

The Derailment of Detroit: Public Transit as a Threat to the Brand of Capitalism

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The disappearance of the Detroit Street Railway in the mid 1950's ushered in the demise of a functioning mass transit system in a city that had found such a thing to be obsolete. While this loss cannot be blamed for the economic, social, and spatial collapse of the city, neither can the reverse be said that the once largest urban network of streetcars in the nation was simply a victim of Detroit's ruin. When the last streetcar made its final run in 1956, the Motor City brand and the auto industry it nurtured were at the peak of their economic powers, and the high-water mark of the city's population. This paper will examine the factors that caused a large city to abandon its primary mass transportation system and build the argument that it was not the slow deterioration of a failing municipal amenity, but the result of an automotive branding campaign that defined capitalism by infiltrating the spatial, social, cultural, economic, and governmental mechanisms of the American city.

"Forget what you think you know about this place. Detroit is the most relevant city in the United States for the simple reason that it is the most unequivocally modern and therefore distinctive of our national culture: in other words, a total success."¹

—Jerry Herron

FORDISM AND THE ERASURE OF HISTORY

A pair of contradictions arises when discussing the story of mass transit in Detroit, but it is in confronting these issues that the nature of the city becomes clear. The first is attempting to examine the history of a place for which the erasure of the past was a fundamental instrument of progress. The second is the analysis of public transportation in a city that was fully dependent on the one industry that directly opposed it. At the root of these two dichotomies lie the key to understanding what made Detroit the most important industrial city in the world, before turning it into the most infamous example of urban decline.

Detroit's rise to industrial power was facilitated by its relationship to the machine with which the city would become synonymous. The Motor-City industrialists identified the automobile as being the definitive modern apparatus, a valuable commodity that provided individual freedom through mechanization. While creating the methods to mass-produce it, they also built the infrastructure on which to use it, and instilled in the nation a desire to consume it. Detroit set the precedent for reshaping the city and the landscape, restructuring the government and the economy, and rebranding culture and class lines around the success of a single product. It also recognized and eliminated anything that impeded the dominance of the automobile - such as a centralized urban population, threats to capitalism, and public transportation. The ultimate result of this success vastly contributed to the establishment of a nation of middle class suburbs dependent on the highways that guided, and the oil that propelled their private carriages into a future that was defined by simply being beyond the past.

This rejection of history was inherent to the type modernism that Detroit assembled. The city, according to Dan Hoffman "define[d] itself through pursuit of material perfections, and by forgetting the past in order to make way for technologies that promise greater accuracy and production efficiencies."² This perfection could only be approached through rapid mass production coupled with constant reinvention and redesign.

The most profound developments in methods of mass production were formulated in the factories of Henry Ford. A 1923 article described him as being "not a human creature. He is a principle, or better, a relentless process."³ This principle Ford represented became the model for developing industrial cities around the world. When Ford was quoted as saying: "History is Bunk", he was revealing the basis of Fordism, and introducing a methodology for the production process that would be the foundation of Detroit's industrial power. At the core of Fordism was the refinement of a particular production method that would become his most important contribution to modern industry: the moving assembly line.⁴ The nascent automobiles on this line were in a continual state of preparation for their next stage of completion. The worker was placed on the edge of the assembly line, amidst this ahistorical current of material, to perform his singular contribution as a stationary marker of progress. The penultimate station was the installation of the consumer inside the machine, perpetually expanding the assembly line beyond the factory and beyond the city.

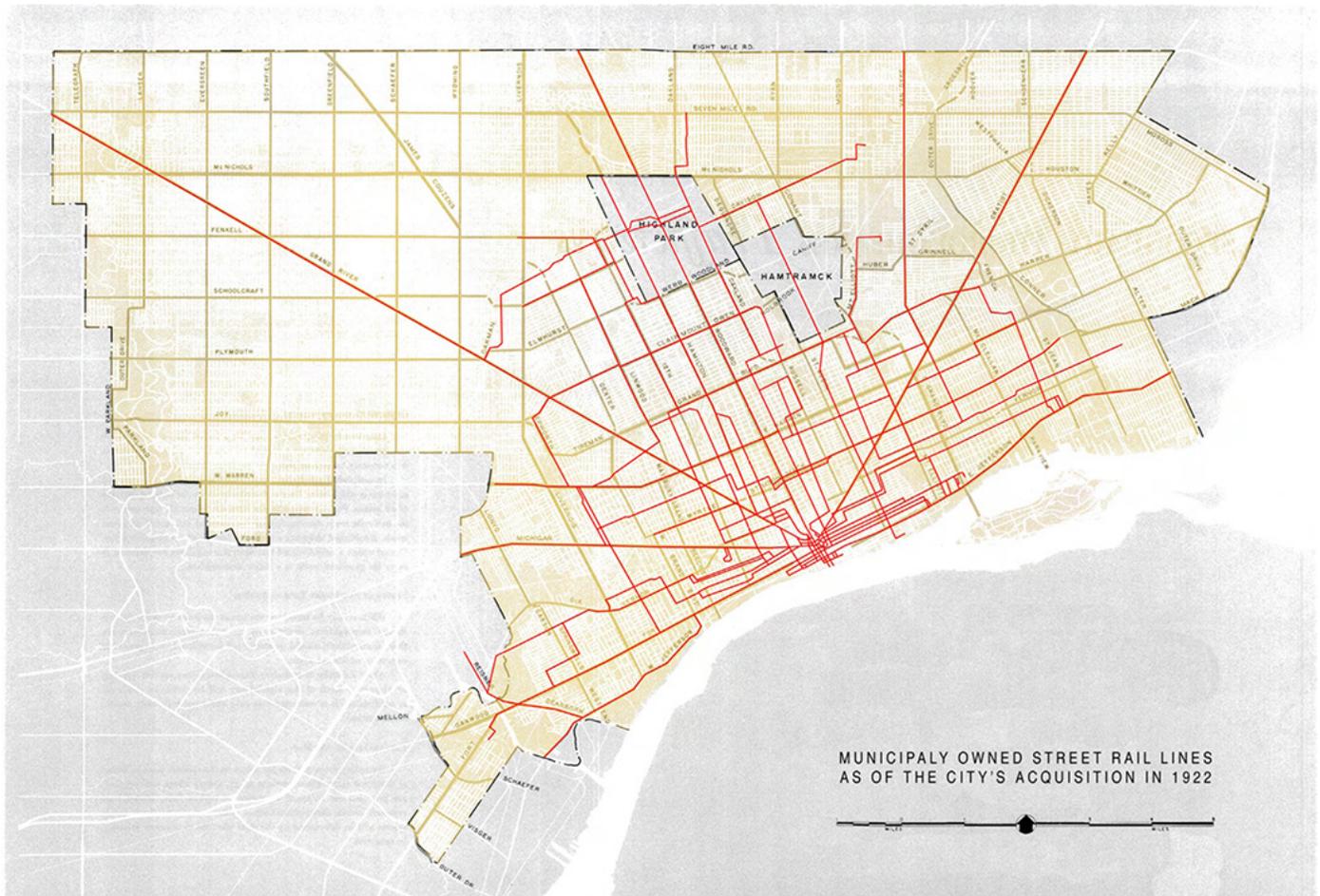


Figure 1: Map showing the Municipally owned street rail lines as of the City's Acquisition in 1922

FORDIST URBANISM AND THE LOGIC OF DECENTRALIZATION

Detroit repeatedly transformed itself according to the decentralized spatial logic of Fordist urbanism. Architects such as Albert Kahn translated the basic principles of production efficiency into built form. Multiple single story buildings, each facilitating a specific process, were joined together and extruded to the required length. The inner city mid-rise factory buildings were abandoned for more efficient sprawling multi-building assembly lines, located in the open space beyond the city center. Once built, these factories became the seeds of suburban towns that supported multitudes of workers. Disinvestment of the automobile factories from the downtown core was the first step towards the large scale decentralization that would transform Detroit into an urban assembly line, its contents spread horizontally into the vast suburban space; its center, like its past, was bunk.

Although there were numerous short-term benefits and outside circumstances that motivated the auto companies to abandon Detroit⁵, the severe decentralization that occurred was not simply the result of discreet acts of industrial and social relocation. The unique structure of Detroit's economy being completely dependent on one single product meant that whatever legal, political, or urban planning decisions that were in the best long term interests of the automobile industry always prevailed. The ultimate interests of the car companies centered on

selling cars, which was initially achieved by creating, maintaining, and facilitating a demand for them. In *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, Jane Jacobs writes about the phenomena of 'negative feedback' from the unhealthy demand of automobiles in Detroit⁶. In tracing the source of this relationship between cars and city space, Jacobs draws a parallel between the development of the automobile and that of the suburbs, while failing to make the connection that suburbia itself was made possible by the legislature, economics, and infrastructure controlled by the automobile industry. Jacobs points to well-meaning but misguided planners and traffic engineers as being responsible for the erosion of urban fabric, rather than the corporate powers behind the actual decision-making and design processes. The complete dominance of the auto-industry in Detroit meant that there was little opposition to the planning decisions that were executed in the interests of these companies. The low-density sprawl Detroit succumbed to was the ultimate achievement of industrial modernism in urban planning. The horizontal separation of city functions, homogeneity of the suburbs, and the overreaching logic of transportation infrastructures onto the landscape of Detroit became the model for modernist urban designers. Fordism crept into the concepts of LeCorbusier's 'La Ville Radieuse', Hilbersheimer's plans for Chicago, Wright's 'Broad Acres City' and of Mies and Hilbersheimer's Lafayette Park in Detroit. The decentralization of the Motor City was as much a function of modernism as it was the result of carefully planned and executed policies of the automobile industry and its branding.

CAR CULTURE TAKES HOLD

The combined economic, political, social, and intellectual power of the car companies produced a number of tools to manipulate both the market⁷ and the government in order to ensure their success. The primary tool was the creation of a 'car culture' that would lead consumers to convince themselves that they needed automobiles to complete their households. The desirability of automobiles for both utility and pleasure was amplified greatly through developing trends in advertisement. An enormous proportion of the car companies' overhead went towards branding. Automobiles made further inroads into popular culture through Hollywood publicity and sport racing. As the industry gained economic dominance in the market and in turn employed nearly one in every seven Americans, the general attitude in government could be gauged by such truisms, as 'what is good for General Motors is good for the country'. Owning a domestic automobile became a patriotic act.

HIGHWAY BUILDING AND THE DISINVESTMENT OF THE CITY

In addition to creating the market and demand for their product, the car companies took it upon themselves to facilitate its usefulness. The tool they developed for this would have a more profound effect on the urban landscape than any other modernist construction.

"Perhaps the most important historic site in Detroit goes entirely unnoted because it is not marked... The stretch of Woodward Avenue between Six and Seven Mile Roads was the first piece of concrete paved highway in the United States, laid down in 1909, before anybody could have guessed at the importance of what was being done."⁸

This initial piece of highway was devised by Henry Ford as a way to connect his new Model-T factory with suppliers in the suburbs. Ford combined the use of rock crushers invented by his friend and mentor, Thomas Edison, with advanced methods of reinforced concrete developed by his factory architect, Albert Kahn. Together, these three men introduced highway building as a new industry. Inspired by Ford, the chief executives of other Detroit car companies formed the Lincoln Highway Association in 1913. Its goal was to promote the construction of a coast-to-coast highway made of reinforced concrete. The LHA successfully pressured congress into passing a \$75 million National Highway Act by 1916. In doing so, the pro-auto lobbyists – along with several senators and congressmen secretly on the auto-companies payroll - revolutionized Federal-state relations by establishing the concept of matching public-private grants for the building of infrastructure. Growth in automobile sales following this highway building initiative was immediate and substantial. The proliferation of highways not only helped popularize the use of cars for habitual commuting, it was a major catalyst in the decentralization of the city. Freeways allowed the factories to break free from rail dependency as well as provided an escape route for the white middle class exodus to the suburbs⁹.

THE BRANDING OF THE SUBURBS

As the population, job market, and wealth disinvested from downtown and reinvested along these highway routes and junctions, the basic functions of the central city followed, reinserting themselves in the rapidly growing suburban centers that had evolved out of the various factory towns¹⁰. These areas would eventually amass so much wealth from the urban migration out of Detroit to be distinguished as the richest suburbs in the world.

Once the industrial and service sectors fled the city, the downtown relied more upon its retail shops and department stores to attract capital. But these too would feel the pull of decentralization, and be enticed to leave the city limits. In 1951, J.L. Hudson, Detroit's largest retailer and founder of the Hudson Motorcar Company, conceived and built what was to solidify the economy and brand of the suburbs, and drain the downtown of what commercial viability it had left. The company constructed Northland Shopping Center, the first regional mall in America, just north of Detroit. Northland concentrated small retail stores around an anchor, the Hudson's Department Store. Unlike Hudson's downtown skyscraper, the new complex was oriented according to the Fordist logic of horizontality. Located at the intersection of the major routes connecting the southern and northwestern suburbs, Northland was accessible only by car and provided unlimited parking. This 'hub' design would become the prototype for all suburban shopping malls, and had an immediate effect on downtown sales.

With the industry, economy, and population of Detroit no longer existing within its boundaries, the city center became its own hinterland. A desolate island inhabited by the underprivileged and racially discriminated — who did not have the means to take flight — surrounded but separated by an archipelago of suburban towns of its own progeny.

THE DISAPPEARANCE OF TRANSIT

The story of Detroit portrays a city whose essential components were uprooted from the center, and relocated in the suburbs - with the exception of one significant urban element that did not reappear anywhere in the metropolitan area. Metro-Detroit overlooked its need for an efficient, non-polluting, public transportation system in order to satiate its desire for private automobiles. As the city expanded, rail transportation diminished. This disappearance was blamed on several factors: the system's supposed inflexibility in its service to the suburban populace, communities' undisclosed desires for racial or economic segregation, and taxpayers' unwillingness to incur the expense of building and maintaining transit infrastructure. However, its dismantling was largely driven by the pursuit of profit for the automobile industry.

In pre-automotive Detroit, downtown factories and dry-docks employed nearly 40% of the city's population, most of whom were dependent on streetcars to get to work¹¹. The various privately owned intra-urban and inter-city electric rail lines were eventually appropriated by the city in 1922. The resultant Detroit Street Railway was the largest municipally owned transit system in the world, ironically, in the city which also

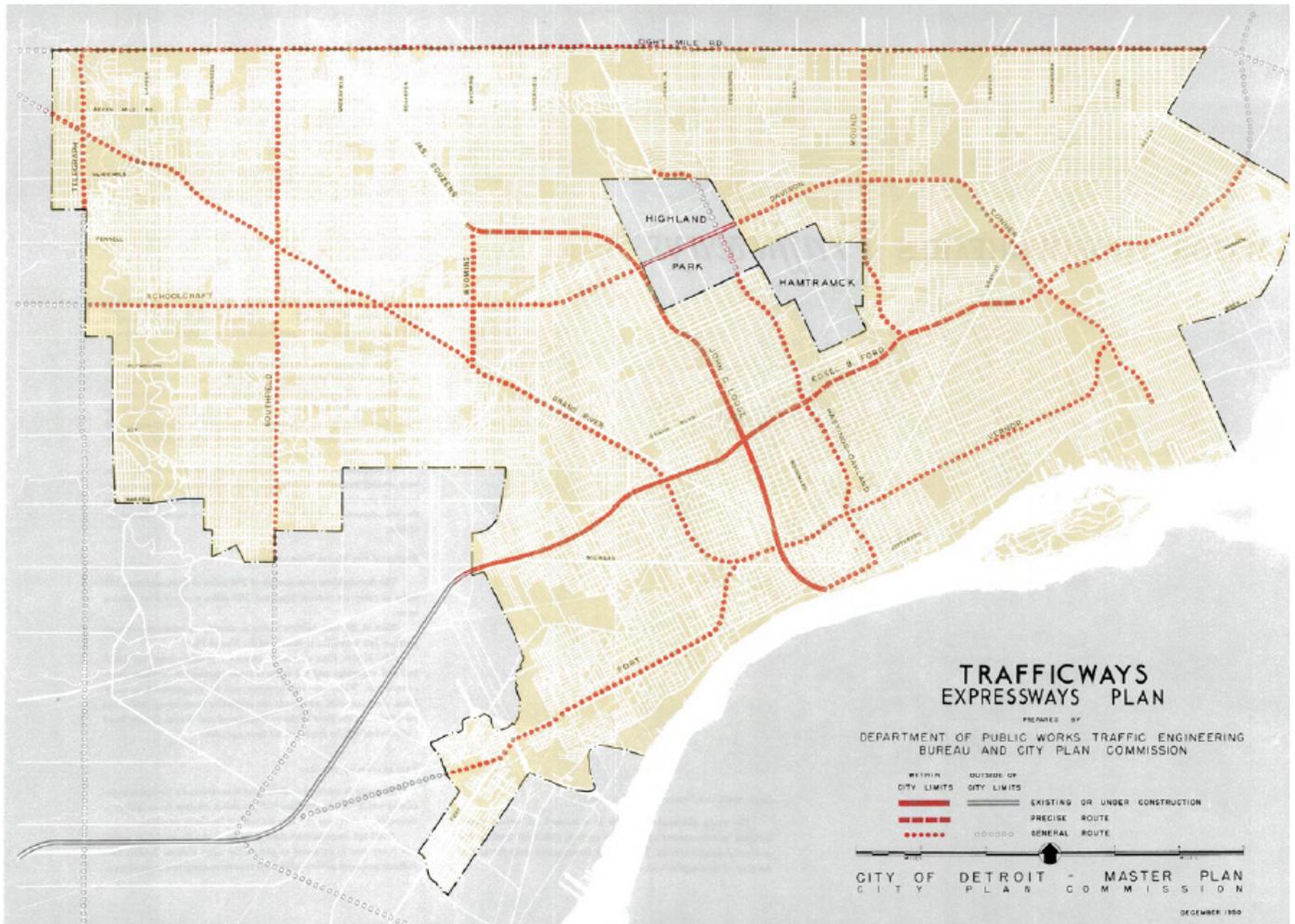


Figure 2: City of Detroit’s 1956 Expressways Plan

boasted the world’s largest percentage of automobile ownership. As large as this system was, however, its importance and stability were in peril as soon as the automobile industry asserted its stronghold on the city.

The auto executives were swift in accruing political influence over the operations of the city’s mass transit. Even before any significant decentralization had occurred, the shifting employment patterns that the auto plants imposed on the urban workforce had a drastic effect on transit ridership¹². Detroit’s disproportionately high factory wages made it possible for many blue-collar workers to purchase cars, and eliminate their reliance on public transit. As the auto magnates grew in political and economic power, they sought to convert the remaining street railway commuters into automobile owners by any means they saw fit. While the factories moved outwards, the street rail lines that were promised by the city never came to fruition. Those families with the suitable racial makeup and financial status bought cars and moved out to the newly settled subdivisions that surrounded these factories. Those who stayed behind — mostly poor immigrants, African Americans, and the elderly— were left to contend with an eroding city that offered no access to the jobs that lay outside its borders.

THE FALLACY OF THE DETROIT STREET RAILWAY COMMISSION

In 1913, when the effort to achieve full municipal ownership of the various streetcar systems was officially approved by the voting public, City Hall created the Detroit Street Railway Commission. This commission had the responsibility of completing the initial acquisition of the entire system, and subsequently operating and managing it. The first members to be appointed to this commission were John Dodge, partner of Dodge Brothers Motor Car Company; and James Couzens, general manager of Ford Motor Company. Throughout its existence, the DSR would often be chaired by auto-executives, without any inquiries ever being made into this inherent conflict of interest¹³. The commission immediately proclaimed that urban rail transportation was inherently inefficient, inflexible, and incapable of fulfilling the needs of the modern commuter. They asserted that the only acceptable option for a public transportation system in Detroit was one powered by internal combustion and running rubber tires. Within its first year the DSR began experimenting with motor coach routes, and in 1925 they succeeded in opening the first permanent bus route, using Dodge Motor buses.

By the late 1920’s, the transit riders were publicly complaining about the DSR’s obvious preference for buses over streetcars. Both commuters and transit workers felt that streetcars were more attractive, quieter, cleaner, faster, more comfortable, and required less maintenance than motor-buses. Nevertheless, the DSR habitually ignored the voters’

repeated requests for extended rail routes, a downtown subway, and the general longevity of rail operations. Although sixty percent of the public transit being used at the time was on the streetcars, most of the DSR's budget was being spent on what was essentially a competing bus system. At the end of the 1930's, the commission was steadfast in its commitment to buses as the primary carriers. A moratorium on the purchase of new streetcars went into effect, and every major car line was coupled with a bus route competing for the same passengers. In 1946, the commission made public its plans to discontinue all rail use in favor of buses¹⁴. It advocated for a network of radial expressways and a cross-town superhighway. A DSR report stated: "The ultimate form of rapid transportation will be by modern motor buses operating over the expressway network...It is a superior type of rapid transit that cannot be economically achieved by any other means". These highways were built according to the DSR recommendations. The commission continued its campaign to dismantle the streetcar system at a rate predicated by that of highway construction. The first sections of track to be torn up were those that lay in the direct path of the proposed freeways. As more highways were planned, bus routes replaced every streetcar line that the new construction was to intersect, leaving only the major radial streets of the city with rail transport by the early 1950's.

THE GENERAL MOTORS CONSPIRACY

In 1951, the Transportation Survey Department of the General Motors Corporation, Trucks and Coach Division released a report assessing the condition of the Detroit Street Railway operations. This report claimed inefficiency and decreasing ridership of the system, and outlined a clear and immediate solution to the problems. It proposed that the DSR acquire nearly four hundred GM diesel buses for conversion of the major rail routes. Under GM's influence, the commission heeded this advice, and began the conversion within that same year. The direct involvement of GM in the dismantling of the city's rail system was not exclusive to Detroit. The infamous conspiracy, in which GM undermined the mass transit systems of America's cities, was the subject of almost thirty years' worth of Federal antitrust hearings, beginning in 1949. GM's interest in motor-bus transportation was, according to San Francisco mayor Joseph Alioto's testimony in front of the Senate Sub-Committee on Antitrust and Monopoly: "a deliberate concerted action with the oil companies and the tire companies...for the purpose of destroying a vital form of competition; namely electric rapid transit."¹⁵ GM and the allied auto interests were accused of destroying one hundred electric rail and electric bus systems in fifty-six cities. A study undertaken for the Subcommittee took these accusations a step further. It states:

"A war has been raging in this country between automobiles and mass transit, and that this war has, in effect, shaped American society. It began as an economic struggle between competing methods of transportation. It became a relentless campaign to destroy America's rail and bus systems...[GM, Ford, and Chrysler] eliminated competition among themselves, secured control over rival bus and rail industries, and then maximized profits by substituting cars and trucks for every other competing method of transportation, including trains, streetcars, subways, and buses. In short, they put America on wheels."¹⁶

The report provides evidence of how GM colluded with Standard Oil, Firestone Tires, and others to form holding companies that purchased, then discarded electric transit systems and tore up the tracks and transmission lines. These companies were then authorized to replace the train systems with GM motor-buses fueled by Standard Oil and equipped with Firestone Tires. In order to prevent these unfortunate cities from rebuilding their rail systems, the holding companies used contracts that prohibited the purchase of "any new equipment using any fuel or means of propulsion other than gas."¹⁷ The result was that the "noisy, foul-smelling buses turned earlier patrons of the high-speed rail systems away from public transportation and, in effect, sold millions of private automobiles."¹⁸

Amidst the commencement of these trials involving GM's illicit role in the mass transit monopolies, the General Manager of the Detroit Street Railway, bolstered by his recent contract with the accused company, released his own report pleading the case for rail abandonment, and outlined the DSR's final plan for derailment¹⁹. Despite rigorous public objection, the full conversion of Detroit's transit system to diesel buses was completed in April 1956, when the last electric streetcar rolled down Woodward Avenue²⁰.

THE SOCIAL REORGANIZATION OF THE AUTOMOTIVE DETROIT

The degree to which capitalism was allowed to shape the urban environment and brand the culture in such a direct manner is what made Detroit the most successful modernist city of the twentieth century. The city's single source of capital was the ability to move individuals at a rapid speed, independent from one another. It defined the individual by placing them in a modern conveyance, and giving them the freedom to go in their chosen direction, at their chosen velocity, in solitude. This freedom came at the expense of the city's centrality of cultural activity and social interaction. In Detroit, the urban functions were spatially reorganized year after year based on a logic of horizontally increasing distance and a network of paths leading out of the city. As automobiles became faster, these distances grew exponentially, and the paths became more pronounced. Detroit became an assembly line, expanding horizontally and discarding its past. Its product was the modern middle class American who would strive to move in the same direction, out of the city slums and into suburban bliss. Everything Detroit produced moved out of Detroit. To the proprietors of this assembly line, public transportation disrupted the flow, restricting a mass of potential consumers to a single location inside the city, but outside of the market. Transit maintained connectivity to the urban center, which was weighed down by the burden of history. While cars traveled on a linear path away from this center, mass transit moved in a cyclical pattern, always returning to the location of its past. From the vantage point of the individual in their automobile, the collective group incarcerated within the public transit system was stationary. These passengers were motionless, moneyless, and powerless. The network of streetcar tracks and bus routes was a web wound around the center of the city, in which was caught the trappings of the past. But the future of Detroit, as left in the hands of the automobile companies, was also to be forgotten about—a footnote in the story of its suburbs. Jane Jacobs blames the decline of this city on the 'dead-end' situation of its singular economic dependence on the automobile industry; when it went sour,

the city's economy simply followed. However, this decline is as much the result of urban trends set in motion during the greatest period of the industry's power, trends that went unopposed and whose sole benefit was to the industry itself. Detroit's success was its ability to organize its pursuit of profit into a spatial logic, one that justified the product while simultaneously creating its market, controlling its labor force, and eliminating its competition. Detroit's success was in its ability to rebrand itself as a commodity driven by the market forces that it created and controlled. Detroit's success was in its singular commitment to the industrial production of technologies that would profoundly affect the culture and space of every modern city. Detroit's success was its failure.

THE POST-MOTOR CITY

The current palpable revitalization of Detroit is adhering to a re-branding, not of machines manufactured within the city, but in the city itself as the desired product. A broad cross-section of actors and activists must participate in this re-branding, by interrogating the outmoded municipal regulatory processes through innovative design of the built environment, to create more inclusive, equitable and nimble development strategies that engage the unique physical characteristics and communities of Detroit and its need for regional transit. The pilots at the wheel of this new campaign are no longer a cabal of industrial magnates, but rough mix of community organizers, entrepreneurs, corporate investors, housing developers, hipsters and holdouts. All of these stakeholders must embrace an alternative to Fordism as the default philosophical motivation controlling the development, urban planning, and policy decisions in the city. Traditional top-down hierarchical structures of industry and government have been replaced by multilateral processes, influenced by powerful grassroots community organizers throughout the vast and variegated urban fabric. A successful urban brand must abandon the notion of a single compact city and seek to build infrastructural connections to the remaining urban islands, while simultaneously re-strategizing the programming and image of the infill. It seems clear that these connections can be accomplished through a re-introduction of a public transit system, as the private and public investors of the new M-1 streetcar line along Woodward can attest. This new brand can shift the power and mechanics of capital back to a centralized population incorporating the entire metropolitan region via a regional transit authority. The disinvestments of a formerly monolithic industry can be mediated by future reinvestments in public infrastructure, transit oriented development, and housing policies that restore the livability of Detroit.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Herron, Jerry. "Three Meditations On the Ruins of Detroit," in *Stalking Detroit*. Eds. Georgia Daskalakis, Charles Waldheim, Jason Young (Barcelona: Actar, 2001), p.33
- 2 Hoffman, Dan. "The Best the World Has to Offer," in *Stalking Detroit*. Eds. Georgia Daskalakis, Charles Waldheim, Jason Young (Barcelona: Actar, 2001), p. 42.
- 3 Josephson, M. "Henry Ford," in *Broom* (October 5, 1923), quoted in Gerhard Fehl, "Welcher Fordismus?" in: *Zukunft aus Amerika: Fordismus in der Zwischenkriegszeit* (Dessau: Stiftung Bauhaus, 1995).
- 4 Henry Ford's abilities were not in inventing or engineering; his unique skill was in assembling. Just as his Model-T was an assemblage of pre-engineered parts (it consisted of Dodge Brothers' engine, chassis, and transmission; and C.R. Wilson Carriage Company's body and cushions. He relied fully on his engineer Harold Wills for the design of the car), the implementation of the moving assembly line was a combination of an existing production method (The origin of the assembly line technique of production is considered to be in the slaughterhouses of Cincinnati) with Fredrick Winslow Taylor's principles of scientific management and efficiency. In Ford's factory, automobile production evolved from being an artisan's craft to being a scientific process.
- 5 As early as the 1920's the multi-storied urban factories near downtown Detroit were being left behind in order to achieve the land expansion needed for the Fordist production methods. As more automobiles were consumed in the city, it became increasingly more difficult to manufacture them there. Factory owners were put off by the high tax rates, inadequate space for growth and employee parking, and the difficulty of servicing plants in the inner city. Beyond the spatial considerations, there were various social and labor motivated issues that pushed the factories out. Henry Ford was notorious for his animosity towards organized labor. He quickly realized that the longer he maintained a factory in one area, the stronger the workers' organization became. His selection of new plant locations was heavily influenced by his ability to exploit certain non-unionized labor pools outside of the city. Additionally, General Motors had a longstanding policy of decentralized manufacturing based on what they claimed were social grounds. Thomas Ticknor states that:

"G.M. believed that decentralization made it easier to meet the increased demands for housing and social services created by plant expansion, softened the burden of frequent lay-offs in the industry by distributing it among various communities, and took advantage of lower costs of living and more desirable living conditions than if production were concentrated in Detroit."

Ticknor, Thomas. *Motor City: The Impact of the Automobile Industry Upon Detroit, 1900-1975* (Ann Arbor, The Univ. of Michigan, Ph.D., 1978), pg 118-119.

World War II introduced broader national pressure for a rapid decentralization of Detroit. Even before America's involvement in the war, the major car companies began re-tooling their plants for the manufacture of military vehicles for European armies on both sides of the conflict. As America joined in the fighting, Detroit was counted on to supply over eighty percent of the cars, trucks, tanks, fighter planes, and bombers to the U.S. armed forces. It was during those years that the city was known as the 'Arsenal of Democracy', prompting General Eisenhower to proclaim: "Detroit... came to mean, in war, practically everything we needed to defeat the enemy... Detroit is a symbol of the strength our enemies came to fear." (Ticknor pg 248). But the citizens of this 'Arsehole of Democracy', as it came to be called, understood the predicament of this city's importance in the war effort. Coupled with the extremely long and stressful work hours was the looming fear that 'Hitler will come here first'. The Federal government was quick to acknowledge the vulnerability of having the majority of the country's military manufacturing in one place. This anxiety was greatly multiplied by the end of the war as the realization of a nuclear threat gripped the nation. Military contractors became subject to a strict post-war Defense Department policy that demanded the dispersal of all new plants away from Detroit to limit the consequence of atomic attack.
- 6 Negative Feedback is when: "an action produces a reaction which in turn intensifies the condition responsible for the action. This intensifies the need for repeating the first action, which in turn intensifies the reaction..."

Jacobs, Jane. "The Death and Life of Great American Cities", (New York: Random House, 1961), pg 343-350.

In her view, the unnecessary amount of inefficiently used private passenger vehicles necessitates more roadbed and parking space to be taken from the city. In order to accommodate the amount of land required, the city must spread out its other economic uses horizontally. Pedestrian access to a multiplicity of these uses is no longer convenient, as a result of the greater distances between them. Thus the need arises for even more automobiles for these individual users, coupled with the need for more space to accommodate these new cars. Put simply: the more new space that is provided for cars, the greater the demand for new cars to traverse this ever-expanding space.

7 The economies of scale that Henry Ford achieved with the assembly line allowed him to continuously drop the price of his Model-T well into the range of the middle class worker or farmer. The motivation behind this tactic was his dream of supplying a car to every American family. The first to buy into this vision of cheap cars for the masses were Ford's own workers in Detroit, who were coerced into purchasing Model-T's under the threat of losing their jobs if they did not. By the late 1930's, there were forty percent more cars per each one hundred people in the Motor-City than the average all the large U.S. cities.

8 Herron, Jerry. op.cit., pg 39.

9 By the late 1940's, a complex network of almost two hundred miles of freeway was programmed to run throughout Detroit on over ten different routes. To the residents whose neighborhoods would be eradicated by these urban incisions, the 1951 Master Plan of Detroit hailed the freeways as being "landscaped strips approximately 300 feet wide... Fully recognized, this characteristic will be an asset to the sections which the expressways pass through."

City Plan Commission, City of Detroit 1951, Detroit Master Plan: Plans for a Finer City. The Official Comprehensive Plan for the development and improvement of Detroit as approved by the Mayor and the Common Council (Published in 1951 on Detroit's 250th anniversary), pg. 70.

10 The manufacturing that had once been a dominant feature of downtown Detroit primarily relocated in the northern and southern suburbs. The white-collar businesses and corporate headquarters favored the Northwest Passage along Woodward Avenue. Originating at the riverfront, Woodward bisects the downtown before continuing northwest to connect prominent towns. Before long, the Woodward corridor would have more leasable office space than downtown and house most of the professionals in the region. Even renowned architects such as Eliel and Eero Saarinen, Minoru Yamasaki, and Gunnar Birkerts took part in this urban migration, finding a more lucrative practice in the suburbs than in the city.

11 In 1873, a Detroit inventor, Charles Van Depoele, discovered that not only could electric power be generated by the mechanical power from steam engines, conversely, electricity could be used to run mechanical machines. He applied this principle to locomotives, and within a year had built the first electric railroad outside of his shop in downtown Detroit. By 1886, the privately owned Detroit Electric Railway purchased his system and put it to use on Woodward Avenue.

12 Previous to the highway act and other road paving initiatives, the poor quality of the mostly dirt roads made most automobile use a seasonal activity. As a result, the sale and manufacture of cars became seasonal as well, with long breaks of unemployment between production periods. Workers were not guaranteed that their jobs would be available when the work started up again. Frequently, semi-skilled laborers would be employed by a different company each season, making it nearly impossible for workers to maintain housing in proximity to their jobs. Ridership suffered greatly as these frustrated workers turned to the increasingly accessible form of private transportation.

13 At one point in his tenure on the commission, Couzens along with Henry Ford threatened to replace a troubled streetcar line with a thousand model-T's. A number of years later, as mayor of Detroit, Couzens rejected a plan already approved by the voters, which called for the reduction of traffic congestion and increased streetcar efficiency through the construction of a downtown subway. Nearly as soon as the commission was chartered, it adopted many auto-centric working principles that steered its actions for the next forty years.

14 In 1946, the commission made public its plans to discontinue all rail use in favor of buses. This was outlined in a DSR report that was a direct response to a Mayoral committee of the previous year. The committee advocated:

"a network of radial expressways, as well as a cross-town superhighway. Each of these new roads was to include a center portion for high-speed rail lines, which would be operated with multiple-unit streetcars in trains... Streetcars would enter a subway at the edge of the central business district and run to a new underground terminal."

Jack E. Schramm, William H. Henning, and Thomas J. Dworman,
Detroit's Street Railways: Volume 2, 1922-1956 Bulletin 120:
Central Electric Railfans' Association pg 83.

The DSR realized the inevitability of the highway construction that the Mayoral committee proposed, but would ensure that the new expressways would not move anything on rails. Their response to the committee's plan was to substitute the high-speed rails with high-speed bus routes. The DSR report stated that:

"The ultimate form of rapid transportation will be by modern motor buses operating over the expressway highway network...It is a superior type of rapid transit that cannot be economically achieved by any other means because of the physical characteristics of Detroit. Rapid transit by bus operation on the expressways will immediately create extensive demand for this superior service".

The early expressways were built according to the DSR recommendations and without the downtown subway. But by 1948, these high speed busways were eliminated as buses were constantly being trapped in expressway traffic, and thus unable to maintain a working schedule. The DSR continued its campaign to dismantle the streetcar system at a rate predicated by that of highway construction. As more highways were planned, bus routes replaced every streetcar line that the new construction was to intersect, leaving only the major radial streets of the city with rail transport by the early 1950's.

15 The Industrial Reorganization Act: Hearings Before the Subcommittee on Antitrust and Monopoly of the Committee on the Judiciary United States Senate, Ninety-Third Congress: Second Session on S. 1167, Part 3: Ground Transportation Industries, February 26, 27, 28; and March 1, 1974 (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1974), pg. 1786.

16 Ibid., pg 1840-1841.

17 Ibid., pg 1845.

18 Ibid., pg 1844.

19 Citing the danger of street loading onto streetcars; the massive capital outlay of track maintenance and route expansion; and the inability of an inflexible rail based system to react in a Civil Defense emergency, the DSR outlined its final plan for derailment.

20 Ironically, the transit authority operated the buses under the name Detroit Street Railway until 1974. During the eighteen years between the demise of the streetcars and the end of the DSR, transit ridership dropped from 205 million passengers per year to just under seventy million. As the city dissolved and the suburbs grew, the level of service of the bus system continued to decline. Jobs continued to hemorrhage into the suburbs, but the buses failed to provide adequate access to these areas. Although over one half of its population has left the city since the late 1950's, Detroit is still left with 700,000 people living within its city limits. Most of the remaining residents are in low-income situations and over fifty percent are not registered as owning an automobile, due in part to the inordinately high insurance rates. The unsatisfactory public transit system leaves those without the means to acquire private transportation locked out of the suburbs, and bereft of the fruits of industrial modernism.