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## An Archaeology of Loss in New York City

Mark Hage's photos of empty storefronts reveal how real-estate development leaves behind sites of civic neglect.



Louis Bury July 3, 2021

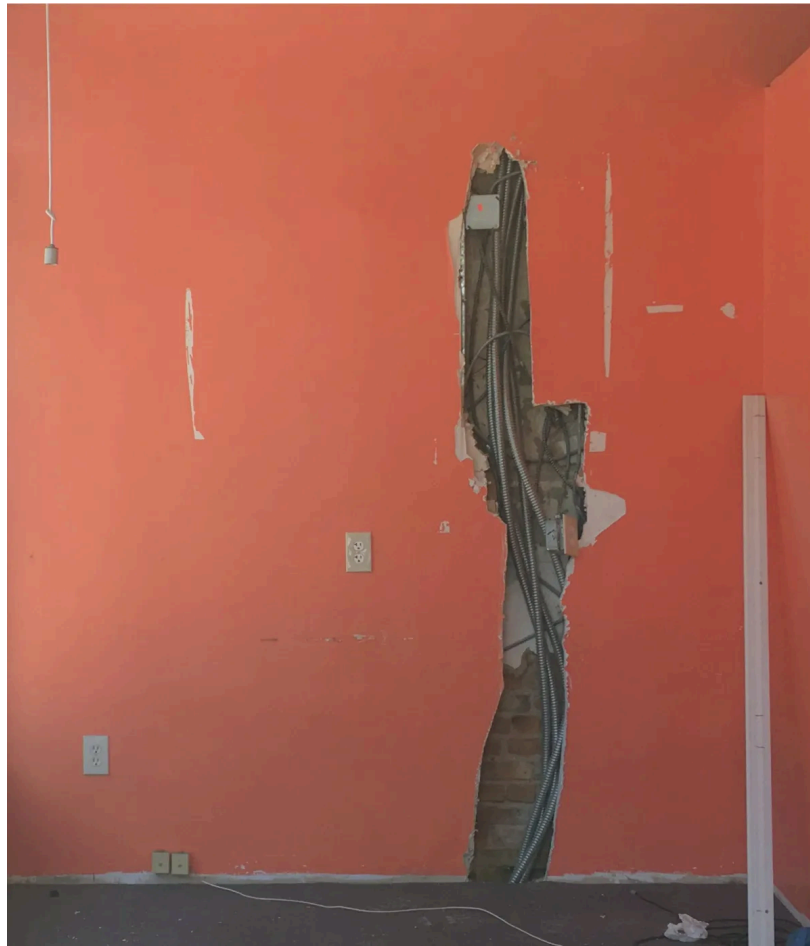


Mark Hage, *Capital* (A Public Space, 2020)

The pandemic may have shuttered many New York City storefronts but local businesses were closing and not always being replaced, in neighborhoods across the socioeconomic spectrum, well before COVID-19 altered the cityscape. Mark Hage's moody photo documentary book, *Capital* (2020), published by A Public Space Books, depicts the interior architecture of those vacant retail spaces in the years just before, and during, the pandemic. The book merges these two time periods into one continuous, formally indistinguishable, 100-plus page study of disuse, suggesting that decades of constant real-estate development have paradoxically produced a baseline quotient of civic neglect.

*Capital's* images capture the vestiges of this neglect with an eye for demolition's compositional accidents. Hage's camera zooms in on walls stripped down to scarred and textured abstractions, outlets and wires bereft of purpose, and columns that stand sentry over emptiness. Windows are few and far between, and glimpses of the outside world are even less common, creating a claustrophobic cumulative effect. Similar to how the book's title lacks specificity, and the individual photographs aren't given titles, these interior spaces that were once carefully designed and curated now appear interchangeable, nondescript.

An epigraph from experimental French filmmaker Babette Mangolte — “How you frame something is a moral decision” — signals the ethical drift of Hage’s aesthetic choices. *Capital* laments the spaces market churn has left behind leaving outside the camera’s frame everything but the husks of the spaces themselves. The book’s short, dexterous author’s statement likewise favors aphoristic pith — Hage describes New York’s Soho neighborhood as “a chicxulub to mercantilism,” for example — over detailed sociopolitical context. The result is a hyper-focused archaeology of urban loss, a visual inventory of the commercial amnesia that forms the obverse side of the city’s recent booms.



Mark Hage, from *Capital*

***Capital*** by Mark Hage is published by A Public Space Books and is available online and in bookstores.