

THE MEDIATED CITY CONFERENCE

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THE GHOSTED CITY: UNREPRESENTED X-FACTORS

LISA SAUVE

ADJUNCT PROFESSOR, LAWRENCE TECHNOLOGICAL UNIVERSITY

POST VS. LATE-INDUSTRIAL

Post-Industrial Cities

Post-Industrial cities are still in operation shifting to different industries and urban structures. While the late-industrial city ceased to exist after the elimination of a manufacturing industrial economy, the post-industrial city is a still present condition of cities transitioning their industries into economically viable sectors. This is the condition known more commonly within the urban landscape. Cities such as Detroit, Michigan, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and Youngstown, Ohio are examples of an industrial America that is presently working to transition these cities. In the condition of post-industrial the city assets have an opportunity to flux for alternative industrial programming.

Late-Industrial Cities

Late-industrial cities are those extinguished after their industrial uses. Late-industrial describes recently deceased cities such as the late Picher, Oklahoma, a city recently dissolved because of its reflexive handicap to the changing industrial demands of the present. Natural resources determined geographic developments across the American landscape at the beginning of the twentieth century. The industrial revolution and increasing population created high demand for materials and thus the extraction of materials became big business developments in resource rich landscapes. Sites across the country were established relative to their resource deposits creating “Company Towns” dependent on the local industry and national demands.

A LATE-INDUSTRIAL CASE

History of Picher

The demands of World War I created an early twentieth century industrial boom in America. Increasing orders for weapons, devices and ammunition led to the rapid material extraction in natural resource rich lands of Middle America. The Tri-State Mining District including northeastern Oklahoma, southeastern Kansas and southwestern Missouri was a historic lead-zinc mining territory at this time. Picher Mining Company established mines in northeast Oklahoma and rapidly grew to a sustainable company town.¹ The mines of Picher extracted more than fifty percent of the lead used for ammunition during WWI. The material resource became the city’s single assets and economic driver relative to the demands of WWI. The natural resource infrastructure of Picher existed for a specific task and a definitive quantity of lead. This single-industry limited the city’s ability to develop beyond

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the lead-zinc mining. The city grew only to service the miners and their family, providing only the most fundamental social infrastructures creating a swelling single industry quotient.



Fig. 1 Picher, Oklahoma 1931 (Library of Congress)

The limited development in cities like Picher transformed them into late-industrial cities within a single century. The post-industrial counterparts resiliently responded but also have infrastructures developed around strategies of manufacturing and production rather than resource extraction. In the case of Detroit, MI and other rust-belt cities during World War II the automotive factories were able to transfer production modes from that of the car to tanks and bomber planes. These large factory spaces presently have the ability to be reprogrammed unlike mining shafts of the Middle American mining towns. This elastic use of space is the tipping point between a late or post-industrial city.

Tar Creek Superfund Site

Along with Picher, Oklahoma's inability to adapt beyond the single industry, the mining practices resulted in massive contamination of the water supply of the area. Tar Creek Superfund Site was once labeled the largest environmental disaster in the United States, covering approximately 115 square miles. The Tri-state Mining District was over 500 square miles of mining infrastructure and company towns. The effected superfund site encompasses five of these towns; Treece, Kansas, Hockerville, Picher, Cardin, Commerce and North Miami, Oklahoma. Buyouts in Picher, Cardin and Treece and Hockerville created complete ghost towns around the toxic Tar Creek.



Fig. 2 Superfund Sites (by author)

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THE GHOSTED INDUSTRIAL LANDSCAPE

Footprint

Richard Brook and Nick Dunn “use the term ‘map’ loosely to describe any form of representation that reveals unseen space, latent conditions or narratives in and of the city.”² To map within the loose terms allows operations between disciplines, medium and modes to extract. The work laid out lends focus to the city and its geographically proximate constituents. Extrapolating the practices beyond the city and into the hinterland, where many of the supporting territories exist, may provide insight to latent hinterlands and their passive effects on the networked cities, specifically the relationship between cities and their industrial counterparts. Manuel Delanda expresses this relationship as “the intensification of the flow of knowledge also affected the dynamics of cities and their industrial hinterlands.”³

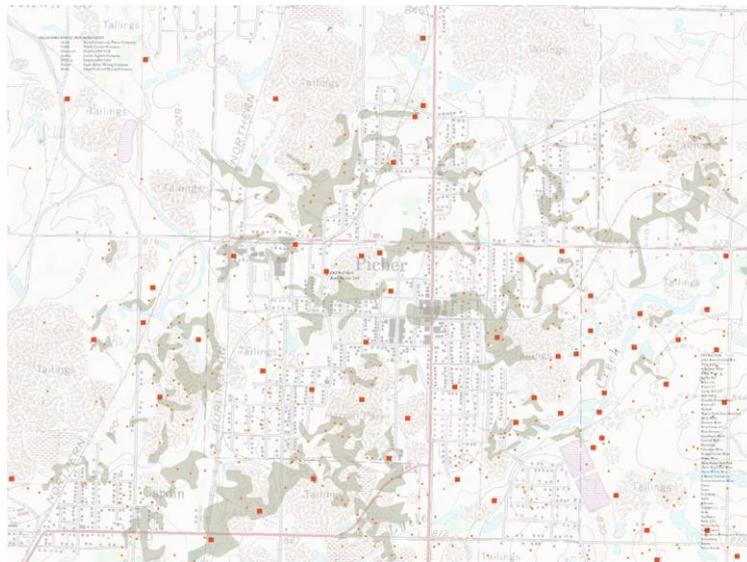


Fig. 3 Picher, Oklahoma original town plan, mine shafts and underground cavities (by author)

The historical footprint created by Picher Mining Company and the town grown around it will remain. Municipalities were recently dissolved erasing the civic condition. While the largest environmental disaster, the ability to invest in the displacement of residents so the landscape is abandoned as in rather than preparing remediation treatments. Borrowing from René Daumal’s reduction of x in his 1928 essay *Pataphysics and the Revelation of Laughter* “to know $x =$ to know (everything - x)”⁴ there exists an intriguing operation to evaluate conservation situations. Imagine a context with x , now remove x , what effect does it have on the content? This is the nature of x , less than physical. X becomes the ghost of something and its effects. Place and space are tethered to the same relationship of the physical and the ghost.

Invention, addition, utilization, removal. Expanding the boundaries of how we engage in the practice begins with stretching its parameters to its limits. By bringing attention to these non-sites across different landscapes, it will reveal to the profession the broader context and discourse outside of itself. Acclimating ourselves with adjacent practices gives abilities of handling new programs and social

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complexities that architecture has before been unable to deliver. While these sites late-industrial sites end with the same characteristic of a ghosted x-factor the traces of their coming to be may be quite different. Through these traces and variables, common places and divergence are amplified, this brings them back into the conversation not as a ruin but an active engagement of after the built form. The site operates through a narrative to showcase emergent conditions between history and artifact.

As Peter Eisenman explains in his essay *Diagram: An Original Scene of Writing*, “as a generator a diagram is a mediation between a palpable object, a real building, and what can be called architecture’s interiority.”⁵ It can then be said that the narrative mapping operates as a diagram to expose the relationships between the site, event, artifact and discourse to generate new associations. Deleuze explores emergence and the diagram in the scope of a diagrams authenticity, in his essay *The Diagram* “It is like a catastrophe happening unexpectedly to the canvas, inside figurative or probabilistic data. It is like the emergence of another world. ...The diagram is the possibility of fact - it is not the fact itself.”⁶

A series of cities have been eliminated from the industrial landscape because of the treacherous harm that has been done because of such activities. The resolution of these late-industrial spaces takes up Gertrude Stein’s perspective that “in America there is more space where nobody is than where anybody is. That is what makes America what it is.”⁷ This moment in American culture the memory of specific sites are slighted for the benefits of a collective national history. In the case of Picher Oklahoma, it provided support to a critical history of WWI while simultaneously being eliminated from memory in the vast American landscape.

ENDNOTES

¹ Margaret Crawford, *Building the Workingman's Paradise: The Design of American Company Towns*

² Richard Brook and Nick Dunn. *Urban Maps: Instruments of Narrative and Interpretation in the City*. (Ashgate, 2011), 3.

³ Manuel de Landa, *Geological History: 1700-2000 AD* in *A Thousand Years of Nonlinear History*. (New York: 2000), 91.

⁴ René Daumal, *Pataphysics and the Revelation of Laughter*, in *Pataphysical Essays*, ed. and trans. Thomas Vosteen (Cambridge: Wakefield Press, 2012), 8.

⁵ Peter Eisenman “*Diagram: An Original Scene of Writing*” pp 27.

⁶ Gilles Deleuze, *The Diagram* in *The Deleuze Reader*. pp 194-199.

⁷ Gertrude Stein, “*The Geographical History of America*” 1936.