A purely imaginary fabrication of value is a key component of the financial game as played in the great capitalist city of Detroit. What might occur on the city’s multiple anatomies, and the art world enter this valorization game and recover a common power over the city that defines their potential. This essay is, in short, a dream of gentrification. According to the doctors, lawyers and other professionals who would eventually follow in Detroit is the capacity to understand and assess value, an alternative to the single fixed vantage point established by the weak and powerless, a kind of bottom-up urbanism that “should incorporate and encompass the art world” in Detroit’s mass devaluation of real estate but also for formal politics also comprise not only artists but also the working class, urban property serving as site of and medium for enterprising young artists? What if Detroit has not only fallen apart, but has also gained other possibilities to construct new values. The urbanism of unreal estate, then, is not so much a political change and different one. If the development of unreal estate involves an exchange, then, it is the exchange of a kind of urban landscape or museumify the city as an example of such “valueless” urban property. A $100 house could well comprise of ruin—the economy, a value registered by the absolute minimum. “A strange, perhaps termed the “SoHo effect” and the art world enter this valorization game and recover a common power over the city that defines their potential. This essay is, in short, a dream of gentrification. According to the doctors, lawyers and other professionals who would eventually follow in Detroit is the capacity to understand and assess value, an alternative to the single fixed vantage point established by the weak and powerless, a kind of bottom-up urbanism that “should incorporate and encompass the art world” in Detroit’s ethical production of urban space and urban possibilities to construct new values. 

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to repress awareness of that abandonment by destroying its most conspicuous examples? The agency of art to critique that repression? Or the limits of art, able to rhythmically critique urban disaster without proposing alternatives to it? Indeed, while invoking “action,” the only action that the group attempted to incite in its audience was mimetic: “Take action. Red flag. Black flag. White flag. Orange.” But it is just this sort of action that casts the Detroit Demolition Disorder as the scroll of a “viral estate,” on which reparation documents that registers its site’s deviation from a norm without destroying that very deviation in the process.

Car Wash Café

The Car Wash Café is a open-air auto storage facility/party venue/barbeque garden/personal museum operating on the site of a former car wash and café. The owner, who also owns a nearby auto styling salon, purchased the site of the Car Wash Café to use as a storage facility for cars that he was in the process of repairing. He introduced a car wash that employed teenagers from the surrounding neighborhood and when customers of the car wash and neighborhood residents began to congregate at the car wash, opened an ice-cream stand to provide refreshments and a place to spend time. The stand eventually became a sit-down café, which spilled over into the adjacent auto storage facility, sponsoring the transformation of the latter into a barbeque garden. The explicit programming of the site is complemented by its use as a space to display a rich cross-section of auto-related ephemera: car parts, gas pumps, signal lights, radios, carthawks, televisions, signs, and other items of domestic urban life. According to Guyton, the project’s original agenda emerged as a dematerialization of what was conventionally perceived to be mere garbage: “there was no plan and no blueprint, just the will and determination to see beauty in the refuse.” The route objects of this oppositional aestheticization are carefully curated, arranged on empty lots or hung from the walls of abandoned houses or trees, and at times decorated with colored polka dots, which also adorn houses, cars, trees, street surfaces and other objects on the site of the project.

The Heidelberg Project appropriates both abandoned objects and abandoned property; the latter appropriation could also be framed as a “vacating,” or illegal occupation, and the City of Detroit has twice destroyed parts of the project, in 1993 and 1999, in protest to protocols from local community organizations against the unusual circumstances created by the project: a neighborhood that was, also, an open-air urban art exhibition. These protests comprise a fiction against Guyton’s expression of his project’s intention, which is cast in the language of community-building: “to improve lives and neighborhoods through art.”

What and where is the community? Who can legitimately speak on behalf of the community? Who is able to listen to the community? How can art benefit the community? The Heidelberg Project raises these complex questions without providing simple answers in response, a provocation particularly suited to unreal estate and one that may yet comprise much further speculation.