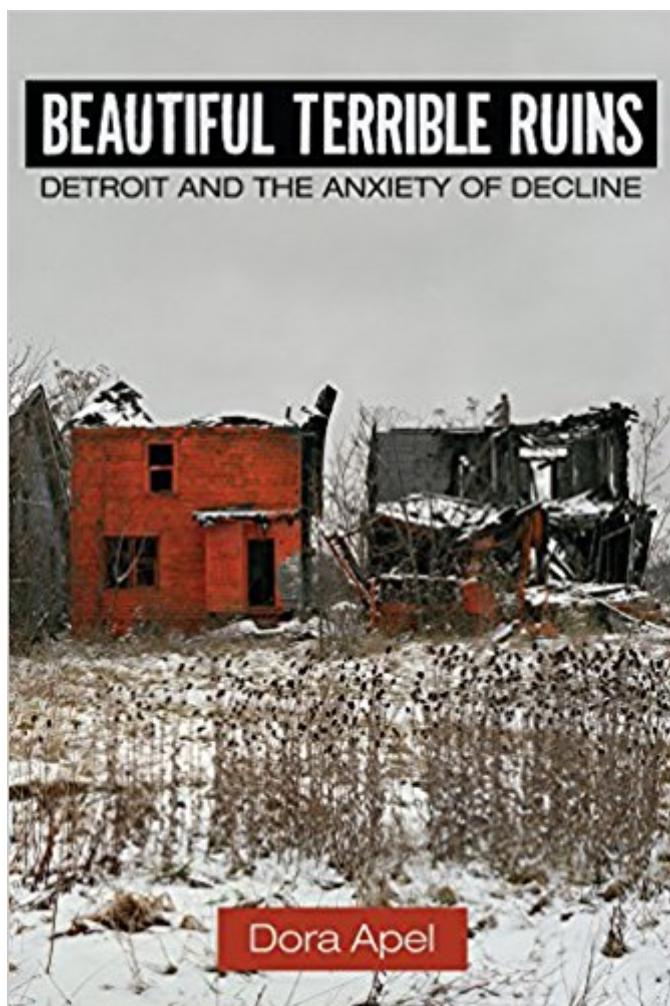


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# Beautiful Terrible Ruins: Detroit And The Anxiety Of Decline



## Synopsis

Once the manufacturing powerhouse of the nation, Detroit has become emblematic of failing cities everywhereâ "the paradigmatic city of ruinsâ "and the epicenter of an explosive growth in images of urban decay. In *Beautiful Terrible Ruins*, art historian Dora Apel explores a wide array of these images, ranging from photography, advertising, and television, to documentaries, video games, and zombie and disaster films. Â Apel shows how Detroit has become pivotal to an expanding network of ruin imagery, imagery ultimately driven by a pervasive and growing cultural pessimism, a loss of faith in progress, and a deepening fear that worse times are coming. The images of Detroitâ "s decay speak to the overarching anxieties of our era: increasing poverty, declining wages and social services, inadequate health care, unemployment, homelessness, and ecological disasterâ "in short, the failure of capitalism. Apel reveals how, through the aesthetic distancing of representation, the haunted beauty and fascination of ruin imagery, embodied by Detroitâ "s abandoned downtown skyscrapers, empty urban spaces, decaying factories, and derelict neighborhoods help us to cope with our fears. But Apel warns that these images, while pleasurable, have little explanatory power, lulling us into seeing Detroitâ "s deterioration as either inevitable or the cityâ "s own fault, and absolving the real agents of declineâ "corporate disinvestment and globalization. *Beautiful Terrible Ruins* helps us understand the ways that the pleasure and the horror of urban decay hold us in thrall.Â Â Â

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## Customer Reviews

"In *Beautiful Terrible Ruins: Detroit and the Anxiety of Decline*, Dora Apel goes on the offensive against the myriad myths and delusions peddled about the Motor City; not only that, she rebuffs the blame and shame that have traditionally been directed at the Detroit citizenry, and redirects our attention to the corporations and bureaucrats who have abandoned it. The result is a work that seems to invigorate a depressed debate and ask timely questions about social values in America and the world it influences." (Los Angeles Review of Books)"The borders between art, media, advertising, and popular culture have become increasingly permeable," Apel writes, "as visual imagery easily ranges across these formats and as people produce their own imagery on websites and social media." And the aestheticized ruination of Detroit feeds into a more widespread (even global) anxiety of decline; expressed in post-apocalyptic videogame scenarios, survivalist television programs, zombie movies, and so on ... Much of the imagery analyzed in *Beautiful Terrible Ruins* seems to play right along with that social vision. The nicely composed photographs of crumbling buildings are usually empty of any human presence, while horror movies fill their urban landscapes with the hungry undead - the shape of dreaded things to come." (Scott McLemee Inside Higher Ed)"Wayne State prof looks behind the fascination of Detroit's ruins: the new pornographers" by Lee DeVitoRead the full interview (http://bit.ly/1FNfkli) (Detroit Metro Times)"Bringing her usual due diligence to bear, Apel digs deep, tracing the roots historically, culturally, and politically of the West's fascination with ruination and its import for today ... Essential reading." (Infinite Mile)"What is refreshing about Apel's approach is that her analysis reaches far beyond the spectacle of abandonment and decay to address the forces behind urban decline. In the process, she delivers a powerful critique of the role of corporate disinvestment and neoliberal globalization in ruining cities." (Journal of American Studies)"Apel again captivates with her incisive reading of cultural production." (The Journal of American History)"Dora Apel's multi-layered, thought-provoking account of the decline of Detroit and our visual perception of that decline uses Detroit as a case study to explore the anxiety brought by the repeated and continual emphasis on ruin imagery. An eloquent examination of the aesthetics of decay, the charismatic appeal of both the beautiful and the repulsive, drives the book." (ARLIS/NA Reviews)"A provocative and challenging book | Recommended. General readers, upper-division undergraduate students, graduate students, and research faculty." (CHOICE)"Writing against the genre of ruin porn, Dora Apel's wonderful *Beautiful Terrible Ruins* reveals the way decay is inbuilt into capitalism at its creation. An excellent and penetrating study." (Greg Grandin author of *Fordlandia: The Rise and Fall of Henry Ford's Forgotten Jungle City*)"In her thoughtful and riveting take on the decline of Detroit, Dora Apel makes

the case that 'ruin porn'; images of urban decay say less about a specific city than about the grinding forces of globalism and political abandonment." (Scott Martelle author of *Detroit: A Biography*) "In the early twentieth century, Detroit was defined by Charles Sheeler's photos of the River Rouge plant and Diego Rivera's murals of work. Today, the hulking ruins of old industrial buildings and empty skyscrapers symbolize the city. In this provocative analysis, informed by urban geography, political economy, and art history, Dora Apel reflects on what images of ruined Detroit teach us about the city, popular culture, and American capitalism." (Thomas J. Sugrue *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit*)

DORA APEL is a professor of art history and visual culture and W. Hawkins Ferry Endowed Chair in Modern and Contemporary Art History at Wayne State University in Detroit. She is the author of *War Culture and the Contest of Images* (Rutgers University Press).Â Â

Last week I received my usual daily email from a digital magazine that is in the forefront of creating and reporting political news. In the center of the page was an advertisement called Nine Scenes from A Changing Detroit. It is full of optimistic and promising chatter about the new Detroit that is emerging due to business and government coalitions. Whole Foods, a charter school (and the privatization that comes with that), a central market and much more all powered by a \$100 million investment from JP Morgan Chase and CO. I had just read *Beautiful, Terrible, Ruins* so I viewed this with a different lens then I might have otherwise. While I live in a city that has gone through its own machinations with gentrification and the suffering and anguish that comes with it, *Beautiful Terrible Ruins* makes it clear that the winners blames the losers and that this is just the way of crony capitalism. The concept of "ruins" is new for me and I appreciated how clearly Dora Apel defined it and her critiques of it. I felt challenged by the book and wholly immersed in it. The art demonstrated her theoretical perspective and give life to it. Now when I am walking in Boston, in an area that has been almost fully gentrified I see the new construction of multi-million dollar condos as the ruins and it's pretty heartbreaking. I thank Edelweiss for giving me the opportunity to review this book for an honest opinion.

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