Our City, What Ruins

by

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Master of Architecture

ABSTRACT:

Leaks, demolitions, vacancy and ruins. Our City, What Ruins is a double entendre we use to describe the conditions of urban life at the peak time of our practice. On the one hand, one third of the land lay vacant, transforming into blight, and targeted for demolition. The city was the world’s flagship destination for wonders of the modern day ruin. We declared the largest federal bankruptcy in the nation’s history, and our democratically elected officials were on their way to prison. It was clear the ruin landscape was an allegory for a failing system from the top down. On the other hand, Our City, What Ruins willfully drops the connotations associated with the ruins and the blight that surrounds them, and the bodies who still call the neighborhoods home.

Our practice was born out of a necessity we saw to fill a void in society; a collectively led spatial justice practice that was willing to work both nefariously and legally, on the psyche and on the land, on damaged histories and invented futures.

We advocate for an expanded agency of the architect; especially in landscapes of divestment and subtraction. This thesis explores spatial and socio economic tactics relating to rebranding of the body, community wealth building and emancipatory infrastructures in the form of drawings, models, slides, legal documents, literature, animation, collage and various other materials and documentation from the time of our practice. All of this presented in the very bureaus we discovered and rescued from a school tainted for demolition. Just as our practice worked to unravel the failed bureaucracy that helped produce Our City, we dive into our bureaus to question What Ruins?

ANATOPIA

Thesis Supervisor: Joel Lamere
Title: Homer A. Burnell Career Development Professor, Assistant Professor of Architecture
**Mentions:**

**Advisor:**
Joel, I can't thank you enough for your ability to consistently meet my ideas from a place of authentic curiosity and allowing me to take risks and step into the darkness of the unknown. You have true talent in intellectual stewardship and curatorial feedback and have been among my favorite voices throughout my career studying in higher education.

Congratulations on becoming a father this year! I wish you happiness wherever life takes you next.

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Azra, Azra, Azra, you are such an amazing energy to be around that brings me true joy! It was an amazing opportunity to work together in so many ways throughout my time in this crazy, ridiculous place we know as MIT. Your incites and unique perspectives certainly rubbed off on me in many ways that I am grateful for. I'm looking forward to see what new amazing work you have in store in the future (heritage lab!)

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**Press:**
To Daniel Glick-Utterman, Dwight Portocarrero, Ian Donaldson & last but certainly not least, Philip Marcantonio - you four are a dangerous breed when it comes to exchanging ideas, collaborating in thoughtful debate and following through on passionate projects. Each of you have my utmost respect as I look forward to growing further alongside yourselves.

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It's difficult to even know where to begin thanking the two of you. My entire life you have continuously supported and believed in my abilities while coaching my inabilities. Regardless if you agree or disagree with my ideas or beliefs, you support my passion which means so so much to me. You're truly amazing teachers in the category of life and love and I thank you for your being.

**All Kinds of Support**
Sam Arabbo, thank you for listening to the endless hours of rambling thoughts, insecure lows and excited highs. Sharing ideas, receiving feedback, criticism and overall support was overwhelmingly helpful throughout the process, and made the process that much more enjoyable.
Table of Contents:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anatopia Badge</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anatopia Non-Profit Corporation</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Animation Film Stills</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anatopia Publication</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Around the Neighborhood</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anatopia Collage Series</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demolition Diptych’s</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 Plots</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Un-Coloring Book</td>
<td>158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sculpture Garden</td>
<td>168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playruins</td>
<td>176</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ana-park</td>
<td>180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thesis Presentation</td>
<td>186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thesis Documentation</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTERNAL REVENUE SERVICE
P. O. BOX 2508
CINCINNATI, OH 45201

DEPARTMENT OF THE TREASURY

Employer Identification Number:
27-2011211
DLN:
17053183307010
Contact Person:
Michelle Brown
Contact Telephone Number:
(313) 829-5500
Accounting Period Ending:
May 31
Public Charity Status:
170(b)(1)(A)(vi)
Form 990 Required:
Yes
Effective Date of Exemption:
March 1, 2010
Contribution Deductibility:
Yes
Addendum Applies:
No

Dear Applicant:

We are pleased to inform you that upon review of your application for tax exempt status we have determined that you are exempt from Federal income tax under section 501(c)(4) of the Internal Revenue Code. Contributions to you are deductible under section 170 of the Code. You are also qualified to receive tax deductible bequests, devises, transfers or gifts under section 2055, 2106 or 2522 of the Code. Because this letter could help resolve any questions regarding your exempt status, you should keep it in your permanent records.

Organizations exempt under section 501(c)(4) of the Code are further classified as either public charities or private foundations. We determined that you are a public charity under the Code section(s) listed in the heading of this letter.

Please see enclosed Publication 4221-PC, Compliance Guide for 501(c)(4) Public Charities, for some helpful information about your responsibilities as an exempt organization.

Sincerely,

Lois G. Lerner
Director, Exempt Organizations

Enclosure: Publication 4221-PC
Like many, we found ourselves in a landscape of subtraction.

For years, we witnessed the steady divestment, watched our city morph into ruin as the world progressed.
We felt the urban fabric corrode away with time,
we watched architecture animated,
performing a dance with nature and the body.
On occasion, some would gather to watch and bid the buildings farewell as they disappeared in a fiery spectacle of instantaneous reversal.
Other occasions were less glorious

as our memory boxes were violently erased from the landscape.
And even at times, it feels like the necessary mutilation.

After all, we've grown tough skin.
As the years progressed, it became clear we were not the only communities on the losing side of progress.

A pattern evolved, and we recognize ourselves across the region.
Foreclosures led to vacancy
Vacancy led to blight
Blight led to subtraction,
to demolition,
to erasure
lots and lots of erasure.
Our city became a destination for so-called “urban explorers” who found awe, romanticized, fetishized and for some, found freedom in the ruin.
Often, these passerbys rendered our city as a zombie wasteland - absent of life of any kind beyond trees.
Narratives developed,
casting blame on the citizens of the city for the scenarios that surrounded them.
Our bodies were branded synonymous with failure, with danger,

with the ruin.
And so,

we wear our ruins like fashion
Our practice was born out a necessity and an urgency to fill a void in society; a collectively led spatial justice that was willing to work both nefariously and bureaucratically, on the psyche and the land, on damaged histories and uncanny futures.

We are ANATOPIA
ru·in
/ 'rōo-in/
noun
1.  the physical destruction or disintegration of something or the state of disintegrating or being destroyed.

verb
1.  reduce (a building or place) to a state of decay, collapse, or disintegration.

1 Superimposition of contemporary ruin, Packard Plant, Detroit MI and painting by Canaletto
Over the past decades Detroit's reputation has been determined by in large by economic forces and policies outside the fault of everyday citizens of the city. This reputation has been amplified by national and international media who have helped solidify the narrative of a failed, empty, dangerous city: a city in ruins. However Detroit's ruins are unlike the classical ruins of Rome or Athens. Where classical ruins have reached their absolute form and work towards reaffirming a historical identity for the present, the contemporary ruin erodes our sense of identity as they expose the true fragility contemporary society is built on. We are told our neighborhoods are blighted like a disease, that if you get too close you could be infected with the same misfortune of inequality that produced the urban infestations.

There is no denying the large scale abandonment of the city, beginning in the 1950s and continuing right up to our latest 2020 census. Detroit and its longstanding residents have not had it easy, from the racist redlining policies that oppressed Black homebuyers freedom to purchase, the white flight to the suburbs taking billions of yearly tax revenue for schools and public infrastructure, the riots of '67, the initial Big 3 auto-bailouts, the 2008 financial crisis, and of course, the largest Title-9 Bankruptcy in United States history.

However, at the moment there is yet another ongoing injustice to the communities of Detroit who have patiently gathered through wave after wave of economic and political hardship. Since 2002 there have been over 155,968 tax foreclosed homes, the vast majority of those occurring after 2008.
Housing Units in Structure

Year Structure Built

1929 or earlier
1930-1939
1940-1949
1950-1959
1960-1969
1970-1979
1980-1989
1990-1999
2000-2009
2010 or later

Source: American Community Survey 2011-2015

Year Structure was built: Source: American Community Survey 2011-2015
3 Tax Foreclosures 2002-2016 totaling 155,958 Detroit
Unemployment 1990-2015
DETOUR FORCLOSED PARCELS

155,958 FORCLOSED PARCELS

2 Every tax-forclosure from 2003-2016
  Information provided by Data Driven Detroit
  Cartography by Landis Technologies
blight / blɪt/
noun
1. a plant disease, especially one caused by fungi, such as mildews, rusts, and smuts.

verb
1. infect (plants or a planted area) with blight.

1 From Kevin Bauman's 100 Abandon Houses series
https://www.100abandonedhouses.com/
In February of 2010, during the wake of the financial crisis fallout, the Obama Administration established the Hardest Hit Fund (HHF). The program targeted aid to families in states where the effects of the economic downturn were greatly felt. States were selected if the steep home price decline was greater than 20 percent or if the state's unemployment rate was higher than that of the national average.

The program funds were distributed to primarily provide mortgage payment assistance for unemployed or underemployed homeowners, principal reductions to help homeowners who are transitioning out of their homes and into more affordable housing, and for blight elimination and downpayment efforts.

"We need to remove every single structure and building in this city that is no longer viable. Once you remove all of that, and I mean all of it, you start renewing hope."  **Dan Gilbert**

Michigan received a total of $761 million, the fourth highest allocation to a state, behind Ohio, Florida, and California. Of the $761 million over $500 million has gone towards demolitions across the state. In 2013 the mayor of Detroit Mike Duggan, with the help of the federal funding, partnered with capitalist Daniel Gilbert to create the Detroit Blight Removal Task Force (DBRTL). The trio between the federal government, the mayor of Detroit and one of Detroit's most influential and invested business people has ignited an urban renewal on the scale not before seen in the United States. Demolition industries became the new construction contract, except it was deconstruction and material flows that became the new interest of the city.
Anatopia Research Publication

Research Spread

**HARDEST HIT FUND (HHF) STATE**

**ALLOCATION 2011-2016**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Full Allocation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment Mortgage Subsidy Program</td>
<td>$ 81,861,539.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loan Rescue Program</td>
<td>$ 216,572,902.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal Curtailment Program</td>
<td>$ 2,764,875.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modification Plan Program</td>
<td>$ 8,837,288.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blight Elimination Program</td>
<td>$ 381,185,556.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Permitted Expenses</td>
<td>$ 69,981,853.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>$ 761,204,045.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Hardest Hit Fund**

**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE TREASURY**

**Program Purpose and Overview**

The Hardest Hit Fund (HHF) is a program established to address the critical housing challenges posed by the 2007-2009 recession and its aftermath. The HHF program is designed to provide financial support to states and local governments to address the needs of struggling homeowners and communities impacted by the housing crisis. The program aims to stabilize the housing market, prevent foreclosures, and support sustainable neighborhood revitalization.

**Program Eligibility**

States and local governments are eligible to apply for HHF funds through a competitive process. Eligible programs include:

- homeowner assistance programs
- community development programs
- programs that address vacant properties
- neighborhood stabilization programs
- programs that support affordable housing
- programs that promote sustainable development
- programs that address blight and abandonment
- programs that address economic development

**Application Process**

Interested states and local governments must submit applications that meet the program criteria and demonstrate how the funds will be used to address the needs of struggling homeowners and communities. The applications are subjected to a rigorous review process by the U.S. Department of the Treasury to ensure compliance with program guidelines and objectives.

**Funding Information**

The Hardest Hit Fund provides a significant infusion of resources aimed at supporting sustainable housing solutions and community revitalization efforts across the United States. The program’s success in tackling the housing crisis is dependent on the effective utilization of funds and the innovative strategies adopted by states and local governments to achieve lasting outcomes.

[End of document]
The Detroit Housing Commission characterized the area as “a fertile breeding spot for the development of crime - an area in which juvenile delinquency and major crimes are common....contagious disease flourish”

Journal of HOUSING
The Tragedy Of Detroit
How it all fell and how it all began.

1 TIME Cover magazine, October 2009
2 New York Times - Too Big to Fail, or to Survive, WILLIAM POOLE JUNE 07, 2008
Around the Hood
"Around the Hood"
Site Visit 11/26/2017
Digital Photograph
"Around the Hood"
Site Visit 11/26/2017
Digital Photograph
Site Visit
"We need to remove every single structure and building in this city that is Not of it, then you start repairing.

Once you remove all of it, you start renovating hope."
Demolition Diptychs
DAVIDE MACKENZIE HIGH SCHOOL
DEMOLED 2013
Paul Robeson / Malcolm X Academy / St. Francis Home for Boys
DEMOLISHED 2012
St. Anthony / East Catholic High School
DEMOLISHED 2012
Willard School / Highland Park Adult Education / Bright Center
DEMOLISHED 2013
OBJECT INTERIOR
Demolition Dyptich

School Exterior

Thomas Houghton Elementary
DEMOLED 2018
Demolition Dyptich

School Exterior

Henry Cary Sheppard Elementary

1030 RUSHLD 2000
Guardian Angels Catholic / Brewer Elementary School
DEMOLISHED 2013
Samuel B. Dixon School
DEMOLISHED 2017
Demolition Diptych

Dexter Ferry Elementary
DEMOLOISHED 2010
Demolition Dyptich

School Exterior

Graveling Elementary School
DEMO-LISHED 2013
Grayling Elementary School
DEMOLISHED 2013
Oliver Wendell Holmes School
DEMOLED 2013
Helen Newberry Joy Middle School
DEMOLISHED 2009
Demolition Dyptich

School Exterior

Lillibridge School / McKinley D.T. Treatment Center
DEMOISHED 2015
Lillibridge School / McKinney Day Treatment Center
DEMOLISHED 2015
Original photographs in “Demolition Dyptichs” are pulled from anonymous photographers from the website: detroiturbex.com/
17 Plots
AD: 4006 MILFORD
PARCEL NUMBER: 14008116-7
OWNER: ANATOPIA COMMUNITY LAND TRUST
Satellite Annotation

"17 Plots"

AD: 4006 MILFORD
PARCEL NUMBER: 14008116-7

S - 22665 (P.158)
AD: 4436 Tireman
PARCEL NUMBER: 14001506
OWNER: ANATOPIA COMMUNITY LAND TRUST
AD: 4653 Allendale
PARCEL NUMBER: 14001967
OWNER: ANATOPIA COMMUNITY LAND TRUST

Surveyor City Document
"17 Plots"

AD: 4653 Allendale
PARCEL NUMBER: 14001967

S- 22665 (P.156)
AD: 5002 Allendale
PARCEL NUMBER: 16002504
OWNER: ANATOPIA COMMUNITY LAND TRUST
'17 Plots'
AD: 5048 OREGON ST
PARCEL NUMBER: 16002764
AD: 5040 OREGON ST
PARCEL NUMBER: 16002765
OWNER: ANATOPIA COMMUNITY LAND TRUST
AD: 5289 OREGON
PARCEL NUMBER: 16002671
OWNER: ANATOPIA COMMUNITY LAND TRUST
AD: 5925 NORTHFIELD
PARCEL NUMBER: 16012752

Owner: Anatopia Community Land

17 Plots
AD: 6349 IRONWOOD
PARCEL NUMBER: 16011737
OWNER: ANATOPIA COMMUNITY LAND TRUST
ADDRESS: 6064 28TH ST
PARCEL NUMBER: 14011070
OWNER: ANATOPIA COMMUNITY LAND TRUST
ADDRESS: 6064 28TH ST
PARCEL NUMBER: 14011070

"17 Plots"
AD: 6401 30th st
PARCEL NUMBER: 16010728
AD: 6337 30th st
PARCEL NUMBER: 16010739
OWNER: ANATOPIA COMMUNITY LAND TRUST
AD: 5606 VINEWOOD
PARCEL NUMBER: 14008900
AD: 3872 HUDSON
PARCEL NUMBER: 14001325
OWNER: ANATOPIA COMMUNITY LAND TRUST
"17 Plots"

Satellite Annotation

AD: 5606 VINEWOOD
PARCEL NUMBER: 14008900
AD: 3872 HUDSON
PARCEL NUMBER: 14001325

S - 22665 (P 158)
ADDRESS: 6427 ROOSEVELT ST
PARCEL NUMBER: 12010242
OWNER: ANATOPIA COMMUNITY LAND TRUST
AD: 6500 STANFORD
PARCEL NUMBER: 14011600
OWNER: ANATOPIA COMMUNITY LAND TRUST
AD: 6540 Hartford
PARCEL NUMBER: 14011426-7
OWNER: ANATOPIA COMMUNITY LAND TRUST
Satellite Annotation

AD: 6540 Hartford
PARCEL NUMBER: 14011426-7

"17 Plots"
Surveyor City Document

Owner: ANATOPIA COMMUNITY LAND TRUST

Address: 5200 Ivanhoe

Parcel Number: 16003017-8

Registered Land Surveyor:

S - 22665 (P 158)
In this space....
- Draw what you see
- Draw what you don't see
- Draw what you'd like to see
- Draw what you think about
- Draw your reaction
- Draw your invention

And in this space....
- Write what we need to be doing, thinking, feeling about the illustrated spaces.
- Tell us about your vision.
Sculpture Garden
Playruins
Description:

an intersection between the institutions of play and domestication, these play structures may serve more as scaffolding for the mind to jump, swing, and skip from past to future than purely a physical fitness. The models represent a grounding of the idea that collective actions made possible by the remains of acute ruins, decaying houses, blighted industrial facades and shopping centers who've collected like a Everyman donated or excess building materials.

Scouring:

turning walls constructed out of the destruction of the industrial building at 4425 Humboldt st

wood supplied by the campsite in which it was taken

wood used supplied by 5053 Humboldt st
Thesis Discussion
The discussion (photo by Sarah Wagner)
Thesis Presentation

The discussion (photo by Sarah Wagner)
Thesis Documentation

Anatopia's Imancepetory Infrastructure Model