CONTEMPLATING RUIN

GENERATING A TOOLSET FOR A NEW APPRECIATION

Coen van Bergeijk

Contemplating Ruin
Generating a toolset for a new appreciation

by Coen van Bergeijk
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4157524

Faculty of Architecture
University of Technology Delft

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This is more than mere beauty. It evokes a sensation of loneliness, of decadence, of direct interaction with the material world, of the passage of time. Photographs like these are highly popular on the Internet.
James Kerwin, Congo, Decadence series 2013-2015
image courtesy of James Kerwin Photographic

Foreword

Ruins are the ghosts of a lost past. They are neither alive nor dead, but speak to us form beyond the present. They are witnesses of a time, sometimes eons ago, sometimes mere decades, when life was different and they were alive and loved. Now they have become still, as beacons of timelessness, forgotten places in the world. Time has won and nature has taken root, but their power to speak has only increased. They speak of transience, but also of persistence; of grandeur, and of loss; of fragmentation and of being one with nature. Ruins have the unshared quality of being material, while being timeless and intangible. They are part of the material world and are therefore subject to decay, but just like memories they can be forgotten or be rejuvenated. At the same time, they sustain more than mere thoughts as all sorts of creatures roam flourish in the cracks and seek shelter between its walls.
I proudly introduce this thesis on ruin and decay as part of my graduation project.

- Coen van Bergeijk

1.   Introduction

Decay is a part of life. Everything withers, everyone ages, and all eventually fade away. Some might feel conflicted or even sad about this, but the fact is that the transience of material things holds a special beauty that is different than any newly made object. Ruins evoke a mixture of fear and delight, because we can't fully determine them. Most have fond memories of places where the newness has faded and decay has taken root, colonized by plants and animals, full of graffiti and broken windows. Antique aqueducts near Rome, desolate lands full of ivy and brambles on the city's edge, the derelict villa from that holiday long ago, walls full of graffiti in the squatters' hangouts; places where supervision lacked and everything seemed possible. It is those feelings that make places like these so special. It seems unreal that such places still exist in our well-organized lives, but yet they do and add an incredible value to the urban environment.

However, most of the antique ruins have now become pacified. The sublime landscapes through which Goethe and Shelly roamed are transformed into gentle urban parks; their monuments fenced off and stripped of all vegetation and danger. Little is maintained of the wild character of the ruins, leaving behind an empty shell. More values vanish as the ruin is domesticated.

The same goes for our more modern ruins. With the constant urge for progress that characterizes our society, there are bound to be some casualties. Disused and forgotten by the people not immediately involved with them, post-industrial areas are often left vacated of formal society. Obsolete factories, empty shopping malls, abandoned villages and creepy hospitals litter the urban fringes of many European and American cities. These areas as well rapidly disappear. Urban development and gentrification irreversibly change these forgotten areas in the western metropolises and too often the present values are ignored, exploited for financial gain or poorly mimicked. They form an eyesore for developers and city officials, and many have

fallen to the sledgehammer. Derelict areas like these prosper however in natural life and create a safe haven for people in the margins. Insubordination of all sorts can roam freely through these areas.

This essay, however, aims to celebrate decay as something to cherish, something to curate.[1] For designers there lies a challenge on how to appreciate and eventually preserve these wild and unplanned spaces. In this thesis I will try to clarify that decay not just damages a building, a street, an environment, but simultaneously adds something nameless, some mysterious component to the experience of the built environment. I will explore these elements and try to find the answer to the question of how decay adds value to the built environment. However, this is not a plea for ruination or anti-preservation. I merely try to understand the factors that shape our perception of decay. I intend to use the findings of this research in the design phase of my graduation project, which strongly deals with decay and its influence on the experience of the built environment.

This essay is structured along three key values I found embodied in ruin: artistic, social/biological and psychological/emotional. They cover most of the ground in the common appreciation for ruin, yet remain often separated in the literature. The different chapters are not mere expositions of history or psychology, but are all arranged along the topic of architecture and how we as designers can use and learn form these values. I will, however, stay in my own comfort zone of the Western world, where I know my way around. Other cultures and parts of the world all have different connotations on age and decay, but that is for a next research to explore.

The first section of this research will explore the depths of history and review the artistic value of decay. The visualization of ruin in the arts is off all ages, but the usage differs form period to period. From the Picturesque to the Sublime,

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[1] As is the beautiful title of Caitlin Desilvey's book *Curating Decay*
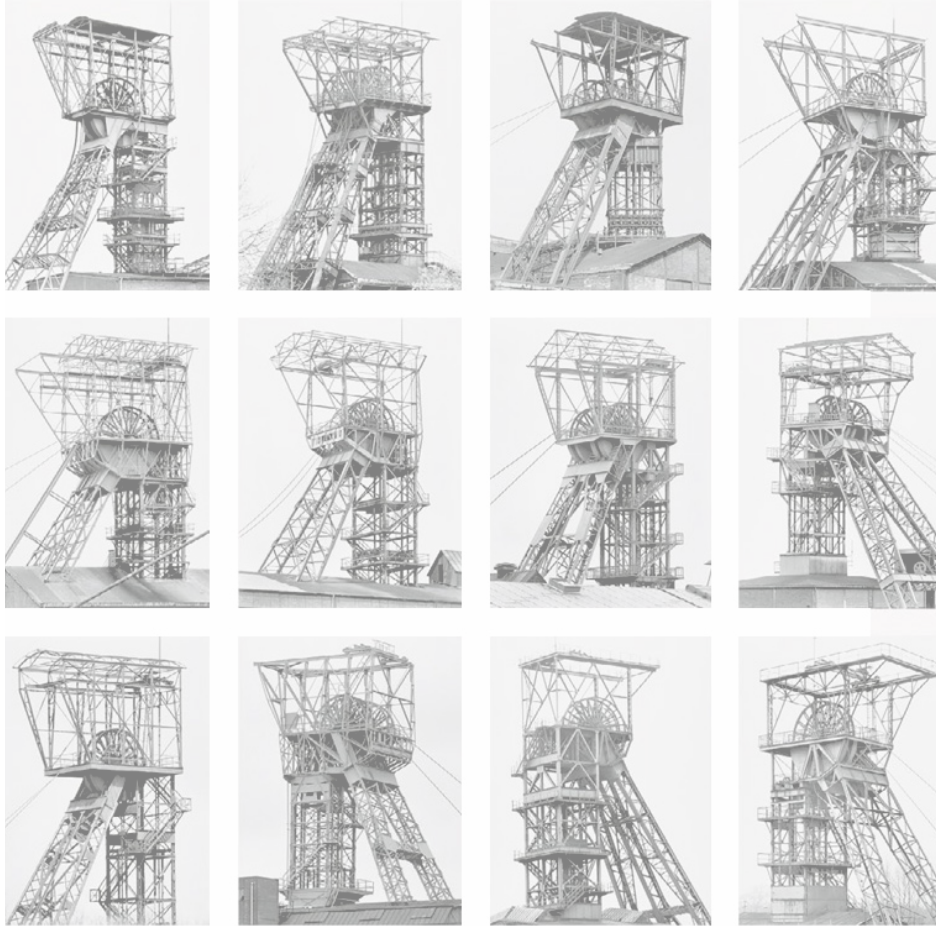
The beauty of these silenced structures was first shown by the Bechers. The Ruhrgebiet is littered with now abandoned mining facilities.
Bernd and Hilla Becher, Fördertürme (Winding Towers), 1971
Digital print, 90 x 130 cm, Typologies

from Piranesi to #ruinporn, this chapter will try to explain how decay is used as a means for different messages. The different theories about decay and their spatial consequences are discussed generally, but this is not an historical treatise. The feeling of transience, of the idleness of human endeavour, is historically as well as today strongly evoked by ruination, but there are more factors to deal with. The urge to fill in the missing elements as well as the juxtaposition of decay and newness are both linked to the weathering of a structure. We will see this depicted in the different manners to recreate ruin in the arts.

The necessity of ruin for the social realm is treated in the second chapter, namely that of the Urban Wildscape. This edgeland, between the urban and natural world forms a safehaven for marginalized groups of people as well as plants and animals that seek shelter from regulated urban life. It forms a special décor for all sorts of informal activities and provides a new wilderness in the urban jungle. The same could be said about the plant and animal world, which seek shelter in these forgotten spaces. Brownfields and fringes are rapidly becoming the richest areas of biodiversity in the world and are therefor invaluable to our fast urbanizing world.

The last chapter deals with the psychological values of decay. Emotions such as loss and trauma are important for the construction of a regional identity and will be discussed in relation to the old mines in the Ruhrgebiet. However, also the potential of decay in the fading or amplifying of memory and solace is enormous. In this chapter multiple examples will be discussed as well as the broad theoretical framework to come to a final set of values of decay for the built environment.

In the end I will have gathered a certain amount of notions, which could be combined in a toolset for future evaluation of decay in the built environment. The toolset I propose in this thesis is intended to help guide the analysis of future projects having a direct involvement with decay. Nowadays the ruinous is rapidly transformed

into trendy hotspots for the urban elite. Too often, however, designers do not fully understand the ambiguous and paradoxical values of places of decay. The question remains whether some of these places add more value to the built environment when transformed into conformist safe-places, but even when it does; it remains key to understand the particular values of the places involved. When solely the aesthetical qualities of ruin are maintained or even enhanced, maybe a wholly invisible layer of emotional relevance disappears. When transformed to a monument, maintaining the structure as a memory, the social or ecological values might disappear. This toolset hopes to help the designer to make a thorough analysis and a considerate choice in what to enhance and what to abolish. It helps understanding the values often almost invisible and helps to create a balanced project for everyone involved.

The subject is composed of knowledge from multiple disciplines in which I neither am nor pretend to be an expert. This research aims to be informative, but goes further by implying that there is a set range of notions to be distilled from the different disciplines. As an architect, it is possible to combine these superficial excavations to a thorough thesis. By combining and comparing these different viewpoints I am able to pick the topics and notions I find interesting while discarding the ones I deem superfluous for my topic. This makes this thesis in no way a work of thorough scientific overview, but rather is it building a broad theoretic cadre for a multisided topic. This way, this thesis is not bound to a single extensive research on a single subject, limiting the theoretical horizon, but draws out of a variety of sources. The literature used for this research consists, therefore, mostly out of seminal or influential works, as I found myself too often in field of expertise not my own. A last remark should be made: although this is a literary study, it is also a reflection, where I do not shy away from framing the proposed facts and subjectify the results. I am contemplating ruin.

Although we ourselves cannot leave everything behind to live among the ruins, the cats of Rome form a lovable substitute. The cats of Largo di Torre Argentina and Cimitero Acattolico make it possible to identify ourselves with them, as they lay tanning on the boulders or jumping the columns.
image courtesy of www.favrify.com/cats-of-rome

2.   The Aesthetics of Transience

Introduction

From Piranesi to Albert Speer and from Caspar David Friedrich to the Bechers, ruin has played an immeasurable part in our imagination and our art. The sensation evoked by these structures lost in time seems to re-captivate generation after generation. The most recent name for the phenomenon is 'ruin porn', but this is nothing more than a new hashtag for an old sensation. Ruin value, ruin craze, speaking ruins, ruinophilia, ruinosity, these are all labels for the same aesthetics.[2] What is it in ruins that so entice us? This question is as old as the feeling itself.

General appreciation for ruins runs back to the eighteenth century when the emerging industry and growing inability to personalize the world evoked a strong sense of nostalgia on its contemporaries. Ruins spoke of a past where life was simple, idyllic and good. Now, it is not only the monolithic structures along the Via Appia we adore. The current craze has supplied us with new and existing ruins of our own time and although utterly different in aesthetic, they evoke the same sentiment. With the former industrial landscapes becoming obsolete they leave us with their towering structures too impressive to ignore; natural disasters and past wars leave scars in the landscape, too painful to wipe clean; victims of the constant yearning for progress are seen in the urban tissue. These places are now rapidly becoming as photogenic as the ruins of old. So what do these places have in common that they evoke such strong emotions in the eye of the beholder and what can a designer learn from them?

In this chapter I deal with the aesthetical qualities of ruin, often immortalized in art and literature. I speak of the artistic principles, but also of the simple beauty of weathering. To give every example of ruin and decay in art and literature, this thesis would not fit on a common bookshelf. I limit myself, therefore, to a broader description of the phenomenon, jumping hundreds of years through history. The

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[2] See Diane Pham, "Ruin Porn: An Internet Trend That is Older than You Think", Andreas Huyssen, *Nostalgia for Ruins*, p.7 Silke Arnold-de Simine, *The Ruin as Memorial – the Memorial as Ruin* p. 101 and Ellen Braae, *Beauty Redeemed: Recycling Post-Industrial Landscapes*, 176.

use of literature is for the same reason limited to a few key works on the subject, as not to overcrowd the limited space provided. Christopher Woodward has been an excellent source, as he describes the beauty of decay in a very broad spectrum, ranging from the classics to Detroit. The work of Mohsen Mostafavi and David Leatherbarrow on weathering can not be ignored as is the work of Michael Roth.

Memento Mori

The history of ruin value teaches us that what we experience when wandering through ruins is nothing new. Whether we are mesmerized by ancient structures or stimulated by industrial erections we feel little different than Goethe and Shelly did centuries ago when they explored the ruins of antique Rome. But what makes us experience these strong sensations? What draws us, even today, towards decay? Why do we feel so captivated by these pictures of decline?

For Christopher Woodward ruins have a double value. One is objective, often justified by archaeologists and preservationists for their removal of vegetation and the addition of fences and signs. The other is subjective, as an inspiration to, in his view, artists, writers and children.[3] As the reader will see in the rest of this thesis, a ruin has more to offer than mere inspiration, but it is necessary to start with stating that the objective values of places of decay are often subservient to what gets projected on the ruin. It is often not about the material properties, but about the feelings they evoke. Shelly, in his poems, teaches us that the ivy and grass are not just ways of decoration or signs of decline, but ignite a deeper sense of connection in the consciousness of the beholder. Shelly saw the hand of Time, with a capital letter, and "the contest between the individual and the universe".[4]

We do not have to go as far as Shelly did, though, but without personifications

[3] Christopher Woodward, *In Ruins*, 69.
[4] Ibid.

of immortal entities the thing of which ruins speak can be quite poetic indeed. The plants adorning the ruin, their often remote location, their sheer size, it is more than mere beauty. The ruin speaks of the power of nature over culture and the power of culture over nature. As man used the natural elements for the erection of the building, nature retakes the decayed remains as a bedding ground for its growth. This paradox tells us about our own relation to nature. It is easy to forget the wilderness from urbanized lives, but when plants and animals take over something manmade, there is something thoroughly romantic about that. As we came from nature, so we go back again.[5] Time gets us all in the end.

Time is a factor very important for the appreciation of decay. Time does not flow in ruins. It is fascinating that something that provokes such a strong historical sensation can be completely timeless. By being obsolete and deserted, life does not take hold on the ruin and inhabitants are but birds and plants. It does not participate in society. The silence in ruins can form an oasis, a welcome hub of timelessness, in a busy and progress-based world. This is, of course, stronger in a natural setting than in the middle of a city, but the same notion applies almost everywhere. It is this feeling of timelessness, of eternity, that is often used in art and (landscape) architecture. The ruin gives us the existential opportunity to revere in its presence the magnificence of life, existence and the inevitability of time.

A Warning of Transience

Ruins can provoke a strong existential experience on the contemplating wanderer and it is an effect often used by landscapers and architects in prior eras. The remains of churches, castles and temples form a petrified reminder of a lost past. It recalls not only its former glory, but can ignite a sudden thought about the future as well. It

[5] Michael S. Roth et al, *Irresistible Decay: Ruins Reclaimed*, 2
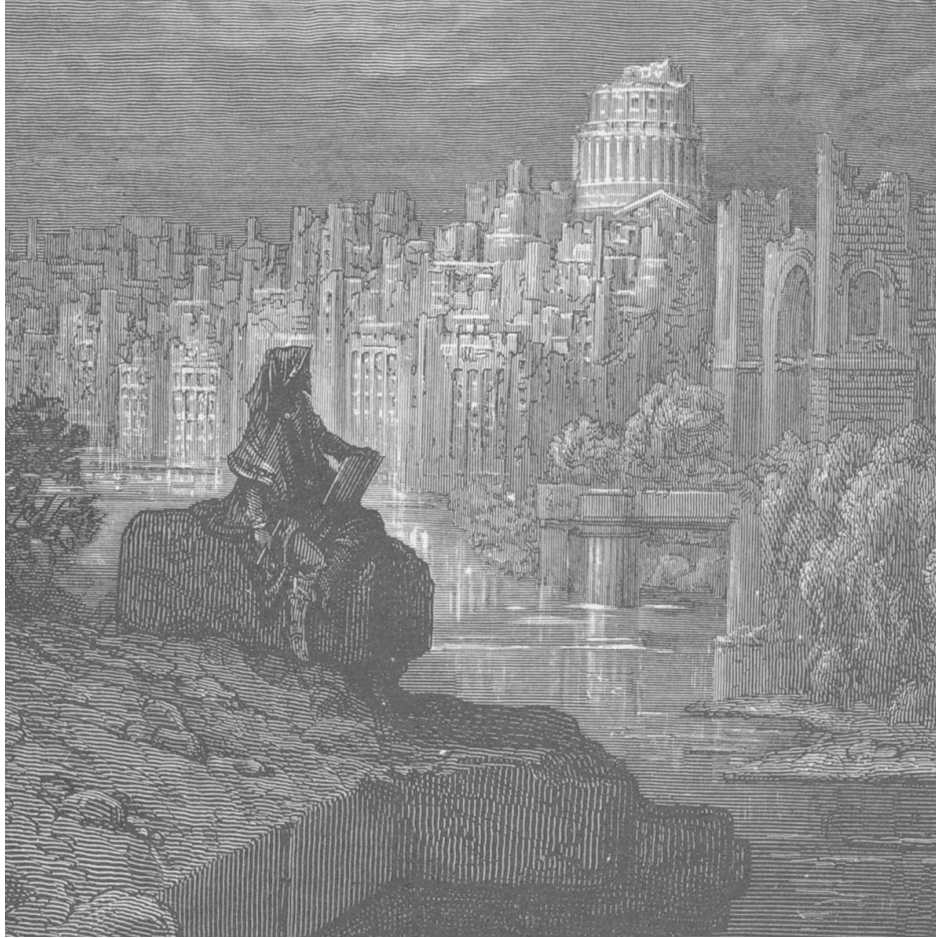
As a warning to the decadency of 19th‑century London, Gustave Doré made this etching of a lonely wanderer, contemplating not the ruins of an ancient civilization, but of future London. This was a popular theme in those days, as the height of the British Empire reached its top.
Gustave Doré, The New Zealander, 1872, image courtesy of museumoflondonprints.com

raises as many questions of what lies beyond as of what lies behind. Either personal or as a species, the transience of existence and the futility of human endeavour are challenged by the weathered remains of great empires. Gloomy as it may sound, it also has a more hopeful aspect. For Shelly, wandering the ruins of tyrant Caracalla's bathhouse, the onset of plants and the blooming flowers spoke of a future free of despotism; the ruins of tyranny being slowly submerged by nature.[6] There is apparently something very comforting about the overpowering force of nature.

The fascination for ruins was strongest in the 18th - century, when industrial progress had little appreciation for the beauties of old.[7] A growing distance between people and the new industrial time of progress resulted in a strong urge for real emotions. After centuries of rationalizing the arts in a strict objectivity, art and architecture could be subjective again. Not the configuration of geometry or religious referencing, but the emotional beauties of the capriciousness time and the onslaught of nature became leading themes in the arts. Artists and scholars on their grand tours visited the monuments of old to find new meaning in their lives. Melancholy surrounded the structures, as the good seemed lost and out of reach in these times. By understanding the past, they could make sense of the present.

With the rise of Romanticism a new notion came to be: the Sublime. From the second half of the 18th century the playful and constructed compositions, which shaped the gardens of the decades prior, changed into disheartening structures of power and awe.[8] Man was reduced to a footnote, mere toys in the hands of nature. Melancholy was replaced by fear and self - preservation. Transience became a direct threat instead of something to ponder over.

The history of the aesthetic of ruin can hardly be disconnected from the message it was meant to convey. In the 18th - century, the ruin was a vanitas motif, warning the spectator for pride and human's fleeting time here on earth.[9] From the

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[6] Silke Arnold - de Simine, *The Ruin as Memorial – the Memorial as Ruin*, p. 94.
[7] Mohsen Mostafavi & David Leatherbarrow, *On weathering: The life of buildings in time*, 6.
[8] Ellen Braae, *Beauty Redeemed: Recycling Post - Industrial Landscapes*, 180.
[9] Ibid.

beginning of the 19th century a new genre of paintings emerges; that of the ruinous remains of significant buildings, until that day still intact and in use. Hubert Robert was the first who painted, next to his original design for the Grand Galerie of the Louvre, the same monumental hall in ruins.[10] Peasants are burning picture frames to keep warm and marble is being quarried. Later examples are that of Soane's bank of England in ruins, which formed a particularly popular subject to ruinify, and that of whole cities in ashes, with contemplating travellers gazing over the ruins.

#ruinporn

As in former times ruin was mostly depicted in paintings and poems, nowadays a different medium is used by a new set of explorers. The spiking interest in modern ruins can now mostly be found on the Internet. Indeed, it is more than probable that the accessibility of the enormous amount of these photographs contributed to its popularity, just as it did in the times of the salon. Suddenly everyone can imagine being lost in an abandoned sanatorium in southern Belgium, wandering about through the contaminated amusement parks of Chernobyl or circling a Soviet monument, just by scrolling through a web page. In fact, it is probably the same fantasies that spectators experienced when viewing the sublime landscapes of Thomas Cole and Caspar David Friedrich. But how comes this changed aesthetic suddenly is so popular?

The term ruin porn was presumably first formulated by writer and photographer James Griffioen, who in a 2009 interview with online magazine Vice eloquently thrashed hypocritical reporters and photographers who came to Detroit to shoot the perfectly cropped, out-of-context, abandoned train station, car manufacturing plant and primary school, while completely ignoring the problems

[10] Christopher Woodward, *In Ruins*, 155.

Ruin porn photographs are often littered with debris and random objects, as if to say they were just deserted. In this case that could be true, as this is a classroom in Chernobyl.
Jane and Louise Wilson, Atomgrad, Nature Abhors A Vacuum V, 2011, , 180 x 228 cm
image courtesy of Seoul Museum of Art

and accomplishments of the city.[11][12] Somehow it is the mere manifestation of these fallen angels that capture the readers, seeing them as the remains of the downfall of this once great American city. The result is, however, not as pretty as the bodies it leaves behind. Liking ruin porn is a safe way of enjoying danger and excitement, while being safely at home.

A compositional difference with the sublime paintings of old and modern ruin porn is the amount of litter in the latter. The most celebrated photographs are full of weird objects. Seemingly random items like scruffy teddy bears, old photographs, piled up books, ragged furniture and other broken things are starring in their own tragic décor. It seems as if the articles hold the key to the captivity of these pictures. The eerie shots of Chernobyl, the abandoned circus, the forever stopped bumping cars, have become more lost in time because the objects in them seem proof of enduring dereliction.

Beautiful Weathering

There is another reason the aesthetics of ruin porn is different than that of the ancient ruins. Steel, concrete, glass and other modern material don't age the same, or not as well, as for instance stone does. Modernist architecture refuses to return to nature, as Andreas Huyssen eloquently stated.[13] Although concrete cracks and steel rusts, the picturesque 'finish' of the environment, which was so desired a century earlier, often lacks in modern buildings. Concrete first becomes dirty before it cracks, rust stains its surroundings, rainwater leaches plaster and prefab elements decompose rather unpredictable.

However, what is different in our modern appreciation of ruin is just that unpredictable process of decay.[14] When hundreds of years ago, the ruins revered

[11] Thomas Morton, "Something, Something, Something, Detroit"
[12] Diane Pham, "Ruin Porn: An Internet Trend That is Older than You Think"
[13] Andreas Huyssen, *Nostalgia for Ruins*, 20.
[14] Ellen Braae, *Beauty Redeemed: Recycling Post-Industrial Landscapes*, 175.

were already in place for at least also a few hundred years, the post-industrial ruin is aged hardly more than a century and its desertion probably from the last fifty years. In their fairly recent abandonment, the processes decaying the structure are still proceeding. Weathering and decay happen as soon as, or even before, construction finishes. Everything eventually ages, humans and buildings alike. Glass breaks, wood rots, steel rusts, concrete bursts and grass grows from the cracks. The elements eventually obliterate all that is left of the structure and the cycle starts anew. This process, called weathering, decay or deterioration, comes with age and affects every part of the built environment. According to Mohsen Mostafavi and David Leatherbarrow in their book On Weathering: the Life of Buildings in Time there are two types of weathering: functional and aesthetical. When the material of a building breaks down due to the constant exposure to the elements, it is a "functional" deterioration, because the material loses its characteristics to function as a shelter. Whenever due to the weathering of a building the material becomes stained, this might be called "aesthetical" deterioration, as the building becomes either "sightly" or "unsightly" as they call it.[15]

The romantic notion of aging is harder to describe. Alois Riegl, who greatly contributed to making art history an autonomous academic discipline in the end of the 19th-century, worked on the idea of 'age-value'. His idea of age is that of an augmentation of the original structure in the sense that the layers and markers of the façade, or palimpsest, express the history of the building and the past lives of the people linked to it.[16] So the aging of the structure and the weathering of its façade represent its past itself. If a building weathers it shows us that the structure has endured the passage time, has become part of history.

What then is the value of weathering; of staining and dirt; of erosion and mould? Why should we as designers anticipate and treasure these often unwanted

[15] Mohsen Mostafavi & David Leatherbarrow, *On weathering : the Life of Buildings in Time*, 31-32.
[16] Ibid. 84

Villa Savoye, along with all the other modernist masterpieces, were intended to be ephemeral. What becomes of these monuments when allowed to age? This playful vandalism gives us a rare insight in the process.

Villa Savoye Northwest view, in the series Pèlerinage sur la Modernité, 2014, image courtesy of Xavier Delory

effects of aging? These ordinary forms of decay are nothing like the romantic conquest of ivy and thorny creepers nor result in the sublime silhouettes of crumbling stones against a blackened sky. These effects occur on a much smaller scale and are based on a subtler aesthetic. It relies on the juxtaposition of different materials. Copper stains green and drips on the underlying stone. Limestone washes white and sandstone turns black. This can be a construction fault or can be a desired effect by the architect. It can create an encounter between two materials not there before and contribute to the harmony of the design.[17] The building slowly becomes part of its surrounding ad of history itself.

Conclusion

To summarize the history of ruin value is an almost impossible job. Multiple levels of appreciation existed alongside and practises around the world shifted every few decades. This is however not the purpose of this chapter. What we have seen in the previous pages is a reoccurring cycle of appreciation. I believe this forms the key to understanding and enables us to apply a framework to the notion of ruin value. In the ruins of ancient Rome opportunistic greed was followed by indifference, curiosity and finally led to adoration. The same cycle appeared in the United Kingdom with the numerous ruins of the abbeys and gothic churches after their dissolution. After being plundered and used as quarries for building materials, locals let the ruins deteriorate until artists came along to immortalize the structures. This spiked general interest and soon the fortunate sought to add the picturesque to their gardens.[18] In a smaller scale, this cycle occurs even in recently abandoned structures, but I will talk about that in a later chapter. The point is that like all appreciation, ruinophilia is engaged in cyclical.

[17] Mohsen Mostafavi & David Leatherbarrow, *On weathering : the Life of Buildings in Time*, 72.
[18] Christopher Woodward, *In Ruins*, 108-114.

When ruins are cleansed from their vegetation and used as décor for various activities, what happens with the ruin value? If they are reused as framing for new functions, what happens to their independence? If ruins are restored to their former glory, what beauty remains? If framed by fences and flower beds, what power is retained? If rearranged to follow modern standards, what authenticity do they have? As something that is both timeless and a product of time itself, the ruin is difficult to act upon. Every act of preservation or restoration inevitably reduces the effect of the ruin. However, the structure also needs to be protected from the elements that created it, as otherwise they slowly disappear and are bound to be forgotten.[19]

It remains key to understand that the absence, caused by the deterioration of the structure, is filled in by the beholder. The fragmentaion of ruins results in mentally piling up the broken columns and naming the industrial commodities. The imagination finishes the fragmentation, rendering a unique image for everyone. For some it may be a reminder of the inevitable onset of time and the transience of existence. Others find peace and tranquillity. The aesthetical qualities of ruin and decay have a strong effect on the human mind and will remain to do so as long as humanity leaves their proverbial rubbish on the surface of this world.

[19] Michael S. Roth et al, *Irresistible Decay: Ruins Reclaimed*, 1

3.   **Where the Wild Things Are**

This man made his home from a place he did not own, transforming the obsolete industrial landscape to a home. Transgression and appropriation shaped the ADM compound, sustaining dozens of people forced or voluntarily retreated into the margins of the city.
ADM compound Amsterdam, image courtesy of Vice

Introduction

The experience of discovering a hidden, restricted area cannot be entirely described by feelings of aesthetics or the sublime. It goes further than mere beauty and the sublime. The sensation of absolute solitude and lack of surveillance gives one the idea of being able to do anything at all without judgement or consequence. These qualities are often present in ruinous spaces and attract all sorts of people, as well as plants and animals, to seek shelter from the regulated city life.

From here on this thesis focuses less on the aesthetical and more on the social and ecological qualities of decay. For these topics it is necessary to shift the focus from individual and isolated objects of ruin to a more intertwined form of decay in our urban environments. Decay is seen not as the weathered window frame or the tagged wall on our way to work, but in a much bigger and integrated scale, where urban development has come to an end and new and transgressive forms of life have taken over. This chapter deals with these unplanned spaces, these urban fringes, their unique spatial qualities and their value for the city and its inhabitants. It is this spatiality that is key in my research.

In this chapter the social tendencies of decay are combined with the ecological. I am aware that this could seem a rather strange combination, but as I focus on the values of decay for the built environment, it can easily be understood. Both the civilized and the natural world benefit from places lacking restrictions. People flock to unregulated spaces as animals do to shelter. Places where informal activities can flourish, often allows plants to take root. As stated before, the intention is to flush out a set of tools that will allow for a new and structured appreciation of decay. This method traverses formal divisions of disciplines. To combine sociology and ecology, in my experience, new and overall topics can be discussed.

The literature used for this section of the research deals mostly with the

fringes as indispensable part of urban life. Writers like Ignasi de Solà-Morales Rubió, Gil Doron and especially Tim Endensor have been great influences on my view on the intrinsic values of decay. All these writers have a strong connection to architecture and the built environment and all propagate the necessity of the urban wildscape. In that sense they are perhaps biased or at least have an agenda to change our current view on these mostly derelict places, but it is in this that I find myself mirrored in their view.

The Urban Wildscape

Many names and criteria circulate for more or less the same phenomenon. As Rupert Nabarro quite clearly explains it: "ultimately, dereliction is a question of degree. Like the elephant, it may be hard to describe but it is relatively easy to recognise."[20] Brown fields, fringe lands, voids, dead zones, wildscape, wasteland; these are all sides of the same coin. The difficulty of designation lies in the fact that it has many changing factors, like whether and in which way the land is being used, whether it is completely vacant or the number of built structures and the level of decay. But, as stated before, most of the time you know it when you see it. In this thesis I prefer to use the term (urban) wildscape, as it in my opinion covers all the characteristics and adds a layer of adventure to the whole.

  The physical manifestations of the urban wildscape are perhaps best summed up by Tim Endensor, who is widely regarded as the expert in the field, as everything from and between "industrial ruins, […] wasteland, unkempt parks, alleyways, culverts, edgelands and ramshackle spaces on the urban fringe."[21] Others may add abandoned structures, stretches of derelict train tracks, overgrown parking lots or other in-between spaces, but the idea remains the same. Often, the

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[20] as quoted in Gil M. Doron, "…badlands, blank space, border vacuums, brown fields, conceptual Nevada, Dead Zones …", 12.
[21] Tim Endensor et al., "Playing in Industrial Ruin", 65.

Of course not every group of people expelled to the margins of the city leads the romantic life propagated by squatters and artists. A lot of misery can be found on the edges of society, like here, in the former slum on the abandoned railroad around Paris.
Shantytown, 'bidonville', on the Petite Ceinture in Paris, image courtesy of Le Parisien

misassumption is made that these areas are not in (official) use anymore. However, that is not necessarily so. Often, places like these have seen a diminishing of activity on their lands or even have found a new usage. The fact is that asserting an overall definition is practically impossible, but this no man's land, these dead zones or voids in the urban environment do shape our post-war cities and the way in which we experience them.[22]

Ignasi de Solà-Morales Rubió explains us the difficulties of interpreting the non-physical qualities of this place he, in his seminal essay, came to call terrain vague.[23] Other than its English literal translation the French term describes a more or less urban plot with a specifically ill-defined character. Because our response to the terrain vague is not solely physical, but derives much from our emotional reaction to the perceived uselessness, the fragmentation, the informality, it is not a literal definition. He claims that "the relationship between the absence of use, of activity and the sense of freedom, the expectancy, is fundamental to understanding the evocative potential of the city's terrain vagues."[24]

The urban wildscape functions both without and within the city. It is here where the past takes over from the present, is predominant over the existing developments. The residual qualities of the city, as De Solà-Morales quantifies them.[25] It becomes clear that abandonment and a lack of oversight play integral parts in the wildscape, next to a certain degree of dereliction and indefinability. Hence his French term terrain vague.

To make sense of the characterisation and the values of the wildscape, I use here the findings of Gil Doron, journalist and researcher for the Bartlett School of the Built Environment in London, on his travels through Europe and North America. He breaks down its manifold features in a way that is both comprehensive and thorough.[26]

[22] Gil M. Doron, "The Dead Zone," 247.
[23] Ignasi de Solà-Morales Rubió, "Terrain Vague".
[24] Ibid. 119
[25] Ibid. 120
[26] Gil M. Doron, "...badlands, blank space, border vacuums, brown fields, conceptual Nevada, Dead Zones ...", 16-17.

— Industrial ruins are mostly found on the 19th‑century city's edge and thus located in between the inner city and the suburbs.

— Most of the time they do not correspond to their neighbouring environment, which is either rural or urban and forms a hiatus within the fabric of the landscape.

— These places are either spacious and open or closed‑off and barely accessible. Most of the time they combine these factors.

— They transgress the boundaries, for they are both open and closed, interior and exterior, private and public, rural and urban, etc.

— The aesthetic of ruins is chaotic and disordered.

— Wildscapes do not have a formal usage or programme.

— This does not mean that there is no usage, but that the usage is mostly informal. Productivity can still be found, but not in an economically quantifiable way.

— The structure/area is commonly inhabited and used by both people and animals, transgressing the former usage of the building.

— The new users are never the owners of the land.

— They create a place that is both and neither public nor private.

— The physical manifestation is often less present or important than the emotional layer, being a place of fantasy, identity and freedom.

— It is neither part of history nor of the present. It has no past, as it has been forgotten and is not part of the contemporary city. It has no future, as its qualities are lost when demolished or preserved.

— The place is volatile and ephemeral, both structurally, in the sense that it literally falls apart, and socially, because there is no formal hierarchy and norms and laws don't apply.

This list forms the essence of Gil Doron's qualification of the wildscape. Like stated above, it is multi‑interpretable. Gil M. Doron, "…badlands, blank space, border vacuums, brown fields, conceptual Nevada, Dead Zones …", 16‑17.

The characteristics described above give us a tool for the analysis and understanding of the urban wildscape. We could summarize this rather extensive list like this: (industrial) ruins are ill-determined space, lack regulation and surveillance and blur the boundaries between private and public. They are an in-between area, not urban and not rural, not entirely human nor natural and the informal activities there are neither entirely legal nor illegal. They are beautiful in their vagueness and ambiguity.

The Architecture of Transgression

Gil Doron speaks of the importance of the void.[27] However, using the term 'void' to classify the urban wildscape is problematic. It suggests a lack of activity, of things happening. Many wastelands are, however, in use. Not officially, but informal by all sorts of animals, colonized by plants and people living in the margins. There has always been a need for space for abnormal behaviour and (semi-) illegal activities in places where man lives close together. Crime, innocent mischief and insubordination are an unavoidable part of civilized life, but not all these activities are in the illegal spectrum. Home-making, sleeping rough, informal cultivation, bartering, drinking, taking substances or just simply hanging out with friends away from prying eyes are significant parts of urban life, yet are seen as undesired or abnormal behaviour.[28] People in the margins of society often seek unsupervised areas for their day-to-day life. Places where they can go about their business without constantly being observed or engaged on with suspicion. Insubordination is, therefore, an integral part of civilized life, yet urban parks don't reflect this need for 'undesired' behaviour. Public space seems to be specially designed to pacify human escapades and normalize undesired behaviour. Conformity rules in our parks and public spaces.[29]

All these aspects described by the above mentioned writers are present in

[27] Gil M. Doron, "…badlands, blank space, border vacuums, brown fields, conceptual Nevada, Dead Zones …", 16-17.
[28] Tim Endensor, *Industrial Ruins*, 21-31.
[29] Catherine Ward Thompson, "Places to be Wild in Nature", 50.

A lot of frowned upon things occur when no one is looking. These informal activities are sometimes in the illegal spectrum, but are an integral part of urban life.

Project by LATA 65 where they try to dissolve the age stereotype of graffiti, image courtesy of Boredpanda

every urban wasteland, but for these to fulfil their potential, some key characteristics have to be present. First, some level of accessibility is needed, whilst maintaining its closed-off nature. Secondly, a lack of oversight and a sense of liberty of repercussions seem essential. In fact, an urban wildscape can only grow when a certain sense of suspension hangs over the abandoned landscape. Only when city officials or private developers do not know what to do with the area, and the whole stagnates, new activity can take hold. Gil Doron sees this, paradoxically, as an opportunity for both architects and planners to use this phenomenon of suspension to create a niche for the architecture of transgression, thus allowing unplanned activity in a planned world.[30]

The urban wildscape transgresses many of the limitations and restrictions we perceive in the city. It is important to note that the landscape doesn't create this kind of undesired behaviour, but allows it. To ignore these activities and the people in the margins is to neglect part of the system. A system is structured in such a way that it regulates the irregularities of human nature. A society that could exist without marginalization would be either a radiant utopia or a grave dystopia. It challenges the materials we use as architects and town planners, it challenges our aesthetic and it challenges the boundaries of what is architecture and what is not.[31]

The title 'the architecture of transgression' would suggest that there is something tangible as well about these activities. In a sense, architects and urban planners impose an image of their reality on the physical world, while these squatters, urban farmers, home-makers, graffiti artists and playing kids actively shape their environment. Community gardens for instance change private property into (semi) public space by way of demarcating the soil.[32] What is then the architectural quality of the architecture of transgression? It is the same idea of people furnishing their own homes, but in this case it happens on a possibly much larger scale and outside in

[30] Gil M. Doron, "The Dead Zone," 260-262.
[31] Ibid. 255
[32] Ibid.

the public realm. The homeless, street vendors, prostitutes and beggars occupy part of the street, same as protestors and street artists do, thus transforming the street from a passing area, a place for solely traffic, to a place of residence.[33] Without propagating or advocating anything, this critically changes the function the street holds in the city. The city becomes the canvas.

Child's Play

Alexander Pope, as interpreted by Catherine Ward Thompson, already in the 18th century saw the possibilities of nature where one could encounter complex patterns and unpredictable situations and be surprised and delighted by the landscape.[34] Edmund Burke, the literary father of the sublime, regarded risk and danger as the most important notions in our interaction with the natural world.[35] Indeed, these qualities are still the things we seek when going into nature, to appease the mind and relax the body. However, nature seems less and less accessible to a growing group of people, not in the least because the wilderness rapidly dissolves into the planned world of men. As nature becomes less and less accessible for certain groups of people, the urban wildscape becomes a necessary substitute for the original wilderness. For children and adolescents growing up in the city it may even be the only access they have to 'real' nature.

In this part of the chapter I propagate the necessity and value of the urban wildscape for play. As urban nature rapidly becomes the only accessible interaction with unplanned spaces for children and adults alike, this space of transition and its lack of supervision is increasingly important for a balanced youth and the types of play it evokes could shape the adult life of future city dwellers. I regard play in a wider field than mere a game of hopscotch of skipping line, but as a state of mind for both children and adults alike. Tim Endensor distinguishes four categories

[33] Gil M. Doron, "The Dead Zone," 254.
[34] Catherine Ward Thompson, "Places to be Wild in Nature", 49.
[35] Ibid.

Kids and teenagers learn from testing their limits and mimicking others. Not only in physical sense, but mostly in an emotional way. 'What can I do?' 'How do others react on what I do?'
South Bank skatepark London, image courtesy of http://www.whatsoninlondon.co.uk/

of play, all occurring in the urban wildscape: destructive, hedonistic, artistic and adventurous.[36] In the following pages I will try to make sense of what these are and how our environment shapes our play.

Destructive play
Vandalism; shattering windows, breaking stuff, jumping on obsolete cars, the immense joy and adrenaline rushing through one's body when destroying things without fear of repercussion is hardly reproducible in regulated social life. Letting go off imposed values and norms can be immensely liberating and is felt universally, as do the massive amount of shattered windows in abandoned buildings testify to.[37] But why do we like smashing things, to break and to shatter, to topple and break? For one, it can be regarded as games of skill. Testing the body and practise to become better at throwing, stronger or more agile.[38] It promotes skills of balance, improvisation and inventiveness, but also makes one aware of possible dangers and risks.[39] These are skills necessary for growing up. However, it goes deeper than this superficial exercise of strength and skill. Vandalism is of course frowned upon, but can do little harm in estates in a far state of dereliction. The value is in imposing ones will upon an object. One engages the body with the materials of the world in a sense that is impossible in the 'real' world. The status of these objects usually protected by social conventions and surveillance changes when being handled and broken.[40] The affordances of the objects changes, just by being present in an unregulated space.

Hedonistic play
The activities happening in these unregulated spaces are of course not all as innocent as playing hide and seek. Hedonistic activities like drinking, smoking and drug taking are pursued by both children and adults alike. The urban wildscape

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[36] Tim Endensor et al., "Playing in Industrial Ruin", 67-71.
[37] Tim Endensor, *Industrial Ruins*, 27-28.
[38] Ibid. 28
[39] Tim Endensor et al., "Playing in Industrial Ruin", 68, 70.
[40] Tim Endensor, *Industrial Ruins*, 28.

forms a playground for these frowned upon activities that seek a place without surveillance. Again, children and adolescents learn to recognize the limits of what is allowed and what is not. This semi-illegal, informal behaviour is already discussed before, but can here be linked to the notion of play. From the emergence of the rave culture the extensive floor spaces enable gatherings of young and old. Here, as well, transgressions take place unsupervised and in relative openness.[41]

Teenagers as well often look for a place where they can be free from their parents and other grown-ups, to seek the company of their peers. Catherine Ward Thompson discusses the need for teens and pre-teens to seclude themselves from adult supervision. She links this desire to the importance of the existence of a physical area where rules are bendable and danger and thrill can be sought out. She finds this area in the urban wildscape, where unpredictable things still happen. Here, teenagers have the opportunity to test their skill and learn to interact in a highly social world.[42] By being 'bad', they learn what is right,

Artistic play
Artistic play in ruins can easily be shared under the denominator of destructive play, as graffiti, one of the most common artistic acts in wasted space, is often seen as vandalism. Graffiti seems almost inseparably connected with spaces of decay.[43] The boundaries between art and the abandoned blur, until they become one. For the appliers, appropriation is a strong factor in the act of graffiti. By a tag, one takes ownership of a space, at least until it gets cleaned off or sprayed over. Graffiti is an ephemeral art in the sense that as the artist vacates the mural, others may cover it at any given time. It is done hastily in fear of repercussion and spectators often just throw a glimpse while passing. It is a form of art that is fleeting and to be seen in movement.

[41] Tim Endensor et al., "Playing in Industrial Ruin", 68.
[42] Catherine Ward Thompson, "Places to be Wild in Nature", 51,52.
[43] Tim Endensor, Industrial Ruins, 33.

Berlin has embraced, or even amplified, its ruinous image. Countless creative initiatives have settled amongst the ruins of old factory buildings, derelict estates and walled - off wastelands. The ruin form sometimes the décor, but is most of the time an incorporated part of the experience.
East Side Gallery Berlin, image courtesy of berlijn - blog.nl/

Adventurous play

The last type of play can be defined as adventurous. Although the danger of getting caught and the sense of adventure they evoke make them so attractive as places for play, there are of course real dangers to be found among the ruins. Parents warning their children for drug users abiding in the shades, shattered glass and rusty nails are right to do so in many cases. However, the possibilities for endless exploration and an ever-changing environment make the urban wildscape a perfect place for play. Hide and seek, playing tag, den building, the imagination is boundless when freed from the conventions imposed by their parents. These places of fantasy offer multiple ingredients for all sorts of play.[44] The affordances of the (industrial) ruin are plenty. Large open floors, stretching ceilings held up by scattered columns, are ideal places for running, joyriding and skateboarding. All sorts of objects laying about the obsolete spaces could become shelters, projectiles, victims or other instruments of imagination. A floor with holes in it becomes an obstacle run as kids test their physical skill.[45] Also in a less literal sense ruins become places of play. Urban explorers roam abandoned structures in search of places unknown and photogenic.[46] The thrill of getting caught, of discovery and insubordination, as well as the found beauty of the ruinous makes these trips worthwhile for many. Photographs are sent into the world, which evoke a strong sense of desolation and transience, as described in the first chapters of this thesis. An additional advantage of this newfound obsession with ruin is that is can be explored form ones desktop without ever leaving the safety of the known.

The Cycle of Ruin and Regeneration

As the types of play differ from state to state, the actor changes as well. Every wildscape, ruined castle and obsolete factory building caters to a different public

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[44] Tim Endensor, *Industrial Ruins*, 25-26.
[45] Ibid. 28-29.
[46] The 'Urbex code' (according to Boreally Urban Exploration): "take only photographs, leave only footprints, break only silence" takes on a new form of adventurous exploration where ruins form only the décor of artistic life. No participation is required.

and may change its appeal in time. Most of the informal activities seen above do not happen at the same time or in the same place. They vary according to the degree of decay, the level of surveillance and accessibility of the area. Christopher Woodward tells of a conversation he had with a youngster offering him a tour in the abandoned railway station of Detroit.[47] The teenager recites the 'natural order' of the obsolete structures in the city. First, when the water and electricity are turned off, the plunderers come to strip the building of everything valuable, from furniture and office supplies to stained glass and copper wiring. They are followed by the vandals, smashing everything smashable and breaking everything breakable. Not much after, the graffiti artists discover the place, covering up every spot of plain surface. It goes further. Whenever the graffiti artists make it into the building, they lead the way for curious minds to explore and play. After a while, when the structure has become part of the common heritage, it may be turned into a creative hotspot by squatters or other semi‑illegal communities. This often forms a motor for gentrification, beginning the cycle anew.[48] The course will of course sometimes derail, or stagnate, as will it be forced by planners to skip its natural course. Also, it may be too simply put, but I found it to be a good example of the mixed social necessities of decay.

Conclusion
Ruin, and especially industrial ruin, thus offers an enormous potential for play and a direct involvement with the material world. This affordance of materiality is a key factor in appreciating decay and the urban wildscape. Kids burning empty spray paint cans, building dens or shattering glass and tearing down walls are among the many possibilities, but also graffiti, seeking shelter or privacy are informal activities decay allows between its rubble. In the playful interaction with unfamiliar landscapes the subject appropriates the environment and makes sense of strange sounds, smells,

[47] Christopher Woodward, "Learning from Detroit", 21.
[48] Ibid.

sight and materials.[49] Not only the direct involvement of space and materiality is what makes ruins interact with our senses. The physical deterioration of wood, fabric and iron, as well as plants growing between the cracks make for the spectator to be part of its environment and the passage of time. This is amongst the reasons why precisely these spaces are sought out by both kids and adults. The wildscape incites investigation and the sense of adventure and is sought to in all types of play, whether hedonistic, adventurous, creative or destructive. Moreover, often when entering a ruin, one needs to climb over a fence, pass underneath the rubble, crouch through a hole. Walking through ruined space thus requires skill and attentiveness, as things might fall down, floors are uncertain, the soil is rough and the route may vary. The space 'constantly corporally engages the visitor' as Tim Endensor clarifies it.[50] However, visitor may not be the right word with the constant engagement going on. Ruin changes the visitor in the actor, who constantly shapes his environment and it him.

Colonizing the Void

What is a ruin without ivy, a derelict train track without brambles or an abandoned villa without spiders? "No ruin can be suggestive […] unless its dialogue with the forces of Nature is visibly alive and dynamic."[51] Thus names Christopher Woodward the importance of the presence of vegetation and animal life in ruins. He, of course, means it in an aesthetical manner, and by naming the ruin as the subject, adding to its sublime appearance, but the opposite is true as well. What is the wildscape but an extension, or a lost patch, of nature inside the urban world? This is the place where nature and civilization meet, the fringe between the natural world and the constructed lives we live. This twilight world of concrete and vegetation houses, as

49 Tim Endensor et al., "Playing in Industrial Ruin", 67.
50 Ibid. 70
51 Christopher Woodward, In Ruins, 73.

Guerrilla gardening on the Petite Ceinture in Paris. Maybe, if done right, even large grazers could thrive on the urban wildscape.
image courtesy by guerilla-gardening-france.fr

| Epilobium angustifolium | Typha latifolia | Digitalis purpurea | Achillea millefolium | Salix nigra | Lolium perenne | Agrostis capillaris | Festuca arundinacea |
| Wilgenroosje | Grote Lisdodde | Vingerhoedskruid | Duizendblad | Zwarte wilg | Raaigras | Struisgras | Rietzwenkgras |

De Ceuvel in Amsterdam is a precursor in implementing vegetation in ecological design. DELVA landscape architectects used a specially selected range of fast-growing plants to partly sanitize the polluted grounds of the former industrial area.
image courtesy of De Ceuvel & DELVA Landscape Architects

described before, all sorts of different activities, from natural to cultural. Plant and animal life from all over the world thrive in ruins and wastelands. It is here that I show the significance of these ruined spaced for both plant and animal life and its necessity for the urban ecology.

As the elements scale of the newness of the structure, weathering adds a new layer: that of the environment itself.[52] As materials degrade, their remains form the soil for new plant life, in turn speeding up the process of decay. Plants search out the cracks in the concrete; the moulded woodwork becomes a haven for growth and animals find nesting places and food sources amongst the rubble.[53] What this swift colonization of the urban wildscape means is that, although often thought to be absent or subservient, plant and animal life is very present in the city. It finds the margins of human development and settles wherever it gets the chance. Nature is opportunistic; it forms through the cracks of civilization. Long-term abandonment and the lack of maintenance make abandoned areas such as brownfields, derelict factory grounds and obsolete train tracks ideal sites for urban wildlife to flourish.

The importance of the wildscape
The diversity of species in managed forests, farmlands and cities, cultivated lands, is generally lower than that of neighbouring leftover space, claims Gilles Clément, garden designer, writer, in his Manifeste du Tiers-Paysage.[54] For him this third landscape is 'unattended' space, ranging form vast urban fringes to narrow stretches along roadsides. He continues to name this 'third landscape' as the reservoir of the planet and states it is the responsibility of designers and planners to leave space open for organic growth and wild nature.[55] An additional condition which makes brownfield often home to a large variety of species is its former function. Often

[52] Mohsen Mostafavi & David Leatherbarrow, *On weathering : The life of buildings in time*, 16.
[53] Tim Endensor, *Industrial Ruins*, 42
[54] Gilles Clément, *Tiers Paysage*.
[55] Ibid.

indigenous plants are alternated by exotic species. A small anecdote: when botanist Richard Deakin visited the ruin of the Colosseum in 1855 he found 420 different species of plants, including some rare flowers which presence he could only explain by way of the gladiator games of old, where enormous amounts of exotic animals were slaughtered and the insides of their bowels scattered.[56] As trains, boats and cars visited these now obsolete landscapes, often they too have left something behind as a witness to their voyages, bringing exotic seeds and animals to the ecosystem.

Succession
The rate of colonization and nature of plant and animal life depend greatly on the regional climate and ecology. Quality and pollution of the soil, materiality of the site and present biodiversity plus a factor chance create a diverse spectrum of growth.[57] The initial colonizer or pioneering species shapes its environment, thus rendering every landscape different. However, there are some plants, present in many Western cities, which are almost omnipresent and are basically part of the typology of the derelict wasteland. Pioneering the wildscape are the weedy, ruderal vegetation types.[58] These plants are mostly of the fast-growing, deep-rooted and plentiful-seeding type, generating offspring fast and colonizing large spaces in a short time.

It is for this reason that in wastelands often are found the same species, but it depends on time how well they are represented. A myriad of wild flowers covers the bushes of green and later, taller plant forms take root, such as bushes and trees. In the damp and darker places of the complex, mosses and fungi sprout up and creepers adorn the walls. These phases of plant life are to be categorised in four stages, defined by Gilbert (as cited in Endensor 2005) in his 1989 publication The

[56] Christopher Woodward, *In Ruins*, 23.
[57] Tim Endensor, *Industrial Ruins*, 42-43.
[58] Paul H. Gobster, "Appreciating urban wildscapes", 33.
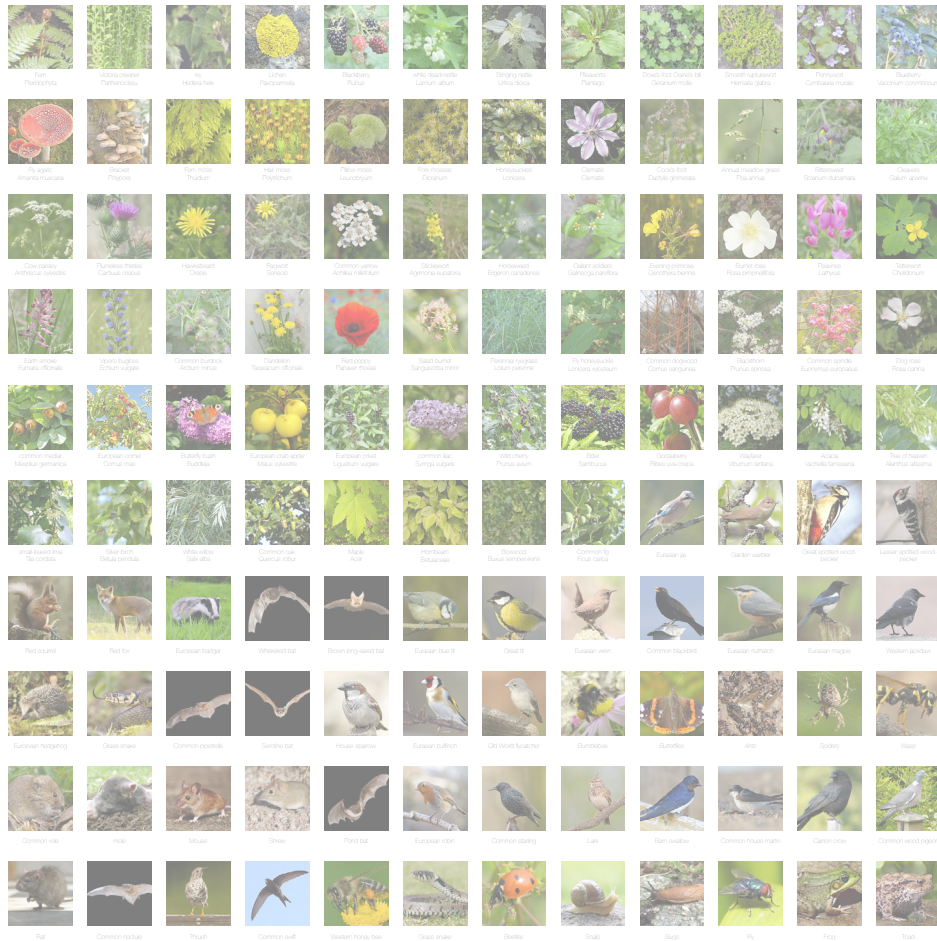
Although their preferred habitat differs from each other, many species thrive in the urban wildscape. From pioneering species to tall grass and herbs to shrubs and eventually trees, plants offer shelter and food to local wildlife.

Image edited excerpt form the authors design proposal, 2018

Left to develop completely autonomous, the third landscape is present in all its beauty in the by Gilles Clément designed parc Matisse. High walls prevent humans from entering, thus sustaining a closed - off biotope.

L'île Derborence iin the parc Matisse, image courtesy of Wikimedia

Ecology of Urban Habitats. In the 'Oxford ragwort stage'[59], as he calls it, pioneering species move in, preparing the ground for larger plants in the 'tall-herb stage'. Then, as the land is left to nature long enough, the 'grassland stage' takes over and in the end, at the 'scrub woodland stage', trees and shrubs dominate the landscape.[60] As said before, it all depends on the degree of maintenance, passage of time, geographical location and regional climate to what extend plant life develops.

As plants grow, animal life advances accordingly. Wildflowers and herbs nourish drifts of bees, grassland attracts mice and other small mammals, while trees and bushes attract nesting birds. Insects are usually the first to move in, creating webs in every uninhibited corner or feasting on the decaying woodwork. Ants roam the floors and moths nest in the deserted fabric. They in turn become food for all sorts of birds and mammals. Scavengers already dominant in cities, such as pigeons and magpies, quickly move in through holes in walls and windows, quickly followed by other urban dwellers.[61]

Cultivating for the uncultivated
Nature is, however, not always balanced in these areas of decay. Pests as well as dominant weeds sometimes cover up all available space if left unchecked. [62] Not only in the ruin itself, these unwanted plants and animals take no note of normative, desired urban (plant) life and spread freely through the city. A small amount of maintenance is therefore necessary to keep a stable ecology. As it is with the social value of the wildscape, a little supervision is required to make the landscape 'profitable' for all. As Catherine Heatherington explains it is sometimes necessary to plant flowering plants among the colonizers, enhancing the impression of 'wild' nature for the public. A little cultivation is required as well to halt the advancement

[59] Senecio squalidus, in Dutch: 'kruiskruid'
[60] Tim Endensor, Industrial Ruins, 42-43
[61] Ibid. 44
[62] Ibid. 46-47

The ephemerality of human endeavour is depicted strikingly in the Eco-cathedral in Mildam. It consists of a "spontaneous landscape", where everything grows freely, even the structure itself.

Hemelpoort, ecokathedraal, Mildam, image courtesy of Henk-Jan van der Klis, Flickr

of the initial opportunistic colonizers to give a chance for more durable colonies to grow. She calls the advancement of plants and animal life the 'ecological narrative' and this is just as important as the industrial or cultural narrative in the understanding of the site.[63] However, it remains clear that particularly the lack of maintenance is a key factor for urban wildlife to grow and prosper. Wildflowers are not cut down prematurely in industrial wastelands, nests are left to hatch in abandoned farmhouses and little cats hunt on derelict train tracks. Animals of course seek shelter in areas less supervised and regulated, where they can safely feed and nest, but even they may need a helping hand.[64] Insects roam the unattended banks and foxes hunt without being disturbed by people and dogs, but only if we let them have their space.

Conclusion

It is clear now that ruins are ambiguous landscapes. The presence of 'wild' plant and animal life in the city blurs the distinction between urban and rural, just as the fringe distorts the relationship between private and public, as well as the division between accepted and unaccepted behaviour. To take it even further, the distinction between man and nature is being challenged, as both seek refuge in this undefined space. The urban wildscape is a hybrid form, a realm of transition.

What we can clearly observe is that the nature of a ruined site is never inert or rigid. It is a volatile and vulnerable ecosystem that greatly depends on regional features and the changing environment. The temporality of the industrial brownfield or urban wildscapes makes plant and animal life, as well as people, adapt quickly. To survive, a constant change is necessary. However, in the wildscape the refuge can find asylum from the constant surveillance and maintenance of the crowded city.

As seen above, the ruin takes on a new function as an affordance for play. The

[63] Catherine Heatherington, "Burried narratives", 179, 183
[64] Tim Endensor, *Industrial Ruins*, 47

absence of surveillance, the often derelict and mangled space forms the perfect adventurous landscape for the physical and emotional growth of both kids and adults. Ruin transgresses of the relationship between the body, the surrounding, materials, nature and even other people. Yet these activities are all but completely ignored by planners of public space. The in‑between space is crammed full and there remains little for social development and rebellious behaviour. Luckily, our constant urge for progress is bound to leaving behind left‑over spaces, thus creating a never‑ending cycle of decay and regeneration.

4. **The Ghost of Ruin**

Introduction

Ruins are both here and they are not. They have endured time, but have perished. They are alive and they are dead. This is why ruins are often thought haunted.[65] Like ghosts, they are stuck in their past life, while lingering on in the present. They have unfinished business. Ruins talk of a past, a present and a future. At the same time, they have neither. They exist in a world of temporality. However, in the lost world of the ruinscapes memory, like ghosts, often persists. According to De Certeau there is no place that is not haunted by many different spirits. He believes that the only places people can live in are haunted, with stories, with memories. These ghosts can only be seen when summoned, but they remain until forgotten.[66]

Monument versus Memorial

The ways in which a ruin tells of the past, present or future, however, differs from beholder to beholder. They can tell of a lost utopia, of pending doom or a future in which nature and man are in balance. They are both monuments and memorials. They speak to the imagination and talk of transience, vulnerability and beauty, but also speak to the ego, with stories of power, grandeur and the sublime.[67] But how can decay evoke both melancholy and glory? Christopher Woodward somewhat clears the subject by explaining that every spectator of ruin is forced to supply the missing pieces by his own imagination, which results in each of us seeing a very different projection of the ruin. The imagination works through the accumulated memories of the observer and is therefor a strictly personal medium, thus rendering a different experience to everyone.[68] This explains why Shelly appreciated the power of the republic or the decadence of the ancient city, Hitler saw in his visits to the ruins of Rome, monuments to the power of the emperors and found a validation for his rule.[69] So although we might see the same structure, we hold different connotations

[65] Silke Arnold - de Simine, *The Ruin as Memorial – the Memorial as Ruin*, 95.
[66] Michel De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 108.
[67] Silke Arnold - de Simine, *The Ruin as Memorial – the Memorial as Ruin*, 94
[68] Christopher Woodward, *In Ruins*, 15, 120.
[69] Ibid. 29

Often the reason for desolation is unpleasant. Trauma, neglect, destruction...

Thomas Cole, The Course of Empire: Destruction, 1836
Oil on canvas, 100,33 × 161,29 cm, New-York Historical Society

by it. This is perhaps evident, but forms a critical subject on how and why we perceive ruins the way we do. Ruin becomes a dialogue between reality and imagination.[70] This notion of incompleteness, or fragmentation, has already discussed been in an aesthetical sense, but forms a pillar when talking of the more psychological values of decay. It is in this chapter that I want to address these psychological notions like nostalgia, identity and trauma and the way decay can be used to incite this.

This part of the thesis is structured along three key elements: nostalgia, trauma and (regional) identity. Although they overlap in many senses, I feel the need to divide them to get a better understanding of a tricky subject. While discussing nostalgia, I cannot ignore the groundbreaking publication of Andreas Huyssen, who with his 2006 piece Nostalgia for Ruins was the first to address the modern day ruin craze. Dylan Trigg's work helped me to understand the trauma affiliated ruin and its necessity for the built environment. For the part on regional identity I mostly used the dissertation of Linde Egberts, professor at the VU in Amsterdam, on regional identity in the Ruhrgebiet.

The manifestation of decay I use here is manifold. It deals with destruction, neglect, downfall and (natural) disaster. It is a broader notion than the urban wildscape and even the aesthetical ruins in painting, but deals with every form of decay that is subject to psychological projection. In this last chapter, I will simply call it ruin.

A Celebration of Collapse

The human mind is flawed and easily corrupted. Memory can be changed both externally or internally, by society, museums and politics and by repressing ones own mind. It is fragmented and its reality often does not testify to truth. Even if the

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[70] Christopher Woodward, *In Ruins*, 139.

...but when gazing on the stilled images of ruin, it is easy to forget. Desolation evokes nostalgia to an ideal past.

Thomas Cole, The Course of Empire: Desolation, 1836
Oil on canvas, 100,33 × 161,29 cm, New-York Historical Society

memory seems clear and reliable, the subject is not able to remember completely disconnected from the social conditions and environment in which he resides. He perceives the memory through the knowledge and experience he has acquired, which are collectively determined by the group.[71]

Before the 19th-century, history and memory were more or less interchangeable, until German historians, led by Leopold von Ranke, transformed history into a professional discipline.[72] From that time on, it was not the people who owned the past, but the scholars and institutions. Public remembrance is in these globalized times a highly social and political process, but still it is not fixed. Memories are constantly selected and interpreted by the dominant class and housed into 'memoryscapes': museums, monuments and other heritage.[73]

Nostalgia for Ruins
When the past becomes more vague and less personal, its memory seems sweeter than the actual time was itself. The inaccessibility of something makes us long for it. This is called nostalgia, but nostalgia can be a dangerous thing. As we have seen, memory is fragmented and only holds a fragmented reality and can be easily corrupted. In the ruin this interference of time is always present. Like discussed above, the past and present intertwine in the body of the ruin and it seems part of neither. It is a fragmented and stagnated part of the past. This triggers a strong sense of nostalgia in the beholder. It is interesting that both critical thinking and scientific research can easily coexist with irrational feelings of nostalgia. Huyssen links nostalgia to the longing for utopia, a place far away in time and space, of which our mind can hardly fathom the reality.[74] The past is a foreign country and ruin seems to form a direct connection to this far away land.

[71] Linde Egberts, "Chosen Legacies," 69.
[72] Ellen Braae, *Beauty Redeemed: Recycling Post-Industrial Landscapes*, 174.
[73] Tim Edensor "The Ghosts of Industrial Ruins", 830.
[74] Andreas Huyssen, *Nostalgia for Ruins*, 7-8.

Often, their sheer size and expanse obsolete industrial compounds evoke the same sublime feelings as the ruins of old do. But to be fair, they are hardly as beautiful or enduring as the classical ruins, it seems. To understand the contemporary magnetism to industrial ruin, we should see them as testimonies to a different culture. Where we see the remains of temples and pyramids as manifestations of entire cultures so is the industrial era to which these remains belong a culture, different than our own.[75] They speak of a time of constant progress and the urge for power. The fact that something so vast, a culture so dominant, perished so quickly, gives many spectator a shiver along their spines. It is, as Gil Doron poetical states, the difference between a Cyborgian landscape versus an Arcadian one.[76]

Does this explain why we feel nostalgia for the ruins of the twentieth century? The towering furnaces of the Ruhrgebiet, the monuments of Socialism, the bunkers of WOII, the bankruptcy of Detroit, these are not times to celebrate but rather to condemn. Still, people seem keen to remember these times they often have not even seen with their own eyes. It is a common symptom in former communist countries, where the oppressive regimes have not so long ago been toppled. The memory is still fresh, but people, not happy with the current political climate, difficult times or general state of the world, yearn to a simpler time. This ostalgia is practiced by young and old.[77] It seems perhaps conflicting in our eyes and hard to understand, but nostalgia does interesting things with memory. According to Huyssen these monuments of modernity still hold a promise to a different age. A side-track from our current course of history.[78] Therefore, nostalgia will not be banished by the common heritage discourse or official memoryscapes, but remain a part of our notion of the past.

[75] Ellen Braae, *Beauty Redeemed: Recycling Post-Industrial Landscapes*, 176.
[76] Gil M. Doron, "The Dead Zone," 255.
[77] Silke Arnold-de Simine, *The Ruin as Memorial – the Memorial as Ruin*, 95.
[78] Andreas Huyssen, *Nostalgia for Ruins*, 8.

A Testimony to Trauma

Where there is ruin, there is trauma. Evidently, something happened that transformed a perfectly good structure into a temporal place of stagnation and decline. Often it is mere neglect that caused society to forget, while in other cases more traumatic events shaped the environment. As with nostalgia and the derivation of identity, an unseen layer of public and personal memory lingers on, while the building slowly decays. Yet, this memory is not always a pleasant one.

The three notions I discuss in this chapter are closely intertwined and have much in common, but the reason I treat them here separately is the difference in their manifestation and their value for the built environment. Collapsed buildings often become petrified metaphors for a shared disaster, of loss and of absence.[79] Thus, trauma is a fundamental part of memory, the personalisation of history and the forming of (regional) identity, but in their dealing with ruin they each touch different notions.

Trauma is an elusive and dangerous notion that is hard to describe in superficial manner and in relation to the built environment. According to Dylan Trigg, it has much to do with displacement, rather than site-specific qualities. The body and mind are disconnected as the latter travels in time to a point of recollection. The experience 'overwhelms the relation between place, time ad embodiment'.[80] This is often strongly displayed when the actual place of trauma is no longer present, but the mind still feels connected to the initial events. To go even further, the event, freed form its original container, persists in the memory of the place.[81] It is still present, yet its material form has diminished. The event haunts the site.

It is here that ruins can be a strong testimony. These places are, as discussed, places disconnected to time and place and are neither a part of the present nor the past. They seem part of the event yet hold on to the present just as the survivors

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[79] Michael S. Roth et al, *Irresistible Decay: Ruins Reclaimed*, vii.
[80] Dylan Trigg, "The Place of Trauma", 88.
[81] Ibid. 91

In the village of Oradour-sur-Glane the 1944 massacre of 642 mainly women and children, is still not forgotten. Charles de Gaulle ordered the town to be never rebuilt and form a eternal memorial, Thus becoming part of the general heritage discourse.
Oradour-sur-Glane massacre, image courtesy of Wikimedia

think often of themselves. The event becomes part of the victim as it does within the architecture.

There are numerous examples throughout the world where trauma is remembered through its architectural expression. In the diversity and severity of tragic there can of course be no real comparison, but in its architecture even more so. According to Woodward a variation upon a familiar dialogue of fragmentation versus wholeness can be found in any form of petrified pain.[82] Take for instance the Hiroshima Peace Memorial, the village of Oradour-sur-Glane or the ruins of the crematorium at Auschwitz-Birkenau. In a dark sense, they evoke the same reaction of the mind filling in the pieces. Not necessarily the architectural elements, but a picture of time is trying to get recreated with the help of fallen structures.

Blissful Forgetfulness

Of course, tragedy is not always wanted to be remembered. Strong ciphers of trauma can often be problematic, especially if the sorrow wants to be forgotten. Woodward poses a striking example of this in his account on the memorial of the bombing of Dresden. After the war, with the city in ruins, efforts were made to rebuild the city as soon as possible, with the exception of the bombed Frauenkirche. The once glorious dome was left in rubble by the Soviet liberators as a reminder of Western, and thus capitalist, aggression and war crimes. As soon as the Soviets left, however, work was begun to restore the church in its former magnificence and the traumatised survivors in Dresden could begin to sink into blissful oblivion.[83] It is almost impossible to distinguish where trauma is deliberately trying to be forgotten and where it just fades away gently. Ruins, witnesses of a past sometimes too painful to remember, are easily mistaken by an outsider as valuable remnants of history. This is something to keep in mind when entering an unfamiliar terrain and imposing ones

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[82] Christopher Woodward, *In Ruins*, 139.
[83] Ibid. 210.

After the bombing of Dresden by the Allied forces, the Soviets maintained the rubble of the Frauenkirche as a reminder of Western warmongering. Instead it became an unofficial place of remembrance and identity.
Walter Möbius, Dresden Frauenkirche ,1957 SLUB Dresden, image courtesy of German Photo Library

Hope and horror go hand in hand in the bombed church of Hiroshima. Although it forms a reminder of the power of destruction and death of the first atomic bomb, it serves as a place of hope for world peace and the ultimate elimination of all nuclear weapons.
Hiroshima Peace Memorial, image courtesy of UNESCO

view on the region.

What I did not deal with yet is the notion of closure visualised in traumatized architecture. In its destroyed materiality, the clear passage of time and continuous presence in the now, the ruin can serve as a metaphor for memory itself. The ruin acts as a mirror to the internal world of the witnessed trauma. It forms a testimony.[84] As the structure crumbles, so does the memory of the event. This is precisely the difference between rubble and ruin.[85] Where one is deliberately destroyed and erased from memory, the other offers solace and time to heal. However, in our modern infatuation with the romanticized ruins, the rubble has indeed bee transformed to ruin; from trauma to solace.[86]

Stagnation versus crumbling into oblivion, which of the two sends a more powerful message? A gothic chapel, slowly collapsing under its own weight and the conquest of ferns and ivy certainty recalls a strong message, but after it has vanished, what remains of the memory? Does a scar eventually vanish or remain as a reminder of past trauma? The problem is that when heritage is kept alive artificially, it immediately becomes part of the general heritage discourse, thus being handled by professionals rather than the people involved. A strong example can be found in Oradour-sur-Glane, where, after the massacre of 1944, Charles de Gaulle ordered the site to be left exactly as found as a memorial to the victims of the town, but also for the cruelties of the Nazis in the whole of France. De Gaulle in a sense hijacked the site to be part of a greater discourse, maybe bypassing the locals.

Warning!
What also can be derived from this example is the usage of ruin as a warning for future generations. The decayed remains are kept as they are, like a scar, to avoid repetition of the vicious act.[87] This of course is mostly the case in man inflicted

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[84] Dylan Trigg, "The Place of Trauma", 95-96.
[85] Andreas Huyssen, *Nostalgia for Ruins*, 8.
[86] Ibid.
[87] Silke Arnold-de Simine, *The Ruin as Memorial – the Memorial as Ruin*, 96.

destruction, but could in the future also be done with natural disaster, to better our destructive ways. It is, however, a practice of all ages. It disagrees with Woodward's claim that for real appreciation, brutal destruction is necessary.[88] The mere warning is enough.

Places of trauma often radiate a strong magnetism to the general public, but even to survivors and the people initially complicit. This can be explained by the need for mourning, as the place itself can be a testimony of the event and thus a place of remembrance, of closure. [89] It can, however, also just be for the thrill of it. This is called dark tourism and it forms another difficult to explain notion of trauma.[90] Why do tourists flock to places like Auschwitz, DDR prisons and Khmer Rouge killing fields? A very cynical explanation could be that people need these places to be connected to feelings they otherwise would be unable to evoke. They feel human by pondering the trials of other people; feel connected to their anguish; and feel good about it. On the other hand, the visitor can never fully experience the trauma. The ruin forms a threshold between the here and the past.[91] Although it is haunted, we never see more than the ghost of things past. As with material incompleteness, the memory remains personal and vague, resulting in everyone to construct a different image.

Shared Identities

Identity is a tricky subject, often hailed by press and politicians when feared it is in danger. But what is identity and what can architects and designers learn from it in correspondence to decay? Identity, simply said, means that two persons are exactly alike, while being utterly unique. People, either individual or in groups, but also places, habits or objects, can thus both have, share and project an identity.[92]

[88] Christopher Woodward, *In Ruins*, 239.
[89] Dylan Trigg, "The Place of Trauma", 89.
[90] Silke Arnold - de Simine, *The Ruin as Memorial – the Memorial as Ruin*, 96.
[91] Dylan Trigg, "The Place of Trauma", 99.
[92] Linde Egberts, "Chosen Legacies," 44 - 45.

In the ruin pubs of Budapest you can encounter young, happy people sitting in an old communist-era Trabant having specialty beers, wallowing in Ostalgia, a nostalgia for the days before the fall of the Soviet regime. Szimpla Kertmozi in Budapest, image courtesy of thriftynomads.com

However, and that is often the problem, when identifying to a certain group, there is always the other, who does not share the same race, gender, status, religious ideas, language, morals, customs and so on. So identity both includes and excludes people. This process is often manipulated to convert particular places and objects to one's identity, to his territory. Borders, but also regions, buildings, places, are markers of territory and all are saturated with constructed meanings, memories and relationships.[93]

This is, however, a two-way process. Not only does identity shape territory, territory also plays a strong role in shaping identity.[94] As identity states what we have in common, it can easily be applied to geography and architecture: the identity of a place or region. Architectural historian Christian Norberg-Schultz translated this in 1980 to the Genius Loci; a now often used term in (landscape) architecture. He uses it as a tool for identifying the spirit of the place and linking the local habits and architecture to this concept.[95] This is, however, not only in a physical sense true. It is the memories that tie one to a place, according to De Certeau.[96]

The Construction of Identity

Identity based on region does not just rely on a shared past. History is only a small facet of the lifeworld of people, as they inflict upon it ideas, utopias, ambitions and expectations. People look with an eye of the present towards their past, changing the meaning and relevance of events accordingly. This makes identity a thing of the past, the present and the future.[97] Before, I argued that ruins have neither; it is the layer of identity that people attach to it that gives these ruins a place in the society. In turn, they often supply people a place in the world. It is this that makes ruins a strong bearer of identity. It supplies a sort of freedom to derive and impose any sort of meaning on the stripped structure.

[93] Linde Egberts, "Chosen Legacies," 45.
[94] Ibid. 44-45.
[95] Christian Norberg-Schulz, *Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture*.
[96] Michel De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 108.
[97] Linde Egberts, "Chosen Legacies," 56.

Zeche Zollverein is a place completely turned around. Where once enormous machines clammered and smoke flew high, now there are festivals, museums and art. However, is this a solution to every problematic post - industrial area?
image by the author

Regional identities are thus often imagined and constructed, they form communities bound together by shared legends, heroes, golden ages, traditions, shared trauma and the features of the landscape. Donald McNeil, as paraphrased by Egberts, sees four ingredients that shape together a regional identity: stories, symbols, geographical space and 'the other'.[98] Folk stories and legends often tie a people, either in a small scale or as big as entire continents together. Symbols are everything that can be seen as heritage, such as famous people, food, monuments and language and the geographical space is things like mountains, cities and rivers. The other is more difficult to pinpoint, as it is everyone and everything that does not belong to their group. Here again people sometimes belong and sometimes do not, as the perimeter shift according to the strangeness of the other.

Identity in ruins
For regional identity to grow there need to be anchors fixated in the landscape. These provide authenticity, legitimation and traces of roots.[99] These anchors, or symbols, of course, don't have to be in ruins, but for the sake of this research I focus in this part of the research on the obsolete mines of the Ruhrgebiet. This is partly because I have visited Zollverein in the past year and partly because it makes for an interesting example of regional identity in relation to decay.

The Ruhr is of course littered by obsolete mines and towering steel. Since the 'Zechensterben', the closing of the mines, from the 1960's and 70's, there has been a complete shift in identity.[100] For the Ruhrgebiet the mines are both its creational story, golden age and recent trauma. This makes this area so interesting, as normally regions store only one of these principles in their collective memory.[101] Nevertheless, where multiple generations of Germans as well as immigrants worked together in the mines for decades, their children suddenly grew up in a mining town without mines.

[98] Linde Egberts, "Chosen Legacies," 59-60.
[99] Ibid. 75-76
[100] Ellen Braae, *Beauty Redeemed: Recycling Post-Industrial Landscapes*, 50.
[101] Linde Egberts "Heritage in the construction of Regional Identity."

The 'postmemory' transferred by their parents has shaped the identity of the next generation thoroughly.[102] However, this is not the second-generation war survivor story, but a generation that was able reshape its identity by turning their region and their heritage around.

In 1979 the first museum was opened in a former mining complex and more were to follow. Now the 'Industriekultur' of the Ruhrgebiet is unprecedented and completely turned the region around. The decaying structures towering above the trees are now not so much monuments for a lost past, but a hope for a new rejuvenation. They speak of the future, of the Ruhr as a cultural hotspot. It teaches us that although trauma is a strong sensation, public remembrance can be turned around to form a stronger type of identity.

The Privilege of Proximity

It is rather easy to write about the wonders of ruin while sitting in a library in Amsterdam. As a resident in one of the most planned cities in the world, I can feel only a vague nostalgia for dereliction and an enthusiasm for wired-off areas. As we have seen, ruin embodies often more than a sublime experience for a passer-by or a safe-haven for people in the margins. Whether we appreciate ruin or not has much to do with the either physical, emotional or socio-economic distance we occupy from the actual ruination and abandonment of the object. Alice Mah, a sociologist cited by Christopher Woodward, introduced the term 'proximity' to express the difference in aesthetical and emotional reaction of different groups of people towards the dereliction of their environment. This sense of proximity can be quantified in distance, time and wealth.[103] How then can we come to fathom the emotional depth that accompanies the ruin of the scattered bunkers on the

[102] Linde Egberts, "Chosen Legacies," 290-291.
[103] Christopher Woodward, "Learning from Detroit", 24

Atlantic coasts or radioactive amusement park of Chernobyl? To the victims directly or indirectly involved these ruins bare with them the downfall of their families and their region solely in their enduring existence. Ruins hold little aesthetics for the people directly involved in their creation.

The same goes, in a slightly different way, with our appreciation of the ruins of Nîmes or Segovia, where the Roman ruins and aqueducts have for thousands of years formed a décor to everyday life and stir little reaction in the minds of the inhabitants. We see now that the notion of proximity not only relates to trauma, but can also be used in a wider sense. Christopher Woodward relates his youth in prosperous Welwyn to his fascination for ruins and comes to the conclusion that particularly the absence of ruination, this lack of adventure, shaped his obsession with the very thing he seemed to lack in his youth.[104] The same could probably be said about the author.

Conclusion

More happens in the wastelands than meets the eye. A layer of memory and identity wraps itself around the abandoned structures and lost landscapes. The obsolete railway tracks and harbours are witnesses to the industrial revolution, the voids in the city are a reminder of the terrors of war, of racism, of nationalism, the abandoned shopping malls a reminder of failing capitalism. Every ruin has its story and cannot be fully appreciated without.

Although ruin could thus evoke strong feelings of trauma and nostalgia, the aesthetical and social values discussed before are often simultaneously present and inseparably connected to the experience of ruin. In plain daylight, the death camps could look almost peaceful, without ivy the passage of time is hard to witness. The sublime, transience and temporality of ruin are still present in traumatised

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[104] Christopher Woodward, *In Ruins*, 32-33.

Rubble versus ruin. When does destruction become decay? When turns chaos into tranquillity?
Richard Peter, Blick vom Rathausturm nach Süden mit der Allegorie der Güte, 1945
image courtesy of Deutsche Fotothek

When an earthquake struck this this old Italian village, instead of rebuilding, they filled the remains up and built a new village away from the rubble. It is now a barren scar in the landscape, testifying to the local trauma.
Gibellina vecchia, image courtesy of Sicily Guide Tourism

architecture. They help to hear the testimony of the structure. It is because of this that sometimes the feelings don't reach the surface and the ruin is no witness to the memory expected. It is then no more than a pile of broken masonry.

It is however clear that the architecture of trauma has roughly the same appeal to modern visitors as it did with Shelly and Wordsworth. Although the ruin has changed from toppled columns in an idyllic landscape to the remains of war stricken cities and testimonials of genocide, whether it is on a grand tour or a field trip from a beach resort, people seem to be drawn to these testimonies of trauma.

Again we see a fading of boundaries. History and memory are intertwined, as are haunting and nostalgia. Ruins are more than in a single sense ambiguous. As everybody summons different 'ghosts' from the ruins, what they say is manifold.

5. **Toolset**

Conclusion

We have seen that ruins are testimonies of the past, persisting in the present. They speak of futility, of transience and of the power of nature. They are awe-inspiring, timeless and evoke a deep sense of tranquillity, while being almost painful to behold. Ruins are filled by imagination and form a décor for contemplation. They offer asylum to people and animals in the margins and are substitutes for a lost wilderness. Decay lets plants grow and animals hide. It offers a canvas for artistic freedom and insubordination. It teaches children to be adults and adults to be children. Degradation lets one interact with the material world and find a place in the environment. Ruin can offer solace and can act as places of mourning. They are warnings for future mistakes and draw visitors in search of excitement. They evoke nostalgia, while offering hope for a better future.

But how, whilst having so many qualities, is it then possible to refine the value of decay for the built environment? In the preceding research I have treated a very broad array of subjects, discussing a vast spectrum of values. From this, tools for appreciation can be distilled. In the conclusion of this thesis I put them together to create a set of values, to be used not only in my graduation project, but in future dealings with ruin and decay. As said in the introduction of this thesis, too often now areas of urban decay or post-industrial areas are transformed according to the latest trends. Gentrification takes hold and something intangible gets lost from these areas. Although often beautifully repurposed, more gets lost than initially can be perceived. As designers too often not fully understand the ambiguous and paradoxical values of these places, only a fragment of the spirit remains. For instance, when focussing solely on the aesthetical qualities, the social necessity of these places diminishes. On the other hand, when leaving an area to the forces of nature or the hands of people, the memorial values may disappear. It is hard

The abandoned amusement park in East Berlin will soon open to the public. The structures will be kept and kept in their deteriorated state, as a décor for future development. I wonder, does the sublime feeling remain while the space is pacified?
Spree Park Berlin, image courtesy of partyflock.nl

to distil a single value from ruin. As seen in the previous pages values range from highly intangible to concrete, from psychological to aesthetical and from cultural to natural. The toolset presented here helps to make sense of all the different layers of appreciation possible and hopes to guide the designer to a balanced project.

Tranquillity
As the ruin is neither part of the past nor the present, time does not flow in these spaces. A deep sense of tranquillity can be aroused shut off from the world. For people to escape the constant chaos and distraction of urban life, these oases are a rare good. In this rare moment of suspension the people can find the peace and quiet they cannot find in their own lives, as even at home people are constantly reminded of the outside world through television screens, computers and phones.

Transience
The first artistic notion the ruin evokes is of course that of transience. The leftover carcasses of ancient civilizations and towering structures of former industries are reminders of the futility of human endeavour. Everything goes back to where it started and nature will prevail. This is a quality that is maybe solely aesthetical and therefore better suited for art than architecture, but the sublime feelings evoked are indeed valuable for the built environment. It makes people reflect upon their existence and their place in the world. Maybe this will raise some respect for the world we live in and the plants and animals we share this world with, as an appreciation for the inevitable forces of time and decay.

Fragmentation
The current practise of refurbishing ruins and areas of decay leaves little room for

imagination. Medieval ruins being 'finished' with concrete toppings, old factories 'filled in' with new structures, these projects, although popular and often beautifully done take something away from our perception of ruin. Although the new and the old form a juxtaposition of materials and forms, it becomes impossible to derive a personal meaning from the deteriorated structure. The dialogue of what has remained and what has perished is one of the strongest ciphers of our interest in ruins. Sometimes it is better to leave it to the imagination.

Ambiguity
The ill-defined character of the wildscape makes it such an interesting and diverse place. As the boundaries between private and public, urban and rural, legal and illegal fade, the human and natural worlds coincide. The enormous potential this raises is invaluable, because it gives the opportunity for freedom. Plants and animals can prosper, cultural initiatives may sprout and people will find places to be themselves. As the area does not impose limits, the possibilities for expression thrive.

Asylum
Informal and even illegal activities are inseparably connected to living in groups. To ignore these transgressions of conformity is to be utterly naïve. People in the margins of society need and deserve a place to act about and be relatively free of repercussion. But not only people have a need for places free of surveillance. Plants and animals, compelled to urban environments, seek refuge in these places of little maintenance. It is these areas that thrive in biodiversity and it is here it should be left to develop.

It is, however, almost impossible to maintain the values of the terrain vague after actively intervening in the non-designed character of the place. Altering
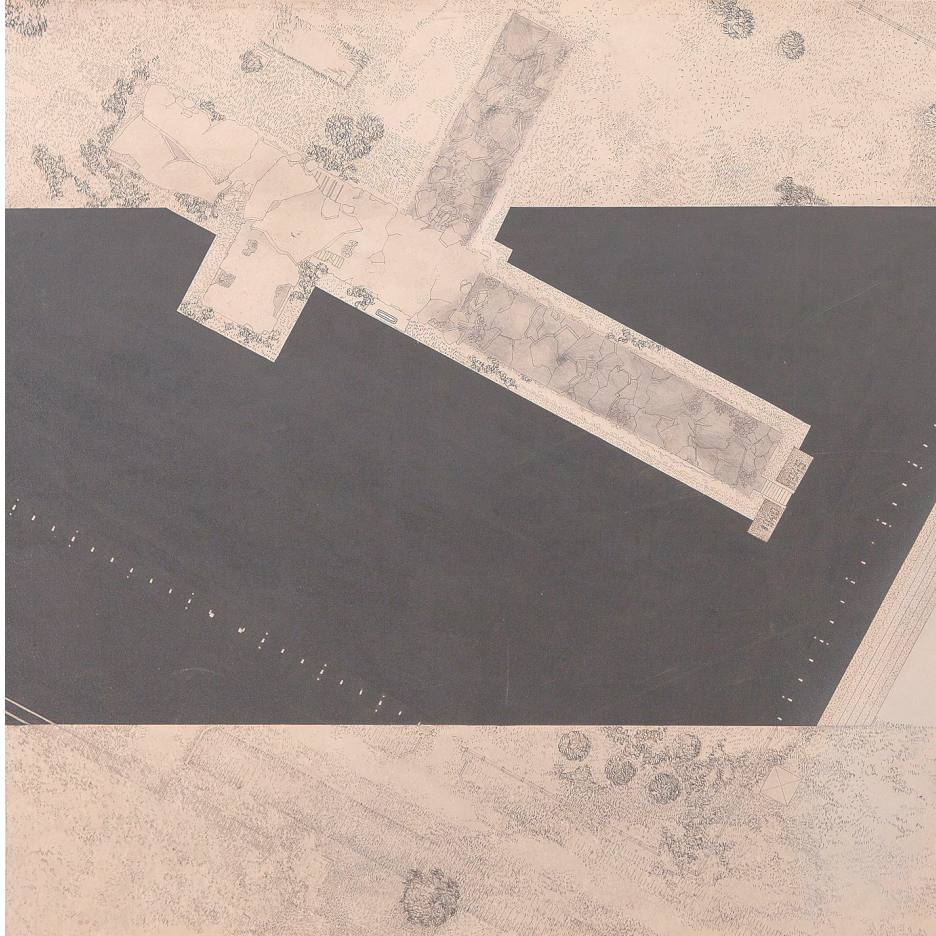
Oskar Hansen's 1958 proposal for a monument to the victims of Auschwitz-Birkenau was to project a broad stretch of asphalt over the site ending in a gate wielded shut. The barracks would be left to nature and slowly, just like the memory he hoped, fade.
Oskar Hansen, 'the Road' (detail), 1958 image coutesy of artmuseum.pl

almost always means sacrificing the wildscape. While intending to make it accessible for everyone, the space becomes restricted for marginalized groups of people. Even opening up a place for creative initiatives, drives out people lower on the ladder. There is, therefore, a choice to make.

Affordance

As shown in the chapter about play, the material found in the urban wildscape becomes during play a tool for testing the skills. The scattered remains of an interior transform into projectiles, den materials and obstacles. The untidiness of derelict structures helps children and adolescents to interact with each other and the material world. It teaches to be responsible adults by seeking out the limits of desired behaviour. What is more, the direct influencing of material teaches care and knowledge of the world, just by breaking and shattering it. These activities are impossible in the regulated spaces we normally occupy and it is in this the wildscape offers freedom and affordance. By playfully interacting with these strange environments, people will appropriate the structure and make the sounds, smells and other characteristics their own.

Testimony

The ruin has often less an objective than a subjective message to the beholder. People derive identity from symbols, which are stronger when being evidence of roots. Remembrance is fixated to architecture. Decayed structures and mangled landscapes are especially strong in evoking nostalgia and trauma, as their fragmented formation is subject to mental addition and the accumulation of psychological layers. Apart from that, ruin can act as a testimony to trauma, soothing the pain, while being a physical reminder of the devastations of war, natural disaster and atrocious

crimes. They often become a magnetic point for tourism as well as for victims.

      With this toolset it becomes possible to distil the values of decay even without the genuine ruin present. It could be possible to evoke the same sensations with new architecture without relying on the deteriorated remains. It is by no means a strict formula, but the above - stated characteristics, without making a ranking, are a necessity for urban life. If a ruin gives either meaning to a place, support biodiversity or insubordination, evokes the sublime or the imagination, while being juxtaposed against contemporary structure, we as designers are obliged to take every present value in account and act accordingly.

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