ESCAPING MODERNITY THE COMPLEX INTERPLAY OF ROMANTIC IDEALS AND CONTEMPORARY ESCAPISM

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The Complex Interplay of Romantic Ideals and Contemporary Escapism

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_01 J.M.W. Turner: *Plymouth Citadel,* 1815, in a private collection.

_02 BIG: *NOT A HOTEL Setouchi,* 2024, Japan.

_00 **INTRODUCTION** URBAN DESIRES AND RURAL DAYDREAMS

Like many Europeans, I am drawn to the vibrant energy and constant movement of urban landscapes. The last 5 years of my life I spent migrating from one large city to another large city across Europe. It is easy to be captivated by the lively, fast-paced urban life. However, I also find myself daydreaming of life on a farm with close friends, where the rhythms of nature set the pace of life. This inner urban-rural dilemma was the starting point for writing this text.

The number of mental health problems in the Western Euro-American world is alarming, think of depression, burn-outs, anxiety, stress and substance use.[1] And over the past decade, there has been a consistent rise in mental health issues.[2] Our current neoliberal society favours policies that promote free-market capitalism, valuing high expectations for success, consumerism and constant connectivity as central pillars of our culture. A disconnect between the speed of technological advancements and human adaptability often leads to feelings of being overwhelmed and contributes to mental health issues.[3] Furthermore, participation in communal interactions is no longer central in modern Western societies, resulting in anonymous urban places and individual-focused cities, where it is easy to be anonymous.

Because of all these factors, the mental pressure in cities is very high, leaving little to the imagination as to why city residents feel disconnected and lonely in the constructed fast-paced, anonymous concrete urban jungles. This has led many to look for alternative lifestyles outside the city, a revival of the Romantic ideal. An increasing number of urban Europeans consider moving to rural areas for a slower and simpler lifestyle to feel more connected with their immediate environment (nature and community).[4] The COVID-19 pandemic and the rise of remote work have further enlarged this desire, making rural living even more interesting. But, as I will argue, rural life is not as simple as we imagine, one reason for this is because the modern housing consumer appears to want the best of both worlds. This, again, highlights the ongoing tension in human experience: the desire for excitement versus the need for more peace of mind and stability. Similar to the Romantic era's yearning for a return to nature that emerged in response to the urbanisation of the Industrial Revolution.

In the following text, I will begin with an analysis of our current neoliberal society, exploring how its mental pressures manifest in a yearning for natural landscapes—often referred to as the back-to-nature movement or the rural ideal. I will examine how this longing is reflected in contemporary architectural projects, where poorly integrated green often fails to live up to the dream architectural renderings promise. I will then draw parallels to the ideal of the Romantic period, highlighting the similarities and questioning the idealisation of rural lifestyles since it is not as simple as it initially appears. Moving forward, I will delve into the concept of the public realm, arguing that loneliness is not simply resolved by escaping urban landscapes, revisiting the viewpoints of Hannah Arendt. The city must shift from being an environment of individualism to one of community and connection, do we want to solve its problems. In the final chapter, I will advocate for the development of more robust, public green spaces within cities—spaces designed not just for visual appeal, but integral parts of a collective urban experience.

[1] Hans-Ulrich Wittchen et al., "The Size and Burden of Mental Disorders and Other Disorders of the Brain in Europe 2010," *European Neuropsychopharmacology* 21, no. 9 (2011): 655–679.

[2] World Health Organization (WHO), "The Impact of COVID-19 on Mental, Neurological, and Substance Use Services: Results of a Rapid Assessment," Geneva: *World Health Organization*, 2020. https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240012455.

[3] Thomas L. Friedman, *Thank You for Being Late: An Optimist's Guide to Thriving in the Age of Accelerations* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2016), 31-32.

[4] European Commission, "Demography of Europe – 2023 Edition - Eurostat," *Eurostat*, accessed August 9, 2024, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/interactive-publications/demography-2023#about-publication.

_**03** Caspar David Friedrich: *Der Wanderer über dem Nebelmeer*, 1818, Hamburger Kunsthalle.

_**04** Nicolás del Río + Max Núñez: *Chalet C7*, 2008, Chile.

Just as industrialisation in Europe was a catalyst for the Romanticism movement can modern accelerations like climate change, social media and COVID-19 be seen as catalysts for the current 'back-to-nature' movement? To better understand the connection between our modern living desires and the Romantic ethic, I will start with a brief analysis of our modern Western society.

Modernism is the orientation toward the future and the desire for progress; in other words, it is a break with tradition.[5] Modernity freed people from traditional constraints and limitations imposed on them by their family or community, but it did not give freedom to everybody, everywhere.[6] The benefits of modernity are not evenly distributed, on a national as well as on a global scale. The focus on progress and innovation can further lead to a disconnection from social and cultural traditions, that once provided a sense of community and identity. In Chapter 1 of *Architecture and Modernity: A Critique* (2000), Hilde Heynen, professor of architectural theory and history at KU Leuven, explores the complexities of modernity. She argues that inherent contradictions and tensions mark modernity. On the one hand, it promises emancipation and autonomy, on the other, it often sustains new forms of control, alienation, and inequality.[7] This goes hand in hand with the inner conflict, that draws residents to urban as well as rural life, as mentioned in the introduction.

We live in an era characterised by rapid urbanisation, industrialisation, technological advancement, standardisation and social interconnectedness, resulting in a world where social, political, and physical parameters change faster than our capacity to process and adapt to those changes. The book *Thank You for Being Late* (2016), by Thomas Friedman, a renowned American journalist and author, discusses how the accelerating pace of change impacts our ability to cope with it, contributing to a pervasive sense of disorientation, alienation and anxiety.[8] This disconnect between the speed of technological advancements and human adaptability often leads to feelings of being overwhelmed and contributes to mental health issues.[9] Approximately 46% of the European population experiences mental health issues each year, according to the World Health Organization and the European Commission, including conditions such as depression, anxiety and substance use.[10] Over the past decade, there has been a consistent rise in mental health issues. For instance, the World Health Organization reports that the global prevalence of anxiety disorders increased by 25.6% and depression rates rose by 27.6% from 2010 to 2020.[11] These numbers show that the pressures of modernity, including high expectations for success and constant connectivity, now not only a sense of dislocation bring, but also lead to real depression, high levels of stress and anxiety, burnout and other mental health issues. Social media, while facilitating connection, also plays a significant role in worsening mental health by fostering unrealistic comparisons, cyberbullying, and the effect of being active 24/7. All these aspects contribute to a growing disconnect between perceived success and actual well-being.[12]

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[5] Hilde Heynen, *Architecture and Modernity: A Critique* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000), 9.

[6] Ibid., 15.

[7] Ibid., 10.

[8] Friedman, *Thank You for Being Late*, 25-26.

[9] Ibid., 29-30.

[10] European Commission, "Flash Eurobarometer 530: Mental Health," Ipsos European Public Affairs, 2023. DOI:10.2875/48999.

[11] World Health Organization (WHO), "The Impact of COVID-19 on Mental, Neurological, and Substance Use Services: Results of a Rapid Assessment."

[12] European Commission, "Flash Eurobarometer 530: Mental Health."

_05 Caspar David Friedrich: *Klosterfriedhof im Schnee,* ca. 1810, Alte Nationalgalerie Berlin.

_06 BIG: *Vollebak Island,* 2023, Canada.

Today, about 80% of the European population lives in urban areas and 25% in rural areas according to the European Commission.[13] The amount of people living in urban areas is still growing, but, this growth did slow down, between 2015 and 2020, the urban population growth rate decreased from 0,5% (2015) to 0,3% (2020) per year.[14] This decrease in growth rate, combined with a continuing growing population (largely driven by migration rather than natural growth), suggests a shift in residential patterns and a potential increase in residential or even rural migration. The rural idyll, also known as the 'back-to-nature', 'back-to-the-land', or 'simple life' movement is characterized by urban-to-rural migration, evident in the appeal of rural living, off-grid lifestyles, portable small homes, and renovation projects such as second homes and farms.

A common meaning of 'rural' or 'the real world' draws to the model of animal life. Nature is real and responds in the best way to interior and exterior forces, to live a pure life and reach the same state of existence humans must also live close to nature. Rural communities contain small, lower-order settlements which demonstrate a strong relationship between buildings and extensive landscapes.[15] Spatial imaginaries of rural are, for example, the countryside, wilderness, periphery, farms, villages, unincorporated territory and open space. The concept of 'rurality', on the other hand, encompasses more than just physical space and scale, it also has a link to ideological and social constructs.[16] Until the 1970s, rural areas were increasingly seen as spaces of production. However, there is a changing role of rural areas in modern society, they are no longer solely sites of agricultural production but also places of lifestyle consumption and leisure.[17] Because of global cosmopolitanism, a broad conceptualisation of rurality as 'the other' has spread, illustrating the enduring appeal of rural life as a counterbalance to urban pressures, thus making it appealing to cosmopolitan tastes.[18] The rural serves as both a physical escape and a conceptual refuge from the relentless pace of urban life.

When uncertainty plays a large role in life, the thought of escaping is a form of imagination, manifesting in desires to transcend, transform, or temporarily depart from one's immediate reality and escape.[19] This yearning to go back to nature applies mostly to modern Westerners, primarily the wealthy middle-class, for whom society rather than nature is unpredictable and violent. David Bell, Professor of Cultural Geography at the University of Leeds and writer of the chapter 'Variations on the Rural Idyll' in *The Handbook of Rural Studies* (2006) says: "The idyll is a product of the bourgeois imaginary that emerged with modern urban industrial culture, and which sought

to produce an ordered social spatialisation of margin and centre."[20] But, whether people move to nature or if this longing stays a mere dream (since economic and practical considerations also need to be taken into account) is not of importance according to American writer Edward Abey. In his book *Desert Solitaire* (1968), Abbey emphasises that the option to escape is as crucial as hope itself for maintaining mental health and social stability.[21] The immersion in nature would serve as a vital form of escape, allowing people to preserve their sanity and moral integrity amidst the chaos of modern society.[22] This underscores the essential role of escapism as a means of safeguarding hope with nature as medicine. A medicine for the soul that is suffering from the pressures of an increasingly urbanised world.[23]

Brian Short, Professor in Historical Geography at the University of Sussex, emphasises in *The Handbook of Rural Studies*, the power of media and advertisement and its ongoing link between rural descriptions and consumerism, "the consumer buys (into) the countryside through the link made with products, whether they be cars, duvets, beer, kitchen interiors or other 'heritage' products." Besides media and advertisement, the rural idyll can also be found in films, novels, shops and in the local or exotic food we order in a restaurant. There are endless opportunities to buy into (imaginative) rurality, but we want even more, we want to buy into rural life and reproduce 'traditional' forms of family and social life. "These landscapes represent an attempt," David Bell suggests, "to model an imaginary rural idyll for new managerialist (and new traditionalist) homeowners."[24] In the same book Emeritus Professor of Geography at Exeter University Paul Cloke says that rural areas are often perceived as places of simplicity, tranquillity and authenticity, in contrast to the complexity and chaos of urban environments.[25] This separation is, however, more nuanced since urban populations move to rural areas and bring with them urban expectations and lifestyles, which in turn transform rural communities.[26] Cloke's analysis reveals the paradox of the rural idyll: while it represents an escape from urban life, it is simultaneously reshaped by the very forces of urbanisation it seeks to avoid. The commercialisation of the rural idyll highlights the complex relationship between urban and rural spaces, where the desire for escape is constantly mediated by the forces of consumer capitalism. In other words, we simply cannot get rid of modernity and it is no longer possible to find a place where its influence doesn't prevail. We need to find other solutions.

[13] European Environment Agency, "Urban Sustainability," accessed August 11, 2024, https://www.eea.europa.eu/en/topics/in-depth/urban-sustainability.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Paul Cloke, "Conceptualizing Rurality," In *The Handbook of Rural Studies*, edited by Peter Cloke, Terry Marsden, and Patrick H. Mooney (London: Sage Publications, 2006), 20.
[16] Keith Halfacree, "Rural Space: Constructing a Three-Fold Architecture," In *The Handbook of Rural Studies*, edited by Peter Cloke, Terry
[17] Cloke, "Conceptualizing Rurality," 19.
[18] Terry Marsden, "Pathways in the Sociology of Rural Knowledge," in *The Handbook of Rural Studies*, edited by Peter Cloke, Terry Marsden, and Patrick H. Mooney (London: Sage Publications, 2006), 4.
[19] Yi-Fu Tuan, *Escapism* (JHU Press, 1998), 14.

[20] David Bell, "Variations on the Rural Idyll," In *The Handbook of Rural Studies*, edited by Paul Cloke, Terry Marsden, and Patrick H. Mooney (London: Sage Publications, 2006), 150.
[21] Edward Abbey, *Desert Solitaire: A Season in the Wilderness* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1968), 8-19.
[22] Ibid., 30.
[23] Brian Short, "Idyllic Ruralities," In *The Handbook of Rural Studies*, edited by Paul Cloke, Terry Marsden, and Patrick Mooney (London: SAGE Publications, 2006), 138.
[24] Bell, "Variations on the Rural Idyll," 154.
[25] Cloke, "Conceptualizing Rurality," 20.
[26] Ibid., 22.

_07 Caspar David Friedrich: *Klosterruine Eldena,* 1825,
Alte Nationalgalerie Berlin.

_08 Stefano Boeri Architetti: *COP27,* 2022–ongoing, Dubai.

'Uncertainty' can be seen as the overarching theme of why there is dissatisfaction with modern cities; including stress, mental health issues, lack of time and more. This modern uncertainty can manifest in a yearning for a simpler, more connected way of life, a sentiment that echoes the Romantic era's fight against industrial society, its withdrawal from culture and its search for nature. Juxtaposing the escapism of the Romantic period, spanning from the late 18th to the mid-19th century, with the modern rural idyll can help us better understand this behaviour and help us find the roots of this phenomenon. The connection with the Romantic period arises from questioning whether the longing for rurality is an intrinsic aspect of human nature that has always existed, or whether this yearning is triggered by specific events and keeps reappearing.

In the book *Escapism* (1998), the author Yi-Fu Tuan quotes the text of the German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, where he explains that a longing for the natural and the wild goes back to the beginning of city building: "Human beings have been and continue to be profoundly restless" […] "They both reveal a discontent with the status quo, a desire to escape."[27] This human restlessness can find form in geographical mobility; my brief migrations to other cities in Europe could be seen as an example of this escapism and restlessness. Another form of escaping is by looking at nature, where Romanticism art is a striking example. The Romantic desire to capture a panoramic landscape scene in a work of art first emerged during Roman antiquity in Europe, sometimes disappearing and popping up again.[28] Yi-Fu Tuan says that "Europeans have wanted it badly enough to spend some four centuries perfecting the art", he is referring to the modern trend of capturing panoramic landscape scenes.[29] The Dutch philosopher Cornelis Verhoeven stated in 1968 that we only try to regain possession of our landscape once we realise that we are losing it.[30] Maybe it is the feeling of loss, detachment and alienation that grows into a feeling of nostalgia, a nationalistic desire for what was. The main illustrations by Romantic artists, for example, were of living beings in their landscapes, positioned at a distance from industrial society.[31] Similarly, the nature displayed in current architectural renders is often exaggerated and tries to transfer a certain atmosphere. Just like the Romantic paintings, they can be categorised as pieces of art. More and more emphasis is placed on the loss of old traditions, but "with nostalgia, we won't save the landscape; instead, we flatten it into an image, a postcard," according to Hans Teerds and Johan van der Zwart, a Dutch architect and landscape artist, in their book *Levend Landschap* (2012).[32]

In current times, construction is an ongoing part of our lives at increasingly enlarged scales. New architectural designs increasingly feature housing blocks or entire neighbourhoods enveloped in greenery, with plants appearing to overtake man-made structures. The 'back-to-nature' movement is evident not only in the shift towards rural living but also within urban spaces, new living cooperatives are emerging and trying to change our cities from the inside out. These modern urban designs, nevertheless, have sparked debate. Critics argue that maintaining such greenery requires significant energy and often misrepresents how nature would naturally appear in these specific locations.[33] Also, the outcomes differ from the rendered hyper-realistic images.[34] New architecture projects almost all attempt to merge urban development with environmental consciousness, the proposed vegetation, however, is often not the local nature of the site nor can it grow well under the required conditions (like amount of space, height from the earth and specific climate). Solving this deep-rooted longing for rurality is not as simple as just building urban gardens or green spaces. Daniel Barber and Erin Putalik argue in their essay "Forest, Tower, City: Rethinking the Green Machine Aesthetic" from Harvard Design Magazine issue 45 *Into the Woods*, argue that this way of incorporating nature into urban environments only distances residents from genuine interactions with nature, resulting in a superficial connection to it. The essay further questions whether projects like these truly reconnect people with nature or if they simply mask ongoing urban expansion.[35]

[27] Tuan, *Escapism*, 20.
[28] Ibid., 99.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Joks Janssen, "Nostalgic Landscape: Planning Between Conservation and Modernisation," *OASE*, no. 60 (2003): 26-51.
[31] Short, "Idyllic Ruralities," 139.
[32] Hans Teerds and Johan van der Zwart, *Levend Landschap* (Amsterdam: SUN, 2012), 14.

[33] Daniel Barber and Erin Putalik, "Forest, Tower, City: Rethinking the Green Machine Aesthetic," *Harvard Design Magazine*, no. 45 (2019). https://www.harvarddesignmagazine.org/articles/forest-tower-city-rethinking-the-green-machine-aesthetic/.
[34] Lloyd Alter, "Another Look at Stefano Boeri's Vertical Forest," *Treehugger*, August 13, 2020, https://www.treehugger.com/another-look-stefano-boeris-vertical-forest-4859164.
[35] Barber and Putalik, "Forest, Tower, City."

_09 J.M.W. Turner: *The Fighting Temeraire*, 1839, The National Gallery, London.

_10 Flux landschapsarchitectuur: *Spuisluis*, 2011, Zeeland.

The Romantic epoch is about moving away from Enlightenment rationalism and going back to one's inner emotions. The Romantics embodied a spirit of rebellion against rationalism and the Enlightenment era. In the words of John Stuart Mill, a 19th-century British philosopher and political economist, Romanticists fought "against the narrow mechanical and the merely intellectual conception of human nature," [...] "against the philosophy of the eighteenth century."[36] Romanticism embraced subjectivity, emotion, and the sublime, almighty, frightening and primal beauty of nature. To the Romantics, nature was a refuge from social conventions, political oppression and industrialisation's alienating effects, a place to seek solace, inspiration and spiritual renewal.

Brian Short's exploration of the rural idyll reveals its deep roots in Romanticism, where the countryside was idealised as a timeless, idyllic space, providing a refuge from the pressures of urban life.[37] He argues that the rural idyll was more of a romanticised escape than a reflection of the realities of rural life. This vision of the countryside, formed in the Romantic era, continues to influence contemporary perceptions of rural life, reflecting an enduring desire to find solace in a simpler, more authentic way of living. The rural idyll in the Romantic period, as Short describes it, was not merely a product of nostalgia but also served as a critique of modernity.

American writer and philosopher Henry David Thoreau was a frontrunner of the 'back-to-nature' movement and resigned himself in 1845 from public life to a shack in the woods next to a lake for 2 years, 2 months, and 2 days of his life. In his book *Walden* (1971), he says; "I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived."[38] Thoreau continues by saying that we tell ourselves the following lie every time: "What's going to finally make me feel good? It's when I can travel the world and meet all kinds of new people and see all these amazing cultures!" But just like in the other example, he says that whether you're in India, South America or Europe, the common problem in all of those is you and that to find inner peace you should look within to find answers.[39] He tried to do so while living a simple life, surrounded by nature. His experience at Walden Pond, however, revealed that rural living is more complex and nuanced than he might have originally thought. Idealised images can sometimes lead to disappointment when reality fails to match expectations. Similarly, the Dutch journalist Roderick Nieuwenhuis also felt the attraction to a primitive lifestyle in nature. In his book *Een Simpel Leven* (2011), he challenges the romanticised view of rural living, arguing that it is far from the idealised simplicity many imagine.[40] He highlights the significant labour and hardship involved in sustaining a rural lifestyle, contrasting this with the fantasy of a carefree existence in nature.[41] Nieuwenhuis discusses the economic and practical challenges that complicate rural living, debunking the myth that it is an easy escape from urban complexities. In other words; the fantasy differs from the reality. Dreaming of a life on a farm with friends is only idyllic from a position of comfort and wealth; when you know you can return to the (luxurious) life you used to live. Similarly, camping in the wilderness and heating up a pan with canned food is only romantic because you know it will end. Besides, time to recharge in nature shouldn't be mistaken for the reality of rural life. Making a living in rural areas or the countryside is not simple and, whether you want to be or not, you are dependent on others.

[36] Colin Campbell, *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism: New Extended Edition* (Springer, 2018), 267-268.
[37] Short, "Idyllic Ruralities," 143.
[38] Henry David Thoreau, *Walden; or, Life in the Woods*, ed. J. Lyndon Shanley (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), 75.
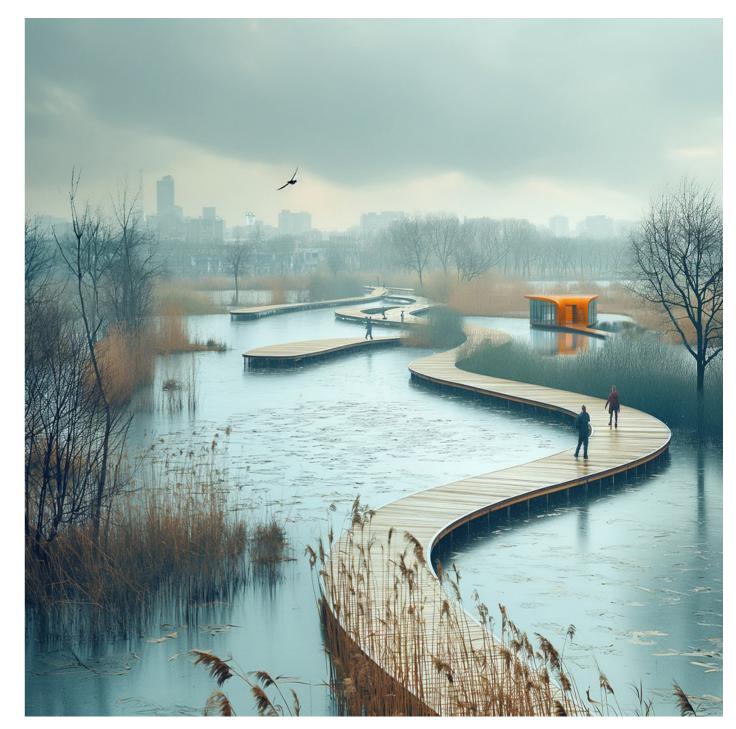[39] Stephen West, "Henry David Thoreau," *Philosophize This!*, June 4, 2016, https://open.spotify.com/episode/3IrKI0KvwjnkrN5L5Ft8vS?si=6c4a04746f7946d8.
[40] Roderick Nieuwenhuis, *Een Simpel Leven* (Amsterdam: De Bezige Bij, 2022), 15.
[41] Ibid., 22.

_11 Caspar David Friedrich: *Der Morgen,* 1821–1822, Niedersächsisches Landesmuseum Hannover.

_12 MVRDV: *WHAT-IF: NEDERLAND 2100,* 2024, the Netherlands.

The density of urban environments, coupled with the fast pace of city life, often leaves individuals feeling isolated despite being surrounded by people. This phenomenon is referred to as 'urban loneliness', where the physical presence of others does not translate into meaningful social connections. This shows the lack of the city to foster public spaces to facilitate a community, encourage genuine interactions and build a sense of belonging. 'Place attachment' and 'place identity' is the sense of identity and belonging individuals feel for their environments, whether urban or rural.[42]

Hannah Arendt, a well-known German-American political theorist recognised for her work on totalitarianism, authority, and the nature of power and public spaces, emphasized in her book *The Human Condition* (1958) the importance of the 'public realm'. The term 'public realm' encompasses areas where individuals can come together, interact, and engage in civic life, fostering a sense of community which she believes is essential for a vibrant and healthy society.[43]

Rural living areas are characterised by the fact that the private domain and the public space benefit from one another and merge together.[44] This integration can foster a stronger sense of community and belonging. A significant aspect of urban life is the boundary between public areas and private spaces. The division ensures that what belongs to individuals remains separate from communal spaces. This distinction is crucial as it provides a sense of privacy and security amid urban anonymity.[45] Arendt calls the private realm a place to recharge in intimate spheres, with the intent to return to the public domain at a later stage.[46] Yet, the delicate balance between public and private is in danger; because of modernity, we are losing the public domain in our cities. Which causes a lack of place attachment and intensifies feelings of isolation and alienation. Moreover, the pressures of modern life, the constant bombardment of information through social media and the rise of the 'home office' after COVID-19 have blurred the line between public and private spaces. Resulting in a more public form of our private places, a trend already identified by Arendt in her analysis of society in 1958.[47] Retreating from society isn't a possibility for everybody, and this takes a heavy toll on our mental wellbeing. The vacation to nature described in the previous chapter could be seen as a form of recharging but happens less frequently and excludes people who aren't able to afford it.

Hannah Arendt also mentions that loneliness isn't solved when stepping out of society.[48] Even though human contact can be more intensive in the countryside, the diversity of people is more limited, which can cause other problems such as the potential for social homogeneity. In *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1958), Hannah Arendt argues that loneliness is not simply a condition that can be improved by stepping out of society or by physically distancing oneself from others. Even when one escapes the immediate pressures of society, the deeper sense of isolation and alienation can persist, as it is rooted in a loss of connection to the communal fabric that defines human existence and the disconnect from a shared world. Besides, even if rural life would be a solution we should not just let the problems of city life be as they are without trying to solve them.

[42] Omnia Ali et al., "Assessing The Identity Of Place Through Its Measurable Components To Achieve Sustainable Development", *Civil Engineering And Architecture* 10, no. 5A (2022): 137–57, https://doi.org/10.13189/cea.2022.101407.
[43] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (1958; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 198-199.
[44] Jaap Van Den Bout and Franz Ziegler, "Living in the Country, or Inhabiting the Lanscape," *OASE*, no. 60, (2002): 68. https://www.oasejournal.nl/en/Issues/60/LivingInTheCountryOrInhabitingTheLanscape.
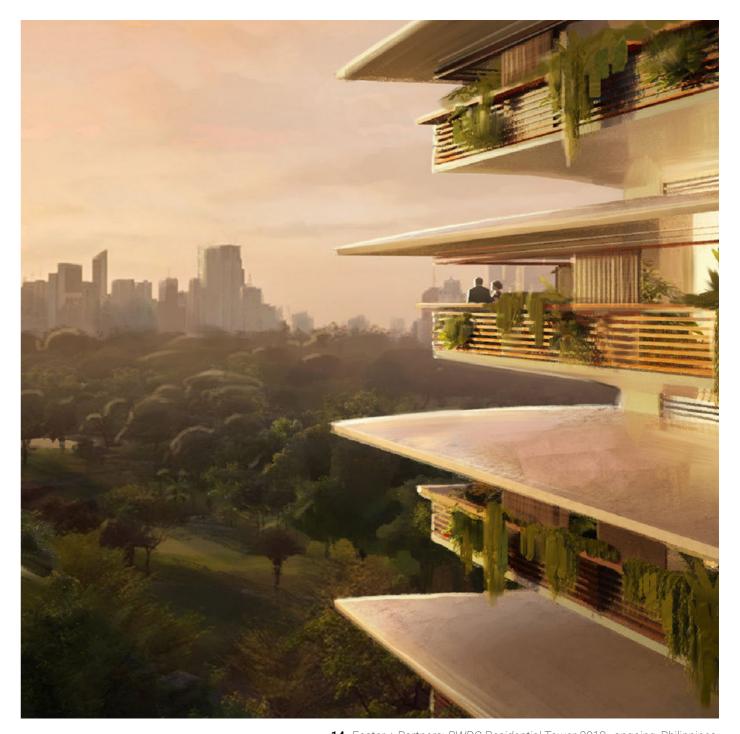[45] Ibid., 68.
[46] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 30-31.
[47] Ibid., 39-40.
[48] Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 2nd ed. (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1951), 475-478.

_**13** K.F. Schinkel: *Landschaft mit gotischen Arkaden,*
1781–1841, Schinkel-Pavilion Berlin.

_**14** Foster + Partners: *BWDC Residential Tower,* 2018–ongoing, Philippines.

In reflecting on the urban-rural dilemma, it becomes clear that neither complete urbanisation nor a return to rural living offers a viable solution for the future. Instead, the key lies in balance. Perhaps what we need is a new form of Romanticism that doesn't reject the city in favour of the countryside, but rather seeks to bring the best of both worlds together. In today's context, where cities often seem to prioritise efficiency and productivity over human experience, the Romantic ideal can serve as a powerful reminder of what we stand to lose—and what we can still preserve.

Urban life has led to mental health crises and a longing for a slower, nature-oriented existence, similar to the previous escape from industrialisation during the Romantic period. The modern 'back-to-nature' movement reflects a deeper yearning for simplicity, but often, paints a romanticised image of rural communities. Modern architecture attempts to resolve the urban-rural tension by integrating nature into urban environments, but these efforts frequently fail to foster true connections between people and the natural world, offering instead superficial solutions to the complexities of modern life.

What is needed is a more thoughtful integration of nature that respects its complexity and where people can create real connections and understanding of it. The goal of architecture for housing should be to foster real relationships between urban residents and the natural environment, moving beyond mere aesthetic or performative solutions. I believe that there must be a balanced approach to incorporating nature in our cities that can help us escape the constraints of modernity without entirely abandoning the opportunities and advancements it offers. According to Rory Rowan, a political geographer and cultural critic, "political struggles need to be fought over rather than against technology. If technology is rejected or neglected as the object of political struggles, then our fate is left to the nostalgia of localist escapisms, the passivity of Leftist melancholia or the reactionary psychosis of Right-wing identity politics."[49] Rowan suggests that instead of resisting or ignoring technology, which might be the first thing that comes to mind when thinking about creating a more peaceful and nature-focused society, we should use technology to enhance our adaptive capacity. However, we shouldn't rely solely on technology but also integrate the role human behaviour plays and rekindle the primal relationship with nature. This deeper connection is essential for fostering a sustainable coexistence, where urban life and the natural world are not just integrated visually, but harmoniously intertwined.

In the research paper "Assessing the Identity of Place through Its Measurable Components to Achieve Sustainable Development", the authors discuss how understanding and enhancing the identity of a place can contribute to sustainable development. They argue that the measurable components of place identity, such as its physical attributes, historical significance and social functions, are crucial for creating environments that foster a strong sense of belonging and community.[50] By incorporating these elements into urban planning and development, cities can enhance place attachment and improve social cohesion, addressing some of the issues associated with urban loneliness. The paper emphasizes that sustainable development is not just about environmental or economic considerations but also about the social and emotional connections people have with their surroundings.[51]

While the exact future of our cities remains uncertain, I am optimistic. I believe that the integration of large, robust, public structures of greenery in our cities might be a step in the right direction. These robust structures can create a place where city residents can come together and create genuine connections to nature and to each other, where nature can be experienced together. The individual character of the city will transform into a more collective one. Ebenezer Howard, a British journalist famous for his 'Garden City' concept, aimed to achieve this balanced and sustainable living environment where private and public spaces complement each other. He did so by promoting communal ownership and involvement, which fosters a sense of collective responsibility. Howard argued that when people collectively own and manage resources, they are more likely to work together and support one another, enhancing social cohesion and community spirit.[52] Furthermore, communal ownership will prevent the fragmentation of land, which often leads to waste and mismanagement, but, ensuring that the land is developed and maintained in a way that benefits the entire community.[53]

[49] Rory Rowan, "The Green Machine: A Critical Review of Technology's Role in Environmental Design," *Harvard Design Magazine*, no. 45 (2006).

[50] Ali et al., "Assessing The Identity Of Place Through Its Measurable Components To Achieve Sustainable Development".
[51] Ibid.
[52] Ebenezer Howard, *Tomorrow: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform* (London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co., 1898), 85–90.
[53] Ibid., 75–80.

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