GEOG 220
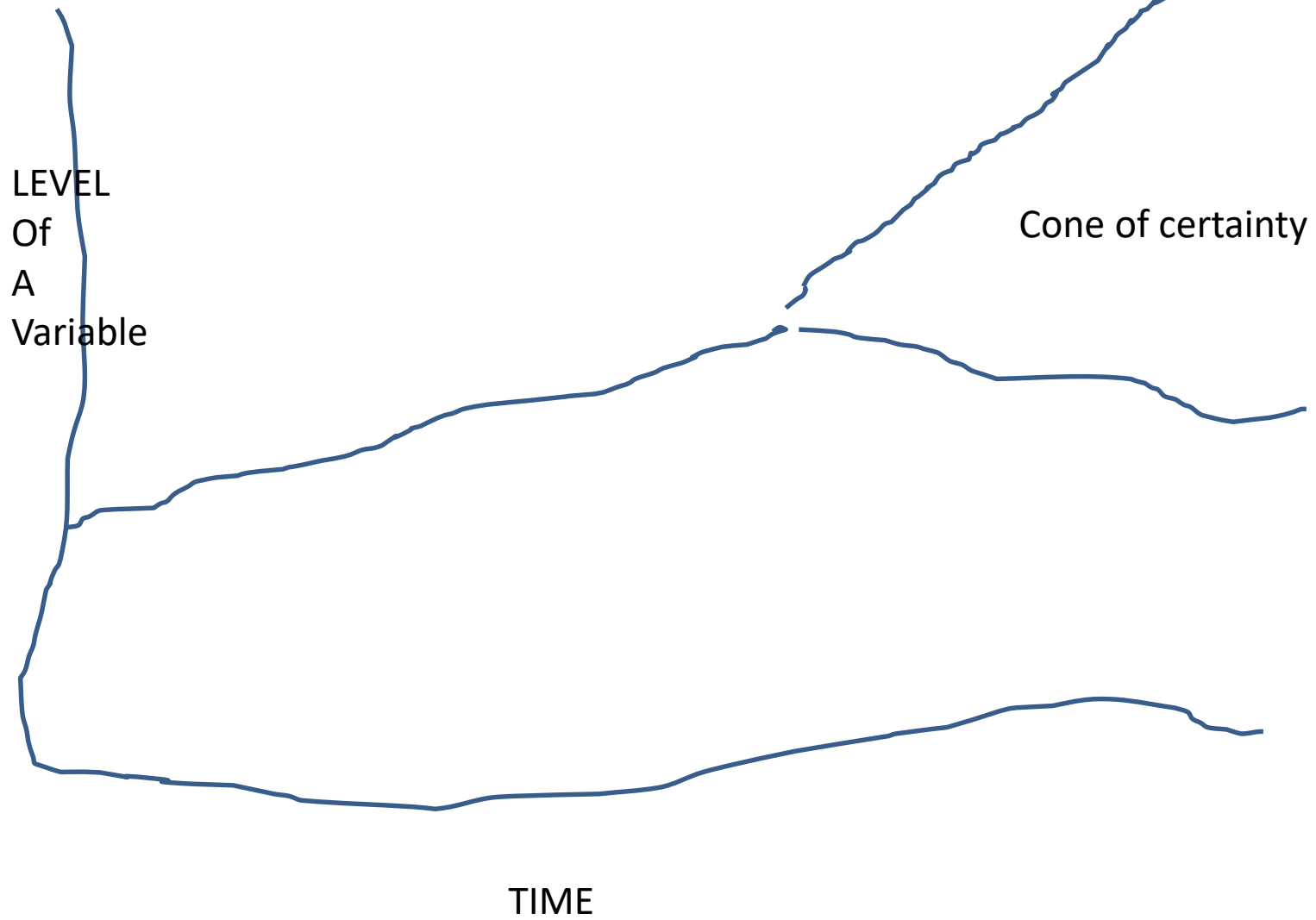# Some final thoughts – or what could be called ….

…The future?

"The Ruins of Detroit"

The future?

How can we think about the future?

One way is to sensibly predict

and the best we can do is the "cone of certainty"…

LEVEL
Of
A
Variable

Cone of certainty

TIME

Science fiction?

Another way is to use science fiction to creatively imagine a world in the future where things are different because we have changed some of the key variables – i.e. who is in power…?
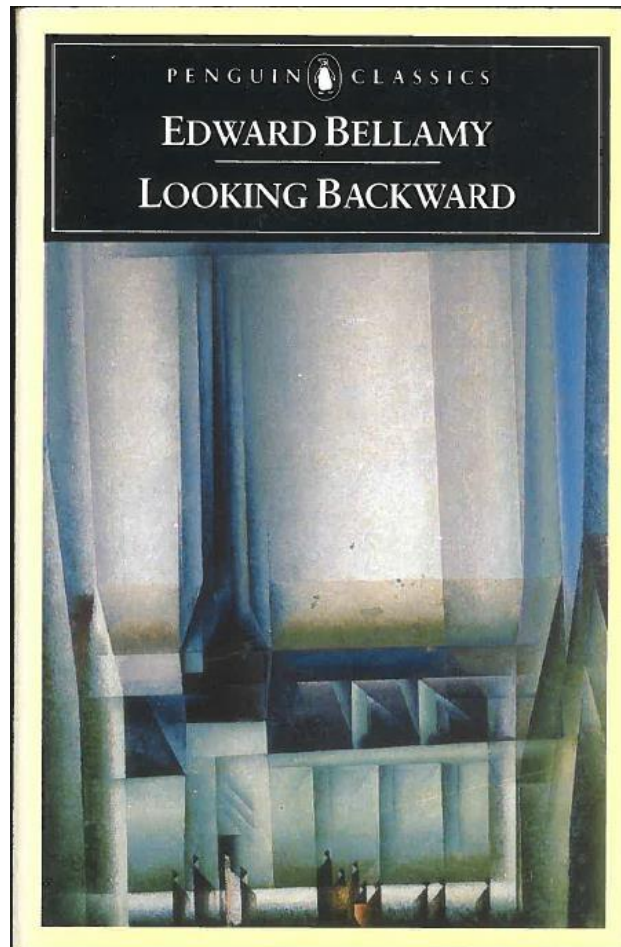
We can imagine better worlds (utopias) or worse worlds (dystopias)

Do you know of any useful examples of such science fiction worlds – from novels, films or computer games…..?

………………………………………………………….

…………………………………………………………

………………………………………………………….

PENGUIN CLASSICS

EDWARD BELLAMY

LOOKING BACKWARD
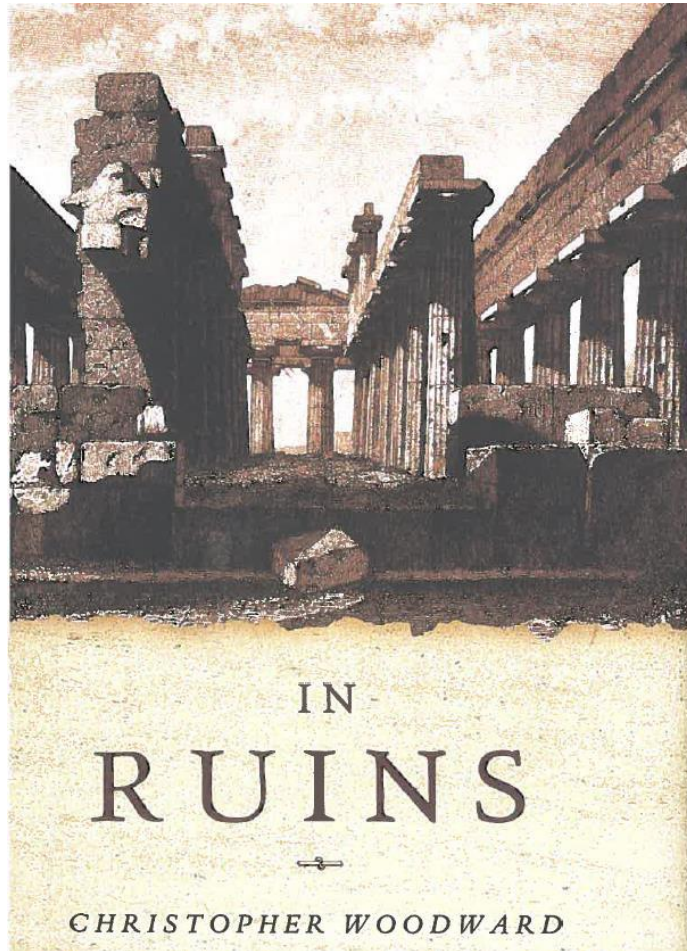
– Edward Bellamy, Looking Backward, 2000-1887 (orig pub 1888; NY: 1960
    » Falls asleep in Boston in 1887 and wakes up in the same place in 2000
    » predicts group kitchens and restaurants
    » Predicts "credit cards"

The future?

- Another way of thinking about this is to reflect on the idea of *ruins*

- Why?

  – Because it encourages us to reflect on change

An interesting introduction is

- Christopher Woodward, <u>In Ruins</u> (New York: Pantheon 2001)

For geographers, I'd recommend this recent academic paper on the ruins of Detroit

Unbecoming place: urban imaginaries in transition in Detroit

Emma Fraser ⓘ
The University of Manchester, UK

Woodward suggests

- "… a ruin has two values. It has an objective value as an assemblage of brick and stone, and it has a subjective value as an inspiration to artists" (p 69)

Fraser suggests that

- When thinking of Detroit -- "What is new here … is the framing of urban – or modern – **ruins as valuable and precarious places**" (p 441)

- In Detroit – where once wealth and growth made place (they were "always becoming") we now see "an emplaced **encounter with unbecoming**" (pp 443, 445)

Ruins as "unbecoming places"

- Fraser adds on p 446:

Unbecoming place

Place is always somewhat precarious because it is always in transition. Doreen Massey writes that 'the identity of places, indeed the very identification of places as particular places, is always in that sense temporary, uncertain, and in process'.[36] Tim Cresswell echoes Massey in saying that 'places are never complete, finished, or bounded but are always becoming – in process',[37] providing a framework for place as always *becoming*. This is as true of ruin and regeneration as any other moment in the process, but these are perhaps best understood as particular moments in the production of place that are specifically involved in *unbecoming*.

Footnotes 36 &37 :

The concept of 'unbecoming' is adapted from the work of Tim Cresswell, and Doreen Massey, where place as always in process, or always becoming, which is discussed in more detail later in this article: T.Cresswell, *Place: A Short Introduction* (Malden; Oxford: Blackwell, 2004); T.Cresswell, *In Place/ Out of Place* (Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press, 1996); D.Massey, 'Places and Their Pasts', *History Workshop Journal*, 39, 1995, pp. 182–92.

Woodward's book on ruins suggest we think about ruins because they:

- "A ruin is a dialogue between an incomplete reality and the imagination of the interpreter" (p. 139) because it

  - 1. reminds us of the passage of time
  - 2. shows how civilization [i.e. Roman ruins] triumphed over paganism; of virtue over time [in case of ancient tombstones]
  - 3. Shows that us that our body decays
  - 4. Shows how individual wealth & power decay

Roman ruins

The town of Bath, UK

Underfloor heating: Spain

"The Ruin" (9thC AD saxon poem about the city of Bath's Roman ruins)

Original Old English	Modern English[2]
Wrætlic is þes wealstan, wyrde gebræcon;	This masonry is wondrous; fates broke it
burgstede burston, brosnað enta geweorc.	courtyard pavements were smashed; the work of giants is decaying.
Hrofas sind gehrorene, hreorge torras,	Roofs are fallen, ruinous towers,
hrungeat berofen, hrim on lime,	the frosty gate with frost on cement is ravaged,
scearde scurbeorge scorene, gedrorene,	chipped roofs are torn, fallen,
ældo undereotone. Eorðgrap hafað	undermined by old age. The grasp of the earth possesses
waldend wyrhtan forweorone, geleorene,	the mighty builders, perished and fallen,
heardgripe hrusan, oþ hund cnea	the hard grasp of earth, until a hundred generations
werþeoda gewitan. Oft þæs wag gebad	of people have departed. Often this wall,
ræghar ond readfah rice æfter oþrum,	lichen-grey and stained with red, experienced one reign after another,
ofstonden under stormum; steap geap gedreas.	remained standing under storms; the high wide gate has collapsed.
Wunað giet se ...num geheapen,	Still the masonry endures in winds cut down

As an aside, compare this to a poem a student told me about a few years ago …

Spring 1929: "New York seems horrible, that's why I'm going.
I think I'll have a great time."

Federico Garcia Lorca

Dawn

Dawn in New York has
four columns of mire
and a hurricane of black pigeons
splashing in the putrid waters.
Dawn in New York greans
on enormous fire escapes
searching between the angles
for spikenards of drafted anguish.
Dawn arrives and no one receives it in his mouth
because morning and hope are impossible there:
sometimes the furious swarming coins
penetrate like drills and devour abandoned children.
Those who go out early know in their bones
there will be no paradise or loves that bloom and die:
they know they will be mired in numbers and laws,
in mindless games, in fruitless labors.
The light is buried under chains and noises
in an impudent challenge of rootless science.
And crowds stagger sleeplessly through the boroughs
as if they had just escaped a shipwreck of blood.

Rome: Egyptian obelisk

Here we see
a physical memory
If not quite a ruin
Of Egypt moved to
Rome
Is this some sort
Of cultural
Appropriation?
Other examples:
Elgin Marbles from
Athens in London;
Lions of St Mark in
Venice

Woodward quotes the French philosopher Diderot reviewing an exhibition of drawings of Roman ruins exhibited in Paris in 1767 (p 153):

- "Everything vanishes, everything perishes, everything passes away; <u>the world alone remains</u>, <u>time alone continues</u>. How old this world is! I walk between these two eternities … what is my ephemeral existence compared to that of this crumbling stone?"
  - Is this not the *sublime*?

Woodward provides a brief chronology of ruins in British thought

- 1.First ruins recognized as such were those of ancient Rome – esp the Coloseum.

- 2. When the concept first becomes fashionable in England, in 16thC, it is attached to sites like Verulamium (an excavated Roman villa).

- 3. Then, it becomes attached to the hundreds of dissolved monastery ruins following the Reformation of 1550s.

- 4. 18thC landscape gardens

- 5. World War 1 and 2 destruction in Europe

Rome: Spanish Steps

Rome: Colosseum (AD 72)

Verulamium, nr London

Ruins of Theatre (cAD 70)   **Ruins of town wall**

Fountains Abbey

- Then – in 18th C -- we see idea of "fake ruins" in landscape gardens as a *picturesque* feature.

    – Often called a "folly"

Examples of "follies"

Hagley Castle, Britain 1750

Ermenonville, France {nr Rousseau's grave}1762

Thomas Cole: *The Course of Empire* series

Note: Cole is the painter of the Connecticut River picture we saw in a previous class that marks the passing of the American frontier

Thomas Cole: *The Course of Empire* series

WW1 Stereoscopic picture

Albert Cathedral, where statue of Virgin Mary hung amid the ruins 'til felled by Hun shells.

- WW2 wartime destruction = ruins
  - Woodward adds that British had little interest in this – exception of one or two destroyed churches [old façade of Coventry Cathedral]
  - WE Sebald (*Natural History of Destruction*) says much the same for Germany – in this case no desire to revisit the past
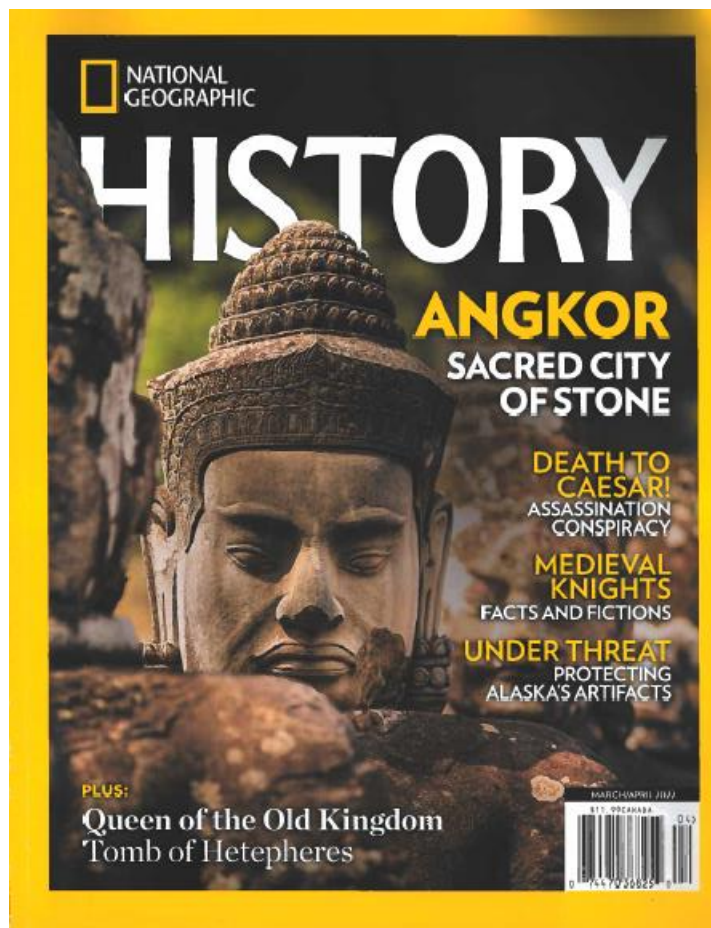
On reflection, I do think that Woodward's chronology is a bit limited – may be he misses a stage?

In particular, I would want to add those famous ruins that were becoming known to Europeans during the second half of the Nineteenth Century, and very early into the 20thC

I think we could see this as part of the exoticization of the "Other", an aspect of the "tourist gaze", given some added value as a contemplation of the decline of non-Western civilizations

Such as Macchu Pichu (Peru)

And – Angkor Wat in Cambodia --- lets look in more detail at this example (and I recommend the latest issue of the following magazine as a nice introduction..)

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC

HISTORY

ANGKOR
SACRED CITY OF STONE

DEATH TO CAESAR!
ASSASSINATION
CONSPIRACY

MEDIEVAL KNIGHTS
FACTS AND FICTIONS

UNDER THREAT
PROTECTING
ALASKA'S ARTIFACTS

MARCH/APRIL 2022

PLUS:
Queen of the Old Kingdom
Tomb of Hetepheres

Feb/March 2022

Angkor Wat

VISIONS OF
ANGKOR

The capital of Cambodia's Khmer Empire was both a sacred
and cosmopolitan city, welcoming religious pilgrims and
merchants alike. Abandoned in the 1400s, Angkor's splendor
would not fade but endure through the centuries.

VERONICA WALKER

Angkor – ruins (*Encyclopedia Britannica* 1961, p 928)

"**ANGKOR**, an assemblage of ruins in Cambodia … the relic of the ancient Khmer civilization. They are in forests to the north of the Great lake (Tonlé-Sap), the most conspicuous of the remains being the town of Angkor Thom and the temple of Angkor Vat [Angkor Wat], both of which lie on the right bank of the river Siem-Reap, a tributary of the Tonlé-Sap"

"Angkor Thom became the capital city of the Khmers at least as early as AD 890. The size and magnificence of the ruins suggest a larger population than Cambodia has today."

"Although sometimes said to have been devoted to the worship of Brahma, the French school of the far east now thinks that the temple [at Angkor Wat] was consecrated to the worship of Buddha."

Angkor Wat – a general map of the entire site
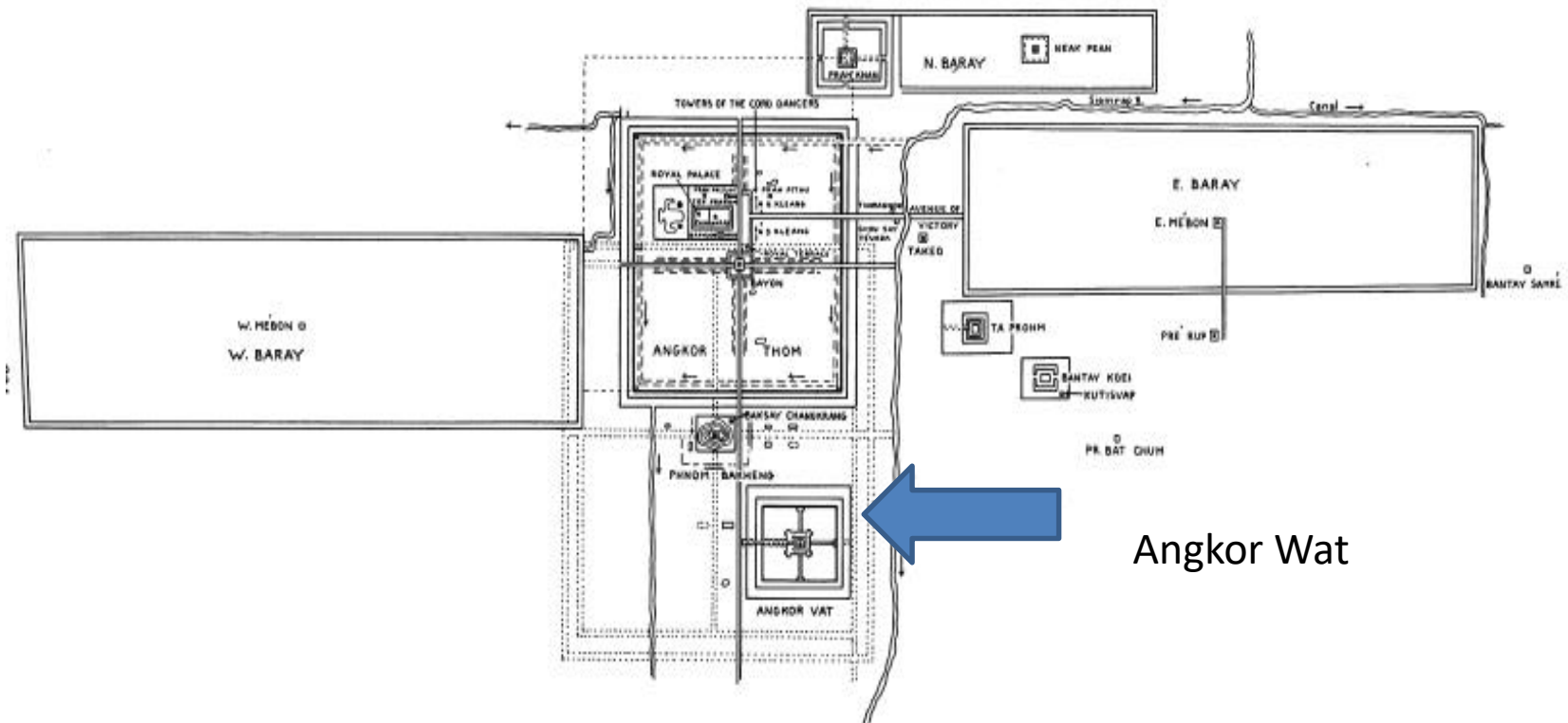

PLAN 22. The Yaśodharapura of Jayavarman VII.

Angkor Wat

Angkor – a general map of the site   [source Briggs The Ancient Kingdom of the Khmer *Trans Am Phil Soc.* 1951]

Some notes

"The temple at Angkor Wat was built at the height of Cambodian political power, during the reign of King Suryavarman II (reigned 1113 to about 1150 AD)." [Mannikka, 1996, p 8]

Eleanor Mannikka, Angkor Wat: Time, Space, and Kingship (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1996)
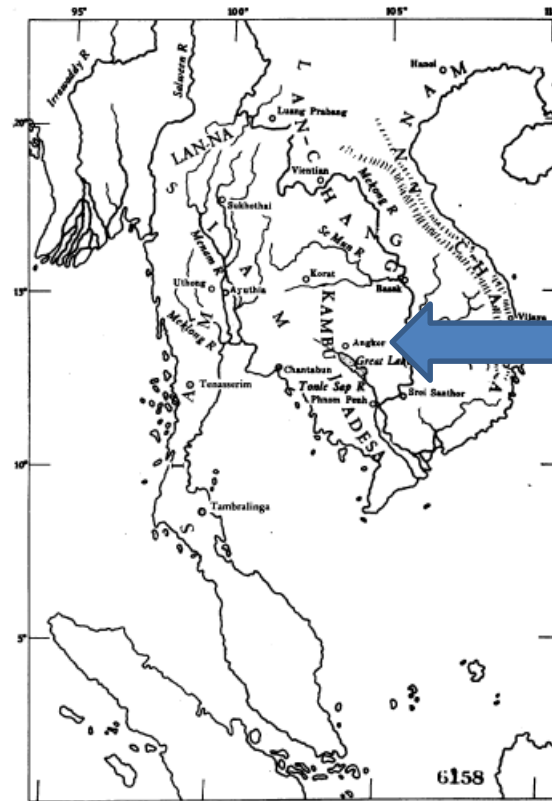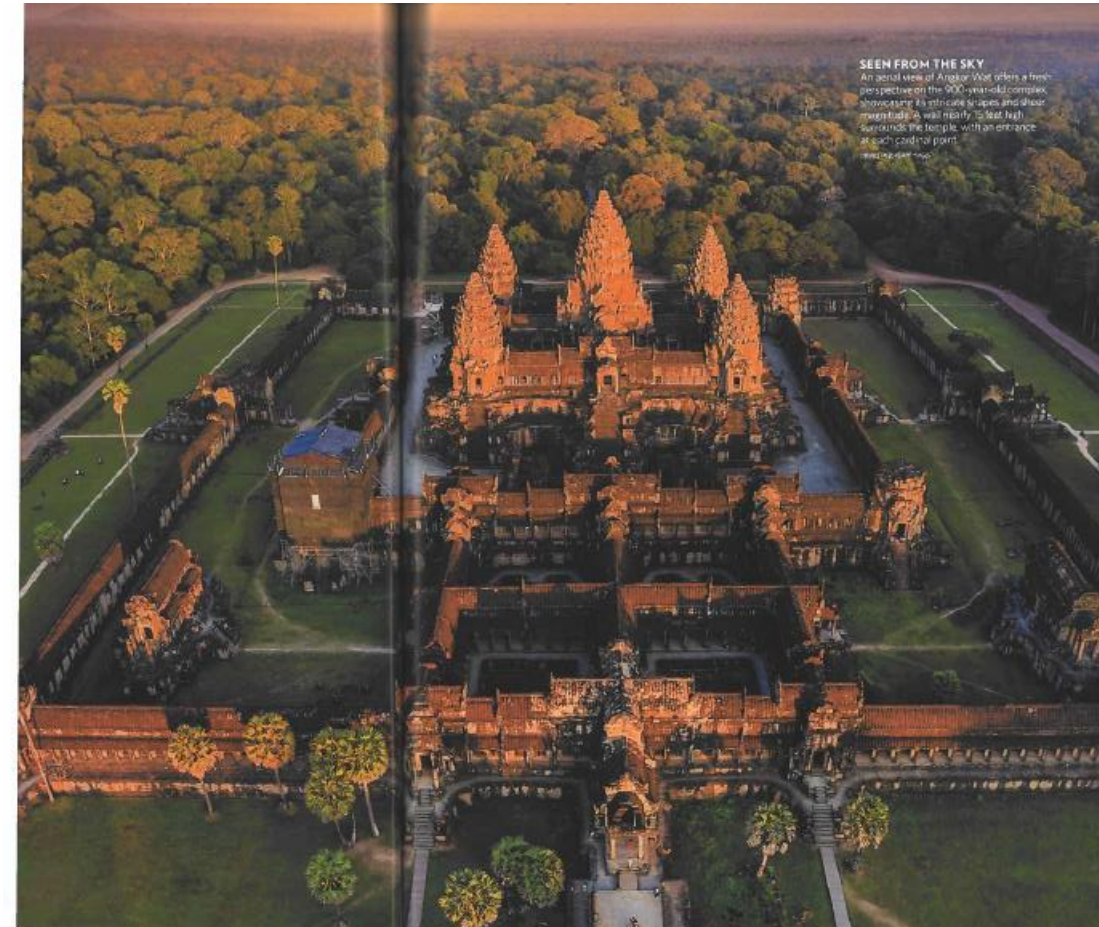
Where is Angkor Wat?

MAP 17. Cambodia in 1430–1434.

Angkor Wat

Source: Briggs 1951

Angkor Wat

Angkor Wat – its surrounding lake and reservoirs

Source: Nat Geog 2022

Parts of the Angkor complex, as originally built

GILDED AGE
This re-creation shows the third level of the Bayon temple, with access to the central sanctuary (right) and several axial towers (left) that surround the second level of the enclosure.
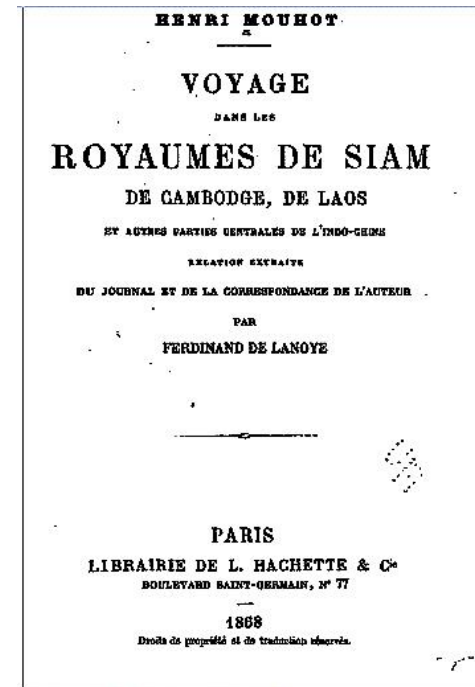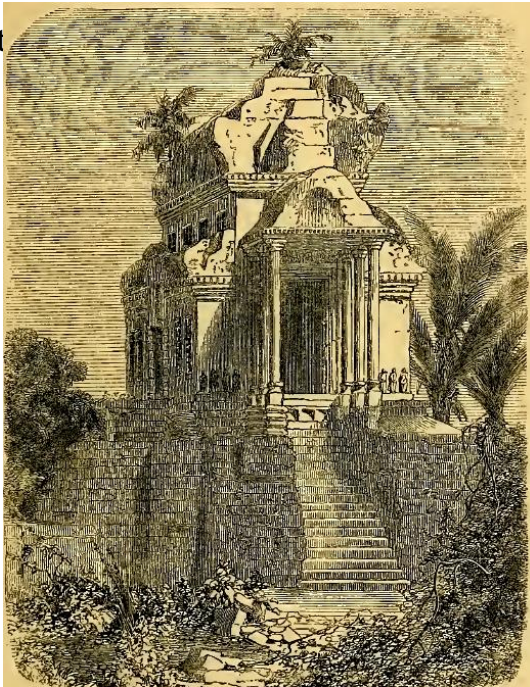
Angkor Wat – a ruin "discovered" by French explorers in 19thC
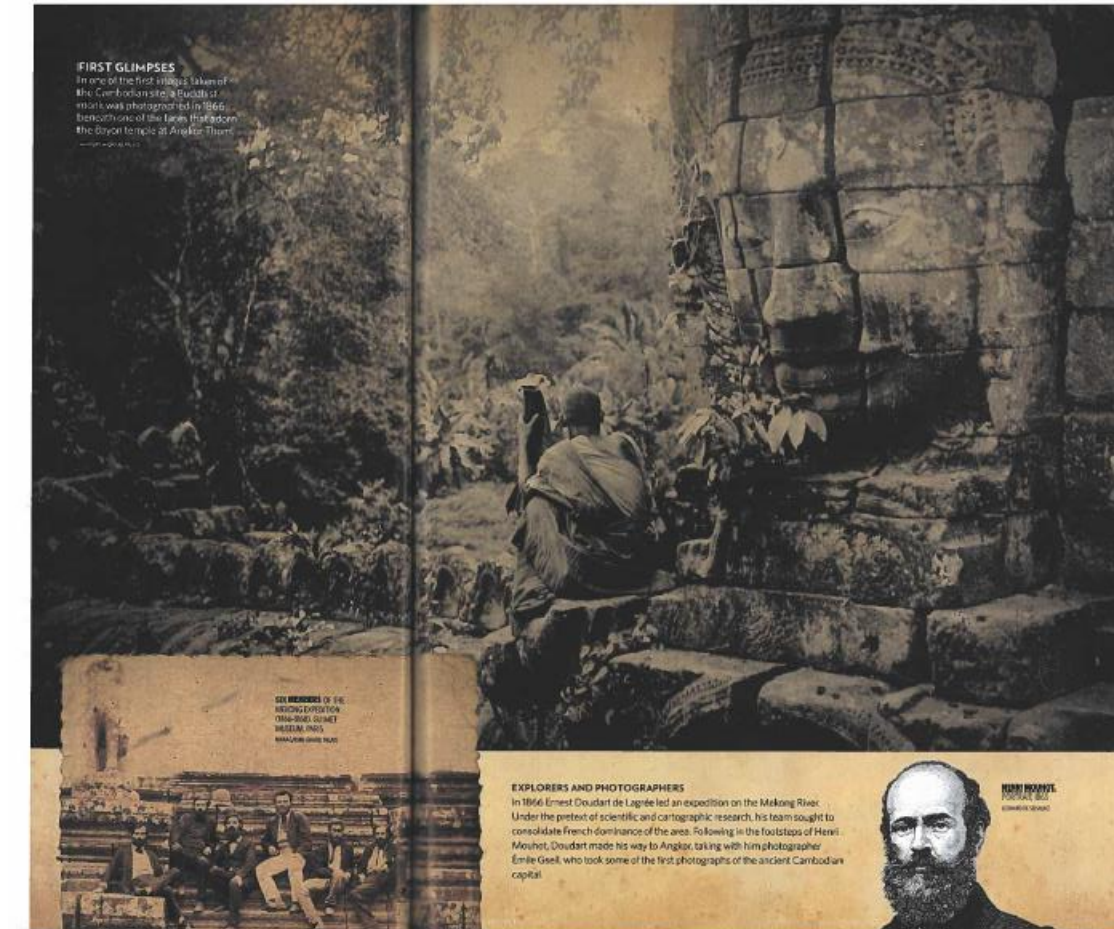
Source:
Nat Geog
2022

Henri Mouhot – one of the first to rediscover the site

(source bot

HENRI MOUHOT

VOYAGE

DANS LES

ROYAUMES DE SIAM

DE CAMBODGE, DE LAOS

ET AUTRES PARTIES CENTRALES DE L'INDO-CHINE

RELATION EXTRAITE

DU JOURNAL ET DE LA CORRESPONDANCE DE L'AUTEUR

PAR

FERDINAND DE LANOYE

PARIS

LIBRAIRIE DE L. HACHETTE & Cⁱᵉ

BOULEVARD SAINT-GERMAIN, Nᵒ 77

1868

Droits de propriété et de traduction réservés.

Façade: Henri Mouhot's drawing 1860 – of course, the site was well-known to locals
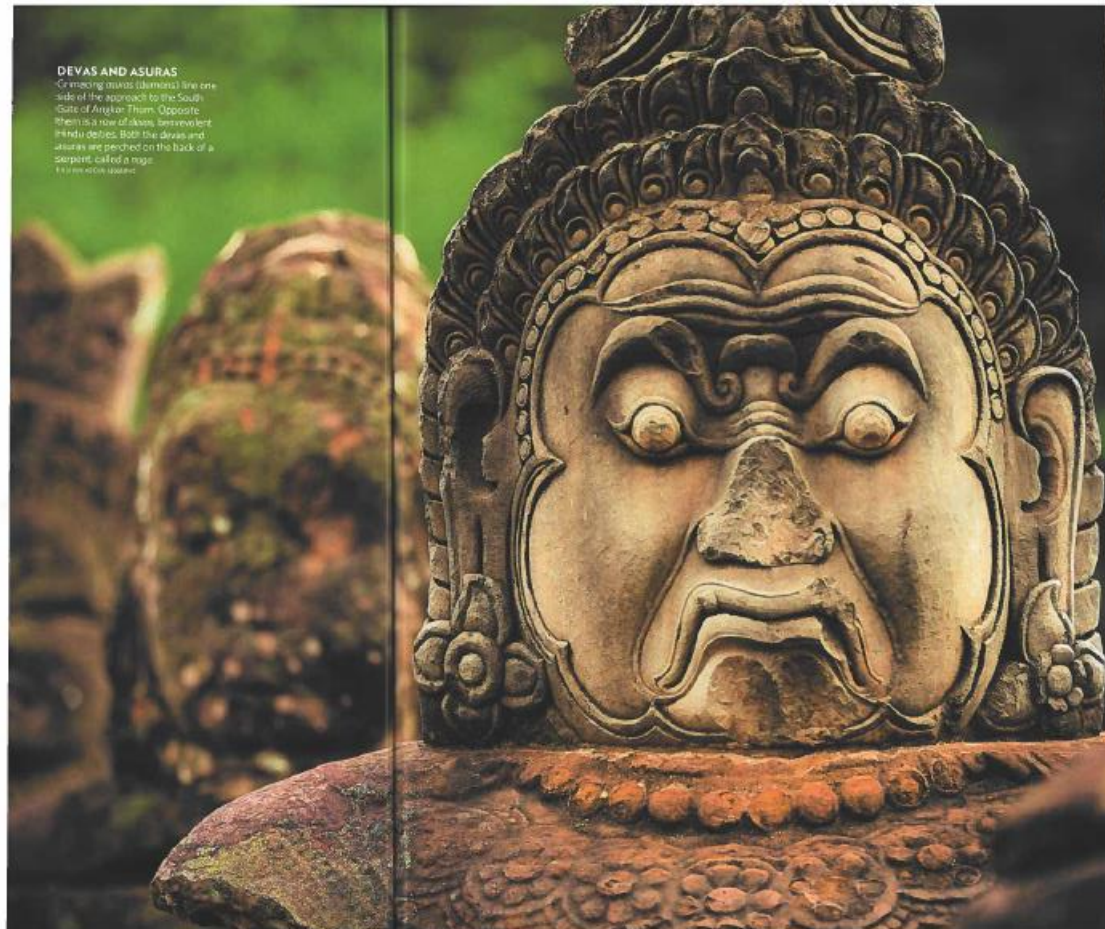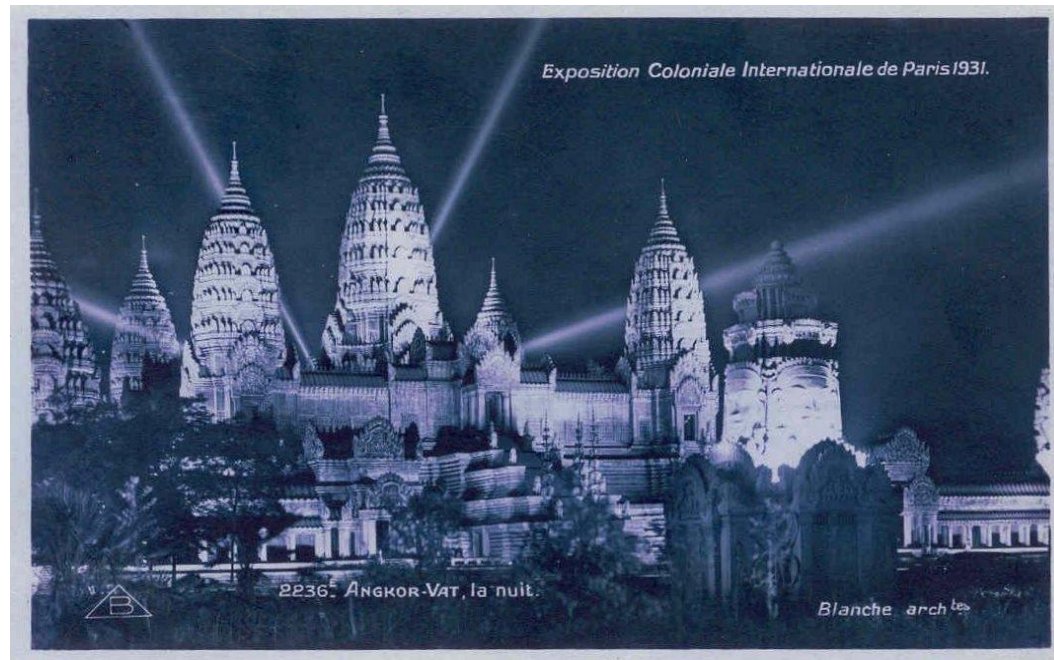
DEVAS AND ASURAS
Grimacing asuras (demons) line one side of the approach to the South Gate of Angkor Thom. Opposite them is a row of devas, benevolent Hindu deities. Both the devas and asuras are perched on the back of a serpent, called a naga.

Source:
Nat Geog 2022

Paris Expo 1931 a replica Angkor Wat is rebuilt in Paris
[source: Wikipedia]

So "ruins" are not an unusual idea

- And using this hook, we can muse about what the ruins of Detroit might mean.

- George Steinmetz, "Colonial Melancholy and Fordist Nostalgia: The Ruinscapes of Namibia and Detroit" in Julia Hell and Andreas Schönle, eds., <u>Ruins of Modernity</u> (Durham: Duke Univ Press 2010)294-320

The ruins of Detroit

The end of empire

Sean O'Hagan is overwhelmed by the beauty and poignancy of this document of Detroit's past

Yves Marchand/Romain Meffre:
The Ruins of Detroit
by Robert Polidori
Steidl Verlag 230pp £78

In December 2001, the old Highland Park police department in Detroit was temporarily disbanded. The building it vacated was abandoned with everything in it: furniture, uniforms, typewriters, crime files and even the countless mugshots of criminals who had passed through there. Among the debris that photographers Yves Marchand and Romain Meffre found there in 2005 was a scattering of stiff, rotting cardboard files each bearing a woman's name.

In total 11 women had been catalogued by the police, including Debbie Ann Friday, Vicki True-love, Juanita Hardy, Bertha Jean Mason and Valerie Chalk. Down in the dank basement of the police station, where "human samples" were stored - and had been abandoned along with everything else - the two French photographers also uncovered the name of the man who was linked to all of the women's deaths. Benjamin Atkins was a notorious serial killer. Between 1991 and 1992 he left the bodies of his victims in various empty buildings across the city.

A photograph simply entitled Criminal Investigation Report, Highland Park Police Station is one of the many startling images in an extraordinary book that Marchand and Meffre have made from their seven-week-long visits to Detroit between 2005 and 2009. The book's photographs suggest the countless strange and sad narratives from urban life in America in the mid-to-late 20th century. It is also a book of testimony, which not only illustrates the dramatic decline of a major American city, but of the American Dream itself. Many of the images seem post-apocalyptic, as if some sudden catastrophe has struck downtown Detroit, forcing everyone to abandon homes and workplaces and flee the city.

Cumulatively, the photographs are a powerful and disturbing testament to the glory and the destruction cost of American capitalism; the centre

Lost city ... the magnificence of Detroit's past is everywhere. Clockwise from top: Ballroom, Lee Plaza Hotel; Dentist Cabinet, Broderick Tower; Michigan Central Station Yves Marchand and Romain Meffre

- "…we had no idea of the scale of the project, of the vastness of downtown Detroit and its ruins. There is nothing comparable in Europe."
  - [The photographers Yves Marchand and Romain Meffre commenting on their project to photograph Detroit in 2005]

- Source for photo: Robert Polidori, *Yves Marchand and Romain Meffre: The Ruins of Detroit* (Steidl Verlag, 2011) reproduced in Sean O'Hagan's review of the book, "The end of empire", *The Guardian Weekly* 21 January 2011 p. 36.

- "Cumulatively, the photographs are a powerful and disturbing testament to the glory and destructive cost of American capitalism: the centre of a once thriving metropolis in the most powerful nation on earth has become a ghost town of decaying buildings and streets."
  - Sean O'Hagan's review "The end of empire", *The Guardian Weekly* 21 January 2011 p. 36.

Fraser argues that ruins are *Affective* sites, where our emotions connect ruins with *Precarity (448)*

Old house 2015
Detroit
Fraser: 2018:444-5

The personal, embodied experience of decay – the smell of damp and mould, the chilly contrast between a boarded up house and a hot day, the ephemera of human occupation (past and present), the graffiti on the walls, long grass divided by human-and-animal tracks . . . hole-ridden fences, half-empty bottles, spray-paint cans, flapping pigeons, wild kittens, paint flakes, still-warm ashes, banging roofs, rotting wood and squelching floors, unrestricted thresholds and faded repossession and warning notices: these are all place forming, even as they are place disappearing.

Figure 6. Revitalising the Packard Plant, 2015.

- **Reflections**:
    - **That the geographical forces of global capitalism are not static but change over time**
        - and in those changes there are winners and losers – which are real places to their residents
        - That these changes are not only in the periphery of the world system, but also in the core – creating "spaces of exclusion".

Sometimes "new spaces" emerge unexpectedly

- Anna Tsing The Mushroom at the end of the World: On the Possibility of Life in the Capitalist Ruins (2015)

    – She reports how, for example, picking the matsutake mushroom provide jobs for SE Asian refugees and Vietnam vets in the industrialized lodge pole pine plantations of Oregon.

- **Reflections**:
  - **That these changes will be hard on people who have lived in places like Detroit all of their lives:**
    - The geographer Douglas Porteous' notion of *domicide*, or the extinction of place:
      - "It is not the financial loss that hurts. What hurts is that you are losing the land on which you have worked … It is full of remembrances, of your failures and successes. It becomes a part of you". [re flooding of Arrow Lakes, BC in 1960s]
      - But is place completely extinguished?

Detroit was once a place

- Benedict Anderson's important notion of countries as 'imagined communities" tells us that we can "invent" communities of people without having seen them all – so Detroit, for example, was once a community – everyone in Detroit shared a sense of identity, and outsiders would know it existed.

- Is this sense of community lost, un-invented, when places are destroyed
- - perhaps not….Why? Because the memories of place will endure – place is concretized memory [time]
  - The site of a once important place itself becomes important as a "place of memory" (Pierre Nora's phrase)
  - So – the ruins of Detroit could be a memorial

- **Reflections**:
  - **That our settlement systems and spatial economies are also not fixed but change over time**
    - And that "space" (defined in economic sense) changes over time
    - That – on a broader scale -- settlement systems and spatial change occur all of the time

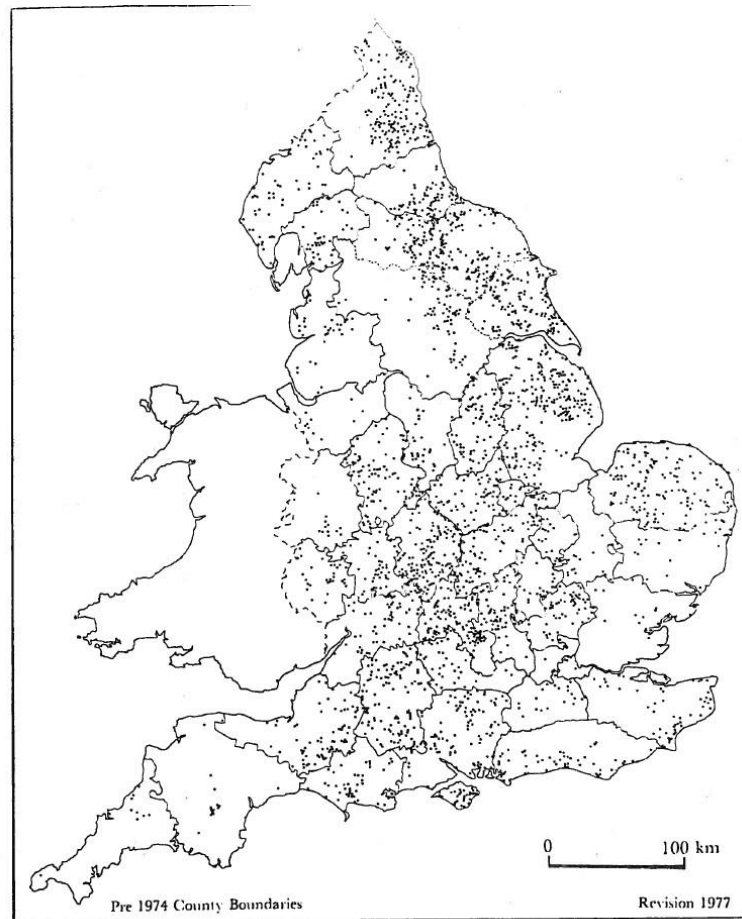# Deserted medieval villages in Medieval England

Fig. 20   Deserted Medieval Villages: sites recognized by the M.V.R.G. up to 1977

The deserted medieval village of Hound Tor in SW England

Hound Tor, Dartmoor. Image via Historic England.

Gainsthorpe, image via English Heritage

Gainsthorpe (Lincolnshire) is one of the best-preserved medieval villages around, and its footprint is still clearly visible as a series of linear humps and bumps. Ancient streets survive as worn 'hollow ways', and on either side there are individual houses separated by low banks, with 'tofts' – frontage plots

- If this is so, how far should we fight this process-- How far should we help people remain in places that are in decline?
- -- Do people have a right to remain where they are?
  - Should people, for example, be able to remain in parts of Newfoundland which are becoming remote [outport relocation]
  - Should towns that have depended on mining a resource that is now no longer needed be abandoned – or should their residents expect to be supported to continue living there?

- **Reflections**:
  - **That these processes of decline pose enormous challenges to our cities**
    - They are a challenge to the simple models of urban structure (Burgess, Hoyt etc)
    - They pose huge problems of funding for municipal governments – empty areas are paying no taxes, but still using up city resources (fire service)
      - So much so, that one recent serious proposal for parts of Detroit has been **demolition**

- **Reflections**:
  - That these processes of decline pose enormous challenges to our cities – not only in North America but also in Europe
    - This is because of the decline in population in many parts of the continent
    - A number of small cities in eastern Germany have now "closed" whole parts of the city and re-grouped their diminishing populations together to make it more economical to provide services like lighting, garbage collection, policing – even schools.

- **Reflections**:
  - **May be these processes of decline pose enormous OPPORTUNITIES for our cities – not only in North America but also in Europe**

    - Why? The city becomes a "shock city" of change
      - A diminished carbon footprint??
      - An opportunity for urban agriculture – these large areas of inner-city demolition are ideal sites for urban farming – and it comes as no surprise to hear that Detroit is already adopting this measure.
      - A revival as artists have moved into abandoned houses in city core because of cheap rents and large studio space (see the video "Detropia").

Fraser 2018, p 443:

Detroit in context

The key issues historically problematised in Detroit include decentralisation, disinvestment and population shrinkage (encompassing capital flight and white flight).[17] Like many post-industrial spaces in America, the result has typically been spatial segregation – low income, majority black neighbourhoods with high levels of unemployment and deprivation. This in turn leads to what Graham et al. describe as 'spatial stigma', in which the dilapidated state of a declining area facilitates negative perceptions of place and, by association, residents.[18] As this article will discuss, such stigmatisation of place precipitates the conditions of unbecoming – a place needs to be devalued to justify erasure, and spatial organisation of the city depends on areas deemed to be obsolete, or not fulfilling their function, in order to free-up sites for redevelopment.[19]

When I first visited Detroit in 2009, the decay of the built environment dominated the landscape: industrial ruins, disintegrating roadways, broken streetlights, rubbish-strewn wastelands and abandoned buildings were the norm throughout much of the city. Mass decay was the most noticeable aspect of a particularly devastating period of decline that originated with post-war deindustrialisation, social inequality and the resulting abandonment and population loss.[20] Around this time, urban exploration of Detroit's mass ruin hit the mainstream, and by 2011, widely distributed aestheticisations of Detroit's ruin were criticised as 'ruin porn' that romanticised urban ruins, and Detroit's ostensibly emptied out core.[21] Detroit was very much occupied, however – even if the life of the city was to be found among real, material ruin.

As Detroit's experience shows, these are all problematic

- For Detroit, Emma Fraser (2018) observes:
  - Three possible futures:
    - Urban ruin [destruction and decline]
      - Encourages ruin tourism and "ruin porn"
    - Detroit Future City [Growth and Profit]
      - Gentrification – demolition of largely poor areas of minority group housing *as if they had never been there*
      - *This type of erasure literally clears ground for "greening"* Idea of an "urban frontier" and "Settler colonization"
    - Greening [revival and regeneration]
      - Degrowth and Rightsizing – normalizes ideas of contraction
      - Urban agriculture
        - » *An idea that focuses on nature and not people*
      - One scholar suggests urban agriculture is "greenwashing" , another form of gentrification.

But there is hope – of renewal, restoration …

Figure 2. Michigan Central Station, 2015.

Detroit: Michigan Central Station

2009

2015

Figure 1. Michigan Central Station, 2009.