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RENEWING PLACES

Detroit is a Blank Slate: Metaphors in the journalistic discourse of art and entrepreneurship in the City of Detroit

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This paper presents an investigation of metaphoric language in the contemporary discourse of Detroit's "renewal." News articles from local and national news sources from 2009-2011 provide evidence of critical and provocative metaphoric constructions found in the gentrification discourse of Detroit. As harbingers of gentrification, the discourse communities of artists and business entrepreneurs are the focus of this review. The author argues that metaphoric language in journalism must be critically evaluated and challenged to help ensure sustainable, equitable, and historically sensitive "renewal" of the city of Detroit and similar inner-city urban communities experiencing gentrification.

INTRODUCTION

Many American cities like Baltimore, Cleveland, Gary, Pittsburgh, and Detroit were once markers of industry and American opportunism. Their landscapes, made up of buildings, homes, parks, roadways, institutions, and dense populations, spoke of a thriving present and a promising future. These cities, once defined by growth, movement, and change are now often described with language that speaks to distress, suffering, stagnation, failure, or death. These cities, and the ways in which we talk about them today, challenge our sense of identity as a progressive nation. The experiences of their landscapes disappoint our typical notions of success and, all-to-often, they are talked about as failures to be fixed or wrongs to be righted.

Language that reflects these notions of failure has permeated the discourse of the City of Detroit. The landscape of Detroit is a marker for decades-long divestment of city infrastructure and social and economic disenfranchisement of city residents. In the book *The Origins of the Urban Crisis; Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (2005), Thomas Sugrue critically discusses how systemic conditions of disproportionate wealth, racial segregation, and class division were solidified in the mid-century and dominates the history of Detroit: from the 1940s when Detroit offered the most abundant and highest paying blue-collar jobs in America; into the 1950s and '60s when the city lost millions of residents and workers as industry headquarters, along with a rising class of affluent Whites, "flew" to the suburbs; followed by a steady decline of the middle-class Detroit population from there on out. "White flight" has become somewhat of a catchall expression, frequently used to answer questions of why the City of Detroit looks and operates the way it does, with rare mention of "Black flight" also being a reason for the decline of the city. I argue that this language reinforces a narrative that when Whites leave cities or neighborhoods, they somehow "fall apart" and that "rebirth" and "renewal" are dependent on Whites returning.

Today, roughly 83% of the people in the City of Detroit are Black and roughly 11% are White (USA Govt 2010b). The majority of city residents struggle financially, with 50% of Detroit families making less then $25,000, 15.5% of the population unemployed, and 35.5% of families living below the

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poverty line (USA Govt 2010c). High numbers of buildings, schools, and homes remain empty and uncared for due to foreclosure. The Detroit that had a population of 1.8 million in 1950, had an estimated population of 706,585 as of 2011 which was down from 713,700 in 2010 (Schulz 2002, USA Govt 2010a). This is roughly the equivalent of a loss of 20 people per day. The city, which is 138 square miles, now contains roughly 79,700 vacant homes (USA Govt 2010b) and over 40 square miles, or 30,000 acres of vacant land scattered throughout (Weatherspoon 2012, Mogk 2010, USA Govt 2010b). Additionally, there are 80 unused school structures throughout the city and school closings have accelerated recently (Huffington Post 2012). However, the past few years have shown a steady increase of nation-wide media attention to a "comeback" for the City of Detroit. The narrative of this comeback is that Detroit is now at a critical point of "rebirth" or "renewal." In targeted areas of the city, such as the Renaissance Center, the New Center, and the recently renamed Midtown area (which includes the Wayne State University Campus and a few well-populated neighborhoods including the Cass Corridor, Woodbridge, and Historic Canfield), developers are refurbishing former factories and warehouses into "luxury loft" apartments; erecting mix-use condominium and retail spaces; and restoring many of the historically recognized office buildings that have been left vacant for years. Starbucks has been trickling in and a Whole Foods supermarket is slated to open in 2013 (Gallagher 2012). Restaurants, boutiques, cafes, and other enterprises are surfacing at a steady pace. As is the case with many gentrifying or gentrified neighborhoods in America, these changes to the landscape are often indicators that the function, the identity, and the economic value of these neighborhoods are being re-determined primarily through an influx of capital investment and the expectation that new, financially attractive residents will follow.

Beyond these areas of "renewal" Detroit looks a lot different. Much of the landscape, left untended for so many years, often feels unshaped and unformed, chaotic, and complicated. The landscape itself communicates a loss of control, disorder, and danger. However, in the discourse of urban renewal in Detroit, the landscape is used as the vehicle through which to present a narrative of opportunity. The city is often presented as cheap, up for grabs, and, depending on the economic standpoint from which you are viewing, a place where you can set up shop with minimal investment and for minimal risk. This presentation is made up of stories of successful startups and entrepreneurs moving into the city to take advantage of low rents and housing prices and how young people from all over the world are coming to utilize the landscape for creative inspiration. I argue that the landscape of the city itself becomes a metaphor through which to construct this narrative of renewal.

In the ways in which metaphors help us to understand and articulate abstract concepts, metaphors of our experiences and responses to space and place are often a means through which to understand and evaluate social and economic values. For example, Sugrue uses metaphoric language when reflecting on the once prosperous urban center of Detroit as a "shell" of it's former self:

> Today the city is **plagued** by joblessness, concentrated poverty, physical **decay**, and racial **isolation**. Since 1950, Detroit has lost nearly a million people and hundreds of thousands of jobs. Vast areas of the city, **once teeming with life, now stand abandoned**. Prairie grass and flocks of pheasants have **reclaimed** what was, only fifty years ago, the most densely populated section of the city. Factories that once provided tens of thousands of jobs now stand as **hollow** shells, windows **broken**, **mute** testimony to a lost industrial past…. Whole sections of the city are **eerily apocalyptic** (Sugrue 2005).

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This excerpt illustrates the patterns of metaphoric language that are often used to describe Detroit: sickness, death, exile. Sugrue uses words such as *plagued, decay, isolation,* and *abandonment* to describe Detroit, as it existed in 2005. Some of this language reflects a lack of a voice or a soul, *muted* and *hollow*. He describes the feeling of the landscape as *eerie* and *apocalyptic* where nature reclaims the city. Prairie grass grows back and wild pheasants return. This language continues to proliferate the journalistic discourse of Detroit today. However, undertones of "White flight" as the source for the death of the city also still exist. This is most poignantly clear in examples of journalistic writing that biases the comeback of the city as largely dependent on the upper-middleclass White return. These stories of opportunity and opportunism are set against a backdrop of negative reporting that reinforces and deepens the belief that poor Black people are at the root of crime, danger, the deterioration of the landscape, and the overall plight of the city. Building on the above examples of Sugrue's use of metaphoric language, this paper continues by exploring how language in journalism both blatantly and subtly shapes a narrative of the White savior, especially in the context of high art and business entrepreneurialism, twisted from a more comprehensive and humbling narrative of preexisting conditions of urban poverty and social disenfranchisement.

METHODS AND INTENTIONS

Although this project did not engage in ethnographic work, the purpose of this project is to inform future ethnographic work on gentrification, identity, and sense of place in the City of Detroit. The project was influenced by an increased focus on urban agriculture, land use, resource capacity, and foreclosure in the City of Detroit. This focus was further influenced by the emerging presence of analogies of Detroit to cities like Berlin or Brooklyn, as in the July 7, 2011 PBS online article and July 21, 2011 NPR program which both posed the question, *"Is Detroit the Next Brooklyn?"* These analogies communicate a referential present and future for the City of Detroit where inexpensive properties lure the creative class, followed by the upper middle class, and increased gentrification.

The source material is documentary and pulled from the online news sources: *Time Magazine Online, CNN.com, The New York Times Online, Huffington Post Detroit,* and the local online magazine *Model D*. Articles from these journals were reviewed for patterns in metaphoric content. The timeframe includes articles and some blog posts from the years 2009 to 2011 with much of the content cited from 2010. The 2009-2011 time bracket was chosen primarily to include, as a focal point, the *Time Inc.* and *CNNMoney.com 'Assignment Detroit'* collaborative project which was initiated in Fall, 2009 and ended in November of 2010. Twenty-eight articles from this blog were reviewed in total, all written by *Time* reporters and freelance journalists hired for the project. Articles from the *Time.Inc Detroit Blog* and the associated *CNN.com* reporting were selected through a search of all posts from 2009-2010. *The New York Times Online* articles were selected through a word search of "Detroit artists" and Detroit entrepreneur" within the years of 2009-2011. *Huffington Post Detroit* articles were scanned through a word search of the writer and creative director Toby Barlow, a Brooklyn-to-Detroit transplant who has been rigorous in his pursuit to "brand" Detroit (Andrews 2008). Barlow has received significant public response for his article entitled "Detroit, Meet Detroit" in which he encourages more people to recognize the assets of the City of Detroit and to relocate themselves and their businesses to the city (Barlow 2011). The *Model D* posts were selected through searches of the key words: entrepreneur and

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artist. The first 50 articles for each search were then selected and reviewed based on relevancy and date.

The structure of this investigation follows the approach of Otto Santa Ana's article *'Like an Animal I was Treated': Anti-immigrant metaphor in US public discourse* (1999). Santa Ana references articles from the *Los Angeles Times* for the entire year of 1994 and concludes that a main metaphoric theme in the discourse of immigration in America is that IMMIGRANTS ARE ANIMALS. His analysis is powerful in that he addresses how metaphors can be used as linguistic vehicles to subversively penetrate the public discourse with racist sentiments that, in their subtleness, they quietly offend while effectively shaping a public viewpoint. This paper draws from Santa Ana's approach by identifying and analyzing metaphoric language used in the discourse communities of artists and entrepreneurs.

The project of this paper was not an attempt to tell the whole story of journalism about Detroit. Nor do the metaphoric constructs revealed here communicate a code or model for understanding the real-life experiences of the people residing and working within the city. Rather, this is a focused attempt to look at messages that were being conveyed at a time when there was a noticeable increase in national media attention about entrepreneurialism and urban renewal in the city of Detroit.

ABOUT METAPHORS

Lakoff and Johnson (1980a) discuss how metaphors, pervasive in everyday thinking, speaking, and acting, are tools through which we structure our relationship to the world. The authors posit that by looking to metaphoric language we can start to understand our hidden conceptual systems, or the structures through which we shape our understanding of abstract concepts and ideas. Through language and metaphors we can begin to understand the systems that make up how we construct, think, and act (Lakoff and Johnson 1980b). The authors use the example of the conceptual metaphor of ARGUMENT IS WAR to illustrate how war is evident in the ways in which people talk about arguments: *He shot down all my arguments; His criticisms are right on target; I've never won an argument with him.* Arguing is thus shaped by the concept of war and, therefore, the metaphor of WAR structures the actions of arguing. In contrast, the authors ask us to imagine a culture where an argument is viewed as a dance, with participants as performers and where the goal of an argument is to have a balanced and aesthetic outcome (Lakoff and Johnson 1980a). Arguments as we know them would look, sound, and feel completely different, and the very concept of an argument would be transformed. Another example, TIME IS MONEY, illustrates how metaphoric expressions are tied to metaphoric concepts. In our conceptual framework of time, time is a valuable commodity. It is something that is gained, lost, shared, spent, saved, etc: *You're wasting my time; I don't have the time to give you; I've invested a lot of time in her; this flat tire cost me an hour.* This concept plays out in various cultural constructions like wages, hotel room rates, and interest on loans. The significance, and perhaps the danger of conceptual shaping through metaphor, is that this "systematicity" of one concept shaping another causes other aspects of the concept to be hidden.

Metaphors also play a role in how we understand our emotions. We use metaphors of *being swept off our feet, being madly in love,* and *boiling with anger* to describe our feelings and emotions (Kövecses 2000). These metaphors allow us to move beyond common words for feelings like anger, sadness, happiness, and into more descriptive and creative spaces. Through understanding metaphors, we can start to understand how our motivations, social goals, expectations and other aspects of how our lives are shaped.

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I argue that in discussing metaphors used in journalistic discourse it is important to consider the fact that trained writers deliver prose with the intention to reach and influence the masses. Rhetorical skills, often finely honed, are where the production of powerful metaphors can be found (Cameron and Deignan 2006). It is also critical to note that in the context of discourse communities, people are inseparable from their language and equally inseparable from the context of the conversation being played out. In discussing metaphors in the discourse of Detroit, these ideas help us to see how language is intimately linked with feelings about the city, its history, its current conditions, and its many complex components that become the basis for metaphoric constructions. In the journalistic space of this discourse, we see a range of metaphorical possibilities to explore. The following sections highlight some of the metaphors that were identified in this project.

METAPHORS IN THE DISCOURSE OF DETROIT: Race, Class, Gentrification, and Sense of Place

DETROIT AS OUT-OF-PLACE and the ENTREPRENEUR AS PIONEER: The anthropologist Mary Douglas and the geographer Tim Cresswell discuss *out-of-placeness* and that in our seeking to create order, we condemn disorder. Tim Cresswell writes that our ideas of *out-of-place*-ness are engrained in the way we think and act. What we understand to be *in-place* and *out-of-place* become part of our common sense and when something conflicts with this common sense, it is considered deviant and dangerous (Cresswell 1997, Douglas 1966). Wilson notes that urban areas, like Detroit, that are "targeted for renewal" are often discussed in terms of taking the *out-of-placeness* and putting it *in-place*. These *out-of-place* places are called *"no man's land"* and *"places of no return"* and, without renewal programs to "*wisely steer"* and "*plot a redevelopment course,"* they would *"be left in the backwater of the stream instead of navigating upon it."* (Wilson 1996). This language metaphorically places the people who reside in these areas in socio-spatial isolation, demeaning them symbolically and socially, and positioning them as outside of the process or *"path"* of redevelopment. This begins to illustrate how deeply engrained biases of race and class are placed, consciously or otherwise, in the construction of urban renewal programs. Similarly, in the discourse of renewal of Detroit, the city is often discussed in terms of a lack of directionality: *unstructured, unbounded, nebulous;* its landscape often referred to as *cavernous* and *hollow*. The examples below illustrate how this lack of directionality both challenges renewal and justifies renewal (demolition as a form of improvisation and shrinking the city):

> "For generations, residents of this hollowed-out city hoped that somehow Detroit could be reborn — its population would return and its crumbling core would be rebuilt. No idea was more heretical than widespread demolition of thousands of derelict buildings. But a new momentum has taken hold here that embraces just that: shrinking the city in order to save it…. Strategies are now coming from every corner, with community groups and nonprofit organization and trade groups producing frameworks…" (Saulny 2010)

> "…block after block of what used to be neighborhoods and now are weed patches and incipient forests, devoid of people unless they've bedded down in the tall grass where we can't see them….As the city dissolves back into the landscape, analysts discuss the possibility of forcing the few still living in the empty zones to

> move into more densely populated areas so the city can cut back on utilities and police services.” (Hale 2011)

> “What would a new Detroit look like? Many say it will have to be smaller, greener and denser. The city can start with the chunks of town that have withered into wasteland…. The approximately one-third of the city lying empty or unused--an area about the size of San Francisco--is not just an emblem of its corrosion but also the blank slate on which to chart a path to renewal.” (Altman 2009)

In these examples we see how Detroit is linked to a sense of something withering and fading, beyond grasp and lacking a structural presence, perceived as empty and unused and in need of strategies, frameworks, charting, and path-making. Unlike traditional ideas of urban reconstruction as going up (as in skyscrapers), Detroit as an orientation is seen as needing to become flat, parceled, chunked, and shrunk. In one example from the *New York Times*, a young artist and technology entrepreneur discusses the intentions for a project where inches of land in Detroit are sold for a nominal fee for small artistic projects:

> “Even such a lightweight form of ownership has a really cool psychological effect. Even if they bought the inches on a whim, it would bring people into the city a little bit more.” (Ryzak 2010a)

It could be argued that this *lightweight form of ownership* that can be had *on a whim* reinforces the idea of ownership of land in Detroit can be viewed as a *psychological* investment more than a full-on commitment. Other stories of young entrepreneurs further construct Detroit as a low-risk investment. The uncontrolled and unmonitored landscape; the abundance of empty buildings and storefronts; and the weathered infrastructure hold the promise of business ownership and creative inspiration for artists:

> “I don't know of any other city in the country where you could open up a theater just because and where four screw ups who are just hanging out can now be business owners. Detroit is the one place where you can just kindda do whatever you want to do.” (Mehta 2010)

> “…the city offers a much greater attraction for artists than $100 houses. Detroit right now is just this vast, enormous canvas where anything imaginable can be accomplished… local and international artists are already leveraging Detroit’s complex textures and landscapes to their own surreal ends.” (Barlow 2009)

> “ ‘This city is a blank slate,’ says Detroit's Nicole Rupersburg, 29, who relaunched herself as a culinary tour guide after being laid off.”(Easton 2010)

> “There’s a sense that it’s a frontier again, that it’s open, that you can do things without a lot of people telling you, ‘No, you can’t do that….
> ‘It’s the land of opportunity.’”(Ryzak 2010a)

Many of the examples illustrate a sense of unboundedness and emptiness that is appealing to the

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entrepreneur. The language starts to illustrate a perspective that what isn't there (the *vacancy*) provides a promise for what can be claimed and what could be built. In this sense, the current economic decline of Detroit is in a state of tension: it is good for starting a business, for buying cheap and getting out if you need to, and it speaks to the notion that Detroit is there to be taken by the adventurous and the willing. This example further illustrates this relationship:

> "There are a few brave souls who CHOOSE to live in Detroit… All of a sudden, everyone they know is coming to see them downtown. And they lived to tell the tale." (Erdodi 2010)

The language "*those who CHOOSE"* illustrates that there is a marked value distinction between the people who are moving in and those who are already here. The language *"they lived to tell the tale"* presents a narrative of bravery and heroism. New residents with *choices* are celebrated for their relocation because they are perceived as having more economic and social value than existing residents who may be perceived to not have these same choices.

I argue that this perspective reinforces a construction that the city requires outside interest in order to be *saved*. In these examples, the landscape- the place- has literally become a metaphor. The metaphor of DETROIT AS OUT-OF-PLACE illustrates how the idea of *boundaries* is used to construct ideas of how these entrepreneurs define their communities and their work in the city. We can start to see this desire for structure, for chunking and parceling, for a sense of rigidity, boundaries, control, all deeply rooted in colonization and historical American values of land claiming and property ownership. I further argue that because the conditions of the city have been largely deemed unattractive, undesirable, or crime ridden, the entrepreneur is given allowance to exercise ownership in a way that closely parallels the pioneer rhetoric of the Wild West and Manifest Destiny: the potential for personal gain in exploiting the main weakness of the city which has been and continues to be grossly undervalued real estate. The constructions of Detroit as a *blank slate,* a *vast, enormous canvas,* a *frontier,* or *the land of opportunity* serve to devalue and/or negate existing people, structures, and artifacts while glorifying the new.

These examples begin to illustrate how those without capital or without entrepreneurial motivations might be marginalized or overlooked by the media, rendered invisible in the metaphoric construction of the "renewed" city. In the American historical discourse of "Go West" and Manifest Destiny, the poor who have remained in the city are as the indigenous American tribes were to the original pioneers: a misguided and unworthy people who stand in the way of economic and social progress. The ENTREPRENEUR AS PIONEER is in essence understood to be critical to a changing landscape and is recognized as being entitled to the space, resources, and identity of that landscape.

DETROIT AS A VICTIM and the ENTREPRENEUR AS SALVATIONIST: Wilson identifies the metaphoric concept of CITY AS ORGANISM whereby the city has body parts that suffer from *"eyesores, lesions, and hardening arteries"* until the SALVATIONIST provides *nourishment* and *resuscitation* to bring it back to health, as a doctor or technician would save a sick patient (Wilson 1996, 2004). In understanding CITIES AS ORGANISMS, Detroit as an organism is one that is perceived as dying, dead, vanished, or ghostly:

> "Bustling neighborhoods have vanished, leaving behind lonely houses with

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> crumbling porches and jack-o'-lantern windows. On these sprawling urban prairies, feral dogs and pheasants stalk streets with debris strewn like driftwood… Asked recently about a dip in the city's murder rate, a mayoral candidate deadpanned, "I don't mean to be sarcastic, but there just isn't anyone left to kill." (Altman 2009)
>
> "Spread over roughly 140 square miles, it has a business district that resembles a ghost town." (Yablonsky 2010)

The metaphor of DETROIT AS A VICTIM stems from this language: Detroit is in a state of *disease, decay* or *death*. In the discourse of optimistic entrepreneurs, Detroit is dying but not quite dead. The language tends to describe a tragic victim, often without hope, without motivation, and unmoving, mentally ill, self-destructive, and blamed for its own condition. The examples below start to illustrate these ideas:

> "The island [Belle Isle], like the city, is plagued by neglect… The aquarium is still in a good state of repair. Unlike much of Detroit, vandals and nature have yet to ravage it." (Dybis 2010a)
>
> "Detroit often seems numb to violence." (Gray 2010a)
>
> "They are the vultures who feed on the carcasses of dying neighborhoods… miserable crooks turn fast bucks by feeding off the innards of this town… we're going to have to figure out a way to stop feeding on ourselves…" (Dawsey 2010)

In the metaphoric construct of DETROIT AS A VICTIM, some of this victimization is self-induced. Detroit is *numb* and *feeding off its innards*. In these examples we see Detroit as self-loathing and self-defeatist, and in the last example, Detroit is actively participating in its own demise. Detroit is blamed for Detroit. This language positions Detroit to be without health, mentally and physically, and in need of protection, help, and *new blood*:

> "Oliver… [is] confident that his startup will help the battered city…. Oliver is one of the exceptions to a dire situation." (Gray 2010b)
>
> "To disprove the charge that Detroit is in terminal decline, Nafa Khalaf offers himself as Exhibit A…. For Detroit, a city in critical condition, this new blood could make a difference." (Ghosh 2010)

Similar to the pioneer construct, the victim construct of Detroit affords the space for an outside intervention to right what has been deemed to be wrong. The entrepreneur is described as *confident*, the *exception*, an *exhibit*, and *new blood*. The city is described as *battered*, *dire, in terminal decline,* and *in critical condition*. This relationship positions the entrepreneur as empowered and special, amidst a victim or sick patient in need of saving. Other examples illustrate a sense that the position of SALVATIONIST belongs to a few individuals who are *"doing good."* Again, these stories present creative entrepreneurs who are building businesses and projects, which, in the context of Detroit, are often framed as acts of altruism. These examples from the *New York Times* frame a local restaurateur in this light:

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> "…this creative do-gooder verve is small. "You can't change a city of 800,000 with 200 people," said Phil Cooley, an owner of the popular Slows Bar BQ in Detroit. "There's so much work to do." That includes diversifying: a largely white creative class stands out in a largely black city; integration remains rare." (Ryzik 2010a)

> "To make sure the positive change takes hold, Mr. Cooley has parlayed the good will of his barbecue joint into a restless pursuit of community-building. This is an incredibly fruitful place to do business, because we're so starving for anything… I'm needed here," he said. "It's rewarding, the day-to-day work that I do. I wake up and I feel like I'm making a difference." (Ryzik 2010b)

These examples begins to illustrate a construction that if you are not one of the entrepreneurs who is *"doing good,"* than you risk sitting outside of a narrative of who cares for communities and what that caring is supposed to look like. In these examples, the SALVATIONIST positions themselves at the center of renewal. That renewal rests with a few individuals who assume that responsibility for everyone. If you are not one of the few who are *"doing good"* you are outside the "path of progress." Overall, the narrative that is taking shape in the examples above favors the values of movement, change, and personal investment, revealing constructed ideas of the entrepreneur and the evidence of entrepreneurship. We can see in some of these examples where the entrepreneur is determining and declaring that change needs to happen and that they are at center that change. The entrepreneurial communities being presented here are often more affluent and educated than many of the long-term residents of Detroit who make up the actual (and not the rhetorical) identity of the city. I argue that the ENTREPRENEUR AS SALVATIONIST (in these examples, the *do gooders*) threatens to negate the value of your average Detroit resident who may not have the means, the time, or the interest in opening businesses or restoring infrastructure. Simply put, I am arguing that the exceptional-izing of the entrepreneur as SALVATIONIST for the city challenges the value, and in some cases the identity, of many Detroiters.

DETROIT AS A SEXUALIZED FETISH and ARTIST AS DOMINION: Finally, the metaphoric construct of DETROIT AS A SEXUALIZED FETISH is rooted in artistic tensions of provocation and control. As mentioned earlier in this paper, there is much rhetorical evidence that illustrates a fetishization of the landscape of Detroit. Phrases like "ruin porn" and "horror and beauty" have become popularized in the public discourse of Detroit. The language is highly visual and stems from criticism of fine art and editorial photography of factories and public buildings, like the Packard Plant or the Central Train Station, that have long been unused. The language also symbolizes a consuming of the landscape for artistic use. To the entrepreneurial artist in Detroit, the *abandonment* and *decay* is mystified and romanticized. Detroit is a prize to be both exploited and guarded, and which, in a state of submission and abandonment, is aestheticized:

> "There is the city: Detroit, in all of her horror and beauty. Then there are the suburbs: everything else around Detroit." (Dybis 2010b)

> "It is a look at one art museum's decision to run a series of 'ruin porn' photographs about Detroit and people's reaction to both the display, the photos themselves and the city as a whole." (Dybis 2010c)

> "Doulos says artists lured to the 'beauty of the decay' need to look beyond it. But, he admits, "it's difficult to escape because we work with the visual language. Let's be fair, we get stimulated by this orgy of decay." (Archambault 2010)

> "Artistically they're very important in the way that they combine the almost romantic sense of horror with beauty," she said. "That dissonance between the beauty and the sense of waste and destruction and decay leads you to really consider not just the situation of Detroit but to put them in a larger context of the rise and fall of civilizations…" (Rubin 2011)

These examples start to illustrate how conditions of poverty and economic divestment are fetishized and glamorized for artistic inspiration. The entrepreneurial artist coming to live or work in the city exploits the *decay* and *horror* as *stimulation* and inspiration for their work. In thinking about how this language exists alongside the more blatant "orgy of decay" language of the artistic community, we can start to see some tensions between mainstream culture outside of the geographical boundaries of Detroit and a growing subculture of ARTISTS AS DOMINIONS within the geographical boundaries of Detroit. This language is revealing at a time when the landscape, both physical and metaphorical, is appealing to young creatives who may feel priced out of other cities in the United States and abroad. However, the language of these artistic entrepreneurs sometimes reflects a tension with personal identity and speaks strongly to a desire for exclusivity and control– a desire to own both the artistic identity of the city and the consumption of the landscape as inspiration. These journalists write:

> "Get used to 'intruders' playing an even bigger part of the creative culture here…" (Archambault 2010)

> "Detroit's wonderful. Detroit's horrible. Detroit's wonderful in the way it's horrible. I sooooo want suburbanites to like us, to visit us, to really get it. I so want this place to myself… Where did all these people come from, and why don't I know any of them?" (Boyle 2011)

Metaphorically, Detroit in these examples has been fetishized as a prize to be claimed and protected. However, these examples also express a fear of personal identity being taken away through *intrusions* of new artists and an influx of *suburbanites.* In the context of the city of Detroit, and the impending gentrification that is surfacing there, the ARTIST AS DOMINION both covets and fears the city. This combination of "wonder" and "horror" serves to further fetishize and turn into spectacle an already abstracted narrative of the city. I might argue that, for the artist, the exclusivity and the status that is created as a result of this fetishization is only maintained if the level of poverty of the city is also maintained. The established individuals, families, and businesses, which exist as part of the existing landscape of Detroit, are then folded into a construction of the city that is romanticized (and then commercialized) in terms of broken infrastructure and the proclamation of cheapness.

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However, the amenities that regularly surface as a result of this creative influx (cafes, restaurants, boutiques, galleries, etc) also become the emblems of renewal that serves to attract more mainstream investment that inherently changes the landscape. These new emblems, in turn, often overshadow, or even negate, long-established businesses, artists, and other residents. As a result, these established individuals and efforts remain under-represented in the media discourse of positive urban transformation, in a chapter in the city's history that is being written largely by and for the "new."

CONCLUSIONS

Mary Douglas challenges us to think about people who are on the margins of society or "people who are somehow left out of the patterning of society" by where "they may be doing nothing wrong but their status is indefinable" (Douglas 1966). If Detroit is *out-of-place*, then many of the Detroiters who have occupied and sustained the city for decades are thus considered irrelevant, indefinable, or, at worse, deviant. Their values, experiences, challenges, and ultimately their voices sit outside of the "planning," "strategy," and "frameworks" of "renewal." Whether consciously or not, this affordance further anchors a belief that a narrative of returning Whiteness to the city is the preferred formula for success and that Blacks are not critical to this scenario.

Bonnie Urciuoli writes that in the United States "character requirements" for good citizenry are rooted the dominant cultural model of the middle-class White Anglo (Urciuoli 1994). A model of *self-motivated production,* where one can support oneself and contribute socially and economically is a key concept to *the good citizen* model and *self-control*. Therefore, the defining ideas of the "good ethnic citizen" are always tenuous measurements of Whiteness. She refers to this as "race-making" and adds that when racial status is low, it is the "result of not trying hard enough." Working-class status becomes an unacceptable endpoint for good citizenry. In essence, our ideas of model citizenry are highly individualistic and ideologically narrow, overvaluing personal effort while hiding economic disparities like access to adequate resources (shelter, safe neighborhoods, education, job opportunities, etc).

Where race and class are prominent in the social discourse of a city, we can start to see how the rhetoric of PIONEER, TECHNICAL SAVIOR, and DOMINION can be linked to ideas of the good, desirable citizen. The examples cited in this paper reveal that the narrative of Detroit privileges optimistic entrepreneurs and independently minded artists who embody these ideals and therefore become the empirical, and therefore measurable, evidence of urban renewal. The metaphors discussed throughout this paper are at the root of this privilege. The public discourse of artists and entrepreneurs in the city of Detroit has often been exclusionary in highlighting a well-curated sampling of stories. This curation threatens to diminish the larger narrative of the city and mask a more comprehensive picture of a city that is much more diverse both culturally and socio-economically.

Although this project references articles and blog entries from 2009-2011, it is important to note that in 2011-2012, criticism of metaphoric phrases like *blank slate* and pioneer rhetoric has grown. Although the presentation of "renewal" is still predominantly one of youth and whiteness, local journalists and contributors to the website Model D and other websites are starting to speak out against these themes. Here are a few examples:

> " 'Detroit [is] not a blank canvas, there are pre-existing conditions.' This was in

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> response to a point raised regarding some newcomers to the city not respecting Detroit's style.” (Wasacz 2011)
>
> “...In talking about Detroit as unsettled frontier, we have effectively removed anyone living in marginalized, underfunded, or neglected neighborhoods from the conversation… because newcomers are mostly White, gentrification in Detroit picks at the abscesses of racial segregation in our city...” (Elliott 2011)
>
> “There’s a quiet turf war going down in Detroit. Or maybe it’s a capital-intensive neighborhood re-branding campaign…. It isn’t just the rumble of bulldozers clearing ground for huge new projects like the Auburn Building or the much ballyhooed Whole Foods supermarket. It’s the history, the identity of the place, that’s being forgotten.” (Sands 2012)

These examples start to illustrate how language that makes up the public narrative of urban renewal challenges neighborhood identity and can lead to negative feelings and resentment. I argue that there is room for a more comprehensive narrative of renewal that is grounded in the voices, experiences, and successes of a broader and more representative cross-section of people. I further argue that metaphoric language in Detroit discourses (and the racism, exploitation, appropriation, and colonialism that are part of that history) must be critically evaluated in order to explore more comprehensive and inclusive approaches to improve urban life and strengthen urban communities. If not, urban renewal efforts may serve to further disenfranchise the many individuals, families, institutions, and organizations that often get ignored in the name of progress.

As anthropologists, we try to be vigilant in our self-critiquing of how language informs and reinforces our biases. As ethnographic researchers, we must force ourselves to continue to understand how language shapes our experiences in the field, our findings, our assumptions, our conclusions, and our resulting production. I feel that an acute awareness of metaphors, and linguistic anthropology overall, can help us get there. As we have learned from Lakoff and Johnson, we, as humans, rely heavily on metaphors to understand and to communicate our experiences, values, assumptions, fears, and desires. A critical review of metaphors used in a discourse community– like the project presented here– can provide an ethnographer with some context through which to begin an ethnographic project. As advocates and storytellers, metaphors will ultimately influence our stories and how we tell them. Through identifying patterns in language, we can better identify and understand metaphoric constructions found in the communities that we serve and those that are embedded in our own points of view. This recognition will lead to far deeper and more insightful evaluation of our data and how we understand our obligations to that data.

The metaphors in this paper reveal that narratives of urban renewal often privilege a narrow set of ideals that become the construct of urban renewal. To go back to Lakoff and Johnson and how language shapes our actions and our thinking, we have come to accept that urban success and urban failure looks a certain way. In this case, it is deeply rooted in existing constructions of colonialism, progress, and privilege. As anthropologists, it is crucial for us to more critically evaluate and more regularly challenge the ways in which ideas of “renewal” are constructed and presented and what this really means in the context of our work. If we, the anthropologists, self-identify as agents of renewal, it is imperative that we then also be self-critical of what this might mean and what this might imply to the

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communities in which we work: What is ANTHROPOLOGIST AS AGENT? Who is an "agent" who imposes themselves on a group of people and, in writing about that group, becomes the representative for the group but not necessarily part of the group? Are we like the SALVATIONIST or the DOMINION that exploits and also guards? Might we be wrongly assuming this role for ourselves, and if so, why are we assuming this role? From the position from which we stand, are we allowing ourselves to critically discuss how "renewal" often means drastic changes to the landscape: the removal of people; the deconstruction of buildings and the construction of new buildings; the loss of culture; and the material means through which to connect with history (both good and bad)? As is the case with Detroit, are preexisting conditions of disenfranchisement and poverty twisted into a narrative of opportunity? Is "renewal" a word that encourages us to celebrate taking without considering theft? As an anthropologist working in this most complex of landscapes, I find these questions to be critical to research and resulting production. I argue that understanding the prevailing metaphors in a public discourse can help us better understand our own biases while also critically evaluating the empowered position from which we stand.

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