

Material Consequences: Detroit and the Shadow of Growth by Andrew Zago

Detroit has experienced a drastic decline over the past 40 years highlighted by the current United States Census which estimates the population to be 911,402, less than half of its 1950 population. While other cities have experienced extreme de-population in the past century, Detroit is unique in the size and speed of its decline and its iconic notoriety. While Detroit shrank, other cities experienced unprecedented growth. Indeed, one of the most disconcerting aspects of the decline of the city of Detroit is its juxtaposition with thriving and rapidly expanding suburbs. It is the hollowed center of an expanding ring.

There are specific mechanisms that can be identified as agents in Detroit's decline, from the aging of industrial infrastructure to racism, but the broader mechanism it reveals is more disturbing in its implication for both urbanism and industrial growth. In his book, *Unknown Quantity*, Paul Virilio comments on the nature of accident. He convincingly concludes that every technology creates - at its inception - the potential for its own accident as an implicit and ultimately unavoidable corollary. In Detroit we see that such accidents needn't be the sudden catastrophe of a car accident or a Chernobyl, that they can unfold over decades with awful patterns that are only discernible in retrospect. If these material consequences are the unavoidable byproducts of development, then a careful study of Detroit may be indispensable to our understanding of the limits and consequences of urban growth.

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