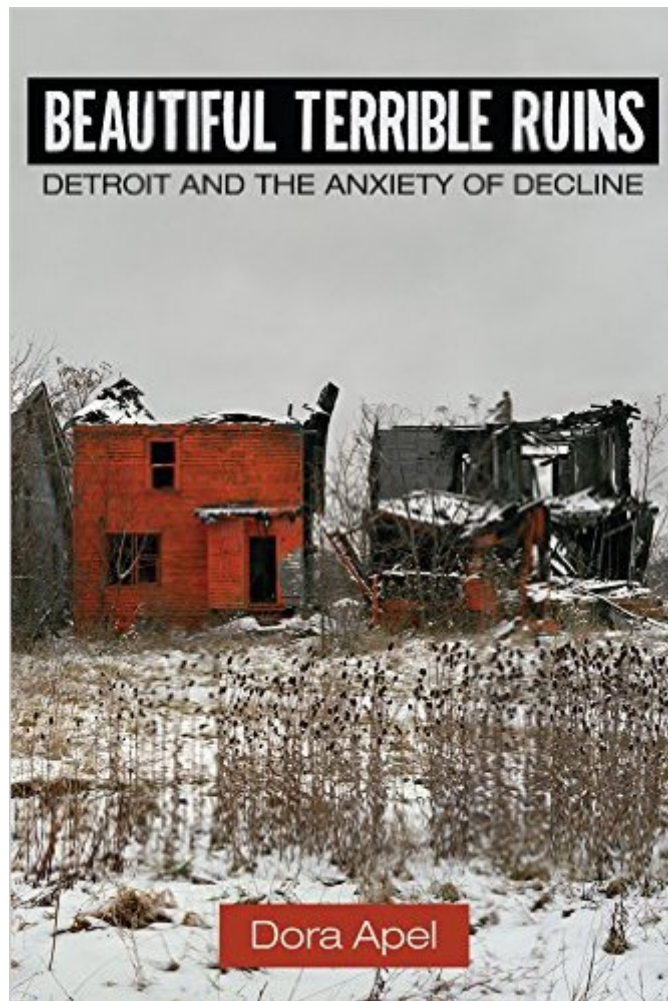


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# Beautiful Terrible Ruins: Detroit And The Anxiety Of Decline



## Synopsis

Once the manufacturing powerhouse of the nation, Detroit has become emblematic of failing cities everywhere—the paradigmatic city of ruins—and the epicenter of an explosive growth in images of urban decay. In *Beautiful Terrible Ruins*, art historian Dora Apel explores a wide array of these images, ranging from photography, advertising, and television, to documentaries, video games, and zombie and disaster films. Apel shows how Detroit has become pivotal to an expanding network of ruin imagery, imagery ultimately driven by a pervasive and growing cultural pessimism, a loss of faith in progress, and a deepening fear that worse times are coming. The images of Detroit's decay speak to the overarching anxieties of our era: increasing poverty, declining wages and social services, inadequate health care, unemployment, homelessness, and ecological disaster—in short, the failure of capitalism. Apel reveals how, through the aesthetic distancing of representation, the haunted beauty and fascination of ruin imagery, embodied by Detroit's abandoned downtown skyscrapers, empty urban spaces, decaying factories, and derelict neighborhoods help us to cope with our fears. But Apel warns that these images, while pleasurable, have little explanatory power, lulling us into seeing Detroit's deterioration as either inevitable or the city's own fault, and absolving the real agents of decline—corporate disinvestment and globalization. *Beautiful Terrible Ruins* helps us understand the ways that the pleasure and the horror of urban decay hold us in thrall.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Last week I received my usual daily email from a digital magazine that is in the forefront of creating and reporting political news. In the center of the page was an advertisement called Nine Scenes from A Changing Detroit. It is full of optimistic and promising chatter about the new Detroit that is emerging due to business and government coalitions. Whole Foods, a charter school (and the privatization that comes with that), a central market and much more all powered by a \$100 million investment from JP Morgan Chase and CO. I had just read Beautiful, Terrible, Ruins so I viewed this with a different lens than I might have otherwise. While I live in a city that has gone through its own machinations with gentrification and the suffering and anguish that comes with it, Beautiful Terrible Ruins makes it clear that the winners blames the losers and that this is just the way of crony capitalism. The concept of "ruins" is new for me and I appreciated how clearly Dora Apel defined it and her critiques of it. I felt challenged by the book and wholly immersed in it. The art demonstrated her theoretical perspective and give life to it. Now when I am walking in Boston, in an area that has been almost fully gentrified I see the new construction of multi-million dollar condos as the ruins and it's pretty heartbreaking. I thank Edelweiss for giving me the opportunity to review this book for an honest opinion.

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