

# Ruinscapes: Cultivating Life from Neglected Past

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## Problem Statement

In an era of rapidly advancing technology, distinguishing between reality and artificiality becomes increasingly challenging.

In our contemporary world, the image of a city has transformed into a polished representation of societal values and aspirations. This crafted image, often prioritizing comfort, happiness, and modernity, can feel like a facade—almost like a cardboard set mimicking real life, evoking the same eerie artificiality as a hyper-realistic AI-generated image. Such spaces, meticulously designed to project positivity and success, can paradoxically feel inauthentic, as if they are constantly “selling” an idealized version of life, regardless of what people may actually need or desire.

Life, however, is inherently multi-faceted, encompassing both light and shadow. But in modern urban culture, the darker aspects—grief, aging, decay and hardship—are frequently marginalized or concealed. Death and disease have been banished from public life, from the present, from the tidy cityscape (Minkjan, 2019). We are trying to erase traces of wear traces of decay. This avoidance extends to our cities, which increasingly mask the less

polished sides of life, projecting a vision of unwavering optimism and uniformity that can feel flat, insincere, and disconnected from reality. In this digitally-driven age, where social media and online platforms intensify the pressures of image and appearance, the push to “sell” happiness, success, and a curated life has grown even stronger. As a result, cities, much like our social media feeds, risk becoming glossy veneers—optimistic but lacking depth, dimension, and honesty.

This raises the question of the care and attention needed when approaching cities and their existing elements. Rather than focusing on destruction, erasure, or redefining the image of an area, we might instead embrace acceptance and cultivation—fostering natural change through reflection and reinterpretation, allowing space for growth and freedom for creativity.

## Introduction

*The beautiful quality of places is that they frame every interaction and every emotion humans experience and humans reward places with traces and meanings.* People die, places get changed and ruined, but aging and ruination can smoothly cultivate new life with meaning instead of being aggressively destroyed to bring someone profit. Such cultivation can promote interaction between the human species and, at the same time, the peaceful life of non-human species. Nature taking over ruins is a bewitching process illustrating a battle between human civilization and nature but does it have to be a battle or are we part of nature taking over and growing on the foundation of the past?

How can a ruin become a framework for human and non-human life and growth, while enriching the context of publicness?

Subquestions:

1. What is the value behind decaying industrial heritage in the Haraldsgade neighborhood?
2. Why ruin is humane and why it is an important characteristic of public buildings/ of architecture in general?
3. How abandonment and neglect of buildings became companions of artists, places of creativity and canvas for street art, what is a place of architectural ruin in art?
4. How buildings in neglected state, which are under threat of demolition can be included in the future of the city, how building waste can be used and displayed in the new construction?



## Memory

Memory of a place brings value and depth into its interaction with humans, bringing traces of time and giving hints is comparable to maintaining a certain type of dialog. The perception of such memory of the city, memory of the neighborhood and memory of a building can have many angles, is it still there when buildings get demolished? Is it still there when people die? Are memories shaped (framed) by sequences of spaces buried together with those who envisioned them or lying in piles of waste?

Globalization has popularized certain design trends worldwide, often making it difficult to preserve local identity while following these broader movements. Historically, industrial architecture also exhibited a certain uniformity across regions, yet over time—and through shifts in function—it evolved into something unique to each place. This raises questions of value: How can the worth of these patinated structures be understood or measured? In exploring the remnants of the past, discussions on memory and architecture become essential, expanding the conversation to consider how buildings serve as vessels of collective history and identity.

John Ruskin, a 19th-century art critic and social thinker, saw architecture as unique in its capacity to preserve the labor, intellect, and intentions of the people who created it.

In his *Lamp of Memory*, Ruskin argued that architecture alone bears testimony to the work and conditions of its creators, embedding human endeavor into material form.() This preserved memory is not merely personal or individual but social, encompassing the experiences of the community. Ruskin famously insisted that we have no right to alter the buildings of the past, asserting that these structures belong both to their creators and to all future generations. To him, buildings were like cultural artifacts, timeless repositories of human history, deserving reverence and protection as social memories that transcend any one life. (Forty, 2000)

Marcel Proust and Sigmund Freud, both writing in the early 20th century, viewed memory as fundamentally elusive and resistant to capture in concrete forms, even architecture. Proust, for example, described memory as hidden beyond the reach of rational thought, accessible only through unexpected encounters with physical objects that can evoke forgotten experiences. This unpredictability of memory makes it difficult to fix within the built environment. (Forty, 2000)

Similarly, Gaston Bachelard, in *The Poetics of Space*, argued that memory does not naturally align with architecture, as memories are inherently mobile, emotional, and subjective rather than fixed in place. (Forty, 2000)

Italian architect Aldo Rossi turned to memory in the mid-20th century as a means of offering an alternative to the rigid functionalism that dominated modernist thought. Rossi saw cities as layered fabrics of collective memory, where each building contributes to the shared experience of urban life. He believed that architecture should acknowledge and interact with these accumulated memories, actively shaping the city's character. Influenced by Marcel Poëte, Rossi asserted that a city's complexity is rooted not only in its present-day functional relationships but in the persistence of elements from its past. These permanences, as he called them, are indelible features that constitute the "essence" of the city and connect its inhabitants through shared, enduring memories.

## Demolition

Nowadays days regardless of the sustainability concerns demolition is still a widespread solution for every problem related to buildings that do not fulfill their function anymore, do not bring much profit, and were not maintained properly. Substitution of such heritage with non-place architecture representing technological and economic advancement is typical for the built environment that emerges under neoliberal economic policies. This model prioritizes privatization, deregulation, and profit-driven urban planning, often at the expense of local identity, social equality, and public space. It has had profound impacts on cities globally, often leading to the homogenization of urban landscapes. As cities conform to a standard of international development, distinctive architectural styles, cultural heritage, and vernacular traditions are often sidelined. This results in the erasure of local identities, making cities feel interchangeable, with little connection to their historical, social, or cultural roots.

The future of industrial heritage which does not have a proper status and which was ruined by years and weather is predetermined- turn into piles of waste and free space for new development. Needless to say, the destruction of capital and contribution to a waste mountain is indeed harmful. Furthermore, such changes at some point cause the

citizens to experience social memory weakness, question their spatial belonging, and social exclusion, and feel deprived of their right to the city.



## Freedom for creativity

The city's scars are stimuli for the mind. They raise questions, about thought memories and imaginations of a foregone past, and of potential futures. They visualize the passage of time and the inevitability of collapse(Minkjan,2019). Urban crack is a term defined by Riet Steel pedagogue and researcher at the Faculty of Human and Well-being of the University College Ghent and Elly Van Eeghem, artist and researcher at the School of Arts/KASK in Ghent. They wrote a book about social and artistic interventions on urban cracks, urban intermediate spaces in the city(Van Den Bergh, n.d).

urban cracks are spaces with a lively, colourful past, for which future plans exist, but that remain neglected at present. An urban crack is situated between more defined or developed urban spaces, but is characterised, intrinsically, by an apparent void. It has two important characteristics. On the one hand, there is the interim character, the layering in time. Urban cracks have lost their original meaning and usually there is already a plan ready for a different future that has not yet been made concrete. In the meantime, the site or building is rather abandoned. On the other hand, there is also a layering in meaning(Van Den Bergh,n.d). Those are the spaces where art culture is developed uncontrolled such as grass growing through the cracks in pavement .

## Ruin as a framework for new life

Inevitably, there comes a time when nature reclaims its space. A single crack in smooth, dense concrete provides just enough opportunity for even the smallest plant to take root. This natural transformation is a process that cannot be halted, only slowed. But what can be slowed can also be accelerated: by creating space for an approach where nature drives transformation, we can foster a process of acceptance and adaptation rather than resistance. (Schubert, 2018)

By granting nature time and space to thrive, rather than fighting against it, we reveal the beauty of decay. Instead of demolishing a building, allowing it to gradually transform fosters a new reality, re-integrating the structure with its surroundings and creating a place where local community can develop as a part of this system. This approach embraces a metamorphosis from building to landscape, inviting those who wish to contribute, to take part in shaping not only the place and structure but also its history and future. (Schubert, 2018)



## Methodology

Theoretical and case study research design was chosen to investigate relations between concepts, find new meanings that can strengthen the design, and answer research questions. Books, journal articles, and possibly poems will be studied to get the best understanding of all the perspectives the topic has.

Primary data was collected through archival research: architectural drawings and archival documents of the building site. Interviews conducted on-site gave a fuller understanding of the area and its communities, local businesses, and organizations.

Data will be analyzed using thematic analysis, focusing on recurring themes such as memory, identity, art, and public space.

The theoretical research process is divided into chapters investigating important aspects of the topic. Through such instruments as observation photography, collage, sketching, sculpture, physical models, and writing ideas will be investigated and expressed.

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