Alla ricerca della spiritualità nei luoghi del degrado urbano: Casi studio a Detroit

In Search of Spirituality in the Places of Urban Decay: Case Studies in Detroit

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Questo articolo esplora la spiritualità nel degrado urbano e suggerisce che la spiritualità dei luoghi nel degrado urbano può essere definita in quattro modi: i luoghi nel degrado urbano possono essere spirituali, perché ispirano le persone a fare cose buone per la comunità (catalizzatore); possono essere spirituali, perché sono consolanti (terapeutico); possono essere spirituali, perché aiutano a connettere gli individui alla loro interiorità (riflessivo); e possono essere spirituali, perché mettono in relazione le persone in modi diversi (impegnativo). La letteratura trascura l'aspetto catalizzatore, pur sostenendo gli altri aspetti. I risultati di questo studio suggeriscono che l'idea di spiritualità in architettura debba essere ampliato nella società post-industriale. L'articolo suggerisce che il ruolo giocato dai luoghi spirituali nel degrado urbano, nel creare luoghi, soprattutto in città contratte come Detroit, meritino ulteriore attenzione degli studiosi.

This paper explores spirituality in urban decay. This paper suggests that the spirituality of places in urban decay can be defined in four ways: places in urban decay can be spiritual because they inspire people to do good things for the community (catalytic); places in urban decay can be spiritual because they are consoling (therapeutic); places in urban decay can be spiritual because they help connect individuals to their inner selves (reflective); and places in urban decay can be spiritual because they connect people in different ways (engaging). The literature neglects the catalytic aspect, while supporting other aspects. The results of this paper suggest that the idea of spirituality in architecture needs to be expanded in post-industrial society. This paper suggests that the role that spiritual places in urban decay play in place-making, especially in shrinking cities such as Detroit, deserve further scholarly attention.

Parole chiave: **Rovine urbane; Spiritualità; Post-industriale; Catalizzatore; Terapeutico; Riflessivo; Impegnativo**

Keywords: **Urban ruins; Urban decay; Spirituality; Post-industrial; Catalytic; Therapeutic; Reflective; Engaging**

This paper[1] suggests that people find spirituality even in the midst of urban decay and ruins. It is a noteworthy phenomenon deserving research, particularly in the context of shrinking cities in post-industrial regions, which face significant urban decay as a result of growing numbers of vacant properties. This paper sheds a new light on people's attitudes towards urban disinvestment and decay, and illustrates the virtues of urban ruins without trivializing the hardships faced by inner city residents. The paper's central thesis suggests the value of engaging urban ruins, typically at a community level. To support its thesis, the paper discusses the need for specialized studies and approaches to investigating spirituality in urban decay, proposes four types of engagements with urban ruins, and uses interdisciplinary and combined methods coupled with Detroit-based case studies. Although the lessons learned from the general fields of spirituality in architecture informed this research, it differs from others in that it repositions prevailing attitudes about urban decay by exploring more social, psychological, and behavioral perspectives on urban decay. While mankind's fascination with ruins, in many parts of the world and throughout the human history, has been has been the subject of extensive writings, this study is focused on urban decay, and social scientific methods and findings to investigate spirituality in urban ruins. However, this paper does not engage in the shallow "Ruin Porn" characterizations of Detroit. Instead, it focuses on different interpretations and potential benefits of urban decay to promote more constructive dialog about the future of urban ruins.

It is useful to briefly touch on Detroit's unique context in which this study is situated. Detroit, once called "Paris of America," reportedly has hundreds of thousands of vacant parcels of land as a result of several decades of population loss, recently became the first major city in America's history to declare bankruptcy. The city's financial demise received national and international attention from the mass media. Consequently, it is no surprise that Detroit has become a city of urban decay and ruins. This fact led the author to inquire about whether or not people experience spirituality in urban decay. Considering the fact that it often symbolizes disappointment, despair, failure, or hopelessness,[2] one may not consider urban decay worthy of a meaningful inquiry. However, Spittles[3] and Davis[4] maintain that urban ruins can cultivate positive responses and behaviors. Similarly, this paper proposes different ways in which ruins in urban decay can also be beneficial.

Even though Detroit residents might want its urban ruins to be eliminated, the reality is that a complete eradication of urban ruins is impractical, even impossible. Despite strong and honest efforts by many organizations (see for example Longo's writing on General Motors' Renaissance Center[5]), and the people of Detroit, urban ruins have existed for many decades. Therefore, it is likely that residents of underserved areas in Detroit will continue to face urban ruins for many years to come. Arguably this situation forces us to think about how to manage the urban ruins until they are eliminated. This paper suggests that exploring spirituality in places of urban decay is one way to address such a challenging situation.

What makes some urban ruins in urban decay take on a spiritual aspect? What are the key characteristics of such ruins? These questions led the author to review the literature on architecture, culture, spirituality, and phenomenology, but also social sciences. This paper focuses on types of interventions, place typologies, and the impact on the study of spirituality and scientific rigor in the study of spirituality, more than the impact of religion, as the first two contributions are more relevant to the author's present research.

Passive vs. Active Interventions

Some writers focus more on the physical or visual aspects of urban decay than its spiritual aspects. This paper explores the spiritual dimension of urban ruins mainly with respect to their constructive aspects. It investigates scholars and practitioners who have shed new or positive light on urban ruins, some who practice passive interventions, others who engage in active interventions. One kind of passive intervention is to comment on urban ruins and decay through art, design, or writing. An example is the conveyance of the idea of an ominous, yet sublime, End Times, by connecting decay to a post-apocalyptic state (which resembles some parts of Detroit) via "urban ruin" photography.[6] Adding new structures to urban ruins, modifying some part of ruins, or using landscapes to "treat" urban ruins in an aesthetically pleasing way or in an attempt to make them meet modern functions[7] would be considered an active intervention. Both types of interventions attempt to do something about urban ruins. Both are often incremental or piecemeal, but are nevertheless constructive because they are searching for positive, lessons, meanings, or unknown potentials of the ruins, or because they look forward to bringing about new changes to the urban ruins or to their larger context.

Typologies: Place vs. Visitors

According to the literature, place typologies is one of the approaches to studying spiritual places. However, as I will argue, the current typologies are limiting, and many studies (see for example studies by Price, Britton, Eduardo, Glanville, and Barrie)[8] focus on spirituality in exotic places that possess striking natural beauty, or popular, well-known tourist attractions, and well-maintained places that have long histories as traditional urban environments. They leave out the recent rise in international tourists' curiosity about the urban ruins of Detroit. The number of Detroit organizations that provide tours of its ruins, both free and for a charge, have steadily grown recently.[9] These groups provide packages that include guided tours of industrial, residential, school, and other types of urban ruins.

Gleaning from the essays of writers[10] who have observed Detroit's urban ruins for a long time, the motivations of tourists are as follows: those who are motivated by a "morbid curiosity" about Detroit's malaise; those who come because of intellectual curiosity or commercial interest since some of the ruins are of significant historic value or are on the market for sale; and those who are attracted to the potential of Detroit's urban ruins, as evidenced by a recent surge in the number of proposed commercial developments in the places in urban decay. Despite growing intellectual, spiritual, or commercial interest in urban ruins and their potentially positive impact, the literature on spirituality rarely focuses on urban ruins, especially in postindustrial cities such as Detroit that have experienced decades of significant blight and decay.

Considering that the current literature on spiritual place typologies are based primarily on tourist attractions, this paper stresses the need to include urban ruins. For example, Millington[11] suggests typologies of urban nature (results of urban decay) in Detroit. This place typology approach illustrates the significance of understanding the unique physical characteristics of a given place (e.g., place attributes), and the various ways they impact people who live, work, or visit there (e.g., their activities and conceptions about place).[12] Here, Canter's[13] place model is useful to a place typology approach. Canter's place model advances the study of spirituality by looking at it in terms of human behavior, as well as the relationship that exists among a spiritual place, human behavior, and perceptions associated with it. These behavioral and perceptual dimensions motivated the present study and will be further discussed in the Results section.

Scientific Rigor

The advancement of scientific investigations on spirituality in architecture has been achieved by other disciplines. Studies by Bergmann,[14] Sterrett and Thomas, Britton, Todres,[15] as well as various works, especially in the field of phenomenology by McGrath and Wierciński, Tilley, Seamon and Mugerauer,[16] provide robust studies on spirituality. Some of the recent studies have also advanced the general areas of spirituality in architecture, religion and spiritual places, particularly through more grounded studies (e.g., Barrie, Mugerauer),[17] systematic inquiry (e.g., Todres),[18] and empirical investigation (e.g., Britton).[19]

While *Architectural Research Methods* by Groat and Wang[20] does not focus on research on spirituality, it has an expanded discussion on case studies, interpretive-historical research, qualitative research methods, and combined strategies. Some of these methods are informed by recent advancements of the general areas of spirituality and religion in architecture, and phenomenology. In particular, an increased use of combined strategies and cross-disciplinary approaches in some spirituality-related studies (e.g., studies that explore the deep connection between religion and spiritual places, such as Bergmann 2009, Barrie 1996)[21] are noteworthy and encouraging, as they can attract more collaboration and more cutting-edge strategies to examining spirituality research in architecture. These combined and cross-disciplinary methods informed this paper. But despite these valuable lessons and accomplishments (e.g., place typologies, scientific rigor, the impact of religion, combined strategies, and cross-disciplinary approaches), spirituality literature has neglected the spirituality of places in urban decay.

While studies on the general areas of spirituality in architecture and spiritual places were beneficial to the author's research, emerging studies in the field of anthropology, landscape urbanism, urban ethnography,[22] environmental psychology,[23] social entrepreneurship,[24] public interest design (Abnedroth and Bell)[25] design activism,[26] public health, and eco-tourism were also useful. These fields, by way of cross-disciplinary and combined strategies, examine urban decay with a fresh outlook and draw new and interesting lessons.

I next turn to a discussion of the research methods used in this study. To address the research questions posed earlier, this study conducted a) in-depth interviews with people who possess long-term familiarity with Detroit's areas of urban decay, b) focus groups, and c) in-depth physical investigations of place. The respondents were longtime (e.g., 20 to 50 years) residents of Detroit. This approach also used the earlier-mentioned place model proposed by Canter,[27] which holds that place emerges from the complex interaction of physical attributes, human behavior, and human conceptions. His model is useful for understanding the way the study participants view place or act upon it (e.g., fixing it); for example, participants in the author's preliminary interviews often talked about how places spiritually affected them, or other people, especially their worldviews, ideas, work, and activities.

After the literature review, the author conducted face-to-face interviews with residents who were familiar with the urban ruins in Detroit that have received much media attention. In total, 22 people participated in the interviews, which included both open-ended and close-ended questions, such as "What kind of emotional reaction do you have when you see the urban ruins?" Based on the results of the interviews, 14 people participated in three focus groups (either four or five participants in each focus group). The focus groups were also used to examine or clarify the interview responses. Students at the Detroit Studio + Community Outreach Program, where the author teaches, conducted several site observations, focusing on the surrounding contexts, the condition of the sites, and pedestrian and vehicular circulation. The

results of the interviews and focus groups were transcribed and grouped according to several distinct categories, and, themes that recurred in the interviews, focus groups, and site observations were identified. The participants' various responses were grouped according to ten categories, further refined to four partially overlapping themes that ran through the interview narratives.

Spirituality of Urban Ruins

Interview findings regarding the urban ruins are split between positive and negative emotions. For example, in response to the question of why the urban ruins may evoke a spiritual feeling, residents made the following comments:

"Some of these places have enduring interesting qualities....They inspire me, my neighbors, or other people to do something nice for their community, whatever it may be."

"they [urban ruins] encourage us to fix them, improve our homes and playgrounds, or clean up the streets in our community...It is almost as if these ruins yell right at you like 'do something!'... It is like they wake you up in some way."

"Some of the ruins have become a kind of shrine to me and Detroiters...like sacred places...I used to go there and pray that things will get better...They are also places that bring me a lot of memories....good and bad...You know these places may deteriorate rapidly and eventually disappear any time...but they will remain in my mind forever as long as I live...You feel attached to some of these places."

A common thread that runs through the respondents' comments is the dimension of spirituality. Moreover, several common themes include senses of hope, energy, and empowerment; senses of community, collective responsibility, and permanence; sacredness and religious experience; senses of place and attachment; ethics; and soulfulness, among others. In response to the question of why certain urban ruins are spiritual or how they can be spiritual, four primary themes stood out more strongly than others: catalytic, therapeutic, reflective, and engaging. While there are overlaps among them, these four dominate the participants' responses.

Catalytic

The participants felt that some of the urban ruins have an element of spirituality because they feel that those places motivate people to take actions, including improving urban decay, making a political or social statement, or bringing awareness to local residents, politicians, community groups, or civic leaders of potentials of the ruins.

One respondent stated.

"North End community residents got together with college students and other supporters and help artists to create [a mural] on a large empty building on the main street of the community...The mural spans the [building's nine stories] with blast of colors that stream down from the sky like falling tears [symbolizing] a growth of new community, community empowerment, a spirit of hope, sense of community, sense of unity, sense of change, and sense of future."
(Fig. 1)

Another resident commented that "strong graphic images of the ruins warn people about safety, educate them about public health and welfare, and constantly provoke us about doing something, not just talking and complaining about the decay." According to several of the respondents, many of the urban ruins, especially well-known ones, are spiritual because they can transform people's behavior to bring about positive changes, such as improving the undesirable situations and collaborating with others on art, installation, and design projects. Currently, there are several new projects planned or begun by grassroots groups and by individual residents or artists in the North End community and other underserved areas in Detroit.

Affecting change is a more aggressive aspect of the catalytic domain of spirituality. An example is in Souther's case study in

Fig. 1 - "Illuminated Mural 101" (Artist: Katherine A Craig).
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Cleveland,[28] where educational institutions worked with communities to fight urban decay, which eventually mobilized other industries such as the medical sector to revive the decaying city. Similarly, Ho[29] calls for collaborative grassroots-based regeneration and rehabilitation efforts to bring about a catalytic impact. On the other hand, Haggard's article[30] takes spirituality a step further and explores how being spiritual eventually circles back into stewardship within the community, promoting sustainable lifestyles that combat urban decay. Several provide another important aspect of the catalytic dimension, examples of making social and political statements about urban decay to inspire people to bring about positive changes. Such social or political statements can be made by connecting the proactivity of seeking happiness in decaying environments (see for example Dreyer's article)[31] or by using public art as a tool to be critical of the current status, stir social consciousness, raise awareness, or inspire changes (see, for example, Mantracity's work)[32] Awan et al.[33] in their book *Spatial Agency: Other Ways of Doing Architecture*, and other scholars (e.g., Lepik)[34] illustrate several examples where everyday people take a significant risk to transform their hopeless situations into more desirable environments, which requires a tremendous leap of faith of a spiritual journey to an uncharted territory.

Therapeutic

A number of respondents stated that many of the urban ruins induce spirituality because they are places for consoling themselves, their family members, their friends, or their neighbors. Some of these places have become shrines of sorts, places where residents pay a visit and commemorate, meditate, or pray, roles similar to visiting a loved ones' grave at a cemetery.

One of the participants commented that:

"when the weather is nice, especially after my church services, I go to a block which [used to be] a community center, not far from where I grew up…This is a place where my grandparents used to take me to various community stores…They have been empty for many years…but not too long ago, residents created a pretty flower garden in an empty lot near the stores…You can sit near the garden and watch beautiful flowers…It is a place for healing for me and many others."

Another respondent, who occasionally visits Michigan Central Station, stated, "A new massive garden created in front of the empty building comforts visitors…It is like healing the old large scar of the city." Michigan Central Station (also known as Michigan Central Depot or MCS) opened in 1913 but closed in 1988. At the time of its construction, it was the tallest rail station in the world[35] (Fig. 2). Other participants mentioned various other urban ruins that were considered places for healing and consoling.

To fully appreciate the experiences of the study participants, it is helpful to learn from social science disciplines such as public health, psychology, and religion. Canel-Cinarbas[36] reports that visiting shrines benefits mental health. Cinarbas, and others,[37] suggest that religion can be defined as the search for significance in ways related to the sacred, and that the word spirituality is used to refer to the inner experience of a search for the sacred. These definitions support remarks made by the study respondents that visiting a decaying site after church services is therapeutic, just as visiting shrines and nostalgic places is therapeutic and becoming a part of religious culture or practices in addition to evoking an inner experience.. On the other hand Arndt[38] presents nostalgia as a sense of emotional connection or spiritual associations with old times, childhood, or past environments. The nostalgic feelings described by the study connects the feeling of nostalgia to therapy.

Gockel's report[39] deals with people who use spirituality to cope with times of difficulty and healing. Such a healing process is therapeutic and works similar to the way residents in this study seek spirituality in the

midst of urban decay in order to handle more effectively the environment and quality of life under unfortunate circumstances. Gockel suggests that spirituality can aid growth and adjustment, due to its therapeutic effect. Similarly, the respondents in the study who experienced spirituality provoked by urban decay developed a sense of growth or adjustment through the therapeutic journey of healing. Horowitz[40] suggests that people use meditative spaces as a way to process their grief, anxiety, or longing. In this case the spirituality of place may bring about changes in the residents' mental states and to play a therapeutic role in meditating, remembering, or grieving processes.

Notably, many of the urban ruins cited for their healing and consoling effects have a green component, such as a garden or a park. Landscape Urbanism,[41] and research on natural environments in environmental psychology[42] and landscape architecture (e.g., Constant, Fenton, Krinke),[43] have received much attention from scholars because of the spiritual, therapeutic, or healing effects of green landscape on urban residents.

Reflective

A number of respondents shared their views that the urban ruins can be spiritual because they help them reflect on their lives and their communities—past, present, and future. A key difference between the therapeutic dimension and the reflective dimension is that the former focuses more on the healing and consoling aspects of spirituality. Although there may be areas of overlap between the two, the therapeutic process is more active than the reflective process.

One participant stated:

"I participated in free tours of Detroit's famous ruins organized by non-profit groups in Detroit... It is a nice way of re-discovering your own community and your city...It is a journey that takes me to my roots...I also see a glimpse of [a] better future of Detroit and my community... Despite all the bad things and tragedies [that have] happened, I feel the positive spirit and hope of [the] city is there... When I tour it...the tour tells a story, which makes me think about many things."

Another commented:

"My kids and I attended a tour of Detroit hosted by a community organization, which included...urban ruins, urban gardens in vacant properties, and other revitalized places... Through this kind of tour, we learn about where we are from and where we are heading...and changes, both good and bad...It is educational and also inspiring."
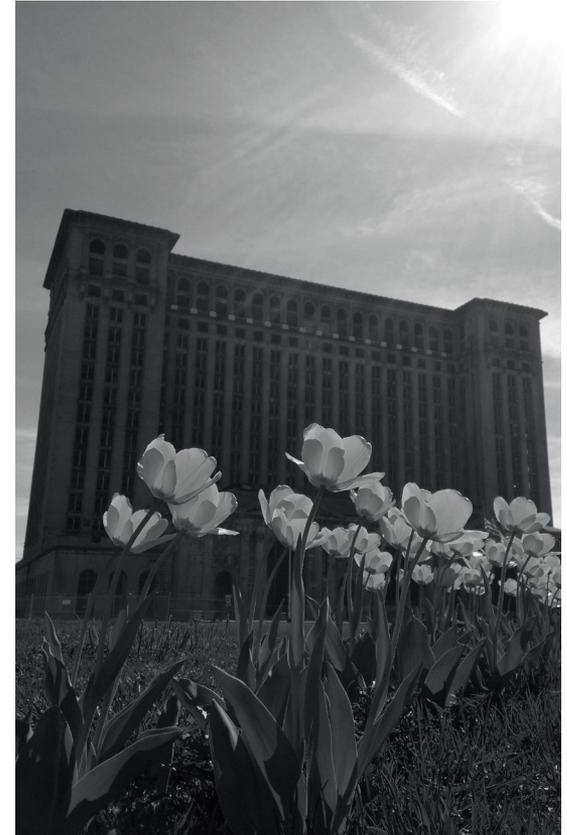

Fig. 2 - Michigan Central Station.
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A number of participants talked about the benefits of having a "story-telling" tour where they learn about the city's past, however unfortunate or tragic it may be to some, and also learn the importance of moving forward. A "re-discovery" type tour of Detroit's ruins was mentioned by many participants as a useful way to reflect on the spiritual aspects of their cultural heritage and how it can help bring about new, desirable changes to the city.

Among many writings on the power of reflection, Tilburg's work[44] is most relevant to the reflective dimension of spirituality. Tilburg argues that nostalgia fosters creativity and takes people back to a glorified past, but with impacts on the present and the future.[45] Tilburg contends that nostalgia helps one cope with discomfort, increases empathy, breeds inspiration, and raises optimism, all of which allows nostalgia to harness the past for the purpose of engaging with the present and future.[46] The birth of the urban ruin tourism industry in Detroit is attributable to thinking differently about ruins, defying the popular view of them, and turning them into something positive and profitable, which in many ways is a creative endeavor. It can be argued that a transition from nostalgia to creativity can be employed as a mechanism to provide creativity in a reflective way. Rowland[47] explores the concepts of a post-apocalypse era in a manner comparable to urban decay in Detroit, and suggesting that the idea of the post-apocalypse can also be spiritual. Rowland discusses post-apocalypse imagery through painting, where the act of painting may be seen as an active venture, but the act of experiencing the painting is more reflective.

Reimer[48] argues that "spiritual identity is dependent on a narrative...Whether the issue is moral identity or ethnic identity or whatever, what is critical is the meaning we attribute to this story, what it means to the self, and how the narrative shapes our behavior into the future." Scholars that use story-telling, participatory action research, and urban ethnography in the fields of urban planning, sociology, and anthropology, have studied spiritual journeys and stories told by local people, who used them to re-connect to their roots in terms of both time and place (e.g., Hayden), pursue reflection in action, and find new meanings in life or in the current environment. It is clear that the "story-telling" that is occurring in Detroit through the methods described above provide stories of identity (e.g., African American identity, Detroit identity, community identity, a resident's identity), but also integrate people within the story, causing reflection on how to think about a city of the future.

Engaging

While the reflective dimension connects individuals to their inner selves, the engaging dimension connects them to other people. Many participants described an "engaging" aspect of spiritual urban ruins and the social aspect of urban decay.

One respondent's comments reflected sentiments shared by many others:

"If there is one thing that many urban ruins we have in our city, big or small, famous or not well known, have done to the city, it is the fact that they have brought people together... not just residents but also outsiders, college students, volunteers, community organizations, philanthropic groups, and even tourists from other US states and countries...They come to our community, places of urban decay... One thing they all share is that they want to do something about urban decay."
(Fig. 3)

Another stated:

"Not all engagements result in real changes or successes but there is something special about these urban ruins...They connect people from all walks of [life]...connected thorough warm heart and spirit."

Sekine[49] discusses "urban footprints" and "pavement shrines" in India and other

Fig. 3 - Globe Trading Company: People gather near the empty historic Globe Trading Company building to participate in a community event. © 2013 Christopher Bartholomew. Used with permission

countries, and suggests that these types of shrines built on public land promote social interaction among the citizens, and often bring awareness to politics or society. Sekine discusses the various types of shrines, their function (religious, spiritual, social, environmental, all often overlapping), and their ability to harness social engagement. While the urban footprints and pavement shrines are not the same as examples in Detroit, the basic concepts of the former seem applicable to shrines (e.g., urban ruins), urban environments (e.g., public space), and social activity discussed or mentioned by the participants in this paper.

Gutierrez and Mattis[50] stress the significance of volunteerism in a fight against environmental decay. In particular, Gutierrez suggests that volunteerism driven by empathy and acts of social outreach, connect environmental decay with spirituality, specifically within an African American context. Volunteerism is likely to encourage people to attend to the plight of others, promote social norms that reinforce involvement, and maximize the likelihood that they will extend themselves to help those in need.[51] In this sense volunteerism is essential to the engagement dimension of spirituality. Allen[52] supports the idea that hope is an experience felt by aiding others. He proceeds to argue that we are social creatures and as such seek attachment and interaction to alleviate suffering.

There is extensive literature in the fields of environmental psychology,[53] natural resources and environments, and community psychology on the benefits of social interaction or civic engagement and how such activities can lead to helping behavior and social support. In particular, Kaplan and Kaplan[54] and other landscape scholars have written about the benefits of nature, greens, open lands, parks, and gardens (e.g., the positive impact of the spirituality of such places on people's social interactions and reasonable personal behavior).

Discussion and Conclusion

While there are many studies about spirituality in architecture, there is a lack of study on spirituality in urban decay. Based on the results of this research, this paper suggests that the spirituality of places in urban decay can be defined in four ways. Some places in urban decay can be spiritual because they inspire people to do good things for others and the community (catalytic); some can be spiritual because they are consoling (therapeutic); some can be spiritual because they help connect individuals to their inner selves (reflective); and some can be spiritual because they connect people in many different ways (engaging).

Robinson (2012)[55] discusses two modes of environmental experience, the contemplative mode and the active and participatory mode, and advocates for a multi-sensory, actively involved perceiver who is a contributing part of the aesthetic environment. While Robinson's two modes and this paper's four dimensions share a few commonalities, I argue that the latter advocates for a greater number of finer degrees of the multi-sensory experience and thus is more applicable to understanding spirituality in places of urban decay, especially at a community level. On the other hand, Walker (2013)[56] discusses the history of spirituality in architecture through architectural movements, and proposes four aspects regarding levels of spirituality; contemplative (inner growth, esoteric, narrow path), reflective-active (active life enhanced by self-examination), active (selfless action, right doing, service), and neglectful (not regarding inner self, unmindful, selfish). While Walker's typologies are insightful and correspond to some of the typologies of spirituality proposed by this paper, they may be too broad and are insufficiently applicable to Detroit, particularly at a community level.

One of the key implications of the author's present study is that the places in urban decay can be spiritual and also can have positive effects on people. While other places that are fully revitalized and

significantly improved can be equally, if not more, spiritual and positive, I suggest that scholarship on the spirituality of ruins is equally beneficial to cities such as Detroit that suffer from extensive shrinkage, vacant land, deterioration, and other chronic urban ills. The revitalization of Detroit requires an enormous amount of time, efforts, and resources (i.e., long-term, major projects) to undo the damages done to the city over the last several decades. In other words, it can be argued that what the city most urgently needs is short-term, incremental, and grassroots-level interventions. Many of the urban ruins that are cited by the participants in the author's study are the ones involving small-scale, piecemeal changes at a community level that are spiritual. Often, they are not government-directed but citizen-initiated, and not always sophisticated to the eyes of experts but nevertheless empowering, engaging, and inspiring. Taken together, this study argues for the value of engaging the ruins, typically at a community level.

While the literature in the general areas of spirituality in architecture and religion tends to support the therapeutic and reflective aspects of spiritual places more than the engaging aspects of spiritual places, it often neglects the catalytic aspect. The results of this paper suggest that the idea of spirituality in architecture needs to be expanded in a postindustrial society, in which

the old or traditional built environment will continue to decay even as some residents find spirituality in places of urban decay during their daily lives. And while there are negative aspects (e.g., pessimism) of spirituality in urban decay, there are many constructive effects of spirituality in urban decay. This paper suggests that both aspects of spirituality and the role that spiritual places in urban decay play in place-making, especially in shrinking cities such as Detroit, deserve further scholarly attention.

Some of the study respondents also shared conflicting emotions about the urban ruins because sometimes they summon simultaneously both good and bad memories, and also because those memories can be personal (e.g., involving their families or friends in past unfortunate or tragic incidents). Furthermore, studying spiritual aspects of urban decay can be tricky or risky, especially in cities such as Detroit, where residents are still struggling to survive. Despite signs of recovery, albeit weak, the jobless rate in many of the challenged communities still remains far higher than the national average. In the meantime, the crime rate remains among the highest in the nation, and the physical environment, including urban ruins, continues to deteriorate. These are some of the challenges faced in the study of the spirituality of places in urban decay.

Perhaps cross-disciplinary research via collaboration among architecture and other disciplines could address those challenges (e.g., Juhasz).[57]

It is especially noteworthy that eco-tourism, social entrepreneurism,[58] guerrilla urbanism,[59] the grassroots design movement, landscape urbanism, public health, public interest design, ethics,[60] and place-making,[61] are increasingly receiving interest from scholars, policymakers, and practitioners in design fields. The lessons from, and accomplishments of, those fields can help shed new light on the spirituality of places in urban decay.

Endnotes:

1. This study is a culmination of (i) the author's applied research and teaching at the Detroit Studio, a design- and community-based outreach program directed by the author at Lawrence Technological University; and (ii) an update to the author's work presented at conferences held in America and England.

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