

“The architecture emerges from the logic of mourning: not to preserve, but to process and recompose. Through the transformation of Soviet spolia, the visitor follows a path where memory dissolves into material, and material dissolves into landscape.”

### **Slide 1: Welcome**

Good morning everyone and welcome to the final presentation of my graduation project. Before I begin with the slides, I wanted to draw your attention to the images displayed around you. This gallery echoes Aby Warburg’s Mnemosyne Atlas and is a mnemonic network of images I collected over the year. These resources are parts of my ethnographic and architectural research as well as some personal associations I found and felt throughout the process. The images clustered together are always associated with one another, be it in form, symbol, meaning or context. Feel free to look around and create your own connections.

My project’s title is Hauntology of Loss: the Ghosts of Tbilisi.

### **Slide 2: Research**

It explores how architecture can become a metaboliser of collective trauma and unresolved mourning that is encrypted in Tbilisi’s urban fabric. It does so through collection, deposition and transformation of Soviet-era spolia on macro and micro scale.

### **Slide 3: Spolia — From Imperial Rome to Post-Soviet Hauntology**

In ancient Rome, **spolia** were fragments of buildings or monuments of conquered nations, repurposed in new construction. The act was political: incorporating the past into the present, **visibly subordinating** the old world to the new.

But spolia never fully assimilate. Their past lives and shows through the cracks. They remain **ghostly intrusions** — reminders of something that refuses to disappear.

### **Slide 4: Derrida**

This tension resonates with **Jacques Derrida’s** concept of *hauntology* — the idea that the present is always haunted by specters of the past, and by **lost futures** that never materialised. In “Spectres of Marx”, Derrida explains that a “spectre” or a “ghost” is a paradox. It is created when we try to get rid of something which does not truly exist. In trying to destroy that something, we actually reincarnate it. In other words, it’s a process of creation by destruction. In post-Soviet Georgia, that haunting is architectural.

## **VIDEO**

To introduce you to my optics on the architectural haunting in Tbilisi, I want to show you a video I recorded while there. It showcases an example of one of the Soviet ghosts I found on the study trip. It’s the former Technical Library – once a glorious example of Soviet architecture, now a semi-abandoned, unwittingly transformed caricature of itself. You can find a photo of its original state in the gallery around you. For me, the building serves as a visual metaphor for the

ghosts of the past. It is an architectural remnant that oscillates between presence and absence, reflecting the broader themes of my research.

### **Slide 5: The Freedom Charter**

In 2011, the Georgian government passed the **Freedom Charter**, banning Soviet symbols in public space. Some monuments were removed, mosaics painted over, inscriptions buried, buildings repurposed and sanitised.

But the Soviet past doesn't vanish with its symbols. It lingers — as trauma, nostalgia, myth, silence. As Derrida says “The ghost is not simply a dead or a missing being, but a social figure — a trace of something denied or unresolved.”.

### **Slide 6: Soviet Inventory**

This project begins with that residue: the architectural **spolia** of the Soviet era. It doesn't seek to restore them to former glory, nor to obliterate them, but to **transform** them — through processes of fragmentation, embedding, erosion, stacking — into a landscape of **ambiguous mourning**. It is neither preservation nor erasure. It is a **slow architecture of embracing, conquering and reframing** — where ghosts are not exorcised, but given form.

### **Slide 7: Hauntology map**

This map shows just one axis of the city, riddled with Soviet spectres similar to the Former Library.

### **Slide 8: Hauntology map – larger scale**

And this is a map I found online features 404 reliefs, monuments, mosaics and iconic Soviet buildings. It's by no means an exhaustive map and it only features remnants found in Tbilisi, as opposed to the whole country. It also implicitly shows how the Freedom Charter was ineffective in its attempts to erase the Soviet past.

### **Slide 9: From Collective Symbols to Personal Losses**

If Soviet architecture leaves behind public ghosts — monumental, ideological, structural — then what about the private ones?

The Freedom Charter sought to erase Soviet imagery from public space.

But no law can erase what lives in **drawers, attics, photo albums, and memories** — the personal aftermath of a regime that shaped generations.

This project doesn't just ask what to do with the **physical remnants** of the Soviet era — but also: what to do with the **invisible ones**.

### **Slide 10: Red Terror in Numbers**

The **disappearances**, the **executions**, the **exiles**, the families who never saw bodies, never received explanations. Here, mourning is complicated. Not just because it's politically repressed, but because it's often **formless**. There is no grave. No site of memory.

**Slide 11:** No script for how to mourn something you were told never to speak of.

### **Slide 12: The Site**

Therefore, in order to spatialise this unresolved grief — to hold both the silence and the trace — I selected a site where these tensions are most concentrated. It lies in a small urban park between Liberty Square and the Parliament of Georgia, surrounded by buildings marked by both Soviet presence and historical repression. I found this site through an earlier mapping exercise I conducted.

### **Slide 13**

### **Slide 14: Modus Operandi - Models**

To begin translating these abstract ideas into architectural language, I made a series of physical models during the Modi Operandi workshop. They explore absence not as void, but as a spatial agent — through tension, filtering, concealment, and revelation. Each model is a small study in how architectural gestures can respond to loss.

### **Slide 15: Modus Operandi – Translation – Exploded**

This drawing is an exploded translation of the models — separating layers that represent what was, what is, and the void in between. It reveals a third agent formed in the interstitial space — ephemeral, unstable, and unresolved. This is where the ghost lives: not in the past or present, but in their friction.

### **Slide 16: Modus Operandi – Translation - Stacked**

Here, the same layers are brought back together — compressed and stacked. The third agent is still there, but now buried within the structure. It becomes atmosphere, density, and tension within the built form. These spatial translations formed the conceptual and material foundation for the architecture that follows.

### **Slide 17: Project Overview**

The project operates on **two interconnected scales**:

- At the **macro scale**, it receives Soviet architectural fragments — the spolia — collected from across the city – and the country. These are not presented as static monuments, but they undergo a process of **gradual transformation**, mirroring the stages of grief: from confrontation, to reckoning, to release.
- At the **micro scale**, the project provides a space for **individual mourning**: a cemetery for objects. People can deposit items linked to loved ones lost to the regime — tokens of memory, grief, or unresolved histories — and choose how to place them in the space. This creates a **non-prescriptive exhibition of loss**, shaped by those who carry it.

Together, these two scales form a spatial and material journey through mourning — neither glorifying the Soviet past nor erasing it, but engaging with its lingering presence through a slow, tactile process of transformation.

### **Slide 18: Site**

These conceptual and spatial logics are now fully embedded in the architectural proposal. The project is not only shaped by ideas of loss and transformation — but built through them. The building is organised into five consecutive spaces, each holding a different phase of transformation, echoing the five stages of grief. The site is a sloped urban park with a 30 meter height difference from East to West.

### **Slide 19: Diagrams**

Instead of placing one monumental volume, I fragmented the mass — breaking down the logic of the Soviet block into five smaller structures. This decision echoes the act of fragmentation imposed on the spolia. It emerges through a logic of disassembly or deconstructivism, forming almost architectural remains which surface from the terrain.

### **Slide 20: Render 1**

This first structure is made from reassembled façade fragments of the former Technical Library in Tbilisi. They are not load-bearing — they function like a reconstructed ruin, supported by a new façade retention system. This new structure is deliberately made visible and intrusive — it creates friction. The visitor confronts a past that refuses to vanish but cannot return to stability. This space stages the initial encounter with contested memory that's direct and legible.

### **Slide 21: Render 2**

Here, large broken fragments of bas reliefs and monuments are stacked. The space is heavy and chaotic. It has traces of legibility, but the objects are distorted and semi-concealed. Here, the personal objects brought to the site are 3D scanned and digitalised. The visitors can also choose to bury and re-visit their object in the space underground.

### **Slide 22: Render 3**

Fragments of spolia are embedded in lime mortar and concrete. Like fossils in a wall, they are absorbed but still partially visible. The act of embedding mirrors the process of working grief into daily life. The irregularities in the walls create small niches, like reliquaries, where personal objects can be placed and displayed.

#### Slide 23: Render 4

This structure works through erasure. Here, fragments are used as formwork: they shape the walls but are removed after casting. The space marks a turning point — from memory as presence to memory as echo. The central space visible in the image, is where personal objects are accumulated, echoing works of Christian Boltanski, which you can also see in the gallery around you.

#### Slide 24: Render 5

The final space uses crushed fragments as terrazzo and aggregate. Everything has dissolved into almost untraceable material out of which new things are constructed. It is the space of letting go, which dissolves back in the landscape.

#### Slide 25

The sequence shows how each building corresponds to a phase of material transformation, but also to a different way of mourning — from confrontation to release. I will go to more detail in a bit. Like Dimitris Pikionis on the Acropolis path, I imagine the building work unfolding **as a conversation between drawing and hand**, led on site by local craftsmen who know the weight and temperament of each fragment better than any BIM model could. The architect's role is to mark the gradient—what must be stacked, what may be embedded, what will be crushed—and then to walk the line with the masons, adjusting courses and joints as new pieces arrive. Spolia come with irregular backs, hidden rebar, unexpected voids; their final position can only be decided with the stone in hand. This participatory process allows the project's central idea—*memory as layered, adaptive matter*—to be enacted in real time rather than merely represented in drawings.

Working this way is not nostalgic improvisation; it is a pragmatic response to the **near-impossibility of fully pre-detailing a building made of remnants**. Each façade fin, relief fragment, or carved lintel dictates its own tolerance and demands a unique seat within the wall. By guiding, not dictating, I can keep faith with the project's ethic: allowing the past to surface where it insists, recede where it yields, and ultimately align itself with the new structure in a manner that is negotiated, not imposed. The result is an architecture whose precision lies in its *collective making*—a built record of dialogue, adjustment, and shared authorship, matching the ritual procession it houses.

#### Slide 26

This image captures the procession as movement through these spatial thresholds.

## **Slide 27**

## **Slide 28**

The slope of the site is part of the narrative, a ritual surface. The buildings are arranged ascending a slope. During my ethnographic research, I learned that procession is a vital part of traditional mourning rituals in Georgia. It involves moving with an object, with its weight, through space and time. The act of walking through the architecture is a part of the ritual, a way to carry absence forward. The last space is not only the lightest in material — it is also the highest in elevation. It's both an ascent and a release.

Fragmentation operates as a spatial logic across the entire procession. The further you move, the finer the spolia fragments. The first space is made of recognisable parts. The last is made of dust. Each space employs a different stacking method — but more importantly, a different form of binding, or bringing the elements together. The sections also begin to show how light and sound are handled. Openings are irregular. Some spaces are cave-like and echoing, others are hushed and close. There is no single acoustic logic — just as mourning isn't linear. In some moments, you hear the world clearly. In others, it's muffled, distant.

Plans show how these transitions are not just material but programmatic. The macro function — housing contested spolia — is mirrored by the micro rituals of mourning. At every stage, the visitor encounters not just Soviet remains, but also the possibility of adding their own grief to the architectural body. Some transitions are abrupt — a sharp step or compressed doorway. Others stretch out into long paths and deep thresholds. This rhythm of rupture and pause once again reflects how mourning actually feels: moments that suddenly overwhelm, followed by long silences. I thought a lot about pace and pressure — how space can speed you up or hold you still.

## **Slide 29: Space 1**

The confrontation space is curated from a displaced concrete monument of Saint Nino and reassembled fins from the façade of the former Technical Library.

## **Slide 30**

The monument is 23 meters tall and marks the beginning of the procession. The concrete fins are demounted from their original location and brought together in a new arrangement by bolting them to one another.

## **Slide 31**

Then, they are mounted on a steel façade retention system. The old and the new work together to generate space, but as two individual agents.

### **Slide 32**

Stacked reliefs and monuments generate the 2<sup>nd</sup> space. Although there is no concrete data, according to my research, there are still over 300 Soviet-era reliefs in the country. The space is very permeable and using the principle of dry-stacking. Its outline is made of limestone blocks excavated from the structure's basement.

### **Slide 33**

The dry-stacked walls gain stability through their sheer mass and volume. The irregularity of surfaces is combated by using sand in-between the layers, allowing for direct downward load transfer and micro-movement. The load is transferred directly to the bedrock with no need for additional foundation. The main space is not climatized but partially covered by a roof made of reclaimed concrete. The underside of roof is polished and reflective, creating an impression of the stacks repeating ad infinitum.

### **Slide 34**

Functionally, the space covers two actions – 3D scanning, which immortalised the personal objects brought by the mourners and optional burial of the physical object. The plan is laid out in a way which avoids repeating the same circulation path, to reinforce the idea of a procession which builds upon previous experiences towards something new. The space where the personal objects are 3D scanned is comprised of a vault created with the spolia and a metal deck, which also rests on the spolia. The only climatized space within this structure is dedicated to staff, who guide the visitors through the deposition process. The space downstairs is carved out of the limestone bedrock, where mourners can choose to bury the personal objects they brought.

### **Slide 35**

The structure can expand and spill over its current outline, hosting more contested monuments. As the structure grows by accumulating more spolia, these outlines can demarcate the passage of time, like growth rings in tree trunks.

### **Slide 36**

The next space is a meandering pavilion which offers opportunities for slowing down, resting and contemplating. Some spaces are well lit, while others rather dark and solemn, creating variety of atmospheres. Here, the stability and structural integrity is also enabled by the mass of the walls, which are around 700 millimetres thick.

### **Slide 37**

The spolia here is embedded in the walls as larger fragments and in the floor as terrazzo. The irregularities of the embedded spolia create niches in the walls and in space. You can also see this in the physical model I made. Where this space meets the previous pavilion, the wall-embedded spolia are bound together with lime mortar, which on one hand serves as glue and on the other allows for reversibility of that integration. The further down the structure you move, the more irreversible this embeddedness becomes and poured concrete is used instead of mortar and rough masonry. Therefore, as the visitors move further down the space the spolia is more and more consumed by the mortar.

### **Slide 38**

The niches in the walls can be used as reliquaries holding the personal objects. The niches in space allow for closer interaction with the spolia, sometimes for hiding, other times for sitting down on a piece of a monument which sticks out of a wall.

### **Slide 39**

The stacking logic is also visible in the construction details, where each consecutive element of the structure is placed on top of the previous. For example, the green roof sits on top of oak joists, which sit on top of oak beams, which sit on top of the solid wall. The green roofs serve not only as an environmental gesture, but also as ballast, accommodating the stacking principles. This space is, once again, not fully climatized. The stacking of elements leaves ventilation gaps in-between the beams. The roof overhang prevents the water from getting inside the structure. The mass of the thick walls and the roof insulation prevent the building from overheating in the summer months. You can also see more construction details in the booklet.

### **Slide 40**

In the next space, the architectural spolia are brought together to create a formwork in which new walls are cast. The spolia are then broken down completely and used as aggregate and terrazzo for the construction of the last space. What remains is a negative of the original. The wall records the ghost, not the object. Just like in the model displayed there.

### **Slide 41**

Moreover, the space is generated around a bas relief, which was dropped and broken. Its outlines are extruded creating a large central glass void. The void is used as a living archive of the personal objects. As people vertically circulate around it, they have a choice of several

platforms from which they can throw their objects in. Like throwing a coin in a fountain for good luck or throwing a handful of soil onto a coffin that is being lowered into the ground. The void is opened to the elements, so the personal objects are left to the processes of degradation and decay.

#### **Slide 42-43**

As the void fills up, the lighting conditions inside the pavilion change, reflecting the heaviness of collected memories.

#### **Slide 44**

**Space 5:** This is a moment of dissolution and release. As I mentioned, the walls and floors of the space hold only traces of the spolia. The spolia is still there, barely material, but at the same time allowing for new structures to emerge from it. The history is embraced and generative.

#### **Slide 45**

The pavilion is open and dissolves back into the landscape. Terrazzo continues inside and outside. The central space is a small data centre, where the files of 3D scanned objects are stored. The servers are placed inside a translucent glass box, which gleams softly. The intensity of the light it produces changes according to how much the data is interacted with.

#### **Slide 46**

Now I'd like to zoom out and look at how these ideas play out across the entire procession. I've diagrammed the various ways in which visitors physically engage with the spolia throughout the architectural sequence. From the beginning, it was important to me that this not be a static museum — not a room of objects passively observed — but a space in flux, where the boundary between body and architecture becomes blurred. The spolia are not just seen; they are touched, resisted, sat on, hidden behind, carried past. The spaces invite interaction — they want to be enacted, inhabited, felt. I believe that meaningful mourning is not only a psychological process, but a **somatic** one as well. Grief lives in the body, and this architecture tries to give it form, texture, and weight — to accommodate or even enforce movement, stillness, and physical encounter into a ritual.

#### **Slide 47**

So what begins as a theoretical concept — absence, memory, loss — becomes a physical architecture. Not metaphorically, but materially. Through tectonics, through process and through form.

#### **Slide 48**

This is not a building that freezes memory. It's a building that metabolises it. And while this project is rooted in Tbilisi, it's not only about Georgia. We're witnessing the destruction of cities, homes, and histories in places like Gaza and Ukraine — and with them, the collapse of ways to grieve, remember, or rebuild. Architecture doesn't always have to reconstruct what was. Sometimes it has to hold what's lost, without fixing it — to give form to grief, to hold space before it turns to silence. I believe that's more urgent now than ever. Thank you.