933. In turn, Charles Sheeler interpreted the plant as the 'industrial sublime', completing the synthesis of machine and landscape suggestive of a 'new American pastoral'. Ironically, Sheeler first documented the complex in a series of photographs – such as *Criss-Crossed Conveyors* (1927), in which metallic surfaces and shapes are rendered with mechanical precision – then used the photographs to produce a number of paintings that soften these forms, stilling the movement and noise of modernity. *American Landscape* (1930) and *River Rouge Plant* (1932) are two examples.¹⁷

The desire to incorporate nature within the industrial assemblage also informed a number of Ford's projects during

14. Alan J Trachtenberg, 'A Book Nearly Anonymous', op cit, 283.

15. Lincoln Kirstein, 'Photographs of America: Walker Evans', op cit, 198.

16. Jerry L Thompson, *Walker Evans at Work*, op cit, 151

17. Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (1964) 356. Marx considers the 'machine in the garden' as the mediating figure between industrialisation and the natural landscapes. For a recent reconsideration of Marx see: Jeffrey Louis Decker, 'Dis-Assembling the Machine in the Garden: Antihumanism and the Critique of American Studies', *New Literary History* 23/2

(Spring 1992), 281–306; George Lipsitz, 'Our America,' *American Literary History* 17/1 (Spring 2005) 135–140; Jeffrey L Meikle, 'Leo Marx's "The Machine in the Garden"', *Technology and Culture* 44/1 (January 2003), 147–159; and David M Robinson, 'The Ruined Garden at Half a Century: Leo Marx's *The Machine in the Garden*', *Reviews in American History* 41/4 (December 2013) 571–576.

the 1920s and 1930s. The year before River Rouge opened, two of Ford's representatives negotiated a lease on 2.5 million acres of Brazilian rainforest with the intention of starting a rubber plantation – finally securing a stable supply of the one resource the Ford Motor Company was unable to control. Unsure of the precise terms to exact, Ford's emissaries gained rights to exploit any mineral and timber resources the company discovered, construct railroads and airstrips, erect buildings without official oversight, run schools, establish banks, set up a private police force, use hydroelectric power and dam the Amazon River 'in any way we needed to'. As locals soon realised, Ford had effectively established a 'separate state', Fordlândia, that was to be governed according to the industrial principles and ethics of the US. Nor was this annexation of foreign territory by American interests unique: around the same time the United Fruit Company was busy building model towns throughout Central America, while the largest chocolate manufacturer in the US established its eponymous Hershey on the outskirts of Santa Cruz, Cuba. The point was to ensure the translatability and universal application of industrial processes. Crops were grown, harvested and processed, workers accommodated and administered, and materials, products and labour transported, all without leaving company grounds.

By the late 1920s, Ford's principles of standardised production, high wages and mass consumption – known simply as 'Fordism' – were synonymous with American progress. The interchangeability of these terms was acknowledged by the political theorist Antonio Gramsci in his essay 'Americanism and Fordism' (1935), which highlights how social conformity – exerted through mechanisms of coercion and consent – was crucial to Ford's industrial success. As Greg Grandin has argued, Ford's ambitions for his Amazonian rubber plantation should not be framed solely within the terms of American expansionism, but should be seen in relation to the industrialist's larger project to produce a kind of technologically enabled agrarian utopia – a totalising enterprise that sought to synthesise the disparate models of modern industrial production and nature within a pastoral ideal. In these terms, this project can also be read as a recasting of the nation's founding narrative of 'manifest destiny' –

a forceful, religiously inspired ideal, motivated by the desire to overcome deprivations and corruption and remake the world anew.¹⁸ 'Mr Ford considers the project as a "work of civilisation"; an official at the American consulate reported, offering Ford's utopianism as the 'only theory' he could think of to explain his persistence with the enterprise.¹⁹

Before he settled on the rainforest, Ford had planned to build utopia closer to home, but the US Senate blocked these ambitions. Earlier in the decade, he had purchased tracts of Michigan's Upper Peninsula with the intention of nurturing generations of 'farmer-mechanics' with a talent for processing both lumber and automobile components. At the same time, he planned a 75-mile linear city running alongside the Tennessee River in Muscle Shoals, Alabama, designed 'to fit agriculture and industry together so that the farmer may also be an industrialist and the industrialist also be a farmer'. Ford wanted to 'make a new Eden of our Mississippi Valley, turning it into the great garden and powerhouse of the country', a force to regenerate the whole nation.²⁰ The founding of Fordlândia, then, gave him the chance to not only secure a stable source of industrialised latex, but to finally realise his frustrated utopian dreams.

Ford believed that the 'efficiency of a factory, a town or a sawmill could be ascertained from its visual order'. Like any small American town, Fordlândia was laid out on a grid, which plantation managers appointed with 'local concessions' and leisure activities, such as a tennis court, swimming pool, clubhouse, cinema and golf course. Palm-lined streets were flanked by manager-occupied bungalows with front lawns and porches, while workers lived in serially arranged cottages and communal sleeping huts. Here, in the midst of the rainforest, one visiting US official found a 'midwestern dream', an 'oasis in the jungle' complete with 'electric lights,

18. See Greg Grandin, *Fordlândia: The Rise and Fall of Henry Ford's Forgotten Jungle City* (London: Icon Books, 2010).

19. Similarly, H G Moore, a Fordlândia manager, conceded in a letter dated 26 September 1934 that 'the experiment is as much sociological as industrial. Indeed, it is in the sociological field that Ford has thus far registered his finest achievements in Brazil'. Ibid, 268.

20. For Ford's activities in Michigan's Upper Peninsula, see Ibid, 60–65, 206–7; and Ford's plans for Muscle Shoals, see 65–68, 75–76 and 257–59.

telephones, washing machines, victrolas, and electric refrigerators'.²¹ The design of Fordlândia also conformed to the architecturally enacted separation of production and 'social happiness' that Gramsci read as essential to Fordism and, by extension, the ambitions of contemporary American society.

Compared to the landscape of the United States, which had been comprehensively surveyed during the nineteenth century, the Amazon rainforest was an untamed yet bountiful, Eden, and one increasingly enticing to American expansionism. For Theodore Roosevelt, it was simultaneously untouched by the 'morality enforced by civilisation' and – given the hardships involved in its exploitation – a cure for the corruption of modernity. Contemporary accounts sought to portray the settlement of Fordlândia as an existential struggle between industrialised capitalism and the primordial figure of nature, with one radio commentator boasting of how the 'skill and wits' of the Ford Motor Company would triumph over the 'tricky and perverse Amazon jungle'.²² (Perhaps not coincidentally, the radio programme was sponsored by Ford.) A more nuanced reading of this wilderness was offered by the Brazilian writer José Maria Ferreira de Castro in *A Selva (The Jungle, 1930)*, which describes how the primacy of the rainforest not only prompted observers to 'recoil sharply under the overpowering sensation of the absolute', but also, in less celestial terms, rendered perspective impossible. Of course this distortion of legible dimension was conceptually opposed to the man-made 'straight lines, good and true' that underpinned Fordlândia's planning and operations.

Ford's understanding of nature came from reading Ralph Waldo Emerson, whose works he interpreted as an affirmation of self-reliance and industrial progress. Unlike many of his contemporaries, who viewed industry as a violation of nature, Emerson valued the productive capacity of technology, recognising its essential role in the founding of the nation and



22. Linton Wells, 'Ford Summer Hour' (Sunday, August 24, 1941), as cited in Grandin, *Fordlândia: The Rise and Fall of Henry Ford's Forgotten Jungle City*, op cit, 267–8.

the utilisation of its natural resources.²³ 'Nature, in its ministry to man, is not only the material but is also the process and the result. All the parts incessantly work into each other's hands for the profit of man', he wrote in his famous essay 'Nature' (1836), laying down the basis for the mechanics of American modernism while at the same time setting out his transcendentalist vision of nature suffused by the divine. Fusing these contradictory terms, Ford effectively viewed nature as an industrial concern, one among a multitude of components, products, workers, machines and resources that needed to be marshalled within a vast industrial assemblage ruled by the principles of modern efficiency.

While the operation of River Rouge could be calibrated to within fractions of a second, the organic processes associated with the growing and harvesting of *Hevea brasiliensis* – typified by the slow drip of tapped latex – were the diametric opposite of Ford's industrial ideals. Given the serial inability of Fordlândia's administrators to industrialise nature or even to understand the landscape they were operating in (an ignorance magnified by their stubborn refusal to hire botanical experts), the failure of the enterprise was inevitable. From the mid-1930s on, the crowns of the maturing rubber trees, planted in continuous straight rows to match mechanic ideals, began to fuse together, allowing the fatal spread of leaf blight. The literary image of the machine in the American garden – recalled by Marx as the locomotive shriek that disturbed Nathaniel Hawthorne's pastoral vision of nineteenth-century New England – had expanded into the modern industrial sublimity illustrated by Sheeler during the 1930s, only to be exhausted in the Brazilian rainforest. Evident of fallen ambition, at Fordlândia, this machine is best expressed in the photographic image of a company vehicle – one of millions of automobiles produced at River Rouge – trundling along an orderly row of saplings, spraying insecticide in an attempt to civilise the resisting garden.

23. For a reading of Emerson's essay, see Eduardo Cadava, 'Nature's Archives', *Emerson and the Climates of History* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997) 17–90.

Lot

In the mid-1960s the photographer Lewis Baltz began documenting a building boom that was rapidly overrunning the western United States. A native Californian, Baltz was both repulsed and fascinated by the construction of tract houses, suburban developments and lightweight industrial warehouses – the cheap utilitarian buildings, or 'sub-architecture' as he called it, that appeared to 'accrete solely because of economic reasons, unmediated by anything else'.²⁴ In direct contrast to modernist depictions of industry – works such as Sheeler's elegiac images of River Rouge or Lewis Hine's heroic 'Power House Mechanic' (1920) – Baltz's photographs emphasise the 'hyperbanality' of these speculative developments. Comprising 'inoffensive, anonymous structures, often with extensive landscaping', this was a standardised architecture of deliberate concealment. 'You didn't know whether they were manufacturing pantyhose or megadeath', he later noted.²⁵

One typical image, 'Foundation Construction, Many Warehouses, 2891 Kelvin, Irvine', from *The New Industrial Parks near Irvine, California* (1974), depicts a flat landscape of concrete slabs stretching out towards the distant hills. While these slabs remain covered in frost, the snowfall at ground level has already melted away, lending an ethereality to the foundations, the very architectural element that most clearly signifies permanence. The effect of these preternaturally whitened slabs is akin to that of a mirage – a disorientating visual image that calls into question the veracity of what it represents.

At first glance the viewer is uncertain whether these architectures are under construction or in the process of being demolished. However, rather than suggesting 'monuments rising into ruin' – to recall Smithson's anti-romantic formulation in 'A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey' (1967)²⁶ – what Baltz shows us is distinctly anti-monumental: details are incidental, miniaturised and divested of any legible function other

24. 'Lewis Baltz in conversation with David Campany', *AA Files* 69 (London, 2014).

25. *Lewis Baltz: Rule Without Exception* (Göttingen: Steidl, 1993) 39.

26. Robert Smithson, 'A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey', *Artforum* (1967) 52–57.



Lewis Baltz, Foundation Construction, Many Warehouses, 2891 Kelvin, Irvine, 1974

than to contribute to the image's aesthetic composition. These incomplete components are indicative of an interchangeable architecture, assembled bit by bit and born of the systems of prefabricated construction. Only through enlargement is it possible to discern that the capped services, electrical conduits, heating and water pipes have been tagged for future completion. Instead of the permanence usually associated with architecture, these foundations signal the relative ahistoricism of the American west, where for Baltz 'everything was transitory'.

The concept of American progress was intertwined with the 'west of the imagination', a nexus of ideas that transcended geographic boundaries, informing notions of political and religious freedom, individualism, commerce and the utility of nature. This progress was partly motivated by the doctrine of manifest destiny, which suggested 'the untransacted destiny of the American people is to subdue the continent',²⁷ as William Gilpin asserted in his *Mission of the North American People* (1873). Before the nineteenth century was out, this subjugation was more or less complete. Half of the continental landmass of the US, extending from the Mississippi River to the Pacific Coast, had effectively been settled within 80 years. Writing in 1893, the historian Frederick Jackson Turner defined the frontier as the 'line between civilisation and savagery' – between modernised industrialisation and primitive nature – a boundary that, in being contested, pushed ever forward, extended, was an essential way of defining the American character. But now Turner famously declared that the American frontier was closed: the land-surveying project was complete, and the process of subdividing the territory was well underway. With this subdivision, however, the tensions that defined this boundary – the violence, commercial exploitation, individualism and the intolerance of governance – would turn their focus inward.

In these terms, the initial propositions for westward expansion were based not just on an ideal but on an abstraction,

27. William Gilpin, *Mission of the North American People: Geographical, Social and Political* (Philadelphia, PA: J B Lippincott, 1873) 130.

the imposition of the Jeffersonian grid, which parcelled up the landscape for development, ignoring any geographic, social, economic or natural particularities along the way. Through its unvarying demarcation of the territory, the grid imposed an equivalence, an ‘overwhelming sensation of sameness, emptiness and ephemerality’. Besides facilitating the exploitation of natural resources, it also encouraged the social conformity of the citizens who came to inhabit its subdivisions. As Aaron Betsky has argued, the imposition of this abstracted equivalence engendered a kind of amnesia, leaving ‘an emptiness central to all picturing of western space’.²⁸ Set in these terms, architecture operated as an infill – a standard bearer of the uniformity and progressive development that sought to obscure this vacancy.

Baltz’s industrial parks are located on the periphery of the city, planned and constructed by the Irvine Corporation from the 1960s on, and celebrated as an exemplary postwar development. Just like the fictitious setting of Thomas Pynchon’s *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966), the constituent elements of Irvine – tract houses and commercial warehouses – grew together in a sprawling ‘circuit-board layout like a well-tended crop, drawn from the dull brown earth’, less an identifiable centrally coordinated city than ‘a group of concepts’, an amalgam of census tracts, special-purpose bond-issue districts and shopping nuclei, bound by access roads to the state freeway system.²⁹ Innocuous landscapes such as this marked the end-point of westward expansion in the United States, the mechanical surveying and resource exploitation of the nineteenth century giving way to the emerging technologies and real-estate speculations of the postwar era. As Baltz’s *Prototype Works* (1965, 1967–73), *Tract Houses* (1969–71) and *Industrial Parks* (1974) indicate, the concurrence of cheap construction technologies (figured in the endless proliferation of suburban tracts and industrial infrastructures) and imminent decay (foretold

by the easy consumption of existing landscapes, architectures and historical points of reference) was especially apparent in the American west, a landscape in which the stark coincidence of the beautiful and the repulsive marked the progress of modernity.

For Jeff Rian, Baltz was the most ‘conceptually literate’ of the group of loosely affiliated photographers who engaged in a reappraisal of the postwar American landscape, as represented in the seminal *New Topographics: Photographs of a Man-Altered Landscape* exhibition staged at George Eastman House in 1975.³⁰ Tending towards the critical, rather than the celebratory, the work was defined by its ‘stylistic anonymity’ and its exploration of ‘weed lots, highway verges, gasoline stations and six-dollar motels’ overgrown with telephone wires, mobile homes, motels and other residues of urban sprawl.³¹ In depicting this ordinariness, the photographers were indebted to the work of contemporary artists like Smithson and Ed Ruscha and the photography of Evans, which had been revived through a retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art just a few years before. Evans’ ‘pictures have enlarged our sense of the usable visual tradition’, argued John Szarkowski in his introduction to that exhibition. Seeking to link the architectural and the photographic vernaculars, he noted Evans’ impact on ‘the way that we now see not only photographs, but billboards, junkyards, postcards, gas stations, colloquial architecture, Main Streets, and the walls of rooms’.³²

While Baltz and his contemporaries acknowledged the influence of Evans’ ironic detachment, these photographs of the 1930s – already seen, back then, as recording a series of ‘anachronisms’ – were by the 1970s distinctly historic in register, not just in terms of the temporal markers of historical detail – materials, signage, cars – but also through their potent recuperation into nostalgically inclined narratives of the vernacular. Moreover, while Evans’ notion of anonymity may have questioned the conditions of American democracy, it never completely dismissed the idea of its potential renewal. Already conflicted in the 1930s, this underlying modernist

28. Aaron Betsky, ‘Emptiness on the Range: Western Spaces’, *Crossing the Frontier: Photographs of the Developing West, 1849 to the Present* (San Francisco, CA: San Francisco Museum of Art, 1997) 54–65.

29. Thomas Pynchon, *The Crying of Lot 49* (London: Vintage, 2000) 12–14. In the novel, San Narcisco is home to Yoyodyne Inc, a fictional corporation that evokes the names of actual defence contractors, illustrating the crossover between fiction and reality that Baltz also noted in relation to the deliberate ambiguity of such corporate titles.

30. See Jeff Rian, ‘As if Machines were God’, Susanne Figner and Walter Moser eds, *Lewis Baltz* (Cologne: Walther König, 2012) 71–128.

31. ‘Lewis Baltz in conversation with David Company’, *AA Files* 69 (London, 2014).
32. John Szarkowski, *Walker Evans* (New York, NY: Museum of Modern Art, 1971) 17.

belief in continual American progress appeared in the politically charged postwar era as almost wilfully naive. By the 1960s–1970s the reevaluation of photographic notions of objectivity, irony and documentation in the description of the man-altered landscape – introduced by Evans in the 1930s – had acquired a degree of desperation.

In terms of its consideration of these peripheral landscapes, this visual approach was also influenced by the technocratic work of the nineteenth-century survey photographer, Timothy O’Sullivan (1840–1882), who recorded the landscape with a remarkable prescience, and by the ‘new vernacular model’ of commercial real-estate photography, which unapologetically correlated landscape and architecture with monetary value.³³ Baltz illustrates this correlation at its cynical extreme in his 1981 series, *Park City*, documenting the construction of residential development on contaminated former mining land outside Salt Lake City, Utah. ‘Beneath the world of boom-time optimism, the condition of the land suggested a sense of ultimate futility. It was no mystery why the land looked like it did’, he concluded.³⁴

This sense of underlying futility, evident in the images of Baltz, was also identified by Baudrillard as a defining characteristic of the contemporary US. In his oft-critiqued travelogue *America* (1984), he offers a singular account of the United States in the Reagan era, at the moment of its transition from late-capitalism to the contemporary neo-liberal economy characterised by transglobal capital. For Baudrillard the nation’s development had been fuelled by the confidence that it was an ‘achievable utopia’, an ambition evident in its desire for perpetual reinvention. While this formulation is a brash generalisation, ignoring the complexities underlying the founding of the nation, it is worth pursuing Baudrillard’s line of enquiry further, as this rejection of history implies not only that America is the ‘original version of modernity’ (which all other nations follow), but also that it exists ‘in a perpetual present of signs’, its transitory reinventions – or



Joel Sternfeld, *After a Flash Flood, Rancho Mirage, California, July 1979*

33. Lewis Baltz, 'Notes on Park City, *Texts*, op cit, 47–76. See also 'Lewis Baltz in conversation with David Campany', *AA Files* 69 (London, 2014)

34. Baltz, 'American Photography in the 1970s: Too Old to Rock, Too Young to Die', *Texts*, op cit, 41.



Walker Evans, Erosion near Jackson, Mississippi, March 1936

compulsion for rewriting narratives – wrought by the uneasy transference of the imaginary into reality, a process that others noted was defined by a ‘deep disquietude’. Circulating between the desert landscapes and the affluent suburban developments of the west, Baudrillard concludes, ‘The US is paradise’. But contrary to conventional depictions, this ‘Paradise is just paradise. Mournful, monotonous, and superficial.’³⁵ As an ‘achieved utopia’ America offers an image – or, rather, an infinite number of images – of what the end of modernity might look like. Here, as with all paradises, Baudrillard detects an anxious acceptance of an inevitable and imminent fall from grace.

This precariousness also suffuses Joel Sternfeld’s *American Prospects* series from the end of the 1970s, which depicts – in resonant colour and surface detail – a post-industrial service-oriented society distracted by technology, consumerism and the narcissism of self-enhancement. One representative image, ‘Beverly Hills, California, May 1979’, captures a man lounging in a hot tub in the Hollywood Hills – a literal illustration of Baudrillard’s indictment of the United States’ ‘soft resort-style civilisation’ and ‘sentimental reconciliation with nature’. In the image that follows, however, ‘After a Flash Flood, Rancho Mirage, California, July 1979’, the photographer captures a landslide that has exposed the fallible service infrastructure of a wealthy development, collapsing the road and washing away a car, which lies, overturned, at the bottom of a ravine. The diagonal path of the subsidence has disturbed the coherence of the property grid, suggesting, in miniature, the mining operations that tore open the surface of California in search of profit. Like the developments in Pynchon’s *Lot 49*, Rancho Mirage has been conjured into existence by real-estate speculators. In contrast to the manicured landscaping, palm trees and ornamental plants foregrounded in the image, the mountains in the background indicate a geological time – or ‘mineral time’ as Baudrillard called it – that runs counter to the transitory notion of cultural time. Thus, the subsidence also alludes to the collapse of history, in the sense that the fragility

35. Jean Baudrillard, *America* (London: Verso, 1989) 82, 107.

of this newly divided land aligns with larger forces of geological instability.

In an earlier indicator of this fragility, Evans recorded a more plainly mismanaged landscape, shaped by the aggressive agricultural practices then endemic in the southern states. More disturbing than his images of architectural decay, these photographs resist inclusion within the nostalgia of a vernacular narrative, and instead illustrate a no less-American idiom marked by corrosion and indifference. Roy E Stryker, Director of the US Farm Security Administration, had given his errant employee a clear brief: 'Get some good erosion pictures'. Documenting the results of destructive farming practices – 'erosion, sub-marginal areas, cut-over land' – was in keeping with the department's agenda, but wherever possible, Stryker added, Evans' photographs should also aim to illustrate 'the relationship of the land to cultural decay'.³⁶ In one brief phrase he had encapsulated the flipside of progress and the dissipation of the carefully charted subdivision of America. In a final irony, discernible only in extreme enlargement, one of these images, 'Erosion near Jackson, Mississippi, March 1936', illustrates this convergence, capturing a small sign – nailed to the sole tree on an inland promontory held together only by the roots of that tree – advertising the commercial sale of the surrounding land.

36. Roy E Stryker, letter to Walker Evans (December 1936 – January 1937) cited in Jerry L Thompson, *Walker Evans at Work*, op cit, 118–19.

White Light

Confronted for the first time with the landscape of California's Mojave Desert, Reyner Banham's response was not aesthetic, but visceral: 'Silence, heat and light.' As he readily concedes in *Scenes in America Deserta* (1982), his 'art historian's generalisations' are quite inadequate to the task of describing the 'kind of landscape that has served mankind for so long as a metaphor of hell and death, of beauty and morality, of the transience of life and the persistence of living beings'.³⁷ While he can account for the visual majesty of the American desert – its 'notoriously stark, savage and inhuman light and colour' – in terms of the eighteenth-century concept of the sublime, he must turn elsewhere for an explanation of the attraction it exerts: 'Puzzled to know what I am doing in the desert, I hope to find illumination by the study of what other men have been doing in the desert.'³⁸

The Mojave was the 'most feared barrier' to westward expansion and Banham's 'desert of first instance and last resort'. There were 'more traces of man to be seen', given its history of mineral exploitation and scientific testing, and the encroachment of major urban centres. And while these traces of occupation were obvious indicators of obsolescence – run-down railroad settlements, bankrupt service towns, nuclear test sites and abandoned resorts – Banham also cited the desert architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright and his disciple Paolo Soleri, together with the 'mad alien townscape of Las Vegas', as evidence of the 'impermanence of man in the desert'.³⁹ This misguided interpretation, Alessandra Ponte writes, arose from Banham's functionalist conception of architecture.⁴⁰ Caught between aesthetics and technology, his view of the desert was regulated by the histories and the by-products of its exploration. The opposite to conventional notions of natural beauty, the American desert, he concluded, was 'man-made'. Banham himself acknowledged that his response, alternating between 'elation and bewilderment', was shaped in part by the

37. Reyner Banham, *Scenes in America Deserta* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989) 8, 221.

38. *Ibid*, 194, 191–192.

39. *Ibid*, 86–87, 42.

40. Alessandra Ponte, *The House of Light and Entropy* (London: Architectural Association, 2014) 91.

desert writing of Charles Doughty's *Travels in Arabia Deserta* (1921) – 'a kind of ancestral presence', which his title pointedly evokes – and John Charles Van Dyke's *The Desert: Further Studies in Natural Appearances* (1901), 'a sensational discovery' made shortly after his first forays into the Mojave.

In contrast to Banham's fascination with the architecture of past occupation (and its inclusion in written narrative), Van Dyke's *Desert* describes that earlier art historian's retreat from America's industrial east – stifled by ennui and the 'smoke and dust of the ruin' – into a wilderness free of any residual pastoral or productive connotations, filled with 'pure sunlight' and the 'grandeur of the desolate'.⁴¹ As Banham noted, Van Dyke was both 'a connoisseur of views, a skilled savourer of lights and colours' and 'a fanatic celebrant of dry, pure air',⁴² which increased the field of vision. His conception of the American desert was distinctly modern, however, unencumbered by 'classical or romantic landscape with its literary or cultural allusions', Ponte writes. In surrendering to the heat and silence and light of the desert, Van Dyke was seeking a space which allowed a 'pure perception' that went beyond form or meaning, sensing 'only the abstraction of light and colour'.⁴³

This desert light is the opposite of the romantic view Americans first had of the natural landscape. The work of nineteenth-century painters such as Thomas Cole and Albert Bierstadt, cast America as 'nature's nation', with its most distinctive characteristic being its wildness. As Nancy Anderson has noted, these images 'carried a conciliatory message implying the natural and technological sublime were compatible, that the wilderness landscape Americans had used to define themselves and the nation would endure as a cultural icon while being converted to economic use'⁴⁴ – a reconciliation that would be manifest in the visual depiction of California's Yosemite Valley, the counterpart to the state's desolate deserts, which Frederick Law Olmsted pronounced 'the greatest glory of nature'.

41. John Charles Van Dyke, *The Desert: Further Studies in Natural Appearances* (New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1922) 21.

42. Reyner Banham, *op cit.*, 157.

43. Alessandra Ponte, *op cit.*, 19, 79.

44. Nancy K Anderson, 'The Kiss of Enterprise: The Western Landscape as Symbol and Resource', William H Truettner ed, *The West as America: Reinterpreting Images of the Frontier, 1820-1920* (Washington, DC: National Museum of American Art, 1991) 241.

More technologically reproducible means than painting were deployed to enact this conversion. The images produced by Carleton Watkins, one of the first photographers to visit Yosemite, have become synonymous with its cultural representation. As Emerson recalled, Watkins' photographs 'made nature possible', in the sense that they provided incontrovertible evidence of what seemed almost inconceivable. Cognisant of the commercial and aesthetic possibilities of his explorations, Watkins first travelled to Yosemite in 1861 laden with photographic equipment that included stereoscopic camera – a new technology deemed particularly suitable for rendering scenes from nature – and a custom-made 'mammoth' plate camera, which yielded an enormously detailed 18" x 22" image. Between 1864 and 1865 his work for the California State Geological Survey 'called attention to the scenery of California and furnished a reliable guide to some of its most interesting features', the state geologist Josiah Whitney explained. These images would subsequently be published in the seminal *The Yosemite Book* (1868). The astonishing detail in these 'mammoth' plates, printed at actual scale and readily accessible as books and in exhibitions, collapsed the distance between viewer and landscape. They also dictated the visual points of reference – the 'most striking points of view' – for many subsequent generations of tourists, fostering a sense of proximity and ownership. In these terms, Yosemite was the very image of nature.

The transcendentalism of Emerson and Thoreau, given visual form by the romantic paintings of the Hudson River and Rocky Mountain schools, encouraged Americans to read Watkins' representations of nature in the context of manifest destiny. Thus Bierstadt, after visiting an exhibition of Watkins' views in 1862, immediately declared his intention to travel west. In addition to their obvious cultural significance, these images were also driven by a political imperative. Among the first viewers of these images were politicians and industrialists who were instrumental in the expansion of the American west, including Watkins' childhood friend, the railway magnate Collis Huntington. Watkins' work was used by the Californian senator, John Conness, to promote the Yosemite Bill (signed into law in 1864), which gifted the valley to the state to preserve it against future development. In stipulating that the land be reserved for 'public use, recreation,

and restoration' and 'held inalienable at all times', the bill effectively paved the way for the establishment of the US National Parks system.⁴⁵

The significance of Yosemite in the history of American photography, the park having been photographed by 'everyone from Eadward Muybridge and Carleton Watkins to Ansel Adams', was part of the attraction for Stephen Shore, one century later. His seminal photograph, 'Merced River, Yosemite National Park, California, August 13, 1979', part of the *Uncommon Places* project, captures an American family 'doing ordinary things': swimming in the river, photographing one another on vacation. Here, the imposing uniqueness of the natural environment is offset by a familiar sense of occupation. By the 1970s the subjugation of the western wilderness, now unthreatening, even bucolic, is signalled by the child's stroller resting in the foreground, the toddler and mother walking towards it. 'Merced River' is unique among the images in the *Uncommon Places* series for recording a place of acknowledged national significance, rather than the anonymous everyday landscapes that had informed his work up to then – Shore was the youngest participant in the *New Topographics* exhibition.

Thematically, 'Merced River' represents a transition between the formally complex inhabited landscapes of *Uncommon Places*, the earlier *American Surfaces* series and Shore's later landscape photography of the 1980s. While the 'snap-shot aesthetic' and artificial light of *American Surfaces* revealed the reflected surfaces – plastic tabletops and garish finishes – of the nation at the moment it finally gave way to the forces of commercialisation, the use of daylight and large-format colour images in *Uncommon Places* enabled Shore to exploit photography's potential for registering extreme detail – what he memorably described as 'the surreal density of information'. For Kirsty Lange, 'Merced River' also suggests the culmination of a particular form of landscape



Stephen Shore, Merced River, Yosemite National Park, California, 13 August 1979

45. See Carl Parcher Russell, *One Hundred Years in Yosemite: The Story of Great Park and its Friends* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1947); and George Dimmock, *Exploiting the View: Photographs of Yosemite and Mariposa* by Carleton Watkins (North Bennington, VA: Park-McCullough House, 1984).



Lewis Baltz, Fluorescent Tube, 1977

photography – a coherent visual representation in which the density of detail, rather than the overall composition, formed the focal point or subject: ‘Each image is so sharp and detailed that it seems to have infinite centres of attention, or none at all’.⁴⁶

In contrast to Shore’s formal coherence, Baltz’s photographic work from around the same time explored the visual possibilities associated with a more fragmented representation of the peripheral landscapes of the American west. His ‘Fluorescent Tube’ (1977), made the same year as Shore’s ‘Merced River’, is characterised by a spatial ambiguity, with the vast scale of the desert difficult to grasp in relation to the tube that lies shattered on the ground. One of 15 images included in the short series *Nevada* (also 1977), it marks a representational shift. From the recognisable architectural typologies and stark frontality of his earlier works (*Prototype Works, Tract Houses, New Industrial Parks*), Baltz moves in to capture a more complex scene of lingering panoramic views, explicitly referencing the use of image sequences and other visual techniques derived from cinema. In thematic terms, *Nevada* directly addresses the irredeemable landscape through its overt references to waste, shown not in the modernist bricoleur’s potentially productive use of raw materiality, but rather in an anxious concern with the appropriate disposal of waste products.

Unlike other images in *Nevada*, the blunt captioning of ‘Fluorescent Tube’ does not indicate specific location, adding to its ambiguity as a register. This abstraction is both compositional – the shattered glass fragments divide the image horizontally, suggesting that multiple vehicles have passed over the tube – and conceptual, as the two ends of the tube have become separated and now lie perpendicular to one another (and parallel to the picture frame). Not only is it impossible to know the original length of the tube, but this man-made object no longer provides a legible means to gauge the landscape, of which it is now part. With the open-ended framing of this image, Baltz visually acknowledges his own suggestion that ‘despite their verisimilitude, photographs are

46. Kirsty Lange, ‘Nothing Overlooked’, *Stephen Shore* (London: Phaidon Press, 2007) 87.

abstractions' capable only of furnishing 'selective and incomplete' information about these landscapes in crisis.⁴⁷

The dispersal of these shattered fragments also recalls *Royal Road Test* (1967), in which Ruscha documents the results of throwing a typewriter out of an automobile speeding along US 91 between Las Vegas and Los Angeles. The forensic quality of Ruscha's images is reinforced by characteristically deadpan captions, naming the 'Scene of strewn wreckage', 'Point of impact (piece of rubber not part of typewriter)' and – in particularly resonant detail – the unravelled caracole of 'Left ribbon spool and ribbon', cast out across the tarmac.⁴⁸ In this way, *Royal Road Test* intersects with both literary and pictorial traditions – with Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* (1957), referenced in the form of the Royal Model 10 typewriter (the model famously used to write the novel), and with the nineteenth-century practice of survey photography. Like his earlier artists' books, such as *26 Gasoline Stations* (1963) or *34 Parking Lots* (1967), Ruscha's *Royal Road Test* was calculatedly ambiguous. As he explained, 'My interest in facts is central to my work. Not that you'll find factual information in my work' – a statement that could also be read as a provocative reformulation of Evans' 'documentary style'.

Similarly, we see in Baltz's photographic practice a questioning of the singular image's capacity for narrative explanation, with an increasing use of techniques drawn from cinema – zooming, framing, cutting, editing, montaging – to explore this fragmented entropic landscape. The resulting image sequences illustrate an architectural space that is crossed by constantly changing forces, a landscape that had itself become cinematic, much like the one experienced by Robert Smithson: 'When I walked on the bridge, it was as though I was walking on an enormous photograph that was made of wood and steel, and underneath the river existed as an



47. Lewis Baltz, 'The New West', *Lewis Baltz: Texts*, op cit, 33.

48. The Royal Model 10 typewriter was an exemplar of mass production. By the time Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* (1957) was published, over ten million typewriters had been produced. On Ruscha's use of the car 'as medium' and his referencing of Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* (1957) see Jaleh Mansoor, 'Ed Ruscha's One Way Street', *October* (Winter 2005) 127–42. As Mansoor notes, '*Royal Road*

Test takes the celebrated Kerouac typewriter and tosses it from the car into the desert, where it breaks against the gravel and becomes so much wreckage, finally part and parcel with the ground. Ruscha and collaborators Williams and Patrick Blackwell then go to great lengths to document the physical traces of the event in its aftermath, which results in a book of photographs of typewriter parts embedded in dirt and sand that occupy the entirety of the frame.'

enormous movie film that showed nothing but a continuous blank', he wrote in his 'Tour of the Monuments of Passaic'. This strategy of representing the landscape from multiple indeterminate viewpoints illustrates a conceptual shift from the documentation of the sterile man-altered landscape, mined by Ruscha and Shore, to a concern with an 'entropic *terrain vague*' – an endless periphery that enacts a final break with the linear distinctions of Turner's frontier and the molecular subdivision of the property grid. As Baltz described it, the landscape now appeared 'neither wholly natural nor wholly an agglomeration of industrial artefacts': what Americans had previously thought of as landscape no longer existed.⁴⁹

If the American desert was a refuge for Banham, who acknowledged his European susceptibility to its 'immense vastness', then for Baltz it had lost any residual semblance of romantic innocence, or potential for unspoiled occupation. The desert was void. Simultaneously proto-apocalyptic, in the sense of containing the forces that ensured its own vacancy, and post-apocalyptic, in its harbouring of former nuclear test sites and their contaminants. In contrast to his contemporary Robert Adams – who continued to invest the western landscape with an almost-metaphysical quality, evident in his stilled images in which light is used as a 'tarnished metaphor of divine grace' – Baltz suggests 'a less redemptive reading', recognising this 'light is hard and glaring, with little shade or comfort, a perpetual noon that magnifies each flaw of a desiccated and tired land'.⁵⁰ (A light that is the opposite of the domesticated nature captured by Shore.) Baltz's vision is not at all like the primordial illumination that Banham described at the beginning of his *America Deserta*, or the perceptive abstract sunlight evoked by Van Dyke; rather, this 'hard and glaring' desert light finds its closest correspondence in the work of the survey photographer Timothy O'Sullivan, whose images registered both the historic complexity and endemic ambiguity of the American landscape of the nineteenth century.

A protégé of the celebrated Matthew Brady, O'Sullivan operated as a photographer during the American Civil War before being employed on four different surveys, working with the geologist Clarence King in 1867–69 and 1872, and the explorer and cartographer George Wheeler in 1870–71 and 1873–74. Like Atget, O'Sullivan was ostensibly a technician. (And like Atget, his images are altogether more complex than mere technical documentation.) King and Wheeler both valued photography as an accurate record for registering geological and topographical information and a promotional object, a means to generate political and financial support for their endeavours. Here, the disinterested search for scientific knowledge intersected with the production of an instrumentalised knowledge of the landscape, opened up for territorial acquisition and financial gain.

Like other survey photographers, O'Sullivan often showed the surveying teams at work. Unlike the others, however, he sometimes included his own photographic equipment, like the wagon darkroom in 'Desert Sand Hills near Sink of Carson, Nevada' (1867), or the rule in 'Historic Spanish Record of the Conquest. South Side of Inscription Rock, New Mexico, No 3' (1873), which not only provide an indication of human measurement but also, crucially, signify that these images are photographs. As Trachtenberg noted, 'these photographs illustrate that these landscapes cannot be simply understood in terms of "nature" – as existent prior to the action of being surveyed, or exploited – but rather as the product of distinct modes of seeing, knowing and possessing'.⁵¹ For Adams, O'Sullivan was the most significant of the survey photographers because he 'understood nature first as architecture'. While western genre painters were quick to infill their compositions if nature proved too barren, O'Sullivan was interested 'in emptiness, in apparently negative landscapes, in the barest, least hospitable ground. His best pictures are of vacancies – canyons or flats or lakes.'⁵²

49. Lewis Baltz, 'American Photography in the 1970s: Too Old to Rock, Too Young to Die,' *Texts*, op cit, 71.

50. Lewis Baltz, *Texts*, op cit, 35.

51. See also Toby Jurovics ed, *Framing the West: The Survey Photographs of Timothy H O'Sullivan* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010); Rosalind Krauss, 'Photography's Discursive Spaces', *Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, MA: MIT

Press, 1986); Alan Trachtenberg, 'Naming the View', *Reading American Photographs*, op cit, 119–63.

52. See Robert Adams, 'In the Nineteenth-century west', *Why People Photograph* (New York, NY: Aperture, 1994) 133–54.

O'Sullivan's acknowledgement of the vacancy at the centre of these American landscapes is evident in 'Salt Lake Desert, Utah' (1869) – an image devoid of any visible human presence. Confronted with a vast unmarked territory, O'Sullivan did not add an artificial register of human measurement, but rather provided a dispassionate technocratic record of the emptiness that stretched out across the mineral residues of the salt flat to the horizon. (A century later, Baudrillard would remark that jet-propelled vehicles had to be invented to conquer the horizontality of these plains.) In the mechanical, architectural registration of this image, O'Sullivan documented the 'nothing-in-between' – pure space – measured out and inhabited solely by the harsh desert sun. What he discovered, or, rather, what can be read through this image of the photographic survey of the American west, is this abstracted historical light, a native luminosity that is not only attractive, in the heliotropic sense, but also repulsive, destructive, annihilating, erasing. Opposed to the image of nature represented by Yosemite, 'Salt Lake Desert, Utah' illustrates an alternative, profane sense of progress – a vernacular marked by architecture's imminent decline into obsolescence and decay.

In contrast to the poetic metaphors of life and death read by Banham in his visit to the Great Soda Lake, O'Sullivan evinces an actual, technological, erasure. Given the exposure range of the albumen plates and the mechanical limits of his camera equipment, the photographer was forced to sacrifice any detail in the sky in order to expose the ground; an obfuscation that speaks of the violations of nature that followed. If a moment of critical awareness is afforded by the flash of history, as Benjamin supposed in his photographic analogy of historical understanding, then the shock of this American photographic landscape – its evocation of both the modern and the primordial – lies in the relentlessness of this white light that speaks less of presence than of the desiccation that names history. What lay before the architectural register of O'Sullivan's camera – and of those who would come after him – was the implausibility of paradise.

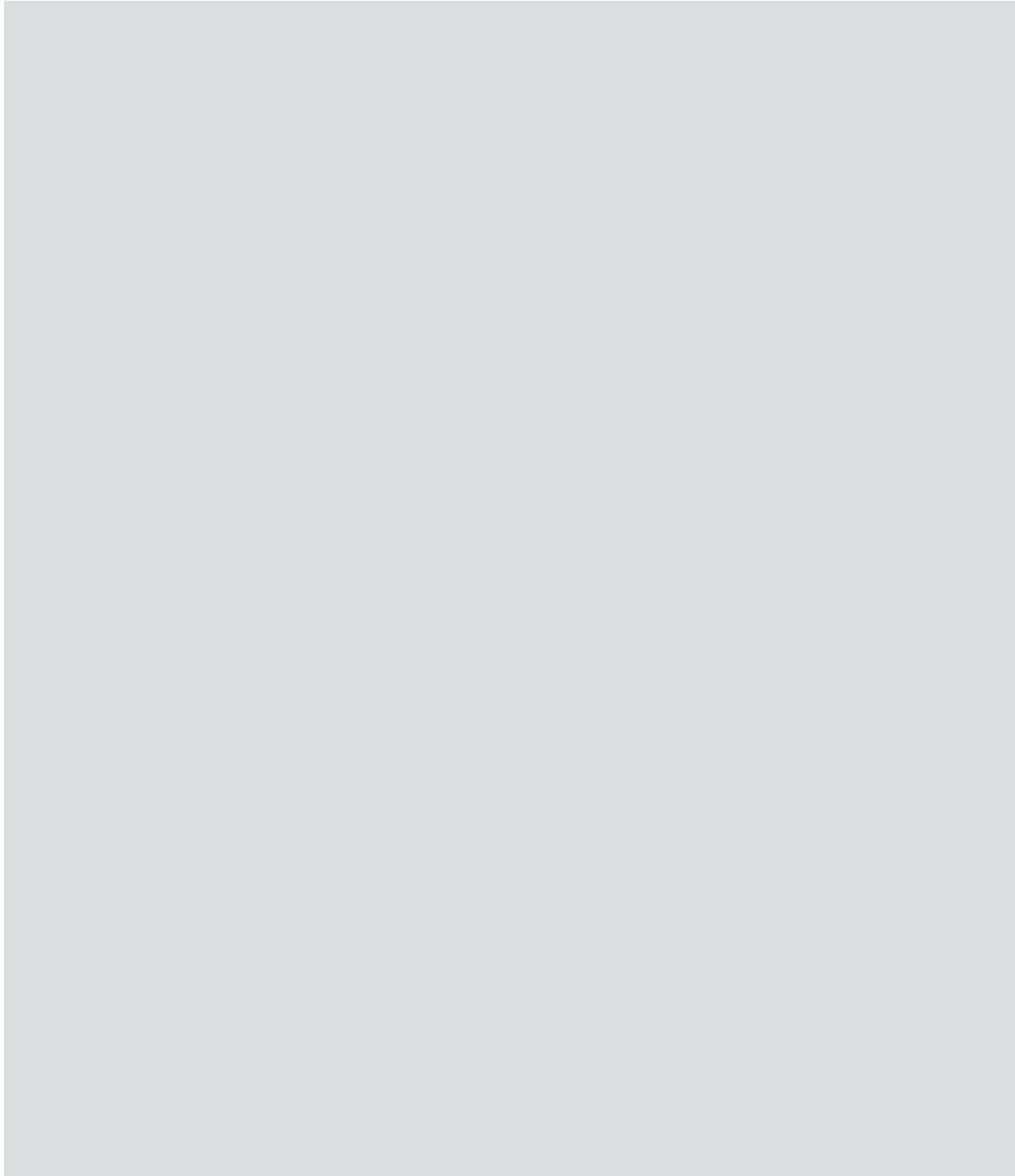


The following photographs were taken between 2007 and 2014, captured at first with the careless haste of a tourist, then later recorded with greater care, in an attempt to explore a scattered and provisional history of American architecture shaped by patterns of political and economic upheaval.

However outwardly benign, abandoned or appreciably spoiled, these locations proved to be contested sites, and a number of the photographs in this book were taken before, or shortly after, conversations with local law enforcers. Yet the implausibility of the suspicions regarding the photography of these buildings was typically revealed by the inconsistencies of their policing. While, for example, it was possible to photograph the petrochemical plants lining Houston's Buffalo Bayou from the water, a faction of private security, local police and the FBI enforced a 'voluntary ban' on recording from the shore – a level of conflicted action indicative of the protracted mistrust bred by the post-9/11 era.

In other instances the financial or legal status of the architectures became points of contention. Many of the sites in the Borscht Belt of upstate New York were subject to lengthy disputes over ownership and use. By contrast, the neglect that marks areas like Salton Sea in California or the city of Detroit renders the very notion of proprietary rights irrelevant. In this way, the images here evidence the dichotomy between the perceived value of the land and the valuelessness of its architecture – a contradiction that is clearest in the most banal, least continuous and anonymous of all architectures: those possessed solely by time.





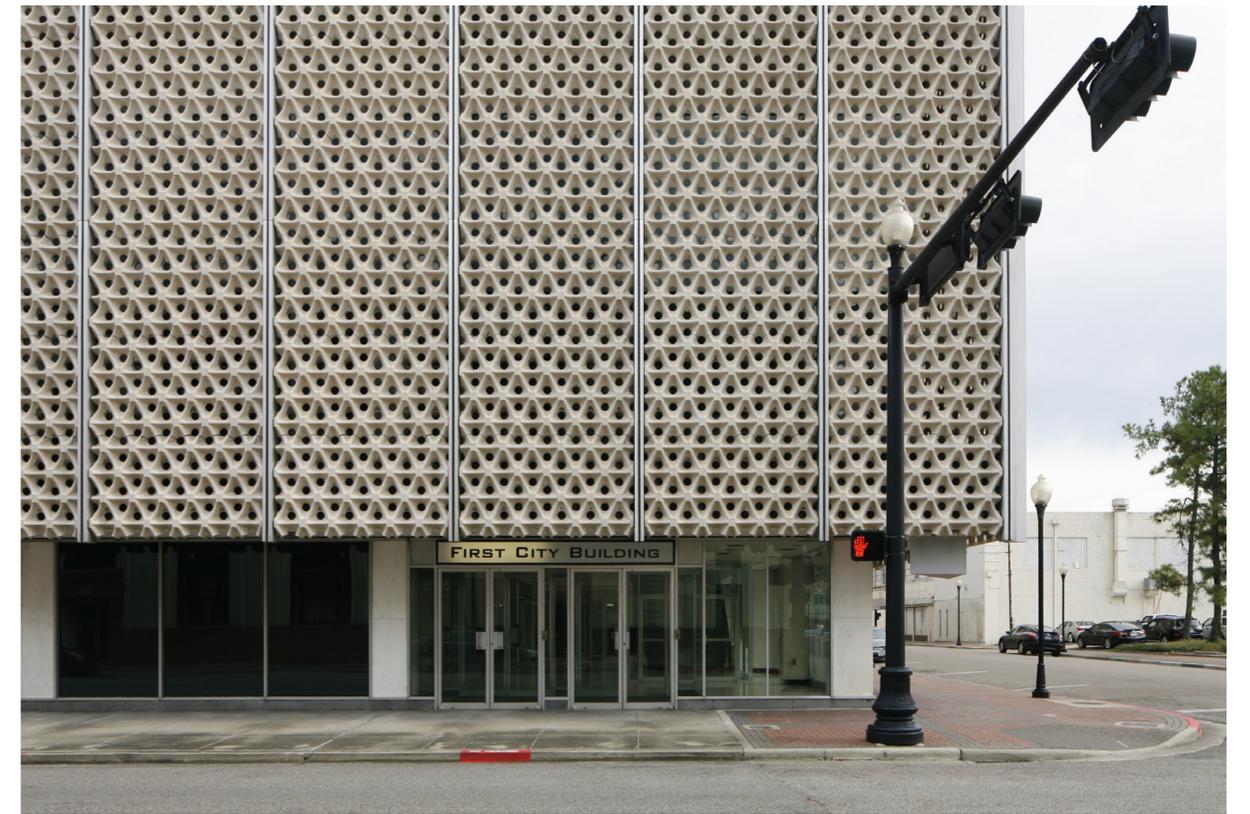




































































Image Captions

- p53 *Paramount Music Theater, Alexander Avenue, Greenville, Mississippi, December 2009*
- p55 *First City Building, South Bowie Street, Beaumont, Texas, November 2014*
Oil was first discovered in the United States on 10 January 1901 in the town of Beaumont, Texas, where the ground was so pregnant that gas was frequently seen bubbling at the surface. The Spindletop rig, which brought in the strike, unearthed a geyser so powerful it yielded 100,000 barrels of crude oil per day. Naturally, this power and wealth manifested itself architecturally as the Beaumont Commercial District, whose twentieth-century and Art Deco buildings are now listed on the National Historic Register of Places.
In the early 1960s the First Security Bank, which had profited from investments in the petrochemical industry, expanded its operations into the First City Building, designed by local architect Llewellyn W 'Skeek' Pitts. The sculptor Matchett Herring Coe designed the white cast-concrete panels that cover the building's facade to shield the harsh Texas sun and provide ventilation. Over the years, the district passed into decline (in terms of occupation, if not underlying finances). These white panels, inset with marble chips and glinting marble dust, offer a stark contrast to the boarded up buildings of downtown. During the oil bust of the 1980s the First Security Bank declared bankruptcy. The First City Building has been available to lease since 2006.
- p57 *Rapid Finance Loans, Alexander Avenue, Greenville, Mississippi, December 2009*
One of the main reasons for filing individual Chapter 13 bankruptcy in the United States is the compounding high interest associated with rapid finance, or payday loans.
- p59 *West Main Street, Baytown, Texas, November 2014*
ExxonMobil's plant in Baytown, Texas is the largest integrated refining and petrochemical complex in the US. Both the town and the complex are by-products of the offshore wells in Galveston Bay and the nearby Goose Creek Oil Field, which has been in operation since 1903. As part of routine industrial maintenance, gas flares are burned to diminish pressure build-ups and release airborne pollutants. The events are signalled by an interconnected system of loudhailers and sirens.
- p61 *Omega's Ham & Corn Beef Restaurant, 8 Mile Road, Detroit, Michigan, December 2012*
Omega's Ham & Corn Beef Restaurant went bankrupt before the premises ever opened for business. In 2015 the building and surrounding lot were purchased by a local used car dealership.
- p63 *4th Street, Bombay Beach, California, November 2011*
The Salton Sea was created in 1905 when the planned diversion of the Colorado River went awry. Two years later, when the flow was finally stemmed, 350 square miles of the Colorado Desert Basin had been flooded. This 'accidental sea' soon became a tourist attraction and the site of rampant architectural speculation. But whatever promise
- the California Riviera offered soon faded with the toxic reality of summer temperatures that reached up to 60°C and the apocalyptic die-offs of millions of Tilapia fish in the overstocked basin. Today, Salton Sea is fed by the contaminated waters of the adjacent Imperial Valley, the most heavily mechanised farm region in the United States. When the sea eventually dries out, it will release clouds of toxic dust across southern California.
- p65 *Hair Salon, North Cherokee Drive, Desert Shores, California, November 2011*
- p67 *Ice Skating House, Grossinger's Catskills Resort Hotel, Liberty, New York, November 2013*
Every summer, from the 1920s-70s, hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers would leave Manhattan for the Arcadian promise of the Borscht Belt, a cluster of resorts in the Catskill Mountains popular for budget accommodation, Kosher food and raucous comedy shows. A variety of winter sports added to the year-round appeal of the 'Jewish Alps'. At Grossinger's Catskills Resort Hotel artificial snow was invented to ensure skiers and onlookers could enjoy ample powder whatever the weather.
- p68-69 *Office Building, Church Street, Liberty, New York, November 2013*
- p70-71 *Krug's Stationery, South Main Street, Liberty, New York, November 2013*
The town of Liberty in Sullivan County, New York, was one of the major centres of the Borscht Belt. But by the mid-1960s, the advent of budget air travel and anti-discrimination legislation opened up the possibility of other holiday destinations across the US, and the once-popular tourist spot went into decline. Today the elaborate infrastructure of swimming pools, cabanas, restaurants, kitchens, hotel rooms and lounges have either been destroyed or silenced by a lack of demand, illustrating not only the fleetingness of leisurely distractions but architecture's vulnerability to change.
- p73 *Skyline Drive-In Cinema, Old Highway 58, Barstow, California, January 2010*
In the early 1960s, there were more than 4,000 drive-in cinemas in the US. But with the arrival of home video and cable TV in the 1970s and 80s, the popularity of these instantly recognisable structures waned. Unable to afford the expensive conversion to digital projection, the Skyline Drive-In Cinema closed in February 2015.
- p75 *Wilson's Dairy, Mack Avenue, Detroit, Michigan, December 2012*
The cow's head that sits on the roof of the now-vacant Wilson's Dairy Building was sculpted to resemble 'Elsie', the favourite bovine of the dairy's owner, Ira Wilson. After closing in the early 1960s the building went through a number of failed conversions, and despite its apparent restoration it has sat unoccupied since the mid-1990s. Elsie's relatively pristine condition can be attributed to her status as a local landmark and her appearance in the film 8 Mile (2002), the biopic of local rapper Eminem.
- p77 *TV Room, Graceland, Elvis Presley Blvd, Memphis, Tennessee, December 2010*
In addition to op-art graphics and assembled objects, Elvis Presley's television room at Graceland includes three TV sets, installed to allow simultaneous viewings of multiple broadcasts. The arrangement was inspired by Presley's 1970 visit to the US Presidential Oval Office, which also featured multiple television screens.
- p79 *Playground, Slab City, Sonoran Desert, California, November 2011*
Slab City is located on the remaining concrete foundation slabs of Camp Dunlap, a now defunct training facility for the US Marine Corps constructed in the Sonoran desert during the Second World War. Since its decommissioning in 1961, the site has been occupied by an outsider community that calls it 'the last free place on earth'.
- p81 *Swimming Pool, Desert Shores Yacht Club, Desert Shores, California, November 2011*
- p83 *Munson Diner, Lake Street, Liberty, New York, November 2013*
In 2005, the Munson Diner was sold and relocated 100 miles from its Hell's Kitchen neighbourhood to the town of Liberty, where it was added to the US National Register of Historic Places. Built in 1945 by the Kullman Dining Car Company, the diner survives as a relic of accelerated construction methods and materials - prefab components, riveted steel-framing, fluted ceramic panels, stainless steel and Formica. Since relocating, the diner has passed through the hands of four owners - all have gone bankrupt.
- p85 *Wigwam Motel, West Hopi Drive, Holbrook, Arizona, September 2007*
The Wigwam Motel was built in 1950 using a patented design that rendered Native American motifs as one-bedroom concrete teepees. The motel closed in 1974, with the opening of Interstate 40, which bypassed Holbrook and effectively made Route 66 redundant. In 1986 the Wigwam reopened. It has been listed as Wigwam Village #6 on the National Register of Historic Places since 2002.
- p87 *Ice Rink, Grossinger's Catskills Resort Hotel, Liberty, New York, November 2013*
The annual World Barrel-Jumping Championships at Grossinger's were broadcast live on national television. After circling the ice rink in an effort to gather speed, contestants would attempt to clear a stack of wooden barrels that increased with every successful vault. In 1975 the American Jim Papreck set the world record, clearing 18 barrels with a leap of 29'4".
- p89 *Basketball court, Kutsher's Hotel and Country Club, Thompson, New York, November 2013*
When it closed in September 2013, Kutsher's Hotel and Country Club was the last of the family-owned Borscht Belt resorts in operation. Sport, most notably basketball, had been the hotel's prime attraction - Wilt Chamberlain was a frequent guest. In 2015, Kutsher's was demolished to make room for a multi-million-dollar 'health and wellness' resort.
- p91 *Intersection of Aisle Palms and 5th Street, Bombay Beach, November 2011*
- p93 *Parking Lot, Salton Bay Yacht Club, Salton City, California, November 2011*
Salton City was the most prominent real estate speculation built on the Salton Sea. Developed by the Holly Corporation of Los Angeles, the 'miracle in the desert' was to include a motel, restaurant, post office, convenience store, elementary school, airport, yacht club, golf course and 22,000 fully serviced residential plots, all connected by an infrastructure of paved roads, electricity, water and telephone lines. The ambition to realise such a 'miracle' also revealed the difficulty of occupying the harsh, flat landscape. Though pitched by the Holly Corporation as an opportunity 'limited only by your imagination', only seven per cent of Salton City's 22,000 lots were ever sold. Palm trees planted to mark significant buildings, such as the once luxurious Salton Bay Yacht Club, designed by Albert Frey, now serve merely as a way of measuring the vast unoccupied desert.
- p94-95 *Roof Trusses, Concord Resort Hotel, Kiamesha Lake, New York, November 2013*
Like many resorts of the Borscht Belt, the Concord Resort Hotel had to grow in order to meet demand. Over the years it expanded from a small, family-run guesthouse to encompass a host of buildings and leisure facilities that covered 2,000 acres. The Concord became the largest and most lavish of the area's resorts, with 1,500 rooms, a restaurant and a club - the Imperial Room - that could accommodate up to 3,000 diners, extensive landscaping and a number of buildings and interiors designed by Morris Lapidus. But in order for a resort of this scale to remain financially viable, a huge amount of occupants were required to keep it in operation. Unable to sustain the necessary numbers, the Concord closed for good in 1998, and since its bankruptcy sale in 2004, the site has been the subject of a protracted multi-party litigation. The main buildings were demolished in 2008 to make way for a redevelopment project that was later abandoned. In 2014 the New York Gaming Commission approved a gambling license for the latest scheme, which includes an 18-storey hotel, meeting spaces and an indoor waterpark.
- p97 *Bungalow Colony, Old Liberty Road, Thompson County, New York, November 2013*
In addition to large-scale resorts, the Borscht Belt was home to thousands of smaller, often Orthodox, vacation communities.
- p99 *Outdoor Tennis Courts, Grossinger's Catskills Resort Hotel, Liberty, New York, November 2013*
- p101 *Nevada Avenue, Valentine, Texas, November 2014*
The principal export of Valentine used to be cattle, but since the closure of the railway depot in the mid-1950s the only thing coming out of the town has been its annual Valentine's Day mailing - each February, thousands of letters are processed through its US Postal Service centre, if only to secure the 'Valentine, Texas' postmark. But the devolution of terrestrial mail coupled with the city's dwindling population means the Valentine post office is now under threat of closure.

p103 *Indoor Swimming Pool, Grossinger's Catskills Resort Hotel, Liberty, New York, November 2013*
No expense was spared on the construction of Grossinger's indoor swimming pool, which was conceived to be the most luxurious example of interior design in all of the Borscht Belt. For the opening a chartered plane transported a number of luminaries directly from New York City to the resort's private airstrip. Guests in adjacent accommodation towers were rerouted through the space in order to fully appreciate the splendour, while bathers watched the sun set over the Catskills. The pool's realisation accelerated an arms race among the area's resorts, and many responded with their own financially unsustainable indoor facilities. While Grossinger's has been slated for imminent demolition since 1986, the double-glazed warmth and humidity of the pool house has enabled the growth of a delicate microclimate. However, more recent instances of vandalism have compromised this fragile artificial ecosystem.

p105 *Woodward Avenue, Detroit, Michigan, December 2012*
Woodward Avenue was the first street in the United States paved specifically for automobiles. It was also the site of the J L Hudson Department store, an impressive 33-storey Chicago School building and the largest retail outlet in the Midwest. In 1998 its televised demolition marked the city's social and economic decline. The event also prompted the closure of the store's train connection to the Detroit People Mover elevated railway, which had opened the previous year in a failed attempt to regenerate downtown. Federal subsidies were later used to develop the site into a multi-level underground parking garage.

p107 *Dixie Queen, Austin Peay Highway, Memphis, Tennessee, December 2010*

p109 *Avenue A & Third Street, Bombay Beach, California, November 2011*

p111 *Concord Resort Hotel, Kiamesha Lake, New York, November, 2013*

p112-113 *Concord Monster Golf Course, Chalet Road, Thompson, New York, November 2013*
A ski run and certain sections of a 36-hole 'monster golf' course are the only functioning facilities at the Concord Resort Hotel. These are sporadically operated in order to maintain the site's legal status and the potential for future schemes.

p115 *Ohio, December 2012*

p117 *Petrochemical Plants, Buffalo Bayou, Houston, Texas, November 2014*
The Buffalo Bayou flows 53 miles from the centre of Houston, down the Houston Shipping Channel and into Galveston Bay where it then pours into the Gulf of Mexico. Since the early 1900s a series of successive oil booms has given rise to a stretch of riverside petrochemical plants and associated infrastructure now vital to local and national economies. Along with the band of the Mississippi River that runs from Baton Rouge to New Orleans

(nicknamed Cancer Alley), the Buffalo Bayou is one of the most heavily industrialised waterways in the United States. A study by the University of Texas found that children living within two miles of the river had a 56 per cent higher risk of developing acute lymphocytic leukemia than those living farther from the channel.

p119 *Tethered Aerostat Radar Station, US 90, Marfa, Texas, November 2014*
The Tethered Aerostat Radar Station is one of several airborne surveillance stations based along the border between the US and Mexico. Weather permitting, the aerostats (moored balloons) fill with helium, rising as high as 15,000ft to scan for low-flying aircraft and suspicious ground-level activity.

p121 *Salton City Airport, Salton City, California, November 2011*
The construction of an airport was part of the original development plan for Salton City. Although it features a gravel runway, the terminal building was only partially completed. Given the pockmarks and penetrations in the concrete blocks, the structure now appears to serve mainly as a shooting target.

Image Credits

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p16 *Walker Evans, Church of the Nazarene, Tennessee, 1936*
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p19 *Walker Evans, Tin Building, Moundville, Alabama, Summer 1936*
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p27 *Anon, Men Dusting Nursery Plants Growing at Belterra, Brazil, c1935*
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p36 *Walker Evans, Erosion near Jackson, Mississippi, March 1936*
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p43 *Stephen Shore, Merced River, Yosemite National Park, California, 13 August, 1979*
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p44 *Lewis Baltz, Fluorescent Tube, 1978*
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p47 *Ed Ruscha, Royal Road Test, 1967, collaboration with Mason Williams and Patrick Blackwell*
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p50 *Timothy O'Sullivan, Salt Lake Desert, Utah, 1869*
Published in Clarence King, *Geological Exploration of the Fortieth Parallel* (1878)
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Afterword

Pier Vittorio Aureli

The word paradise comes from the old Persian *pairi*, meaning around, and *daeza*, meaning heap, but also fort or enclosure. The word is common to many languages and addresses something archetypal and foundational: the primary enclosure that defines a community of settlers and, later, the city itself. In ancient cities, enclosures as city-walls were built not just for the purpose of defence, but to mark the ownership of a territory. Paradise in its original sense denotes a 'walled estate', often represented as a verdant garden, distinct from the surrounding chaos of nature.

It is possible to argue that paradise has always been a latent force in the foundation of cities and states. The idea of paradise was certainly at work in colonial America, where early settlements such as New Haven, Connecticut, were modelled as nine-square grids, after Juan Bautista Villalpando's drawing of the temple of Salomon – a form whose symmetry and perfection made it the ideal geometric configuration for settling an otherwise virgin and limitless territory. In this context, paradise became a strategy for creating civilisation from *tabula rasa* and starting life from scratch – for making something out of nothing. Yet in the founding myth of America, *nothing* was never nothing. *Nothing* was a powerful sublimation of everything perceived as hostile: all the things that settlers had left behind (ie, civil war, political chaos and religious persecution) and what they wished to keep out of their new world (ie, indigenous peoples). Paradise, therefore, equated to containment sublimated in the form of an ideal plan.

Eventually the Puritans' nine-square grid expanded to the Jefferson Grid, an all-encompassing vision of the western territory as a pastoral idyll of rural settlements. But America, as we know, did not remain a rural nation. It became an industrial monster. Paradoxically, such abnormal development was driven by the possibility to escape the industrial city for the myth of the vast frontier where one could imagine a fresh start away from the factory. Confronted by the threat of labour force defection, America's industry developed its technological apparatuses to conquer any and all available space. The tension between pastoralism and industrialisation reached its peak after the

Second World War, with the single-family home marking the last attempt to enclose the country within the perimeter of the 'walled estate'. Yet the economic politics of such paradise eventually backfired, and the promise of suburbia began its slow descent.

If the beginning of photography coincided with the beginning of America as a nation, then the use of photography as an artistic practice coincided with the crumbling of the American dream. Robert Smithson's 'A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic' (1967) marked a seminal moment in this shift, depicting the Garden State of New Jersey as a field of industrial ruins, and 'causing us not to remember the past... but to forget the future', he would later write in his essay 'Entropy and the New Monuments'. And yet even in the entropic landscape of New Jersey, the allegory of something grandiose loomed as Smithson tried to elevate the city of Passaic to that of Rome, his wandering to a pilgrimage or Grand Tour. Lewis Baltz and the New Topographics, approached suburban American following Smithson's disenchanted irony, combining the urban realism of Walker Evans's *American Photographs* (1938), the conceptualism of Dan Graham's *Homes for America* (1966) and Ed Ruscha's *Thirty-Four Parking Lots* (1967). Embedded in their work was a tension between the modernist taste for photographic starkness and the crassness of the landscape they wanted to portray – a tension that was later downplayed by European photographers (think of all those images by the Düsseldorf School or the Italian photographer, Luigi Ghirri) who transformed the subject matter into a distinct form of postmodern aestheticism.

Yet in revisiting the reportage style of Evans, Baltz and Robert Adams through Mark Campbell's engaging research, we see the photograph not as a unique, aesthetic object, but as a slide – a frame of a larger, and still epic, narrative for a landscape of increasingly useless architecture whose obsolescence is neither aestheticised nor assumed as a 'problem' to be solved. Even if 'lost', the idea of paradise is an unvanquished part of the American territory, as both its starting point and its manifest destiny. But no matter what around us is crumbling, as long as there is a story or ethos, there is a possibility to sustain things and give them form – even if this form serves no purpose. In accepting that paradise is forever lost, Campbell affirms that the possibility of a history remains.

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Finally, this book is dedicated to Saskia Lewis.

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Mark Campbell

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