INTRODUCTION

Defining Fordism through Urbanization

"This is the Rouge—the world's largest industrial city!"[1] So declared the small guidebook distributed to tourists visiting this city's historical museum in the 1930s. The city in question was praised in a series of impressive statistical facts: it contained nearly 16 million square feet of industrial buildings, over 100 miles of rail tracks, and hosted nearly one hundred thousand workers daily. A hospital staffed by two hundred employees managed health and injury, an industrial trade school educated workers in advanced skilled trades, and a bus system facilitated rapid transportation from one end of the city to the other. Massive ocean-going ships docked at the piers lining the river that coursed along the edge of the city, and a system of pipes transported a "half-billion gallons of water" per day from the river to the city center.[2] The guidebook reveled in the power of a new kind of city—an industrious city whose machines of production worked twenty-four hours per day and seven days per week all year long; an infrastructural city with extensive transportation networks that supported vast systems of order; a technological city that offered a vision of the future through the latest advancements in science and engineering. These attributes sounded like those of many

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large industrial cities of the twentieth century, except that while the city in question generated enough fuel gas to support a population of 1.5 million people, its actual residential population was zero. The city in question was in fact the Ford Motor Company's River Rouge Plant, an automobile factory situated along the Rouge River in Dearborn, Michigan, adjacent to the southwest border of Detroit (fig. I.1).[3] That it was a factory—and not, for example, the city of Detroit—that was promoted as "the world's largest industrial city" is of central concern here.

My aim is to bring together insights and approaches from urban theory, the history and philosophy of technology, and the social history of architecture and the built environment to read deeply into historical archives to reveal how the standards and practices of the Ford Motor Company rearticulated urbanism in the image of industrial production. Soon after its opening in 1924, the factory-city of the Ford River Rouge Plant stood at the center of processes that transformed industrial production over the course of the twentieth century, catapulting the United States to the forefront of global economic power while fostering the rapid growth of cities across the nation. The Ford Motor Company emerged as a leading figure in American economic growth during this period due to its unique association of mass production with mass consumption coupled with automated assembly-line manufacturing—a perfect storm of innovative technology, new industrial techniques, and novel approaches to production management that we have since come to know as "Fordism." More than just a set of manufacturing techniques, however, Fordism functioned as what sociologist Pierre Bourdieu has called a "structuring structure," that is, a system whose primary function is to systemize and distribute its own organizing logic.[4] As an ideological construct with profound social and spatial implications, I argue that Fordism, as a particular mode of capitalist accumulation, generated distinct spatial conditions that both stabilized and reproduced its production ideology.

Partly a social history of Fordism through its spatial (re)productions and partly a reconsideration of industrial labor through architectural and landscape analysis, this book presents Fordism as a spatial practice that distributed its production logic through the bodies of workers, through the architecture of its factories, and through the urbanized landscapes left in its wake. From the opening of its first factory in 1903 through the unionization

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of its workforce in 1941, I closely trace how the Ford Motor Company's vision of industrial production—and its enaction of that vision through corporate policies—profoundly shaped the built environment. Focusing on Michigan and its environs as the heart of the Fordist empire, I show how the spatiality that the Ford Motor Company identified with its processes was not, in fact, the burgeoning industrial city of Detroit, but the dense factory complex of the River Rouge Plant, the small industrial towns lining the Rouge River watershed, the growing automotive administrative centers dislocated from downtown Detroit, and the urbanized resource landscapes of upper Michigan from which the raw materials for manufacturing were extracted. The Fordist turn toward such decentralized and diffuse industrial landscapes resulted in a decentering of Detroit—and of conventional industrial cities more broadly. Occurring decades before interstate highways carved up urban cores and sprawling suburban subdivisions dispersed urban populations, the industrial decentralization initiated by the Ford Motor Company in the early twentieth century itself constitutes one of Fordism's more profound contributions to the history of urbanization.

That the Rouge factory was presented to visitors in the 1930s as "the world's largest industrial city" demonstrates one of the key ways that manufacturing techniques emerging from the Ford Motor Company during the first half of the twentieth century altered modern conceptions of urbanism. The Rouge as a factory-city reflected a mode of capitalist accumulation that produced spatial forms that were not cities in the conventional sense. Fordist industrial production generated what I call a counter-urban paradigm that was neither "city" nor "not-city" nor "anticity" but rather an urbanistic "Other," a competing urban form that both shadowed and undermined the conventional cities in its surroundings. These Fordist urbanistic Others, such as the River Rouge Plant, were not just places of production but were themselves products that were "sold" for consumption; the visual representation of the new urbanistic forms produced by Fordist manufacturing played a key role in marketing and distributing the production ideology underlying Fordism. The guidebook that tourists received at the Rouge plant served as one such distribution channel that communicated the new spatiality endemic to Fordism by translating its technicalities into easily understood aesthetic forms. Through photographs, maps, illustrations, and text, the booklet celebrated the technical practices of factory production—such as

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forging, stamping, and assembling, among others—and by organizing those practices under the nomenclature of "industrial city," it served to communicate the new spatial practices of Fordism as but a natural evolution of existing and familiar forms.

My analysis of Fordist counter-urbanism relies on reading the geographies of industrial production to offer new insights into the spatial history of capitalism. Central to this approach is a historical analysis of the built environment that does more than reveal the events occurring in and around urban spaces to also contend with how the architectures, infrastructures, and landscapes of Fordism mitigated and shaped the very conditions under study. Through this spatial reading of Fordist production, I hope to offer new ways of thinking about cities in general, and about Detroit and its environs in particular, namely by reconsidering the productive extents called to mind by the nominative signifier "the Motor City." I argue that Fordist industrial production both undermined and circumvented the conventional urbanism of cities like Detroit in favor of a decentralized, de-densified, and diffuse technological landscape. However, counter to the prevailing literature that examines deindustrialization as a phenomenon arising after World War II, I show how its predecessor industrial decentralization emerged as early as 1915, when Henry Ford first articulated his plan to decentralize the production of automobiles in order to maximize profits. Accordingly this book suggests that the roots of postwar, postindustrial decline might be found in the protocols and practices enacted during the height of industrial output in the first half of the twentieth century.

Counter-Urbanism and the Spaces of Fordist Production

Located on the banks of the Rouge River near where it flows along the southwestern edge of Detroit and into the Detroit River, the Rouge factory at the time of its opening in 1924 was the latest in the Ford Motor Company's territorial expansion in the region, which included factories near Detroit, numerous small parts plants distributed throughout southeast Michigan, thousands of acres of agricultural lands throughout the state, hundreds of thousands of acres of forests and ore mines in Michigan's Upper Peninsula (UP), and an array of rail lines, docks, and technical infrastructure (map I.1). In celebration of its enormous production output, the Ford Motor Com-

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