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The Excess and Potential of the Movie Theatre Ruin: The Midnight Star

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Abstract:

Abandoned and derelict movie theatres are some of the most striking of contemporary ruins. Movie theatres of the interwar 'picture palace' era were designed to create an atmosphere of leisure, fantasy and escapism, qualities which continue to inform understandings of these places in ruins. Movie theatre ruins have a heightened quality of excess, both in terms of their original atmosphere of fantasy, and their obsolescence as ruins. Theatre ruins are vital entities, sites of temporal flux and multiple, intersecting narratives provoking strong affective responses. This narrative potential is investigated using the Midnight Star theatre in suburban Sydney as a case study. Drawing on the theatre's material presence and media traces, this article explores the narrative and critical power of the theatre ruin in the contemporary urban landscape.

Keywords: ruins; cinema; memory; temporality; derelict architecture

The Midnight Star, an abandoned movie theatre on the major thoroughfare of Parramatta Road, Sydney, is one of the city's most striking and persistent ruins. A place of pause amid the streetscape, it is a site for observation, reflection and speculation. It is one of a few remaining of the once plentiful suburban movie theatres constructed during the peak "picture palace" period in the 1920s and 30s. These theatres were hubs of social life and leisure, part of everyday life and routines as they were also spaces of otherness, of fantasy and transformation. During its operation, and in its current state of dereliction, the Midnight Star has been a place concurrently incorporated within, and existing outside of, urban order, routines, and temporalities. This article traces the persistence of this identity into the movie theatre ruin by collecting some of the stories and interpretations of the Midnight Star across its history.

The Midnight Star's grand but dilapidated form stands out from the surrounding utilitarian architecture of commercial buildings, car yards and newly-built apartment complexes. Despite the peeling paint and boarded-up windows the building has a solid appearance, its capacious size accentuated by the adjacent vacant lot which grows wild with patches of grass and clover. Built in the mid 1920s, it opened as the Homebush Theatre cinema in 1925 and moved through a variety of entertainment uses – an ice rink, a theatre restaurant – until becoming vacant, at least officially, in the 1990s. Its evocative name arises from its last use as the Midnight Star Reception Centre, the signs for which remain on the theatre's facade.



Figure 1: Midnight Star, Homebush, 2015. Photo: Vanessa Berry.

Writing the Ruin

Before turning to an examination of the Midnight Star and its presence in the urban landscape in detail, I will consider "ruins of the recent past, dynamic and unsettled" (DeSilvey and Edensor 466), and in particular movie theatre ruins, as sites of narrative potential.

All places "stretch through time" with a multiplicity of possible readings (Massey 188). This multiplicity is highlighted in the case of the ruin, where stories incessantly "fill in the gaps" in its fractured material form (Beasley-Murray 215). Ruins contain and generate a multiplicity of narratives as they confound linearity. They are sites of intersecting temporalities, equally present, past and future (Edensor, *The Ghosts of Industrial Ruins* 834). A sequential narrative can be constructed in the form of a timeline charting changes in ownership and use, however this "neat and tidy" approach does not fully address how places are a "conjunction of many histories and many spaces" (Massey 191) nor the vital, suggestive and speculative properties of the ruin which emerge through observation, urban folklore and artistic and literary responses.

The plenitude and complexity of these narratives suggests other, non-linear or spatial forms for presenting stories. Rather than a linear historical narrative, engagement with places through their materiality can instead produce a "constellation" of stories (DeSilvey 405). The notion of the constellation used here is derived from Walter Benjamin and a form of history "which link[s] past and present in a non-linear network" (Orley 6). In the *Arcades Project* Benjamin describes how "image is that wherein what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation" (463). The constellation provides a spatial metaphor for writing places, foregrounding connections, interrelationships between fragments, and a diversity of readings. This is especially pertinent in the case of ruins, which exist as incomplete, temporally complex, and fragmentary.

Beasley-Murray suggests that writing ruins requires a balance of material engagement and narratives of restoration, through a process of ventriloquism (215). Alternatively, rather than speaking for the ruin, as ventriloquism indicates, another approach is to write with the ruin. British geographers Lorimer and Murray approached the ruin of St. Peter's Seminary in Cardross, Scotland as "a forum for open investigation," letting the ruin "have its say" (58). They do this through a process of questioning, using inscriptions found within the ruin as responses, which are used as generative prompts for exploring the ruin's multiple narratives. This approach incorporates the vital nature of the ruin, as an active entity that shapes and directs interpretations.

Taking up DeSilvey and Edensor's suggestion of further scholarship into the sensual and affective experience of the ruin, and the ruin's material vitalism (480), the Midnight Star can be investigated as a "forum for open investigation" (Lorimer and Murray 58) through its material, media and archival traces. The ruin's discontinuities and multiplicities are generative elements, suggesting the density of narratives

that can potentially exist within such spaces. Within the confines of a textual essay, the multiplicity of these narratives can be suggested by an openness to stories of connection and speculation, and an insistence on the ruin as an incomplete space of gaps and cracks and traces.

The Theatre Ruin

Amid the diversity of contemporary ruins scholarship there has been a focus on industrial ruins. Ruined factories and industrial sites have been interpreted as sites of play (Edensor et al.), of memory (Mah *Industrial Ruination*), of re-use (Göbel) and of critique and transgression (Doron; Edensor *Industrial Ruins*). The factory ruin's subversive potential becomes apparent by the shift from "intensively managed" and regulated space to a space of disorder (Edensor, *Industrial Ruins* 87). The factory ruin is also explicitly connected to the political, economic, and social processes of deindustrialisation. As deindustrialisation exists as a network of processes, the form of the industrial ruin exists in a similar state of fluidity. Alice Mah writes of such places — abandoned factories, former industrial zones, brownfield land — as within a process of ruination, rather than in a "fixed form," "a snapshot of time and space within a longer process of ruination" (*Industrial Ruination* 11). Analysing these places involves "reading processes within processes," attuned to the interconnection between the physicality of the ruin and social and economic processes (129).

Theatre ruins have an atmosphere distinct from those of industrial, domestic or utilitarian ruins, arising from their origins as spaces of leisure and fantasy. While they share the temporal and processual qualities of industrial ruins, their form engages different histories and memories. In 1926, at the peak of picture palace construction in Europe, Siegfried Kracauer described Berlin's movie theatres as an "optical fairyland" designed to engage the masses through sensory stimulation (91). Theatre architects of this period worked explicitly to create "a total environment consistent with the make-believe, artificiality, or escapist content of the films" screened in these theatres (Thorne 5). Attention to exterior and interior colour, texture and form aimed to create a heightened, pleasurable environment for cinema patrons. The ornate and ornamental interiors of these movie theatres were aspirational, designed as "tangible expression[s] of hopes and dreams" (Lee and Valentine xi). Neo-classical references such as columns, statues, and urns, as well as palatial sweeping staircases and velvet upholstery further characterised these spaces as spatially and temporally apart from their primarily urban or suburban surroundings.

The cavernous space inside a picture palace movie theatre was designed to inspire awe, an emotional response linked to a sense of escape and possibility, a chamber designed for sensory and synesthetic experiences (Lee and Valentine xi). The fullest expression of this was the "atmospheric theatre" of the 1920s, a movie theatre design devised by American architect John Eberson. Atmospheric theatre interiors evoked a Mediterranean open-air amphitheatre, with columns, statues, and ceilings painted to resemble the night sky, enhanced by projections of drifting clouds. Australian theatres such as the Capitol in Sydney, and the Forum in Melbourne, were designed in this style.

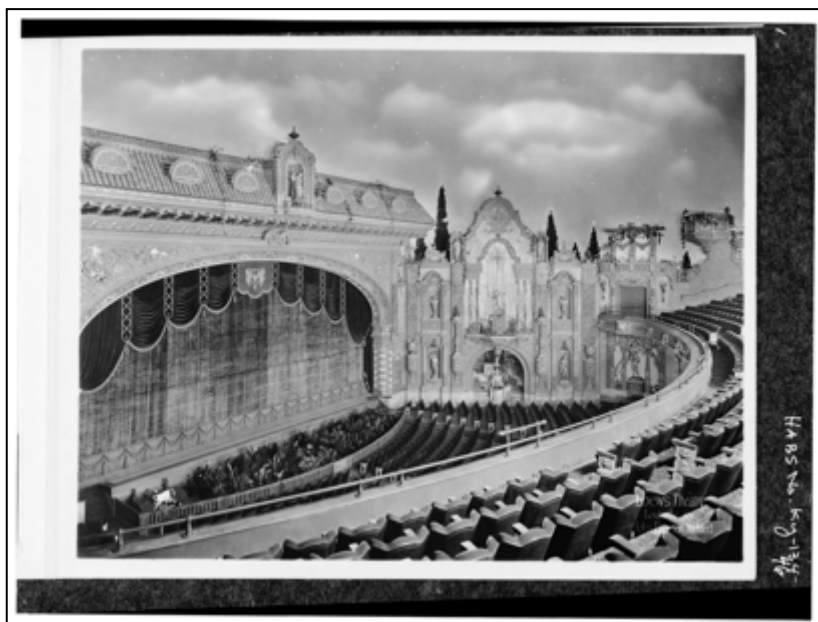


Figure 2: Loew's Theatre, An Atmospheric Theatre in Kentucky, USA: View of auditorium from balcony showing the atmospheric ceiling. Source: Wikimedia Commons.

While the movie theatres of suburban Sydney were more restrained than these atmospheric theatres, they were nevertheless designed with an atmosphere of pleasure and escapism in mind. In the theatre ruin the remains of architectural and design elements that were chosen to evoke luxury, relaxation and leisure give it poignancy. Walter Benjamin wrote of the resonance of architectural intentions in encountering grand ruins: "in the ruins of great buildings the idea of the plan speaks more impressively than in lesser buildings" (*The Origin of German Tragic Drama* 235). The ruined theatre's decaying materiality can provide a sense of fantastic aspirations, past moments of inception and intention, failed or broken, provoking speculation on what happened for this place to fall into decline.

In ruins the symbolic effect of the movie theatre is also heightened: if the factory is broadly symbolic of industrialisation, the picture palace symbolises media technology, as well as leisure, imagination and a retreat from the everyday that is nevertheless an accessible part of the local built environment. Movie theatres "conjoin the mundanity and materiality of bricks and mortar with the worlds of fantasy and the imagination" (Kuhn 141). They are concurrently spaces of dream and of ritual (Richards 1), a dual identity which carries through into the theatre ruin. In the case of the *Midnight Star*, rituals of cinemagoing are replaced by rituals of surveillance, of urban exploration, and of the daily rhythms of the Parramatta Road environment.

Highlighted in the movie theatre ruin is the decline of what was once a key social space. As studies of cinema experience have shown it is often the social aspects of cinema-going, rather than the films themselves, that have the strongest presence in memory (Allen; Bowles; Cork; Kuhn). The memories of Sydney cinemas shared by members of Facebook cinema nostalgia groups such as "Sydney Cinemas Flashback" indeed support this, with stories of first dates, friends and encounters attached to specific Sydney cinemas. In Kuhn's ethnohistorical study of British cinemagoing in the 1930s, she notes how "place is extraordinarily insistent" in cinemagoers' accounts, particularly the locations of local movie theatres, and the current uses of these former theatres (17).

Alice Mah uses the term "living memory" to describe how memories bound up in ruins exist dynamically within the present and are grounded in everyday lived experiences (*Industrial Ruination* 96). As Kuhn identifies, cinemagoing is remembered as "part of the fabric of daily life," part of people's daily and weekly routines (100), as well as cinemas being places of "magical ambience" (224), where people could be transported away from their everyday lives through the space of the theatre and cinematic spaces of the films.

These elements are present in a description of the Homebush Theatre (or *Vogue*, as it was then known) that opens Thomas Keneally's travel memoir of the American southwest. He describes how his obsession with this landscape began with his viewing of westerns as a young man at the *Vogue* in the 1940s and

50s. He describes the surrounding suburb as a place "noted mainly for its abattoirs and for its biscuit factory," but the picture theatre was "as cinemas were everywhere – our place of dreams and our secular cathedral." Keneally also remembers the effect of the building's architecture, its sweeping staircase and "statuary, moldings and stucco grandeur" (3).

Other forms of "living memory" include experiences of encountering the theatre as a ruin, as described in detail in posts on Sydney history and urban exploration blogs (From the Sports Desk; Wayne), or discussions on Facebook groups such as "Lost Sydney." These recorded encounters with the theatre are manifestations of memories held within individuals and communities, those who regularly saw films there, who encountered the theatre in its different incarnations, who pass by it during their daily commute, or who have memories of similar suburban picture theatres. Other forms address the forgotten places and stories of suburban cinemas, such as the Ryszard Dabek artwork *Forgotten Foundation*. This work of "cinematic archaeology" combined archival footage of the demolition of the Marrickville Kings movie theatre in 1971, with contemporary footage of the same location, addressing the "ghosts of the recent past" (Dabek "Forgotten Foundation").

Encountering the Midnight Star

Parramatta Road, one of Sydney's oldest thoroughfares, runs west from the city centre. The road was established by 1794 although like many of Sydney's major roads it incorporated Aboriginal walking paths (Foster). The road is a problematic and often controversial thoroughfare and has been throughout its history (Wotherspoon). Whereas in the 19th and early 20th century the road's poorly maintained condition was of primary concern, the focus has shifted in contemporary times to its surrounding built environment.

Currently much of the built environment surrounding Parramatta Road is run-down and decaying, an effect of changing patterns of commerce and industry and the relentless and ever-increasing traffic. Former industrial and commercial sites are gradually being redeveloped, predominately into medium and high density housing. This ongoing transformation is the road's future and the impending redevelopments give an intermediacy to the former industrial sites and dilapidated buildings. It is with a sense of transience I observe the blackened remains of the Brescia furniture warehouse burnt out in 2006, or the rows of empty shops that were once local grocers, chemists and drapers.



Figure 3: Abandoned Shops, Parramatta Road, Concord, 2015. Photo: Vanessa Berry.

There is a tension between this perceived intermediacy and transience and the physicality of these ruined sites. On the one hand they appear tenuous, yet in many cases they have remained as ruins for decades and continue to exist as such. The fragmented and episodic narratives that are suggested by the

Midnight Star's presence amid the Parramatta Road streetscape arise from its many years as a ruin, its history of use, and the speculations and narratives of imagination and possibility its ruined state inspires.



Figure 4: Midnight Star Facade, 2015. Photo: Vanessa Berry.

Encountering the Midnight Star as it currently stands, the first impressions of it are of its neo-classical facade, the curved carapace of its tin roof, and the size of the space which it encloses. It is also immediately noticeable as a ruin. The facade displays the hallmarks of an abandoned building: boarded up and broken windows, grime-streaked paint, graffiti, weeds. Observing the Midnight Star from across the Parramatta Road intersection, as cars are hastened or held by the traffic lights, is to become aware of its stillness in contrast to the surrounding scene. As in many ruins, the site's "reciprocating natural and human ecologies" (Jorgensen and Tylecote 457-8) are particularly noticeable. The building bears the marks of slow processes of decay, water stains, peeling paint, cracks, weeds. The momentary energy of a spraypainted name occasionally intercedes but the building mostly operates on a timescale of material deterioration. This decay-time sustains the identity of the movie theatre as a site of alternative temporality. In the movie theatre time is "qualitatively different from ordinary time... more elastic, more flexible, more giving" (Kuhn 224). This flexibility is also present in the ruin's complex temporality, which sustains simultaneous past, present and future narratives.

As a ruin the Midnight Star exists both in and out of step with its surroundings. Close up, the immediate impression is of a building under scrutiny and surveillance. The theatre and its surrounds are marked with traces — the litter of security company cards, the graffiti along the side walls — that this is a place observed and interacted with. The concertina doors at the entrance are blocked off by metal fencing. Poked through the shank of the heavy, new padlock on the side gate is a crisp blue carbon copy receipt from a security company. It reports a call out the night before in response to the alarm. "No fresh damage found," it notes, "rubbish all around" and "no person seen onsite."



Figure 5: Side Gate Lock, Midnight Star Theatre, 2015. Photo: Vanessa Berry.

This object is a reminder that the Midnight Star is incorporated into the present-day urban environment, despite the building's abandoned appearance. As much as the Midnight Star can be thought of as an interruption to orderly space, it is also a place integrated into mundane urban routines: surveillance by security guards; scrutiny by motorists as they wait at the adjacent traffic lights and the pedestrians passing by on their way to and from the busy Teachers Credit Union head office next door; historical society working bees to remove graffiti. Such rhythms of routine exist in counterpoint with the slow processes of material decay present in the ruin. As with the relationship between movie theatres and their local communities, these routines enmesh the ruin within a wider order, even as it remains a site of otherness or difference in the urban landscape.

The facade can be read as a collection of past identities, links to its history and chronology. The names visible on the building are its bookends, recording its first and last identities. High up on each side of the facade are the letters HT, for Homebush Theatre, painted entwined to form an emblem. This monogram is a record of the theatre's initial identity, a name which in contemporary use mostly appears in historical or heritage documents.

In 1933 the Homebush Theatre was one of 115 movie theatres in the Sydney suburbs (Spearritt 220). It then changed its name to the Homebush Vogue in 1939 and operated as a cinema until 1959. Its trajectory conformed to the general pattern of Sydney suburban cinemas' boom and bust. Many of these had been built in the 1920s and 30s as extravagant picture palaces, adorned with interior and exterior decoration in the art deco style. By the 1960s, with the increasing popularity of television, movie theatre buildings were rapidly being repurposed or demolished. After its days as a cinema the Homebush Theatre became an ice skating rink in the 1960s and 70s, and then a reception centre in the 1980s before officially closing in 1996 (Jones).

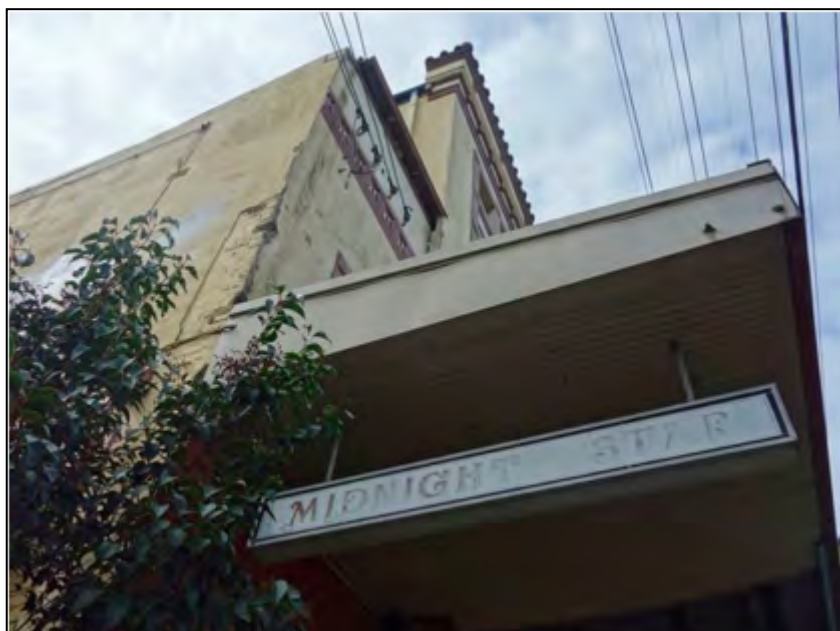


Figure 6: Midnight Star Sign. 2015. Photo: Vanessa Berry.

It is the remaining signs on the facade at street level that have given the building its most persistent colloquial name, the Midnight Star. "Midnight Star Reception Centre" is painted above the doorway in a fantasy, curled-serif script and again on a sign overhanging the street. The reception centre operated alongside the Niterider Theatre restaurant, for which an ad remains on the facade promoting "sing-a-long laugh-a-long clap-a-long" entertainment. The Niterider, featuring an American Wild West theme, existed at the tail end of a proliferation of theatre restaurants around Sydney. Arising in the 1960s, these restaurants themed around a theatrical production provided an alternative to the "essentially domestic and miniature experience of television" (Milne 110). Other theatre restaurants also operated out of former cinema buildings: the popular Music Hall Theatre Restaurant occupied the once-Hoyts Southern Cross cinema in Neutral Bay from 1966-1980.

Former movie theatres were in rich supply in the 1960s, as cinema-going audiences dwindled. Once busy, social spaces, many cinemas became vacant and as large, ornate buildings, designed to accommodate hundreds if not thousands of people, their uses were restricted. Many were demolished in the 1960s and 70s to build carparks or office buildings, a process recorded in a series of 16mm films by documentarians Roger McKenzie and Bernie Kent (Dabek "The Roger McKenzie Collection"), and Barry Sharp's *A Pictorial History of Sydney Suburban Cinemas*. Other former cinemas became ice skating or roller rinks, retaining their connection to spaces of leisure.

Over decades there has been a progressive demolition of suburban cinemas as their alternative uses have become increasingly limited. The Midnight Star is now one of the few remaining picture palace buildings in Sydney. Some such as the Hayden Orpheum, Roseville Cinema and Randwick Ritz still operate as cinemas, some have been adapted into furniture warehouses, supermarkets, or apartments, and some like the Midnight Star and the Marina Picture Palace in Rosebery are boarded-up ruins. The Marina retained its connection to cinema after closing as a theatre in 1984, operating as a video store before this business, too, became unviable.



Figure 7: Marina Picture Palace, Rosebery, Sydney. 2015. Photo: Vanessa Berry.

This transformation is common to cities which once had plentiful picture theatres. Giuliana Bruno describes her survey of New York's movie palaces as "a map of metamorphosis":

If I did not find the theatres in ruins, cut up into multiplexes, or transformed from a cinematic temple into the sanctuary of a church, I found myself in such establishments as a supermarket, a restaurant, or even a university cafeteria. Some food for thought: a form of imaginary architecture that feeds the metropolis... (48)

This description reveals the balance that exists between the ex-theatre's material and architectural presence and its presence in imagination. In Bruno's description the ambience of the movie theatre affects its contemporary identity and use, even if that use is a functional one such as a supermarket. This ambience can also be used for effect: in the Brisbane suburb of Paddington an antique centre operates in the former Plaza Theatre, an atmospheric theatre built in 1929. The peeling paint and faded decorations give the space a tangible sense of past spectacle. In a description of the theatre by a local cinema blogger, this sense of the extraordinary is described as the "bones of something special" (Christine).



Figure 8: Paddington Antique Centre in the former Plaza Theatre, Paddington, Brisbane, 2015. Photo: Vanessa Berry.

In writing of repurposed theatres Bruno goes on to propose that movie theatre spaces were designed to

"absorb us and transport us to different places" through their use of "excessive space" (48). Their repurposing into supermarkets and furniture warehouses disguises this excessive space to some extent — these uses require ample space — but theatre ruins only amplify the sense of excess.

Excessive Space

The term "excess" features often in reference to picture palaces: Bruno's "excessive space" mirrors other descriptions of the movie palace as an "environment of excess" (Lee and Valentine 89), and even Thomas Keneally's memoir of the Vogue's architecture describes it as in the "best, excessive, Californian tradition" (3). It also often features in descriptions of ruins, where excess is used in reference to superfluity and waste, obsolescence and irrelevance (Edensor, *The Ghosts of Industrial Ruins* 833).

Of all the features of the Midnight Star ruin the most noticeable is its physical and architectural excess, as a grand and disused building. The notion of excess can also be applied to the ruin's interpretations. Edensor describes the "excess of meaning" produced by the cluttered space of the industrial ruin. This produces "a plenitude of fragmentary stories, elisions, fantasies, inexplicable objects, and possible events which present a history that can begin and end anywhere" (*Industrial Ruins* 141). The ruin's material excess and physical discontinuity, the broken objects and mysterious structures encountered around and within it, generates narrative excess, especially in terms of speculating how the ruin came to be in this state.

In writing on excess Edensor is referring primarily to the ruin's physicality, and encounters with the "remains" within the ruin. These remains also exist in the form of archival traces. Benjamin's *Arcades Project*, a work itself described as a ruin (Gilloch 123), is the exemplar of such a merging of physical and archival traces. The obsolete spaces of the arcades, as "a past become space" (Benjamin *Arcades Project* 871), are the framework for collections of archival fragments.

The narratives of memory and observation of the Midnight Star collected in this essay, while they can be understood and envisaged without ever having visited the place, are grounded in the ruined building. The building's form and details act as clues to decades of shifting identities, uses and interpretations. The vital presence of the ruin, open to diverse understandings, can be used to situate a multiplicity of stories. In his study of memory and place in *Remembering*, Edward S. Casey uses the example of a familiar local movie theatre to explain how a building can hold the "past in place" (187). Places act as containers, with the effect of "maintaining or retaining rather than dividing or dispersing" memories (186).

The movie theatre, designed as a space to be filled by the atmosphere of the film and by the audience, heightens this notion of place as a container, although the fractured form of the movie theatre ruin is perhaps more of a "leaky container ... always refer[ring] beyond" (Solnit vii). The unfixed form of a ruin is generative of a potentially endless number of alternative narratives — speculations, memories, observations, connections — and allows these to coexist. Contrasting the Midnight Star with another Sydney cinema of the interwar period, the refurbished Hayden Orpheum in Cremorne, illustrates the ruin's narrative potential. The Orpheum also spent some time as a ruin in the 1980s, before being restored and reopened in 1987, but today it operates as a popular cinema. It was restored to its art deco picture palace heyday and the cinema now screens new and classic films. Encountering the Orpheum is primarily an encounter with an operating cinema, one that very much engages with specific past narratives of the picture palace and golden age of cinema.

The Midnight Star, in its indeterminate, ruined state, suggests these stories of cinema history along with many others: a dystopian or post-apocalyptic site, an urban exploration zone, and a potential site for occupation. As a ruin its temporality is fluid, and it is able "to conjure up critiques of present arrangements and potential futures" (Edensor 15). These potential futures can be dystopian, signifying the breakdown of social and urban order, as much as they can be utopian, indicative of alternative forms of sociality.

One period within the Midnight Star's recent history actualised some of the potential of this excessive ruin space, while retaining the multiplicity of its interpretations. In February 2002 the empty Midnight Star building was occupied by SCAN (Social Centre Autonomous Network), a network of squatting activists and anarchist-autonomist groups. The group squatted the building, named it the Grand

Midnight Star Social Centre, and set up a community meeting and event space there. It was regarded by the activist community as a space of possibility, a quality accentuated by its size and relative luxury. The description posted on the Social Centre's website described the Midnight Star's aesthetic as "not dissimilar to a David Lynch film. Velvet and chandeliers and olde worlde remnants of opulence" (quoted in McIntyre and McGrath).

Social centres "turn unused or condemned public buildings and factories into self-organized cultural and political gathering spaces" (Hodkinson and Chatterton 306). The Grand Midnight Star Social Centre was based on Italian and Spanish models (Ihle 51). These spaces arose in Italy during the 1970s, connected with radical political movements that in part sought empowerment through access to "superfluous commodities," in addition to basic needs such as housing and employment (Ruggiero 171). Accordingly the Grand Midnight Star Social Centre was a space for activism and skill-sharing but it was also a space for leisure, for performances, music, and film-screenings, in-keeping with its picture palace origins. Screenings included the 2002 edition of the annual "Squatfest" short film festival, a DIY version of Sydney's Tropfest that critiqued the exclusivity and corporate connections of that event (Squatfest).

The Grand Midnight Star Social Centre existed during a period of prominent activism by Sydney squatters. In 2000 the Broadway Squats occupied a row of empty buildings owned by the Sydney City Council on Broadway in Ultimo. These squats had a prominent physical profile, their exteriors draped in banners protesting the gentrification and housing shortage brought about by the 2000 Olympics, and were widely reported on in media from alternative and DIY sources to tabloid news. The artist group Squatspace was based here, their gallery featuring among its exhibitions "UnReal Estate," a simulation of a real estate agency window that featured empty, squattable buildings in the city described in the language of commercial real estate listings (Ihle 50).

These squats continued a lineage of urban squatting in Sydney in response to housing pressures, redevelopment, and the erosion of social housing. In the Green Bans era of the 1970s squatters had occupied houses resumed for expressway or property developments, and protested the eviction of tenants from low-rent housing in inner city areas. Confrontations such as the 1974 eviction of squatters at Victoria Street in Kings Cross drew further public attention to the destruction of these inner city communities. Similarly high profile confrontations occurred at the Broadway squats in response to eviction threats. After being granted a caretaker lease, the squatters were evicted in July 2001.

In 2002 the Grand Midnight Star Social Centre continued the momentum of the Broadway Squats. But after 10 months of occupation it was raided by police after the space was used to organise protests for the World Trade Organisation meeting held in November of 2002 at nearby Olympic Park. Though protest numbers were relatively small, estimated at around 1000 people (Crawford 235), the Midnight Star was identified as the protesters "nerve centre," and eviction soon followed (McIntyre and McGrath). The building was cleared out, fortified and left vacant. Apart from its use as a film set in 2008 as a boxing gym for the film *X Men Origins: Wolverine*, the Midnight Star has been empty ever since, only accessible to urban explorers willing to trespass inside.

The brief period in which the Midnight Star operated as a social centre actualised some of the fantasies and conceptions of possible futures that theatre ruins inspire. In this case it was an alternative political space, as well as a manifestation of the desire to explore, inhabit and make use of a space of excess. As a social centre, a community space subject to minimal self-regulation, the Midnight Star still retained its identity as a ruin, a "fecund" space of potential and possibility (Edensor *Industrial Ruins* 15).

No physical traces of the social centre remain on the exterior of the building, but the potentials of the space still exist in its ruined form. Despite the encroaching high density residential developments, the Midnight Star persists as a site of excess, a grand theatre ruin, open to multiple narratives and potentials. Some of the many possible narratives of the Midnight Star have been traced in this account. Among them, the most striking are those which follow through from the movie theatre to the theatre ruin. Both spaces are incorporated within, yet are also outside of, urban order and everyday life, and present and contain alternative temporalities. As such the movie theatre ruin is a resonant place for considerations of urban space. It is a space to reflect on changing technological and social formations, and to consider the ruin's grounding yet generative relationship to personal and cultural memories and narratives.

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