The Leftover City:

Leftover Sites as Disruptors of Urban Narratives in the Work of J.G. Ballard, Jim Jarmusch, and Wim Wenders

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ABSTRACT

During the 1970s and 1980s, emerged a second wave of architectural criticism to Modernism related with the global oil and fiscal crises of the period. This criticism, targeting the issues of the ongoing urbanization, the unlimited spending of resources and the environmental degradation rendered the fragmentation of cities a critical problem for social coherence. In this second period, leftover sites were rediscovered and appeared as a favorite subject in narrative arts. Literature and cinema explored the lyrical role of such sites as allegories of alternative forms of urban life, romantic forms of unlawfulness, and the re-establishment of the senses or the rediscovery of lost identities. In these cases, leftover sites in cities appear as a more complicated phenomenon, one that had already been established and had evolved in cities for more than four decades. Leftover sites became more internalized and they were used to project the profound psychological concerns of the contemporary inhabitants of the city, such as the experience of a lost identity in the city, the shattering of social coherence of urban life, the overwhelming presence of dominant patterns of use in the city, or the city's problematic relation with nature. This article examines the ways that various narrative artistic projects from cinema and literature refer to the presence of the leftover sites in cities. It investigates the way that these artistic projects can form a consistent narrative about alternative forms of urban life, one that exists in parallel to the dominant patterns of use of the city. The article also aims to contribute to the discussion on the role that artistic narratives can play in transcending architectural and urban design stereotypes in acknowledging, and documenting the leftover sites and possibly re-introducing them in the urban environment.

1. LEFTOVER SITES: THE BY-PRODUCTS OF URBAN FRAGMENTATION.

The *Leftover City* is a phenomenon that emerged after the Second World War, grew over the second half of the twentieth century due to urban fragmentation, was acknowledged by theory and practice in the 1970s and 1980s, and continues to influence life in Western cities today. I use the term Leftover City to describe the presence in the city of a sum of sites that are abandoned, underused and, most of the times, neglected by the dominant patterns of urban use. The Leftover City however is something more than a mere sum of sites with similar qualities. It is related with artistic, urban or architectural practices that introduce a creative, holistic understanding of the phenomenon and discusses alternative uses of the urban environment. The leftover sites can result from extraordinary conditions; for example, wars, physical destruction or mass migration. However, they are mainly the by-products or the unintended products of long-term processes, such as the fragmentation of a city due to rapid, uneven and unbalanced development. They can be produced by the spasmodic sprawl of the city, inconsistencies in the built context and discontinuities of landscape, topography and infrastructure, or by a combination of these. They can also result from land ownership issues, policies that separate areas—for example by dividing land into purpose-built plots,—as well as from the errors, the insufficiency, or even the total lack of planning policies.

The phenomenon of leftover sites is generally considered to be negative. Leftover sites are usually linked with negative circumstances and aspects of the city: dirt, garbage, decomposition and abandonment. They are referred to as dump spaces and as voids; they are considered places to be avoided or places in an in-between condition waiting for development. The academic and urban design practitioner Roger Trancik introduced in 1986 the term 'lost space'[1] in order to describe the negative presence of such spaces in the Western cities. According to Trancik, such spaces are the by-products of the urban design intensions that have formed the contemporary cities: the use of car infrastructure, the modernist attitude towards open space, the zoning policies, the unwillingness of public institutions to relate with public space and the abandonment of former industrial, military and transportation uses.[2] Trancik uses the term "leftover" in order to describe the chunks of 'lost space' that remain after the rest of space has been consumed by "positive" design. According to this positivist/negativist binary understanding, these spaces are seen as "negative" sites that should be re-incorporated in the life of the city and become 'positive' again with the use of urban design:

> Generally speaking, lost spaces are the undesirable urban areas that are in need of redesign—antispaces, making no positive contribution to the surroundings or users. They are ill-defined without measurable boundaries, and fail to connect elements in a coherent way. On the other hand they offer tremendous to the designer for urban redevelopment and creative infill and for rediscovering the many hidden resources in our cities.[3]

Fig 1.

necessarily due to their re-design as open public spaces, can help "rediscover the hidden resources" of our urban environments, as Trancik mentions. The leftover sites may address specific needs and aspects of the city's informal living, which official, channelled and fixed patterns of use may ignore and fail to address. Moreover, their often ambivalent legal status or ownership offers a positive alternative to official city policies that tend to exercise authority and are based on controlling activity.

2. THE ROLE OF CRITICAL PRACTICE IN THE UNDERSTANDING OF THE LEFTOVER CITY.

There are architecture and urban practices that have used the phenomenon of leftover sites in ways that transcend the positive/negative dichotomy and have contributed to the holistic view of what I call the 'Leftover City'. The British architect Alison Smithson in her 1977 article "The City Center Full of Holes"[5] argues for the importance of preserving the 'holes' in the city, and for the need of architectural and urban practice to focus on the "abandoned railroad right-of-ways and areas adjacent to freeways".[6] Smithson introduces the term 'holding operations' to describe the way that the city can benefit from these sites without necessarily overcoming their negative connotations of abandonment, but instead by using this abandonment and wilderness as landscape opportunities for creation of an urban landscape and eventually as connecting opportunities between the city centre and the surrounding sprawl.[7] Almost 20 years earlier the Dutch architect Aldo van Eyck was starting his, more than thirty years long, project of the Amsterdam Playgrounds, which, at its peak in the 1970s, numbered 745 playgrounds placed in small- to medium-sized sites with leftover characteristics, scattered over the city in various contexts, such as parks, traffic islands, junkyards and empty plots.[8] Van Eyck's project was based on using abandoned and derelict plots for playgrounds by applying small and cheap alterations, such as paving and adding play objects. Liane Lefaivre and Alexander Tzonis note that "Van Eyck's achievement was to transform leftover city sites from 'blind spots' on a city map into what a contemporary and sympathetically inclined architect and urbanist, John Voelcker, called 'an inescapable reality'".[9] [Fig. 1]

Although Trancik acknowledges the leftover sites' contribution in "rediscovering the many hidden resources of our cities" his general understanding of these spaces is related with the way that many planning policies in Western cities understand today such sites. Many urban policies use the generic term "green spaces" to describe public or private owned leftover sites, which, along with other sites in the city containing wild or cared nature, such as smaller or bigger parks, should form a network of public open accessible spaces. Leftover sites, according to such policies are considered from a utilitarian point of view as sites that should be redesigned and utilised in order to be again organic parts of the network of public spaces. In this way they are not seen as distinguishable from city life or as places that continue bearing characteristics that can be considered as negative.[4]

For the Leftover City however, the negative perceptions of the leftover sites and their in-between character act as a starting point. The Leftover City asks: What are the varied forces, circumstances and actions that make and maintain a site leftover and how do they influence the broader city? The article aims to discuss leftover sites as conditions in the city that, due to their "negative" aura, and not

01. Trancik, Roger. *Finding Lost Space: Theories of Urban Design.* New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1986. p.4
02. Ibid., p.4.
03. Ibid., p.4.
04. See for example the 'Nicosia Local Plan', published by the Department of Town Planning and Housing of the Republic of Cyprus in 2009, with revised editions in 2011 and 2012.
05. Smithson, Alison. 'The City Center Full of Holes.' *Architectural Association Quarterly* 9/2, 3 (1977). p. 11.
06. M'Closkey Karen. 'Mats, Holes, and the Promise of Landscape Urbanism'. In Writing Urbanism Douglas Kelbaugh and Kit Krankel

McCullough (eds.). London: Routledge, 2008. p.122
07. Ibid., p.122
08. Aldo van Eyck's Amsterdam Playgrounds was the most celebrated project which however followed a series of projects that since the early 20th century focused on the idea of 'Junk Playgrounds' by landscape architects, such as the British landscape architect Lady Allen of Hurtwood and the Danish landscape architect Carl Theodor. Lady Allen and Sørensen idea for playgrounds that are placed on abandoned sites or sites destroyed by war and using simple material, such as wood and stone

and modest landscaping was based on their observations on children's ways of informally using abandoned sites for play and the debris they contained for building play-obejets. For more about that see Mara Gutman and Ning De Coninck-Smith (eds), *Designing Modern Childhoods: History, Space, and the Material Culture of Children – An International Reader* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2007), p.5. and Roy Kozlovsky, 'Urban Play, Intimate Space and Postwar Subjectivity', in Vittoria Di Palma et al. (eds), *Intimate Metropolis* (London: Routledge, 2009), p.14.

However beyond Smithson's "preserving the holes" strategy and van Eyck's "inescapable reality" of the leftovers, most of architectural and urban strategies for such spaces are based on the 'negative to positive' stereotype as explained by Trancik. There were mainly some artistic practices, which, during the late twentieth century have raised the creative potentiality of the phenomenon of leftover sites as an outcome of urban fragmentation. Narrative artistic practices especially, such as literature and cinematography, have engaged with leftover sites and urban voids in cities, in many cases more intensively and more clearly than architecture and urban design has done. The investigation of the leftover phenomenon could not overlook such practices because they present aspects of the phenomenon that architecture has been unable to investigate fully by itself, such as the impact on the everyday life of citizens; the psychological impact on the city users; the qualities of neglect, particularly their possible lyrical qualities; and the establishment of a parallel reality to the city in the form of an alternative narrative. The aim of this paper is to question whether the 'positivist' attitude of architecture and urban design is enough in understanding and treating these special sites and to highlight the contribution of the narrative artistic practices, as part of a 'critical practice'[10] in the acknowledging, understanding and assessing the peculiarity and importance of these sites in the urban context.

3. LEFTOVER SITES AS DISRUPTIONS OF THE CITY AND ITS NARRATIVES.

During the 1950s and 1960s, Western economies grew as a result of industrial development, and urban populations grew along with an extensive urban sprawl. The first oil crisis of 1973 and the second energy crisis of 1979 that arose because of the oil embargoes by the Arab countries brought to an end three decades of interrupted post-war Western economic development. Between 1973 and 1975, there was also a stock market crash in the US. The neoliberal economic model, with its conflicting phenomena of euphoria and austerity, emerged during this decade, notably with the governments of Ronald Reagan in the US and Margaret Thatcher in the UK. Mass unemployment was also born during that time, and, as a counterbalance, other phenomena came about, such as environmental awareness or a concern for human rights. During the fiscal crisis of the 1970s, inflation rose above 20 percent, property prices tumbled, and economic growth in many cases reached zero. Between 1969 and 1975, some 500,000 jobs were lost in New York as the local manufacturing industry continued to disperse to the suburbs. The present fiscal and economic crisis has many resemblances to that of the 1970s, and there are financial and political analysts who argue that many of the dead ends in our financial models were built during this decade.[11]

The 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s were three decades that transformed the city as an environment, a context of knowledge and a place of artistic practice. After the growth frenzy that took place in Western economies after the Second World War, it was during these decades that societies understood for the first time that growth was a finite quantity and had a limited perspective. This is when sustainability and the reasonable use of resources reappeared in the debate over possible urban strategies. During these decades, the fragmentation of urban space continued in a more sophisticated way, as a tool for controlling urban space and regulating urban behaviour. Foucault, in his thesis about discipline, argues that: "discipline fixes; it arrests or regulates movements; it clears up confusion; it dissipates compact groupings of individuals wandering about the country in unpredictable ways; it establishes calculated distributions."[12] He notes that the objective of discipline is to prevent spontaneous activity, such as useless wandering, unpredictable movement, or even the grouping of people. He also argues that the means of discipline to control spontaneity is a form of fragmentation, or at least a form of manipulated fragmentation: "the disciplines use procedures of partitioning and verticality, that they introduce, between the different elements at the same level, as solid separations as possible, that they define compact hierarchical networks."[13] Although Foucault here argues for social fragmentation as a means to control society, an equally valid argument is that urban fragmentation is a means to control urban space and the activity within it. However, fragmentation can also work in a subversive way: it can mean a calculated distribution of the relations between the parts, but it can also mean a deregulation and collision between the parts. Fragmentation actually has two faces: it can be an opportunity to control urban space, but it can also be an opportunity to overcome structure and facilitate free use. This duality is obvious in a series of artistic projects, in which fragmentation is expressed simultaneously as a wandering, or as an occupation of a series of leftover spaces in cities. I refer to two films:

09.   John Voelcker was part of the Team 10 and appreciated Van Eyck's work. The specific expression is cited in Lefaivre and Tzonis, *Humanist Rebel*, p. 17

10.   The British architect and academic Jane Rendel argues about a 'critical spatial practice' as a hybrid between architectural and artistic practices, where architectural practice is benefited by the critical approach that art can offer. As Rendell argues:'As a mode of cultural production that enjoys a greater degree of separation from economic and social concerns , art can offer architecture a chance for critical reflection and action'. In: Jane Rendell. *Art and Architecture. A Place Between*. I.B.Turis: London, 2006. p.191.

11.   Kim Phillips-Fein, 'The legacy of the 1970s fiscal crisis', The Nation, 16 April 2013, http:// www.thenation.com/article/legacy-1970s-fiscal-crisis/ (accessed 7 March 2017).

12.   Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (London: Penguin Books, 1991), p. 219.

13.   13 Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p. 220.

Fig 2.

Jim Jarmusch's *Permanent Vacation* and Wim Wenders' *Wings of Desire* and one novel: J.G. Ballard's *Concrete Island*. In these three narrative artistic practices the authors document leftover sites as conditions of exception in the urban environment and establish narratives that introduce alternative patterns of using the city, which at the same time establish alternative understandings of the city. These artistic projects discuss these spaces as conditions of pause, disruption, estrangement or hesitation that, as I will explain below, contain the sense of abandonment or dissociation from the urban environment and, at the same time, the sense of freedom, expectation and perspective.

The Barcelona-born architect and theorist Ignasi de Sola-Morales has discussed the existence of such spaces in contemporary cities. He notices that in the 1970s there was a recurrent theme in many photographers' work: "the empty, abandoned space in which a series of occurrences have taken place seems to subjugate the eye of the photographer."[14] He refers to David Plowden,[15] but also to other photographers of the era, such as John Davies, Thomas Struth, Jannes Linders, Manolo Laguillo, and Olivio Barbieri. [Fig. 2] These spaces, he argues, stand outside the "effective circuits and productive structures" of the city. He uses the umbrella term *terrain*

vague to describe not only large-scale spaces, but also small-scale leftover spaces with similar characteristics; the word *vague* refers to a condition of emptiness that these spaces produce, as well as to a condition of availability that they promise.[16] As he argues:

> The relationship between the absence of use, of activity, and the sense of freedom, of expectancy is fundamental to understanding the evocative potential of the city's terrains vagues. Void, absence, yet also promise, the space of the possible, of expectation.[17]

Although these spaces are usually received negatively, this should not be so, because, as he argues, "this absence of limit, precisely contains the expectations of mobility, vagrant roving, free time, liberty."[18] Sola-Morales highlights the importance of these spaces in our contemporary understanding of the world. Building his argument on the ideas of the German philosopher Odo Marquand and the Bulgarian-French philosopher Julia Kristeva, he describes our era as one of 'estrangement',[19] which has been caused by the separation of the person from his or her environment, the division from his or her identity, the estrangement from the city, and the attraction to negativity and negative feelings. Sola-Morales argues that the needs of the contemporary divided person are different from those of the person who lived the ideals of modernisms and the industrial revolution, for today the individual looks to the city "for forces instead of forms, for the incorporated instead of the distant, for the haptic instead of the optic, the rhizomatic instead of the figurative".[20] He argues that the *terrains vagues* can offer these qualities, and, as a result, they are spaces that we should preserve in cities. More than that, they can become the spaces where the modern city subject can liberate him or herself. On the other hand, he argues that the role of architecture becomes problematic because its usual tools—the distant, the optic, the figurative—can be catastrophic when applied to these fragile spaces. Instead, he proposes that architecture should be concerned with continuing the existing qualities of these sites, and with cultivating their existing contradictory elements, instead of trying to regulate them.

14. Ignasi de Sola-Morales, 'Terrain vague', in C. Davidson (ed.), *Anyplace* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1995), p. 119.
15. During the 1970s and 1980s, the American photographer David Plowden recorded wastelands of various sizes that had resulted from the spasmodic urban sprawl in American cities. These spaces created no particular meaning as they were completely cut off from access or just meaninglessly led to a wall. They are dead ends, firewalls, garbage plots, traffic islands, traces of landscape, and by- products of urban infrastructure. Plowden's photographed spaces were the paradoxical outcome of uneven development. They are generally considered the by-products of the prosperity of the late twentieth-century city, but the isolation, dereliction and impersonal character of these spaces create a condition not much different to the post-war condition earlier in the century. The photographs also show the infrastructure of the industrial age in a derelict status that stemmed from the fiscal crisis occurring during the two decades of Plowden's project. The photographs depict the fragmentation of a typical developed Western city in the late twentieth century. However, Plowden provides these sites with an artistic content: his photographs have narrative qualities that consolidate the sites as part of a cultural identity of the Western city. Plowden's project can be considered as presenting an artistic allegory that may even imply a lyrical perspective on these spaces.
16. De Sola-Morales, 'Terrain vague', p. 118.
17. Ibid., p. 119.
18. Ibid., p. 119
19. Ibid., p. 121.
20. Ibid., p. 122.

Sola-Morales's use of photography in order to interpret such spaces is indicative of the inability of architecture and urban design to fully understand the potentials of these sites. Narrative arts like cinema and literature, on the other hand, have used specific urban elements to tell stories of this transformation. Many of these works concern leftover spaces in the city. The protagonists drift aimlessly in a series of leftover spaces, or they are trapped in them, as if the city consisted of a deserted, overlooked or abandoned landscape of leftover sites. These leftover spaces do not appear in the narratives as having a specific use, but they are not exactly unused either. They are mostly inhabited by peculiar individuals or particular groups of people: children, the mentally ill, outlaws, the elderly, or even imaginary creatures, such as angels. Often inaccessible, these leftover spaces are inhabited by beings that cannot fit into or exist at all in any other regulated and productive space of the city. For the narrative arts, these kinds of space form an alternative to the neoliberal city of the 1970s and 1980s, which excludes uses or behaviours that do not fit. In these spaces, an alternative humanity is born, where the outcasts, the less adaptable and the unfit can take their place.

The British academic Charlotte Brunsdon, highlights the use of empty sites in post WWII British cinema. She documents a number of British films of the era that weave their narrative around leftover sites, and she argues that the main function of these sites is to disrupt, both the continuity of the urban environment and that of the filmic narratives that they include them:

> The most obvious empty spaces of post-Second World War British cinema are bombsites: cleared ground, ruined houses, debris—a rich symbolic terrain. The contrast between what is left standing and what has been destroyed offer many possibilities for distinctive visual compositions which proved attractive to filmmakers all over Europe. Bombsites and war damage provide imagery for disruptions in the social fabric which is both material and metaphoric. The question here is how the symbolic possibilities of this imagery are mobilized.[21]

Brunsdon argues that the binary function of these spaces, as disruptions of both the urban and the social fabric acts on a material as well as symbolic level and make them function as opportunities that connect filmic narrative with the place and the geography: "Cinematic empty spaces are, I want to suggest, places of both narrative and analytic possibility, where the challenges of simultaneously thinking aesthetically, historically and geographically about cinema can be articulated." [22]

These examples reveal a quite characteristic quality of the leftover sites that architectural practice may have overlooked: the presence of these sites is not obvious in the city, since they are overlooked and one has to

Figure 3.

spend time and invest effort in a form of initiation or a special mental condition to acknowledge the site and understand its reality. Narrative, as expressed in literature or cinema, is the tool that leads this kind of initiation and can help us understand the special condition that the leftover sites have in the city.

4. J.G. BALLARD'S IMAGINARY ISLANDS OF LONDON.

The idea of discovering the natural landscape as a leftover site overlooked by the city was used in the novel *Concrete Island* by the British novelist J.G. Ballard. Published in 1974, the novel tells the story of the fictional character Robert Maitland, an architect who gets trapped on a traffic island in central London. The traffic island is one of the many blind spots in the city, which are patches of land produced by the extension of the city and its infrastructures [Fig. 3]. The novel describes a story of a violent separation of a man from his familiar world due to a car accident. The first chapter of the book, which is titled "Through the Crash Barrier", narrates the violent passage of the protagonist from the familiar world of the city to a parallel world of the abandoned traffic island, and to the island's inner world where Maitland finds himself after an act of violently penetrating a road barrier.

Like most people who live in the city, Maitland is not used to looking beyond that barrier, although he passes it every morning and evening as he goes to and returns from his office. After his entrapment on the island, he does not accept the site as more than a place of accident. The writer narrates Maitland's struggle to understand the boundaries of the site and his successive attempts to escape the island and return to the real world. However, his injury from the accident, the stiff embankment of the highways that surround the site, the heavy road traffic and the fact that the site eludes the passengers' attention lead to him gradually acknowledging that he might not be in just a hole. He understands that the site can be a piece of land that is isolated, and from which it is not easy to escape. It is the moment when he turns his interest towards the site and changes his perception of the place that he understands that the site might as well be seen as an island, while the surrounding city could be seen as a hostile sea:

Deliberately, he turned his back to the motorway and for the first time began to inspect the island "Maitland, poor man, you're marooned here like Crusoe—If you don't look out you'll be beached here for ever..." He had spoken no more than the truth. This patch of abandoned ground left over at the junction of three motorway routes was literally a deserted island. Angry with himself, Maitland lifted the crutch to strike this meaningless soil.[23]

The protagonist starts to acknowledge the complexity of the island and the fact that it may be a part of a city other than the city he knows. He then starts to see the surrounding city from a different viewpoint, by recognising landmarks as distant islands themselves, and by paying attention to natural circles, like day and night, sunrise and sunset. At the same time, and as a result of his thorough inspection of the island, he recognises important fragments of the memory of the city buried within the site: a water reservoir, an old air-raid shelter from the war, ruins of houses that resemble an abandoned settlement. These fragments give to the site a complexity that reveals layers of its history. The site becomes a place where the city hides its subconscious and its rejected memories. Ballard presents a protagonist who gradually composes out of his findings a mythical city different to the city from which he comes. The island gradually becomes a model of his imagination, where he projects his own memories and desires:

Looking at the shuttered pay-box, Maitland thought unclearly of his own childhood visits to the local cinema, with its endless programmes of vampire and horror movies. More and more, the island was becoming an exact model of his head. His movement across this forgotten terrain was a journey not merely through the island's past but through his own.[24]

Maitland eventually learns how to survive on the island and, after having dominated all its contents, living and not, he identifies himself with it. He then becomes the consciousness of the island. The island becomes real only in the consciousness of its inhabitant, and the desertedness of the island becomes a quality that frees the protagonist from his routines: "Far from compromising it, humans bring the desertedness to its perfection and highest point"[25] argues Deleuze, meaning that the inhabitation of the island is what provides the island with the consciousness of its desertedness and that this, more than a quality of a leftover site, might be a human need.

The novel discusses the idea of an identity of desertedness that parallels the identity of the contemporary city with its programmed patterns of daily life. This identity includes the self-sustained natural environment, junk and debris from an old part of the city, as well as plants, animals, and even real people who find a refuge on the island. In the end, the place is transformed by Ballard's narrative into an island with its own life, memory and identity. The protagonist refuses the real world of the city and disappears into the wild heart of the island. Ballard develops here the idea of a parallel world, in the form of a microcosm that parallels the real world, and which is both at heart of the real world and is overlooked by it. The central idea of the novel is that this microcosm has its own formed identity, with its own protagonists, and that these are largely developed within an abandoned, self-sustained natural environment.

Brunsdon also stresses the desertedness of leftover spaces, posing at the same time an interesting question: What are these empty spaces emptied of? Her answer is that these spaces are at a first place empty of narrative, and this emptiness builds up a form of expectation: "They are immanent: spaces in which something might happen. Something might be found, someone might hide".[26] When one however reads within the longer narratives of the city one can understand that these spaces 'are often not so much 'empty' spaces as 'emptied' spaces, bearing traces of earlier settlement, labour or industry'.[27] Their emptiness also, according to Burnsdon, is related with their distance from what we usually call the social: order, government, control. The narrative techniques, in practices such as that of cinematography and literature, according to Burnsdon, can provide the viewer with an imaginary insight in what 'might happen' in these spaces, and lead the viewer or the reader through their potential.[28]

5. JIM JARMUSCH'S 'BOMBED' NEW YORK.

In 1980, six years after Ballard's novel, and in the aftermath of the 1970s oil crisis, the American film-maker Jim Jarmusch released his film *Permanent Vacation*, which was also his diploma project. Costing $15,000, the cheap production is obvious from the low quality of the sound engineering. On the other hand, the cinematographer Tom DiCillo enriches the film with fascinating scenes from New York, converting it into an imaginary set of bombsites and destroyed places. At the beginning of the film, Jarmusch introduces the protagonist, Chris Parker, a young man in his early 20s, wandering in New York, encountering different people and places,

21. Brunsdon, Charlotte. 'Towards a History of Empty Spaces.' In The City and the Moving Image, Richard Koeck and Les Roberts (eds.). NY: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010. p.96.
Ibid., p.96
22. Ibid., p.91.

23. J.G. Ballard, *Concrete Island* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1974), p. 32.
24. Ballard, *Concrete Island*, p. 70.
25. Gilles Deleuze, Gilles, *Desert Islands and Other Texts 1953–1974* (New York: Semiotext(e), 2004), p. 10.

26. Brunsdon.'Towards a History of Empty Spaces. p.99.
27. Ibid., p.99
28. Ibid., p.99

Fig 4.

Papastergiou, Christos. 2020. "The Leftover City Leftover Sites as Disruptors of Urban Narratives in the Work of J.G. Ballard, Jim Jarmusch, and Wim Wenders." *in*forma 13: 208–221.

in an episodic structure of wandering that recalls that of the *Odyssey*. In his dialogues with other people in the film, Parker repeatedly mentions a supposed destruction that the city suffered as an outcome of a nuclear war. He repeats this statement many times in the film and it is never opposed by any other character, leaving the viewer to wonder whether this is a narrative truth or Parker's delusion.[29]

Jarmusch locates the action in abandoned sites, weedy fields, and empty plots among buildings. All the filming locations create the image of a distressed city. The people that Parker meets and who inhabit the destroyed or abandoned sites are themselves suffering: a distressed girl cries while lying on the backstairs of a building over an abandoned site; an anxious Vietnam war veteran runs through the ruins of a weedy field; children play in the empty lots of an abandoned neighbourhood. The film's narrative helps Jarmusch to focus on sites that are abandoned, neglected and detached from the routine of the city. On the other hand, the neglected sites serve as the natural habitat of characters who can be considered the by-products and pariahs of society: distressed, mentally ill people, poor children and wandering artists. The human pariahs coincide with the pariah sites in a complementary coexistence. This is, for example, the case at a part of the film where the protagonist crosses an abandoned site in-between two buildings. He changes his aimless wandering into a cautioned approach as soon as he listens a woman's singing and speaking to herself apparently in a distressed mental condition. The short but intense dialogue between the two that follows renders the indifferent site into a temporary social place which, as Bunsdon argues, is "filled with potential". [Fig. 4]

The life in these sites, when existing, is not that of a usual routine, but rather that of a 'hesitation'. This is a term that Brunsdon uses to describe a narrative technique in the form of disruption in the flow of the filmic narrative that allows the existing, hidden social narratives of these sites to interfere in the film's main narrative: "These spaces are often the site of what we might call a 'hesitation' in the cinematic image, when it can be read either within the fictional world of the narrative, or as part of extra-filmic narratives about the history of the material city, or, more formally as a self-reflexive moment of urban landscape".[30] This emergence of the hidden city narratives is possible through the peculiar materiality of the site. The allegory of the nuclear aftermath and its victims enables Jarmusch to introduce a view of New York City as still suffer-

ing from the recession of the oil crisis.[31] The result is the creation of a sense of a different New York, one that exists in parallel to the dominant routines. This might also mean a city with two parallel identities. Jarmusch's leftover, abandoned city is not, however, less real than its counterpart, the lively, vibrant city that New York was in the 1970s. The leftover sites in the city are filmed as an environment that appears to be strangely familiar with the peculiar mental condition of the protagonist and his encounters. At the same time, the leftover sites appear strangely familiar to the viewer, as if they depict leftover sites that could be in any city in the world. With this film, Jarmusch highlights the universal character of the leftover sites and the common appeal that they can have for any urban user anywhere in the world.

6. WIM WENDERS'S SITES OF DESIRE.

In 1987, the German film-maker Wim Wenders released *Wings of Desire*. Filmed in West Berlin a few years before the historical reunification of Germany, the film narrates the imaginary story of Damiel and Cassiel, two angels who wander over Berlin in 1981, when the city was still divided by the Wall. The angels' task is to testify on human's spiritual side, and for that reason they persistently collect evidence of this existence: thoughts, events and stories that people recall in their daily lives. The angels collect these by intruding into the minds and lives of people. During their wanderings in the city, the angels come into contact with many inhabitants, with the strict obligation though to remain strictly neutral and not to interfere in the people's routines. Although humans do not acknowledge the angels' existence, there are times when a peculiar kind of spiritual connection is established between the humans and the angels, and this is where the most lyrical parts of the film unfold.

Wenders links these spiritual connections with specific places, which are often places that resemble Ballard's island and Jarmusch's pariah sites: by-products of the city's division, spaces in-between the walls, deserted plots, ruins of buildings from the 1945 bombardment, and traffic islands of newly built infrastructures. The film constructs a subverted conception of the city by overlooking the dominant urban space of streets, buildings and squares, and focusing instead on its leftover, unwanted, overlooked and unclaimed spaces. This is supported by the films cinematography that frames these sites by cutting out the rest of the city. In the film, these sites create a condition of exception that helps Wenders unfold his narrative about the suppressed and

29.   The narrative of destruction reflects the actual condition of the city, which in the aftermath of the 1970s oil crisis and recession was often the theatre of 'relentless acts of vandalism as well as muggings, murders and arson'. For more see: Lazzari, Lorenzo. 'Storytelling "No New York." Necessity for an Extra-ordinary City'. In *Narrative*

Urbanism, MONU Magazine #29, Autumn 2018. p.45.
30.   Ibid., p.91
31.   Kevin Baker has described how crime overtook New York during the 1970s. The fear of people because of the recession and crime led to the devaluation of land, resulting in abandoned, derelict sites. This condition probably inspired

Jarmusch to use the allegory of the 'bombed' and 'destroyed' city. See Kevin Baker, 'Welcome to Fear City', The Guardian, 18 May 2015, http://www.theguardian.com/cities/ 2015/may/18/welcome-to-fear-city-the-inside-story-of-new-yorks-civil-war-40-years-on (accessed 3 March 2017).

Fig 5.

fragile mental life that exists within the concrete presence of daily life. In many parts of the film these spaces of exception are linked by the narrative with exceptional moments in the lives of the protagonists, which interrupt their daily routines: an accident, a decision to commit suicide, or a decision to change one's life. The narrative, based on these separate incidents and the implicit communication between the people and the angels, takes place within frames dominated by the emptiness of these sites. [Fig. 5]

Wenders is generally fascinated by these leftover sites and the quality they offer to the life of the city, and in an interview with Hans Kollhoff, where he highlights the importance of these deserted lots as spaces that have escaped the city planners, he commented: "In Berlin, I think, there is an amazing number of such places which have suddenly appeared. I see the living quality of a city directly in proportion to the possibility of such 'gaps in planning.'"[32] Wenders acknowledges here the importance of such spaces, as they bear a multiplicity of potentials for the city. In his opinion, they can host

desires that have been banished from the city. In the same interview he also argues: "I think the most extraordinary thing about Berlin is that it still contains these little wild areas […] One can't really describe their function. In fact, they have no function, and this is what makes them so pleasant".[33]

Wenders uses the term 'gap' in order to reflect on the leftover sites that he frames in his film. He compares the sites that act as gaps in the continuity of the city with the technique of the filmic gaps that interrupt the continuity of the films narrative in order to help the viewer intrude into the mental condition of a character. He sees these gaps as representatives of the originality of a narrative: "Only those films with gaps in between their imagery are telling stories"[34] but also as carriers of the originality of the urban environment: "I felt that the city defined itself much better where it was empty than where it was full."[35]

Wenders creates in the film the counter-image of a city that consists of unproductive places with no function. The same quality that renders them

32. Hans Kollhoff, 'The city: A conversation', interview with Wim Wenders, Quaderns, 177 (1988), p. 70.

33. Kollhoff, 'The city', p. 70.
34. Wenders, Wim. *The Act of Seeing: Essays and Conversations/ Wim Wenders.* Translated by Michael

Hofmann. London: Faber, 1997. P.99.
35. 35 Ibid., p.98.

useless becomes also the quality that makes them places with potentialities. In them, the spiritual side of humans meets with the material side; the story of the city can be told anew; a new beginning is possible. In one of the final scenes of the film, Marion, a woman with whom one of the angels has fallen in love, sits alone on the sandy ground of one such empty site among the blind walls of buildings. Marion thinks: "I am here, I am free. I can imagine anything. Everything is possible. Now... in this place... a feeling of happiness that I could have forever" [Fig. 6]. Cesare Casarino notes that this scene establishes an urban potentiality of an island within the city, which is emptied after the departure of the circus tent that hosted it, and becomes open to speculation; empty as it is, it creates the expectancy of future events that it could possibly host.[36] The activities that these sites host in the film have to do with speculation and fantasy: a circus, the filming of a film. They are activities that detour from the organised life of the city, either for a short period, as a result of an unexpected event, or as a conscious choice, such as with the nomadic life of the circus people.

Wenders himself argues that these sites can help the "character" of the city emerge in a film.[37] According to him the main carrier of this character is the landscape and its materiality. He characteristically refers to the sand that appears in the empty sites of Berlin, which is also present in the Marion scene emerging through a circle on the ground at the centre of the site, and which represents the original character of Berlin, as a big part of its subsoil consists of sand.[38] The site of the specific scene serves also for Wenders as a representation of the city's memory, and its original character. Wenders describes how the blind wall of the building at the north part of the site, the "gigantic firewall"[39] as he calls it, is an element that implies the specific locality of the film. This seemingly banal element, he argues, is something that one can only meet in Berlin. The wall with its exposed layers, graffiti and time marks, acts as a huge décollage that exposes

the history of the city. As Wenders argues: "Those walls are like history books. They tell you about loss and defeat in history"[40] and he considers to be a loss of urban memory when these walls are renovated and plastered over, as happened with the specific wall after the end of the film: "Finding it was like a dream, and I thought, a place like that won't exist for much longer. That's why we filmed there. In all my films I have looked for locations that might disappear before too long."[41]

7. UNCOVERING THE LEFTOVER CITY: THE ROLE OF THE CREATIVE PRACTICES.

Although one is American and the other is European, Jarmusch and Wenders appear to be linked in various ways. They have often used the same collaborators in their films, such as the Dutch cinematographer Robby Muller. According to the British novelist and film-maker Chris Petit, they were both influenced by the American photographer Robert Frank.[42] Jarmusch, according to the film theorist Luis Armand, was "ostensibly mentored by Wenders (Jarmusch's second feature, *Stranger than Paradise* (1984), was partly shot on B/W stock left over from *The State of Things*—on whose soundtrack Jarmusch incidentally appears as a member of the New York-based no wave band Del-Byzanteens (keyboard and vocals))."[43] Although the work of both film-makers declares an obvious influence from Ballard, there is no specific evidence that the three were somehow linked biographically. On the other hand, all three belong to the same generation of artists who based their work on the found conditions of an estranged late twentieth-century urban environment. Petit, who links the three artists as the main influences of his own work,[44] also argues that "boredom, relentlessness and drift, were the main impulses of the late twentieth century".[45] These three conditions—boredom, relentlessness, and drift—become the main themes in many artistic works of this generation of artists, and they link their legacy with the leftover sites as places where boredom, relentlessness and drift become possible and creative.

36. Cesare Casarino, 'Fragments on "Wings of Desire" (Or, Fragmentary representation as historical necessity)', Social Text, 24 (1990).
37. Wenders. *The Act of Seeing: Essays and Conversations/ Wim Wenders.* p.98 38
38. Ibid., p.98.
39. Ibid., p.105.
40. Ibid., p.105
41. Ibid., p.105.
42. Luis Armand, 'der amerikanische freund: petit/wenders/jarmusch', 3:AM Magazine, 18 March 2017, https://www.3ammagazine.com/3am/der-amerikanische-freund-petitwendersjarmusch/ (accessed 16 October 2018).
43. Armand, 'der amerikanische freund'.
44. Chris Petit, 'Drive-by shooting', The Guardian, 8 June 2007.
45. Armand, 'der amerikanische freund'.

All three artistic projects unfold their narratives in leftover sites that share recurrent qualities. First, they all bear an informal character, and they do not fit into the usual categories of urban spaces, but rather form a distinct category, or an exception. Second, they do not have formal uses, although this does not mean that they are not used. They host events, which can be festive or awkward, refer to the mental world or the memory, or at times even be irrational. They are seemingly empty of social context, however the projects may unveil the presence of their own hidden and peculiar social micro-narratives. These events usually contradict the common routines of the city and involve people who are either outcasts or are in a condition of exception or transition. Third, these sites are always defined by a frame that distinguishes them from the rest of the city. At times, this frame can take the form of a physical boundary, and at times it can take the form of a distinct materiality of the site itself, like nature in a wild form or a junkyard. At all times, this physical frame is accompanied by a mental frame that is experienced by the protagonist. The protagonists appear, therefore, both physically and mentally isolated in these spaces. Their isolation is, however, temporary and transitional, and it eventually brings them to a state of self-consciousness, freedom, optimism, or even euphoria. The consequence of the physical framing of the site is that the leftover site is always introverted and eventually creates a context of place and time that distinguishes the site from the rest of the city and gives it the form of a heterotopia. The fourth characteristic of the leftover sites in the novel and the films is that they are used as the canvas for the unfolding of allegorical stories of peculiar users, such as castaways, wanderers and angels. In this way, the authors create a view of the city that is different from the rational view that we usually have; this alternative view is spiritual, lyrical and connected with the deepest fears or distant memories.

These three works are the results not only of crisis but also of the emergence of new ideas about the city, the appreciation of its negative aspects, its lyrical transformation and the promise of the liberation of the person. The works describe the phenomenological qualities of leftover sites, but they also construct the psychological world of the sites' users. The result is the depiction of unique dialectic relationships between a person and the site. It is at a leftover site that Robert Maitland decides to change his life in Concrete Island; it is at leftover sites that the angels and the people are able to communicate in Wings of Desire; and it is in leftover sites that Chris Parker has his most important life-changing encounters. Like the three artists, Sola-Morales sees the leftover sites as referring to the subject of contemporary cities, namely the person; the novel and films unfold the problematic about the individual's estrangement and loss of identity, and they negotiate his or her freedom.

The three artistic examples elaborate the existence of a non-utilitarian city that is parallel to the familiar city of daily urban routines. This counter-world, although ignored and overlooked by the dominant routines, exists and develops its own identity and microcosm. The city that consists of such spaces forms a Leftover City, a parallel city within the city, which is the sum of the possibilities of these leftover spaces. The Leftover City, as expressed in narrative arts from the 1970s to the 1990s, is a quest for alternative identities in the city. The parallel city of the leftovers has an elusive presence in the city and, in order to be understood, it has to be uncovered. A key theme in this article has been the existing, or found, character of the leftover spaces. I have explained how these spaces were not invented or imposed, but were instead found or uncovered. The three artistic projects use narrative techniques and their own means of representation, such as the framing of the camera that distinguishes a reality different from the dominant reality of the cities they film; in this way, they uncover the significance of the leftover sites. If uncovering is a strategy, then what can be the tools for acknowledging and uncovering the qualities of the leftover spaces? The acknowledgment of their existence in the city and the uncovering of their presence are needed in order to unfold their possibilities.

Narrative artistic practices, such as cinematography and literature can be essential in this process of uncovering the peculiarity of leftover sites. Firstly, by acknowledging and documenting their presence in the city. The architect and academic Francois Penz argues that the sum of films that have been produced about architecture and the city in the last 120 years constitute "an extraordinary archive of lived and practised spaces, a formidable reservoir of post-occupancy studies."[46] Based on Henri Lefebvre's research on everyday life[47] Penz mentions that films and literature can be used as fields for investigating the extraordinariness of ordinary daily life, or what is "extraordinary within the ordinary."[48] Above I have discussed how Wenders sees the filming of the leftovers sites as essential in documenting the originality of a city, which, he notes, is lost along with the disappearance of these spaces from the city. He talks about this when he describes his experience in looking for the appropriate site to film the Circus scene in the *Winds of Desire*: "Finding it was like a dream, and I thought, a place like that won't exist for much longer. That's why we filmed there. In all my films I have looked for locations that might disappear before too long."[49] Narrative artistic practices and especially films become the means to document such sites and preserve them in history as cultural products of the city.

46.   Penz, François. *Cinematic Aided Design: An Everyday Life Approach to Architecture.* London: Routledge, 2017. p.4.

47.   Lefebvre, Henri. *The Urban Revolution.* Translated by Robert Bononno. London: University of Minnesota Press, 2003.

48.   Ibid., p.39.
49   Wenders. *The Act of Seeing: Essays and Conversations/ Wim Wenders.* p.105.

The relation between films and leftover sites is an area that transcends the role of their documentation. It has to do with a critical practice that can be developed for understanding and re-incorporating them in the life of the city as a parallel condition. Architecture and urban design can benefit from the critical tools and the concepts that the narrative artistic practices, such as cinematography and literature use to describe such sites. Brunsdon has called it filmic "hesitation" while Wenders has called it filmic "pause". Both conceptions see the filming of leftover sites as disruptions in the flow of the film. The disruption of the film's narrative and its sequence of images allow the production of a space where the viewer can reflect on the films 'reality' and perceive the possibilities of the site. Architecture and urban design can very much benefit from the hesitation and pause these artistic practices can offer in the understanding of these sites and their role in the city.

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