

Drive-By Shooting: Filming Detroit

Interviews with the Filmmakers

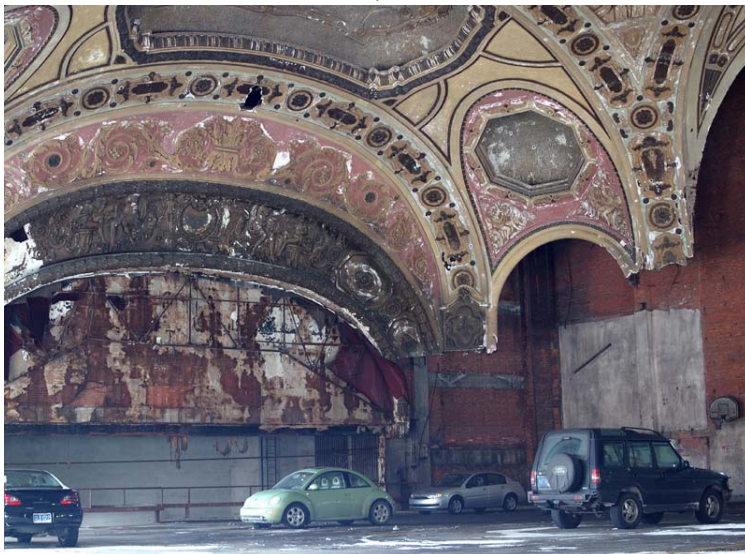
I. Talking to Michael Chanan

Michael Chanan is a seasoned filmmaker, beginning with documentaries on contemporary music for BBC television in the early 1970s, and a number of films on Latin America for Channel Four Television in the 1980s. He has written books on various aspects of cinema and on the social history of music. He was appointed Professor of Cultural Studies at the University of the West of England in Bristol in 2001.

Why Detroit?

First of all, I have always been deeply fascinated by cities, ever since a trip I made as a young man which took me in the space of a few weeks to Mexico City, then New York, back through London to Bucharest and finally Tel Aviv, the only one I'd visited before. Detroit makes a very unusual visual impact, because it has so many open spaces – empty lots in various degrees of neglect. The only other city like that I know is Managua, where it's the result of huge earthquake damage. Detroit's earthquake was man-made, however, and lasted much longer.

What confronts you visually is the disintegration of an urban landscape: streets and avenues interspersed with vacant lots and visually studded by extraordinary ruins, which display their own strange and bitter beauty. Ruins which speak of a lost history and a seemingly hopeless present, of abandonment and suppressed anger. Some are the result of the annual ritual known as Devil's Night, on the eve of Halloween, which has tailed off in recent years but not entirely disappeared, when the anger boils over and people go out on the streets and set fire to buildings and automobiles, which we show in the film's opening sequence. Others are the results of the city's inexorable decline, the loss of jobs, the resulting disuse of



often the most magnificent buildings. The Michigan Theater transmogrified into a multi-storey parking lot, the proscenium at one end, projection booth high up at the other, and traffic entering and leaving, as of old, through a once-majestic lobby.

But the film really began to take shape when our research uncovered the wealth of archive footage about Detroit and the motor industry. Then we realized that we could use this footage to deconstruct some of the myths which have grown up about Detroit. Because Detroit is a mythical kind of place: the Motor City, home of Henry Ford and the giants of the US automobile industry, but also of “the brown bomber” Joe Louis, and of Motown and Eminem – all of them emblems of urban culture.

In short, we thought that we could use these elements to create the portrait of a city, Detroit, which is both typical and untypical of the modern city, which represents the forces that made the modern city what it now is, but in the process has itself been left behind, reduced to a shadow of its former glory.

Why do you call this film a documentary road movie?

We’ve called it a documentary road movie because if you go to Detroit, you can only get around by car, which is true of many US cities; but in Detroit it becomes symbolic because this is Motor City, so it seemed right that we should film in and from the cars we traveled around in. And in fact the very first thing we filmed, which gave us the idea, was Lowell Boileau’s tour of “The Fabulous Ruins of Detroit,” which became one of the linking strands in the film.

How do you paint the portrait of a city on film?

Answers to this question go back to the city films of the 1920s – Ruttmann’s Berlin, Vertov’s composite Soviet metropolis, Ivens’ Amsterdam, Cavalcanti’s Paris, Vigo’s Nice. This is one of the original genres of documentary cinema, and these are the films which are always cited in the film histories. We discovered that you can add Henry Ford’s Detroit – Ford as the intellectual author, like a film of 1921 called ‘Dynamic Detroit’, made by the Ford Motor Company and issued as part of the Ford Educational Library.

The city films of the 20s are all very different, not only because they each have their own style or aesthetic strategy, but also because the cities are different, and the scenario of a city film must arise from the chosen city itself. This means, of course, that it makes a fundamental difference whether you live in the city you’re filming or not, but either way has its advantages and disadvantages. In each case, the film-maker has to create a cognitive map of the city on the screen, a way of moving around it, which makes sense of it whether the viewer knows the city or not. We chose the point of view of the automobile, and then we circle around the city in a kind of spiral.

The biggest difference between making a city film in the 1920s and making one now is not just the benefits of digital video as against silent 35mm film cameras, but also that eighty years later, there are now, for so many cities, audio-visual archives covering several decades of history, and in the case of Detroit, these archives are especially extensive.

Historical images of Detroit are rolled up in thousands of feet of film to be found, first of all, in the national film archives in Washington, where they were deposited by the Ford Motor Company. They’re also found in a number of films held in collections like those of MOMA in New York and the Walter Reuther Library in Detroit itself; including a 1932 newsreel about the hunger march on Ford’s River Rouge plant made by the Workers Film and Photo League, and then seven years later, a film by the Auto Workers Union on the great strike of 1939 against General Motors. Then important bits of the city’s post-war history are

filed away in television newsreel libraries like ITN in London. We've used all these sources. There are also other films for which we couldn't find room, or in some cases we couldn't get the rights.

Bringing these together, as we've done here, one of the stories they tell is that of a battle of representation which began when Ford instructed his advertising department to start making films before the US entered the First World War, encouraged by his friend Thomas Edison. The battle extends far beyond the material we've included, to the Hollywood movies discussed in our film by Dan Georgakas, a writer returning to visit the city where he grew up. But we didn't include clips from these films – *Blue Collar*, *Robocop*, *Eight Mile* – because our budget was much too small. The great thing about the Ford films is that being in the public domain, there are no huge rights to pay. We are extremely grateful to some of the other sources who kept their charges very low to allow the film get made.

How much did the film cost, and how long did it take to make it?

Above-the-line costs, what you actually have to shell out in cash, were no more than about \$20,000. The funding came from both sides of the Atlantic: the AHRB in England and the ASA/NSF in the States, plus some small contributions from the University of Michigan. My home university also contributed to below-the-line costs by giving me research leave and administering the grant.

I think this is an interesting model, which shows that low-cost digital video production from within an academic base is a very good way of making a kind of documentary that has been abandoned by television, and to take it in new directions. In this film, the intention is to forge a new kind of collaboration between the documentarist or videographer and the academic inquirer, in which authorship is fully shared, but there are many ways to do this sort of thing.

As for how long, it was two years in the making. My first visit was in January 2003, then we looked for the main funding and I went back in October 2004 and a third time for new year 2005. In between, we did archive research and George filmed a few scenes without me.

Your collaborator, George Steinmetz, is present in front of the camera, but you're not. Why not?

First of all, because I'm behind the camera. We sometimes filmed with two cameras, because when George wasn't in front of the camera he was often also filming, but he wasn't filming me; he was filming the same things I was but from a different angle. Second, because we decided to record our conversations so that I'd be present on the soundtrack, so that instead of a commentary, you get this conversation between us. Third, because when I met Loïc Wacquant, I found that his perspective as a European coincided with my own, and at times, while I was editing the film, I felt that he became my surrogate. Indeed, he frequently expressed my own responses from the first time I visited Detroit, but which I didn't articulate verbally because I was filming. If once or twice this seems to give the camera a voice, then speaking as a Londoner who has usually felt more European than English, I'm perfectly happy that the camera should speak English with a French accent.

How did Michael Nyman get involved?

Michael and I are old friends, going back to when we were young music critics together at the end of the 1960s. I have followed his career and admired both his chamber operas and his film music (though I didn't always like the films themselves). Then about the time I was starting out on this project, I heard his new score for *Man with a Movie Camera* which he was performing live. I found it delightful, and asked him if he'd like to work on a documentary with me, adding that I wouldn't be able to pay his usual fee! He was intrigued and said yes. From that point on I knew I didn't have to worry about picking and choosing bits of music in the way I'd always done in the past, but instead could design a film that would maximise the opportunities for a score which would be integral to the film's argument. Hence the various montage sequences that break up the inevitable flow of words, and which allow the music to take over the narration of the film.

II. Talking to George Steinmetz

George Steinmetz moved to Michigan in 1997 after teaching at the University of Chicago for a ten years and living on the south side of Chicago. He teaches Sociology and German Cultural Studies at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, and is the author of books on the welfare state, the colonial state, and social science methods as well as numerous articles on social theory and social movements.

What sparked your interest in Detroit?

I first visited Detroit in the early 1980s, then again in the early 1990s, and in 1997 I moved to Michigan and began visiting the city frequently. My interest in Detroit has several sources:

- The first was social theory. As a sociology student during the 1980s I studied social theory that analyzes postwar capitalist societies using the category of *Fordism*. Fordism is understood here as a system of steadily increasing mass production and the mass consumption of standardized consumer goods, in which wages were pegged to increases in productivity and labor relations were stabilized and relatively peaceful. This social contract between capital and labor was buttressed by a “welfare state” and Keynesian fiscal policies that buffered workers during cyclical downturns in the economy, while propping up aggregate demand. Fordism was also linked to a permeation of social life by mass culture. The \$5.00 daily wage offered by Henry Ford to workers at his Highland Park factory in January 1914 marked the beginning of a model in which industrial workers consumed their own products rather than being paid only enough for food, shelter, and other bare necessities. Ford’s elaborate system of worker selection and surveillance, implemented by his “Sociological Department,” seemed like a microcosm of the disciplinary welfare state introduced in the New Deal and coming to full fruition after 1945. Ford provided loans to his unemployed workers to remove them from the relief rolls during the Depression. His famous “rescue” of the suburb of Inkster, home to many African-Americans working at the River Rouge Factory in Dearborn, exemplified an approach to social policy that was paradigmatically “recommodifying.” A special self-help program for home improvement was created within Ford’s sociological department, which offered interest-free loans and direct assistance in construction to workers who wanted to turn ramshackle shelters into respectable wooden houses, on the condition that the loans would be paid back later via payroll deductions. Ford’s relief program in the 1930s was a model for the WPA (works projects administration) in President Roosevelt’s New Deal recovery program.

But the theorists of Fordism rarely referred to its origins in the vision of Henry Ford and the model of social relations he developed in Detroit and its close suburbs (especially Highland Park, Dearborn, and Inkster) during the first third of the 20th

century or by the local practices that gave rise to the “Treaty of Detroit” in 1950. I thought it would be interesting to explore the actual historical and geographical location in which this model emerged. Detroit is thus both an example of more general social process, a microcosm of the dominant mode of organizing capitalist society in the mid 20th century, and a privileged case.

Detroit was “on the cutting edge of national prosperity” during the first three decades of the 20th century and its exemplary status continued after 1945, when auto sales crested (8 million in 1955) making hefty wage increases possible. The most significant innovation was the Cost of Living Adjustments, first offered by General Motors in 1948, which were intended to ward off labor disputes. The 1950s were also marked by highway construction, “urban renewal,” and the movement of actual automotive production outside the city proper, while suburban homebuilding continued at a frenetic pace. By the end of the 1970s, Fordism was already a historical phenomenon rather than a category for describing the present, and the 1980s marked the beginning of the continuing rollback of policies from the New Deal, the weakening of labor unions, a spiraling increase in economic inequalities, the development of niche markets, more interest among employers in “just in time” production as an alternative to mass production, and a shift away from heavy industry. Detroit had always been more highly specialized than other large cities in the U.S. and “had never become a dominant center for trade, financial services, higher education, entertainment, or government,”¹ however, and this aggravated its problems. The question became how the post-1970s restructuring would play out in a city so completely identified with a now obsolete social-industrial model. Commentators during the 1980s focused on the abandonment of the higher-wage urban industrial “rustbelt” of the Northeast and Midwest; Detroit seemed especially likely to fall victim to this trend, given its reputation as a union town with a combative African-American mayor (more on that below). Would the “capital of Fordism” be able to map itself into the emerging “post-Fordist” economy, or would it instead become a shrinking backwater?

- I have already alluded to the second reason for my interest in Detroit: It is a mythic city for the American labor movement, the site of a highly organized working class and a powerful labor union, the UAW. The union movement is still omnipresent in Detroit. General Motor’s riverfront corporate headquarters in the Renaissance Center is located between the UAW’s modern international headquarters and a recently unveiled “Labor Legacy” monument. Some of the key events in 20th century US labor history were associated with Detroit and its environs: the 1932 “Hunger March” of the Detroit Unemployed Councils; the flood of unrest in 1936 and 1937 in which the “sit down” strike was invented; the recruitment of women workers into defense production during World War II, epitomized by the Willow Run bomber plant; the

¹ Reynolds Farley, Sheldon Danziger, and Harry J. Holzer, *Detroit Divided* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2000), p. 6.

election of a left-leaning New Deal era mayor, Frank Murphy; and the recruitment of wave after wave of migrants seeking factory work. Hauntingly, many homeless or underemployed men whom we encountered while filming in Detroit were wearing shirts with the UAW logo.

-A third attraction of Detroit is its mythic status within African-American history, culture, and politics. Although the number and proportion of blacks in Detroit was still tiny in 1900 (4,111, or 1.4%), by the 1980s the majority (63%, or 758,939) of Detroit's population of 1,203,339 was African-American (and in 2000, 81.55% of the city's population of 951,270 was black). At the same time, Detroit was always a highly segregated city. Blacks were informally restricted to the east side ghetto (Paradise Valley) and to a few other neighborhoods. Paradise Valley was the first area targeted by urban renewal after World War Two; the neighborhood was razed, its inhabitants scattered, and a massive highway driven through the area along with low density housing projects such as Mies van der Rohe's Lafayette Park development. According to the US census in 2000, the Detroit metropolitan area was the most segregated in the country, and in 1990 it was also the poorest city in the U.S., with a third of its residents living below the poverty line (this improved somewhat in the 1990s, but has deteriorated again during the past 5 years).

Despite the city's many problems, African Americans also have seen Detroit as the first major U.S. city in which blacks were able to reinvent urban life in a post-Jim Crow, post-apartheid fashion. In 1973 Detroit became the first major American city to elect a black mayor, Coleman Young, a former Ford worker and union organizer for the UAW and a civil rights activist. Detroit was the city that gave rise, in the 1960s, to a melding of the Black Power movement with the labor movement, in the guise of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers. Other groups were active here, including the Republic of New Africa, the Black Panthers, and the group around James Boggs, an ally of influential Afro-British historian C.R.L. James. Detroit was a mecca for black music, including Motown and techno, the eccentric blues of John Lee Hooker, and gospel music. More recently, Eminem's fame has shed light on the black Detroit hip hop milieu he came out of, including his band D12.

- This leads me to the final way in which Detroit has been a mythic city--namely, in terms of certain aspects of culture, especially early and mid-20th century modernism. The most striking examples are Diego Rivera's "Detroit Industry" frescos and Lafayette Park by Hilbersheimer and Mies van der Rohe. The industrial buildings designed by Albert Kahn bear witness to the monolithic spatial imagination of Fordism and the bravura anti-traditionalism of modernism. And both techno and Motown music have been likened to an "assembly line aesthetic."

Popular culture and especially music in Detroit has exhibited an important feature that is pronounced in Detroit, starting with Diego Rivera's DIA murals, which exemplify "transculturation" or a cultural mixing between folk and modern art. Thematically, this is expressed in the inclusion of four figures overlooking the main murals on the North and South walls that represent the four human "races." The

positioning of these four figures above the entire scene of industry can be interpreted in various ways, but at the very least it suggests that “Detroit Industry” involves a productive mixing of all four elements. Similarly, the successive waves of musical innovation that have poured out of Detroit, from Motown, proto-punk, and techno to Eminem and the current “garage rock” scene, transgress and sometimes simply ignore racial boundaries that are often quite rigorously policed in America. It is perhaps paradoxical that such a segregated city could give rise to musicians like Eminem who seem to move beyond mimicry of black culture into a form that refuses racial categorization (even as it is explicitly addressed in songs like “White America” and “My Band” with D12). Similarly, the embrace of the pioneering German electronic band Kraftwerk by Detroit African American electronic musicians in the late 1970s and 1980s parallels the oblique and critical relationship to dominant racial schemas by Detroit bands like the Dirtbombs.

Why the focus on ruins?

I was struck by visiting the industrial sites in Europe that have been turned into monuments and parks and seeing how they resonate with the preservation of the ancient ruins in Rome and elsewhere. Although there are certainly problems with the commercialized “heritage industry,” I found that this way of dealing with the recent past was much more provocative and useful than simply razing the sites and building on top of them. The entire “dream factory” of American society during the mid-20th century was oriented towards a restless forward movement and celebration of progress, and a turning away from history. This legacy and the dominant forms of collective memory make it especially difficult to rethink the remains of what had once been a relentlessly future-oriented project through the category of the ruin. A complicating factor in Detroit is the fact that the majority of the abandoned buildings are single-family houses, due to the peculiar nature of urbanization here; these “undistinguished” structures do not correspond to the inherited stereotype of the picturesque “ruin.” Add to this the tendency of abandoned buildings to shelter squatters or criminal activities, and we can begin to understand the lack of resonance of the category of the ruin. There is also a widespread resistance to acknowledging the extent to which American society can produce such decay. Resistance to the idea of the modern urban ruin is thus partly a form of disavowal. Nonetheless, Detroit is objectively in near ruins. As Detroit techno pioneer Juan Atkins observed, “in any other city you have a buzzing, thriving downtown.”

The Baroque and Romantic movements led to an aestheticization of ancient ruins that is still with us today. But the new ruins of the industrial era “have not yet acquired the weathered patina of age” and are “still stark and bare,” smelling “of fire and mortality.”² If it seems inappropriate to *aestheticize* these recent ruins, a less

² Dame Rose Macaulay, *Pleasure of Ruins* (London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1953), p. 453.

objectionable approach has been to turn them into memorials or parks. Modern industrial sites have been preserved in the US, as with the 1970s Gas Works Park in Seattle, which was built around the rusted remains of an abandoned coal and oil processing plant. A more recent example is the *Landschaftspark* in Duisburg, Germany, constructed around three abandoned blast furnaces from a former Thyssen plant. But a proposal by Camilo Vergara to TURN the abandoned skyscrapers of Detroit into a museum of urban modernity on the scale of the Roman Forum was met with derision and accusations of insensitivity.

In our film we try to steer a course between the dangers that face any use of the concept of ruins. One is the seduction of *Ruinenlust* (the pleasure of ruins). It is highly inappropriate to simply aestheticize the ruins of cities like Detroit without emphasizing the social processes that produced this landscape of destruction. A second danger is to fall into the widespread pathologization of the city found in crime reporting and Hollywood's urban dystopias. Here the city's ruination bleeds metonymically into a discourse on the "human ruins" who are blamed implicitly or directly for the decayed condition of their environment. A third danger, however, is to avoid the ruins altogether and to produce a polyannish boosterism that ignores the real problems and raises false hopes.

There are several strategies for avoiding these sorts of slippage. Without downplaying the horrors of urban abandonment or indulging in a naïve celebration of the triumph of the human spirit, we avoid any focus on criminal practices. We document participants in the city's cultural scene, including "outsider" artist Tyree Guyton, whose installation on Heidelberg Street thematizes the history of the city and its African-American majority as well as the processes of abandonment. A second strategy for counteracting the pathologization of the cities' inhabitants is to be historical about the processes that have driven Detroit's decline. Here we focus as much on racism as on profit-driven "location decisions."

Why did this project have to be a film, rather than a book?

This had to be a film for two primary reasons. First, many Americans simply do not know that cities like Detroit even exist, or they have a radically distorted picture of them. Most Americans now live in suburbs; white schoolchildren in Detroit's suburbs are taught to stay out of the city. The devastation caused by deindustrialization and racism has to be seen to be believed. Second, Detroit has been systematically demonized in Hollywood and by nightly news. Detroit has made the *New York Times* only a few times in the past year—to report on the city's "fiscal nightmare" and shrinking population (Feb 2, 2005) and on its controversial "Africa Town" initiative to lend city money to entrepreneurs, "but only if they are black" (October 13, 2004). Hollywood films relentlessly depict Detroit as the ultimate urban dystopia ("Robocop," "The Crow") and as the home of the "most lethal criminals" ("Assault on Precinct 13" [2004]). With a few exceptions, like Stephen Soderbergh's "Out of Sight" (1998), films set here have no recognizable Detroit landmarks,

suggesting that Hollywood is using “Detroit” as a metaphor for all that is evil and debased, and that it assumes that actual filmgoers will not recognize the difference, since the city itself is *terra incognita* (of course, given the lack of movie houses in Detroit this is perhaps not unreasonable). The recent remake of “Assault on Precinct 13” is set in a Detroit inner city police station located next to an immense pine forest, in which the final chase sequence takes place. Even in Michael Moore’s films centered on Flint, Detroit seems to feature as a sort of black hole: in *Bowling for Columbine*” (2002), for example, Detroit figures only as the location of a furtive drug deal. Detroit has lost control of the way it is depicted. Especially troubling is the fact that a city of a million people has only a single commercial movie house, located on the city’s farthest northern border (at 8 Mile Road). This stands in stark contrast to earlier decades in which most Detroiters could walk or take an electric trolley to numerous movie theaters. A cluster of exquisitely ornate theaters graced the center of downtown. We counter the monotonous barrage of stereotypical images with the polyphony of visual signatures that characterized the early and middle decades of the 20th century.

What is the division of labor between you and Michael?

Although this is a team project in every sense of the word, Michael is the experienced filmmaker and I am an experienced archival historian. I was frustrated after moving to Ann Arbor from Chicago that it was so distant culturally from Detroit, even though in many respects it was objectively one of Detroit’s distant suburbs. (I found out, for example, that Albert Kahn had given a speech in 1921, when there was a great discussion of creating a subway in Detroit, in which he said that “we’re going to have a subway system as sure as we’re living” and that “rapid transit will make ... Ann Arbor .. [a] mere suburb[s] of Detroit.”³). My main contribution has been to seek out various visual documents and archival sources, although I have also shot some of the moving sequences and all of the still photographs. Michael has done all of the editing.

Is there a problem with the fact that you are two white guys making a film about a city that is predominantly black?

We are certainly conscious of this issue, and we address it in several ways. First, the film is not just about the city but also about metropolitan Detroit. Indeed, the polarization between the suburbs and the predominantly black city needs to be directly thematized and explained. But in Hollywood culture we get representations of the inner city as a realm of hypercriminality into which suburbanites venture at great peril . A movie like “Judgment Night” (1993, dir. Emilio Estevez) reveals this set of stereotypes explicitly. So we drive into the city, like the “white guys” in Judgment

³ “What will the Detroit of the future be like?,” typewritten speech, given Sept 1921, to the Vortex Club in Detroit by Albert Kahn. In Kahn papers, Bentley Historical Library.

Night, but rather than being mugged we encounter a population that is extraordinarily eager to talk, to be represented. There was a warmth and openness to our inquiries that took us very pleasantly by surprise. Rather than disavowing the fact that our perspective is largely an outside one, we confront it head on by staging the film as a “road movie” in which we are continually entering the city from the outside, haplessly losing our way, asking naïve questions, learning as we go, and “changing” our view of the city. Another point is that the position which holds that only an *insider* can generate knowledge about social conditions is untenable, at least in its simple form. In any case, the film is a structural and theoretical essay, an historical exploration, a *genealogy of the present* (as French historian Michel Foucault would have put it). It is not an ethnographic film in the proper sense of that term. It is a road movie, an exercise in “*drive by shooting*.”

How is the film structured?

One way to see the film is as an interweaving of several separate strands:

- The first is a portrait of the city in the present. This is the section in which the viewer is presented with a panorama of urban abandonment and ruination, juxtaposed against suburban wealth, and with a series of interviews with residents of the city.
- A second strand is explicitly theoretical, analyzing the city through the lens of the concepts of Fordism and post-Fordism (see above).
- A third is historical: the film advances from the city’s beginnings through to the present, focusing almost entirely on the 20th century.
- Within this historical reconstruction we introduce a multitude of contending filmic visions of the same object, Detroit. But as we move toward the present, this heterogeneity or variability is radically narrowed. Our film’s opening sequence on “Devil’s Night” underscores this, with the figure of an older woman complaining that the police have dragged her from her home before she was even able to put her clothes on.
- Finally, this is a self-reflexive road movie in which we relinquish any omniscient standpoint and acknowledge that we are learning, and that this film is simply one in a long series of entries.

What role does music play in the film?

Michael Nyman, one of the leading film composers in the world today, composed an original soundtrack for this film. The music plays a strong narrative role, telling part of the story. There was a conscious decision *not* to use extant Detroit music (although our budget, again, would have prohibited this even if we had wanted to include it). There are a few references, however, to Detroit musical traditions, including the use of a Motown style Hammond organ and an electronic sequence that evokes some of Detroit’s techno innovations. The use of non-traditional music serves

to break up a set of extremely familiar musical references that viewers often associate with Detroit.

How does the film differ from other films on Detroit?

Actually, we have not found any other films that deal with the history of the entire city and greater metropolitan area. There are some good PBS documentaries like “The Rouge” (directed by John Owens); “A Job at Ford’s” (dir. Jon Else); and “Finally Got the News” (dir. Stewart Bird) that deal with specific periods in Detroit history, and the short documentary features of local director Gary Glaser on specific topics, including “The Hudson’s Building,” “Train Station,” and “Borderline: The Story of 8 Mile Road.” There is a nostalgia-drenched film called “Detroit Remember When; Motor City Memories and Hometown Traditions” (dir. Jim Woods) and a snapshot of Dearborn Arab-Americans called “Tales from Arab Detroit” (dir. Joan Mandell). But there has not yet been a panoramic view of the city’s 20th century history or of the historical “origins of the urban crisis.”⁴

How can Detroit be saved?

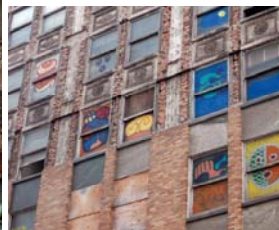
As my friend John Woodford put it, the only thing that could save Detroit would probably be something like a Marshall Plan for America’s cities. “Market forces,” left to their own devices, will not lead to reinvestment on a sufficient scale. Detroit *should* be saved, but the likelihood that this will happen in the near future seems remote. Our view of history is critical and fairly grim, but we think it is realistic.



Corner of Shelby and Michigan, downtown Detroit



Michigan Theater,
Interior



United Artists Building,
west façade



Bird's eye view of
Detroit

⁴ Although there are several excellent histories, most recently Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996).



The Michigan Theater, then and now



The Filmmakers

Michael Chanan (left) and George Steinmetz (right)

DETROIT: RUIN OF A CITY

UK/USA, 92mins, DV

Written and Produced by
George Steinmetz and Michael Chanan

Filmed and edited by
Michael Chanan

Music by
Michael Nyman

Directed by
Michael Chanan and George Steinmetz

Film Research: Lazara Nelson
Additional photography: George Steinmetz
Sound Design and Additional Music: Andy Keenan

Made with the assistance of University of Michigan and the American Sociological Association/National Science Foundation (USA)
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Presented by Bristol Docs, a collaboration between U.W.E. and University of Bristol



Film website:
<http://humanities.uwe.ac.uk/bristoldocs/detroit>

Contact:
Michael.Chanan@uwe.ac.uk; geostein@umich.edu