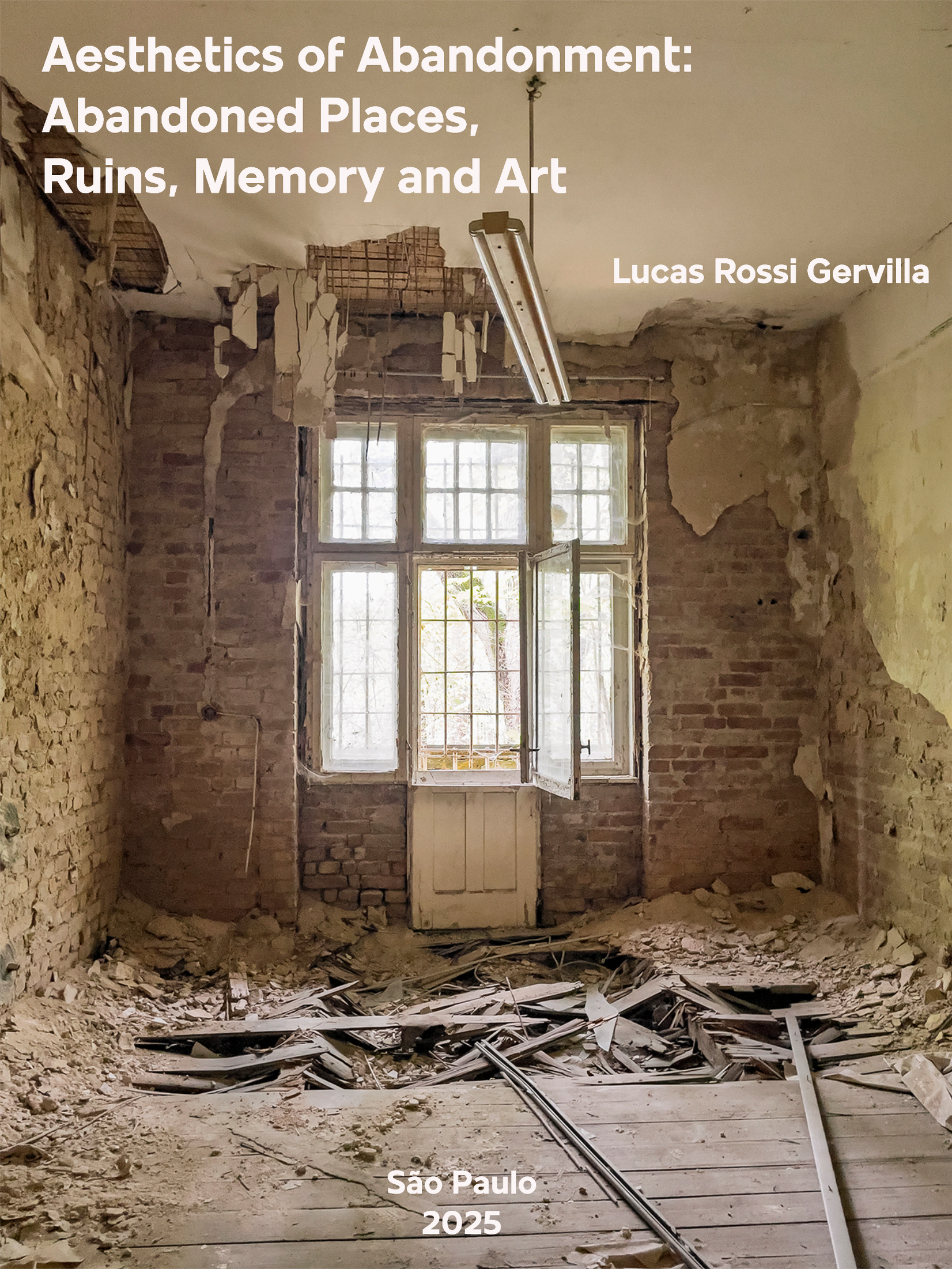
Aesthetics of Abandonment: Abandoned Places, Ruins, Memory and Art

Lucas Rossi Gervilla



São Paulo
2025

SÃO PAULO STATE UNIVERSITY – UNESP
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AESTHETICS OF ABANDONMENT:
Abandoned Places, Ruins Memory, and Art

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Dissertation submitted to the Graduate Program in Arts,
at the Institute of Arts of the São Paulo State University (UNESP),
in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor.

Field of concentration: Visual Arts

Research Line: Artistic Processes and Procedures

Advisor: Prof. Dr. José Paiani Spaniol

Co-advisor: Prof. Dr. Annika Schlitte

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POTENTIAL IMPACT OF THIS RESEARCH

This research investigates ruins and abandoned places as spaces of memory and aesthetic experience, bridging art and philosophy. It contributes to the debate on modernity and heritage, fostering reflections on abandonment, history, and urban transformation, with potential impact on culture, education, and the preservation of historical sites.

IMPACTO POTENCIAL DESTA PESQUISA

Esta pesquisa investiga ruínas e lugares abandonados como espaços de memória e experiência estética, articulando arte e filosofia. Contribui para o debate sobre modernidade e patrimônio, promovendo reflexões sobre abandono, história e transformação urbana, com potencial impacto na cultura, na educação e na preservação de espaços históricos.

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ABSTRACT

This research investigates ruins and abandoned places as spaces of memory, aesthetic experience, and artistic production, bridging approaches from philosophy and visual arts. Drawing from the aesthetics of abandonment, the thesis analyses how ruins aggregate multiple temporalities, challenging linear narratives of modernity. At the same time, these spaces are understood as zones of tension that transcend dualistic relations between progress and decay, remembrance and oblivion, culture and nature. The investigation follows an interdisciplinary path that combines theoretical research, field visits, and artistic production. Concepts of space, place, and the actions that occur within them, as formulated by authors such as Georg Simmel (1908; 1996; 1998; 2009; 2020), Milton Santos (2006; 2013; 2021), and David Harvey (1990), provide a theoretical repertoire for reflecting on the role of ruins in the construction of cultural and subjective meanings. In the artistic field, references such as Andrei Tarkovsky, Giovanni Battista Piranesi, and Caspar David Friedrich expand discussions on the relationship between visual representation and the aesthetic experience of abandonment.The research traverses different landscapes and historical contexts, with an emphasis on cases from Brazil and Germany. The investigation includes visits to abandoned sites such as former factories, deactivated hydroelectric plants, historic buildings, and Soviet military infrastructures, examining their material and symbolic layers. The debate incorporates the practice of "being there", understanding immersion in these spaces as part of the artistic and philosophical process.The study also dialogues with debates on different modernities and their interruptions, considering how projects of progress generate obsolete spaces. The research delves into specific cases, such as the ruins of the former East Germany, analysing their historical significance and their reverberations in the contemporary landscape. Furthermore, it explores the relationship between ruins and nostalgia, drawing from the thought of Svetlana Boym (2001; 2008; 2010; 2017), and discussing how these spaces activate individual and collective memories.The artistic production resulting from the research includes visual essays, audiovisual performances, and films, in which the aesthetics of abandonment is explored as both language and method. The thesis argues that ruins, far from being mere remnants of the past, are active devices that reconfigure our perception of time and space. They do not merely represent absence or loss; rather, they function as zones of encounter between distinct temporalities, opening possibilities for new forms of experience and imagination.

Keywords: abandoned places; aesthetics of abandonment; memory; creative ruins; modernity.

RESUMO

Esta pesquisa investiga ruínas e lugares abandonados como espaços de memória, experiência estética e produção artística, articulando abordagens da filosofia e das artes visuais. Partindo da estética do abandono, a tese analisa como ruínas aglutinam temporalidades múltiplas, desafiando narrativas lineares da modernidade. Ao mesmo tempo, esses espaços são entendidos como zonas de tensão que superam relações dualistas entre progresso e decadência, lembrança e esquecimento, cultura e natureza. A investigação é desenvolvida por meio de um percurso interdisciplinar que combina pesquisa teórica, visitas de campo e produção artística. Conceitos de espaço, lugar e das ações que ocorrem como formulados por autores como Georg Simmel (1908; 1996; 1998; 2009; 2020), Milton Santos (2006; 2013; 2021), e David Harvey (1990), fornecem um repertório teórico para refletir sobre o papel das ruínas na construção de significados culturais e subjetivos. No campo artístico, referências como Andrei Tarkovsky, Giovanni Battista Piranesi e Caspar David Friedrich ampliam as discussões sobre a relação entre representação visual e experiência estética do abandono.A pesquisa atravessa diferentes paisagens e contextos históricos, com ênfase em casos do Brasil e da Alemanha. A investigação inclui visitas a locais abandonados, como antigas fábricas, hidrelétricas desativadas, edifícios históricos e infraestruturas militares soviéticas, examinando suas camadas materiais e simbólicas. O debate incorpora a prática do "estar lá", entendendo a imersão nesses espaços como parte do processo artístico e filosófico. O trabalho também dialoga com debates sobre diferentes modernidades e suas interrupções, considerando como projetos de progresso geram espaços obsoletos. A pesquisa se aprofunda em casos específicos, como as ruínas da ex-Alemanha Oriental, analisando seus significados históricos e suas reverberações na paisagem contemporânea. Além disso, discute a relação entre ruínas e nostalgia, partindo do pensamento de Svetlana Boym (2001; 2008; 2010; 2017), abordando como esses espaços ativam memórias individuais e coletivas.A produção artística resultante da pesquisa inclui ensaios visuais, performances audiovisuais e filmes, nos quais a estética do abandono é explorada como linguagem e método. A tese argumenta que as ruínas, longe de serem apenas vestígios do passado, são dispositivos ativos que reconfiguram nossa percepção do tempo e do espaço. Elas não representam apenas ausência ou perda, mas funcionam como zonas de encontro entre tempos distintos, abrindo possibilidades para novas formas de experiência e imaginação.

Palavras-chave: estéticas do abandono; lugares abandonados; ruínas; memória; modernidade.

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Likely Beginning

This work is full of lacunas. Full of in-between reflections and discussions, that is precisely one of its goals. The lacuna is the place where things happen, the place of encounter. According to the Poetic Edda - a collection of Old Norse poems from the Icelandic mediaeval manuscript *Konungsbók* (The King's Book), a primary source for Norse mythology and heroic legends - the whole world was created in a gap when the Realms of Fire and Ice gathered in there, and the Ymir was born.

A lacuna does not mean an absence but a fertile ground for new beginnings and understandings. The lacuna is also the place of doubt, where previous concepts are questioned. The lacuna is likewise the place of creativity and curiosity. A place between places where fixed answers and definitions disappear. This work employs the lacuna as a method of poetical and philosophical creation, and its beauty is that not every lacuna needs to be fulfilled.

Since the beginning of this research, a simple question has haunted me: "From where does my interest in ruins and abandoned places come?". During the last few years, I have encountered this query several times, whether for my friends, colleagues, or - primarily - by myself. I wish I could point out a definitive and glamorous answer, such as glimpsing an artwork that touched me, a transcendental experience, or even an artistic epiphany. However, the fact is that I do not know the reason for that, and finally, I am comfortable with it. Perhaps the explanation is a combination of all of these elements.

As a child, I remember watching movies such as *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* (1989) or *Rambo: First Blood Part II* (1985), which have notorious sequences among ruins. These films show how abandoned places and ruins were recurrent scenarios in action movies from the 80s and 90s, and that was my audiovisual education back then. In the urban space, this cinematic genre uses these places as background for crimes, reckonings and captivity stories. Where fugitives seek protection, robbers hide stolen merchandise, dealers sell weapons, kidnappers keep hostages captive, corrupt people pay bribes, and many other questionable actions. In the jungle or desert, abandoned structures are temples that hide treasures of pagan gods but also are full of traps. In the countryside, there are mysterious cabins or deactivated mines. This incompleteness, dangerous and unknown atmosphere was a fertile field for a kid's imagination.

Moreover, some video games also played an essential role in my "ruinous qualification". Looking back through time, games like *Golden Axe* (Sega, 1989) bring some stages where warriors fight evil opponents in front of ruins. Later on, *Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare* (Activision, 2007) brought a well-known level through the abandoned buildings of Pripyat, in the surroundings of the Chernobyl nuclear plant in Ukraine. The game uses the original blueprint of the city to recreate the stage. I used to play both games for hours. It is not by chance that I still have them on my cell phone.

In the early 2000s, my first reading of J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of Rings* (1954) also profoundly impacted me. I still can recall feeling the humidity in the air while reading the chapter *A Journey Through the Dark*, in which the Fellowship of the Ring cruises the ruins of the underground city of Moria. Succeeding, Andrei Tarkovsky's *Stalker* (1979) also had a significant meaning for me. The abandoned ethereal landscapes of the movie have, until today, influenced my artistic work.

Figure 01 - Still frame of the game *Golden Axe*.



Source: Sega Company Japan, 1989. Photography created by the auhor, 2021.

When I finally was able to afford my first video camera in 2007 or 2008, I remember that one of the first images I shot with it was a rusty pipe with some ants on its surface in Morungaba in the rural area of São Paulo State. A region I used to go to when I was a little one. At that time, Morungaba was my particular action movie scenario. This picture lies on a miniDV tape, and due to the scheduled obsolescence, I currently do not have access to it. It does not

matter to me if I experienced all these mentioned remembrances or if they consisted of imagined situations my mind created. As long as I can visualise these images, they are genuine.

Among all this context, it was natural that these subjects started to reflect on my artistic production. Little by little, cracks in the wall, broken windows, decaying facades, oxidized barbed wire, and old wooden structures started to appear in my recorded images. At some point, I realised I already had hours of recorded material with this kind of aesthetics. I also enjoyed sneaking into the so-called "lost-places" (a term I am reluctant to use because if I can visit them, they are not lost. At least to me). This line of thinking led me to landscapes of abandonment in diverse parts of Brazil and countries like Argentina, Germany, Italy, and Russia. Following this path, ruined sites became the theme of my Master's and now my Doctorate.

1.2 The Paths of the Present Research

This research investigates possible relationships between ruins, abandoned places, and memories, always having the arts as a mediator. The aesthetics of abandonment can be a tool to approach ruins as a place of tension and confrontation: culture and nature, old and new, progress and failure, recollection and oblivion, to mention a few. One might find all these paired combinations converging into a unique place. However, the dichotomous relations amidst the cited elements start to get fluid when they gather each other in a ruin. The borders get even more blurred regarding the past, present, and future tripartite association; their distinction is not evident in a decaying place. One reason is that a collapsed edifice can agglutinate different temporalities, as seen in the following chapters.

Little by little, the subject of *modernity* and its characteristics became one of the central aspects of this doctorate work since it began in 2020. In the last years, varied events altered the process of this dissertation. My matriculation at the Arts Institute of São Paulo State University occurred the same week when the COVID-19 pandemic was officially diagnosed in Brazil. A few days later, the whole world turned upside down, and no one seemed to know what was happening, an unprecedented modernity.

With the impossibility of developing any outer research activity, I prioritised readings and paper writings. By the end of the year, I had the opportunity to visit two abandoned places: a factory and a hydroelectric, which gained a new possible connotation amidst the pandemic context, as we will debate later. Still, in 2020, I compiled some footage from deserted sites and

combined it into my first feature film, “Ruinous”[1]. The work brings images made between 2009 and 2019, an abandoned decade.

The beginning of 2021 imposed some other new spatial arrengements. The emergence of the Delta variant of COVID-19 summed to the catastrophic extreme right-wing Brazilian government - that deliberately neglected what could be one of the first mass vaccination campaigns against coronavirus in the globe - established a depressive panorama over the population. In this pessimistic scenario, I received the news that the German Service of Academic Interchange - DAAD - approved my application for a six-month field research at the Berlin University of Arts - UdK Berlin. After a stressful process due to the regulations of the German government that barred the entrance of Brazilian citizens (alongside Uruguay, the last two countries removed from the list of banned ones), I finally arrived in Germany for the 2021/22 Winter Semester.

I found a different situation in the German capital due to the pandemic. Compared to Brazil, some prevention measures were stricter there, others lighter. The proximity to a national election also contributed to a diverse Berliner spatiotemporal rearrangement. It all influenced my experience there. At UdK, I had the supervision of Prof. Anna Anders, who is also a video artist. Her appointments and artistic guidance had a significant contribution to my work.

Over the semester, I had the opportunity to visit many abandoned places: hospitals, military bases, and factories were some sites I have been to. Each one aroused a different feeling during the visitation. A critical aspect of this practice investigation was understanding the visit or the “being there” as part of the artistic process. In parallel, I paid dozens of visits to museums and art galleries to investigate more about the fascination of (and for) ruins when it comes to Art.

Although it was not my first time exploring abandoned places in Germany. It started back in 2013 when I created the artwork *Abandonamento*, during an artistic residency at the *Zentrum für Kunst und Urbanistik*, ZK/U. Rethinking now on these activities, a part of my fixation on areas that were left behind has a connection with the nostalgia awakened by them. The desire to find out by myself what they used to be, or even better, what they could be if they were not abandoned.

Having the opportunity to visit places in Europe from a context I had only heard about - such as the Soviet Union, East Germany, or even WWII - developed in me a new type of nostalgia: to imagine *in loco* situations from these contexts that I only know from a distance.

[1] Availabe at: < https://youtu.be/JfvR02U_sUM>.

During the semester in Berlin, once again, a new coronavirus variant appeared, inflicting a new modernity. Also, it would be possible to trace detailed associations between spatiotemporal rearrangements and virus mutations. However, it would be a theme for another doctorate dissertation. By January 2022, Germany was taken by the Omicron variant, registering almost two hundred thousand new cases daily[2]. Antigen tests practically daily, demonstrations in favour of vaccines, demonstrations against vaccines, closed museums and galleries, and various prevention rules: 2G, 2G+, and 3G[3] became part of the country's routine. Among this chaotic picture, an abandoned site appeared as a refuge. Okay, an old bunker for nuclear missiles without any maintenance in the last 35 years might not be the safest place around, but it was at least more quiet than the streets of Berlin.

One of the most fruitful outcomes of this period was a visit to Greifswald, in Northeast Germany, by the Baltic Sea. When I had the opportunity to see some of Caspar David Friedrich's vistas as well to meet in person Prof. Dr Annika Schlitte, from the Philosophy Institut of the University of Greifswald, who later on would become my German supervisor. This connection occurred because Professor Schlitte specialises in *Aesthetics and Philosophy of Culture* and also works with the *Philosophy of Place and Space*, which allowed us to find points of convergence in our research.

By the end of February 2022, when I was almost ready to come to Brazil, there was enough time for another - and abrupt - spatiotemporal rearrangement: the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the beginning of a war between the two countries. Wars are the most potent example of change in the space-time association: they alter everything from one day to another, from hour to hour: the landscapes, the society, and global and local relations.

Barely, I arrived back in Brazil and received the notification that the DAAD had approved my application for a new period of studies in Germany, this time for a two-year term in Greifswald. Six months later, I was back for the Winter Semester 2022-23 at the University of Greifswald.

1.3 Dissertation and Research Organisation

This dissertation represents the culmination of an extensive five-year exploration into the complexities of modernity and the intertwining of diverse temporalities. Splitting my time

[2] Source: Corona Virus Research Center of Johns Hopkins University & Medicine. Available at: <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/region/germany>. Access on: 07 Oct. 2024.
[3] To see: <https://www.infektionsschutz.de/download/5609-1640004234-BZgA_Infografik_2G_3G.pdf/>.

between Brazil and Germany, I embarked on a scholarly journey that traversed cultural landscapes. Guided by Prof. Dr. José Spaniol at the Arts Institute of UNESP and later under the mentorship of Prof. Dr. Annika Schlitte at the Philosophy Institute of the University of Greifswald, I delved into the multifaceted dimensions of philosophy and the arts.

Precisely because it traverses these two fields of knowledge, this work does not follow a traditional academic methodology but rather presents different research structures that at times lean towards philosophy and at others towards the arts. This approach may occasionally give the reader the impression of a lack of methodological consistency. In truth, it is a combination of systems without strict adherence to any single one. Moving between these systems has afforded me greater academic and poetic freedom.

The research unfolded in diverse physical and cultural environments, offering unique insights and challenges. From the bustling streets of São Paulo, with its endless rhythms of contemporary urban life, to the serene coastal town of Greifswald, steeped in nearly eight centuries of history, and the cosmopolitan vibrancy of Berlin, I experienced a spectrum of cultures. This journey of displacement profoundly influenced my poetic and academic approach.

During the initial phase, still in Brazil, I participated in various courses and seminars within UNESP's graduate programs, gathering and analyzing texts that form the bibliographic references for this work.

An investigative practice applied throughout this process was visiting museums and art galleries with the goal of collecting as many artistic references as possible - regardless of the historical period in which they were created - to support both academic and poetic production. The cultural diversity I was exposed to through this practice contributed immensely to my professional and personal development. Along the way, I encountered academics, artists, friends, and individuals whose perspectives enriched my understanding of various cultural aspects.

Already in Greifswald, I frequented the municipal archive, uncovering a wealth of historical materials that provided glimpses into bygone eras and shed light on the complexities of the former German Democratic Republic and the German Reunification times. Here, I would like to emphasise that this research alternates the use of the names: German Democratic Republic (GDR), DDR (*Deutsche Demokratische Republik*), and East Germany to refer to the same country that officially existed between 1949 and 1990.

Attending the *Oberseminar Aktuelle Debatten der Ästhetik und Kulturphilosophie* (Main Seminar Current Debates in Aesthetic Philosophy and Culture) conducted by Prof.

Schlitte offered further opportunities for intellectual exchange as I engaged in scholarly discourse with colleagues and other scholars. Furthermore, taking part in the *Oberseminar* gave me a deeper and more nuanced understanding of authors I was already familiar with, such as Walter Benjamin. Studying Benjamin in his country of origin added valuable context to my research, enriching my interpretations of his work. Moreover, through the seminar, I was introduced to new authors like Rahel Jaeggi and Hartmut Rosa, whose perspectives brought fresh insights into the themes of this dissertation. These encounters broadened the theoretical framework of my research, highlighting the importance of academic exchange and guided exploration in shaping my study.

Meanwhile, my research travels took me beyond national borders to countries such as Greece, Iceland, Poland, Latvia, and Italy, where I encountered diverse cultural landscapes and perspectives on modernity.

A defining aspect of the research organization was its flexibility and adaptability. As the process unfolded, the theoretical approach was adjusted, and the artistic practices were modified in response to both external conditions and internal thinking. For instance, the restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated adjustments in fieldwork, leading to more intimate and familiar explorations of abandoned places. These changes allowed for a deeper engagement with the sites and contexts that became accessible during this period.

Thus, it is possible to say that the work encompasses external movements and internal moments. The external part includes visits to abandoned places and the production of images in these locations, research in archives and libraries, exchanges with colleagues in the academic environment, visits to museums and art galleries, and other practices carried out in collective settings. Meanwhile, the internal part involves reflecting on all the external practices, analyzing the collected data, comparing results, editing images, and a series of other activities carried out individually.

Another important element of the methodology is the concept of “being there” as an integral part of the artistic process, which resonates with Svetlana Boym’s work, particularly in *The Future of Nostalgia* (2001). Boym’s use of her personal experiences as a methodological tool inspired me to let my displacement as an immigrant researcher between Brazil and Germany inform my observations and creative outputs. Combining lived experience with theoretical ponder became central to the research, guiding the exploration of spaces of abandonment and memory.

The selection of references also reflects an intentional positioning of thinkers. The juxtaposition of Brazilian geographer Milton Santos (2013) with German sociologist Georg

Simmel (1908) aimed to bridge cultural and theoretical divides. Santos' notions of spatial systems and everyday life (*cotidianos*) were essential for contextualising abandoned places as dynamic spaces, even in their apparent stillness. On the other hand, Simmel's concept of "nature's revenge" provided a framework to explore the relationship between human-made environments and natural decay - the key to understanding the coexistence of nature and culture in the ruins studied.

In addition, the integration of artists such as Andrei Tarkovsky - whose portrayal of ethereal, decaying landscapes profoundly influenced my visual language - to the theoretical references contributed to an interdisciplinary methodology where the boundaries between theory and practice were purposefully blurred. Audiovisual materials, live cinema performances, and visual essays as part of this dissertation speak to this cross-pollination of disciplines, merging artistic creation with scholarly inquiry.

Attending academic events at other universities also significantly impacted the development of this research. The seminar *Here, There, and Somewhere in Between* (2022), organised by the *Practicing Place* research group of the Catholic University of Eichstätt-Ingolstadt (KU), provided a platform to engage with artists and researchers discussing the nuances of place, displacement, and belonging. This event resonated deeply with my work, particularly concerning migration and the intersection of memory and space. Similarly, my participation in the *Blended Intensive Programme: Maps of Europe - Ways of Philosophy* (2023) at the University of Wrocław, in Poland, allowed me to explore philosophical perspectives on spatial relationships within a broader European context. These experiences enriched my research by exposing me to diverse approaches to space and modernity, contributing to a more interdisciplinary and interconnected framework for my dissertation.

Engaging in three editions of the *Blockkolloquium Ästhetik und KulturphilosophieI*, organised by Prof. Schlitte, was also instrumental in shaping my research progression. In each edition (2022, 2023 and 2024), I presented the current stage of my doctoral work and involved in enriching exchanges with peers from the research group. These feedback sessions provided valuable insights that helped refine my ideas and methodology. In the November 2022 colloquium, I had the challenge and opportunity to deliver my first presentation in German. This experience underscores another important aspect of this research: it has been conducted simultaneously in four languages: Brazilian Portuguese, English, German and Spanish. Navigating between these languages broadened the research's reach and influenced how ideas were formed, articulated, and interpreted. Each language brings specific cultural nuances and frames of reference, shaping how concepts of modernity, space, and memory were approached

throughout the dissertation. Much like the geographic and temporal dimensions it explores, the multilingual nature of this research adds a layer of complexity that mirrors the transnational and intercultural essence of the work.

Thus, the organisation of this research was inherently flexible and adaptive, incorporating both predetermined theoretical frameworks and emergent practices that arose during fieldwork. Visits to abandoned sites, interactions with local communities, and archival research were conducted not just as means of data collection but as embodied experiences that fed into the creative aspects of the project. This methodology is evident in some of my artistic works produced during this period, such as *Rust, Mold and Cracks* (2022) and *Rache* (2024), where the emphasis on presence and temporality challenges dualistic views of space as purely functional or purely symbolic. Both are discussed later in the following chapters.

By integrating theoretical insights from both artists and scholars and making my experience as a researcher an explicit part of the process, this dissertation sought to explore how art can be both a subject of study and a method of investigation. The choices of approaches throughout this research echo an ongoing attempt to understand modernity not as a single narrative but as a confluence of intersecting temporalities and cultural expressions.

In essence, this dissertation represents the transformative possibilities of interdisciplinary inquiry and cross-cultural exchange in navigating the complexities of modernity. It is evidence of the enduring quest for knowledge and understanding in an ever-changing world, where past, present, and future intersections continue to shape our perceptions and experiences of modernity and its manifold expressions.

1.4 Chapters and Structure

The division of the five chapters and their structure were also subject to change during the evolution of this investigation.

The first one, *Early Ruins and Their Pleasures*, delves into the complex and often paradoxical allure that ruins have historically held, focusing on their representation in some different mediums over the centuries. Rose Macaulay's work, *Pleasure of Ruins* (1966), serves as a foundational text, helping to frame the nuanced ways in which ruins have been sources of aesthetic fascination, power, and even a sense of victory. Macaulay argues that the earliest "ruin pleasure" was inherently linked to the conqueror's triumph over the defeated, an idea illustrated by examples such as the depiction of ruins as symbols of military victory in ancient and modern

contexts. Walter Benjamin's (1991) idea on the use of violence, and consequently their ruins, as a manifestation of existence is also applied to the research's context.

Building on this, Andreas Huyssen's (2006) proposition of the difference between ruins and rubble introduces an important distinction: while ruins can evoke nostalgia and aesthetic contemplation, rubble - particularly that resulting from bombings and conflict - carries a different connotation, often devoid of romance and filled with the starkness of destruction, sometimes creating an aestheticisation process. To explore this contrast, the chapter presents examples of ruinous places I visited in different regions of Germany, illustrating how these spaces oscillate between nostalgia and harsh reminders of past destruction. This distinction is crucial to understanding how societies choose to remember or aestheticize the remnants of their past, whether through deliberate preservation or processes of transformation and forgetting.

The chapter also delves into the pleasure of discovering "new" ruins - those sites that have been forgotten or left undiscovered for centuries. This archaeological pleasure is seen as a privilege, a sensation akin to finding a new land, which Macaulay describes as one of the purest of ruin-pleasures. However, it might be connected to political and colonial issues. The discussion extends to the transformative potential of ruins, suggesting that these spaces, once merely symbols of decay, can be resignified. They offer new layers of meaning that shift their role in cultural memory, highlighting their dynamic nature.

Through these discussions, the chapter establishes a comprehensive foundation for understanding ruins as architectural fragments and as dynamic cultural symbols. They catch shifts in power, memory, and aesthetics. This broad understanding sets the stage for deeper explorations of the aesthetics of abandonment and its implications for modernity.

The second chapter, *Diverse Artistic Approaches to Ruins Between 1270 to 1883*, explores different aspects of the representation of ruins in art, highlighting how artists over several centuries engaged with these symbols of decay and transformation in unique ways. By analysing key works of art spanning from the mediaeval period to the late 19th century, this chapter addresses the shifting cultural and aesthetic values associated with ruins and explores the significance of these findings for understanding the evolution of art and culture.

The chapter begins by examining mediaeval and early Renaissance art, where ruins often appeared as symbolic backgrounds in religious paintings. During this period, ruins were depicted less for their aesthetic value and more for their allegorical meanings, often representing the impermanence of worldly power or the divine triumph over earthly decay. This symbolic use can be seen in the works of artists like Martin Schongauer, Johann Heinrich Roos, Carl

Blechen, and Arnold Blöcklin, whose architectural depictions often incorporated elements of decay to emphasise moral narratives.

While the focus remains on pre-modern and artistic production, this chapter does not aim to provide a catalogue of artworks on the subject. Instead, it resonates the culmination of research conducted during my time in Europe, where I had the opportunity to explore museums and galleries across Germany, Italy, Spain, Czech Republic and Poland. A prerequisite is to analyse only artworks which I have seen in person. It is worth noting that the absence of non-European artists underscores the Eurocentric tendencies that have historically shaped museum curation in Europe. The absence of female artists in the researched historical records is not merely an oversight but a consequence of the systemic denial of access to studies and artistic production they faced for centuries. This exclusion extended to the themes they were allowed to explore, often confining their work to subjects considered suitable or "appropriate" for their gender.

The third chapter, *Caspar David Friedrich and His Imaginary Landscapes* was originally part of the second one. However, with the natural expansion of this section, given the significance and impact of Friedrich as an artist, it became necessary to dedicate an entire chapter to his work, especially as half of this research was conducted in Greifswald, his hometown. Friedrich's contributions to the depiction of ruins and landscapes hold a unique place in art history, particularly due to his enduring and profound influence on the Romantic movement and contemporary art. His work continues to shape how we understand the relationship between nature, memory, and the sublime.

This section explores Friedrich's ability to transform real landscapes into imaginative and symbolic works. Focusing on ruins as a recurring motif, Friedrich used these fragmented structures to evoke a sense of temporal dislocation - where the viewer is invited to contemplate the past, present, and future all at once. The chapter examines how his works, such as *Ruine Eldena im Riesengebirge* (1830-34), serve as representations of specific locations and also as imaginative compositions that convey a profound and deeply emotional connection to his homeland. Friedrich's landscapes are often composites, drawing from different elements of places he lived or visited, creating an emotional geography that transcends the physical reality of the depicted sites.

One of the key aspects of this chapter is the exploration of Friedrich's concept of "imaginary landscapes". These are not purely fantastical visions but idealised versions of places that blend memory, emotion, and artistic interpretation. By juxtaposing Friedrich's approach

with contemporary perspectives, the chapter draws parallels between Romantic ideals and the ongoing fascination with memory, place, and nature.

His work bridges the early Romantic fascination with ruins and the contemporary reinterpretations of these fragmented spaces, illustrating how the past continually influences artistic expressions of modernity.

The fourth chapter, *Rust, Mold, and Cracks: Reimagining Places, Spaces and Images* takes as its starting point my audiovisual artistic work *Rust, Mold and Cracks* (2022), which explores the intricate connections between material decay and the lived experience of space. This section aims to position space as a physical entity and a dynamic system influenced by human agency and cultural narratives. It also discusses the concepts of different modernities and the complex relationships between space and time, offering insights into how the human experience shapes and shapes these dimensions.

Building upon the ideas presented earlier, the chapter explores the distinctions between "place" and "space" and how these concepts inform our understanding of different spatial systems. The notions of spatial systems, ordinary spaces, and spatial divisions put forth by, Milton Santos, and the insights into the temporality of space and the coexistence of cultural and natural elements by Georg Simmel, provide a crucial theoretical framework for understanding how spaces are socially constructed and function as systems of interaction. David Harvey (1990), Jeff Malpas (2018), Edward Casey (2018), and Michel Foucault (1994) are authors who contribute to the discussions. The concept of "ruinophilia" by Svetlana Boym (2017a) is also debated and applied within the context of this research.

Expanding on these theoretical insights, the chapter delves into fieldwork, particularly visits to various abandoned places and historical ruins across Germany. This experiential approach allows for a comparison of how different regions reverberate the tensions between human-made and natural elements. By employing "being there" as one of the key methodological approaches, the research aligns with the tradition of walking as a reflective and observational practice, as proposed by Henry David Thoreau in *Walking* (1862). Thoreau advocates for walking as an immersive experience that fosters a deeper connection with the landscape, allowing one to observe and wonder on the dynamic relationship between humanity and nature. Annika Schlitte's (2018) interpretation of Helmuth Plessner's ideas on the human body as a mediator between spirit and space also influenced the concept of "being there" as a research tool and artistic practice. Similarly, this research emphasizes direct engagement with physical environments, offering an experiential understanding of how the concept of space

transforms through human interaction and decay. This emphasis on observation and immersion underscores that the study of space is not purely theoretical but is rooted in lived experience.

Many of the inspirations and theoretical foundations for this chapter emerged from the philosophical discussions and studies conducted at the Institute of Philosophy at the University of Greifswald. This chapter's interdisciplinary approach bridges the gap between theory and artistic practice, demonstrating how spatial theories can be experienced and reinterpreted through creative processes.

The fifth and final chapter, *Interrupted Modernities and Their Influence on My Artistic Production* builds upon exploring different iterations of modernity and how they are manifested in abandoned sites. This work draws from my artistic production carried out between 2020 and 2024 and considerations from my participation in exhibitions in Brazil and Germany to debate these themes in depth. This chapter represents the culmination of my firsthand experiences exploring places left behind during this research. Here, I juxtapose examples from Brazil and Germany, which serve as poignant case studies of different socio-cultural landscapes shaped by shifting modernities. By meditating on these contrasting settings, I emphasise how abandoned sites, shaped by local circumstances, also exhibit commonalities that speak to the shared experience of modernity's disruptive effects.

The chapter delves into examples like the abandoned hydroelectric Dr. Geraldo Tosta in Brazil and post-industrial sites in Eastern Germany, framing them within disrupted and divergent modernity. Drawing upon ideas by Andreas Huyssen, I discuss how these sites blur the boundaries between ruins and rubble as human interventions and socio-economic forces converge to create landscapes of abandonment. In this sense, the chapter considers how places are left to deteriorate yet retain the potential to bear witness to history in unexpected and powerful ways. The concepts of "acceleration" (*Beschleunigung*), proposed by Hartmut Rosa (2013) and "progress and regression" (*Fortschritt und Regression*) developed by Rahel Jaeggi (2023) also help to analyze the various nuances that interrupted modernity projects can reveal.

Here, once again, my personal displacement also serves as a method of research and artistic creation. Inspired by the analysis that Georg Simmel (1908) presents regarding the figure of the "foreigner" (*Fremde*) and how this figure relates to the new society in which they are inserted, I highlight aspects that connect me, as a South American, to the region of Greifswald and the context of the former East Germany.

The visual essays included in this chapter aim to synthesise these conceptual reflections with visual representations, offering a more nuanced and layered portrayal of disrupted

modernities and the aesthetic allure of decay. It represents the intersection of different methods used throughout the research, bringing theoretical ponder into dialogue with artistic practice. It invites the viewer to interpret the visual representations, emphasising how abandoned places are not merely passive sites but active players in the cultural narratives of modernity and its disruptions.

This dissertation encourages readers to explore the layers of meaning abandoned sites hold within their decaying structures. By weaving together personal experiences, artistic production, and theoretical insights, this work offers a comprehensive perspective on the complexities of modernity and its interruptions. I encourage the reader to embark on this travel, where past, future and present collide, revealing how the vestiges of abandoned places continue to shape our understanding of cultural and historical narratives.

2 EARLY RUINS AND THEIR PLEASURES

2.1 Initial Approaches to Ruins and Abandoned Places

One of this work's first challenges is defining what is or is not a ruin and an abandoned place. However, this task has been shown to be audacious from the very first moment. Therefore, I decided to work with a system of concepts - applied throughout the entire process - and then the study objects can orbit around and among them.

The word "ruin" might trigger a picturesque imagination, and the structures related to this mysterious or magical universe have considerable chances of belonging to a Roman or Greek context - at least in a Western scenario. This connection is not by chance. A proper aesthetic of ruins was not precisely common until Petrarca (1304-1374). The Italian poet and humanist is probably responsible for the "beginning of an aesthetical approach to ruins" (*Beginn der Ruinenästhetik*) and seeing these structures as a "scenic element in the theatre of memory" (*szenische Elemente im Theater der Erinnerung*) (Böhme, 1989, p. 289).

In 1336, when climbing Mont Ventoux in Provence, present-day France, Petrarca developed a new way of looking at the landscape, combining natural beauty with historical and philosophical reflections, a direct connection between the landscape and the soul (Rosa, 2016, p. 264). Later, during his stay in Rome, the writer discovered an iconic setting: while strolling through the ruins, he found an elevated place from which he could contemplate the landscape of ruins like a book of memories and history. In the company of a friend, Petrarca immersed himself in conversations about past times, leading him to moments of writing in which he tried to capture and give permanence to his thoughts on the decline of the ruins.

Petrarca's writing transformed the murmur of ruins into a demand for future renewal, establishing a link between the glorious past and the hope of rebirth. Ruins have become aesthetic signifiers, evoking an elegiac feeling that reveals the finiteness of great architectural ideas and the sovereignty of power. This turning point in historical consciousness shows the transience of power and human constructions. Petrarca's vision of ruins as a tangible link to classical antiquity and a platform for meditating on the passage of time and the nature of memory was truly transformative. His pioneering experiences and writings elevated the observation of ruins into a profound meditation on history and time, inaugurating the aesthetics of ruins as a field of philosophical and artistic creation.

The impact of Petrarca's reflections can be seen in his *Epistolae Familiares* (Familiar Letters), published in 1350. In letter IV, 1, entitled *The Ascent of Mount Ventoux*, he writes: "At

the peak, I turned my eyes towards Italy, and my thoughts towards Rome, where I often contemplate the ruins of that great city" (Petrarca, 2024). This passage illustrates how the experience at Mont Ventoux led Petrarca to contemplate the ruins of Rome and the transience of power, wealth and human condition. Such points of view would later inspire a series of artists, from the Renaissance to the Romantic period.

Such considerations, however, do not clarify what could be considered a ruin; therefore, it is necessary to gather more concepts. A ruin is an unstable structure, not only in the architectural sense but also in its broader meaning, which may indicate metaphorical uses of the word (Boym, 2017, p. 46). The interpretation of a ruin might vary over time. This shift also affects the fixed definition of what is and is not a ruin. A ruin can be "a sign of what was once an intact construction", but it carries more meanings than before, in a way "which does not fit into the semantics of the past" (Böhme, 1989, p. 287). This is why a ruin might have an "absence of previous purpose" (*Abwesenheit des ursprünglichen Zwecks*) and a "lack of identity" (*ein Mangel an Identität)* (Böhme, 1989, p. 287). However, these two statements could also apply to diverse buildings, such as a renewed construction or a shopping mall built under predetermined patterns with no connection to its location. So, what is the particularity of these concepts when it comes to ruin?

A ruin carries a not immediately apparent significance; it is latent, like a "temporalisation of memory" (*Temporalisierung der Memoria)* (Klostermann, 2011, p. 239). This suggests that a ruin must be considered within its specific context; otherwise, the analysis might be superficial, leading to a cliché: a deserted or deteriorating structure.

The multitude of categorisations of ruins does not bring us any closer to a definitive understanding of what truly makes a ruin a *ruin*: "sham-ruins" (Macaulay, 1966, p. 37), "actual ruins" and "artificial ruins" (Macaulay, p. 350), "ruins in reverse" (Smithson, 1996, p. 72), and "genuine ruins" (Huyssen, 2014, p. 95) are just a few of the terms coined in an attempt to classify them. However, ruins persist in eluding these definitions. My aim with this research is not to provide a conclusive answer to the question, "What is, in fact, a ruin?"- we can only guess. Guessing is a close companion to Art, which also defies a simple classification in a time-space continuum. Thus, imaginations's natural affinity with the ruinous cosmos becomes apparent.

The definition's complexity also applies to the idea of an abandoned place. After all, it is almost sure to affirm that a ruin was once an abandoned construction. However, what is the difference? The picturesque aspect mentioned might be a factor. Each of us, in one way or another, has a predefined mental image of what a ruin should look like. Commonly, an

abandoned place is *not yet* considered a ruin, but it can become one. If so, how much time does such a place need to turn into a ruin finally? The reverse question is also important: When does a ruin stop being called an abandoned place? What can generate even more confusion is that someone can inhabit a ruin, which does not mean it is abandoned. If we consider a ruin as "a precarious balance of preserved form and decay, nature and history, violence and peace, memory and present, grief and longing for redemption, such as no intact building or art object can achieve" (Böhme, 1989, p. 287)[4], then we might conclude that considerations about ruins and abandoned places will always be precarious; another essential point of contact with art. It justifies the complicatedness interlaced by the four elements of this work's title: abandoned place, ruins, memory, and art. When they touch one another, it is not easy to separate them.

2.2 Early Ruin Pleasures and the Ruin-Triumph

As the ruinous universe is studied, several terms begin to emerge to refer to it: *ruinlust*, *ruin-gaze, ruin-porn*, *ruin-sentiment*, *ruin-feeling*, *Ruinensehnsucht*, *Ruinenstimmung, Ruinenempfindung*, *Ruinenschmerz*, and *ruin-joys* are just some of the examples whose authors are not identifiable. It is imprecise to specify when interest in ruins and abandoned places began, but what is certain is that these constructions have aroused fascination since the early days of humanity and throughout historical periods until reaching our time.

If I can not describe how my interest in ruins started, it would be daring to propose an exact point when Arts and decaying places met each other for the first time. At some moment, I also realised that it is complex to delineate a chronological line of the presence of ruins in Art. Creating a ruinous timeline is obtainable; however, there are significant chances of it being incomplete. After all, we should not expect that Art has a logical behaviour or evolution through time. On top of that, a ruin might gather different temporalities, so it would not be correct to classify them within only a period.

After these observations, one of our goals is to identify different approaches to ruins through art. Before delving into specific artistic representations, it is essential to acknowledge the diverse forms of humankind's attraction to such collapsed structures. By examining various manifestations of this fascination, we can better understand the nuanced relationship between art and the ruinous cosmos.

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[4] "*Die Ruine zeigt eine prekäre Balance von erhaltener Form und Verfall, von Natur und Geschichte, Gewalt und Frieden, Erinnerung und Gegenwart, Trauer und Erlösungssehnsucht, wie sie von keinem intakten Bauwerk oder Kunstobjekt erreicht wird.*" (Böhme, 1989, p. 287, translated by us).

The British writer Rose Macaulay presents several aspects of this connection with ruination in her book *Pleasure of Ruins* (1953). Its background is important to understanding her work. Macaulay (1881-1958) was already an established novelist when World War I (1914-1918) started. At that time, her brother joined the British Army while she worked as a volunteer nurse in a military hospital in England; later, she cooperated with other army departments until the end of the war. This experience brought the author close to desolation caused by humanity. Years later, during World War II (1939-1945), due to the constant German bombings, she was forced to leave her house in London to live in a shelter in northern England. Upon her return, she found that her building and a significant part of the city had been destroyed. Within this scenery, she wrote *Pleasure for Ruins*.

After experiencing the proximity of war, the author (1966, p. 01) posits that the "earliest ruin pleasure was inextricably mixed with triumph over enemies". Let us examine some representations of this assertion. A starting point is Virgil's *Aeneid*, written circa 19 BC. This epic poem narrates the story of Aeneas, a Trojan hero who survived the Trojan War and the destruction of the ancient city following its fall and conquest by the Greeks. The literary work vividly describes the ruins of Troy after a ten-year conflict.

"If it pleases the gods to leave nothing of our great city standing,
if this is set in your mind, if it delights you to add yourself
and all that's yours to the ruins of Troy, the door is open
to that death: soon Pyrrhus comes, drenched in Priam's blood,
he who butchers the son in front of the father, the father at the altar". (Virgil, Aeneid, II, 624-705).

As ruin pleasures are not restricted to a determined region or era, we can find another example at the Mayan temple Bonampak in Ocosingo, Chiapas, Mexico. Its construction started in 580 AD and ended in 800 AD. Inside the main construction, some wall paintings depict military conflicts in the area. In some images, it is possible to see the triumph of the victorious army over the defeated. The main illustrations refer to Yajaw Chaan Muwan, a former ruler from Bonampak. Some interpretations say that the drawings could also represent a ritual of human sacrifice. One way or another, what we see in the drawings is people holding power above the others. The temple has not only on the coloured mural, but also on some images carved in stone, that document their victories.

Figure 02 - Lintel at the Bonampak Temple



Photo: Jacobulus, 2005.
Lintel at the Bonampak Temple depicting Yajaw Chaan Muwan defeating the enemy.

Not all temple walls were painted; their creators left some parts blank to fill it over time, narrating the Mayan history. This process was interrupted after the Spaniard *Conquista del México* (1519-1521) when the Spanish forces destroyed a significant amount of the Mayan culture, including the ancient documents that could help to interpret the paintings and the Mayan sacerdotal who could speak the old native languages were killed, to avoid any resistance of the indigenous culture. The culmination of the actions was a process known as *Relaciones* (1578-1585), when the Spanish crown carried out a demographic census with the objective to find out and eliminate traces of the native culture[5]. Another pleasure of the conquer over the defeated, or ruin-triumph (Macaulay, 1966, p. 03).

[5] *La colonización del imaginário - sociedades indígenas y occidentalización en el México español – siglos XVI-XVIII*, by Serge Gruzinski. Ciudad de México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1995.

These two cases demonstrate that the closeness of Arts and wars is neither unusual nor recent; on the contrary, they walk hand in hand for an extended time. In these examples, art is used as a medium to preserve historical records, and here, it is possible to notice a tripartite relationship between wars, history, and art. When this connection happens, the last one is often subject to being co-opted as a form to testify the narrative of the side who won the conflict. After all, historians will always tend to have true "empathy" (*Einfühlung*) for the winner, which is an inevitable feeling because the victors would be the heirs of all who won before them (Benjamin, 1991a, p. 696). This identification with the conquerors validates their success, and the spoils come under their possession. Gold, precious jewellery, and other riches are naturally well appreciated; regardless, there is another valuable sort of spoils: the "cultural goods" (*Kulturgüter*) (Benjamin, 1991a, p. 696). Taking what belongs to another culture means holding onto a piece of their values for a long time. When one destroys the buildings of the rivals, it's not just taking their wealth, but also wiping out their identity.

Continuing on, the documentation of war victories assumes a noticeable role in gathering art and ruin pleasures, particularly when it comes to photography. On 2 May 1945, the Soviet photographer Yevgeny Khaldei captured one of the most famous photographs of WWII. Later, it received various names in different languages. A possible free translation from the Russian name could be: *Victory Flag over Reichstag*.

The photo depicts a Soviet soldier waving a USSR banner on the top of the *Reichstag* building in Berlin. The image represents the conquest of the German capital by the Red Army after the end of the *Battle of Berlin* (from 20/04 to 02/05/1945). The first publication of the photograph was on 13 May 1945 in the Russian magazine *Ogoniok*. Some stories envolve the framing of the image and its post-editing. What is possible to ensure is that it is an acted photo. It was staged in a sense that Kahldei produced the situation by inviting the two soldiers: the first would wave the flag with help from the other, who would hold his colleague. Here is one of the symbolisms of the work: the companionship.

The background of the image is a devastated city. As far as we can see, destroyed buildings still smoke while military trucks and tanks roll over the streets. However, Kahldei possibly added some haze in a posterior edition; just as removing the watch from the right wrist of the helper, as it would be suspicious to have a soldier wearing two watches. If this late manipulation happened, it is not the focus here. What matters is the determination to document the triumph over the defeat. It does not matter if the smoke is natural, not even how many watches the soldier had. Even the *Reichstag* had a secondary importance as an administrative

building for Germany then. What counts is that it was a symbol of Berlin, the now-defeated capital of the Third Reich.

Figure 03 - *Victory Flag over the Reichstag*, Yevgeny Khaldei, 1945



Source: Khaldei, 1945.

Decades later, the impulse to prove the triumph over others moved from photography to live television broadcasting. In March 2003, the troops of the United States started the invasion of Iraq. On April 9 2003, some US divisions reached the Al-Firdos Square, in the heart of Baghdad. Their mission was to ensure the security of the Palestine Hotel, where journalists worldwide were hosted. Some soldiers reported that the locals who were watching their actions asked them to tear down the Saddam Huyssen statue that stood in the middle of the square. After some reluctance, the officials agreed and ordered the soldiers to do that with a crane (ABC News, 2003).

At this point, television channels from different countries were broadcasting the images; after all, it was happening in front of a base of the international press. Before the statue came down, a soldier covered Saddam's face with a US flag, symbolising the end of his government. The images do not show proper ruins in a conventional sense, yet the objective here is evident: to claim visually and symbolically the victory over the defeated.

Figure 04 - US Flag over Saddam Huyssen's statue

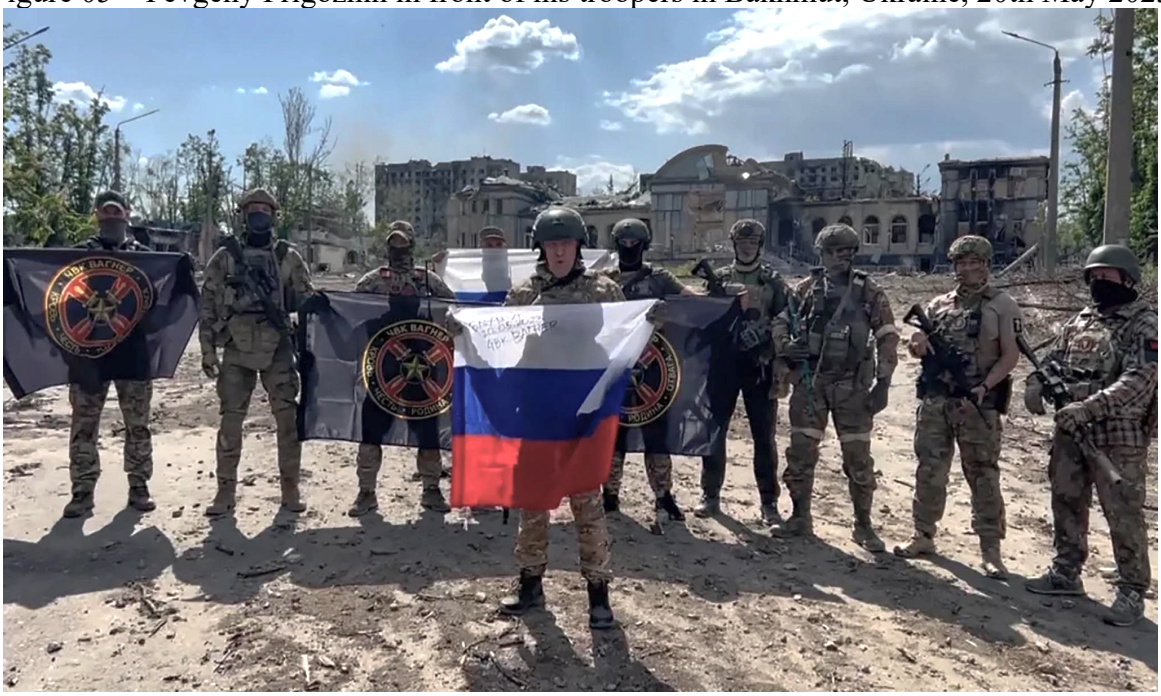


Source: MSNBC, 2003.
Baghdad, Iraq, 2003.

Twenty years ahead, another ruinous triumph became famous. This time, it was not a traditional photograph, nor a television live broadcasting, but a postage on Telegram group. On 20 May 2023, Yevgeny Prigozhin, the former leader of Wagner Group - a Russian organisation officially named as "private military company", also known as mercenaries - published on his Telegram channel a video and a few pictures in which he and some soldiers claim to have gained control over the Ukrainian city Bakhmut, after one of the most violent battles of the Russian-Ukrainian war.

The images show Prigozhin and his fellows in a confident atmosphere, waving the Russian and Wagner flags over the ruins of the city. Before the invasion, Bakhmut had an estimated population of 71,000 people; by May 2023, it decreased to 500, and, according to Ukrainian official sources, almost all of its buildings suffered some damage (Landale, 2023). It does not matter to the conquerors; what counts for them is their image on the leftovers of the conquered. That is what remains.

Figure 05 - Yevgeny Prigozhin in front of his troopers in Bakhmut, Ukraine, 20th May 2023



Source: Prigozhin's Press Service/Telegram, 2023.

Based on these four examples - indeed, there are many others - I would like to mention how the forms of representation of this particular ruined pleasure altered through time following the technological communicational resources from each period. Virgil's *Aeneid* calls on literature, one of the most reliable media back then. Through the centuries, his work survived throughout his career, and it was translated into many languages. The Mayans, on the other hand, chose images, both carved in stone and wall paintings, types of media that require maintenance to endure. Considering the well-preserved state of the artworks, the Mayans possibly did it until the Spanish invasion. As we already saw, preserving the pre-Columbian memories was not one of the priorities of the Spanish crown; on the contrary.

When it comes to Khaldei's *Victory Flag over the Reichstag*, we have a photograph, a widely used media to testify to the truthfulness of the events; with a retouch here and there to bring more authenticity to the facts, like in this example. Although the image was published about a week later - which could be considered fast for the period and context - the audience needed to wait for the printed version of the magazine. The case of the US flag over Saddam's face brings the immediatism of the last breath of the world before the internet era: live broadcasting television. A global audience could watch on their TV sets the images from Baghdad. It could be at home, in a restaurant, or in front of an electronics store as long as a television device was available. Twenty years later, Prigozhin appealed to one of the most popular and fastest communication vehicles of our time, the Telegram. His personal group on

the app had nearly one million subscribers[6]. Minutes after his post, some of the most influential journals in the world republished the information. All the last three objects bring staged situations. However, we can only discuss it now, after a time of distancing ourselves from the situation, from a historical perspective. In the heat of the moment, there is no time for profound thinking; what matters is who has the first access to these images, where the ruins were the first witness of conquest.

All the cases presented so far as examples of the ruin-triumph pleasure might assume another connotation when considering the thoughts of Walter Benjamin (1991b, p. 197). He suggests that violence, at times, is not merely a means to an end or a display of will but primarily a "manifestation of existence" (*Manifestation des Daseins*). Within this context, the triumph of the victors - and its subsequent documentation - validates their existence. It is worth noting that in his original text, Benjamin (1991b, p. 179) uses the German word *Gewalt*, which can be translated as either "violence", "power" or "authority", depending on the context. Following this way, his essay *Zur Kritik der Gewalt* (Critique of Violence, 1921) can be understood as both a critique of violence or authority, in this case, the State. The ambiguity of the term is intentional and crucial to Benjamin's argument, which addresses the limits and justifications for the use of violence or power, whether by the State or other actors.

In the modern world, only a State can declare war against another. Otherwise, it is considered a civil war or an internal conflict. In either case, the declaration of war and the ensuing violence serve as a symbol of the existence or the desire for recognition of all parties involved. Art, within this framework, becomes a powerful tool for reinforcing the existence of all affected parties and serves as a medium for preserving the conflict throughout time, as encapsulated in the lyrics:

"I march before a martyred world, an army for the fight
I speak of great heroic days, of victory and might"[7]

[6]Yevgeny Prigozhin died on August 23rd 2023, in a controversial flight incident in Russia and the circumstances remain unclear to this day. This part of the text was written just a few days before the fatality.
[7]Song: *Orgasmatron*. Composers: Peter Gill, Michael Burston, Philip Campbell, and Ian Fraser "Lemmy" Kilmister. Artist: Motörhead. Album: *Orgasmatron*, 1986 © Motor Music Ltd.

2.3 Ruins or Rubble?

So far, we have seen only cases which relate ruins to wars. However, is it a plausible relation? Andreas Huyssen (2006, p. 08) states that bombings do not produce ruins; instead, "they produce rubble". His affirmation is reasonable, particularly if we consider the relations between ruin and the forces of nature. This former line of thinking considers a ruin as a place where nature reclaims what one day was yours. As the time of nature is different from human time, a ruin might not arise from one second to another. Of course, this discussion receives even more elements when we regard human beings as part of nature. However, this is a debate for the fourth chapter. To summarise, if we see a ruin as something that lawfully needs natural actions, then bombings do not produce ruins.

Regardless, what if we deal with the etymological meaning of the word "ruin"? Our keyword comes from the Latin *ruīna*, which means collapse, downfall, or destruction, just as the verb *ruere* (to ruin): to destroy, to tumble, to sink. The word can be used in a physical sense or as a metaphor: a ruined life is synonymous with failure; ruined plans mean frustration, and so on. Decay, bankruptcy, wreckage, obsolescence, deception, waste, detour from moral values, and push down are all words and expressions one might relate to ruin.

The German philosopher Martin Heidegger (1994, p. 131) uses the term *Ruinanz* to refer to the state of deterioration or ruin inherent to human beings and their existence. Heidegger explores how *Ruinanz* is a characteristic of "factual life" (*faktisches Leben*) (Heidegger, 1994 p. 131), implying that decay and disintegration are intrinsic aspects of human existence. By stating that *Ruinanz* "is the movement that life has in itself, as it is, for itself, from itself, that is, against itself" (Heidegger, 1994 p. 131)[8], he describes the concept as a constant movement of decay that humans experience in their existence. For this reason, human life's intentionality always aims to overcome, but simultaneously, it faces the reality of its own ruin. Another reading of the idea could be understood as our natural process during life: if today I am not the same person from 20 years ago, it is like I am a ruin of myself. Heidegger links *Ruinanz* to the concept of temporality, where humans are aware of time and the inevitability of decay. The idea of *Ruinanz* in Heidegger is deep and many-sided, addressing the fading and failing as fundamental aspects of human existence. He connects ruin to intentionality and temporality, suggesting that life is always in a state of movement that includes its own deterioration.

[8] In the original: "*Ruinanz die Bewegtheit, die das Leben in ihm, als es, für sich, aus sich heraus, d. i. gegen sich selbst 'ist'*".

Nevertheless, if ruin and destruction (either natural or artificial) might walk hand in hand, then yes, bombings can surely produce ruins. All in all, that is their main purpose: to destroy and to collapse the enemy: be it physically or morally. From Gaza to Belgrad, the shellings are also intended to destroy memories and dignity.

When Huyssen (2006, p. 08) establishes this opposition between ruins and bombings, he namely mentions WWII; anyhow, he reminds us that, in the recent past, the approach to war debris assumes a new perspective, and the rubble is "indeed transformed, even aestheticized, into ruin" (Huyssen, 2006, p. 08); be it through books or films. I would add video games and augmented reality software to this media list, which also trigger an incantation to the downfall.

Withal, the shelling's wreckage aestheticization have not necessarily started with the remains of WWII or I. I propose that its origin could be older. Let us look closer at the painting *The Ruins of the former Kreuzkirche (Church of the Holy Cross) in Dresden* (*Die Trümmer der ehemaligen Kreuzkirche zu Dresden*), created in 1765 by the Italian painter Bernardo Bellotto, also called Canaletto. The work's title is intuitive; however, it does not mention what led to the collapse of Kreuzkirche. For that, it is relevant to know more about its context.

Figure 06 - *The Ruins of the former Kreuzkirche (Church of the Holy Cross) in Dresden* (*Die Trümmer der ehemaligen Kreuzkirche zu Dresden*) (1765). Bernardo Bellotto, aka Canaletto



Source: Canaletto, 1765. Photography created by the auhor, 2023.
Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister und Skulpturensammlung bis 1800, Zwinger Museum, Dresden.

During the Seven Years War (1756-1763) - a global conflict fought in Europe, America, Asia, and the Pacific - the Prussian army bombed Dresden in 1760, which at that time was under Austrian control (SKD, [20--]a). The artillery attack destroyed several buildings, including part of Kreuzkirche. However, the tower of the edifice remained. Some years before, in 1747, Canaletto, a prestigious painter from Venice, was hired to depict the most important constructions of Dresden and the urbanisation process of Saxony's capital. In 1765, five years after the shelling, the city administration resolved to demolish the church's tower to avoid incidents. Canaletto documented this process, aestheticizing the rubbles of the church.

Figure 07 - Detail of the *The Ruins of the former Kreuzkirche (Church of the Holy Cross) in Dresden* (1765), Bernardo Bellotto, aka Canaletto



Source: Canaletto, 1765. Photography created by the auhor, 2023.
Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister und Skulpturensammlung bis 1800, Zwinger Museum, Dresden.
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In the image, it is possible to see the workers demolishing the part of the tower which stood and removing the leftovers. On the left background, we might spot many damaged buildings that can be called ruins. Canaletto's piece of art seems to transform the remains of the bombing into part of the development process of the city, like a collateral effect for the greater good. Curiously, another artwork by him, *Die ehemalige Kreuzkirche in Dresden* (1751-52), depicts the church in its original aspect before the war. If we overlay the images, it would be possible to see different temporalities gathering in the same space. After several reconstructions and remodelations, only in 1955 did the Kreuzkirche acquire its current aspect (Kreuzkirche Dresden, [20--]a).

Figure 08 - *Die ehemalige Kreuzkirche in Dresden* (1751-52),
Bernardo Bellotto, aka Canaletto



Source: Canaletto, 1751-52. Photography created by the auhor, 2023.
Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister und Skulpturensammlung bis 1800, Zwinger Museum, Dresden.

This dynamic becomes even more intriguing when considering the relationship between *The Ruins of the former Kreuzkirche in Dresden* (1765) and *Die ehemalige Kreuzkirche in Dresden* (1751-52), which depicts the church in its original state before the destruction. Together, these works form a classic plane and counter-plane, where the observer and the object

exchange viewpoints. By juxtaposing these perspectives, Canaletto creates a visual dialogue that transcends a time-based-perspective, inviting the viewer to navigate between the grandeur of the intact structure and the fragmented remains of the ruins.

Figure 09 - Current aspect of the Kreuzkirche Dresden with a perspective similar to Canaletto's work



Photography created by the auhor, 2024.

This interplay not only enriches Canaletto's artistic production but also stimulates the imagination by presenting the church as a site of layered temporalities. The observer is encouraged to imagine the transition from one state to the other, contemplating the processes of destruction and reconstruction. Such a dual perspective highlights the ruins not merely as symbols of loss but as active participants in the ongoing evolution of the city's narrative.

By placing the audience in this shifting viewpoint, Canaletto's works draw attention on the dual nature of ruins: as remnants of the past and as foundations for future interpretations. This duality, expressed through the artistic strategy of plane and counter-plane, underscores the creative approach, transforming the ruins of the Kreuzkirche into a elements of memory, transformation, and continuity.

Still in Dresden, the Zwinger Museum - also known as Dresdener Zwinger, a four-square palace in the heart of the downtown - or even the city of Dresden itself could also be considered cases of ruin aestheticization. Almost two centuries after the Seven Year's War, the capital was once shelled, this time like never before. In February 1945, the Air Forces from England and the USA devastated the city with incendiary bombs. Due to the brutal firestorm, most of the buildings were destroyed, including the museum. After the end of WWII, the Soviet military administration started to restore the Dresdener Zwinger. It was partially reopened in 1951, and work was accomplished in 1963 (Dresdener Zwinger, [20--]). In the renovation process, many original sculptures, columns and bricks that survived the fire were reused. They were removed from the rubble piles and put once again in place. Over the decades, other destroyed constructions, such as the *Semperopera* and the *Frauenkirche*, were restored. Walking through the streets and alleys of Dresden's Altstadt, it is possible to notice the different brick colours of the facades of the edifices. The ones with a black patina were part of the original structures destroyed during the air raids.

When I visited Dresden in the summer of 2023, the massive inner yard of Zwinger Palace was under renovation, converting the whole place into a vast construction site. For a brief moment, I had the sensation of being in front of a park of ruins or an excavation site. Still, suddenly, I realised that a restoration process generates a suspension state: the place is not anymore what it used to be, yet it is not the final objective, like a parallel temporality. It could be maintenance work or a procedure to bring it closer to its original appearance. However, the construction site generates an in-between situation, a sensorial confusion that is not necessarily aesthetically pleasing or unpleasing.

Figure 10 - Dresdner Zwinger's construction site



Photography created by the auhor, 2024.

In the careful restoration of the Frauenkirche and other Dresden landmarks, original bricks, many blackened by the fires of war, were meticulously retrieved from the ruins and reintegrated into the reconstructed structure. After WWII, only part of the tower and one of the church's walls remained, with a massive pile of rubble lying between them for decades. During the 16-year restoration process (1989–2005), these burnt fragments were deliberately used in the rebuilding, preserving the material traces of the church's past and its symbolic weight. This choice to incorporate damaged, original elements, instead than restoring them to a new state or replacing them with new materials, imbues the structure with visual and mnemonic value (Frauenkirche Dresden, [20--]).

Figure 11 - Frauenkirche's front view



Photography created by the auhor, 2023.

Today, these fragments - once war debris - are real reminders of Dresden's history. Their blackened surfaces create a stark contrast that highlights the overlaying of destruction and renewal. They carry a visible patina of history, transforming the Frauenkirche into more than a reconstructed temple; it becomes like a palimpsest of the city's history. This deliberate balance between preservation and reconstruction depicts how Dresden deals with its past, intertwining past, memory and heritage with the practical and symbolic act of rebuilding. In this way, the Frauenkirche serves as a place of worship and a monument to the enduring dialogue between history and the present.

Figure 12 - Frauenkirche facade's detail



Photography created by the auhor, 2023.

Still discussing the rubble aestheticisation - or their transformation into ruins - I would like to bring up another example: the Hauptkirche St. Nikolai in Hamburg, which was built in 1195 as a small chapel to celebrate the foundation of the Neustadt district and the building of the new docks in Hamburg's west harbour, it was expanded step by step over the centuries. In 1657, it was one of the biggest churches in the city and had a 128-metre tower with clocks that could be seen "all around the city" (Hauptkirche St. Nikolai, [20--]). In 1842, an incident known as the Great Fire destroyed a third of the edifices of the district, including the church.

In 1846, a new church construction started, not precisely in the same place but still in the same area. Following a Neo Gothic project, the new temple was completed in 1874, with a 147,3-metre tower, considered the highest church tower in the world then. Less than one century later, in 1943, Hamburg was the main target of Operation Gomorrah, a joint air-raid series by the British and US-American air forces. After a week under attack, a massive area of the city was utterly destroyed, including the church and all the harbour facilities. As the tower was used as a reference point for the aeroplanes, it was not targeted directly. Still, all the St. Nikolai structures were deeply affected by the action (Hauptkirche St. Nikolai, [20--]). The newspapers and war propaganda from both the UK and the USA exhibited images of the wasted city as evidence of their military success, a typical ruin-triumph.

After the war, the Senate of Hamburg decided that the church would not be restored and that a memorial for the victims should occur there. During the 1950s, the municipality and the

church's council agreed to demolish the compromised structure and to keep just the tower. In the following decade, both sides agreed that the tower ruins should be officially declared a historic monument, and the parish was transferred to a new location. In the 1970s, the Senate resolved that the remaining ruins of the temple itself should be the memorial. By the end of the 1980s, a renovation took place, creating a new and elevated floor above the old foundation and transforming the ruins of the crypt into an underground visiting and exhibition place (Hauptkirche St. Nikolai, [20--]).

Gradually, the site became a well-preserved ruin over the last decades, evolving diverse foundations and sponsors, both public and private ones. The tower's foundations were restored, and a lift inside the columns was installed. It allows the visitors to rise a 76-meter high and to appreciate a panoramic view of the city. The altar was reinstalled at the original place, some walls were reinforced to avoid any risk of collapse, and some pieces of art inspired by the war tragedies were settled around the space (Hauptkirche St. Nikolai, [20--]). The underground exhibition shows details of the original construction, the rebuildings over the centuries and principally, the happenings after the Gomorrha Operation when more than thirty thousand people were killed.

Nowadays, the *Mahnmal St. Nikolai* is a homage to "the victims of war and tyranny", as it can be read on some walls. Here, the structures that, after the air raids, could be considered just a pile of rubble, were resignified not only into ruins but also as a symbol of memory. The place can be read as a different set of combinations: war and peace, recollection and oblivion, old and new, life and death. All these dichotomous pairs are dismantled in a ruin such as St. Nikolai. The movement here is not a mere aesthetisation. The remaining parts of the temple are impregnated with layers of meaning, history and memory.

Nevertheless, about St. Nikolai, there is another aspect - or even a ruined pleasure - that I would like to point out: when a place such as this becomes a tourist attraction. It is not rare to see tourists queuing for a ride at the lift; after all, it offers a pleasant view of Hamburg, a perfect photo spot. On the ground floor, someone is always smiling and striking a pose in front of some fragment of the old church. Surrounded by modern edifices, the memorial looks like an oasis amidst the centre of one of the wealthiest cities in Germany. Is it wrong to stroll around a place like this? No. Are silence and mourning the only allowed behaviours in a memorial? Absolutely not. One can honour and respect the dead and celebrate life simultaneously. To establish how people should or should not act in front of ruin would be too daring and inappropriate. What is

for sure is that in a complex scenario like St. Nikolai, the ruins are no longer evidence of the triumph of winners over the defeated.

Figure 13 - Mahnmal St. Nikolai



Photography created by the auhor, 2023.

The German capital offers two more cases in which what was rubble in the first moment became an aestheticised ruin: the Klosterruine Berlin and the remains of the Anhalter Bahnhof. Let us take a better look at both.

The former refers to the ruins of a Franciscan monastery (*Kloster*) from the 13th century, located in the vicinity of an area known as Molkenmarkt, whose origin coincides with the foundation of Berlin in the same century. An area that nowadays corresponds to the Mitte district. Due to the thriving commercial routes passing through this zone, the monks received enough resources to expand the abbey into a complex of houses and buildings. Still, in the 13th century, the monastery was Brandenburg's largest Franciscan conglomerate, combining Romanesque and Gothic architecture - a symbol of the power and prosperity of the region.

After the Reformation (1517), the court of Brandenburg adopted Protestantism, and the cloister was deactivated in 1539 (Klosterruine Berlin, [20--]). In the following decades, the complex acquired new forms of use, including Berlin's first printing press. In 1574, the place became the first state school of Brandenburg, the Gymnasium Zum Grauen Kloster, embraced by the Berlin bourgeoisie as a reference educational institution. A remarkable library and

advanced chemistry laboratories integrated the establishment that, over the years, welcomed among its students some well-known personalities of German histories, such as the first Chancellor of the Reich, Otto von Bismarck and the architect Karl Friedrich Schinkel (Klosterruine Berlin, [20--]), who, in the second half 19th century designed some renovations in the constructions.

By the end of WWII, the whole complex was seriously damaged, and any activity there ceased. When the Allies divided Berlin into four parts - another ruin-triumph - the area belonged to the Soviet sector and, posteriorly, to the German Democratic Republic. In the second half of the 1950s, the new city administration removed the debris. Later, at the beginning of the 1960s, the most compromised ruins were demolished, and the place became a monument against fascism and tyranny. In 1968, all the former ruins except the church were extinguished due to the widening of the Grunerstraße (the street where the remains are). The remaining structures and their compounds were converted into a green square (Klosterruine Berlin, [20--]).

Figure 14 - Klosterruine Berlin with the Fernsehturm



Photography created by the auhor, 2023.

More than a decade after the German Reunification (1990), between 2002 and 2006, the ruins and the courtyard were extensively restored. Since 2016, the site, now called Berlin Klosterruine, has been under the administration of the Mitte district office (Klosterruine Berlin, [20--]). It has become a cultural centre and exhibition spot for contemporary art, receiving music recitals, temporary artistic interventions, theatre plays and performers. The place that one day was a pile of rubble produced by the air raids is currently an aestheticised ruin, simultaneously attracting artists, audiences and tourists.

The peculiarities of the site do not stop there. Today, the ruins lie just across the street from the Alexanderplatz square, a location whose history, since its creation in the 17th century, is connected to the history of Berlin. Depending on the hour of the day, the shades of the *Fernsehturm* (TV Tower) lie over the ruins; opened in 1969, the tower is one of the most iconic architectural symbols from East Berlin. The Berlin City Hall, *das Rote Rathaus*, is also on the same block, just as other important administrative buildings. The remains of the first Berlin city wall, dated from 1250 are just a few metres away from the ruins. Constructions from different periods are brought together in the heart of the city.

Figure 15 - Klosterruine Berlin



Photography created by the auhor, 2023.

This combination of time layers in Berlin is not just a metaphor. Between 2010 and 2013, the municipal government started a first series of renovations on the Grunerstraße to undo the widening and make it a narrow street again. Here, we seem to be in front of another kind of ruin-pleasure when the "winner" erases the deeds of its predecessors. The German capital is filled with examples of constructions from the GDR period being dismantled, and what was demolished by the socialist administration is rebuilt by the post-Reunification mayors. The dissembling of the Palast der Republik (2006-2008) - the seat of the GDR government - and the rebuilding of the Humboldt Forum (2013-20) in the exact location might be the most significant case of this process. Later we will return to the case of the Palast der Republik. With this technique, the city becomes a text like a screenplay that is "frantically written and rewritten" (Huyssen, 2000, p. 89), where the writers combine fiction with reality and vice-versa, exposing a political dispute for a definitive narrative.

Figure 16 - Photo-shooting with the model Lady Luna Nyx for the clothing brand Liquid Disco Latex at the Klosterruine Berlin



Photography created by the auhor, 2023.

Back to the activities at Grunerstraße, during the dig behind the City Hall, the workers found some house foundations that date from the Middle Ages and very likely belong to one of

the first constructions of Berlin. It has instantly converted the perimeter into an archaeological site. Since then, the municipality has been carrying out discussions with civil society in order to develop a new urban project for the area. Known as *Charta Molkenmarkt*, the plan seeks to connect the region's streets through sidewalks and build new buildings for commerce and accommodation. The Klosterruine and the recently found historical remains remind us of the words of Svetlana Boym (2002, p. 176) about Berlin, a city where "the ruins and construction sites coexist". The *Charta Molkenmarkt* website[9] brings some tricky cliches to this sort of urban enterprise, such as creating a "more alive" (*Lebendiger*) place or revitalising[10] the area. Does it mean that the people who currently live there are not "alive enough" to the construction companies and politicians?

Figure 17 - Front view of the Anhalter Bahnhof



Photography created by the auhor, 2023.

The second Berliner example is the ruins of the Anhalter Bahnhof in the Kreuzberg district on the city's southern side. This station was built between 1839 and 1841 and was

[9] https://molkenmarkt.berlin.de/

[10] The website of the project brings expressions such as "*um besondere Orte in der Berliner Mitte neu zu bilden oder zu beleben*" (To build and revitalise special places in the Berliner's Mitte).
Source: https://molkenmarkt.berlin.de/planung/. Access on 01st Jan. 2023.

projected to be a hub for long-distance trains, connecting Berlin to other southern states, such as Sachsen-Anhalt, Sachsen, and Bayern, and also to Prague, Vienna, Basel, Athens, Rome, and Constantinople (now Istanbul). As soon as it was opened, it became Europe's biggest international railway terminal, with its luxurious Neo-Renaissance architecture and Grepper bricks (Härig, 2007). In 1939, the underground Anhalter Bahnhof S-Bahn station became operational.

From when the National Socialist Party got into power (1933) until the outbreak of WWII (1939), many citizens who were against the regime used the station to flee from Germany. In the same period, political opponents of the Third Reich were sent to exile, departing from the Anhalter Bahnhof. In 1942, the military conflict was already being fought on three different continents when the Nazis began to deport part of the Jewish elderly citizens to the concentration camp of Theresienstadt, today in the Czech Republic. The trains transporting Jews, Roma and Sinti departed from the international station in Kreuzberg.

Figure 18 - Back view of the Anhalter Bahnhof



Photography created by the auhor, 2023.

To board a train as a prisoner at Anhalter was practically a death sentence. In all, about 9.600 people were forced to leave Berlin for Theresienstadt between 1942 and 1944, when heavy shellings partially damaged the rails and the activities of the station stopped. Berlin

became a divided city when the war ended, and the station lost its importance for the regular transport system. Still operating partway with some compromised structures, the station was ultimately deactivated in 1959 (Härig, 2007). Still, in the same year, the city administration started to demolish the building, causing some protests among citizens who claimed that destroying the edifice would be like erasing the suffering of the victims of nationalism. After some negotiations, a portico of the station was maintained as a ruin. Between 2003 and 2005, the construction was refurbished (Härig, 2007). The major area of the former station is today a little park with a football pitch. Until today, the S-Bahn underground station remains operational.

Figure 19 - Photo of Anhalter Bahnhof took by the German Photographer Michael Schmidt between 1976 and 1978. Part of the exhibition *Michael Schmidt - Fotografías 1965-2014* at the Museo Reina Sofia, Madrid, Spain



Source: Schmidt, 1976-78. Photography created by the auhor, 2023.

The Anhalter Bahnhof differs from the former examples as it played an active role during WWII. Ironically or not, it is the only one that receives no regular activity nowadays. Just that fact of staying there as a ruin of one of the most obscure moments of humankind gives

the decaying structure an aesthetical aspect, in the literal sense of the word, arising different sensations in the visitors who cross the arch and pedestrians passing by. The building which one day received people going to be killed just because of their origin today remains a ruin watching kids playing football in the pitch behind it.

The examples in this section illustrate structures that have lost their original functions but have been re-signified, thus constituting themselves as ruins. Alois Riegl, in his work *The Modern Cult of Monuments* (1903), discusses how monuments are constructions that can acquire new meanings over the years. He highlights (Riegl, 2014, p. 55). The monument's "historical value" (*historischer Wert*) (Riegl, 2014, p. 32) rests not solely on its original purpose but also on the layers of significance it accumulates through different epochs and societal changes. Riegl asserts (2014, p. 35) that the appreciation of monuments is deeply tied to the concept of the "artistic will" (*Kunstwollen*), which evolves with cultural contexts and the collective memory of communities.

Riegl's theory elucidates that monuments, when recontextualized, transcend their initial utilitarian or commemorative purposes, embodying a dynamic relationship with the past and the present. This dynamic is evident in the way modern observers engage with these structures as active participants in the cultural and aesthetic dialogue of the present, and they could acquire "memory or celebration values" (*Erinnerungswert*) (Riegl, 2014, p. 63). Thus, the ruins discussed are not merely decayed structures but active agents of cultural memory and identity, continually reshaping their meanings as society evolves.

Furthermore, the fact that these structures are being preserved to maintain a constant aspect of ruination or that their state of decay has been interrupted does not make them any less of a ruin nor diminish their significance. The deliberate preservation of their ruined state underscores their historical and cultural value, emphasising the ongoing dialogue between the past and the present. These preserved ruins continue to serve as powerful symbols, reflecting the plural nature of human history and memory, and their intentional conservation adds to their role as enduring monuments of cultural heritage.

2.4 The Discovery of "New" Ruins

All the points discussed so far are still related to Macaulay's (1966, p. 01) "earliest ruin pleasure" and the idea that brings a paired relationship between losers and winners. Although that could be the first ruin pleasure, the author also highlights that it could be combined with another pleasure that also deserves attention; she points out that discovering a ruin "must be as

exciting as finding a new land" a sensation that belongs to "the highest and purest of ruin-pleasures, but is reserved for the few" (Macaulay, 1966, p. XVI). Discovering a "new" ruin is an event that remits the archaeological world and evokes something that remained lost - or forgotten - for a long time. Eventually, this "disappearance" could be on purpose or not. It is not a problem. This hidden universe is another ruined context that arouses legends and mythos, which could - and often do - trigger other different ruin pleasures. I want to call upon two cases at the Pergamonmuseum in Berlin: the Ishtar Gate and the Market Gate of Miletus.

The first one - popularly named the Gate of Babylon - embraces an entire universe where it is imprecise to determine what is fantasy and what is not. However, it does not matter because if we talk about pleasures, we also speak about subjective and abstract realities. Over the centuries, the rumours of the Gates of Babylon became notorious, a construction that belongs to the same context as the Hanging Gardens of Babylon (one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World) and the Babel Tower. These subjects seemed to jump out from the pages of *One Thousand and One Nights* and haunt the Western imagination to this day.

During his reign, the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar II (604–562 BC) built a tremendous gate to adorn the entrance of his capital and dedicated it to Ishtar, the goddess of war, sex, fertility and love. Soon, it symbolised Babylonian power, wealth, and aesthetic appreciation. When the Babylonian Empire fell in the late 6th century BC (a couple of decades after Nebuchadnezzar's death), the gate, the wall and many other structures of Babylon were destroyed and virtually disappeared. For many years, it held the status of a myth.

Jumping through time, since the Napoleonic Era (1799-1816), France and England fought private archaeological battles to see who could find more and rarer treasures from Antiquity, exploiting the Middle East and North Africa in a colonialist style. A museum filled with valuable items from other countries remains a clear demonstration of power and influence. Distant from the first ranks of this treasure hunt, the German Scientific Society convinced Kaiser Wilhelm II to create in 1898 the German Oriental Society (*Deutsche Orient-Gesellschaft*) to enter the race for relics. From 1899 to 1917, the institution conducted excavations in Babylon, unearthing small fragments of what would become one of Germany's most significant archaeological acquisitions – the Ishtar Gate (Staatliche Museen Berlin, 2021a).

1900, the archaeologists of the institution found in the current Iraq territory what they believed to be fragments from the old constructions of Babylon. When the digging site was implanted, they realised they had found the ruins of the Ishtar Gate. The excavation lasted until 1917 and was impacted due to WWI. After a series of negotiations - which could be

questionable and not so friendly amidst a war - the German enterprise could send the fragments from Iraq to Berlin. Once in Germany, a team of up to 30 people worked to piece together 72 relief animal figures from these fragments, complemented by modern bricks to complete the missing parts (Staatliche Museen Berlin, 2021a). The scientists believed to recover about 20% of the gate. Once in Germany, the pieces and "dismantled ruins" (Staatliche Museen Berlin, 2021a) went through a restoration process and, later on, a reconstruction stage. Following the patterns on the found pieces, the archaeologists could determine the possible dimensions, colours and format of the construction; after that, the missing fragments were remade. In 1930, the Pergamonmuseum presented the first version of the rebuilt gate. The Gate's reconstruction was a monumental effort that synthesised archaeological interest, the imperial ambitions of the German Empire, and the creative craftsmanship of the researchers and museum professionals involved in the project (Staatliche Museen Berlin, 2021a).

Figure 20 - Ishtar Gate



Photography created by the auhor, 2021.

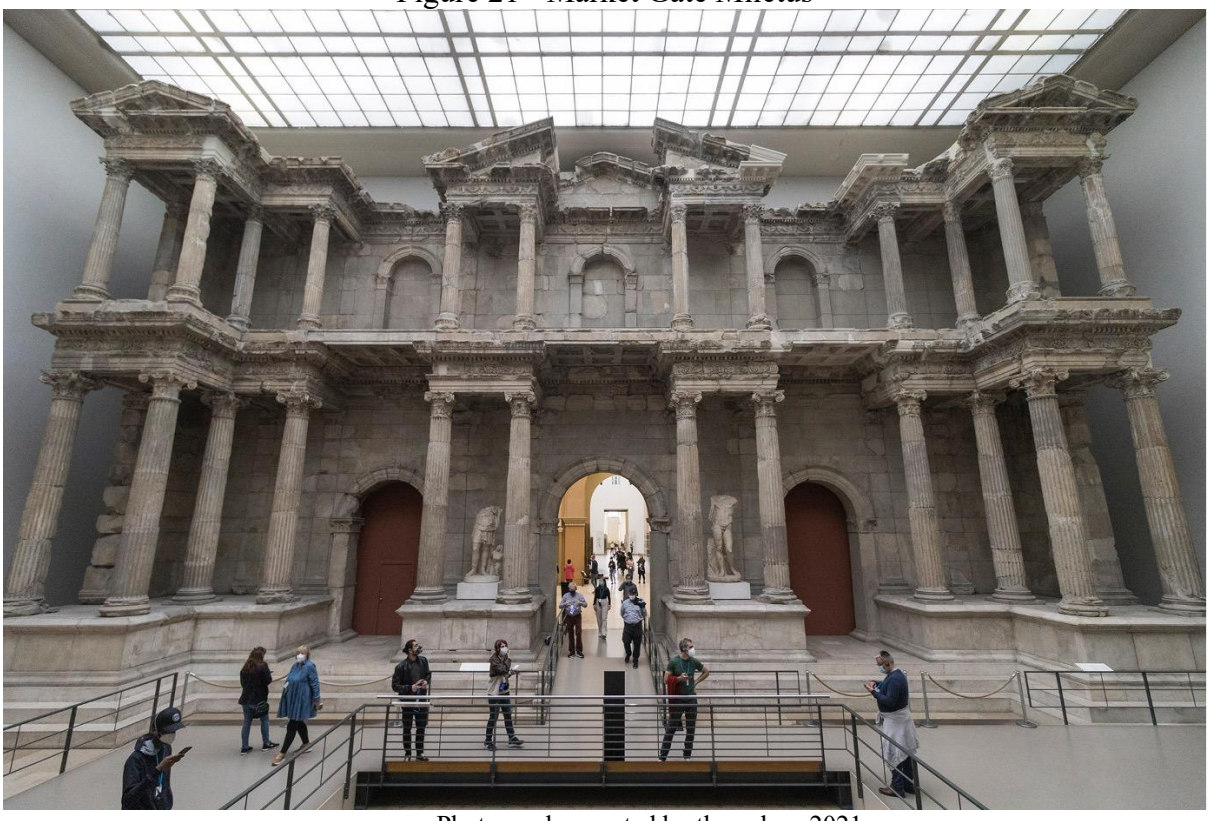
The Ishtar Gate represents a relevant case of how ruin pleasures are interconnected. It was not enough to find the buried ruins but also to remove them from the original site, transport them to a different capital, reconstruct them, and exhibit them in a museum as trophies. Thus, it is still a matter of celebrating the victors through the ruins of the defeated. When it comes to

an empire as mighty as the Babylonians, it does not matter who or what precipitated their fall; what counts is to have their ruins, just like a hunter keeps a stuffed trophy. The justification provided by historians often asserts that, otherwise, these ruins might have remained lost forever, or the reconstruction might not have been possible, denying humanity access to such a wonder. Although these arguments may be valid, the underlying pleasure seems to reside in possessing a ruin or, at the very least, a fragment.

Moreover, the Ishtar Gate is a significant example of a “sham-ruin” (Macaulay, 1966, p. 37), where fragments of the former construction are used as raw material to recreate the original structure, generating a hybrid arrangement, where it is not possible anymore to distinguish what is authentic or artificial.

Just a few meters ahead, following Pergamon’s tour, the visitor encounters the grandeur of the Market Gate of Miletus. Erected in the 2nd century AD within the ancient Greek city of Miletus, now within modern-day Turkey’s borders. The Gate once heralded the entrance to the city’s agora. Its dual purpose was clear: to fortify the city’s access while simultaneously showcasing the aesthetic finesse and architectural power of Greek civilization.

Figure 21 - Market Gate Miletus



Photography created by the auhor, 2021.

However, between the 10th or 11th century an earthquake buried the gate, along with parts of the city. The narrative of discovery parallels the Ishtar Gate: in 1903, the Deutsche Orient-Gesellschaft contoured and unearthed its remnants, transporting them from Turkey's soil to Germany (Staatliche Museen Berlin, [20--]b).

The Gate's imposing structure, which today stands at around 17 metres tall and 29 metres wide, is characterised by its elaborate Corinthian columns and intricately detailed architraves. The painstaking process resignedified the gate's original fragments, while the pieces lost to time were meticulously reconstructed (Staatliche Museen Berlin, [20--]b).

The reconstruction was an ambitious undertaking that spanned several years, culminating in the reassembly of the gate between 1925 and 1929 within the Pergamonmuseum. A significant portion of the gate's appearance today is a product of both archaeological research, creative conjecture and imperial ambitions, filling in gaps where historical evidence was lacking (Staatliche Museen Berlin, [20--]b). The reconstructed Gate stands as a cultural memory symbol, though it remains far from its original location, prompting questions about the nature of cultural heritage and the ethics of transporting monumental relics across continents.

This reconstruction is part of a broader narrative involving the architectural wonders of antiquity - structures that once stood as symbols of civic pride and cultural identity, now finding themselves re-contextualized in foreign museums. The Market Gate of Miletus, with its reconstructed grandeur, illustrates both the achievements of ancient Greek-Roman architecture and the complexities of modern cultural possession and display.

These two cases allow us to examine the complexity of the ruin pleasures. One might point out some of them or how the first ones appeared. However, their representation through Art and association with social variables such as memory, power, and influence are difficult to draw. The first part of this chapter intends to outline how Art has an intrinsic connection to the first and oldest ruin pleasures and also how these "original" and expensive pleasures, so to say, are crossing the centuries, just like ruins. It is also important to mention how these two pleasures are associated with other ruinous forms of delight: looting, collecting, and reconstructing are just a few examples. To possess a structure like these would be the closest that one might get to owning a slice from another time dimension and a symbol of power.

This archaeological realm may conjure images of exploratory ventures and historical discoveries spanning centuries, evoking narratives of desert expeditions or ventures into untamed landscapes. Despite living in an era of advanced technology characterised by high-resolution satellite imagery and sophisticated soil scanning techniques, one might assume that

all significant ruins have already been unearthed. However, such an assumption would be misleading.

One of the greatest advantages of conducting a long-term research project like this is the ability to continuously incorporate new findings and discoveries that emerge along the way. In February 2024, I had the opportunity to visit Thessaloniki, in the region of Northern Macedonia, Greece - a city whose origins evoke the conquests of Alexander the Great. Once again, I felt the sensation of being followed by ruins from different historical periods.

In January 2023, Attiko Metro S.A.[11], the public entity tasked with constructing Thessaloniki's metro system, unveiled a groundbreaking series of discoveries that sent shockwaves through the archaeological community. These revelations came to light during metro construction activities, revealing a vast complex of archaeological sites covering approximately 20,000 square meters. This discovery stands as one of the most significant of its kind in the history of Northern Greece. While notable ruins had been unearthed by the company since 2015 (Elliniko Metro, [20--]), the scale and magnitude of the findings announced in 2023 marked a notable departure.

One of the main subway lines was slated to traverse Egnatia Street, the city's principal thoroughfare, which traces the path of the *Decumanus Maximus*, a significant Roman-era west-east-oriented road connecting Thessaloniki with Pella, the former capital of the Kingdom of Macedonia and the birthplace of Alexander the Great. Along this route, remnants of Byzantine constructions from the 4th century, such as the iconic Maximus Galerius triumphal arch (also known as *Kamara*) and the Rotunda (Egnatia Motorway, [20--]), are still visible today. However, the newfound ruins offer a glimpse into the city's ancient past, revealing structures dating back to the Hellenistic[12] period when Cassander created Thessaloniki in 315 BC.

These newly unearthed structures offer a remark to the urban landscape that once thrived before the city fell under the dominion of successive empires. Excavations have revealed an array of structures spanning depths ranging from 0,5 to 7,0 meters, including residential dwellings, streets, bakeries, workshops, and communal gathering spaces. The excavation sites scattered across the city centre have yielded more than 3.000 artefacts dating back to the

[11] In March 2023, the company changed its name to Elliniko Metro S.A.

[12] The Hellenistic period is generally considered to have lasted from the death of Alexander the Great in 323 BC until the establishment of the Roman Empire in 31 BC. It was a time of significant cultural, economic, and political change across the regions that had been conquered by Alexander and his successors.This era saw the spread of Greek culture and influence throughout the Mediterranean and Near East, as well as the rise of powerful Hellenistic kingdoms such as the Ptolemaic Kingdom in Egypt, the Seleucid Empire in Asia, and the Antigonid Kingdom in Macedonia.

Hellenistic and Byzantine eras, including ceramics, jewellery, metalwork, kilns, and coins (Egnatia Motorway, [20--]). The discovery of a Roman cemetery provides invaluable insights into ancient inhabitants' burial customs and societal practices.

The principal focus of the discussion lies on the future station of Venizelou. In the station's precise location, the excavations found the crossroads between the *Decumanus Maximus* and the *Cardo Maximus* (a north-south-orientated road). The intersection made of marble indicates what was probably the most developed area of Byzantine Thessaloniki. Metalware workshops and stores were found all around the crossroad (*tetrapylon*). Due to the massive size of the structure, it would demand extraordinary logistics for its removal cEgnatia Motorway, [20--]). There is a project to change the station's final location and create a sidewalk of glass; that way, the pedestrians would be able to see the ruins from the street level, converting them into a new monument of the city (Egnatia Motorway, [20--]). Until the closing of this text, the responsible authorities did not announce a final decision about the future of the intersection.

Figure 22 - Archaeological site at Egnatia Street, between the streets Platonos and Agia Sofias in Thessaloniki



Photography created by the auhor, 2024.

In February 2024, in some points of Egnatia Street, like the block between the streets, Platonos e Agia Sofias, it was possible to see the archaeological site and its workers. This scenario creates an unconventional landscape composed of millennial ruins and heavy traffic. During a regular day in Thessaloniki, the pleasure of finding a new ruin is shared with its dwellers and visitors.

Amid the allure of ancient ruins, the practice of transporting relics from their origins to foreign lands for exhibition emerges as a complex narrative of cultural appropriation and historical dominance. This pleasure in finding and possessing "new ruins" extends beyond mere aesthetic appreciation, touching on deeper issues of power, identity, and the legacy of colonialism. The case of Thessaloniki's recent discoveries serves as a poignant reminder of the ongoing nature of these dynamics. Unlike the trophies of past empires displayed in museums, these findings offer a chance for direct engagement with history *in situ*, challenging traditional narratives around the ownership and display of cultural heritage. This examination underscores the importance of contextualising artefacts within their original landscapes, advocating for a more ethical approach to how we interact with the remains of history.

This first chapter began by exploring the allure of ruins, drawing from Rose Macaulay's work *Pleasure of Ruins*, which provides a foundation for understanding the nuanced and paradoxical ways in which ruins evoke aesthetic fascination, power, and even triumph. Macaulay's assertion that the earliest ruin pleasure stems from the conqueror's victory over the defeated established the conceptual groundwork, and examples from classical literature, such as Virgil's *Aeneid*, illustrated the relationship between power and ruination.
Walter Benjamin's ideas on violence and the presence of ruins were also significant in this discussion. His assertion that violence is not just a means to an end but a manifestation of existence added another dimension to the interpretation of ruined pleasures, emphasising the relationship between destruction and the validation of identity and power.

Building on these foundations, Andreas Huyssen's concept of the distinction between ruins and rubble further expanded the conversation. The distinction between romanticised ruined structures and debris from bombings and conflict was illustrated through the various examples of abandoned places I visited across Germany. These examples highlighted the contrasting ways different societies remember, aestheticise, or transform the leftovers of their past, tensing the ongoing tension between nostalgia and harsh realities.

The chapter also explored the notion of discovering "new" ruins, a theme connected to the archaeological world and the sensation akin to finding new lands. Macaulay describes this

as one of the purest ruin-pleasures, and this perspective was linked to my personal experiences of visiting various ruinous sites, offering insights into the shifting meanings and transformative potentials of these abandoned structures.

Throughout the unit, the idea of ruins being resignified was emphasised, showcasing how these decaying places can evolve from symbols of decline to spaces that hold new meanings and cultural memories. Examining ruins was not only a wondering about their physical presence but also an exploration of the cultural, historical, and aesthetic narratives they embody, setting the stage for the subsequent discussions on aesthetics, memory, and the concept of modernity that follow in the next chapters.

Overall, the chapter established a comprehensive understanding of ruins as more than mere architectural fragments; they are dynamic cultural symbols that reflect shifts in power, memory, and aesthetics. This foundation paves the way for a deeper exploration of the aesthetics of abandonment and its implications for understanding modernity. The concepts introduced here - triumph, decay, memory, and transformation - remain central themes throughout this dissertation, inviting readers to consider the complex and multifaceted ways in which ruins and abandoned places shape our understanding of the past, present, and future.

3 DIVERSE ARTISTIC APPROACHES TO RUINS BETWEEN 1270 to 1883

3.1 Dividing the Ruinous Approaches

When I first divided the chapters of this dissertation, my original idea was to bring a retrospective of ruins in the visual arts through time, which is already too daring because this kind of practice always risks leaving some period behind or forgetting some relevant event or artist. After field research developed along this process, I realised that such compilation would be incomplete, not to say exclusionary. It would also be imprecise to determine the ground zero of the relation between arts and ruins and point out a pioneer.

Another factor that adds complexity to this idea is the fact that the presence of ruins in the arts varies across different historical moments. For instance, during the Renaissance, ruins were, above all, a reliable repository of written knowledge (Dillon, 2006, p. 01), as the inscriptions found in the ruins of temples, tombs, and other Greek and Roman structures provided access to the "stratum of the linguistic" of these cultures (Dillon, 2006, p. 01). The appreciation of classical remnants was much more oriented toward the idea of reconstructing a glorious past rather than contemplating their decay. However, during this period, the ruins of Greco-Roman architecture and monuments played a secondary role (Dillon, 2012, p. 04), serving as a backdrop to the main pictorial event, which was almost always a figure or religious occurrence related to the Christian faith.

On the other hand, in Romanticism, which emerged in the late 18th century, ruins became a recurring element, symbolizing the lines of time as well the connection between humanity and nature. They also carried the emotional and melancholic undertones characteristic of this period. For the Romantics, ruins and fragmented structures were more significant than something complete or unified (Dillon, 2006, p. 02). Commonly perceived negative concepts such as death and destruction were reinterpreted as natural aspects of human existence. In this new context, ruins emerged as images "of both natural disasters and the catastrophe of human history" (Dillon, 2006, p. 02).

This alternation in meanings and representations demonstrates how ruins mirror the values and concerns of each historical period. While in Romanticism, ruins evoked a sense of the sublime and introspection, in Neoclassicism, they were seen as objects of study and emulation, bearing witness to the greatness of previous civilizations. These different perspectives make the study of ruins in art a challenge, requiring a contextual understanding of

each era, avoiding generalizations or simplifications that would fail to capture the complexity of the subject.

If this chapter initially aimed to propose a linear chronology of ruins in the arts, it now adopts a more abstract and fragmented character, presenting artistic approaches that engage with ruins at key moments. This is not an attempt to create an exhaustive overview but rather to explore how these structures, in their diversity, inspired different artists, carrying meanings that go far beyond their materiality.

This way, I decided to enunciate, thematise and comment on diverse approaches to ruin through visual arts, not by following a chronological sequence but by dividing the artworks I had contact with into different thematic groups. These categories are not definitive, and some works could easily transit between multiple themes. I do not intend to set up new parameters or classify art pieces into squared boxes, an idea that scares me as an artist. The reader of this text might have a different perception of the works, which I consider not only pleasing but also evidence of the complexity of this subject.

By visual arts, I am considering paintings from a period that goes from circa 1270 until 1883. All works presented here were produced in Europe, which does not mean that people from other continents could not do this kind of artwork. I only focused on the region I had more access to develop my investigation. Contemporary art is not included now because it will be better discussed in the 5th chapter when I use some of my works to access this matter.

It is important to note that many of the pieces mentioned here were not initially created to be displayed in museums or galleries. Instead, numerous compositions served a decorative purpose, adorning churches and other noble buildings. These included altarpieces, doors, and other structures essential to the overall architectural design. As a result, some of the works discussed in this text do not have original titles and have been named based on their primary themes over time. There may be instances where different artworks have identical or similar titles. Some patterns in the works might be noticed, either because the artists had contact with each production or because they had similar influences. Some creators are also unknown. I do not discard the hypotheses of a shared imagination of ruins or just a coincidence. The selection here only represents a small portion observed during this investigation of a much larger and more diverse artistic landscape that spans various mediums throughout history. Furthermore, it is essential to note that, with few exceptions, most works discussed here are not the highlights of their collections, often displayed in secondary sections of their museums. Moreover, they generally lack specific literature. Therefore, exhibition texts and catalogues have become essential resources for deeper understanding.

I am considering the following approaches: *Ruins as a Sign of Humility*, especially in religious pictures; the ruins endorse how humble the characters are. The idea of *Ruins as a Dualist Opposition* explores how old buildings serve as a bridge between different ideas, such as: old and new, sacred and profane. These structures are not just leftovers from history; they are markers that show us how different values and times meet and mix. They help us see how the past and future, or the holy and ordinary, come together, giving us a deeper understanding of how cultures and beliefs overlap and change over time. *Ruins as a Temple of Nature* when it is not possible to distinguish what is a product of the human hands and what is the natural reign; challenging the observer to weigh on the impermanence of civilization's footprint and the enduring resilience of the natural world. *Ruins as a Refuge*, where exhausted people can rest in protection; sheltering those in search of tranquillity from a relentless world. *Ruins as the Place of the Mystery* happens when an unconventional situation is happening or is about to happen amidst the ruined scenario; what we see is just a glimpse of a longer narrative. *Ruins as the Dwelling of the Renegades* is a place for those who are not welcomed anymore in the cities; or those who can not find their place in the society of their time. *Ruins as Documentation* expands its scope beyond the work of Italian artist Giovanni Battista Piranesi to explore how various artists have used ruins as a means of documentation. This section examines how ruins are not merely representations of the past but also presentations that invite viewers to engage with them directly. While Piranesi's intricate engravings famously blend documentation with imagination, we will also delve into the works of Jósefa Kleczenska and Henryk Hryniewski, who approached ruins from different cultural and historical perspectives. Before focusing on these artists, however, we shall first consider some earlier artworks that laid the foundation for this tradition.

3.2 Ruins Before Ruins

As said before, it is not appropriate to define an exact time when art and ruins met for the first time, especially in the visual arts. All we can do is to suppose. For this reason, I propose that one of the first representations of ruins in visual art can be found on the wall painting of Villa of the Mysteries on the outskirts of Pompeii, in Italy. The name itself is already provocative. The Villa received this denomination because of an enormous fresco in one of its rooms. The images depict a mysterious cult. Even though there are some plausible interpretations of its meanings, it is not possible to determine precisely what it is about.

The ancient painting was probably made in the 1st century BC. In 79 AC, the Vulcan Mount Vesuvius erupted, and the whole region was buried under ashes and lava. The artwork remained unseen until 1909 when an excavation team found the constructions (Mann, [20--]) - the purest ruin pleasure. The enigmatic figures of the fresco develop their actions - likely a cult for Dyonisius - in front of a red background. However, there are some scenic elements used by the characters. In one of the frames, we can see a figure - possibly Silenus - playing his lyre (APP, [20--]). The musician leans himself over a rocky structure that could be a column ruin. By his side, two other personas - a pan and a nymph - sat on a rock that could also be a ruin . If the idea of the author of the painting were to depict ruins and all the different meanings that they can have, we would never know. One can not determine if these pieces of architecture are just ordinary objects or if they bring some allegorical connotation. Both possibilities are plausible.

Figure 23 - Fresco of Villa of the Mysteries



Photography created by the auhor, 2022.

Centuries later, after the Christianisation of Europe during the Middle Age, practically all the visual arts production was commissioned by the Roman Catholic church and centred on themes related to Christian mythology. During this process the Christian rulers destroyed the majority of the pieces of art produced by the so-called pagans in Europe; meanwhile the invasions by the Moorish (711-1492) empires and their establishment in the Iberian Peninsula, numerous artworks were also destroyed, echoing the later actions of iconoclasts who sought to

eliminate images deemed contrary to their beliefs. This historical context adds a layer of complexity to the surviving sacred art from this period. Naturally, many of the artworks from this time were conceived as something other than a kind of art to be contemplated in a museum. They were adornments or holy icons for churches, cathedrals, chapels, palaces or castles.

One recurring characteristic of early mediaeval paintings is the absence of background. The characters are positioned in front of a golden backdrop. The two main reasons for this are the gold as a representation of a divine and ethereal word and a sign of the power and wealth of the church (Staatliche Museen Berlin, 2021b).

Figures 24 and 25 - From left to right: *Maria enthroned with a child and two angels*. Florence, Italy. Ca. 1270. *Part of the altarpiece of S. Croce. Florence*, Ugolino di Nerio, 1325



Photography created by the auhor, 2021. Gemäldegalerie Berlin.

At the end of the Gothic period and during the Late Gothic (between the 14th and 15th century, ca. 1430-1500), some architectural structures started to appear in the visual arts, and the scenes are now depicted not just in front of a background but in a proper scenario. The human and supernatural figures are shown inside buildings, which - in many cases - differ from

the architectural style of the time and region in that those actions supposedly happened. The biblical characters are transposed in European medieval constructions. This approach made the scenes more accessible to viewers by placing them in familiar architectural styles and also reflected the artists' interpretations and the symbolic blending of the divine narrative with the cultural and historical identity of Europe at the time; reinforcing the power of the church (Staatliche Museen Berlin, 2021b).

It is feasible to notice this period's dearth of natural elements in the artworks. Nature is only visible through windows or gaps between the columns. A plausible reason for that is to represent the triumph of Christianism over the Pagan religions and traditions. After all, the word "Pagan" might be translated as "the one who comes from the country" or "peasant". These paintings state that in a Christian world, there is no space left for these other categories of faith. The nature seen out in the distance is the place of the unknown, where the monsters, demons, and pagans come from. The architecture itself is a symbol of this victory.

Figures 26 and 27 - From left to right: *Annunciation*, Master from Liesborn, ca. 1480. *The Last Supper*, Master from Köln, ca. 1470



Photography created by the auhor, 2021. Gemäldegalerie Berlin.

Around this time, the depiction of ruins in paintings began to emerge, imbued with multifaceted meanings. This evolution in artistic focus demonstrates a deepening exploration of themes such as the mutable nature of human constructs and the interplay between humanity and the divine. By incorporating ruins - symbols of decay and endurance - artists not only enriched the narrative depth of their works but also offered commentary on the cyclical rise and fall of civilizations. This shift highlighted the artistic and thematic complexity of the period and also underscored the ruins' role as a strong reminder of the impermanence of worldly achievements in contrast to the so-called eternal nature of spiritual truths.

3.3 Ruins as a Sign of Humility

In the Christian mythology, the concept of humility plays a critical role. It would be the opposite of wealth and avarice, and one might reach eternal life only through a humble life. It is a virtue that contrasts the so-called capital sins. This vision influenced artists, who chose ruins to represent the characters' modest lives. The Nativity, or the birth of Jesus, one of the central events of the Christian faith, demonstrates humility. The Christian Bible itself does not provide detailed information about Jesus' place of birth; it only mentions the Palestinian city of Bethlehem and the fact that due to the lack of available places in a guest room, the baby was wrapped in some clothes and placed in "manger". Sometime later, when the Magi visited the child, the book mentions just the word "house"[13] to refer the habitation of the child and his parents. This mystical environment inspired artists over the centuries.

An example of this idea is the print *Nativity with the Adoration of Shepherds* (before 1475) by the German painter and engraver Martin Schongauer (1450-1491), also known as Martino or Martino d'Aversa, or even Hübscher Martin (Martin, the pretty). Schongauer created two artworks with the same name, likely in the same period. However, the second is a coloured painting. The former work is usually mentioned just as *Nativity* to avoid misunderstanding. It is at this one that we will take a closer look.

The engraving measures 25,4 x 16,8 cm and depicts the moment when shepherds from the region of Bethlehem went to adore the newborn. A gothic ruin frames the scene. In the centre of the foregrounded image, it is possible to see Mary beholding her son, Joseph, holding a candle, and the baby Jesus lying on the ground; the manger is not there. Among the family, a

[13] Both references are found in the biblical books Luke 2:07 and Matthew 02:11.

bull and a mule reinforce the simplicity and the improvisation of the action (Staatliche Museen Berlin [20--]b). On the left side, the shepherds queue to pay tribute to the young one. They wear simple clothes and could be mistaken for beggars. In the background, another shepherd stares at an angel while a flock of sheep graze.

Figure 28 - *Nativity with the Adoration of Shepherds*, Martin Schongauer, (before 1475)



Source: Schongauer, before 1475. Photography created by the auhor, 2021.
Technique: Engrave. Dimensions: 25,4 x 16,8cm.

The architectural details in the background reveal Schongauer's interest in evoking not only the humility of Christ's birth but also the human elements of imperfection and decay (Staatliche Museen Berlin [20--]b). On the base of the ruin and the top of the arch, it is possible to see some grass and weeds growing between the bricks, suggesting the construction is slowly being reclaimed by nature. This detail also hints that the place might have remained abandoned for a long time. However, in the upper left corner, an improvised and decaying roof suggests that someone may have inhabited the ruin not long ago. Schongauer combines all these ruinous

elements to underline the human aspects of the Christian god. The emphasis on the setting's rustic nature is meant to bridge the divine and the mundane, highlighting both the imperfection of humanity and the humility of Christ's arrival.

Notably, the architectural style in the engraving incorporates Gothic features - elements that would not have been part of the original setting of the Nativity but were common during Schongauer's lifetime (Staatliche Museen Berlin [20--]b). By incorporating these contemporary styles, Schongauer creates a setting that makes the Nativity more accessible to his viewers, bringing the sacred moment closer to the people of his own time. This anachronistic use of architecture helps to evoke a sense of familiarity for the audience, connecting them more intimately with the scene.

To recur to ruined places to represent the simplicity of nativity was a practice that persisted during different periods. Here, I present one more case: *Adoration of the Shepherds* (circa 1548), by the Venice painter Jacopo dal Ponte (1515-1592), also called Bassano. In his painting, the artist depicts the same scene we just saw. Here, the scenery is a white ruin, likely made of marble. What calls attention to this building is its straight angles, as if the ruins were sculpted like that. Neither the walls nor the columns have cracks and look relatively clean. Over the top of the structure is a semi-deteriorated grass roof - a vulnerable environment concerning the sun, the cold, or even the wind.

As Mary lifts the white sheet that covers Jesus, two shepherds bow in reverence. The herder in the centre of the image wears clothes that do not match the biblical period, such as trousers with pockets and a modern hat, which might be read as a Mannerist characteristic, as well as his muscular arm. A second shepherd looks mesmerised in front of the scene as the third takes care of a mule. Joseph is near the only irregular column of the painting, observing everything from a short distance. The ruins painted by Bassano make the scene even more dramatic, as each character, including the animals, appears to experience a different emotion within the same frame. The warm palette of the male figures contrasts with the clothes and skin tone of Mary and the baby, as well as the architectural structures (Gallerie Dell'Accademia, [20--]a) Somehow, the ruins assume a celestial aspect, almost as though they were part of a religious temple.

Figure 29 - *Adoration of the Shepherds*, Jacopo dal Ponte, ca. 1548



Source: dal Ponte, ca. 1548. Photography created by the auhor, 2023.
Technique: Oil on canvas. Dimensions: 96x141cm. Gallerie dell'Accademia Venezia.

A reason for that understanding is a legendary part of Jewish tradition and interpretation, specifically related to the expectation of the messiah. The concept of the messiah is central to Jewish belief, and various interpretations and myths are associated with this figure. The prophecy often associated with this idea is found in the book of Micah[14] in the Hebrew Bible (or the Old Testament in the Christian Bible). Some interpret this prophecy as referring to the birthplace of the messiah in Bethlehem (current Israeli-occupied West Bank of the State of Palestine), which was also the city of King David, where his palace was supposed to be located. The ruins depicted in the artworks here mentioned would reference of this palace. It may be a symbolic interpretation rather than a literal one, emphasising the connection to the lineage of King David, from whom the messiah is expected to descend.

[14] Micah 5:2 states: "But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting". This verse is often cited in Christian theology as a prophecy foretelling the birth of Jesus Christ in Bethlehem. It speaks of a ruler who will come from Bethlehem and whose origins are from ancient times, symbolizing the divine nature and eternal existence of Jesus.

This event is significant in Jewish Messianic expectation and has been a subject of interpretation within its tradition. Many artists appealed to this mythological symbolism and created imaginary scenarios for the birthplace of Jesus; his advent would mark the end of the Law of Moses and the beginning of a new era. Through its ruinous elements, this painting illustrates the last days of the Old Testament and the dawn of the New Testament - a recurring theme in Christian art, signifying transformation and renewal.

These are just two examples of artworks that explore this thematic approach. A noteworthy amount of paintings also deal with the humility of the legendary messianic birth out of the ruins of David's palace and also inspired from different countries, styles and generations. Here I mention the ones I came across over the last years: *The Adoration of the Magi* (1506-7) by Francesco Francia, also known as Raibolini; *Die Anbetung der Hirten* (ca. 1510-20), by Giovannantonio di Francesco Sogliani (1492-1544); *Die Anbetung der Hirten* (ca. 1500), by Marco Palmezzano (1458-1539); *Der Dreikönigesaltar* (1506-07), by Hans Baldung (aka. Grien); *Adorazione dei Magi* (ca. 1519), by Marco Cardisco (1485-1542); *Die Geburt Christi* (ca. 1395-1400), by Lorenzo Monaco (ca. 1365); *Die heilige Familie in Landschaft mit antiken Ruinen* (unknown year), by Laurent de La Hyre (1606-1656); *The Adoration of the Kings* (1548-50), by Prospero Fontana (1512-1597); "The Adoration of the Shepherds" (ca. 1496), by Amico Aspertini (ca. 1474-1552); *Die Anbeutung der Könige* (ca. 1508), by Benvenuto Tisi (aka Garofalo, 1481-1559); and *Die Anbetung der Könige* (1511), by Hans Suess von Kulmbach.

Still about the humility of the Nativity, in the Varlaam Monastery in Meteora, Greece, the main church has many murals painted by the Theban painter Fragko Katelano in 1542. In one of them, the birth of Jesus is depicted inside a grotto, testifying to the humble ambience. To photograph the artwork is not allowed.

Naturally, the representation of decaying structures in this Christian context might have more than one symbolism, as we will see in the next session.

3.4 Ruins as Dualist Oppositions

In this section, we will explore some works where ruins are depicted as elements symbolizing a dualistic relationship between the new and the old, the sacred and the profane, the Christian and the pagan. These dichotomous pairs, while applicable to various contexts, are presented here within the framework of the Christian religious tradition. Through these representations, ruins emerge not only as decaying or transitional structures but also as spaces

of transition where different temporalities and cultural meanings intersect and engage in dialogue.

Before delving deeper, it's important to recognize that we are navigating abstract concepts within religious art, whether it be Christian, Islamic, Celtic, or rooted in any other belief system. The concept of faith would mediate a dualist relation between subjective and objective. In this context, each religion has its code of symbols to deal with this opaque point in the middle of two extremes. As the concept of god is an "empty word" (*ein leeres Wort*) (Simmel, 1996, p. 349) and its - or their - existence can be affirmed, however not demonstrated. So the faith needs to seek metaphors to illustrate the presence - or absence - of these supernatural beings. At the same time, we can only reflect on the continuous flow of our lives through symbols (Simmel, 1996, p. 353). The discussion becomes even more nuanced within Christianity, where the triune nature of god and the representation of celestial, infernal, and terrestrial aspects pose artistic challenges in defining the human condition in relation to the divine. For the artists under consideration, ruins emerge as a compelling allegorical device to explore these abstract themes.

Conforming said before, I do not intend to establish standard definitions or classifications about the representation of ruins and abandoned buildings in Art, mainly because these classes are mutable, and one work could easily belong to one more of them or even to categories not listed here. To illustrate it, the first artwork of the current bloc could easily be in the last section; nonetheless, it brings some particular attributes that make its reading more dynamic: the *Left and Right Wings of Cross Alter*, made circa 1460 by an unknown master working in Upper Swabia and the Middle Rhine from the Rhine region and found in the St. Martin's Church, in Bad Orb, near Darmstadt, southeastern Germany (Staatliche Museen Berlin [20--]c).

The original panel was a triptych, and each painting measures 207 x 109 cm when opened. The central image shows Christ's crucifixion; meanwhile, the inner left wing brings the adoration of the Magi, also known as the Three Wise Men or Kings, are depicted as they bring gifts to the newborn Jesus. Traditionally identified as Melchior, Caspar, and Balthazar, they represent the homage paid to Christ from different parts of the world, symbolising the acknowledgment of Jesus' divinity beyond the borders of Judea.

Figures 30 and 31 - From left to right: *Left* and *Ring Wings of a Cross Altar* (ca.1460), unknown artist



Source: Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Gemäldegalerie. Photography: Jörg Anders, 2020. Technique: Oil on pine wood. Dimensions: 207 x 109 cm each.

The picture shows Mary and Joseph receiving the three kings and their entourage. Mary wears glamorous clothes while she sits on a carpet and holds the baby, who receives the gift of the first king, while the other two wait for their turn. The scene happens at the gate of a ruined palace. Through its windows, it is possible to notice that a rudimentary roof covered with straw provides makeshift protection. The Romanesque ruined structure with opaque walls symbolises a decaying epoch that is now over with the birth of the supposed messiah (Staatliche Museen Berlin [20--]c) and another reference to the prophecy regarding David's palace.

The triptych's dualist aspect intensifies when we consider the opposition of its inner right wing. The portrayal displays a Gothic church portal before it stands a Catholic bishop holding a wooden cross with the deacons before him carrying ritual candles. In front of this celebration, Emperor Constantine the Great and his mother, Helena, kneel among their court members on the temple's staircase. (Staatliche Museen Berlin [20--]d) In 312 AD, Constantine - the first Roman emperor converted to Christianity - overcame his rival Maxentius at the gates

of Rome and soon became the sole ruler of the Roman Empire. In 326, his mother Helena travelled to Jerusalem, allegedly finding Christ's cross and bringing it to Europe ([20--]d).

The altarpiece celebrates all these events, bringing the ancient imperial family to the days of the unknown artist. The vivid colour of the Gothic church on the right confronts the pallid and dirty Roman collapsing edifice of the painting on the left. The presence of the first Christian emperor opposes the old and pagan European ages, represented by the ruins, a declining symbol of an obsolete order.

In 1821, the altarpiece was dismantled, and both the left and right wings were acquired by the Edward Sally Collection and incorporated into Berlin's museum collection. In 1983, a fire at St. Martin church consumed the original central piece (Staatliche Museen Berlin [20--]c). Today, it is possible to see whether a reconstruction in a smaller proportion of the triptych based on the original wings that remain preserved and on the previous documentation or the original left and right wings, exhibited as separate pieces at the Gemäldegalerie, in Berlin.

Figure 32 - Reconstruction of the altarpiece at the exhibition *Spätgotik: Aufbruch in die Neuzeit*, 2021



Photography created by the auhor, 2021. Gemäldgalerie Berlin.

The juxtaposition of these two inner wings of the altarpiece reveals a deliberate thematic contrast. On the left, the ruins symbolise an old world that is being replaced by a new promise embodied in the birth of Jesus and his royal ancestry. This transformation is visually emphasised by the dilapidated Romanesque architecture - a crumbling edifice now witnessing the dawn of a new spiritual order (Staatliche Museen Berlin, [20--]c). This type of setting also draws on the motif of the fallen classical world, where ruins represented the decline of paganism and the rise of Christianity.

On the other hand, the Gothic church on the right wing symbolises the subsequent establishment and growth of the Christian faith, visually celebrating the triumph of this new order. The Gothic portal, standing strong and decorated, shows continuity and stability (Staatliche Museen Berlin, [20--]d). By including Constantine, who legalised Christianity within the Roman Empire, and Helena, who is believed to have found the True Cross, the artist ties together historical and religious events to reinforce Christianity's triumph over a decaying past. This dualist portrayal offers a visual narrative of decline, renewal, and the ongoing establishment of the Church's authority - a common narrative within Christian art to underscore both continuity and spiritual victory over temporal decay.

Another representation of ruins amidst a dualist opposition is the pair of paintings *Ruinas con San Pablo predicando* and *Ruinas con una mujer predicando (¿una sibila?)* by the Italian artist Giovanni Paolo Panini (1691-1765), both made circa 1735. Panini conceived the artworks not precisely as a diptych but to be shown side by side as a dialogue (Museo Nacional del Prado, [20--]). However, the Museo del Prado, in Madrid, displays the pieces separately.

In the image that supposedly should be on the right, we see a Sibyl - a prophetess - speaking to a small audience before a Roman ruin. The weeds growing through the columns and the mould covering the fallen parts submerged in water make it evident that nature is reclaiming the structures. According to classical mythology, the Sibyls were believed to deliver prophecies inspired by the god Apollo. A famous Sibyl was Tiburna - also known as Albunea - who prophesied to Augusto - the first Roman Emperor - that a virgin would give birth to a special child (Museo Nacional del Prado, [20--]). Later, the Christian mythology co-opted the story incorporating it into its own tradition. In this specific painting, the Sibyl appears to be foretelling the birth of the virgin, suggesting a transition from pagan prophecies to Christian beliefs, emphasising the continuity between the old and the new orders (Museo Nacional del Prado, [20--]).

In the accompanying painting, which is believed to belong to the left side, Paul - one of the major figures in Christian stories - preaches to a small crowd surrounded by collapsed Romanesque structures. Behind him, amidst the fog, we see the Pyramid of Caius Cestius, indicating that the scene takes place in Rome. This location situates Paul, an apostle and early Christian missionary, within the heart of the classical world, symbolising the spread of Christianity within the epicentre of Roman influence, which now lies in ruins.

Figures 33 and 34 - From left to right: *Ruinas con San Pablo predicando* and *Ruinas con una mujer predicando (¿una sibila?)*" (both ca. 1735), Giovanni Paolo Panini



Source: Panini, ca. 1735. Photo: Bank of images of Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid.
Technique: Oil on canvas. Dimensions: 63x48cm each.

The placement of the paintings alongside each other proposes a series of oppositions. The first is the antagonism between Christianity - characterised by Paul, an emissary of Jesus - and Paganism - represented by the Sibyl, a seer of Apollo. With this juxtaposition, the artwork subtly underscores a gendered hierarchy, elevating the significance of the masculine figure while relegating the feminine to the background of the old ways, reinforcing the sexist tone of the New Testament, largely authored by Paul (Gervilla, 2022, p. 51).

Moreover, considering that what we see is an inverted image, Panini chooses the right side (the side of god) to place Paul, while the Sibyl stands on the left (*sinistra* in Italian, meaning the sinister, devilish, and obscure side). The collapsed fragments within both works appear to come from different historical periods, an indicator that this veduta gathers diverse temporal

elements. Sacred and profane, evil and divine - all these dichotomous pairs come together here, having the antique ruins as witnesses of both a bygone era and an emerging faith. Rome, the Eternal City and former capital of the recently fallen Roman Empire, is now the main city of Christianity.

Following this non-chronological path, we come to Giovanni Bellini's *The Announcing Angel and the Virgin Announced* (circa 1490). In this diptych, the Venetian artist, in collaboration with students from his workshop, illustrates one of the most significant events of the Christian faith: the Annunciation, when the archangel Gabriel visits Mary to communicate that she will carry a child. Originally, this piece of art served as the outer doors of the organ at the church of Santa Maria dei Miracoli in Venice. (Gallerie Dell'Accademia, [20--]b). Bellini, as seen in other artworks from this period, recreates a biblical scene while transposing it into the context of his own time. The room in which Mary receives the supernatural visitor recalls opulent 15th-century Venetian decoration, with *pavonazzetto* marble still visible within the church where the artwork was initially placed - demonstrating a blend of sacred narrative and contemporary architectural aesthetics (Gallerie Dell'Accademia, [20--], [20--]b).

Figures 35 and 36 - From left to right: *The Announcing Angel and the Virgin Announced* and a detail from it, Giovanni Bellini (ca. 1490)



Source: Bellini, ca. 1490. Photo: Gallerie dell'Accademia Venezia.
Dimensions: 224 x105 cm each.

In the right-hand image, Mary is depicted praying by an open window, through which the outer landscape becomes visible. On top of a distant hill, framed by a Romanesque window, lies a decaying structure, possibly an old castle. Weeds and small trees growing through the walls indicate that the place has been abandoned for quite some time, allowing the viewer to to think about the transient nature of earthly power. The ruin in the background does not merely symbolise an era about to be gone and the dawn of a new one brought by the news of Gabriel, but also subtly remembers the impermanence of human achievements when confronted with divine providence - making the ruin a marker of both literal and spiritual transitions (Gallerie Dell'Accademia, [20--]b).

The open field visible beyond the ruin - the uncultivated, pagan space - appears smaller and insignificant compared to the luxury of Mary's room, symbolising the transformation from an old, profane order to the sanctity of a new era heralded by the pregnancy of Mary. The countryside - the home of pagans - is, in other words, the space of those who have an inferior belief and education; specially by the eyes of the Christianity. The dilapidated building on the hill serves as a reminder of the fading old world, now replaced by the divine promise and hope represented by the arrival of Gabriel and the impending birth of Christ.

This section highlights several artworks that depict ruins as symbols of opposition between old and new systems, especially illustrating the triumph of Christianity over paganism. Examples include Girolamo dai Libri's *Virgin and Child Enthroned with S. Bartholomew and S. Zeno* (1474-1555), Jacopo Negretti and Tiziano Vecellio's *Madonna and Child with Saint Joseph and Saints John Baptist and Catherine of Alexandria* (ca. 1525-1530); *Der Abschied der Apostel in waldiger Landschaft* (ca. 1523), Albrecht Altdorfer and Marco Basaiti's *The Calling of the Sons of Zebedee* (1510), among many others.

In these pieces, ruins serve as significant backdrops for sacred events, representing the decline of the old and the birth of a new spiritual era. The juxtaposition of decaying structures against vibrant, sacred figures conveys the endurance of faith amidst the ruins of past civilizations, emphasising the cyclical nature of spiritual renewal. This approach estimulates us to consider how faith evolves through the leftovers of previous belief systems, bridging the sacred narrative with broader thoughts on cultural transformation.

3.5 Ruins as a Temple of Nature

Ruins and abandoned places maintain an intricate relationship with Nature, a connection that unfolds layers of complexity beyond initial appearances. This dynamic interplay, rich in its depth and nuance, warrants a closer examination, which we will undertake in the following chapter. Our immediate concern, however, is to explore the process through which ruins become enveloped and (re)claimed by Nature. Initially, these spaces were untouched landscapes; then, they were transformed by human ingenuity into markers of our existence within the natural world. Over time, for myriad reasons, these evidences were abandoned. The forces prompting such abandonment are varied, encompassing both natural phenomena - like extreme weather conditions, geological events, and ecological shifts - and social catalysts, including warfare, demographic changes, pandemics, famine, and societal upheavals.

Yet, with the cessation of human activity, Nature begins to assert its primacy once again, encircling these structures in a slow but relentless embrace: a Temple of Nature. The ruins thus transform into sanctuaries of the natural order, spaces where Nature's unbridled essence is vividly on display. Within this context, ruins transcend their original purpose, becoming symbols of Nature's enduring sovereignty. Throughout history, artists across different eras have been captivated by this transformation, creating works that depict ruins not as mere physical entities but elevate them as profound embodiments of Nature's temple. These artistic renditions estimulate viewers to reason on the cyclical rhythm of the natural world reclaiming its dominion.

Roelant Savery (ca. 1576-1639), a Flemish artist renowned for his focus on natural subjects, dedicated a significant portion of his work to capturing the beauty of the natural world. From 1606 to 1608, he resided in Tyrol, where he immersed himself in studying plants and trees. Later, in his final years in Utrecht, Savery maintained an expansive garden teeming with various flowers and rare plant species, serving as a wellspring of inspiration for his artistic endeavours (Städel Museum, [20--]).

One of Savery's notable paintings is *George Edward's Dodo* (1626), a meticulous depiction of the now-extinct bird. However, in *Ruined Tower by a Bird Pond* (1618), Savery presents viewers with an ethereal landscape with a white tower, likely crafted from marble, enveloped by nature's embrace. Trees, grass, and many bird species, including cranes, geese, and swans, populate the scene. Another dilapidated structure, barely discernible amidst the

foliage on the left side of the composition, appears to serve as a nesting ground for fledglings under the watchful care of their flock.

The central focus of the painting is the towering ruin, itself resembling a colossal nest encircled by diverse avian species. The main ruin appears on a small island amidst the pond, its connection to the mainland severed by a broken bridge, rendering it nearly inaccessible to humans but welcoming to the birds.

Amidst the lush vegetation, the scene suggests the vibrancy of spring or summer, evoking the peak of natural diversity. Savery's work contemplates a reversal of roles: a once-prosperous structure, symbolising human dominance over nature or other humans, now serves as a sanctuary for wildlife. Savery demonstrates his skill in representing the landscape, with careful attention to the details of the foliage's textures, the reflection of the tower in the water, and the delicate interplay of light and shadow. The depiction leads us to wonder about the brevity of human achievements and the natural world's constant ability to reclaim its space, suggesting a return to harmony, where Nature's intervention erasing the traces of human interference.

Figure 37 - *Ruined Tower by a Bird Pond*, Roelant Savery, 1618



Source: Savery, 1618. Photo: Elke Estel and Hans-Peter Klut, 2021. Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden. Technique: Oil on Eichenholz. Dimensions 30x42cm.

In the early days of Christianity within the Byzantine Empire, a blend of pagan symbolism and Christian beliefs permeated various aspects of artistic expression, including funerary art. Tombs from this period often featured intricate illustrations depicting exotic birds and fish, symbolic representations of paradise and the afterlife (Museum of Byzantine Culture, 2024). These depictions conveyed the promise of eternal bliss and the idea of transcending earthly life to enter a spiritual abundance and harmony realm. This imagery of exotic fauna, with its vibrant colours and otherworldly beauty, might offered a visual inspiration to Savery.

Figure 38 - Wall paintings with animals and fruits in a paradisal landscape. Byzantine tomb from the 3rd or 4th century found in the region of Thessaloniki, Greece



Photography created by the auhor, 2024.
Museum of Byzantine Culture Thessaloniki.

Ruined Tower by a Bird Pond presents a scene that evokes a sense of tranquillity and mystery. The dilapidated tower stands as a symbol of the march of time, while the lush vegetation and serene pond hint at the enduring beauty of the natural world. This picturesque setting and its avian inhabitants, with their graceful forms and vibrant plumage, seem to inhabit a realm that transcends the earthly decay depicted in the ruins. Savery includes a variety of birds, each meticulously rendered with exquisite detail; a technique acquired through several

studies of trustworthy encyclopaedias of animals from the whole world in order to create these a paradisiacallandscapes, superseding “Bosch’s and his immediate followers’ fantastic creatures” (Härting, 2017). Alternatively, for the artist, nature is already a sacred temple of the otherworld.

Savery’s depictions were inspired by his keen observations during his travels, and his work transcends the mundane, drawing on the paradisiacal landscapes and themes reminiscent of the Edenic ideals embraced by Flemish artists of his time. His artistic choices resonate with the tradition of incorporating natural elements to convey philosophical points of view on the impermanence of human structures and the inherent sanctity of nature (Städel Museum, [20--]).

The careful juxtaposition in Savery’s work - of a ruined and almost inaccessible human structure now flourishing as a natural sanctuary - suggests an idyllic vision of nature reclaiming its domain, offering an almost redemptive narrative that aligns with the paradisiacal visions found in Flemish landscapes from Bruegel to Rubens (Härting, 2017). The presence of various species of birds in *Ruined Tower by a Bird Pond* evokes a sense of timelessness, inviting viewers to contemplate nature’s strength and ability to outlast human endeavour (Härting, 2017). This portrayal serves as a meditation on the beauty and mystery of the natural world - a sanctuary that surpasses human ambition, thriving despite the inevitable decay of what was once intended to demonstrate human grandeur.

When studying the aesthetics of abandonment in European visual arts from the 18th and 19th centuries, a peculiar motif often appears: a rounded temple with Corinthian architecture, perched on a cliff in Tivoli, Italy. Built in the 1st century BC, the precise dedication of this sacred edifice remains a topic of debate; it could be dedicated to either Vesta or Sybil, hence the dual reference in historical and artistic discourse (Yale Center of British Art, [20--]). However, a third, less favoured theory suggests Hercules as the honoree. Despite this uncertainty, the temple, whether of Vesta or Sybil, ceased its original religious function following the Christianization of the Roman Empire, transitioning into a timeless sentinel overlooking the city.

The temple’s architectural elegance, characterised by its slender Corinthian columns and the harmonious curvature of its structure, epitomises the sophistication of Roman design and engineering (Yale Center of British Art, [20--]). This architectural grandeur, combined with its scenic placement atop a Tivoli cliff, has cemented its status as an enduring symbol of classical beauty and has continuously captured the imagination of artists and architects worldwide.

Throughout the centuries, this fascination has led to the creation of replicas in diverse locales, from Puławy in Poland and Leicestershire in England to San Francisco in the USA, attesting to its widespread influence across cultures and epochs. These reproductions not only honour the original's architectural beauty but also depict the temple's capacity to transcend its ancient origins, embedding itself within the global cultural heritage.

In addition to its physical allure, the temple's historical and cultural context enriches its appeal. The potential dedication to Vesta or Sybil - or the debated association with Hercules - invokes a rich basis of mythological and religious narratives, offering a window into the spiritual life of ancient and polytheist Rome (Yale Center of British Art, [20--]) The temple's enduring presence, despite the weather interperies and the succession of empires and religions, speaks volumes about the human desire to connect with the past, making it a compelling subject for artistic exploration.

Artists of the 18th and 19th centuries, drawn to the temple's ruinous beauty and historical mystique, often incorporated it into their works, using it as a conduit to explore themes of decay, memory, and the sublime. This artistic legacy highlights the temple's role as a bridge between the earthly and the eternal, serving as a muse for contemplation of nature, civilization and ephemerality.

Today, the temple remains a captivating sight, embodying the delicate balance between nature and human achievement. Its preservation and continued admiration underscore its significance not just as a relic of Roman architectural prowess but as a living monument to the enduring power of beauty and history in the collective human consciousness.

Friedrich Christian Nerly (1807-1878), a German romantic painter, found profound inspiration in the Temple of Tivoli, a sentiment vividly captured in his 1834 masterpiece, *The Temple of Vesta and the Temple of the Sybil, Tivoli*. In this painting, Nerly masterfully conveys the temple's precarious perch atop a cliff, embodying the sublime beauty and enduring mystery of ancient ruins (De Chair, [20--]). The temple, resplendent and solitary against the backdrop of encroaching nature, evokes a sense of timeless serenity and the inexorable reclaiming of human achievements by the natural world.

Nerly's depiction goes beyond mere architectural accuracy; it delves into the symbolic, where the temple serves as a nexus between the earthly and the divine, now surrendered to the dominion of Nature (De Chair, [20--]). The trees that envelop the rocky facade underscore a world reclaimed, a motif that resonates with romanticism's fascination with the inspiring forces of nature and the ruins' aesthetic.

The ambiguity of the painting's lighting, whether at dawn or dusk, further enhances the temple's mystique, suggesting the eternal cycle of decay and renewal. This choice of illumination highlights the architectural elegance of the ruins and casts them as a monument to the sublime, where Nature itself becomes the ultimate deity, presiding over the vestiges of past civilizations.

The artist questions the transient pride of human realizations, juxtaposed with the timeless majesty of the natural landscape. It is a meditation on the romantic ideal of ruins as sites of beauty and contemplation, offering viewers a glimpse into a world where the past and present merge under the aegis of Nature's immutable rule (De Chair, [20--]). Through *The Temple of Vesta and the Temple of the Sybil, Tivoli*, Nerly contributes to the achievements of 19th-century art that celebrates the poetic interplay between humanity, history, and the natural environment, ensuring the Temple's enduring legacy and Nature's main role in the annals of romantic art.

Figure 39 - *The Temple of Vesta and the Temple of the Sybil, Tivoli*, Friedrich Nerly, 1834



Source: Nerly, 1834. Photo: Elke Walford, 2020. Hamburger Kunsthalle.
Technique: Oil on canvas. Dimensions: 54,6x39,8cm.

Another vista of the Temple is *View of the Sybil at Tivoli*, painted between 1605 and 1610 by the Flemish artist Marten Rijckaert (1587-1631). This perspective offers a counterplan compared to Nerly's piece, showcasing the Temple's foundations and the galleries beneath the construction and the surrounding landscape (Gallerie Dell' Accademia, [20--]c).

With this wide angle, Rijckaert allows us to observe the actions going on around the Temple, like two figures in one of the galleries conversing and pointing to something on the other hillside; a stream separates the two sides. Adjacent to the Temple is another construction with a tower topped by a Christian cross, likely the same building seen in Nerl''s work. A small drove of goats wanders along the rocks, and a flock of birds flies overhead, while a water stream cascades down the foot of the cliff. A person riding a horse on a winding road is seen approaching two hikers. In the distance, we see Tivoli and a large city, presumably Rome (Gallerie Dell' Accademia, [20--]c).

As in previous works, Rijckaert creates a serene atmosphere where all elements are in harmony, seamlessly blending nature and architecture (Von Kerssenbrock-Krosigk, 2017). The ruins of the Temple of Vesta or Sybil are integrated into the landscape, becoming just another element of nature's grandeur. Rijckaert's approach brings some intimacy with the surroundings of the sanctuary, as it provides a broader context that emphasises the Temple's relationship with both the immediate environment and the cities beyond.

Figure 40 - *View of the Sybil at Tivoli*, Marten Ryckaert, ca. 1605-10



Source: Rykaert, 1605-10. Photography created by the auhor, 2023.
Gallerie dell'Accademia Venezia.
Technique: Oil on Canvas. Dimensions: 43x88 cm.

This broader perspective underscores the Temple's everlasting presence through centuries as a witness to the evolving relationship between civilization and nature. By including elements such as the Christian cross on the nearby tower, Rijckaert suggests a religious and cultural significance continuum, bridging pagan antiquity and the Christian era. The figures in their everyday tasks depict the incorporation of the sacred construction into ordinary life. The rich depiction of animals and landscape details further enhances the sense of harmony, reinforcing the Temple's role as a symbol of integration between humanity and nature (Gallerie Dell' Accademia, [20--]c).

The examined artworks demonstrate a consistent theme of ruins evolving beyond their original roles as mere vestiges of past human achievements. Instead, these ruins transform into integral parts of the natural landscape, becoming what might be seen as Temples of Nature. Whether in the peaceful atmospheres of Nerly's and Rijckaert's paintings or Savery's vivid depiction of a ruined tower encircled by wildlife, these works portray nature reclaiming human constructions. The ruins, now stripped of their former grandness, serve as sanctuaries for diverse forms of life, suggesting that nature ultimately prevails and finds a way to flourish even amidst the vestiges of human civilization. In cases like Rijckaert's vista of the Temple, the construction is simultaneously retaken by nature and incorporated into a contemporary landscape.

3.6 Ruins as a Refuge

"*Ruinas refugio cierto por fin hacia el cual de*
tan lejos tras tanta falsedad."
Samuel Beckett[15]

One of the objectives of this research is to demonstrate how ruins and abandoned places can trigger a diverse range of feelings and interpretations. A sentiment related to these sorts of spots is to see them as a place of refuge. Here, once again, we might need to recur to some abstraction; after all, at first sight, this kind of site could not appear as a primary option for safety: collapsing roofs, cracked porticos, and rugged floors do not have a tight relation to protection. The word refuge here has a broader sense; it can be understood as a place to slow the pace of everyday life, rest, or even be alone. The silence that commonly involves ruin and

[15] Fragment from the poem *Sin* by the Irish author Samuel Beckett, published originally in French, in 1969, through the publisher Les Éditions de Minuit. The work does not have an official translation into Portuguese, so this work uses the Spanish version.

solitude creates a propitious environment. In this situation, the crumbling structures assume a solid character, where the visitor feels peace.

Figure 41 - *Gotische Kirchenruine*, Carl Blechen, 1826



Source: Blenchen, 1826. Photography created by the auhor, 2023.
Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden.
Technique: Oil on Canvas. Dimensions 129,5 x 96,5 cm.

The artwork *Gotische Kirchenruine* (1826) by Carl Blechen (1789-1840) gathers some of these characteristics. The image shows a colossal and semi-wrecked Gothic church. The floor of the nave is practically gone, so we can see the crypt and some coffins. The green patina of Nature is everywhere, and the wide columns have their contours and ornaments covered by the vegetation. At the foot of one pillar, a solitary figure takes a nap. Considering the walking stick, this person is likely an exhausted wanderer who found the ideal bed for rest in the grass of the church floor. His or her serene semblance depicts someone who seems to be distant in your dreams and enjoying the silence and quietude of the church. All alone, this person sleeps like a king in his royal chambers; nothing can disturb him or her (Spitzer, 2018a). For how long is the

wanderer lying there? How long will the sleep last? Will the trip after the awake be resumed? We can not answer any of these questions because Blenchen creates a temporal suspension with his work. In this eternal instant, the small body of the traveller merges with the ruins and Nature; although the roamer is physically there, its mind looks lost in the distance (Spitzer, 2018a). There is no before and after, just this very moment.

Here, Blechen brings together the essence of ruins serving as historical vestiges and sanctuary for the weary soul. In this 1826 masterpiece, the remains of a majestic Gothic church transform into a haven for a solitary wanderer, emphasising the church's dual role as a physical and spiritual refuge (Spitzer, 2018a). The image, rich in detail and emotion, illustrates how the natural world slowly reclaims human-made structures, with vegetation weaving through the ruins, symbolizing the relentless march of time and the healing aspect of nature.

The presence of the wanderer, resting peacefully among the ruins, adds a sentimental layer to the artwork. This figure, likely a traveller seeking respite from his journey, finds solace in the solitude and shelter offered by the remnants of the church. His serene repose amidst the crypts and coffins, under the watchful gaze of the encompassing columns, speaks to the universal search for peace and refuge, like a "parable of life" (*Lebensgleichnis*) (Spitzer, 2018a). Blechen's portrayal of the wanderer, lost in slumber and detached from the temporal world, bringing reflection on the human condition, the pursuit of tranquillity, and the solace found in nature and the ruins of our past.

Figure 42 - Detail of *Gotische Kirchenruine*, Carl Blechen, 1826



Source: Blenchen, 1826. Photography created by the auhor, 2023.
Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden.
Technique: Oil on Canvas. Dimensions 129,5 x 96,5 cm.

The scene's cryptic and almost sacred atmosphere suggests a deeper connection between the individual and the environment. The ruins, serving as a physical shelter, also offer spiritual comfort, allowing the wanderer to escape the world's tumult and find peace in embracing history and nature. This tableau, frozen in time by Blechen's skilful hand, becomes a meditation on the theme of refuge: ruins as spaces where the weary can lay their burdens down, if only for a moment, and where the boundaries between the past, present, and future blur into a timeless now. Through *Gotische Kirchenruine* Blechen contributes to the romantic exploration of ruins, not merely as architectural forms but as emotive landscapes that offer sanctuary and respite to the soul adrift (Spitzer, 2018a). In this work, the gothic church ruins emerge as a metaphor for the human search for meaning and comfort amidst the traces of a bygone era, illustrating the power of ruins to inspire, heal, and provide refuge.

Figure 43 - *Hirten und Herden unter Ruinen*, Johann Heinrich Roos, 1681



Source: Roos, 1681. Source: Blenchen, 1826. Photography created by the auhor, 2023.
Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden.
Dimensions: 58,5 x 79 cm.

Following the path of ruins as a hiding place, we come to *Hirten und Herden unter Ruinen* (1681) by the German baroque painter Johann Heinrich Roos (1631-1685). The bucolic painting depicts a shepherdess leaning on a Romanesque ruin while she sleeps surrounded by

her animals with an Italian *campagna* in the background. This subject of cattleman, animals, and Italian landscapes is a recurring theme in Roos' paintings, who very often conceived his works as counterparts (SKD, [20--]b) as we can see in *Hirten und Herden unter Ruinen* and *Italienische Landschaft mit Vieh* (1683). This pastoral atmosphere is also found in many of his sketchbooks, which are replete with variations of the same motif. What is curious is that there are no records that Roos had visited Italy during his lifetime (Gemäldegalerie Berlin, 2023).

In his first mentioned piece, what draws attention is the tenderness of the scene, as if the roles were now inverted: the animals are taking care of the shepherdess and protecting her whereas she rests by the sunlight. Among diverse places she might know, the herdswoman chose the ruins to lie down during her work. As mentioned in other ruinous works over this research, the scenery here has its own pace, without rush, with its own time. The calmness suggests that all the characters are enjoying the moment, and the most outstanding bull of the flock stares at us as a guard watching his fellows (SKD, [20--]b). On an upper level, the ruins observe this simple moment. It is unsure if they will spend the rest of the day and, maybe, the night by the dew or if any minute she will wake up and lead the flock back to a farm or to an enclosure. Anyhow, all of them were delighted with the occasion.

On the other hand, "*Italienische Landschaft mit Vieh*" captures the essence of pastoral life against the backdrop of Italian ruins. Roos masterfully juxtaposes the serene beauty of the countryside with the ancient architectural. Unlike his other works focusing solely on pastoral scenes or ruins separately, this painting skillfully integrates both elements, creating a harmonious composition inviting contemplation (Gemäldegalerie Berlin, 2023).

The ruins depicted in "*Italienische Landschaft mit Vieh*" evoke a sense of nostalgia and melancholy as they stand as reminders to the passage of civilisations. Overgrown with vegetation and weathered by time, they provide a striking contrast to the lively presence of cattle grazing peacefully in the foreground. Roos's attention to detail brings the ruins to the present time with crumbling walls and moss-covered stones adding texture and depth to the scene. The ruins serve as a metaphor for the transience of life and the cyclical nature of existence, reminding viewers of the impermanence of human activities represented by the Romanesque vestiges in the face of nature's march.

Figure 44 - *Italienische Landschaft mit Vieh*, Johann Heinrich Roos, 1683



Source: Roos, 1683. Photography created by the auhor, 2022 Staatliche Museen zu Berlin.
Technique: Oil on canvas. Dimensions: 129,2 x 198,3 cm.

Compared to Roos's *Hirten und Herden unter Ruinen*, where the ruins take centre stage, *Italienische Landschaft mit Vieh* achieves a delicate balance between pastoral and architectural elements. While both paintings feature ruins as a prominent motif, the former emphasises the interaction between shepherds, herds, and the decaying structures. In *Italienische Landschaft mit Vieh*, Roos demonstrates his versatility as an artist, seamlessly blending pastoral and landscape painting elements to create a richly layered composition that leads viewers to immerse themselves in an ordinary situation of the Italian countryside.

3.7 Ruins as the Place of Mystery (or as a Mysterious Place)

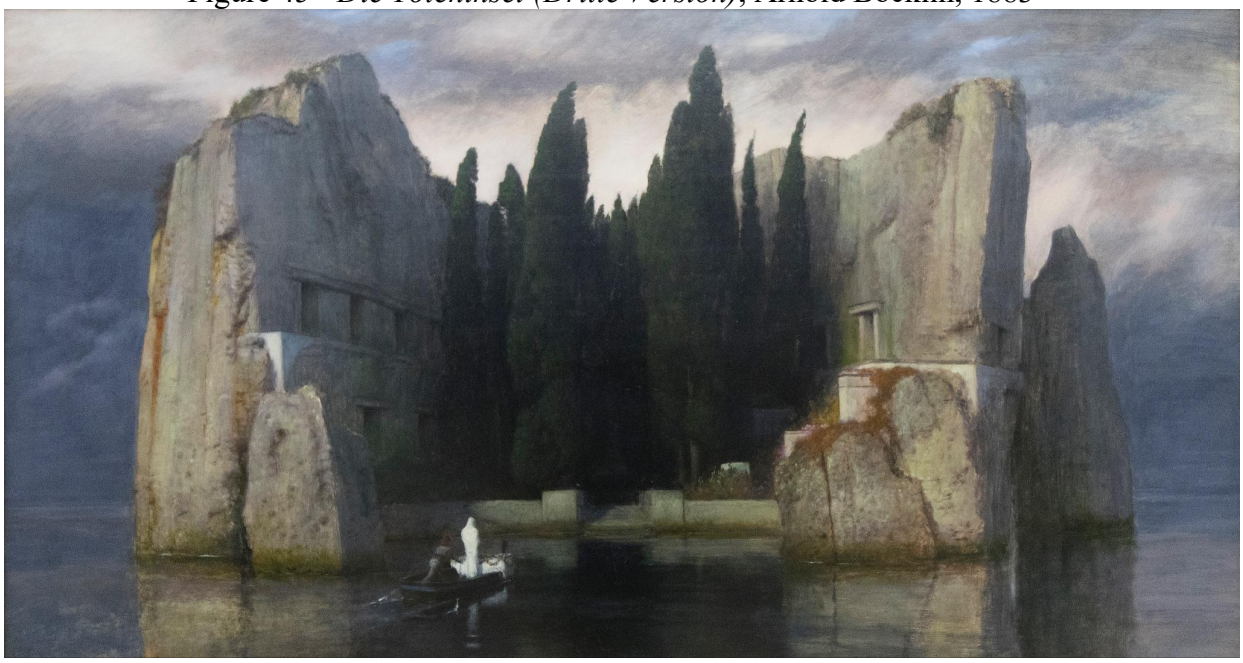
Taking into account that ruins and abandoned places are often used as metaphors to represent situations like those we have discussed so far, they can also emerge as another type of representation: places of mystery, the realm of the uncanny, whether natural or supernatural. These settings spark the imagination not only about the past of these structures but also about their present and future. They invite us to ponder the actions that once took place there, what might be happening now, and what could occur if they were not abandoned.

Pictorial, bucolic, and illustrative are some adjectives one may use to describe ruinous paintings. I used them more than once at this point. Nevertheless, regarding ruins as a mysterious place, I would like to introduce another possibility: the cinematographic aspect of these images. Cinematographic in at least two senses. The first one is in the etymological sense of the word cinema: moving image. Of course, a painting does not have the same movement as seen in a succession of frames (at this point appears the cliche comparison between painting and photography that often questions the artistic value of photogram because of its reproducibility capability). By moving here, I mean an action that is going on in the painting - like the examples we are about to see. Even being a static image, they have some movement inside or outside the frame. The dynamism of the events depicted is undeniable. I would dare say that these paintings might be predecessors of action movies like those named in the introduction.

The second aspect is also related to the concept of *a moving image*, not as a visible movement but an imaginative one: the mental movement of imagining the developments of the exhibited images. Each viewer can create a narrative for those characters and scenarios. “What comes next?” one might ask after beholding an artwork that shows a ruin as a place of mystery. “Is there something hiding in the shadows?” This array of art intigates us to imagine what is out of the frame or *off*, to use a cinematographic term. In this aura of enigma, ruins transform into a stage for the unfolding of stories untold, where the shadows and light play tricks on the mind, suggesting that something beyond the ordinary is woven into the twilight zone of these ancient spaces. The selected pieces here illustrate these ideas better.

The first case is the third version of the art piece *Die Toteninsel* (1883), *The Island of the Dead*, in a free translation by the Swiss artist Arnold Böcklin (1827-1901). With an extensive production, Böcklin is a name that could easily traverse several categories of this research. Gloomy atmospheres and unknown ambiences are recurring thematics in his works. Between 1880 and 1886, the artist made five versions of the *Die Toteninsel*; four remain, and one was destroyed during WWII. With different sizes and colours, the works depict a similar situation: a small boat carrying an enigmaticfigure sails slowly to a rocky island. “Slowly” is a movement adjective I used here without thinking twice. Can we precise the speed of the vessel? Not, however, the cinematography of the image has influenced me to think that it goes leisurely. This imprecision about time in the works of Böcklin is what Simmel (2020, p. 95) would call “timelessness” (*Zeitlosigkeit*). The landscapes that the artist creates are “detached from any historical instantaneousness, any relationship to a before and after” (Simmel, 2020, p. 95). The action unfolds itself within its pace.

Figure 45 - *Die Toteninsel (Dritte Version)*, Arnold Böcklin, 1883



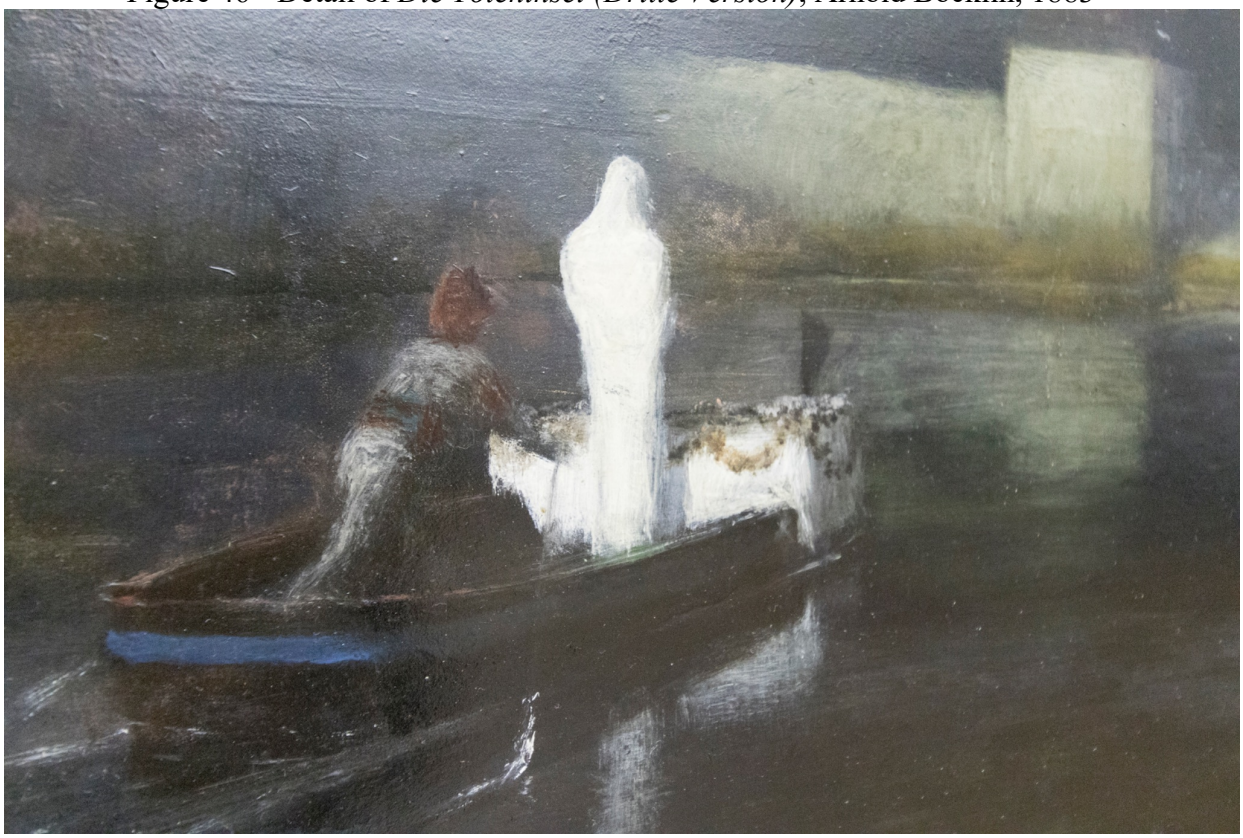
Source: Böcklin, 1883. Photography created by the auhor, 2021.
Technique: Oil on Wood. Dimensions: 80 x 150 cm. Alte Nationalgalerie, Berlin.

Back to the painting versions, some differences are the number of apertures on the rocks, the trees and the boat distance to the Island. Some say that the middle of the Island was inspired by one of the entrances of the English Graveyard in Florence, Italy, where Böcklin lived during the period of the three first versions. The islet could be someplace on the Ionian Sea, by the Greek coast, a region where the artist used to travel (Wesenberg, 2023). If Böcklin'works are separated from time, the same goes for space, and we can talk about "unspacedness" (*Unräumlichkeit*) (Simmel, 2020, p. 97). Even though it is possible to hypothesise about his influences for creating this island, it is not connected to any recognizable place.

An initial interpretation of the image could suggest that the man leading the boat represents Charon, the boatman of Greek mythology responsible for ferrying the dead souls into the underworld. The figure in white could be a spirit passed away or Styx, a nymph who gives the name of one of the rivers where Charon used to work. The adorned object on the boat might represent a coffin (Wesenberg, 2023). Is the ghost watching its crate? These suspicions can be confirmed if the creator has left no clues about it. Just as imprecise to affirm what is about to happen on the Island: a funeral, an occult rite, a mass, a burial? Any answer belongs to the field of supposition. The secrets of the ruins of the *Island of Dead* remain unrevealed for us, which cannot be seen behind the painter's "camera". The symmetry between the vertical and horizontal lines combined to the ethereal lightning create "can atmosphere of solemnity and

sublimity, evoking a feeling of silence and rapture" (Wesenberg, 2023) where the time itself is a ruin.

Figure 46 - Detail of *Die Toteninsel (Dritte Version)*, Arnold Böcklin, 1883



Source: Böcklin, 1883. Photography created by the auhor, 2021.
Technique: Oil on Wood. Dimensions: 80 x 150 cm. Alte Nationalgalerie, Berlin.

What is possible to affirm is that Böcklin's artwork influenced a large number of artistic works in diverse languages: the US-American producer Val Lewton made two films - *I Walked With a Zombie* (1943) and *Isle of the Dead* (1945) - which were inspired by the universe of the painting. The Russian musician Sergei Rachmaninoff composed 1909 the symphonic poem *Isle of the Dead Op. 29*, deliberately inspired by Böcklin. In 2019, the San Francisco Ballet presented the choreography *Die Toteninsel*, created by Liam Scarllet and based on Rachmaninoff's piece and Böckling's painting. The artwork's reach is also observed in the literature and video games. These two former languages were already mentioned on our way until here.

It is not an overstatement to say that *Die Toteninsel* is a work that gathers some of Blöcklin's recurrent characteristics: his peculiar landscapes, the morbid ambience, the ruins, and the mystery. This third version of the work and the other four do not permit a closed reading and a definitive meaning. The artist practically suggests the audience to create their narrative and perspectives for the story that develops in the image. Simultaneously, the action seems

suspended in time, as it is not a before or an after. Simmel (2020, p. 101) suggests that Böcklin's works bring situations that illustrate a "new beyond" (*ein neues jenseits*) the definitions of true or false. While we contemplate them, they exist right in front of our eyes. However, it even provokes us to imagine a whole world around the Island and its enigmas. Would each one of the five paintings be a piece of the puzzle? We will never know. If so, one of them is still missing.

Figure 47 - *Prozession im Nebel*, Ernst Ferdinand Oehme, 1828



Source: Oehme, 1828. Photography created by the auhor, 2023.
Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden.
Technique: Oil on Canvas. Dimensions: 81 x 105,5 cm.

"Eleven saintly shrouded men
Silhouettes stand against the sky
One in front with a cross held high
Come to wash my sins away"
Steve Harris[16]

[16] Song: *Sign of the Cross*. Composer: Stephen Percy Harris. Artist: Iron Maiden. Album: *The X-Factor*. Year: 1996. © BMG Rights Management.

In the misty realm of *Prozession im Nebel* (1828), Ernst Ferdinand Oehme (1797-1855) masterfully captures the essence of mystery and intrigue. Born in Dresden and influenced by the works of Caspar David Friedrich, Oehme's painting transports us to a world where fog obscures the boundaries between reality and imagination. Within this enigmatic landscape, a procession of monks traverses the scene, their figures fading into the ethereal haze as they march onward. Led by a solitary monk bearing a cross, the procession evokes a sense of solemnity and reverence, their purpose shrouded in mystery. Maybe the first enigma of the piece is its name: *Prozession im Nebel* or *Procession in the Fog*, in a free translation. The German word for fog, *Nebel*, is an antigram for *Leben*, which means life (Spitzer, 2018b); therefore the mist might be understood as a metaphor for human existence (Spitzer, 2018b).

Figure 48 - Detail of *Prozession im Nebel*, Ernst Ferdinand Oehme, 1828



Source: Oehme, 1828. Photography created by the auhor, 2023.
Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden.
Technique: Oil on Canvas. Dimensions: 81 x 105,5 cm.

Amidst the foggy expanse stands a solitary ruined column, like an old-time sentinel amidst the nebulous gloom. This kind of pinnacle, representing a cathedral tower, can be found in different parts of Germany and Poland, and, usually, it functions as a monument, with sculpted symbols of Christian mythology and figures, such as priests and nobles, with a Gothic style, which very often symbolises the Christian church itself (Alpermann *et al.*, 2024). It could be in honour to someone, to celebrate something, or to indicate a sacred place. While still standing, signs of decay are evident upon its surface, hinting at the unstoppable time and the eventual encirclement of nature's actions.

As the procession recedes into the mist and the ruined column looms in the background, Oehme's painting allures us to ponder the mysteries that lie beyond the veil of perception. The interplay of light and shadow, fog and stone, imbues the scene with an otherworldly quality, inviting viewers to immerse themselves in its atmospheric embrace, where the cross guides the monks during this passage from earth into the unknown world of the fog (Alpermann *et al.*, 2024). In this mysterious realm, the boundaries between past and present blur, inviting contemplation of the eternal truths hidden within the ruins of time. Here, the narrative is not merely observed but felt, as the viewer becomes a silent witness to the procession's passage through the old monument into the void.

Figure 49 - Detail of *Prozession im Nebel*, Ernst Ferdinand Oehme, 1828



Source: Oehme, 1828. Photography created by the auhor, 2023.
Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden.
Technique: Oil on Canvas. Dimensions: 81 x 105,5 cm.

This setting could easily be a long take of an Andrei Tarkovsky film. Where we first see the frame with the column and the haze. Then, slowly, the monks come into the scene, two by two, and we watch their march until they vanish into the mist. With them and our notion of time also disappears, we can no longer be precise about how long this happening lasted. The pale sunlight makes it hard to distinguish if it is the sunset or sunrise. As all fades, just quietude and the mysterious ambience remain.

3.8 Ruins as the Dwelling of the Renegades

"What would be the opposite of a ruin?" Alternatively, "To whom belongs a ruin?" These are questions that have followed this research since its very beginning. There is another query: "Who dwells in a ruin?" this one might sound contradictory; after all, if someone lives in a ruin, does it continue to be a ruin? Here, I would like to reformulate a previous interrogation; instead, "To whom belongs a ruin?" I propose, "Who belongs to a ruin?". With this question in mind, this section approaches artworks that depict people who live among ruins; do they have another option?

The first production here is *Ruine eines Palastes* (*Ruins of a Palace*) (ca. 1750) by Giovanni Antonio Buti, an artist whose origin, ancestry and education are unknown. There is also a lack of literature on his works. For these reasons, it would not be exaggerated to speculate that he is, in fact, a pseudonym. What is admitted is that he was active in Rome between 1750 and 1754; after this period, his trace was lost once again (Royal Academy of Arts, [20--]). According to the tag that follows the painting at the Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister in Dresden, the work was first mentioned in an inventory in 1754.

One of the characteristics of works by Buti is the depiction of fantastic architectural pieces, for a period some of his paintings were attributed to Giovanni Paolo Pannini oder Pietro Paltronier (Royal Academy of Arts, [20--]). *Ruine eines Palasts* shows an enormous arch of a ruined palace, as the title suggests. Below, a man is passing by; he is wearing clothes in rags and is barefoot. He carries a partially broken wooden board. This piece of wood is similar to some others that are visible, closing the windows of the ruined palace. He stares at two other figures: another man working with a hammer in what seems to be a boat. Near him sits a young man who hugs a dog and gives the idea of being tipsy. The character with the board conveys the impression that he reproves the behaviour of the other two. In the background, through the arch, stands a pompous edifice with people who seemingly belong to another social sphere.

Figure 50 - *Ruins of a Palace*, Giovanni Antonio Buti, ca. 1740



Source: Buti, ca. 1740. Photography created by the auhor, 2023.Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden.
Technique: Oil on Canvas. Dimensions: 136 x 99,5 cm.

A dissonant point emerges on the right side of the picture, where a military workshop is depicted, showcasing spears, shields, and cannon barrels. This scene, captured by Buti nearly three centuries ago, resonates with contemporary landscapes found in various countries across the globe. In port cities like Naples, Italy; Santos, Brazil; Thessaloniki, Greece; or Valparaíso, Chile, one can observe a similar juxtaposition in decaying maritime environments, symbolized by old and imposing buildings that once represented regional progress and now lie in ruins, alongside contemporary commercial constructions, exemplified by the weapons workshop. Those who struggle to thrive within this societal framework are often relegated to dwell among the ruins, a reflex of the complexities of urban decay and economic disparity. This portrayal sugests questions about these cities' shared experiences and post-maritime wealth periods, prompting comparisons and considerations of the factors contributing to their respective

declines and transformations over time, where ordinary buildings coexist side by side with the glamorous buildings from the past.

Figure 51 - Details *Ruins of a Palace*, Giovanni Antonio Buti, ca. 1740



Source: Buti, ca. 1740. Photography created by the auhor, 2023.Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden.
Technique: Oil on Canvas. Dimensions: 136 x 99,5 cm.

A parallel between Buti's creation and the current coastal decadency is seen at the Porta Nolana in Naples. This historic gate served as one of the main entrances to the city during the medieval period. Located in the eastern part of Naples, the gate was an important thoroughfare for travellers and merchants entering and exiting the city. The name Porta Nolana derives from its proximity to the town of Nola, which lies east of Naples. The gate was strategically positioned along the road from Naples to Nola and other towns in the surrounding region.

Constructed during the Aragonese rule of Naples in the 15th century, the Porta Nolana was part of the city's defensive walls built to protect Naples from external threats. The gate was designed with a fortified structure featuring thick walls and defensive towers to guard against potential attacks. Over the centuries, the Porta Nolana witnessed numerous historical events and

changes. For some locals it symbolises the city's resilience and endurance through times of war, political upheaval, and social change (Calderoni, [20--]).

Today, while much of the original defensive walls have been demolished, the Porta Nolana still stands as a historic landmark in Naples. However, rather than being a prominent gateway, the structure has been incorporated into the framework of the urban landscape. Over time, the gate was surrounded by the city's expansion (Calderoni, [20--]), and it now serves as a foundation for collective housing buildings in a popular neighbourhood out of the tourist's eyes and distant from the ferry routes that sail to Capri Island.

Figure 52 - Porta Nolana, Naples, Italy



Photography created by the auhor, 2022.

The coexistence in a ruined environment is also noticeable in *The Ruins of Nimes, Orange and Saint-Rémy-de-Provence* (ca. 1783-89) by the French baroque painter Hubert Robert (1733-1808). At first, the work's title could suggest some confusion, bringing together three locations separated by more than 40 kilometres. However, the piece is a combination of the series *Principal Monuments of France* (1786), formed by four paintings created by Robert, each one depicting the ruins of Romanesque constructions in the state of Provence, in France:

Interior of the Temple of Diana in Nîmes; *The Arc de Triomphe and the Theater in Orange*; *The Maison Carrée, the Amphitheater and the Tour Magne in Nîmes*; and *The Pont du Gard* (Faroult, 2016). With an impressive size of 242 x 242 centimetres each, the series gave the artist the nickname "Robert of Ruins" (Faroult, 2016).

Figure 53 - *The Ruins of Nimes, Orange and Saint-Rémy-de-Provence*, Hubert Robert, ca. 1783-89



Source: Robert, ca. 1783. Photography created by the auhor, 2021. Gemäldegalerie Berlin.
Technique: Oil on Canvas. Dimensions: 117 x 174 cm.

In the artwork presented here, the painter positions the four monuments in order to create an imaginary landscape - another example that proves how hard it is to classify ruin representations (Staatliche Museen Berlin, [20--]e). Besides the grandiose aspect of the structures, what is expected in both pieces is the people who live among the ruins. The triumphal context of the antique is over. In the temporality depicted by Robert, the monuments are immersed in an environment of poverty with humble people who do not seem to be amused. In the one described here, the figures do not execute any specific task; they chat in small groups like they lament their lives (Staatliche Museen Berlin, [20--]e).

Another particularity in this piece is that Roberz did not paint just one ruin or a single abandoned place; instead, he created a whole town in ruins. As far as we can see, all the structures of the place are decaying. Gathering the construction of three different cities, the artist built a ghost town where the people who live there seem not to have a perspective for a brighter future.

This imaginary and almost theatrical arrangement of monuments also conveys a sense of timelessness, as the architectural fragments from different locations merge into a unified vision of the past, creating an ambiguous and evocative setting (Faroult, 2016). Robert's choice to depict the scenes of everyday life among these ruins adds a touching layer to the artwork, highlighting the contrast between the former glory of Roman civilization and the everyday struggles of those now inhabiting these decaying spaces. The figures depicted embody the melancholy of a bygone era; their presence serves as a reminder of how human accomplishments inevitably fade over time.

When contemplating Robert's ruins, we seem to look at an anticipation of what Albert Speer, the architect of the Third Reich, called *Ruinwert* (ruin value) (Bücking, 2023, p. 41). The idea of the *Ruinwert* was to ensure that the monumental buildings constructed during the Nazi regime would leave behind impressive ruins that would symbolise the power and glory of Germany for centuries to come, even after its destruction. Speer believed these ruins would serve as a lasting legacy, similar to the ruins of ancient civilizations such as the Roman Empire (Bücking, 2023, p. 41).

Robert's fictional arrangement and depiction of monuments embody historical grandeur and evoke a sense of wonder, despite the state of dilapidation, as if foreseeing somehow Speer's *Ruinwert* ideology almost 150 years before.

Additionally, Robert brings a paradoxical aesthetic to ruins, highlighting both decay and the persistence of cultural achievements. In Robert's work, the ruins evoke nostalgia and point to the present's fragility. As is, he inverts the intertwining of present and past "by projecting the present itself into the future as its own past" (Steinhauser *apud* Bücking, 2023, p. 36) - this balance between admiration for what was and the melancholy of loss.

For the subsequent case of study, *Capriccio con arco classico e capre* (circa 1730), by Michele Marieschi (1696-1744), I would like to draw attention to the work's name, in particular to the Italian word *capriccio* (often anglicised as caprice). Etymologically, this word comes from *capretto*, the Italian name for a young goat or a goatling, an animal whose movements are unpredictable. In the Renaissance, the term *capriccio* appeared and started to refer to paintings

with fantastic or imaginary elements, usually landscapes and *vistas* (International Lexicon of Aesthetics, 2019). When depicting actual buildings, the *capricci* (the plural form of the name) do not have the obligation to follow the original proportions of the construction. Its use continued during the Baroque and had its apogee in the 17th and 18th centuries. It is impossible to determine who coined the term and when precisely it was applied for the first time (International Lexicon of Aesthetics, 2019). The essential intention of the *capricci* is very plausible; after all, the words image and imagination share the same Latin root, *imago*, incorporated into Middle English as *imitate*. Their meanings can be summarised as one thing that imitates - or represents - another.

With this idea in mind, we could state the works by Caspar David Friedrich, Hubert Robert, and some other creations already discussed here, which are also *capricci*. To answer this question, I will use the German expression *jein*, a combination of *ja* (yes) and *nein* (no). On the one hand, yes, some already debated works bring together distant places and periods. In this sense, they are *capricci*. On the other hand, the term seems more related to Italian artists, expressly in the Venice region (Britannica, [20--]). Of course, there are exceptions, but the concept of *capriccio* is often associated with Romanesque ruins - sometimes with Greek and Egyptian ones, Italian *vedute*, and a set of warm colours (Getty, [20--]). In other words, it evokes a Post-Romanesque atmosphere. An ensemble of the Post Grand Navigations Era, when the golden days of the Italian maritime were gone; the discovery of the lost cities Pompeii and Herculaneum; the grand tours; events that found a fertile ground into artists' heads, stimulating them to create these fictional situations. May each one decide for yourself if a work is a *capriccio* or not. If the making of a *capriccio* involves imagination, so does its interpretation.

Michele Marieschi (1710-1743) was a Venetian artist who received recognition for painting local vistas. According to some records, he lived for some time in Germany, working as a theatre stage designer. This period would have influenced the artist in his future *capricci*, as well as his decorative works for the Venice Carnival (Staatsgalerie Stuttgart, [20--]). The work presented here, *Capriccio con arco classico e capre* (ca. 1740), shows an imponent arch whose top is semi-collapsed. Its base received a wooden gate and is now the entrance of a village or some other property. Because of the goats by the gateway, it is possibly a peasant's living place. The local inhabitants wear scraped clothes and have a delusional expression. The location is by the water; it could be a canal, a river, or a lake. On the other side of the wetness, it is possible to notice a town with big buildings, which indicates some progress. Those not so prosperous to live on the other margin stay on this side, among decaying structures from the old

glory days, which are now being retaken by nature. The noble marble and coloured granite now provide a shadow for the rest of the small flock of goats, while the humans around do not show much expectation for the upcoming days.

Figure 54 - *Capriccio con arco classico e capre*, Michele Marieschi, ca. 1740



Source: Marieschi, ca. 1740. Photography created by the auhor, 2023.Gallerie dell'Accademia Venezia.
Technique: Oil on Canvas. Dimensions: 55 x 83 cm.

Marieschi's work thus offers a discussion about the broader themes of social exclusion through time and the beauty found in the persistence of life amidst decay. Through this *capriccio*, the viewer is encouraged to ponder the complex layers of history, society, and nature that converge in ruins, offering a space for the unfortunate to carve out an existence, however humble it may be. This artwork enriches the narrative on ruins as the dwelling of the renegades, highlighting not just the physical but also the existential dimensions of living in the shadow of what once was.

To close this section, I present two more *capricci* by Giovanni Antonio Canal (1697-1768). Here, it is important to mention that he is the uncle of Bernardo Bellotto, who we already saw in the last chapter. Just like his relative, Giovanni Antonio is also called "Canaletto". Considering that both have a comparable style and became famous for depicting Venetian landscapes, studying their works requires special attention to avoid misunderstanding.

The two works *Capriccio con rovine ed edifici classici* and *Capriccio con rovine e Porta Portello a Padova* (both from circa 1760) present aesthetic characteristics previously mentioned and depict places that do not necessarily exist. The two *Capriccio* show another aspect similar to the piece of art by Michele Marieschi: the clash of social classes. In both, we see humble people with simple clothes, engaging in ordinary activities in an environment full of rubble and under collapsing arches.

Figure 55 - *Capriccio con rovine ed edifici classici*, Giovanni Antonio Canal, ca. 1760



Source: Canal, 1760. Photography created by the auhor, 2023. Gallerie dell'Accademia.
Technique: Oil on Canvas. Dimensions: 63 x 75,6 cm.

Both works delve into a nuanced portrayal of societal margins, where the debris of architectural grandeur serve as the backdrop for the lives of the underprivileged. These capricci, while imaginative, are rooted in the stark reality of social disparity, illustrating how the echoes of a city's illustrious past coexist with the less visible yet equally significant narratives of its inhabitants.

In these compositions, Canaletto juxtaposes the crumbling ruins and classical edifices against the backdrop of well-preserved buildings, suggesting a physical and metaphorical divide between the different strata of urban society. This contrast not only highlights the physical segregation within the cities but also depicts the social stratification that defines the experience of its residents. The people depicted in the ruins, engaged in their daily routines amidst the decay, embody a resistance and adaptability that starkly contrasts with the invisible but palpable presence of a more fortunate class, suggested by the pristine structures in the distance.

Canaletto's choice to set these scenes in ambiguous, peripheral spaces - neither entirely within the city nor outside it - enhances the sense of liminality that characterises the lives of those dwelling in ruins. These areas, akin to no man's land, emerge as spaces where the forgotten and overlooked members of society carve out their existence, surrounded by the vestiges of history and the relentless advance of nature reclaiming its territory.

Figure 56 - *Capriccio con rovine e Porta Portello a Padova*,
Giovanni Antonio Canal, ca. 1760



Source: Canal, 1760. Photography created by the auhor, 2023. Gallerie dell'Accademia Venezia.
Technique: Oil on Canvas. Dimensions: 61 x 76 cm.

Furthermore, Canaletto's *capriccio* enables the viewers to lookt at the cyclical process of prosperity and decline, the transient glory of civilizations, and the enduring human spirit that persists amidst time. Canaletto showcases his mastery of the *vedute* genre through his imaginative landscapes and engages in a more profound commentary on the human condition, the inexorable passage of time, and the complex interplay between history, society, and the environment.

By expanding the narrative to include these aspects, the analysis of Canaletto's works contributes to a broader understanding of the *Ruins as the Dwelling of the Renegades* approach, offering a rich exploration of the interconnections between art, society, and the individual's place within this continuum imagining two different *capricci.*

3.9 Ruins as Documentation

3.9.1 Pre-Photographic Images

Since ancient times, art has served the purpose of recording historical moments, landscapes, and structures, often acting as the sole visual testimony of past cultures and civilizations. Examples of this can be found in the Mayan mural paintings, which depict scenes of rituals and daily life, or in the works of artists like Bernardo Canaletto, whose pieces meticulously detail the buildings of Dresden and the canals of Venice, preserving the memory of places in constant transformation.

In the case of ruins, artistic practice as documentation gains even greater relevance, particularly in periods before the invention of photography in 1826. Without the ability to mechanically capture precise images, it was the task of artists to observe, interpret, and record these remnants of the past. Their works documented and shaped the ways in which ruins were understood and valued in their respective eras.

This section explores how different artists approached ruins as a form of visual and narrative documentation, highlighting the richness of perspectives and techniques employed from Piranesi's meticulous work to lesser-known yet equally significant examples of artists who transformed ruins into living archives of memory and history.

3.9.2 Early Works

One of the earliest notable works within this tradition is *Römische Ruinen* (ca. 1600) by Hendrik Hondius (1573–1650). An engraver, publisher, and cartographer, Hondius played a

pivotal role in the artistic landscape of the transition from the 16th to the 17th century. Born in the Netherlands, he was influenced by Europe's fascination with the ruins of Ancient Rome, which at the time were seen both as symbols of a glorious past and as warnings about the transience of all human achievements.

Römische Ruinen is a series of engravings depicting classical Roman ruins. These works simultaneously illustrate buildings and monuments that were, at the time, sources of fascination for intellectuals and artists and also show Hondius's technical precision and keen artistic vision. He combined architectural accuracy with an aesthetic sensitivity that sought to capture both the forms of the ruins and the atmosphere of decay and greatness surrounding them.

Figure 57 - *Die Thermen des Diokletian*, Page 56 / C.LXXXVII of the series *Römische Ruinen*, Hendrik Hondius, ca. 1600



Source: Hondius, ca. 1600. Photography created by the auhor, 2024 SKD, Dresden.
Technique: Engraving. Dimensions: 21x27cm each.

The importance of *Römische Ruinen* lies in its dual function: on one hand, these engravings serve as documentary records of historical structures that were often already partially destroyed or threatened by time; on the other, they shaped European perceptions of ruins as subjects worthy of both study and artistic appreciation. By depicting these ruins in such

detail, Hondius not only preserved their memory but also placed them in a symbolic context, reinforcing the idea that they were both cultural legacies and reminders of civilization's fragility. This work stands out as one of the earliest milestones in the tradition of using ruins as a medium for artistic documentation, laying the foundation for future generations of artists to further explore the narrative and aesthetic potential of these elements from the past.

The artistic practice of depicting ruins as a form of visual documentation preserves memories of historical structures and events and, at the same time, reflects the cultural and emotional perceptions of each era. Following this approach, two significant examples are *Rom, in den Ruinen des Kolosseums* (1609) by Hans Heintz (1580–1635) and *Ansicht von Grave in der Masse nach einer Belagerung* (1675) by Valentin Klotz (1650–1721). Both works demonstrate the richness of perspectives and intentions that ruins can evoke, ranging from the contemplation of past grandeur to the recording of the immediate consequences of historical events.

Figure 58 - *Rom, in den Ruinen des Kolosseums*, Hans Heintz, 1609



Source: Heintz, 1609. Photography created by the auhor, 2023. SKD, Dresden.
Technique: Pen in brown, brush in brown and blue, washed,
preliminary drawing in pencil. Dimensions: 20,5x29cm.

In *Rom, in den Ruinen des Kolosseums*, Heintz provides a detailed view of the Colosseum, a symbol of the monumentality and decline of Ancient Rome. This engraving combines technical precision and artistic sensitivity to emphasize the vastness of the Colosseum's inner columns in contrast to the smallness of the human figures depicted in the scene. The work depicts the architecture of the Colosseum in its ruined state and, at the same time, conveys a symbolic weight, portraying it as an emblem of Rome's power and downfall. The contrast between the grandiosity of the ruins and the human scale underscores the fragility of human existence in the face of time while also suggesting the enduring legacy of cultural achievements.

This artistic trend of gradually reducing the prominence of human figures relative to ruins and architectural works highlights a shift in focus. Over time, remaining structures began to take center stage, moving away from the Renaissance idea of ruins as mere backdrops or scenic elements. This evolution eventually reached a point where the human figure becomes only a minor reference against the overwhelming grandeur of the ruins (Dillon, 2006, p. 04).

In *Ansicht von Grave in der Masse nach einer Belagerung* (1675), Valentin Klotz (ca.1650-1721) takes a different approach, focusing on documenting the immediate impacts of war on the urban landscape. Depicting the city of Grave in the Netherlands after a military siege, Klotz meticulously records the damaged buildings, destroyed walls, and surrounding fields. The engraving not only captures the devastation wrought by conflict but also serves as a visual marker to the endurance of cities and their inhabitants. By detailing the topographical and architectural elements of the scene, Klotz transforms the destruction into a historical document, highlighting the relationship between war, ruins, and reconstruction.

These two works exemplify how ruins can be interpreted and documented in distinct ways, depending on the context and the artist's intentions. While Heintz uses the ruins of the Colosseum to explore historical grandeur and a melancholic contemplation of time, Klotz focuses on the immediate effects of destruction and the documentary function of art in times of conflict. Together, they illustrate the breadth of the theme of ruins as documentation, revealing how art can both preserve the past and generate new interpretations of the present and future.

Figure 59 - *Ansicht von Grave in der Masse nach einer Belagerung*, Valentin Klotz, 1675



Source: Klotz, 1675. Photography created by the auhor, 2023. SKD, Dresden.
Technique: Graphite, pen & brown ink, grey-blue wash on laid paper,
with brown ink framing lines. Dimensions: 19,6x23,8cm.

By examining these works within the context of *Ruins as Documentation*, we see how they transcend the mere function of visual recording, transforming ruins into living archives of memory. They demonstrate how artists, before the invention of photography, played an essential role in preserving and interpreting cultural and historical legacies.

3.9.3 Piranesi and His *Vedute* and *Carceri*

When discussing the relationship between ruins and documentation, one name cannot be overlooked: Giovanni Battista Piranesi (1720–1778). The Venetian engraver, painter, and architect is renowned for his depictions of ruins in art; his work remains relevant to this day. In 1740, Piranesi was a promising artist. After traveling through various parts of Italy, he was hired as a draftsman for Marco Foscari, the Venetian ambassador in Rome. Once there, he had the opportunity to complete his artistic and architectural studies. Soon, his talent attracted the

attention of the Roman Society of the Arts, and he was commissioned to document the surviving architecture of the Roman Empire. This marked the beginning of some of his most famous works: the *Vedute di Roma* or *Views of Rome* (ca. 1748-1778), a series of over 100 engravings depicting Roman ruins in and around the city.

Piranesi's *Vedute di Roma* were much more than mere documentation of the city's architectural heritage. His works reveal a unique ability to merge objective representation with an imaginative atmosphere, capturing both the physicality of these ancient structures and their temporal and emotional resonance (Dalvai; Wang; Wullen, 2020, p. 9). The engravings depict some of the Roman Empire's most significant monuments, such as the Colosseum, the Roman Forum, and Nero's Aqueducts. The current state of these buildings differs significantly from their appearance during Piranesi's time, and some no longer exist. This means the engravings serve as some of the only surviving records of these structures, preserving their memory.

Figure 60 - *Remains of a covered portico, or a cryptoporticus, in a villa of Domitian, five miles outside Rome on the Frascati road* from the series *Vedute di Roma*, Giovanni Battista Piranesi, ca. 1766



Source: Piranesi, ca. 1766. Photo: The Met Museum, 2019.
Technique: Engraving. Dimensions: 42,5x60,5cm.

However, Piranesi's works are not merely historical records. Instead, they emphasize ruins as spaces rich in narratives, evoking a sense of awe and melancholy in the face of the transience of human achievements. In this sense, his creations can be seen as an aesthetic mediation, portraying ruins as both relics of the past and living artifacts—spaces where history and imagination coexist. His dramatic lighting and perspective often intensify this effect, creating an atmosphere that evokes nostalgia and the sublime, turning the "landscape into a stage and the human figures into actors" (Dalvai; Wang; Wullen, 2020, p. 10). Even in decay, Piranesi brings "monumentality and sublimity" (Huyssen, 2006, p. 15).

Moreover, Piranesi approaches his subjects as dynamic and atmospheric phenomena, rather than static remarks of what once was. His work gravitates toward fascination. According to Bücking (2023, p. 23), the allure of ruins lies in their paradoxical nature: they exist between construction and decay, embodying a tension between the past and the present. This duality is evident in Piranesi's representations, where the remnants of imperial greatness are shown in their dilapidated state, integrated into the contemporary landscape, thereby bringing together historical continuity and the inevitability of decline. At the same time, the artist creates a temporality suspended between the past and the present.

The physical and emotional environment Piranesi creates around the ruins is a fundamental aspect of his work. In many of the series' images, we see nature reclaiming the structures that once represented imperial magnitude, yet no visible effort is made to preserve them. The ruins are often surrounded by scenes of poverty and decay, places inhabited by wanderers, people who appear intoxicated or exhausted. It is a desolate land and a hopeless place, populated by lost souls who seem alive only as long as they remain near the ruins; the collapsing buildings are at once their refuge and their temple (Dalvai; Wang; Wullen, 2020, p. 10).

Piranesi's engravings propose a journey into the monumental Roman past. At the same time, this past is no longer accessible. The artist creates an aesthetic of abandonment that brings together a "dichotomy between the glory of the past and the melancholy of the present" (Gervilla, 2022, p. 52), blending the two so seamlessly that they can no longer be separated. Piranesi's work allows ruins to transcend their status as mere historical artifacts, incorporating memory and imagination.

Figure 61 - *The Temple of the Sibyl, Tivoli: The Broken Side of the Colonnade* from the series *Vedute di Roma*, Giovanni Battista Piranesi, ca. 1766



Source: Piranesi, ca. 1766. Photo: Harvard Art Museums, 2019.
Technique: Engraving. Dimensions: 44,3x66,1cm.

Figure 62 - *The Aqueduct of Nero Leading to the Palatine*
from the series *Vedute di Roma*, Giovanni Battista Piranesi, 1775



Source: Piranesi, 1775. Photo: The Minnich Collection, 2019.
Technique: Engraving. Dimensions: 48,9x70,49cm (plate).

Although Piranesi is widely recognized for his architectural depictions of ruins and classical landscapes, his work also extended to decorative and scenographic projects. A notable example is his contribution to the design of the *Caffè degli Inglesi* in 1765, which belongs to a period in his career when he was actively working as an architect. This phase coincided with the support of Pope Clement XIII and his Venetian patron Rezzonico, who provided Piranesi with opportunities to bring his architectural ideas to life. His work *Diverse Maniere*, published in 1769, demonstrates this moment of creative experimentation, including decorative designs and architectural fantasies that explored the integration of practical function and aesthetics (Grötz, 2002, p. 23). However, not all of his architectural projects were realized, such as his ambitious plan to reform the choir of *San Giovanni in Laterano*, which faced criticism and was ultimately abandoned in 1767 (Grötz, 2002, p. 23). These initiatives demonstrate Piranesi's versatility as he navigated between artistic documentation and architectural and decorative practice.

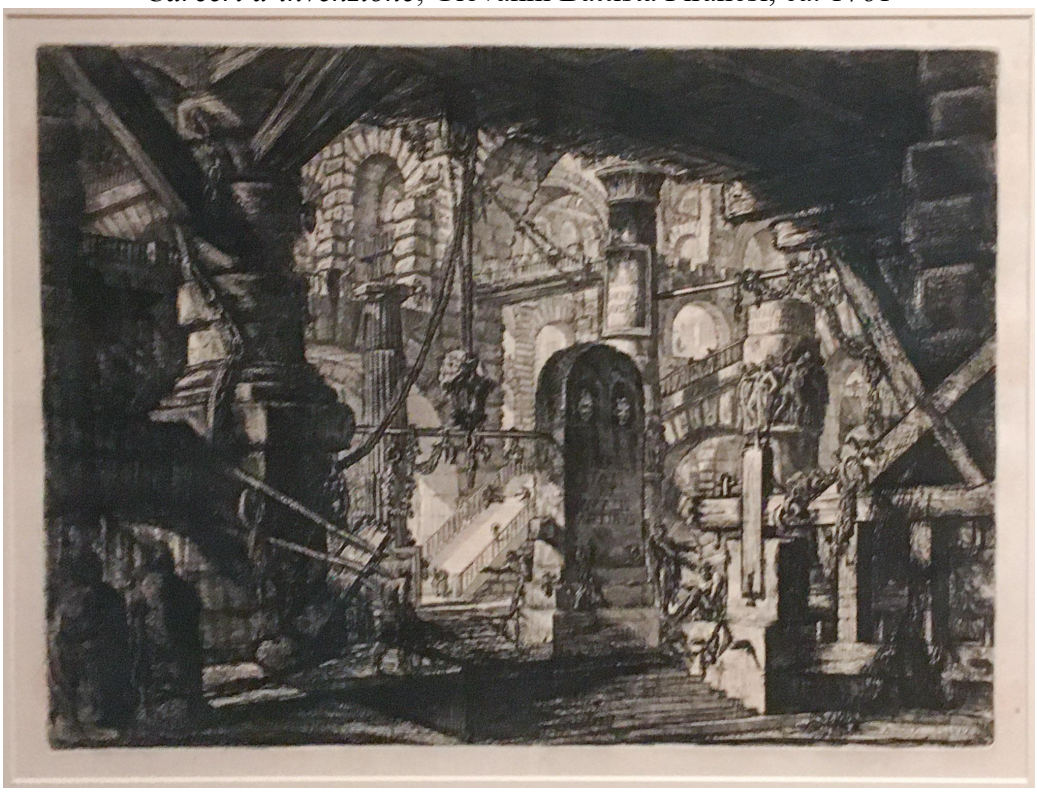
Figure 63 - *Veduta del Tempio detto della Concordia*
from the series *Vedute di Roma*, Giovanni Battista Piranesi, 1774



Source: Piranesi, 1774. Photo: Le Gallerie Degli Uffizi, 2019.
Technique: Engraving. Dimensions: 46,7x70cm.

Another remarkable series created by Piranesi during this period is *Carceri d'invenzione*, or *Imaginary Prisons*, composed of 16 images. The title aptly describes the series: a collection of subterranean dungeons imagined and drawn by the artist (Huyssen, 2006, p. 16), lending the work an aspect of *capriccio*. It is impossible to determine whether these locations are abandoned, as we see a few human figures and shadows, but they play a secondary role in the compositions. Some interpretations of the *Carceri* suggest that they represent the "delirium of an archaeologist deeply absorbed in the terrifying romanticism of the colossal ruins of ancient Rome's grandeur" (Eisenstein, 1967, p. 10), while others propose that they reflect a paranoia that afflicted the artist (Eisenstein, 1967, p. 10).

Figure 64 - *The Pier with Chains* from the series *Carceri d'invenzione*, Giovanni Battista Piranesi, ca. 1761



Source: Piranesi, ca. 1761. Photography created by the auhor, 2022. Sammlung Scharf-Gerstenberg, Berlin. Technique: Engraving. Dimensions: 40,6x55,2cm.

As in the *Vedute di Roma*, the human figures here convey a sense of vertigo, raising questions about whether they are prisoners, guards, or passersby. The succession of columns, arches, and staircases contributes to the creation of a "fantastic architecture" composed of "concrete forms" (Eisenstein, 1967, p. 9). Latvian filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein (1898–1948) was an admirer of the *Carceri* and claimed (Eisenstein, 1967, p. 20) that the composition and continuity of Piranesi's architectural forms significantly influenced his cinematic system of

montage and the sequencing of shots, for which he became renowned. This influence is evident in the iconic sequence of Kerensky ascending the Jordan Staircase of the Winter Palace in the film *October* (1927) (Eisenstein, 1967, p. 21). Eisenstein's perspective reinforces the suggestion that images evoking the aesthetics of abandonment can also possess a cinematic quality. In Piranesi's case, his work can be considered simultaneously as documentation, imagination, and a cinematic sequence.

Figure 65 - Works of the series *Carceri d'invenzione* at the exhibition *Surreale Welten*, 2022



Photography created by the auhor, 2022.
Sammlung Scharf-Gerstenberg, Berlin.

3.9.4 *Vedute* Like Piranesi's in Modern Times

A parallel to Piranesi's melancholic visions of antiquity can be observed in the contemporary landscape of Thessaloniki, Greece, offering a striking contrast. Here, amidst the bustling streets and modern developments of the city, an ancient ruin stands out: the Byzantine Wall. The initial phase of this Early Christian construction dates back to the 4th century. It underwent numerous expansions and, even when the city fell into Ottoman hands in 1430, it was not destroyed but preserved as a symbol of imperial power and fortification. Today, part of

it serves a utilitarian purpose, providing structural support to buildings in the city's peripheral zones. This transformation showcases the ever-evolving relationship between past and present, as ancient ruins are integrated into daily life, with their historical significance intertwined with the rhythms of modern urban existence.

The juxtaposition of Piranesi's fantastical landscapes with the contemporary reality of Thessaloniki highlights the enduring legacy of antiquity and the ways in which ancient structures continue to shape the modern world. While Piranesi's ruins evoke a sense of mystery and nostalgia for a bygone era, the Byzantine Wall in Thessaloniki serves as a tangible reminder of the city's rich history and cultural heritage. However, the wall's current use as a mere architectural element distances it from its original imperial grandeur. Through this comparison, we are reminded of architecture's lasting power to transcend time and connect us to the past, even as the world around us continues to change and evolve.

Figure 66 - Remains of the Byzantine Wall in the Sykies neighborhood of Thessaloniki, Greece



Photography created by the auhor, 2024.

Figure 67 - Remains of the Byzantine Wall in the Sykies neighborhood of Thessaloniki, Greece



Photography created by the auhor, 2024.

Figure 68 - Remains of the Byzantine Wall in the Sykies neighborhood of Thessaloniki, Greece



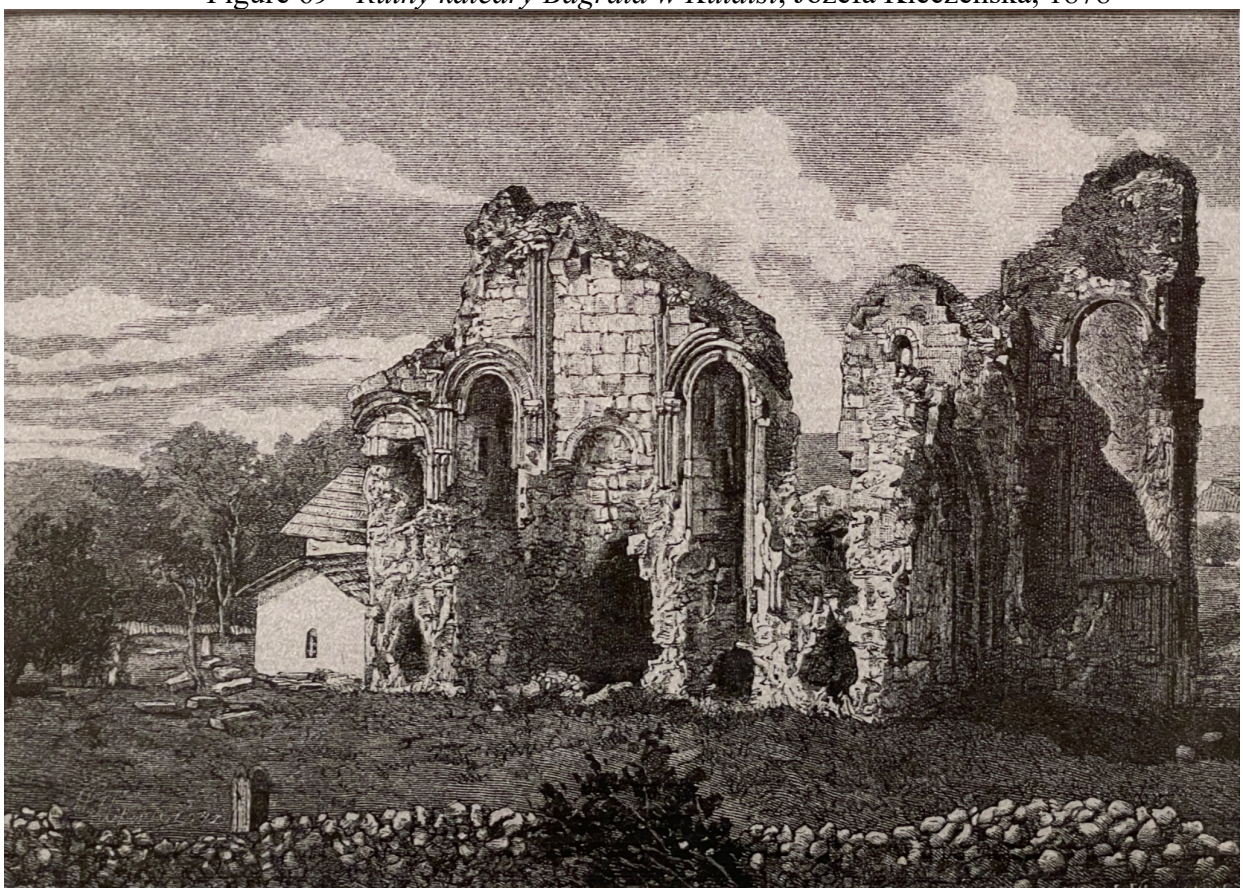
Photography created by the auhor, 2024.

3.9.5 Ruins as Documentation in Eastern Europe

Throughout this chapter, the majority of the works we have explored were produced in Central Europe. However, this does not mean that the practice of representing ruins through artistic methods did not occur in other parts of the continent. The influence of Piranesi in the artistic and documentary representation of ruins, as well as his ability to capture the grandeur of architectural leftovers, inspired generations of artists. Beginning in the 19th century, they continued to explore the narrative and historical potential of ruins in various regions of Europe.

Among these artists is Józefa Kleczeńska (active between 1868-1887), whose work *Ruiny katedry Bagrata w Kutaisi* (1878) exemplifies how ruins serve as markers of cultural and historical identity. Kleczeńska's woodcut, based on a drawing by Henryk Filipowicz, highlights the architectural richness of the Bagrati Cathedral in Georgia, offering the observer a detailed view of the deterioration that bears witness to centuries of political and social change.

Figure 69 - *Ruiny katedry Bagrata w Kutaisi*, Józefa Kleczeńska, 1878



Source: Kleczeńska, 1878. Photography created by the auhor, 2024. Exhibition *Golden Fleece - Art of Georgia*. National Museum Krakow. Technique: Engraving.

The exact years of Kleczeńska's birth and death remain unknown. However, evidence strongly suggests that she was of Polish origin. Her name, along with the fact that her works were published in Polish periodicals such as *Tygodnik Powszechny*, underscores her connection to Poland. Nevertheless, like many Polish artists of her time, she appears to have been drawn to the culture of the Caucasus and Georgia - a region that captivated 19th-century intellectuals and artists due to its historical, cultural, and natural richness (Kruk, 2024).

Figure 70 - *Ruiny zamku*, Henryk Hryniewski, after 1900



Source: Hryniewski, after, 1900. Photography created by the auhor, 2024. Exhibition *Golden Fleece - Art of Georgia*. National Museum Krakow. Technique: Gouache on paper.

Similarly, Henryk Hryniewski (1869–1937), with his work *Ruiny zamku* (post-1900), continues the tradition of documenting ruins as testaments to the relationship between culture and nature. Through gouache on paper, the Polish-Georgian painter depicts the remnants of a castle, emphasizing the interaction between decaying architecture and the natural landscape gradually enveloping it. This dialogue between the human and the natural evokes Romantic aesthetics but also suggests an analytical approach akin to Piranesi's, where ruins function as repositories of memory and contemplation of the past.

These later representations bring an expanded understanding of ruins as spaces that narrate stories of persistence and transformation. Inspired by Piranesi, artists such as Kleczeńska and Hryniewski demonstrate that the visual documentation of ruins transcends mere recording; it is an effort to preserve the emotional, historical, and aesthetic complexity of these structures, connecting different times and cultures within a single frame. Thus, the practice of documenting ruins continues to evolve, always rooted in the tension between collective memory and the inexorable forces of forgetting.

3.10 Reflections on Ruinous Approaches

Exploring various artistic approaches to ruins reveals that concepts like ruin fascination, ruin lust, and the gaze upon ruins encapsulate a profound attraction to decay and deterioration that transcends historical periods. The works discussed here represent only a selection from a broader survey that spans artists of different styles, periods, and backgrounds. These creations range from religious and mythological themes to depictions of a society on the brink of industrialization. However, these differences are often connected by a shared aesthetic of abandonment.

Another common thread among many of these works is the fascination with Italian landscapes, particularly the *campagna romana* and the fragmented ruins of the Roman Empire. This fascination was further fueled by the archaeological discoveries in Pompeii, which began around 1748. Not only painters but also writers and poets such as Goethe and Schiller, as well as sculptors like Antonio Canova and Bertel Thorvaldsen, were drawn to these images.

Amidst this celebration of ruins and abandonment, it was natural for artists to use their imagination to create and recreate scenes of everyday life in these places - ranging from refuge and rest to mystery and the domain of outcasts. This culminated in the *capricci* and their speculative and fantastical settings, as seen in the works of Hubert Robert, who envisioned the future ruins of contemporary constructions.

In a pre-photographic world, artists like Piranesi were entrusted with documenting and portraying ancient ruins through their art. Without their work, many sites that no longer exist today might never have been known. By relating Piranesi’s works to his own cinematic productions, Sergei Eisenstein confirms that the artistic universe knows no boundaries between different mediums. Similarly, the artistic categorizations of ruins become elusive; the more we attempt to standardize them, the more they evade our grasp.

4 CASPAR DAVID FRIEDRICH AND HIS IMAGINARY LANDSCAPES

4.1 Friedrich Early Life and Greifswald in His Days

The German romantic painter Caspar David Friedrich (1774-1840) is undoubtedly one of the most expressive names regarding the artistic approach to ruins. Together with Piranesi and Robert he is considered part of the "Classics of the Ruin Aesthetics" (*Klassiker der Ruinenästhetik*) (Bücking, 2023, p.13). His creations have influenced generations of artists from different languages be it in Germany or worldwide, contributing to the "modern imagery" (*moderne Bildssprache*) in several artistic lines - from painting to cinema, poetry and music - in a way that can not even be estimated (Löser, 2024, p. 257). Furthermore, Friedrich is the greatest German landscape painter of his time (Vaughan, 1990, p. 183). For these reasons, writing about Friedrich's career is no easy task, nor is it easy to find an approach that has not been previously explored. Therefore, the focus here is on observing how ruins from different times and places influenced his imagination.

Over more than two centuries his pieces crossed three great wars and four different German States (Illies, 2024, p.18). The diversity of his works testifies to his versatility in moving from one context to another while keeping his identity. Such complexity makes it hard to fit his name into a single-class approach to ruins here proposed; he could easily float from one category to another, so that is the reason why he deserves his own chapter. At the same time, it is hard to bring something about him that was not said before; that is why we aim to focus here on his diverse connection to ruins.

Most artists bring together some characteristics of their time, and, normally, their backgrounds permanently influence their production. Therefore, to contemplate Friedrich's work deeply, it is necessary to know more about his environment and origin. Let us do that before we go further on his production.

Friedrich was born in 1774 in Greifswald, northeast Germany, in the current state of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, by the Baltic Sea, in a Lutheran family of candle-makers and soap boilers. The formal name of the city - Universitäts- und Hansestadt Greifswald - gives us hints about the local history. Officially founded in 1250, the city was a member of the Hanseatic

League[17], and in 1456, the Universität Greifswald was established. However, the origins of the Forest of the Griffin - literally the name of the town in German - recall a few decades earlier.

In 1199 - when the region was under the rule of the Danes - a group of Danish Cistercian Monks, after losing their abbey in Dargun in a battle between Denmark and Brandenburg, in 1198, were settled at the banks of the River Ryck, currently in Greifswald (Greifswald, 2024). At that time, they received an authorisation from the Prince Jaromar of Rügen I, ruler of the region and loyal to the Danish crown, to explore the river's (at that time called Hilda) salt pans and build a new abbey: the Hilda Abbey, now Eldena Abbey (Greifswald, 2024).

According to the legend, when the monks were walking through the forest nearby the river searching for the best place for their construction, they found a Griffin[18] - the mythical creature with the body, tail, and back legs of a lion, and the head and wings of an eagle - in a nest. As soon as it saw the monks, it fled away. The priests then agreed that it was a divine sign and set the place for their new settlement. The location is today Schuhagen Street, the oldest street in Greifswald's inner city; the new temple, Hilda Abbey, was built a couple of kilometres away. Later, four griffin chicks hatched from eggs and flew off in diverse directions, each landing in a different location and giving rise to a new settlement. Each outpost gave an origin to a city in the Pomeranian region: Rostock, Demmin, Wolgast, in Germany, and Szczecin, in Polen; all founded during the same period. This legend is often cited as an explanation for the presence of griffin symbols in these cities' coats of arms and other iconography; in the Middle Ages, it was common to refer to the Pomerania[19] region as the *Greifenstaat*, literally, the State

[17] The Hanseatic League was a powerful confederation of merchant guilds and market towns that dominated maritime trade in Northern Europe from the 13th to the 17th centuries. Centred around the city of Lübeck - North Germany, which served as its capital, the league controlled trade routes stretching from the Baltic to the North Sea. Its members, known as Hanseatic cities, engaged in lucrative commerce in goods such as salt, grain, timber, and fish. Notable member cities included Hamburg, Bremen, Rostock, and Gdańsk, among others. With formidable naval power, the league protected its merchant fleets, ensuring the security of trading routes and the prosperity of its members. The Hanseatic League left a lasting legacy in the urban development, legal systems, and cultural exchanges of Northern European cities.

[18] The Griffin, a mythical creature with a lion's body and an eagle's head and wings, originates in ancient civilizations, including those of Mesopotamia, Greece, and Egypt. It was believed to symbolise divine power and the union of the terrestrial and celestial. In mediaeval heraldry, the Griffin became a powerful emblem representing strength, courage, and guardianship, often used by cities to assert authority and protect their territories. Its powerful symbolism made it a fitting representation of protection and valour, bridging its ancient origins with its enduring mediaeval significance.

[19] Pomerania is a geographical and historical region located along the southern Baltic Sea coast, covering parts of present-day Germany and Poland. During the mediaeval period, Pomerania extended from the Recknitz River in the west to the Vistula River in the east, encompassing a variety of territories. Today, the region is divided into two parts: Vorpommern and Hinterpommern. Vorpommern (Western Pomerania) lies within the borders of the German state of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, stretching westward from the Oder River. Hinterpommern (Farther Pomerania), on the other hand, lies to the east of the Oder River and is now primarily part of Poland, covering the area that includes cities like Szczecin (Stettin) and Koszalin.

of the Griffin. It is worth remembering that, at that time, Christianity in Northern Europe was still intertwined with pagan syncretism.

Figure 71 - Current aspect of the ruins of the Eldena Abbey



Photography created by the auhor, 2022.

The salt exploitation, the membership in *Hanse*, and the location between Rügen and Usedom - the two largest German islands - made Greifswald thrive and expand relatively fast for the standards of that time. In 1250, the settlement was officially granted by Lübeck with the city status (Greifswald, [20--])a). These factors turned the port city into a multicultural zone, with merchants and workers from foreign lands.

In 1456 the University of Greifswald (the fourth oldest in Germany) was opened, which consolidated the local progress and established the young city as one of the most important hubs in Vorpommern. During this period, Elbena Abbey was expanded and reached its largest size at the beginning of the 16th century. However, a few years later, after the Reformation (1517), Pomerania became a Protestant region, and the Abbey was deactivated in 1535. It is uncertain what exactly happened to the building right after the deactivation; regardless, with the

deflagration of the Thirty Years War[20] (1618-1648), the edifice became a military fortress. As Sweden won most of the battles on the Baltic coast of Germany, the Swedish crown occupied the state from approximately 1630 to 1815, amidst this period the region was called *Schwedisch-Pommern*, or Swedish Pomerania (Greifswald, [20--]b).

During this time, a considerable part of the Abbey was dismantled and its bricks used in other constructions. Friedrich was born amidst this conturbed context. At his time, the Abbey was already a ruin, and these historical factors and the political tension from that time influenced the society of his day.

Figure 72 - Former Friedrich family home on Langestraße in Greifswald. Now the headquarters of the Caspar David Friedrich Zentrum



Photography created by the auhor, 2022.

[20] The Thirty Years' War (1618-1648) was a devastating conflict primarily fought in Central Europe, involving most European powers of the time, including the Holy Roman Empire, Spain, France, Sweden, and Denmark-Norway. Initially sparked by religious tensions between Catholics and Protestants, the war evolved into a complex power struggle involving dynastic ambitions, territorial disputes, and intervention by external powers. One notable aspect of the conflict was the involvement of Sweden, which intervened on the side of the Protestant states and successfully expanded its influence in Northern Germany and the Baltic region. The war also saw conflicts between Sweden and the Holy Roman Empire, particularly in the region of Pomerania, ultimately resulting in Sweden's victory and territorial gains.

Some personal tragic events also had a profound impact on Friedrich's early life and, likely, later on, his artistic works: he lost his mother, Sophie Dorothea, when he was seven years old; in the following years, two of his sisters, Elisabeth and Maria, also passed away (Wolf, 2023, p.93). The most traumatic experience happened in 1787, when he was thirteen: when Caspar David and his big brother Johann Christoffer were strolling over an iced lake. Johann noticed Caspar walking on a thin layer of ice and tried to help him; the ice broke, and Johann fell and drew on the cold water (Wolf, 2023, p.17). The feeling of guilt pursued Friedrich for his entire life. When he was an adult, he suffered another strong shock: his close friend and teacher Gerhard von Kügelgen was robbed and beaten to death (Wolf, 2023, p.94). In his honour, the artist painted *Kügelgens Grab* (1821-22). As mentioned by an unknown writer[21], "Friedrich's life was a tragedy [...] he suffered a lot internally and died in misery".

4.2 Artistic Education in Germany and Denmark: From Early Training to Establishing in Dresden

Caspar David Friedrich's artistic education began in his adolescence at the age of 14, in 1788, when he and some of his siblings were enrolled by their father, Adolf Gottlieb Friedrich, in a drawing and artistic calligraphy course (Frenssen, 2024a). Although, in theory, Friedrich was yet to be considered a professional artist at that time, some preserved works already showed promising qualities.

In 1790, after seeing some of Friedrich's drawings depicting the city's harbour, drawing teacher Johann Gottfried Quistorp invited him to study at the University of Greifswald's art department, where he began developing etching techniques (Wolf, 2023, p. 93). Under Quistorp's guidance, the young student spent his early years sharpening his contours and anatomical details skills by reproducing mythological figures and beings (Grave, 2024, p. 68). Today, the department carries his name.

In 1794, Friedrich moved to Denmark to study at the Copenhagen Academy. Although there is limited documentation about his time there (Grave, 2024, p. 68), under the guidance of instructors like Nicolai Abildgaard (1743-1809), Jens Juel (1745-1802), and Christian August

[21] "*Friedrichs Leben war eine Tragödie; er war zeitlebens rechtschaffen und gerade, litt innerlich viel und starb im Elend"*. Extract from the text "Sonnenaufgang bei Neubrandenburg". Hamburg Kunsthalle, Verlagsnummer 8168. Received by the Greifswald City Archive on 19/09/2000, donated by Klaus Bohn. The document is just a loose paper, so it is imprecise to affirm who the author is.

Lorentzen (1749-1828), he was first introduced to landscape painting, as well as drawings inspired by figurative subjects, such as those in Friedrich Schiller's work *Die Räuber* (1781) (Wolf, 2023, p. 93). In 1798, after completing his studies in Copenhagen, Friedrich returned to Greifswald briefly before permanently moving to Dresden in 1799, where he never had an older mentor, "but merely himself, under the solo guidance of nature" (Alpermann *et al.,* 2024).

Figure 73 - Artistic calligraphy work signed by Caspar David Friedrich, Greifswald 01st Jan 1769



Source: Friedrich, 1769. Photography created by the auhor, 2024. Exhibition *Lebenslinien*. Pommersches Landesmuseum, Greifswald. Technique: Feather on paper.

In the capital of Saxony, Friedrich developed most of his career and lived there until the end of his days, in 1849, whe he was buried at the Trinitatisfriedhof in Dresden-Johannstadt. However, in 1806, another political event impacted the painter's life when, amid the Napoleonic Wars, French forces invaded and occupied Dresden (Wolf, 2023, p. 93). Although Saxony remained formally independent, it became a vassal state of the French Empire and joined the Confederation of the Rhine, created by Napoleon in 1806. These conflicts marked a period of turmoil and change as German states struggled to free themselves from Napoleon's domination, which spanned much of Europe. This situation fostered a German nationalist sentiment in the region (*ein erwachendes deutsches Nationalgefühl*) (Wolf, 2023, p. 28), which eventually culminated in the "*Freiheitskriege*" (Wars of Liberation) between 1813 and 1814, when Saxony

and other kingdoms united to defeat the French forces. Culturally, the Napoleonic Wars and Wars of Liberation acted as a catalyst for a wave of Romanticism in Germany. This movement valued emotion and individuality, the depth of national expression, and the contemplation of regional nature as a form of resistance.

Amid this period of "social upheaval" and "political unrest" (*sozialischer Umbruch und politische Erschütterungen*) (Bach, 2023, p. 13), Friedrich expressed his disapproval of France in works such as *Der Chasseur im Walde* (1814) and *Grabmale alter Helden (Gräber gefallener Freiheitskrieger, Grab des Arminius)* (1812). In *Der Chasseur im Walde* - arguably his most politically charged work (Wolf, 2023, p. 39) - Friedrich depicts a solitary French soldier in a dense forest landscape. The scene conveys a sense of abandonment, symbolising the isolation of French soldiers during the harsh winter and suggesting the decline of French power. The soldier, seemingly lost, is shown amidst a forest that appears to grow without interruption, evoking the myth of the impenetrable German forest, which gained strength during the Napoleonic Wars (Bertsch; Grave, 2024); soon the desolated soldier will be trapped by trees and soon even his footsteps on the snow will disappear (Wolf, 2023, p. 39). The landscape paintings of northern Germany created by him during this period - the peak of his fame - can be interpreted as nationalist manifestations (Vaughan, 1990, p. 185).

In *Grabmale alter Helden*, Friedrich represents the tombs of fictitious heroes in a rocky and barren landscape, conveying a message of homage to those who fought for freedom. The painting evokes the memory of Arminius, the Cheruscan leader who defeated the Romans in the Battle of the Teutoburg Forest in 9 AD, drawing an analogy with the freedom fighters against Napoleon, suggesting that modern liberation mirrored the heroes of antiquity (Wolf, 2023, p. 39); which could also suggest that the hope for German liberation was directly tied to the desire for a prominent leadership figure[22] (Wolf, 2023, p. 38).

Having explored the pivotal personal and social events that shaped Friedrich's life, we can now turn our attention to the wellsprings of his inspiration and the artistic creations that emerged from them. This shift allows us to delve deeper into the interplay between his lived experiences and the profound emotional and spiritual dimensions of his work. By examining the sources of his creativity, we can better understand how his art not only reflected but also transcended his time, offering a timeless meditation on nature, humanity, and the divine.

[22] In the original: "*Die Hoffnung auf die Befreiung des deutschen Volkes knüpfte sich schließlich auch an den Wunsch nach einer großen Führerpersönlichkeit*".

Figure 74 - Monument in Friedrich's honour in Dresden



Photography created by the auhor, 2023.

4.3 *Ruine Eldena im Riesengebirge* and Friedrich's Imaginary Landscapes

"Yo llevo en el cuerpo un dolor
Que no me deja respirar
Llevo en el cuerpo una condena
Que siempre me echa a caminar"[23]

Caspar David Friedrich was a wanderer, but "not a globetrotter" (*Weltenbummler*) (250 Jahre Caspar David Friedrich, 2024b) because his approach to the world did not involve a desire to explore distant cultures, places, and customs, but rather to delve into his own intimate and

[23] Song: *Desaparecido*. Composer: José Manuel Chao. Artist: Manu Chao. Album: *Clandestino*. Year: 1998. © Virgin Records.

familiar landscape. Instead of travelling to far-off lands or seeking inspiration in exotic territories, he focused on his personal experiences in Germany and around the Baltic Sea.

It is no coincidence that *Wanderer* is one of his four facets[24] highlighted in the program of festivities that celebrated the 250th anniversary of his birth in Greifswald in 2024. Since his move to Dresden, Friedrich made at least five documented trips to Greifswald (1801, 1806, 1809, 1815, and 1819) and another six to Rügen Island (1801, 1802, 1806, 1815, 1818, and 1826) (Alpermann *et al.*, 2024). The documentation of these journeys, beyond paintings and drawings, was made through letters Friedrich wrote to his friends and family. His constant communication with loved ones, along with the fact that he was often accompanied on these trips, contradicts the common belief that he was a solitary person, even antisocial (Frenssen 2024a).

On his travels, Friedrich always opted for the slowest means of transportation possible. He would reach the locations of his hikes by carriage and ship, but once there, he often chose to travel on foot (250 Jahre Caspar David Friedrich, 2024b). Another factor that contributed to this form of travel was the fact that it was only in 1835 (five years before the painter's death) that the first railway line in Germany was inaugurated, connecting Nuremberg to Fürth - a short section far from his areas of interest (Elson, 2024, p. 27).

Now is time to draw attention to the piece of art that concatenates several of his concepts and influences: *Ruine Eldena im Riesengebirge* (1830-34), one of the few works by him that are still in Greifswald. The masterwork combines a series of practices used by the Greifswalder painter throughout his career. The title itself already explains the main idea: the artist combines the ruins of the Eldena Abbey - in his hometown - with the Giant Mountains (*Riesengebirge*), a mountain range located in the European Sudetos, especially in the northern part of the Czech Republic, near Dresden, his residence place at that time.

In the centre of the image stands the central ruinous arch of Eldena Abbey, and among it is a dense forest. Behind these elements, the sunset light illuminates part of the Giant Mountains. At the edge of the woods, coming to the foreground, there is a farmhouse, and in front of it, two figures seem to chat. One of them leans on a stick, possibly a staff. By their side, a dog relaxes by the dusk while a horse rides away from the scene. Just in front of them, a swamp mirrors their image. The sky with different shades of yellow and lilac suggests a sunset,

[24] The four facets are: "*Kind aus Greifswald*" (Child from Greifswald); "*Wanderer aus Greifswald*" (Wanderer from Greifswald); "*Farbevirtuose aus Greifswald*" (Colour virtuoso from Greifswald); and "Lichtgestalt aus Greifswald" (llustrious figure from Greifswald or Icon from Greifswald) (250 Jahre Caspar David Friedrich, 2024b).

and the scene depicted could be what in German is called *Feierabend*, which, roughly speaking, is the moment of rest after the end of the work shift. The way Friedrich captures the colors of the sky at this specific time of day became a central element of his work, contributing to moments of abstraction (Alpermann *et al.*, 2024).

Until the end of his life, Friedrich always used the brush to return to the places that were familiar to him (Frenssen, 2024b), and in *Ruine Eldena im Riesengebirge*, it was no different, as if he were bidding a farewell at dusk with the Eldena Ruins as his witness, especially since this was one of his last great works.

Figure 75 - *Ruine Eldena im Riesengebirge*, Caspar David Friedrich, 1830-34



Source: Friedrich, 1830-34. Photography created by the auhor, 2023. Pommersches Landesmuseum, Greifswald. Technique: Oil on Canvas. Dimensions: 103x73cm.

This juxtaposition of elements happens not exclusively with this work in particular but also with some other of his pieces, in which the viewer can recognize fragments from different locations which are brought together by him. This recurrent Caspar's technique has received different names. Werner Hoffmann (apud Dickel, 2006, p. 21) names it "composed landscapes" (*Komposit-Landschaften*), as the artist brings different forms in order to compose an unusual landscape. Norbert Wolf (2023, p. 08) uses a similar term in German to describe Friedrich's

scenery: "*Kompositlandschaft*". Hans Dickel (2006, p. 21) calls it "artificial landscapes" (*Artifizielle Landschaften*), considering that Friedrich combines fragments from different places, creating a new one. The term "invented landscape" (Alpermann *et al.*, 2024) might also appear to describe his creations. I address Friedrich's concept as Imaginary Landscapes.

It is important to highlight that creating fictional landscapes is a conception before Friedrich, as we saw with the *capricci*, for instance. However, to grasp the idea of an imaginary landscape, we must first take a closer look at what a landscape is - or is not. Georg Simmel (2009, p. 05) says we are not yet beholding a landscape when we see trees, water streams, meadows, houses, and similar elements. A landscape is not also "a piece of nature" (*ein Stück Natur*) (Simmel, 2009, p. 06) because such an idea is a contradiction of itself, as nature has no pieces, it is the "unity of a whole" (*die Einheit eines Ganzen*) (2009, p. 06). The notion of unity is fundamental to Simmel's thinking; we only have a landscape when we understand our unity with nature; a landscape is "configuration unity of all its individual elements, as one" (Simmel, 2009, p. 17). Moreover, the author affirms (Simmel, 2009, p. 17) that artists are the persons who can integrally absorb the material provided by nature and recreate it as if it were part of him or her.

Caspar David Friedrich is an artist with this understanding of capturing nature as it is and giving back after processing it in concordance with his perspective. As already mentioned, Friedrich's environment and personal events had a significant portion of melancholy. So when he puts his perceptions of nature back on a canvas, he dramatically does that, attesting that he is painting an authentic landscape, according to Simmel. The French sculptor David d'Angers[25] had this sensation when he got in touch with Caspar David's artistic production: "finally an artist who found out the tragedy of the landscape". Friedrich's landscapes may initially seem unnatural. However, as soon as we notice their unity within themselves, we start to feel their naturalness; their work is naturally unnatural. His combination of techniques results in a "hypnotic effect" (Vaughan, 1990, p. 183). His contemplative approach to accessing nature was greatly influenced by the rise of German philosophy, particularly the thought of Kant and transcendentalism (Vaughan, 1990, p. 183).

He does not depict nature in a conventional "romantic standard" (Wolf, 2023, p. 09), on the contrary, the illusions and simulations of the natural world that he paints present many times an unpleasant aspect. "Nothing could be more sad and unsettling" declared Heinrich von Kleist (1985, p. 327) upon seeing the first public exhibition of Friedrich's *Der Mönch am Meer* in

[25] "Sonnenaufgang bei Neubrandenburg", Hamburg Kunsthalle, Verlagsnummer 8168.

1810. Although it is possible to notice the layers of natural beauty in his paintings, some of his works seem to represent a constant friction with human existence. Yet, this conflict between humanity/natural does not create a detachment of humans from nature. Instead, they carry an affective relationship. The discomfort that it might bring, through representations of nature that could be unpalatable at first sight, confronts our condition. His artworks bring together "romantic introversion" (*romantische Introvertiertheit*) and "isolated subjectivity" (*isolierte Subjektivität*) (Wolf, 2023, p. 09).

The idea of unity mentioned above does not necessarily need to be literal; it could be metaphorical or affective. In *Ruine Eldena im Riesengebirge*, Friedrich gathers all these possibilities and expresses nature as the unity of diversity. The ruins of the Eldena Abbey are a recurrent motif in Caspar David's production. It appears in some of his most notorious works, and in his sketchbooks; the displacement from its original location and the positioning in a new space contribute to creating more imagined views.

The constant reference to one of the symbols of his hometown could be understood as a manifestation of *Heimweh*. A German compound word formed by the terms *Heimat* and "*Weh*". *Heimat* comes from the Germanic word *haima* and means village (*Dorf*) or home (*Haus*), and is attributed to the Indo-Germanic term *kei*, meaning place of residence (*Wohnsitz*) or also trust (*Traut)* (Frenssen, 2024b).

In my first German course, I learned that *Heimat* means "homeland" or "fatherland". Indeed, the word can be translated and understood this way in some contexts, but its meaning is more complex and abstract. *Heimat* refers to a "part of the world" (*Weltausschnitt*) that has become part of our personal history and identity (Rosa, 2016, p. 602). Thus, *Heimat* is not necessarily a country, a federal state, or a city; it can be "anywhere in the world" (*irgendwo auf der Welt*) (Rosa, 2016, p. 602). Schools, parks, coffee shops, art festivals, libraries, workplaces - anything can be *Heimat*.

Ralf Elfering, head coach of the boxing department at Hamburg's famous St. Pauli sport club, refers to the club's gym as his *Heimat*. During a training session I attended with him in 2024, the place was undergoing renovations, and the activities were being held at the Amateur Boxing League gym in Hamburg. "This place is nice, but it's not our *Heimat*," he told me. This is just one example of the subjective and emotional use of the word.

Meanwhile, "*Weh*" means pain, specifically in the sense of physical pain. The verb "*wehen*" can be translated as both "to hurt" and "to have contractions," such as those during childbirth. Additionally, it can also mean "to blow" or "to wave" (as in the movement of wind or something gently moving through the air). Its figurative use is tied to the idea of something

that “comes from within”. At first glance, *Heimweh* can be literally translated as pain or something uncontrollable (like contractions, a pain that comes from the inside) caused by not being at home, or perhaps more simply, as “homesickness”.

Nonetheless, the term is part of a series of particular expressions for patriotic longing or homesickness which appeared in the romantic period (Boym, 2001, p. 22). These words were created by intellectuals and poets from different languages and are usually proudly untranslatable (Boym, 2001, p. 22). To mention a few, in French, it would be *maladie du pay*; in Czech, *litost*; in Russian, *toska*; while Brazilians and Portuguese have the word *saudade*[26] (Boym, 2001, p.22). The former can assume diverse meanings in rapport with the context; however, it brings a feeling of incompleteness or a desire for someone or something that is not momentarily or permanently accessible.

Still, the German variant has a particularity: it has an antonym, *Fernweh*. If *Heimweh* is the desire to go back home, *Fernweh* is the urge to travel or to be distant (*Fern*). *Fernweh* can also represent a longing to be in a place beyond one’s own world, such as a promised land (*verheißener Ort*) (Rosa, 2016, p. 606). Both sensations can coexist, showcasing the beauty and complexity of human emotions; one does not negate the other’s presence. One can be “homesick and sick of home, at once” (Boym, 2001, p. 51). The German pair carries a nostalgic weight, where *Heimweh* represents longing for a time or place in the past, something familiar and therefore safe; while *Fernweh* evokes a nostalgic feeling for something that has not yet happened, for a new and unknown place where the promise of a different life might be fulfilled.

Even while living among the Sudeto’s mountains, Friedrich never left the remembrance of Greifswald and the Baltic Sea behind. Carrying the symbolic components always with him was, presumably, a form to relieve this feeling of missing home. In his life context, the abbey ruins may symbolise his traumatic memories or our existence that slowly fades away through time. However, this remains speculative, and Friedrich’s intentions behind their inclusion will likely remain unknown. At the same time, the mountains and elements observed during his long walks in nature may represent his willingness to travel and always be in movement, as if he had simultaneously *Heimweh* and *Fernweh.* This complex overlapping of feelings can be noted in a letter written by Friedrich in 1816 and addressed to Lund, his fellow student in Copenhagen, where he says: “I can now well imagine travelling to Rome and living there. But I could not

[26] The word “*saudade*” exists in the Portuguese language both in Portugal and its former colonies. However, in the former metropole and other former ex-colonies, the term is often used in a more straightforward manner, not necessarily carrying the profound emotional tone it sometimes assumes in Brazil. For instance, it is common to hear, “Manda saudades ao teu pai” (*Say “saudades” to your father*) (meaning “regards” or “greetings”). In Brazil, *saudade* is typically imbued with greater emotion, expressing a more intense feeling of longing or absence.

imagine travelling back north from there without shuddering; to my mind that would be like burying me alive" (Friedrich in: Grave; Kuhlmann-Hodick; Rößler, 2023).

His evocative depictions of his homeland in northern Germany, amidst the end of the Swedish occupation and the Wars of Liberation, and his celebration of local nature secured Friedrich a prominent place among the names of German Romantic artists. In times of crisis - "whether cultural, political, or related to his health - Greifswald remained Friedrich's refuge" (Frenssen, 2024b). His imaginary landscapes have inspired different generations of artists, painters, printmakers, photographers and filmmakers; and the way he transmits his unity to nature is unparalleled.

Among the items that Friedrich carried on his travels, one was indispensable: a sketchbook. Throughout his career, the painter had numerous sketchbooks, the most famous of which was called *The Small Mannheim Sketchbook*, produced between 1800 and 1801, which accompanied him on his travels to Greifswald and the island of Rügen in the summer of 1801. Unfortunately, this and many other sketchbooks were dismantled after his death, and their pages were sold separately. However, six sketchbooks remain intact (Alpermann *et al.*, 2024). In the winter of 2023, one of these sketchbooks, the *Karlsruher Skizzenbuch*, dated 1804, with 20 sheets and 33 pages, was auctioned by the Grisebach auction house in Berlin[27]. One of the auction's requirements was that, regardless of the buyer, the sketchbook could not be kept outside Germany. The volume was sold for around 1.5 million euros. Only in 2024 was the buyer's identity revealed: a consortium between the museum authorities of Berlin, Dresden, and Wismar, ensuring that the sketchbook is part of all three collections simultaneously[28].

Although during his studies in Copenhagen, Caspar David Friedrich primarily focused on reproducing human figures, he did not enjoy this practice. Whenever possible, he would take short trips (*Ausflüge*) around the Danish capital to make watercolours and drawings of local landscapes (Elson, 2024, p. 33).

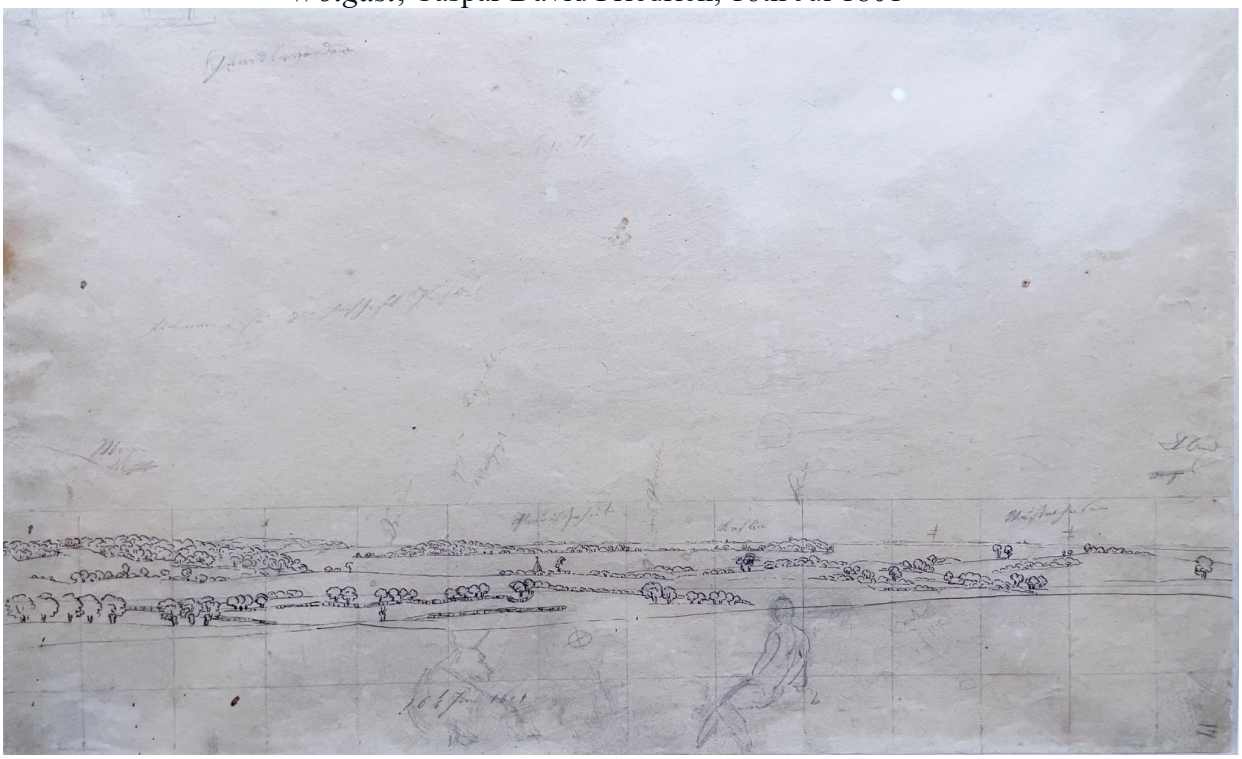
Since then, Friedrich has often used his sketchbooks to capture the nature around him, and these studies were essential for developing his future works. During his travels, he meticulously recorded the landscapes he observed, including trees, rock formations, and mountainous and coastal landscapes (Alpermann *et al.*, 2024). These sketches were an indispensable part of his journeys, allowing him to document his impressions of nature accurately. This careful observation and detailed recording process revealed Friedrich's

[27] To see: <https://cdf.grisebach.com/>.
[28] To see: <https://www.theartnewspaper.com/2024/07/12/rare-caspar-david-friedrich-sketchbook-jointly-acquired-by-berlin-dresden-and-weimar-museums>

commitment to fidelity to nature, which he believed was fundamental for creating authentic and evocative art (Alpermann *et al.*, 2024).

Friedrich's dedication to his craft was evident in the meticulous techniques he used in his sketchbooks. He employed pencil sketches, often refined with pen and ink to create more detailed lines, and shading with brown-toned washes to give objects a sense of depth. In some cases, he added shading through hatching to enhance the representation of light and shadow, capturing the complexity of the natural elements he saw. This attention to detail was not just a technicality but a way to transform his observations into complete compositions, which often combined various elements from different places into a single painting, following his internal vision of an idealised or imagined landscape.

Figure 76 - *Blick von der Südküste Rügens über die Insel Vilm nach Wusterhusen, Kröslin und Wolgast*, Caspar David Friedrich, 16th Jul 1801



Source: Friedrich, 1801. Photography created by the auhor, 2024. Exhibition *Caspar David Friedrich - Wo alles begann*, SKD Dresden. Technique: Pencil and pen on paper.

Some of Friedrich's drawings were practically topographic studies. He made detailed notes about the characteristics of the landscapes, including the names of distant places he could see, which gave them an almost cartographic accuracy (Alpermann *et al.*, 2024). These topographic studies helped him paint the landscape's field depth with exactitude; once he crafted this ability, he never lost it (Vaughan, 1990, 184). This practice demonstrates how

observing nature was not only a source of inspiration for Friedrich but also a means to connect deeply with the environment, conveying the appearance and spirit of the place in his future paintings. That is why Greifswald, the Baltic Sea, and Rügen play such a significant role in his work, while Dresden plays a lesser one (Illies, 2024, p. 18).

Returning to *Ruine Eldena im Riesengebirge*, in the lower left corner, one can notice a dry tree branch, a recurring element in the painter's sketchbooks. There is a gap of over thirty years between the creation of this work and the artist's early sketchbooks. In this case, it is possible that Friedrich brought elements from different locations into the same landscape and different periods, characterising both the idea of an imaginary landscape and the concept of landscape unity, as proposed by Simmel.

Figure 77 - Detail of *Ruine Eldena im Riesengebirge*, Caspar David Friedrich, 1830-34



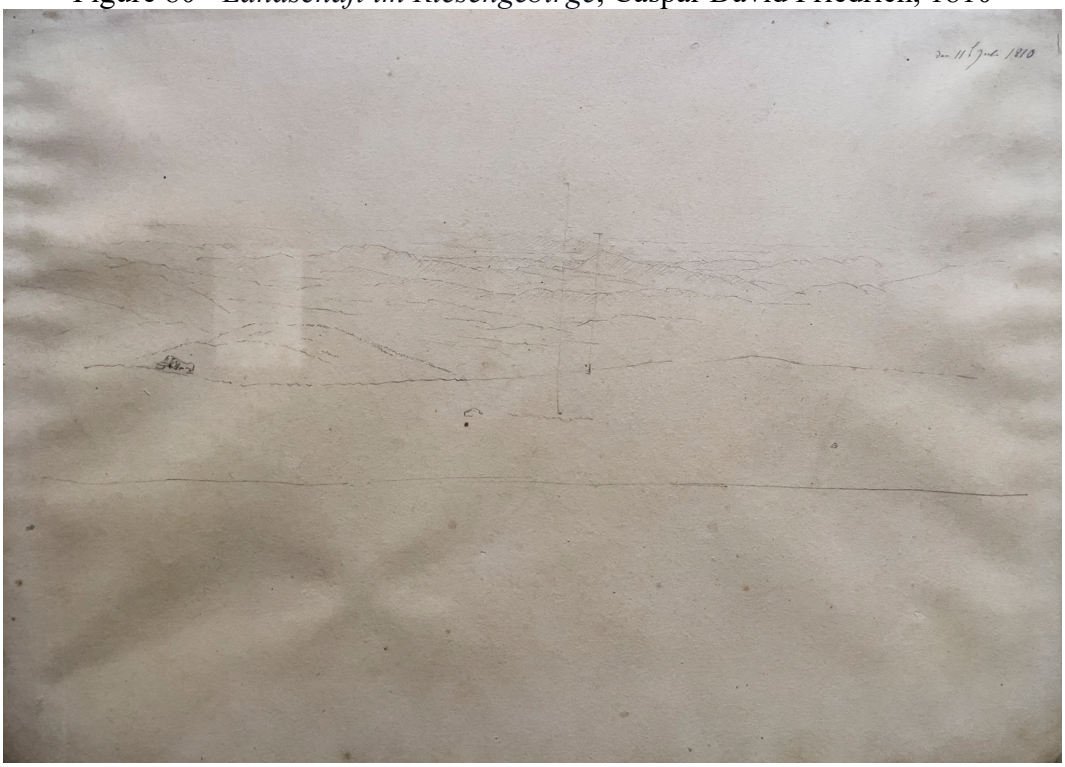
Source: Friedrich, 1830-34. Photography created by the auhor, 2023. Pommersches Landesmuseum, Greifswald. Technique: Oil on Canvas. Dimensions: 103x73cm.

Figures 78 and 79 - From left to right: *Studie einer Weide, Studie zweier Äste*,18th Apr and 2nd Jun 1809; *Brench studies*, 15th May 1801, Caspar David Friedrich



Source: Friedrich, 1801 e 1809. Photography created by the auhor, 2023. Exhibition *Caspar David Friedrich - Wo alles begann*, SKD Dresden.

Figure 80 - *Landschaft im Riesengebirge*, Caspar David Friedrich, 1810



Source: Friedrich, 1810. Photography created by the auhor, 2023. Exhibition *Caspar David Friedrich - Wo alles begann*, SKD Dresden. Technique: Pencil on paper.

His sketchbooks also provide other clues about the creative process behind the painting we are observing. In *Landschaft im Riesengebirge*, a pencil drawing on woven paper dated July 11, 1810, Friedrich sketched the outline of one of the views of the Schneekoppe mountain, part of the Giant Mountains. Horizontal lines delimit the top and bottom of the representation, giving it the character of a panoramic landscape. Vertical lines in the foreground helped Friedrich visualise the height of a person at a specific point in the landscape (Alpermann *et al.*, 2024). Considering that in *Ruine Eldena im Riesengebirge*, there are two human figures at the foot of the Giant Mountains range, it is possible that this sketch assisted the artist in composing - or imagining - the final landscape.

In another work titled *Landschaft mit Weinbergstor (vermutlich bei Dölzschen)*, a pencil and watercolour drawing on wove paper dated October 1824, Friedrich depicts the entrance gate of a vineyard in the Dölzschen district, in the surrounds of Dresden, from a perspective very similar to that of the Eldena ruins in the work we have discussed so far. With its square structure, the gate occupies the centre of the image, with a lake in front of it. On the left side of the drawing, a human figure leans on a kind of staff, another similarity with *Ruine Eldena im Riesengebirge*. This person could also be a traveller or a wanderer, like the painter himself, another recurring character in his paintings.

Figure 81 - *Landschaft mit Weinbergstor (vermutlich bei Dölzschen)*, Caspar David Friedrich, 1824



Source: Friedrich, 1824. Photography created by the auhor, 2024. Exhibition *Caspar David Friedrich - Wo alles begann*, SKD Dresden. Technique: Watercolour.

The two drawings mentioned above have a fourteen-year gap between them, and there is a twenty-year interval from the oldest to the beginning of the creation of "*Ruine Eldena im Riesengebirge*". It is possible that during this time, Friedrich matured this imaginary landscape that combines Greifswald with Dresden, but at the same time, it is no longer either of these two cities; instead, it is a place that cannot be located in the real world, only in the artist's imagination.

4.4 *Abtei im Eichwald* and Friedrich's Mystik Themes

The coastal atmosphere of Greifswald, the rocky cliffs of Rügen, and the ruins of Eldena Abbey accompanied Friedrich throughout his life. However, the ruins of the religious temple that gave rise to the artist's hometown were not the first to be depicted by him. 1797, during his studies in Copenhagen, the painter created the oil on canvas *Landschaft mit Tempelruine*. The painting depicts a serene landscape with a classical Roman temple in ruins by the edge of a lake in the foreground. At the foot of the ruin, three tiny figures - probably wanderers - are represented in contrast to the vastness of the landscape (Feeltheart, [20--]).

Figure 82 - *Ruine, Kirche und Häuser in Tharandt*,
Caspar David Friedrich, ca. 1799



Source: Friedrich, ca. 1799. Photography created by the auhor, 2024. Exhibition *Caspar David Friedrich - Wo alles begann*, SKD Dresden. Technique: Pen and ink, wash, pencil, scoring on laid paper.

In 1799, a year after his move to Dresden, Friedrich undertook a three-hour walk southwest of the Saxon capital until he reached the Tharandt region, where he found a ruined local church (or a castle), which he documented in one of his sketchbooks with pencil and pen. Regarding this experience, Friedrich (in: Frenssen, 2024a) wrote: “The church there, the pointed tower [...] Very firmly built, on rocky ground [...] probably indicating the significance of religion as it teaches…”.

One of the first appearances of the Eldena Abbey ruins in Caspar David’s work (although it seems too bold to definitively state which was the first) was in *Klosterruine von Eldena*, dated from 05 Mai 1801, an observation drawing with feather, pen and pencil. Later on, he created *Ruine Eldena mit Begräbnis*, brush in ink over pencil, on wove paper, created between 1802 and 1803. In the work, the artist displaces the monastery ruins to an imaginary landscape, an open field with uneven terrain, different from the flat coast of Greifswald. On the right side of the image, we see a small funeral procession passing through a ruined gate and heading towards the cemetery around the ruins. Closer to the centre, a lone devotee kneels at the foot of a cross, which appears slightly disproportionate compared to the image of Christ.

> While other highly symbolic pictorial elements, such as the dead tree, the grave crosses, the urn, the sarcophagus, and the scene of the funeral procession are reminders of the transience of all existence, the floodlit adoration of the cross symbolises Christ’s resurrection and hope (Alpermann *et al.*, 2024).

The cloudy sky and the absence of other visible buildings in the surroundings enhance the dramatic atmosphere of the scene.

A few years later, Friedrich once again turned to the monastery ruins to create another imaginary landscape in the work *Abtei im Eichwald* (1809-10), where once again a funeral procession takes place with the ancient temple as the setting. Here he transposes the ruins of the Eldena Abbey anew, this time to an oak forest amidst the winter. The central arch stands omnipotent right in the middle of the picture; on this occasion, it still has its stained glass frame; the glasses are already gone. The construction lies among some giant oaks which look like phantasmagorical figures in contrast with the pale twilight sky. The area appears to be a cemetery with overturned graves covered by the snow.

Figure 83 - *Ruine Eldena mit Begräbnis*,
Caspar David Friedrich, 1802-03



Source: Friedrich, 1802-03. Photography created by the auhor, 2024. Exhibition *Caspar David Friedrich - Wo alles begann*, SKD Dresden. Technique: Pen and ink, wash, pencil, scoring on laid paper. Dimensions: 15,5x21,9cm.

The nocturnal ambience has some other gloomy elements, such as the cortege of monks carrying a coffin and entering the temple. Inside, the main hall is illuminated by candles, creating a space that arouses an estrangement in the viewer; after all, this inner place does not seem to exist along the ruin, especially when we know more about the edifice. The principal nave was located on the opposite side. The arch the monks are walking through was one of the church's entrances.

Thus, Friedrich creates a hall that was initially the outside of the building. In this sense, the arch would be like a portal to an inexistent place, or would it be a gate to another world? On the floor, near the priests, we can see an open tomb, possibly awaiting the coffin after the ceremony that is about to happen. The artist stimulates the observer's mind to imagine what comes next, reinforcing the cinematographic aspect of the scene. In 1821, even before the advent of cinema, Ernst Ferdinand Oehme commented that the scene created by Friedrich seemed to have been meant to be viewed through a telephoto lens (Wolf, 2023, p. 34), given the amount of detail in the more distant planes of the image. Under a cold mist, Friedrich creates

a ruinous atmosphere that is mysterious and has a supernatural inclination. An audience used to the cinema language could mentally compose this ritual's soundtrack.

Abtei im Eichwald carries a "negative beauty" (*negative Schönheit*) and a "conscious monotony" (*bewusste Eintönigkeit*) in its composition (Wolf, 2023, p. 34), creating a unique atmosphere that simultaneously promotes proximity to and distance from nature (Wolf, 2023, p. 34).

Figure 84 - *Abtei im Eichwald*, Caspar David Friedrich, 1809-10



Source: Friedrich, 1809-10. Photography created by the auhor, 2021. Alte Nationalgalerie, Berlin.
Technique: Oil on Canvas. Dimensions: 110x171cm.

The winter scene in *Abtei im Eichwald* is enveloped in a cold mist, enhancing the sense of isolation and abandonment. Friedrich masterfully uses this setting to evoke a ruinous atmosphere that borders on the supernatural. The mist not only obscures but also adds a layer of mystery, suggesting that what lies beyond is subject to the imagination and interpretation of the viewer. This mystical inclination suggests contemplation of the metaphysical, urging the viewer to consider the ruins as physical remnants and gateways to transcendental experiences.

The creation of a gloomy atmosphere is not something isolated in Friedrich's imaginary landscapes. The sculptor and painter Adrian Ludwig Richter (in: Wolf, 2023, p. 08) stated that

the artist from Greifswald, year after year, was increasingly immersed in the mystical mist and that "nothing for him is nebulous and mysterious enough". It is no wonder that Friedrich was nicknamed "the mystic with the brush" (*der Mystiker mit dem Pinsel*) by the Swedish poet Per Daniel Amadeus Atterbom (Wolf, 2023, p. 07).

Figure 85 - Detail of *Abtei im Eichwald*, Caspar David Friedrich, 1809-10



Source: Friedrich, 1809-10. Photography created by the auhor, 2021. Alte Nationalgalerie, Berlin.
Technique: Oil on Canvas. Dimensions: 110x171cm.

Friedrich's religious upbringing, born into a traditional Lutheran family, had a strong influence on his artistic production. His Christian faith and his "intensive devotion to nature" (*intensive Naturandacht*) (Wolf, 2023, p. 19) were key to ensuring that his works conveyed an "elevation of the spirit" (*Erhebung des Geistes*) and a "religious uplift" (*religiöse Aufschwung*) (Wolf, 2023, p. 19). This profound intertwining of faith and nature allowed Friedrich to create landscapes that were simultaneously aesthetically striking and imbued with deep spiritual symbolism, inviting viewers to contemplate the divine through the beauty of the natural world. His choice of elements, such as ruins and vast open skies, often served as metaphors for the impermanence of human life and the hope for eternal salvation.

The interplay between life and death accompanied Friedrich throughout almost his entire artistic career. Although in some works, such as *Abtei im Eichwald*, the artist evokes a somewhat morbid atmosphere, this should not necessarily be seen as something negative. As

Novalis (in: WOLF, 2023, p. 12) states: “death is the most romantic principle of our life. Death is life. Through death, life is strengthened”. Thus, it would not be fair to say that Friedrich resorts to death and funeral themes as an act of despair towards life, but rather as a form of meditation - or even celebration - on the transience of existence and the hope for renewal and spiritual transcendence. His approach to death often demonstrate a search for meaning beyond the material world, evoking the possibility of redemption and the elevation of the soul through a connection with the divine and nature, which are crucial elements of the Christian faith.

Still on Friedrich’s representations of religious processions, I would like to highlight the brush in ink, pencil on wove paper work titled *Wallfahrt bei Sonnenuntergang*, created between 1804 and 1805. This piece depicts a group of pilgrims at sunset, set against a serene natural backdrop. The delicate details of the figures, combined with the dynamic brushstrokes used to create the natural surroundings, suggest both the humility of the individuals and the grandeur of their journey. The setting sun illuminates the scene with a golden glow, symbolising spiritual enlightenment and a divine presence guiding the way. In the composition, nature takes on the role of a “sacred space” (*Sakralraums*) (Wolf, 2023, p. 22).

Figure 86 - *Wallfahrt bei Sonnenuntergang*, Caspar David Friedrich, ca. 1804-05



Source: Friedrich, ca. 1804-05. Source: Friedrich, 1809-10. Photography created by the auhor, 2024. Exhibition *Caspar David Friedrich - Wo alles begann*, SKD Dresden. Technique: Pen and ink, wash, pencil, scoring on laid paper.

This work's atmospheric effect and the depiction of a spiritual journey through nature may have influenced Adrian Ludwig Oehme's *Prozession im Nebel*, discussed in the previous chapter. Oehme appears to draw inspiration from Friedrich's use of light and atmosphere, translating it into his vision with the addition of mist to create an even greater sense of mystery and depth. The portrayal of figures moving through an expansive landscape in *Wallfahrt bei Sonnenuntergang* resonates with Oehme's attempts to convey the spiritual significance of a journey, emphasising the profound connection between the human experience and the sublime forces of nature.

4.5 *Klosterruine Eldena bei Greifswald*

We have already seen that the ruins of Eldena are a "guiding theme" or "recurring theme" (*Leitmotiv*) (Wolf, 2023, p. 19) in Friedrich's work. Through his art, the structure became one of the most famous symbols of Greifswald (Greifswald, [20--]c) and is now part of the European Route of Brick Gothic (*Europäische Route der Backsteingotik*), a cultural and tourist route that connects cities and buildings in the Baltic Sea region, showcasing significant examples of Gothic brick architecture from the mediaeval period, mainly built between the 13th and 15th centuries, highlighting the influence of the Hanseatic League and the use of red masonry in the construction of churches, monasteries, and public buildings.

The reverence with which Friedrich treated the ruins of the old abbey also inspired architect Karl-Friedrich Schinkel and landscape architect Peter Joseph Lenné to visit the site. Painter Carl Gustav Carus, a personal friend and biographer of Friedrich, also honored the ruins in his work *Ruine Eldena mit Hütte bei Greifswald im Mondschein* (Ruins of Eldena with Cottage near Greifswald in Moonlight), from 1819. Inspired by Friedrich's work, early efforts at preserving German monuments focused on this important complex. The ruins of Eldena Abbey owe their international fame to this fact (Greifswald, [20--]c). Today, the ruined complex hosts cultural activities that are part of Greifswald's permanent calendar, such as the *Eldanaer Klostermarkt*, an event that gathers more than 80 exhibitors, including artisans and local vendors, offering products like ceramics, wooden crafts, and artistic performances typical of the medieval period; and the *Eldenaer Jazz Evenings*, a music festival featuring prominent names in German jazz and neighboring countries. Together, these two events annually attract more than 20,000 visitors to the ruins (Greifswald, [20--]c).

Figure 87 - *Eldanaer Klostermarkt*, 2024



Photography created by the auhor, 2024.

Returning to Caspar David Friedrich's relationship with the monastery of Eldena, its ruins appear in works such as *Ruine Eldena*, pencil and watercolour, ca. 1825; *Westfassade der Ruine Eldena mit Backhaus und Scheune*, also known as *Ruine Eldena bei Nacht*, oil on canvas, 1806; *Winter (Eldena Abbey bei Greifswald)*, sepia, 1803; *Mönch im Schnee*, oil on canvas, 1807-08, destroyed during a fire at the Neue Pinakothek in Munich in 1931; and *Ruine der Abtei Eldena bei Greifswald von Osten*, watercolour, pen and ink over pencil on wove paper, dated March 17, 1836. It is on this last work that we will focus.

In this composition, Friedrich depicts the ruins using a framing that we have seen in the previous works, with the point of view of someone standing inside the structure, looking out at its grand main arch still standing. The soft colours and diffuse light emphasise the serene atmosphere of the scene. The work is divided into two main parts: the monumental ruins occupying the right side of the composition and a more straightforward structure - possibly a barn or rural house - located on the left, using the ruin itself as a supporting structure. The empty arch of the former Cistercian monastery can be interpreted as a symbol of the sacred space now

claimed by nature and everyday life. With their utilitarian character, the inclusion of wooden and straw structures reinforces the idea that the sacred and the profane coexist in this setting.

Figure 88 - *Ruine der Abtei Eldena bei Greifswald von Osten*, Caspar David Friedrich, 1836



Source: Friedrich, 1836. Photography created by the auhor, 2024. Exhibition *Caspar David Friedrich - Wo alles begann*, SKD Dresden. Technique: Watercolour, pen and ink on paper.

Although the work is signed and dated by Friedrich himself, the watercolour is the result of an earlier study by the artist from 1801 (Alpermann *et al.,* 2024). Despite no writing from the artist or his close circle, it does not seem exaggerated to say that this 1801 drawing served as the basis for *Klosterruine Eldena bei Greifswald* (1825). Or even the aforementioned sepia drawing *Winter*, from 1803, might have served as a study or inspiration for it (Vogel, [20--]). Here, the artist once again presents the ruins of Eldena Abbey, transposing them to an imaginary setting. The arrangement of the columns and structures is similar to the original design, but the former church is entirely overtaken by nature. The remaining pillars lie among trees, which are as tall as the structure and take on a monumental aspect in this massive temple of nature.

Figure 89 - *Klosterruine Eldena bei Greifswald*, Caspar David Friedrich, 1825



Source: Friedrich, 1825. Photography created by the auhor, 2021. Staatliche Museen zu Berlin.
Technique: Oil on Canvas. Dimensions: 35x49cm.

In front of the enormous wall is a farmhouse, very similar to that in the watercolour, using the massive arch as a supporting structure. The smoke coming out of the chimney indicates that the oven or heating fire is burning. Near the house, two figures appear to be talking to each other - it could be a lunch break or *Feierabend*. Although most trees are still green, some yellow leaves and dry twigs indicate that autumn is approaching. The seasons will come and go, but Friedrich suggests that the ruins will remain for a long time, and with each new cycle, they will become increasingly a part of nature. For Friedrich, the poverty of the building served as a symbol of the impoverished present, contrasting with the imposing relics of the religious Middle Ages (Vogel, [20--]).

By transporting the ruins from the Baltic Sea coast to a dense forest, Friedrich displaces them to another temporality (Gervilla, 2022, p. 54), where actions unfold at their own rhythm, indicated by the patinas of time on the structures of the ruined monastery.

Abtei im Eichwald and *Klosterruine Eldena bei Greifswald* may at first glance seem like opposing paintings[29]: the former, painted on a larger scale compared to the latter, depicts a funeral scene shrouded in mist within a forest of dry oaks, under a pale winter moonlight, highlighted by the haze; whereas the latter shows abundant vegetation and a clear blue sky. However, rather than stating that they are opposites, it seems more reasonable to say that they are complementary as they explore the theme of transience and the connection between the sacred and the natural, albeit in different ways. Where *Abtei im Eichwald* presents desolation and the cycle of death and rebirth through a sombre and introspective setting, *Klosterruine Eldena bei Greifswald* reveals the possibility of renewal and hope, expressed through the lushness of nature surrounding the ruins. Together, they transcend a dualistic view of existence - life and death, the sacred and the mundane - unified by the passage of time and the influence of nature on human creations, exploring themes of mortality and humanity's spiritual journey, creating new imaginary landscapes connected by the monumental ruins.

4.6 The Oybin Ruins

Although the ruins of Eldena occupy a special place in Caspar David Friedrich's work, they were not the only structures of this kind used by the artist to compose his imaginary landscapes. We have already mentioned the ruins of Tharandt, for example. Ruined structures in the villages of Altzella and Meißen, both near Dresden, were also observed by the painter and meticulously documented in his sketchbooks. However, there is another significant ruinous location in his body of work: the old monastery in Oybin, a small German town bordering the Czech Republic, in the Zittau Mountains of Upper Lusatia. In the early 14th century, the city's former fortifications were expanded, and the place became a crucial castle due to its privileged position; within its walls, the Monastery Oybin, or of the Order of the Celestines, was safe. Ironically, religious activities ceased not because of external factors but due to the Reformation, much like the Eldena Abbey in Greifswald. For centuries, the site was ruled by nature. Today, the complex is one of the region's major tourist attractions, and from time to time, the central nave of the monastery's church hosts cultural events. Around 1810, Friedrich visited the old

[29] According to Norbert Wolf (2023, p. 34), *Abtei im Eichwald* is the counterpart (*Gegenstück*) to *Der Mönch am Meer* (1808-10), which presents a minimalist and sombre landscape, where a solitary monk contemplates the infinite vastness of the sea under a cloudy sky, evoking feelings of solitude and insignificance in the face of nature. In contrast, *Abtei im Eichwald*, suggests the mystery of the beyond and a "Religion of Nature" (*Naturreligion*) characteristic of early mediaeval Christianity.Not surprisingly, both paintings have almost always been displayed side by side since 1810, and they are currently exhibited this way at the Alte Nationalgalerie in Berlin.

temple and documented it in one of his sketchbooks. It is not possible to determine exactly when and how many times he was at the location. A first study of the church by drawing with pencil over paper and then watercolour dates from 04 July 1810.

Figure 90 - *Klosterruine auf dem Oybin*, Caspar David Friedrich, 1810



Source: Friedrich, 1810. Photography created by the auhor, 2024 Hamburger Kunsthalle.
Technique: Watercolour over pencil. Dimensions: 25x36cm.

Circa 1812 Friedrichs painted *Ruine Oybin*. The painting shows the church's main altar already covered by green vegetation; behind it, three big stained glass windows are gone, and we see the pale sunlight entering them. The roof has fallen, and the structures are entirely exposed to nature, while the grass is all over the ground. On the viewer's right side is a white sculpture, possibly in marble, of Mary holding the baby Jesus in one of the columns. Just across her, on the other column, lies a crucifix with Jesus already crucified, as if the mother and her child were looking at the future. The vegetation growing on the column has reached the religious piece, and nature will soon completely retake it. The patinas of time have converted the catholic temple into a temple of nature. Religious iconography amidst the encroaching vegetation further enriches the narrative, suggesting a meditation on faith, impermanence, and the cyclical nature of life and death.

Figure 91 - *Ruine Oybin*, Caspar David Friedrich, ca. 1810



Source: Friedrich, ca. 1810. Photography created by the auhor, 2023. Kunsthalle Hamburg.
Technique: Oil on Canvas. Dimensions: 65x47cm.

Friedrich's desire for political and religious renewal *(religiöse und politische Erneuerungswünsche*) never left him (Wolf, 2023, p.61). To express these aspirations, the artist turned again to the ruins of Oybin in 1823-24 when creating the painting *Huttens Grab*. This oil painting depicts the grave of Ulrich von Hutten, a prominent figure of the German Renaissance known for his outspoken advocacy of humanism and reform. Beside Hutten's

grave, a figure, possibly in the uniform of the Lützow Free Corps[30], stands in contemplation, likely paying homage to Hutten's memory and ideals of resistance against oppression.

Friedrich created this painting during the period of the Restoration (1815-1848), a time in European history when the Congress of Vienna attempted to re-establish conservative monarchies following the defeat of Napoleon. During this era, liberal movements and nationalist aspirations were frequently suppressed by conservative forces. Friedrich's work reflects his opposition to this reactionary period and his support for freedom and progress (Alpermann *et al.*, 2024).

The painting includes other notable names inscribed on the monument, such as Friedrich Ludwig Jahn, Ernst Moritz Arndt, Karl Freiherr vom und zum Stein, and Joseph von Görres. These individuals were key figures in German cultural and political life. Jahn, for example, was known as the "father of gymnastics" (because he created some sport segments) and a nationalist figure, while Arndt and Görres were influential writers and advocates of German unification. During the Greek War of Independence (1821-1829), which sought Greece's liberation from Ottoman rule, many Germans, including those mentioned, supported the cause, and some even volunteered to fight alongside the Greeks, inspired by the ideals of liberty and independence.

Friedrich intended that the proceeds from the sale of *Huttens Grab* be donated to support the Greek Revolution, highlighting his solidarity with the Greek struggle for freedom (Alpermann *et al.*, 2024). The inclusion of the Oybin church, along with the monument listing these notable figures, serves to emphasise Friedrich's vision of a shared heritage of resistance, his hopes for future societal renewal and the ideals of the Liberation Wars (Wolf, 2023, p.61). Nature is shown reclaiming the grave, symbolising both decay and the enduring spirit of these ideals, suggesting a deep connection between history, human principles, and the natural world.

In 2024, the painting inspired the Icelandic-Danish artist Ólafur Elíasson to create the work *Fenster der Gemeinschaft*, a permanent stained glass installation at St. Nikolai Cathedral in Greifswald, commemorating the 250th anniversary of Friedrich's birth. According to Elíasson (2024, p. 168), Friedrich created a sacred place, both for those who observe it from within and from outside. The colour palette of the painting also inspired the artist in creating the stained glass.

[30] The Lützow Free Corps (*Lützowsches Freikorps*) was a voluntary military unit formed during the Wars of Liberation against Napoleonic rule (1813-1815) under the command of Ludwig von Lützow. Composed mainly of students, academics, artists, and patriotic civilians, the corps was known for its black uniforms with red and gold details, colours that later inspired the German flag. The group symbolised the nationalist and liberal spirit of the time, and many of its members became icons of the struggle for German unity and freedom.

Figure 92 - *Huttens Grab*, Caspar David Friedrich, 1823-24



Source: Friedrich, 1823-24. Photography created by the auhor, 2024. *Caspar David Friedrich - Wo alles begann*, SKD Dresden. Technique: Oil on canvas. Dimensions: 73x93cm.

4.7 Ruined Cemeteries

Graves, tombs, and funerary monuments also play a significant role in Caspar David Friedrich's imagined landscapes, as these elements are present in many of the works we have seen so far. One justification for this is the fact that his life was marked by war conflicts and their consequences, such as food shortages and lack of medical care (Alpermann *et al.*, 2024). Death was an omnipresent force in his days, and new cemeteries were quickly established as burial spaces were insufficient (Alpermann *et al.*, 2024).

However, Friedrich's cemeteries and tombs rarely seem orderly. Semi-destroyed graves in uneven terrain, with plants and shrubs growing between them, and a twilight atmosphere are some of the features of his cemeteries. Friedrich's cemetery images, however, were also connected to his personal experiences of loss. His grief flowed into his art, which he understood as expressing his inner imaginative world (Alpermann *et al.*, 2024). The cemetery thus became

the place of overcoming the dualism between the outer and inner worlds, between the natural and the supernatural; the cemetery marks the transition between the world of the living and the dead. As a Christian, Friedrich believed in life after death, and because it was an abstract concept, it could not be easily represented. Gloomy light and fog were elements the artist used to illustrate this unknown universe (Alpermann *et al.*, 2024).

Another piece of art by Caspar David Friedrich that combines the aforementioned elements is *Der Friedhof* circa 1825 (sometimes also referred to as *Friedhofseingang*). This work has some particular distinctions when compared to the other paintings by the Greifswald artist that we have discussed so far. The first is the format. Here, Friedrich uses what could be considered a portrait format or *Hochformat* in German, where the vertical dimensions exceed the horizontal ones. This orientation imparts a monumental aspect to the two columns of the entrance. There is no consensus as to whether Friedrich was inspired by the Trinitatis-Friedhof - where the artist was later buried - or the Alter Katholischer Friedhof, both located in the central region of Dresden (incidentally, the latter is located on Friedrichstraße, which is named after the Saxon king Friedrich August I). In any case, the entrances and walls of both cemeteries were severely damaged during the bombings of World War II, and after the war, the graveyard structures were reconstructed. Either way, the imaginary landscape created by him already transforms the painting into a place that is neither of the two previously mentioned locations and cannot be found on any map.

Another particular aspect of this work lies in its creation process and context. In 1825, the German classicist and archaeologist Karl August Böttiger visited Friedrich's studio and saw the work in progress. Böttiger then reported (in: Spitzer, 2018c) that the painter said the work had been commissioned by “a friend of the arts from Leipzig”. The archaeologist continued (Spitzer, 2018c) and described the painting as “a cemetery showing the resting place of a child, with the parents standing at the gate”. Passing through the gate, one can see a small open grave and, next to it, a kind of stretcher. Given the size of both and their proportions to the other graves, it is possible to say it is a child's grave.

Outside, leaning against the left column, we see two “floating figures” (*schwebende Figuren*) (Spitzer, 2018c), possibly the child’s parents, who seem hesitant to enter the site and hide in one another. The idea of “floating” comes from their feet not being visible. The woman, for instance, seems to be disappearing, her garments dissolving. This is because “*Der Friedhof*” is an unfinished work by Friedrich, which remained in his collection until his death (Spitzer, 2018c).

The inner space of the cemetery extends from the iron gate at the entrance to a distant wall of pine trees, which appears to be the beginning of a forest. The terrain is entirely uneven, making it seem less than ideal for a cemetery, and the disturbed graves look like they have not been maintained for a long time. The blue sky brightens as we look toward the top of the image while the sun sets behind the tree line. A mysterious mist covers the place. Looking closely at the painting, one can see the faint outline of an angel or *putto* in the centre. This could be yet another unfinished detail of the work. Between the columns, a metal structure holds a crown of thorns, a spear, and a vinegar-soaked sponge on a staff, resembling a crowned gate - symbols referencing the suffering and death of Christ (Spitzer, 2018c). Given these symbols, the gate appears to mediate between the earthly and spiritual worlds, with crossing it being another act of overcoming the dualism between these two realms.

Comparing this artwork with the ones discussed so far, one might say that it does not depict ruins. In a literal sense, perhaps not, but when discussing art, imagination, and, above all, mystery, the boundaries become less clear. Here is where knowing the context of the work contributes to a different interpretation. Caspar David Friedrich and his wife Caroline Bommer had four children, one of whom was stillborn in 1821 (Alpermann *et al.*, 2024). This event was devastating for the couple, and it is possible that Friedrich - who had also lost his best friend the previous year - transposed his grief into the work a few years later (Alpermann *et al.*, 2024).

This information provides a new and plausible interpretation of the painting: the couple depicted may be Caspar and Caroline standing before their child’s grave, making the painting almost a self-portrait. Thus, the ruins here could symbolise human existence, as if the couple were in deep mourning while bidding farewell to the baby who had already crossed to the spiritual world. If we consider this possibility, the imaginary landscape of *Der Friedhof* transforms into one of Friedrich's most intimate works - if not the most intimate. It captures not only the artist’s profound grief but also his complex wondering about mortality, spirituality, and the fragile line between the physical and metaphysical worlds, emphasising the deeply personal nature of his artistic journey.

Figure 93 - *Der Friedhof*, Caspar David Friedrich, ca. 1825



Source: Friedrich, ca. 1825. Photography created by the auhor, 2023. Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden. Technique: Oil on Canvas. Dimensions: 143 x 110 cm.

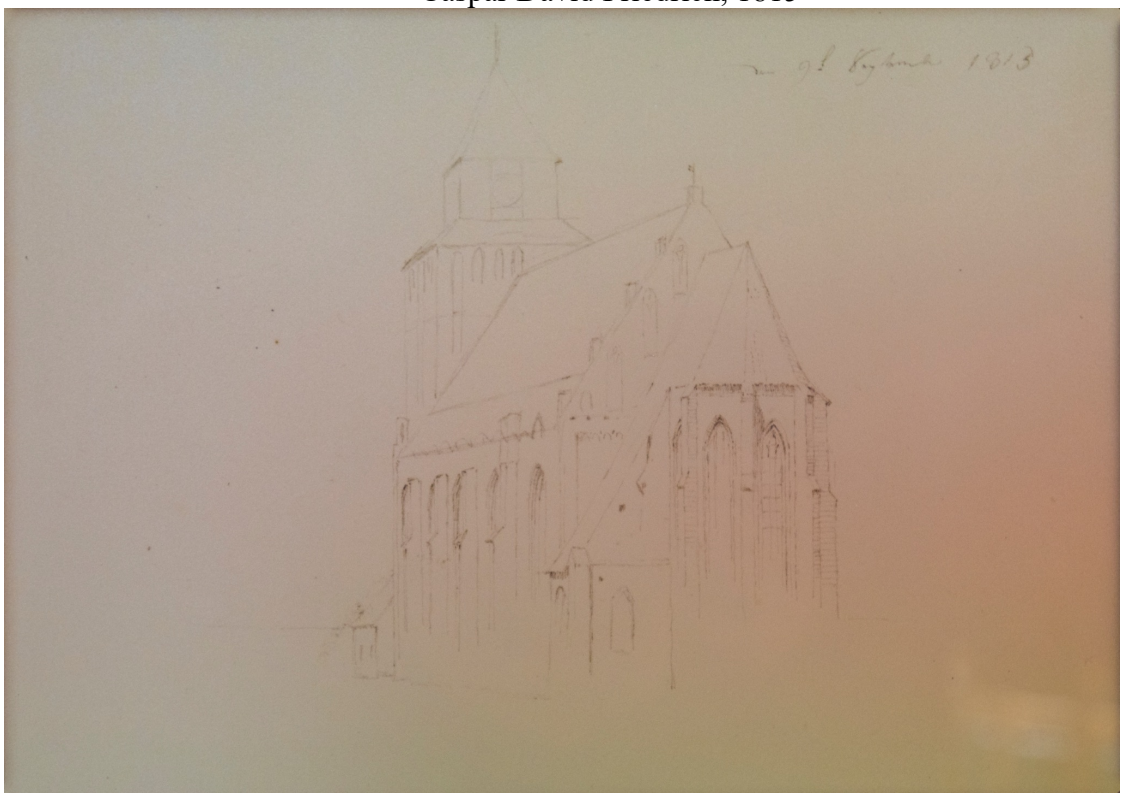
4.8 Future-Past Imaginary Ruins: The Jacobi-Kirche

In the final section dedicated to Caspar David Friedrich, it is necessary to add a new layer of imagination to discuss the painting *Klosterfriedhof im Schnee*, created in 1819. As in the other examples we have explored, it is important to consider some contextual information before addressing the painting itself. The *Innenstadt* of Greifswald has three major churches: St. Marienkirche, whose construction began around 1260 and was completed in the mid-14th century; St. Jacobi (or Jacobi-Kirche), built in the second half of the 13th century and converted into a church around 1400; and St. Nikolai, the city's cathedral, whose construction started around 1280 and ended in the mid-15th century. It is always important to remember that these churches were originally Roman Catholic temples and that they became Protestant churches

after the Protestant Reformation. A fourth church, St. Joseph, was built between 1869 and 1871. The latter was conceived as and remains, a Roman Catholic church (Greifswald, [20--]d).

Our focus here will be on Jacobi-Kirche, which, although the smallest of the three oldest churches, is a prominent point on the European Route of Brick Gothic. In 1815, Caspar David Friedrich created the pencil drawing *Die Jacobi-Kirche in Greifswald von Südosten*. The self-descriptive title shows the church from the southeast side. In this work, Friedrich presents the Gothic structure of the church with soft details and precise lines. The composition emphasises the verticality of the church, including the tower and its characteristic outlines, reinforcing the monumentality of the building. Today, the work is part of Oslo's National Museum of Norway.

Figure 94 - Reproduction of *Die Jacobi-Kirche in Greifswald von Südosten*, Caspar David Friedrich, 1815



Source: Friedrich, 1815. Photography created by the auhor, 2024. Jacobi-Kirche, Greifswald. Technique: Pencil.

Two years later, in 1817, the artist produced two more works based on the church. The first, *Die Jacobi-Kirche in Greifswald als Ruine* is a watercolour, pen in black ink, and pencil currently held in the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York. The second work, also named *Die Jacobi-Kirche in Greifswald als Ruine* is a watercolour, but its current whereabouts are unknown. Both pieces are relatively similar and depict the church in a ruined state. Friedrich transports us inside the church in these works, placing us directly in front of the main altar. In

the first one, two human figures can be seen near a column, reinforcing the monumental character of the church. The interior is portrayed in detail: we see pillars and Gothic windows, but the structure appears to be in ruins, with a missing roof and damaged columns. Elements like fallen stones and vegetation growing inside the building emphasise the sense of abandonment and the feeling of time passing by. When comparing the two works, they function as a form of documentation of the church's decay, allowing us to observe the progression of time from one to the other. Watercolour and black ink contribute to a sombre and melancholic atmosphere, projecting a grim future for the church.

Figures 95 and 96 - Reproductions of *Die Jacobi-Kirche in Greifswald als Ruine*, Caspar David Friedrich, ca. 1817



Source: Friedrich, 1817. Photography created by the auhor, 2024. Jacobi-Kirche, Greifswald.
Technique: Watercolour, feather, ink and pencil.

These three mentioned works possibly served as studies for the painting *Klosterfriedhof im Schnee* in 1819. Here, Friedrich creates an imaginary landscape reminiscent of *Abtei im Eichwald*, which we have already discussed. Once again, we see ruins that allude to Eldena Monastery, transported to an oak forest amid winter, with the entire scene covered in snow. Scattered graves and tombstones can be seen everywhere, and again, a funeral procession of monks strolling in pairs passes through the large arch of the ruin. The differentiating factor here

is that behind the ruins of Eldena stands another colossal ruin: the Jacobi-Kirche, which seems to be the monks' destination after passing through the first ruin.

The ruins of Jacobi-Kirche are so grand that they turn Eldena into a secondary element within the scene. In this landscape, Friedrich combines two churches from his hometown, with the distinction that one was never in ruins, either during the artist's days or today. Friedrich portrayed a ruin from the future and combined it with a ruin that recalls Greifswald's past. Once again, dualistic elements such as death and life, mourning and joy are overcome in this painting, representing a spiritual journey, as if the monks, after passing through Eldena's arch, find refuge within the ruins of Jacobi-Kirche.

The combination of Gothic architectural elements with the austere nature and wintry setting suggests the fragility of human existence and the sands of time. The soft colour palette and diffuse light accentuate the melancholic tone of the work, evoking feelings of introspection and ponder about mortality. However, the snow will melt after winter, and the oaks will regain their green leaves, transforming this sombre landscape into one full of life.

Another layer of imagination is added when we remember that the painting was destroyed in 1945 after a fire at the Alte Nationalgalerie in Berlin, resulting from a bombing during the final phase of WWII. One of the few remaining records is a black-and-white photograph from 1902, which served as a basis for coloured reproductions of the work. This perspective adds layers of complexity to Friedrich's works, inviting viewers to contemplate the intersection of past and present, imagination and reality.

Figures 97 and 98 - From left to right: Front and back view of the Evangelische St. Jacobi-Kirche church in Greifswald. On the image on the right is the Rubenow Square, which honours Heinrich Rubenow, former mayor and founder of the University of Greifswald, in 1456.



Photography created by the auhor, 2022.

4.9 Imagining Friedrich

The concept of imaginary landscapes in Caspar David Friedrich's work reveals the artist's deep engagement with themes of transience and spirituality. Friedrich's use of

architectural ruins - both real and imagined - in conjunction with nature forms a recurring leitmotif that offers profound reflections on human existence. His approach is not merely about capturing physical landscapes but transforming them into spaces of inner questioning, where nature and architecture symbolise spiritual journeys.

His imaginary landscapes are transformed into symbols of the time, the fragility of human creations, and the eternal aspect of nature. The connection with churches and Gothic architectural elements symbolises desolation and the hope for spiritual renewal. Furthermore, we explored the artist's historical and personal context, such as the influences of his religious upbringing and the impact of personal experiences of loss on his work.

Ruine Eldena im Riesengebirge, *Abtei im Eichwald*, *Klosterruine Eldena bei Greifswald*, *Huttens Grab* and *Der Friedhof*; each of these works explores the relationship between the sacred and the natural while also evoking themes as the duality of human existence, such as the relationship between life and death and between the sacred and the profane.

The juxtaposition of the past and future in works such as *Klosterfriedhof im Schnee*, where he combines the ruins of Eldena with the imagined future ruins of the Jacobi-Kirche, serves as a poignant reminder of the fragility of human achievements and the inevitability of decay. However, Friedrich never portrays these landscapes as devoid of hope; instead, he provokes viewers to perceive the potential for renewal and transcendence, as suggested by the natural cycles present in many of his compositions. Even amid winter's stillness, spring's renewal is promised.

These works do not simply portray ruins; they evoke a broader meditation on life, death, and what lies beyond. Friedrich's imaginary landscapes transcend literal representations, allowing the viewer to question the duality between the material and the spiritual, the known and the unknown. By drawing upon personal loss, cultural motifs, and his religious beliefs, Friedrich's landscapes become intimate prepositions of the human condition, ultimately blending melancholy with an underlying spiritual strength.

In the next chapter, we will see how, nearly two centuries after Friedrich, other social and political transformations also influenced the creation of ruins and abandoned places in Germany. We will also explore some distinctions between place and space, how our personal experiences can mediate between them, and, once again, how an artistic work can be developed within this gap.

5 *RUST, MOLD, AND CRACKS*: REIMAGINING PLACES, SPACES AND IMAGES

5.1 Addressing Abandoned Places in Germany

The origins of this section coincide with the initial phase of this research in Germany in September 2021. It could be better to address it as a restart or a new beginning, considering that my first experience at German abandoned places was in 2013, as mentioned in the introduction, when I developed an artistic residency through a grant from the Brazilian Ministry of Culture at the Zentrum für Kunst und Urbanistik - ZK/U, in Berlin. This non-profit cultural centre seeks a crossroads between art and urban spaces, investigating multi-layered dynamics between and around these topics.

Back then, I was looking for a form to combine some of my main areas of interest in a single artistic work: video projections, memories and abandoned places. That was when the work *Abandonamento*[31] was created, a series of temporary audiovisual interventions made in abandoned places in Berlin and its surroundings. With a portable video projector, I displayed images suggesting situations that could supposedly happen in these places if they had not been abandoned. The action proposes speculation about the history and usage of those places, which happens for a short period in the gap between the past and present locations, a temporary fill of a lacuna. A few years later, this research progressed and became my master's[32]. Following a ruined path, I came back to Germany 08 years later with a different perspective about those places.

When I arrived in Berlin for this field research during the Winter Semester of 2021/22, I tried to apply my former method of work, which consisted of investigating abandoned places, their histories, and locations; then visiting and documenting them; afterward, creating the videos to be projected, and, finally, returning to the sites with a portable projector to execute the projections and record them.

So I started to visit such locations as soon as possible, and one of the first obstacles already appeared: in 2021, it took much work to find ruined places in Berlin and its outskirts as it did in 2013. It does not mean that there were plenty of them some years earlier. However, it was still possible to access a few, even inside the urban perimeter, such as an old Ice Factory and the former Iraqi Embassy in Germany. After some research online, I found the first places

[31] Available at: https://vimeo.com/66535004
[32] The complete master's dissertation is available at: http://hdl.handle.net/11449/183211

I would like to visit and another challenge came up: to avoid the tendency of doing a remake of *Abandonamento*. So I decided not to work with the projections this time, not to take dozens of pictures, and to record hours of videos like I used to do in my visits to forgotten places. Instead, inspired by the ideas of Henry D. Thoreau in *Walking* (1914), I would first explore the "being there" experience both as a research and artistic methode and only then would I worry about producing images. Not having a predetermined goal gave me more freedom to create and experience those places. However, as soon as I started this process, new questions appeared, and the research began to follow in different directions, dealing with subject modernity and spatial issues. Then, I investigated those subjects as an artist and academic researcher.

Within this frame, I created the artwork *Rust, Mold, and Cracks*[33], a video in which images were recorded in old buildings of the former USSR in the German Democratic Republic. Both countries no longer exist. At the same time, these places – an airfield, a military village, and deactivated bread fabric - remain in the middle of the forest out there, as witnesses of a time that seems to be distant but not gone. On the other hand, they are not attached to the present because they can help us prospect a different future (maybe more than one). In other words, these constructions bring together at least three different temporalities: past, present, and future. The trace elements found there are sure to affirm that they occasionally receive some visitors: lost-places explorers, party people, security guards, and graffiti artists, to name a few. Through these actions, one cannot confirm that the buildings are totally abandoned. Concurrently, it would be daring to affirm that they are inhabited. They lie somewhere in between those definitions, in a time-space lacuna. In their environment, dualist relations such as past/future, abandoned/not abandoned, place/non-place, and space/non-space seem insufficient to define them anymore.

This chapter, as its title suggests, I intend to approach this discussion using the mentioned video and its first public exhibition at the art gallery of UNESP's Institute of Arts as a starting point to overcoming traditional dualistic ways of thinking that might appear when we come to this matter of questions, occupying the interval between these topics. In the following pages, I address issues such as the differences between place and space, human actions in contrast to natural actions, various facets of the concept of modernity, the fascination for the ruins of modernity, the production and accumulation of images in modern spaces, the erasure and reinterpretation of places in the former GDR, and, finally, my personal experiences as a method of research and artistic creation.

[33] Available at: https://youtu.be/TM-AzjsKJ-Q

I narrate this chapter using the first person not because I have the ambition to propose an unprecedented approach to the spatiotemporal discussion, but because I can only address these matters speaking from my own experience and position in space-time. Which also does not mean that I am - or was - placed all the time during this research. My displacement as an immigrant serves as a lens through which I explore the nuances of abandonment and memory in spaces. This outlook offers a point inside and outside the conventional frameworks of understanding place and time. Through this perspective of displacement and movement across borders - both literal and metaphorical - I have grasped varied layers of meaning embedded in abandoned sites and different modernities.

In addition, my experiences of transiting different linguistic ambiences have influenced my understanding of various themes. Constantly shifting between languages has affected my perception of space and made me more sensitive to the temporal dimensions of spatial matter. This process has added some new layers to my research, enabling me to explore more aspects of how spaces are marked by time and history.

In the following passages, I will delve deeper into how my experiences as a foreigner have contributed to my understanding of the dynamics of space and time. This exploration is an academic exercise and a personal trip through the landscapes of memory, abandonment, and the continuous creation of meaning within the interstices of space and time.

5.2 Space, Place and the Tensions Between Them

5.2.1 Considerations on Space

Before delving deeper, it is important to consider some essential aspects of the topics discussed so far. One of the most pressing issues is the distinction between *space* and *place*. While these terms are often treated as synonyms and, in everyday life, their interchangeable use is inconsequential, they belong to the same conceptual universe but are not identical. In informal conversations and contexts, the misuse of these terms may go unnoticed, but for a deeper investigation, drawing clear distinctions between them is crucial. The extensive body of work addressing this distinction over recent decades highlights its importance.

This is not a new or unprecedented discussion. On the contrary, numerous authors have made significant contributions to this topic, shedding light on the nuances of these concepts. Key works include Otto Friedrich Bollnow's *Human Space* (1963), Yi-Fu Tuan's *Space and*

Place: The Perspective of Experience (1977), and Marc Augé's *Non-places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity* (1992). Their contributions shed light on these discussions, and their points of view remain valid until today.

Firstly, let us acknowledge that both place and space are inherently complex terms, resisting straightforward definitions. To lay a foundation for deeper exploration, we will begin by examining their etymological roots. Annika Schlitte and Thomas Hünefeldt (2018, p. 06) emphasise the importance of the word's etymological origin. The English word "place" comes from the *platea* a Latin word whose roots are the Greek term *πλατεῖα*. Both expressions have practically the same meaning: "open space" or "broad way." Here, it becomes natural for the reader who knows some Latin language to start creating connections and relationships with other words. For example, *plateia* in Portuguese means the area designed for the audience in a theatre, concert or other spectacle. This use certainly comes from the old Greek or Roman amphitheatres, where the spectators used to sit or stay in an open space. The same goes for the Spanish *plaza*, the German *Platz* (Hünefeldt; Schlitte, 2018, p. 06), and the Portuguese *praça*; different words are employed to refer to the same kind of place: an open space, a broad way, or, in some situations, a commercial zone.

Here, we are considering the English word "place". However, in Portuguese or Spanish, the proper term for it would be *lugar* for both languages; a vocable which comes from the Latin *locus*, which, in simple words, would be a determined point in space. The overlaying of terms and definitions might get more complex if we go back to the German language, where *place* is translated as *Ort*, which derivates in Old German and Old English from *ord*, a term for "point" (like the point of a sword) or "line of battle" (Hünefeldt; Schlitte, 2018, p. 06). The military term "horde" has the same root.

The complication goes further when we explore the roots of *"*space" from the Latin *spatium*, which could be translated as "extension". So *spatium* would be the extension (or distance) between two or more points. Portuguese, Spanish, and English are some languages to adopt this source. At the same time, the German word for space is *Raum*, which comes from the verb *räumen*, an old expression for preparing the terrain for a settlement or opening a glade into the woods. One way or another, making a *Raum* presupposes a human action (Bollnow, 2019, p. 35). Likely, the English expression *room* shares a common source.

This brief linguistic analysis helps us understand the ramifications of space and place. Soon, we will add some other terms to bring more dynamism to the discussion. Concurrently, all these vocabulary words are mutable, and their use depends on context.

As it is too audacious to carve definitions of these terms in stone, we will consider a combination of ideas to set up some understanding of place and space and their ties. In the words of Dylan Trigg (2012, p. 40), places are defined by "their relationship with the particular subject who experiences them". Starting with this argument, we can consider place as a subjective and personal matter. For Santos (2013b, p. 13), a place is "always changing its meaning, due to the social movement: at each moment the segments of society that lie in there are not the same". Tim Ingold (1993, p. 159) also shares a similar point of view when he states that "the vista that constitutes the identity of a place changes even as we move".

This perspective aligns with what Tim Cresswell (2002) discusses in his work on theorizing place, emphasizing its relational and dynamic nature. According to him (2002, p. 13), "the concept of place is central to our understanding of how people turn nature into culture by making it their home" (Cresswell, 2002, p. 11). Therefore places carry subjective and shared meanings support the view that they are inherently tied to personal and collective identities. The author (2002, p. 20) introduces the concept of "practicing places" which says that places are not static or passive entities but are continuously created and recreated through human practices. Places do not inherently exist as fixed locations with predefined meanings; instead, they emerge from the actions, interactions, and performances of those who inhabit or engage with them. In this sense, a place becomes a place through its practice - it must be performed to come into being. This performance includes everyday practices, rituals, and even mundane movements, which imbue the space with social, cultural, and subjective significance.

Cresswell (2002, p. 23) emphasizes that places are relational and dynamic, shaped not only by their immediate users but also by broader networks of history, culture, and economic systems. They are sites of continuous negotiation where identities and meanings are produced and contested. Thus, a place is never a finished product; it is always in the process of becoming. This perspective shifts the understanding of place from being a mere physical location to a lived, experienced, and constantly evolving space, deeply intertwined with the practices and narratives of its inhabitants.

Annika Schlitte, in *The Philosophy of Place and the Place of Philosophy* (2024), builds on phenomenological and hermeneutic traditions to explore the deeply relational nature of place. Drawing on Heidegger's concept of *Dasein*, she highlights (Schlitte, 2024, 33) how the experience of place is not merely about physical occupation but is tied to the existential and ontological positioning of the individual. For Heidegger, being is always *being-in-the-world*, a condition intrinsically tied to spatiality. Schlitte (2024, p. 33) expands on this idea by arguing

that places are not static containers but dynamic loci where human existence unfolds, shaped by an interplay of subjective and contextual factors.

Schlitte emphasizes (2018, p. 139) that place, as experienced by humans, operates as a framework for meaning-making, acting as a nexus between the individual and their environment. This is particularly evident in her analysis of Heidegger's "topology of being" (Schlitte, 2018, p. 139), where place transcends its role as a mere backdrop to action, becoming a constitutive element of identity and interaction. She articulates that the relational and performative nature of place allows it to function as both a spatial and existential anchor, underscoring its centrality to human life. By integrating these perspectives, Schlitte advances a nuanced understanding of place as inherently tied to human subjectivity and cultural embeddedness.

Expanding further, Jeff Malpas (2018) delves into the ontological primacy of place, arguing that it is not merely a derivative concept but a fundamental framework for understanding being and knowing. He states that "place must be seen as a structure comprising spatiality and temporality, subjectivity and objectivity, self and other" (Malpas apud Hünefeldt; Schlitte, 2018, p. 05). This integrated and objective aspects of place, illustrating its multifaceted nature.

Despite some particularities of each mentioned author, we can hold, using their thinking as a reference, that a place is essentially a social and relational matter. In other words, a place is not only a materialisation of culture - such as a building or a square - but also the practices and meanings assigned to it, transforming a mere structure or location into something else with relative value. Here, it is important to note that this value is not in the sense of market valuation but in a sense that could be subjective, affective, and tied to identity and memory.

A quick form to illustrate this situation is the difference between a *house* and a *home*. When does the first become the former? Just as the feeling of "being home" is subjective, so are the definitions of place. It is not by chance that different idioms have a specific set of words to this example: *Casa* and *Lar* in Portuguese, *Haus* and *Zuhause* in German, *Casa* and *Hogar* in Spanish, and so on.

Figure 99 - Facade of the furniture store Hoco Möbel in Samtens, on the Rügen Island in Germany



Photography created by the auhor, 2023.
The slogan *Wir machen aus jedem Raum ein Zuhause* can be translated as “We make from every space a home”.

5.2.2 The Dynamics of Space and its Systems

Now, we will consider some definitions of space to understand how it relates to the concepts of place discussed earlier. It is also a complex task once the idea of space can be related to several areas of knowledge, from the Exact to the Biological Sciences. Thus, before we go further, we must point out some initial views about it. This introductory overview aims to lay the groundwork for understanding space by highlighting some foundational perspectives.

The Brazilian geographer Milton Santos (2021, p. 36) summarises space as “a set of systems of objects and systems of actions”. These two systems are “indivisible, interdependent, and contradictory” (Santos, 2021, p. 35). Within this framework, an object can encompass a

variety of entities, including constructions, vehicles, machines, clothes, and any other artefact that results from diverse and/or combined techniques. Essentially, these objects serve as instruments for living, embodying the "materialisation of culture" as articulated by Fredric Jameson (1991, p. 67). Still according to Santos, the concept of actions springs from natural and artificial needs, encompassing "material, immaterial, economic, social, cultural, moral, and affective dimensions" (Santos, 2021, p. 49). These actions profoundly impact how people live and interact, inevitably leading to the creation and production of (not necessarily) new objects. This cyclical interaction between objects and actions underlines a dynamic feedback loop, where each system continuously influences and reshapes the other.

Building on Santos's thinking, it is clear that space is neither a static "thing" where tasks happen, a mere background for actions, nor a term without an autonomous significance. Instead, it is alive and constantly changing, influenced by both the objects placed in/on it and the people who use such objects. This interaction shows us that spaces are more than just spots on a map; they carry meanings, stories, and connections between people. As we talk more about space, it is essential to think about all these complex aspects and how spaces serve as stages for showing varied aspects of human existence.

Moreover, Jameson's concept of "materialisation of culture" suggests that the objects populating our spaces are not neutral but are imbued with cultural significance, reflecting their time's values, technologies, and socio-economic conditions. This perspective brings a more nuanced exploration of how spaces and objects within them narrate stories of cultural identity, technological advancement, and social change. Through this angle, we can better appreciate the multifaceted nature of space as a construct encompassing physical, cultural, and temporal dimensions, offering rich insights into the human condition and the ever-changing base of our shared environment.

Understanding the intricate dynamics between systems of objects and systems of actions illuminates the complex nature of space as conceptualised by Milton Santos. This complexity arises from the versatile interplay between physical entities and human activities, highlighting the non-linearity and simultaneity of interactions within and across different social and physical reality layers.

The boundaries between these systems often blur, leading to a fluid merge where objects and actions influence each other in myriad ways, challenging our conventional perceptions of space and time. These interweaving forms a ground of lived experiences that can differ vastly even within the exact geographical location, giving rise to multiple coexisting spaces shaped by diverse sets of objects and actions.

The geographer expands his ideas (Santos, 2013a, p. 42) stating that this overlaying of multiple systems creates mixed “everyday lives” (*cotidianos*), a scenario in which “groups, institutions, and individuals live together but do not follow the same time”. For him, in a situation like this, it would be more appropriate to use the word “*temporality* instead of time” (Santos, 2013a, p.42); therefore, a unique space can have more than one temporality; it might happen in parallel, or even share some aspects among them, creating some contact zones. His notion of *cotidianos*, or everyday lives, further complicates our understanding of space by suggesting that multiple temporalities and narratives unfold within a single physical space. These parallel existences reinforce the singularities of rhythms and routines of various groups, institutions, and individuals who inhabit a space in temporally distinct ways despite sharing a physical space. This multiplicity of temporalities within a shared space underscores the significance of considering temporality rather than time as a more nuanced way to comprehend the layered realities of space.

Figure 100 - Abandoned building in Vogelsang, Germany



Photography created by the auhor, 2021.

The overlapping of systems, where one may intersect or interact with another, challenges our ability to clearly delineate their boundaries, emphasising the fluidity and complexity of spatial relations. This intersection of systems complicates our understanding of

space and enriches it, revealing the depth of interactions that define our physical and social worlds. When one system touches another, it becomes harder to distinguish their previous form.

This scheme proposed by Santos can be noticed in diverse backgrounds: whether in a metropolis or a small town, from the macro to the microsphere. For example, people who live in the same neighbourhood and share the same public space do not necessarily do it simultaneously and in the same way. Each one could have their preference about when and how it happens. Even for workers who divide the same workspace, if they have different tasks to accomplish, it is very likely that they will do it according to different temporalities. The same goes for people who live in the same house, passengers on a train, students in a classroom, and more. This perspective transcends the conventional dichotomies of urban versus rural or the macro versus microsphere, presenting a nuanced understanding of spatial occupation and temporal engagement. Let us break down some of these mentioned cases.

Take a regular neighbourhood as an example: it looks like one place but is used in many different ways. People use its parks, streets, and squares at different times for different reasons: someone jogging in the morning, someone else walking in the afternoon, and kids playing at night. They are all in the same space but at different times, showing how one place can have many lives, just like Santos explained. This temporality divergence extends into the workplace, where individuals sharing a physical environment may operate within distinct temporal rhythms dictated by their specific roles and responsibilities.

The complexity of shared spaces and temporalities is further exemplified within the domestic sphere. While living under the same roof, members of a household often follow individual schedules that showcase their personal, educational, or professional commitments. The morning routine of one family member may unfold in complete isolation from the evening activities of another, creating a combination of temporalities that coexist within the confines of a single home.

The principle of diverse temporalities is equally relevant in educational settings, such as classrooms. Although students and teachers share the same physical and temporal classroom environment, their engagement with the space and the material can vary significantly. Each student's cognitive and emotional presence within the classroom is shaped by their learning pace, attention span, and personal circumstances outside the school, contributing to a complex overlay of shared and distinct temporal experiences.

Santos's theoretical proposition thus illuminates the intricate interplay between space and temporality, revealing how multiple *cotidianos* coexist, overlap, and diverge within the exact physical locations. This understanding challenges us to conceptualise space not as a static

backdrop to human activity but as a dynamic arena where diverse temporal narratives unfold, interact, and occasionally intersect.

Figure 101 - Still frame from *Rust, Mold, and Cracks*, 2022



Photography created by the auhor, 2021.

With these Santos' ideas in mind: space as a set of systems of actions and objects, it would be reasonable to assimilate his concept of space also as a place. After all, the actions within the system are - very often - social activities. From then on, a traditional confrontation of space against place is converted into a dualistic relation. Nonetheless, it is not possible to determine fixed distinctions among each other. In this sense, *space* and *place* are not rivals but have a dialectical relation. The existence of one depends on another. However, it does not mean they have a hierarchy; "place is not, after all, colonised from raw space" (Trigg, 2021, p. 39). What for myself could be a place, for someone else could be just a meaningless location, and the other way round. The borders between place and space are in constant movement, just as natural transformations at an abandoned place.

5.2.3 The System of Actions of *Rust, Mold, and Cracks*

Now it is time for us to hypothesise and to begin with this association of concepts with the previously mentioned video work: Could Santos' model be applied to places like those depicted in *Rust, Mold, and Cracks*? Constructions could be considered objects - a materialisation of culture - but what about the actions? Since the beginning of the 90s - after the German Reunification and the dissolution of the Soviet Union - those places have gradually lost their original functions. In this sense, the first logical alternative would say that they no longer have a system of actions. Therefore, they cannot be considered a space. Instead of affirming that their system of actions is over, I would rather say that it is suspended and, eventually, can be resumed (Gervilla, 2023, p. 48). For instance, when someone goes there to accomplish any activity: a photographic essay, a security round, for a barbecue in the summertime and to have some fun or even for curiosity, for a while, the systems of actions and objects are again combined. Then, according to Santos, they become a space once more. Some paths through the grass, recent footprints, vivid colour paintings on the walls, fresh cigarette filters, empty beer cans, and other forms of trash are evidence of those actions.

These actions bring new forms of occupation and usage into the ruins, momentarily reactivating the dialogue between objects and actions and reinstating their status as "spaces". These intermittent activities performed by diverse actors showcase the fluid nature of space, where the boundaries between abandonment and usage blur, emphasising the insistence on human presence and interaction. Santos' concept of *cotidianos* further enriches this understanding, suggesting that even in their quietness, these places host a set of temporalities, each visit adding a layer to their ongoing narrative.

Searching on the internet for hashtags like "abandoned", "Berlin", and "lost places", it is not hard to find dozens of websites and blogs on this theme. They bring pictures of the locations and hints of how to get there, avoid security, dangers, and highlights of each space. In the comments of each post, the readers usually exchange their opinions on their visits and updates on the status of these buildings. There is clear evidence that actions are currently being taken there. A popular website among the urban explorers[34] of Berlin is *Abandoned Berlin*[35].

[34] Urbex, short for urban explorer, is a person who engages in the activity of urban exploration. Urbex involves visiting, investigating, and documenting often abandoned structures. Some adhere to the philosophy of "take nothing but photographs, leave nothing but footprints," ensuring that the sites remain undisturbed. Urbex enthusiasts explore a variety of locations, including ruins, sewers, drainage systems, subway stations, and rooftops. It is relatively rare to find urbex practitioners who share the exact location of their visits.

[35] <https://www.abandonedberlin.com/>.

The page does not only publish pictures from these structures but also provides detailed information about how to get there, a practice that is not so common among lovers of this kind of adventure. After an empirical comparison between the pictures posted by the admin of the website when he got to a place for the first time, the number of comments on the postage, and my personal experience there, I would say that the visual evidence of visitors increases after the publication of the access information. Among such evidence, I am considering the number of new graffiti and vandalism, for example. All of it contributes to the restoration of the system of actions.

Figure 102 - Still frame from *Rust, Mold, and Cracks*, 2022



Photography created by the auhor, 2021.

5.3 *Situatedness* and *Placedness:* Something in Between

As place and space are complex and dynamic terms, it would be natural for more names related to them to arise over time: “situatedness” and “placedness” are two, among others. If we just saw that place and space should not be considered dualist oppositions, these two new words lie between the two former ones; they are a lacuna. Let us repeat the same procedure and look at the etymological origin of the new expressions. It might help us better understand**.**

Both the verb “to situate” and “situatedness” have their roots in the Late Latin word *situatus*, the past participle of the verb *situare*, which in its turn can be translated as “to place” (Hünefeldt; Schlitte, 2018, p. 06). These words share the same precedence as the noun *situs*: position or situation. *Situs* might also be the past participle of the verb *situare*: to set down, leave, or let. (Hünefeldt; Schlitte, 2018, p. 06). From this set of words come a significant amount of terms in varied languages with almost the same meaning: *site*, in English, *sitio*, in Spanish, *site*, in French, and *sítio,* in Portuguese from Portugal; in Brazilian Portuguese *sítio* is used to refer to a rural property, a small farm. Interestingly, this linguistic lineage is closely related to the verbs for seating or to seat across various languages, such as *sentar* in Portuguese, *sitzen* in German, and *sentarse* in Spanish, underscoring a common theme of placement or positioning in space. Moreover, in Spanish, the word *cita* which means “meeting” or “appointment” also derives from this root, indicating an occasion where the people will likely sit in front of each other; the same goes for the German word for a meeting: *Sitzung*. This second quick linguistic analysis points out a connection between spatial orientation and social interaction. Now, it is time to see how it can be applied to studies of place and space.

In this context, “situatedness” “refers to the fact that or to how, something is in some place, while “place” refers to that wherein something is or may be situated” (Hünefeldt; Schlitte, 2018, p. 06). A brief reduction of this idea might lead to a short-paired relationship: “situatedness” would answer the question “how?” while “place”, “where?”. However, it would be a fragile statement regarding more complex subjects. Using once multilingual thinking, “how?” and “where?” are two of the German *W-Fragen*: *wie?* and *wo?*,respectively. Automatically, the reader might miss some of the others, such as: *was?* (what?); *wer?* (who?); and, maybe the most crucial: *wann?*, (when?). All these relations are polyvalent and cannot be isolated from each other. As Edward Casey (1998, p. 19) points out, Aristotle’s notion of place is fundamentally tied to the question “Where?”, as it represents the “first unchangeable limit of that which surrounds”. This connection underscores that place is not merely a neutral container but a relational concept that inherently situates objects and beings within a broader framework

To exemplify the multiple facets of situatedness, Casey (2018, p. 20) evokes the condition of a migrant who constantly crosses the border between two countries. Physically, he or she can only be here or there, at one side of the border or another. After all, one of the first physics lessons we learn at the school is about Newton’s statement that two different bodies cannot occupy the same place in space. If so, a divergence of this conception should also be actual: the same body cannot occupy two different spaces simultaneously. Physically, it might be. However, Casey (2018, p. 20) draws attention to the psychological aspect of the migrant,

which might include national and international matters, as well as affective connections such as familiar and personal issues. This condition deconstructs the mere partition of “how” and “where” to define situatedness and place, respectively. This psychological dimension of situatedness expands beyond the constraints of physical presence, suggesting that the migrant’s sense of self and belonging is not grounded in a single geographic location. Instead, it encompasses a broader spectrum of affiliations and identities that cross various spatiotemporal relations. This layered experience challenges the traditional notions of place and situatedness, revealing a more nuanced understanding of how individuals navigate and embody multiple spaces, even when physically present in just one.

Moreover, the author (Casey, 2018, p. 22) gives an example regarding attending a piano recital; the experience transcends mere physical presence within a space, such as a concert hall. While occurring in a single, defined location, this event unfolds as a complex situation with numerous components - performers, audience, and the physical setting, to name a few - each adding layers of meaning. The constancy of the venue’s physical space contrasts with the dynamic, temporal nature of the situation and all its characters. Each visit to such an event is unique, shaped by varying elements and temporal interactions, demonstrating that a singular space can host an evolving series of situations. Beyond just a gathering of parts, a situation embodies an “*eventmentality*”, a collective happening that imbues the space with a unique narrative and history, distinct with each event iteration. This ever-shifting composition of elements within the recital hall underscore the intricate composition of situatedness, where the physical and temporal converge, creating a wide range of experiences and possibilities unique with each moment.

Following the same idea of plurality, we find the “*placedness*” notion. Although it is imprecise to determine who coined the term, Jeff Malpas is responsible for making it known. Again, we are talking about a different connection - or a set of connections - that an individual might have in a place. Malpas (2018, p. 36) states that the placedness concept has an “essential relation to place”; however, it is not a matter of just being positioned or placed but being "*in-place*" (Malpas, 2018, p. 36).

Malpas’ concept of placedness extends beyond merely being located in a physical space. It encompasses an individual’s subjective experience and engagement with a particular place, highlighting how personal and cultural contexts influence one’s connection to and interpretation of that space. Placedness, therefore, involves an active and meaningful relationship between the individual and the place, reflecting a deeper understanding and experience of being situated within a particular context or environment.

Malpas' statement elucidates placedness not simply as a spatial or locational concept but more profoundly as a characteristic of living beings - creatures, agents, or subjects. He emphasises (Malpas, 2018, p. 37) that placedness involves a "genuine relation *to place*" without reducing "place" to merely another concept or considering it as secondary. This perspective views placedness as a mode of behavioural responsiveness, suggesting it is about how individuals interact with and respond to their environment.

Figure 103 - Abandoned building in Vogelsang



Photography created by the auhor, 2021.

A practical example of placedness can be found in the experience of working from home. In contrast, the physical location might be the same - a home office or dining table - but the sense of being placed changes throughout the day. In the morning, this space may serve as a quiet, productive area for work, embodying a professional environment. By evening, the same space transforms into a place for family meals, creating a more personal, communal atmosphere. This shift in placedness highlights how the function and meaning of a single physical space can change based on the activities and social interactions that occur within it, emphasising the dynamic relationship between individuals and their surroundings.

This responsiveness could be defined in purely functional terms, indicating that placedness involves actions, reactions, and interactions with space beyond mere physical

presence. It highlights an active engagement with a place that shapes and is shaped by the behaviours and practices of individuals within that space. It is about recognizing the significance of our situatedness within a place and acknowledging the physical and experiential dimensions of being in a particular location. Situatedness and Placedness are somewhere, sometime, or somehow between place and space.

5.4 Situatedness, Placedness and *Cotidianos*

Integrating Milton Santos' exploration of different temporalities within spaces alongside the nuanced concepts of placedness and situatedness, we delve deeper into the intricate framework that incorporates the physical with the temporal, cultural, and experiential realms. Santos' perspective on *cotidianos*, or everyday lives, presents a dynamic view of space, not as a *tabula rasa* where multiple temporal narratives and social practices unfold simultaneously. This perspective aligns closely with the conceptualisations of placedness and situatedness, enriching, and sometimes confusing, our understanding of how spaces are actively experienced and transformed into places with several significances.

Santos' idea that a single geographic location can host a multitude of *cotidianos* speaks to the layered complexity of spaces and places. These everyday lives, marked by their unique temporalities, intersect and diverge within the confines of the same physical space, suggesting a collage of experiences that contribute to the sense of place. Through the lens of placedness and situatedness, we can appreciate the subjective dimensions of these interactions, recognising that each individual's engagement with space is informed by their personal history, cultural background, and temporal perspective.

The interplay of placedness and situatedness within Santos' spatial-temporal scheme allows for a deeper appreciation of how places are not merely located but are lived. Placedness, emphasising the relational and experiential aspects of being in place, aligns with Santos' notion of spaces as scenarios for diverse *cotidianos*. Similarly, situatedness, which focuses on the conditions and contexts of being within a space, echoes Santos' understanding of the dynamic interactions that shape the temporal qualities of places. Together, these concepts provide insight into how the multiplicity of human experiences within a given space can be understood as contributing to a place's continuous creation and recreation.

Ultimately, the dialogue between space and place, enhanced by the concepts of placedness and situatedness and informed by Santos' theory of temporalities, offers an integrated structure for examining the web of relations that define our lived environments. It

underscores the significance of viewing space and place not as dichotomous entities but as intertwined aspects of human life, where the physical, temporal, and subjective dimensions converge to create the meaningful spaces we navigate and inhabit.

Considering all these perspectives we can conclude that the system of actions at the places depicted in *Rust, Mold, and Cracks* never ceased, so they remained a proper place since their early days. Even when they were a construction site, they were already a place, and each person who lived, worked, or visited them might have different notions of situatedness and placedess about them. In these contexts, ruins and abandoned places are a convergence point of all these non-dualistic approaches to place and space; the ruins are the lacunas being fulfilled repeatedly.

5.4.1 My Personal Displacement Among These Terms

As said before, I narrate this research in the first person because that is how I experienced - and still experience while writing - it. Therefore, before we go any further, it feels necessary to share with the reader a personal sense of displacement that affects me. I work and think about all these topics, including the dislocation feeling simultaneous with four different languages along this process: Brazilian Portuguese, German, English and Spanish.

The first trouble that appears when it comes to spatiotemporal matters is about the verbs *to be*, in English or *sein*, in German. In both languages, these verbs refer to positions, physical or emotional states and characteristics. On the other hand, some Latin languages, such as Portuguese and Spanish, have two different verbs that could indicate these situations: *ser* and *estar*. For example, there are two simple sentences in Portuguese: "*Eu sou feliz*" and "*Eu estou feliz*". Both phrases are translated into English or German as "*I am happy*" or "*Ich bin glücklich*", respectively. However, Portuguese and Spanish verbs have a deeper meaning. "*Eu sou feliz*" means that I am a happy person and my happiness is a permanent state; meanwhile "*Eu estou feliz*" means that I am happy at this moment; this is not a permanent state; my happiness might vary depending on the circumstances.

This subtle difference might confuse a native Latin-language speaker when discussing subjects like *being in a place*. What does it mean: "*estar em um lugar*" ou "*ser* (in the sense of being conscious) *em um lugar*"? The former means that I can stay in place; I stand there, and that is it. The latter suggests that I have some connection with this place. The discussion about the differences between place and space somehow became related to the *ser* and *estar* verbs.

The same confusion might appear when dealing with concepts of *situatedness* and *placedess*. Am I placed here at this very moment, or shall I stay somehow here permanently?

This personal displacement regarding the confrontation of foreign idioms with my mother language followed me through this investigative path. During my period in Berlin, I remember having German classes in the morning, Spanish classes in the afternoon, teaching in Portuguese[36] in the evening and reading and writing in English between these activities. All this combination had somehow an impact on this work.

5.5 The Revenge of Nature and the Seduction for Ruins

After this little deviation (after all, a non-dualist proposal avoids linear thinking), I would like to introduce another possible system of actions. The ones we have seen so far are an outcome of human acts. Nevertheless, we have to consider the role of Nature within this context; it is essential to expand our perspective beyond human-centric actions and consider the character of non-human agents, such as natural phenomena, in shaping the world around us. This broader lens prompts us to question the traditional dichotomy between human and natural actions. Here, we go through a pathway that might raise more questions than answers. One of the first would be: "Is not mankind part of nature?".

Firstly, we must contemplate whether humans are indeed separate from Nature or if they are an intrinsic part of it. If we acknowledge humans as part of Nature, all human actions, regardless of complexity or technique employed, could be seen as natural movements. Conversely, humans could be perceived as foreign entities if we view technology as an alien element within Nature. Here, we are calling "technology" a collective method, skill, and process used by humans to create tools and systems to interact with, understand, and manipulate their environment, bridging the gap between the natural world and human aspirations.

[36] By "Portuguese," I mean "Brazilian Portuguese," as I do not believe that Brazil and Portugal still share the same language after all these centuries.

Figure 104 - Abandoned school in Vogelsang



Photography created by the auhor, 2021.

On the one hand, considering this, human actions developed through different techniques were also part of it. Therefore, all human movements can also be classified as natural movements. On the other hand, the opposite was also true, as stated by Birgit Recki (2021, p. 35), "if technology were a foreign body in nature, then so would humans"[37]. The author suggests this affirmation in a context where she questions traditional dualisms between Culture and Nature. If we take it for granted in a traditional, strict way of thinking, then we could end up with the conclusion that technology is what differentiates culture from nature.

When considering human actions - whether with simple tools, high technology, or even with the body itself - as culture and culture as opposed to Nature, we have great chances of ending up with a dualistic relationship. That is none of our goals here; on the contrary, this research aims to blur these limits, stepping in the uncountable lacunas between these two major subjects.

We open ourselves to a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between human activities and the environment by questioning these dualisms. Rather than viewing culture and

[37] "*Wäre die Technik Fremdkörper in der Natur - dann wäre es auch der Mensch*", (Recki, 2021, p. 35).

Nature as opposing forces, we are exploring their intricate intersections and overlaps. Our goal is to dissolve the rigid boundaries that separate these realms and instead recognize them as interconnected and mutually influencing.

Therefore, instead of framing Culture and Nature as antagonistic entities, we approach them as interdependent elements within a complex web of interactions within a dynamic framework. Bruno Latour (1994, p. 10) critiques the traditional bifurcation of Nature and Culture, proposing instead a framework that acknowledges their entanglement. The author (Latour, 1994, p. 12) describes this as a dual process: the proliferation of hybrids and the purification of Nature and Culture into seemingly distinct ontologies. This approach resonates with the assertion that Culture and Nature function as interdependent elements rather than antagonistic forces. By examining interactions within what Latour ideas we recognize the mutual constitution of Nature and Culture, which aligns with the dynamic human-environment relationships discussed here. This perspective underpins our exploration of nature's actions and reaffirms the integrated framework necessary to understand these phenomena.

Going back to abandoned places and ruins, the actions of Nature could happen in a way that the German sociologist Georg Simmel (1958, p. 379) called "nature's revenge" (*Rache der Natur*). For him, architecture represents a sublime victory of the spirit (*Geist*) over Nature. Despite the complexity of the definitions of *Geist* on Simmel's ideas, it could be read as the human spirit and - why not - Culture. The triumph he proposed is not in the sense that Nature is defeated but as a perfect balance between the will of the spirit (*Willen des Geistes*) and the necessity of Nature (*Notwendigkeit der Natur*) (Simmel, 1958, p. 379).

He proposes the necessity of Nature as an inherent force or principle governing the natural world. For him, this concept encompasses the intrinsic characteristics and behaviours of natural elements and the inevitable processes of change and decay they undergo. Nature's necessity is juxtaposed against human creativity and technological advancement, symbolised by the *Geist* (spirit or mind), which seeks to assert control, order, and meaning upon the natural environment through cultural and architectural endeavours. The interaction between these forces creates works that represent human ambition and the inescapable influence of natural laws. For culture - a manifestation of the *Geist* - to reach a balance with the force of Nature involves integrating human activities within the limits and cycles of the natural world, recognising its constraints and adapting to them.

A roof is an early example of achieving a balance between culture and Nature. By constructing a roof, humans demonstrate an understanding of the *Notwendigkeit der Natur* - the inevitable natural forces such as weather and climate - and create a protective barrier that

harmonises with these elements. The roof represents a technological and cultural response to the necessity of shelter, providing safety and comfort while respecting environmental constraints.

Figure 105 - Still frame from *Rust, Mold, and Cracks*, 2022



Photography created by the auhor, 2021.

Although the sociologist proposes a harmonious balance between culture and nature, this balance is not always achieved, especially in large-scale undertakings such as the Trans-Amazonian Highway in Brazil. A monumental project carried out by the Brazilian military dictatorship in the 1970s, it aimed to connect remote regions, promote development, and integrate the Amazon into the rest of Brazil, under the motto that nature was an enemy of progress to be overcome. Its construction required extensive deforestation and environmental alterations, highlighting the forced imposition of human will and technological capacity on the natural landscape, profoundly transforming the ecological and social fabric of the region. To this day, the proposed project remains unfinished. This imbalance illustrates the complex and often combative relationship between human development and the natural world.

Simmel (1958, p. 379) asserts that this balance does not occur in artistic languages such as Painting, Poetry, and Music, where the materials are submissive to the artistic conception. These artistic languages do not directly interact with the sources or needs of nature in their

creation and existence. They exist within a domain of human expression that is, in a sense, removed from the physical world, focusing instead on the emotional, intellectual, and abstract. While these arts can represent, critique, and explore nature and its relationship with humanity, they neither physically alter nor directly interact with the natural environment as architecture does. Architecture is a unique art form where human creativity and natural forces must find equilibrium for a structure to exist and fulfill its purpose (Simmel, 1958, p. 379). Simmel (1919, p. 125) reinforces this comparison when discussing Sculpture: without human intervention - achieved through various techniques - the marble block itself is not a work of art. The artist must tame the material and eliminate the excess to create the piece.

However, the moment a building begins to crumble, the balance is undone, and the forces of nature begin to dominate human creation (Simmel, 1919, p. 125). This shift destabilizes the previous harmony, with the scales increasingly tipping in favor of nature's dominance. The phenomenon of nature's revenge unfolds slowly but persistently as it begins to assert its supremacy over human efforts, highlighting the perpetual cycle of struggle.

Throughout this process of retribution, we can observe nature reclaiming what was taken from it to construct an architectural structure; after all, all raw building materials originate from nature, and even synthetic materials require natural elements in their composition. This is what we see in - or on - a ruin; natural actions also blur some grammatical rules. The movement here is not merely one of ruin but an intricate process in which nature transforms "the work of art into material for its expression" (Simmel, 1958, p. 381).

Here, it is important to highlight that, in the original text, Simmel (1919, p. 125) uses the German term *Baukunst* instead of *Architektur*. *Baukunst* translates directly as "the art of building" or "architectural art", emphasizing the artistic and creative aspect of architecture rather than merely its functional or structural component. This choice of words underscores Simmel's conceptual distinction between mere construction and the artistic effort involved in creating spaces that balance human will and natural necessity. By using *Baukunst*, Simmel suggests a deeper and more nuanced understanding of architecture as an art form that engages in a dialogue with cultural expression and the material reality of the natural world; this is why he uses the term "work of art" (*Kunstwerk*) (Simmel, 1919, p.125) to refer to architectural creations.

At this stage, we encounter the "fascination with ruins" or "seduction of ruins"[38] (*Reiz der Ruine*) (Simmel, 1958, p. 381), when a new form of unity can be observed between the

[38] The German word *Reiz* can also be translated as "charm," "attraction," or "seduction".

current structure constantly self-transforming - and the earlier stages of nature. There are various manifestations of nature's revenge. Rust, mold, and cracks are just a few examples. Rain, wind, snow, sunlight, and the migration of animals also play a role in this process. Simmel (1958, p. 381) states that one of the seductive aspects is realizing that the same powerful elements that shape the Alps also act upon a ruin. A ruin represents unity - a crucial concept in the author's work - between nature and culture; it emerges as the transcendence of a dichotomous relationship between the two. A ruin can harbor more diversity within itself than when it was a fully operational and well-preserved building.

This diversity can be seen in the different shades of color on a crumbling wall. Since nature follows no specific pattern, the natural palette is nearly impossible to replicate through painting or even photography, which might capture the hues with some distortion, appearing even more altered when printed. A wall reclaimed by nature takes on camouflage and textures reminiscent of an ancient tree, exemplifying another instance of unity between architecture and nature. This transformation also carries an alluring quality, evoking the "seduction of the patina" (of time) (*Reiz der Patina*) (Simmel, 1919, p. 129). The unpredictable movement of human-made objects within an abandoned building is equally fascinating. The presence of animals, insects, and other living beings among the ruins further evidences this fascination and revenge. Nature is in no hurry to reclaim forgotten structures; yet ruins and abandoned places change quickly. From one visit to another, variations can be noticed, whether through vegetation growth or a collapsed beam.

The fascination with ruins highlights the cycle of creation and fall, where human achievements and natural processes intertwine. The beauty of a ruin lies not only in its aesthetic appeal but also in nature's forces and the transient nature of human achievements. Through ruins, we witness the dialogue between past and present - a reminder of our ephemeral place within the broader fusion of time and nature's eventual reclaiming of all human constructions.

Figure 106 - Montage with a mouldy wall in an abandoned place (left)
and the edge of a tree (right)



Photography created by the auhor, 2024.

That is when nature becomes an active agent – no longer the domesticated nature[39] – crafting "the present form of a past life" (Simmel, 1958, p. 385). Nature herself reclaims her protagonism and becomes an artist. Nature does it according to her terms and pace. If we recognise these natural actions as a system, then Santos' system of actions is not suspended anymore – in fact, it never was - because natural movements happen continually. This insight brings to light the dynamic and ongoing interplay between human constructs and the natural world. It emphasises that the actions of Nature are ever-present, continually shaping and reshaping our environments. Thus, the concept of a static "abandoned" space is challenged, revealing these locations as stages of constant natural activity and transformation. Through this lens, the dialogue between Nature and human creations becomes a never-ending cycle of growth, decay, and rebirth, underlining Nature's omnipresent influence in sculpting landscapes through time.

These alternative possibilities of actions reveal the complexity of defining space, particularly in contexts of abandonment and habitation. The interplay of different systems and their combinations makes it impossible to classify these buildings strictly as abandoned or inhabited. Instead, they seem to dissolve fixed categorizations, resisting simplistic binaries. Their existence blurs traditional boundaries, moving fluidly through different dimensions and defying straightforward definitions rooted in oppositional thinking.

Abandoned and ruined buildings embody an intricate and fluid continuum of definitions and states of being. As such, they serve as a vivid illustration of the inadequacy of binary

[39] Santos (2013b, p. 19) reminds us that a "natural nature" – or the first nature (*natureza primeira*) - does exist any longer. It was over when the human has become the "social human". Since then, humanity is no longer a "friend of nature", and it has been under a domestication process.

classifications in capturing the full spectrum of their essence. By existing beyond conventional boundaries, they challenge us to rethink our perceptions of space, place, and the ongoing dialogue between culture and nature, urging a more layered approach to understanding our environment.

5.6 Ruins and Memories Markers

It is still possible to attribute another social role to the ruins and (no longer) abandoned places when one considers them as a memory marker. Not only ruins that became notorious monuments worldwide but also the "ordinary" ones. David Harvey (1991, p. 429) alerts us that "in a world of rapid flux and change", spatial constructs could be seen "as fixed markers of human memory and of social values". According to this idea, a ruin could have another active meaning, and an abandoned place can be seen through another prism. They assume a function of a link between past and present and through diverse modernities; simultaneously, they can bring up both personal and collective memories. In this situation, it is not crucial if these edifices are not used according to their original purposes, and the actions are not necessarily physical. Our memories can convert a space into a place anytime, from everywhere, and our mind can place us again in a different situation, creating and recreating our attachments to those places. The same goes for the feeling of displacement; as the memory about a specific place fades away, one might lose their connection to a place.

The feeling of displacement inside us may also be created by overlaying temporalities, generating time/space confusion. Right away, we might ask ourselves: "Who are we, and to what space/place do we belong?" (Harvey, 1991, p. 427). The distinction between the last two terms is not clear anymore so that we might feel disoriented. We can alter the place through remembrances, just as the place can also alter us. Using our imaginations, we can carry the place with us, and concurrently, we can remain attached to it. A place, therefore, is never a stand *thing*. It is constantly under transformation, be it physically, psychologically, by nature, or all these factors combined.

We can further explore how these elements intersect to shape our understanding and experience of places by expanding on the dynamic interplay between ruins, memory, and space. Ruins serve as physical remnants of the past and a shelter for stories and histories - both personal and collective, actual or imaginary - across time. They are witnesses to the lives that once grew within their walls, offering a tangible link to past and future histories. These spaces become archives of human experience, where every layer of decadence might have a hidden or underlay

detail, making them profound sites of memory and reflection. Ruins may metaphorise human stubbornness; they refuse to go away. On the one hand, they are a stage for Simmel's Nature's Revenge; on the other hand, they oppose themselves against the Necessity of Nature (Simmel, 1919, p. 125).

Figure 107 - Still frame from *Rust, Mold, and Cracks*, 2022



Photography created by the auhor, 2022.

When applying these concepts to everyday encounters with ruins or abandoned spaces, we might take the example of an old factory in a local community. Once a production site, it now stands empty, its machinery silent and halls deserted. Yet, this factory carries traces of past work, daily routines, and the community that formed around it - dreams that were either fulfilled or left behind. Abandoned, it becomes a stage for memory, where stories of the past are retold and reimagined, connecting generations and interfering in a sense of identity. Similarly, a forgotten playground, overgrown and rusting, might still hold the memories of children who once played there, reminding us of the shifting landscapes of our communities.. Of course, it might sound like a romantic vision, but the opposite could also be true: when a ruin arises, mixed feelings about it. They may lead people through uncomfortable memories or even to indifference, which could be a symbolic death of a ruin.

As demonstrated, the characteristics of space have several layers. We will find another and/or a new one when we try to go deeper into one. The images presented in *Rust, Mold, and Cracks* can be seen as a symbol of these encrusting temporalities; such as the three elements of the artwork's title: once they get together, it is almost impossible to separate them.

5.7 Different Views of Modernities and Image Production

As we have seen, definitions of space and place are dynamic because the combination of systems of actions and objects continuously alters previous configurations, creating overlapping temporalities. Approaches like situatedness and placedness also influence these aspects. For this reason, we should avoid seeing time and space as inseparable categories if we aim to move beyond dualistic interpretations. Instead, it is more useful to explore their interrelationships, as outlined by Jameson (1991, p. 154).

If space and its systems are mutable, so are their relationships with time. David Harvey (1990, p. 419) notes that "objective conceptions of space and time must change to accommodate new material practices of social reproductions". This suggests a constant exchange between society, space, and time, without hierarchical order. Each has its own characteristics, yet they remain interconnected. These layers of interaction can sometimes appear transparent, like panes of glass, or at other times opaque. Different arrangements of space and time create new temporalities, which in turn give rise to varied modernities.

This evolving relationship between space, time, and society reveals the fluid nature of lived environments. Space is not merely a backdrop for social activities but an active participant, shaped by and shaping human interactions. This perspective encourages us to see how spaces are continually produced and reproduced through social practices, influencing cultural values and power structures. As such, the study of space and place extends beyond physical analysis to include the ways human actions and societal structures interact across spatial and temporal dimensions. This integrated approach deepens our understanding of the complex relationships that define human experience.

Building on these ideas, I propose defining modernity as a reorganization of space-time relations. This definition challenges the assumption that modernity is always tied to the concept of novelty. Questions such as "Modern compared to what?" or "Which modernity are we discussing?" become central to the conversation.

While space can hold simultaneous temporalities, it can also host multiple modernities. As Santos (2013a, p. 68) notes, there are "successive modernities, which form and dismantle

periods." Harvey (1990, p. 429) introduces the concept of "personal space and time", which can be expanded to understand both individual and collective modernities. If place is subjective, so is time. Modernities, like temporalities, are shaped by diverse variables and can coexist within the same space. They do not necessarily follow a linear trajectory but can overlap, spiral, or take on amorphous forms.

Figure 108 - *Straße der Zukunft*, literally, the Street of the Future in Neuenkirchen bei Greifswald



Photography created by the auhor, 2023.

This perspective reframes modernity as a multifaceted phenomenon, challenging traditional linear narratives of historical progression. Instead, it embraces a pluralistic view where several modernities coexist, interact, and sometimes conflict within shared spatial-temporal contexts. This dynamic underscores the richness of human experience and societal development.

It is crucial to differentiate between modernity and modernization. While they may occur together, they are not synonymous. Santos (2013b, p. 48) argues that modernization refers to creating new activities driven by technological development, not necessarily tied to spatial relations. Modernization connects to the system of actions and the production of new objects. Jameson (1991, p. 310) further distinguishes modernity from modernization and modernism,

linking modernization to the foundation of development and modernism to the superstructure. Modernity acts as a mediator between them. In this sense, modernization often emerges from new techniques and technological advancements, influencing the creation of new modernities.

Svetlana Boym (2017, p. 175) distinguishes between modernisation and modernity, emphasizing their different impacts. She describes modernisation as a process closely linked to industrial and technological developments, often shaped by government policies. In contrast, modernity, a term introduced by Charles Baudelaire in the 1860s[40], comments new perceptions and experiences in the modern world. Boym critiques the linear progress narrative of modernisation, blending nostalgia with thoughts about utopian ideals. She highlights the importance of becoming critical subjects rather than passive participants, valuing freedom while acknowledging its limits. For her (2017, p. 03), "modernity is our antiquity" in the twenty-first century. We live among its ruins and integrate them into our daily lives.

The Industrial Revolution, the rise of the internet, and the advent of artificial intelligence are examples of modernisation processes that continue to reshape societal structures. These innovations constantly generate new modernities, influencing how we experience space and time. Over centuries, the design of mechanised production methods has been closely tied to spatial transformations, as noted by David Harvey:

> The dialectical oppositions between place and space, between long and short-term time horizons, exist within a deeper framework of shifts in time-space dimensionality that are the product of underlying capitalist imperatives to accelerate turnover times and to annihilate space by time (Harvey, 1991, p. 428).

New modernisations and other events could contribute to a new set of modernities: climate changes, pandemics, and wars - this former could be understood as the culmination of the application of new technologies, as stated by Walter Benjamin (1936, p.468) - indeed interfere with space arrangement. As modernity is a dynamic concept, and it is constantly altering itself, a fixed definition does not apply to it. In one way or another, modernity is related to expanding culture over nature, modifying any balance that might exist between them.

Within this scenario, it would not be appropriate to affirm that there is a fixed pre- or post-modernity. The term "postmodern" is well-known when it comes to this matter. However,

[40] Charles Baudelaire's concept of modernity focuses on the fleeting experience of life in an urban metropolis and the artist's role in capturing its transient beauty. For Baudelaire, modernity emphasises the present moment, contrasting the timeless beauty of classical ideals with the ephemeral charm found in the chaos of modern life. These ideas first appeared in his essay *The Painter of Modern Life* in 1863.

it would not be a pointed-in-time period but a criticism of the conventional - or ongoing - modern. Therefore, it has altered itself along with modern times. Jameson (1991, p. 154) states that one characteristic of the postmodern is a feeling of "discontinuous spatial experience and confusion". If modernity is a spatiotemporal rearrangement that leads to another kind of modernism, then postmodernism could be the discomfort caused by these changes. If the concept of modernity is always subject to change, the same goes for the postmodern. Thus, postmodernism can be seen as both a condition and a critique of modernity's transformations, challenging us to reconsider our understanding of time, space, and cultural identity in the contemporary world. Consequently, postmodern art emerges as a critique of the current model of modernity. Ahead, I will come back to some other characteristics of postmodernism.

5.8 The Modernities in *Rust, Mold, and Cracks*

A closer look at the places depicted in *Rust, Mold, and Cracks* reveals examples of spatiotemporal rearrangements and the estrangements they provoke. These places combine various modernities and layers of time. At certain points, their histories intersected, sharing similar agents and influences. However, each location also holds distinct characteristics.

The first location is the Flugplatz Schönwalde, an airfield in the community of Schönwalde-Glien, part of the Hennigsdorf district in Brandenburg State. Its origins date back to 1933, when the German national socialist government acquired properties on the outskirts of Schönwalde to build a military airfield. To avoid violating the Treaty of Versailles, the project was initially referred to as *Sportflugplatz Hennigsdorf* (Sports Airfield Hennigsdorf). Gradually, it became a pilot school for the Reich's Ministry of Aviation (*Reichsluftfahrtministerium*). By 1939, it had evolved into a fully operational base for the German Air Force (*Luftwaffe*), serving as a strategic site during WWII (Military Airfield Directory, [20–]).

In April 1945, the Soviet Red Army took over the site. Like many German military and infrastructure assets captured by the Allies, the airfield was repurposed by the Soviet forces. In October 1949, the property was officially transferred to the German Democratic Republic (GDR) but remained under Soviet administration. Due to its proximity to the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), or West Germany, flights from the airfield would have been easily detected. Consequently, the Soviets used the site as a ground infantry headquarters rather than as an airfield (Military Airfield Directory, [20–]). After the German Reunification in 1990, Soviet troops gradually withdrew, returning their equipment to the Soviet Union. By early 1992, after

the dissolution of the USSR in December 1991, the last soldiers departed, leaving the site abandoned (Military Airfield Directory, [20–]). The new German government showed no interest in reactivating the airfield or repurposing it as a military base. Since then, the Flugplatz Schönwalde has remained deserted.

The Flugplatz holds significance not only in the military histories of Germany and the Soviet Union but also as an example of architectural and structural styles characteristic of its era. The remnants of its infrastructure, such as expansive hangars, the control tower, and the barracks, represent its past and showcase mixed architectural influences.

Figure 109 - Opposition of constructions in the Flugplatz Schönwalde:
a *Plattenbau* in front of a building with German 1930s characteristics



Photography created by the auhor, 2021.

Some facilities still exhibit characteristics of 1930s German architecture, such as brick buildings with flat roofs and narrow, high-squared windows. After 1945, Soviet additions, including hangars with monumental iron roofs, expanded the site. As Soviet soldiers moved to Schönwalde with their families, residential *Plattenbauten*[41] buildings were constructed.

[41] A *Plattenbau* is a type of building commonly found in former Eastern Bloc countries, constructed primarily during the mid-20th century. The *Plattenbauten* (plural form) are characterised by their pre-fabricated concrete panels assembled on-site. They were often built to solve the housing shortage after World War II and were intended

Playgrounds and leisure areas are still visible around the base, along with buildings likely used as schools and communal cafeterias. These utilitarian structures narrate a story of technological advancement, strategic military planning, and social transformation over time.

Beyond its architectural significance, the airfield has become deeply integrated into the cultural and social fabric of the Schönwalde-Glien community. Throughout its operational years, it hosted a diverse mix of individuals, from military personnel to civilians. The transitions between German, Soviet, and reunified German control underscore broader historical shifts and tensions that left an enduring mark on the local collective memory. This layered history challenges the community to navigate spatiotemporal (re)arrangements, producing unique modernities without enough time to fully assimilate them.

Environmental concerns add another dimension to the airfield's narrative. Abandoned military sites often leave behind issues such as soil contamination from fuels and chemicals or unchecked vegetation growth, which threatens the structural integrity of buildings. At Flugplatz Schönwalde, nature's encroachment underscores the ongoing interplay between human-made structures and the natural environment, highlighting both the permanence of nature and the impermanence of human creations.

Artistically, the airfield has inspired creatives, becoming a stage for graffiti artists, photographers, and filmmakers. These artistic interventions reintroduce human activity to the site and suggest alternative uses for the former military base. Vestiges of fireplaces suggest informal barbecues, despite signs prohibiting entry and warnings of possible buried explosive materials.

Over time, the site has attracted urban explorers and historians, drawn by its rich history and abandoned state. Despite its historical importance, plans for redevelopment have been delayed by ownership disputes and bureaucratic challenges, leaving the airfield's future uncertain. Detailed information on these disputes is scarce, but they often involve diversified stakeholders - private owners, local governments, and heritage organisations - each with conflicting interests. Common challenges include disagreements over the site's future use, preservation of historical elements, environmental concerns, and securing funding for redevelopment.

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to provide affordable housing quickly and efficiently. Plattenbau buildings typically feature uniformity in design, with rows of apartment blocks arranged in a grid-like pattern. While they were initially celebrated for their functionality and modernity, they have since garnered criticism for their often-monotonous appearance and issues related to maintenance and social problems.

The artistic series *unHEIMlich schön* (2022) by the artist Jana Rot, born in Russia and based in Germany deals with the societal complexity of the Plattenbauten. To see: <https://www.janarot.com/unheimlichschoen>.

Figure 110 - Still frame from *Rust, Mold, and Cracks*, 2022



Photography created by the auhor, 2022.

The second location, Vogelsang Military Village, shares similarities with the first site. However, “village” might not be the most accurate term, given that up to 15,000 people lived there at its peak, occupying more than 500 buildings. Built about 60 kilometres north of Berlin in 1951, it was part of an agreement between the GDR and the USSR. Vogelsang was essentially a small town, complete with a school, theatre, sports hall, market, and large housing complexes. For decades, soldiers from tank and anti-aircraft divisions lived there with their families.

In 1999, retired Russian colonel Vladimir Aleksandrov (Dolinin, 2001) revealed that between 1959 and 1962, the base stored nuclear missiles on more than one occasion. This means that East Germany likely hosted nuclear weapons three years before the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962, making it one of the first regions outside the Soviet Union to do so. However, although the missiles were stationed in East Germany, they remained under Soviet control, with no authority granted to the GDR government. Thus, East Germany did not technically possess nuclear weapons but served as a host for Soviet armaments (Ivkini; Uhl, 2001, p. 299). The secrecy surrounding these operations was so strict that even the soldiers transporting the equipment were unaware of its nature (Dolinin, 2001).

By the late 1980s, much of the structure had been dismantled, and in 1992, the last units left. Afterward, all residential buildings were demolished, leaving enormous piles of rubble. Some storage facilities, garages, and bunkers, however, remain.

The main social buildings, such as the school, theatre, and sports hall, are still standing. I visited Vogelsang on a rainy and foggy day, which made it difficult to locate some structures. When I eventually found the theatre, it offered shelter from the rain. While exploring the site, I noticed fresh, wet footprints crossing the path I had just made with my shoes. It felt like a sign to leave.

Figure 111 - Still frame from *Rust, Mold, and Cracks*, 2022



Photography created by the auhor, 2022.

The Military Village's dense historical narrative reflects the volatile nature of diversified modernities. It transitioned from a strategic military headquarters, designed during the Cold War, to a desolate site with a complex past. The presence of nuclear missiles at Vogelsang underscores its critical role during geopolitical conflicts. However, its rapid decline from a technologically advanced military village to abandonment and dismantling highlights the transient nature of political and military power; serving as a reminder of the shifts on socio-political landscapes.

The current dilapidation of Vogelsang raises questions about the legacy and interpretation of such sites. The uncertainty surrounding its future represents broader changes in societal values and priorities. What once symbolised state power and technological progress is now being reclaimed by nature and subject to historical reinterpretation. This process illustrates the evolving nature of modernity, where vestiges of the past are continually recontextualised in the present, offering new perspectives on history and memory. The site, which once housed nuclear missiles - a potent symbol of culture's dominance over nature - now sees trees growing through its ruins.

Figure 112 - Abandoned theatre at Vogelsang



Photography created by the auhor, 2021.

The third location is a former bread factory commonly known as the SS Bread Factory (*SS Brotfabrik*) in Oranienburg, a few kilometres north of Berlin. This site has a deeply troubling history, as it was once part of the Sachsenhausen Concentration Camp. From 1941 to 1991, it operated as a bakery. During the Nazi period, approximately 80 prisoners were reportedly forced to work under harsh conditions, producing thousands of loaves of bread daily. According to Wilhelm Nagel (2005), a former prisoner, the facility could produce up to 43,000 *Kommissbrote* per day at its production peak. The prisoners, who came from various nationalities, were required to march from the main camp to the bakery.

After World War II, the Red Army took control of the facility to support survivors from Sachsenhausen. It later became part of the Konsum-Großbäckerei Oranienburg, a model of a popular cooperative managed by workers. The bakery continued operating until after German reunification. However, the structure suffered significant damage from a fire in 1994 and has remained abandoned ever since[42]. Plans to transform the site into a monument were discussed but never realised. The site is located near the Sachsenhausen Memorial and Museum, which commemorates the victims of National Socialism and occupies the area of the former concentration camp.

Figure 113 - Oven of the Brotfabrik's production line



Photography created by the auhor, 2021.

Today, the Brotfabrik stands empty. While it might attract those drawn to its history or urban exploration, the site serves as a remembrance of its dark past and the atrocities associated with it. Officially, entry is prohibited. The factory carries the marks of distinct modernities: from the Third Reich to the GDR, and into the post-reunification era. Each phase has left an

[42] The information about the history of the Bread Factory was obtained from some piece of information panels located near the site. However, it is not possible to determine the author of the texts or exactly when they were written.

imprint on its physical and cultural landscape, turning the site into a palimpsest of human activity and memory. The limited information available about the place mirrors the complexities and sensitivities surrounding its history and the uncertainty about its future.

Considering these three places, we observe how, in a relatively short time compared to longer historical periods, they underwent significant spatiotemporal rearrangements and experienced different modernities. Although located far from urban centres - where such transformations often occur more rapidly - these sites remain in a state of change. As we have seen, places are closely tied to social questions and are therefore frequently subject to transformation.

This aligns with Harvey's (1990, p. 425-26) observation that "rapid changes in the objective qualities of social space and time are both confusing and disturbing, precisely because their revolutionary implications for the social order are hard to anticipate". Here again, the concept of confusion is linked to the emergence of new modernities. Looking back at these three sites with some temporal distance, we see that all were built, managed, and abandoned by political regimes that no longer exist. As Harvey notes, such outcomes are difficult to predict, highlighting the complexity of modernity.

Once more, we ask: modern compared to what? All the actors discussed here were once considered modern relative to their predecessors. For the German National Socialist government, modernity was embodied in the Third Reich (*das Dritte Reich*), envisioned as the culmination of the unification of former empires and kingdoms into a modern German state. The USSR, emerging from the Russian Revolution in 1917, was meant to be the realisation of a communist ideal. East and West Germany arose from the spatiotemporal rearrangements following WWII. Yet, all these regimes have dissolved.

The cases of Flugplatz Schönwalde, Vogelsang Military Village, and the SS Bread Factory in Oranienburg each serve as compositions of modernities, layering time and ideologies within their now abandoned architectures. The interplay of space, place, and time intertwines with social and political narratives, challenging the idea of modernity as a linear progression. Within their decaying structures lie stories of progress and oppression - each layer a chapter in a narrative that urges us to rethink our understanding of advancement and heritage. As they stand today, these places invite us to view modernity not as a single story but as a complex montage of human endeavour, perpetually rewritten yet never fully erased.

5.9 Objects Produced by Modernity

A (not necessarily) new modernity produces objects as solutions to evolving needs. These necessities may arise from natural demands or from the (re)creation of other objects. Today, objects are no longer exclusively physical; they can also be digital, virtual, or even biological. Let us break this down.

Communication is a fundamental human necessity. Every means of communication - except the human body - is an object created to address this need. The telephone serves as a clear example: its name, loosely translated from Greek, means “listening from afar,” highlighting its role in overcoming a natural obstacle: physical distance. Initially, it succeeded the telegraph, enabling people to talk and listen rather than send and receive codified messages.

Over time, additional functions have been added to telephones - many unrelated to their original purpose - leading to the smartphones we use today. As a personal example, I made a bank transfer using my smartphone today, and I will later use the same device to monitor my jogging performance while I listen to music also using it. Simply “listening from afar” is no longer enough. This evolution leads to a new phase in the production of objects. Functional phones can quickly become obsolete due to technological shifts, such as a telecommunications company transitioning from 4G to 5G, forcing consumers to buy compatible devices. Alongside new phones, entire sets of accessories - chargers, cables, earphones, screen protectors, power banks, etc - emerge, only to become useless as new models are introduced.

Marx (1973, p. 749) links this cycle to the logic of consumption under capitalism. He observes how the system continuously produces goods, not just to meet needs but to create new demands, sustaining capital accumulation. This process perpetuates cycles of dependency, where products designed to improve life instead foster reliance on consumption. The alienation inherent in this system reinforces the subordination of workers to the demands of production and market dynamics. In simple terms, we need new objects to solve problems we did not have before - problems created by the previous generation of objects that failed to deliver on their promises.

This cycle of innovation and obsolescence raises questions about sustainability and the long-term impacts of technological advancement. Creating and discarding objects to meet evolving standards exemplifies the acceleration of change - a phenomenon Harvey (apud Cresswell, 2002, p. 16) calls “time-space compression”. This process, driven by advancements in transportation and communication, reduces the time needed to move people, goods, and information, effectively shrinking distances. While central to globalization and capitalism, this

acceleration generates inequalities and cultural disruptions, complicating the narrative of progress.

Our daily lives now unfold within “a system of increasingly artificial objects, populated by systems of actions equally imbued with artificiality” (Santos, 2013a, p. 86). This uncontrolled production distances humanity further from nature, resulting in an accumulation of technical objects. These new creations are not driven by natural needs but by problems caused by earlier generations of gadgets, reminding us that humankind is no longer a friend of nature (Santos, 2013a, p. 86).

Figure 114 - MediaMarkt department store filial in Berlin



Photography created by the auhor, 2021.

Another characteristic of humanity’s detachment from the natural world is the environmental damage caused by extracting raw materials for object production. This ranges from deforestation in Brazil to produce luxury furniture, to the destruction of Argentine lakes for lithium used in batteries, and the explosion of mountains in Peru to obtain zinc for touchscreen displays. Such exploitation is often accompanied by precarious working conditions, exposing an undervaluation of labour and the persistence of colonial production methods.

The cost of this cycle is visible in overflowing landfills, depleted resources, and a growing disconnect from nature, leading to cultural and psychological impacts. This abrupt spatiotemporal realignment fosters a profound sense of loss and disorientation as familiar environments are transformed into something unrecognisable - a feeling described as

"solastalgia"[43] by Glenn Albrecht, referring to the distress of witnessing one's place of origin being drastically altered.

Innovation is not solely driven by human needs; it is increasingly shaped by a consumer culture that glorifies the new and rapidly discards the old. This "throwaway society" is a product of systemic economic forces that thrive on planned obsolescence. Companies design products with limited lifespans to encourage continuous purchases, creating environmental and social repercussions.

This relentless cycle of production and consumption forces humanity to accumulate objects at a pace that outstrips our ability to dismantle or recycle them. Simmel (1998, p. 103) identifies this as a hallmark of modern society: "being surrounded by innumerable cultural elements that are not devoid of meaning [...], but which are not, in their foundation, full of meaning either". On one side, this endless manufacturing reaches a "quality limit" (*Qualitätsgrenze*); on the other, it lacks a "quantity limit" (*Quantitätsgrenze*) (Simmel, 1998, p. 102–103). Amid these physical artefacts and vast amounts of digital data, people feel increasingly "ignorant and helpless" (Santos, 2013a, p. 19). Ignorant because there is no time to assimilate these rapid productions; helpless because ordinary individuals have limited power to change this cycle.

Daily life is filled with frustrations linked to this accumulation. We forget which washing machine setting to use because it has too many options, but it does not matter because we do not know the fabric of our clothes; or we lose access to old digital accounts because they are tied to obsolete phone numbers or services that no longer exist.

The psychological toll of living amidst abundance is immense. Consumerism and digital overload foster anxiety, disconnection, and a sense of inadequacy. The overwhelming choices and complexities of digital platforms heighten this alienation, leaving many paralysed by indecision or trapped in unsustainable consumption habits.

Images, as cultural elements, mirror this dynamic. Every day, countless images flood our lives through smartphones, televisions, computers, billboards, and shop windows - all at once. Harvey (1991, p. 427) observes that the "lifetime of consumption of images [...] is almost instantaneous". Today, that "almost" can be removed. Social media, streaming platforms, and

[43] Solastalgia is a form of psychological or existential distress caused by environmental change, such as land degradation, deforestation, or climate change, in one's home environment. The term reflects the feelings of loss and the negative impact on one's sense of place and identity when their environment is altered or destroyed. Glenn Albrecht, an environmental philosopher at the University of Newcastle in Australia, coined the term in 2003, combining the Latin word *sōlācium* (comfort) with the Greek root *algia* (pain, suffering) to express the feeling of homesickness one gets when one is still at "home".

mobile connectivity have made images ubiquitous. The video, as a medium, occupies a unique space. While historically considered a time-based-media, video now transcends space, appearing everywhere. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated this trend: classes, meetings, sports events, religious ceremonies, and more became videos almost overnight. This surge has filled hard drives and cloud storage with countless hours of footage, much of which will never be revisited.

In this flood of images, the speed of editing and dissemination matters as much as the content. Fast cuts and vibrant visuals drive engagement. If the first seconds of a video fail to captivate, viewers quickly scroll to the next. Compared to today, MTV's editing style feels distant, and Tarkovsky would likely have a heart attack by TikTok. As Simmel foresaw (1998, p. 103), modernity stacks image upon image[44], leaving little room for reflection or meaningful engagement. This relentless flow creates a cycle of consumption that prioritises instant gratification over introspection.

While video offers unparalleled possibilities for communication, its ubiquity also presents challenges. Navigating this visual landscape requires mindfulness to resist the allure of superficial engagement. In an age dominated by images, the act of pausing to question it becomes a form of resistance.

The prevalence of images evokes a contemporary discomfort, as described by Simmel, and a sense of ignorance, as noted by Santos. This convergence of modernities - marked by an addiction to images - surrounds us 24/7. Yet these images are inherently limited, capturing fragments of modernity while failing to encapsulate continuity or the deeper currents of time. They are fleeting snapshots that leave much unexplored.

Santos (2013a, p. 120) highlights the "technical and scientific transformation of space", where technological advancements enable mass production at unprecedented speeds. This disruption extends beyond material goods to include the rapid production of images and videos, reshaping our interactions with time and space.

[44] In the original: "*Buch an Buch, Kunstwerk an Kunstwerk* [...] *zu reihen*".

Figure 115 - Still frame of a row footage in the Bela Vista neighbourhood in São Paulo. An image which tries and fails to capture all the *cotidianos* in the same street



Photography created by the auhor, 2017.

Just as the production of goods has accelerated, so too has the creation of images and videos. The relentless pressure to produce content at an ever-increasing pace mirrors the demands of modern capitalism, where efficiency and speed dominate. As a result, the images and videos generated in this environment often serve as brief snapshots, incapable of encapsulating the full temporal and spatial complexity they aim to represent.

A photograph or video clip may capture a glimpse of everyday life, but it cannot fully convey the richness and diversity of human experience (Gervilla, 2023, p. 57). Each frame isolates a fragment of time, detached from the interconnectedness and continuity that define lived reality. As Santos observes, the transformation of spaces to meet the demands of accelerated production mirrors the role of images and videos as artefacts of this rapid evolution, offering glimpses into ever-shifting landscapes of contemporary life.

In alignment with the historical narratives embedded in the places of *Rust, Mold, and Cracks*, the images captured acquire a precarious quality that transcends mere technical representation. These images challenge viewers by confronting the inherent limitations of representation, attempting to encompass the multifaceted layers of spatiotemporal (re)arrangements and the estrangements they provoke. Much like the remnants of diverse architectural styles combine the complex histories of these abandoned sites, the images and sounds in the video stand as records of human endeavour.

Despite careful attention to detail and the evocative power of visual and auditory elements, the imagery and soundscape of *Rust, Mold, and Cracks* inevitably fall short of capturing the depth and richness of these sites' spatial and temporal layers. Locations like the Flugplatz Schönwalde or Vogelsang Military Village echo their complex pasts and underscore the ephemeral nature of representation.

The Brotfabrik in Oranienburg further illustrates this tension, serving as a disturbing reminder of past atrocities and the complexities of memory and remembrance. Similarly, the imagery and sounds in *Rust, Mold, and Cracks* evoke a sense of unease and displacement, navigating the intricate terrain of memory and forgetting. Despite efforts to capture the essence of these abandoned places, the video underscores the inherent inadequacy of representation in conveying the full breadth of human experience.

Ultimately, the imagery and soundscape of *Rust, Mold, and Cracks* highlight the precarious nature of representation in the face of historical complexity. Confronted by the evocative power of these images and sounds, viewers are welcome to think about the limitations of perception and memory, grappling with the overlapping layers of history that continue to shape the present.

5.10 *Kultivierung* and Heterotopia amidst Modernities

In light of the scenarios previously discussed, it is understandable to feel a sense of displacement in the production of objects. Buildings and architectural structures are also objects created through various modernities. This category includes infrastructure such as roads, railways, waterways, bridges, tunnels, locks, and the buildings associated with them. It also encompasses ports, electricity and gas lines, pipelines, and facilities for storing liquid fuels, as well as activities related to construction, urban expansion, and the transformations linked to these environments.

As part of the accumulation methodology mentioned earlier, these assets often lose their utility and are abandoned. Sometimes this abandonment happens so quickly that there is no time for what Simmel (1998, p. 83) refers to as "cultivation" (*Kultivierung*). This process involves analysing and engaging with objects using our personal and collective backgrounds. The absence of *Kultivierung* can be seen as a characteristic of modernity, suggesting deeper thoughts about how this concept interacts with the rapid pace of life and the accumulation of objects and infrastructures.

Simmel's idea of *Kultivierung* suggests a deliberate and reflective engagement with our environment and its objects. It implies cultivating the self - the subject - and the surroundings through thoughtful consideration and interaction. This process imbues objects and spaces with personal and collective meaning, transforming their mere existence into a cultivated experience. The term originates from agriculture and suggests time, effort, and care. For instance, in Brazilian Portuguese, when we share a long-term bond with someone, we might say we have "cultivated a friendship," emphasising the time and attention required to nurture it.

In modern societies, however, the relentless pursuit of newness often disrupts this process. The accumulation of technological advancements and infrastructures, such as the Soviet bases in East Germany, prioritises utility and progress over a cultivated relationship with the environment. This rush toward modernisation frequently results in the abandonment of objects and spaces once their utility diminishes, representing a broader cultural tragedy tied to unchecked consumption and disposability. Simmel (1998, p. 106) highlights that one of the tragedies of culture (*die Tragödie der Kultur*) occurs when the subject - us, for example - becomes lost during the cultivation process, which is then interrupted or compromised by distractions and accumulation.

The absence of *Kultivierung* in modern contexts reveals a disconnection from a more meaningful engagement with the world. Simmel suggests (1998, p. 106) that the more accelerated a period is, the less time there is for *Kultivierung*, increasing the risk of cultural tragedy. This paradox of modernity highlights the tension between technological progress, which enriches society, and the alienation it causes, leading to a superficial engagement with the world devoid of depth and permanence.

Simmel's concept of *Kultivierung* reminds us of the importance of slowing down and fostering a contemplative relationship with our surroundings and our interactions with the world. This involves rethinking our relationship with objects and spaces.

Engaging deeply with our environment may also prevent another tragedy of culture (Simmel, 1998, p. 94): the dualism between the individual (subject) and the cultural world (object). This tension arises when cultural objects, meant to enrich individual lives, instead become autonomous, imposing their logic and demands. The tragedy emerges when the balance tips too far - either toward the dominance of objective culture, suppressing individuality, or extreme subjectivism, which undermines the shared cultural foundations of society. For Simmel, the challenge of modern life lies in navigating this tension, seeking ways to bridge the subjective experience and the objective world of cultural forms. That is the essence of *Kultivierung*.

Figure 116 - Deactivated sanatorium in Buch bei Berlin



Photography created by the auhor, 2021.

When accumulated objects and spaces escape our time for pondering and cultivation, they begin to acquire new layers of meaning and functionality. The absence of *Kultivierung* and the accelerated pace of modernity transform certain spaces into ambiguous places where the past and present coexist in unexpected ways. These locations, defying traditional definitions, are no longer bound to a single purpose or temporality; they become "other spaces" (Foucault, 1994, p. 17), where boundaries between old and new, functional and abandoned, public and private blend and intertwine. Michel Foucault's (1994, p. 17) concept of "heterotopias" emerges from this juxtaposition of times and meanings: spaces where diverse temporalities and realities coexist and overlap, creating places of multiple interactions and interpretations.

Foucault (1994, p. 14) describes our era as the "epoch of space, [...] epoch of simultaneity, and [...] epoch of juxtaposition". For centuries, places were fixed within real space, contributing to well-defined oppositions between locations and their characteristics. Until the Middle Ages, humanity operated with binary pairs of places: sacred and profane, public and private, celestial and terrestrial. After Galileo Galilei (1564–1642), this conventional understanding of space was rendered obsolete. Space came to be understood as dynamic, where "the place of a thing was nothing but a point in its movement" (Foucault, 1994, p. 15).

When imagining new categories of places, one might think of Utopias. Foucault defines utopias as “emplacements with no real place” (Foucault, 1994, p. 15). To illustrate, he uses the reflection of an image in a mirror: “In the mirror, I see myself there where I am not, in an unreal space that virtually opens behind the surface” (Foucault, 1994, p. 17). He then introduces a contrasting category: heterotopias. These are “places that are outside all places, even though they are locatable. Since these places are other than all the emplacements that they reflect [...] a sort of mixed, in-between experience” (Foucault, 1994, p. 17). Heterotopias juxtapose different temporalities and places within a single space, layering multiple realities into a cohesive whole.

Heterotopias function as divergent spaces, simultaneously physical and mental. Foucault introduced this concept in *The Order of Things* (1966) and elaborated on it in his 1967 lecture *Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias*. These spaces, or counter-sites, represent, contest, and invert real sites within a culture. Examples include cemeteries, gardens, museums, libraries, brothels, and ships. Foucault’s heterotopias reveal how societies compartmentalise and define spaces, underscoring underlying social structures and values.

Heterotopias align with our earlier discussion on the distinctions and connections between space and place. However, they add complexity by “combining in a single real place several spaces, several emplacements that are in themselves incompatible” (Foucault, 1994, p. 19). They blur the lines between public and private, liberal and reactionary, creating amorphous spaces that resist categorisation. In a heterotopia, one might encounter differing *cotidianos* where “the shared everyday time is a plural time, a time within time” (Santos, 2013a, p. 35).

In this context, ruins can be understood as heterotopias because they accumulate layers of time. A ruined structure functions as a threshold to the past and future while remaining firmly grounded in the present. These sites are tied to the ground yet transcend simple temporalities or singular modernities. The former Soviet bases exemplify this idea, illustrating accumulation not only of objects but also of temporalities and places in a process that may be endless. Heterotopias gather diverse times and spaces while simultaneously transcending both, creating dislocation and unease.

Consider, for instance, the school building in Vogelsang. Walking through its hallways, one might feel transported back to its functional days or recall personal school memories. Entering a former classroom, vestiges like the blackboard, broken chairs, and bookshelves evoke a palpable sense of the past. These objects, though no longer present, linger in memory. Inside, one cannot precisely place themselves in the Soviet Union, the GDR, or reunited

Germany; the space exists in all and none simultaneously, embodying the essence of a heterotopia. Visitor interpretations vary, reinforcing the heterotopic nature of the site.

Through Foucault's concept of heterotopia, ruins emerge as heterotopic spaces, bringing together temporal and spatial multiplicity. This is evident in the places explored in *Rust, Mold, and Cracks*, where decaying structures become gateways not just to the past and future but to zones where divergent realities coexist. The essence of ruins as heterotopias lies in their ability to layer different periods, allowing these temporalities to interact and overlap within a single space.

Figure117 - Classroom at Vogelsang



Photography created by the auhor, 2021.

While physically present, the elements found in an abandoned place evoke a sense of absence, reminding us of what once was and what could have been. This duality underscores the ruin's heterotopic nature, existing simultaneously as a concrete location and an abstract space of memory and imagination. Each visitor's experience and interpretation further enrich this heterotopic space, adding layers and on its complexity. Viewing a ruin as a heterotopia allows for a post-dualist perspective, moving beyond the simple abandoned/not-abandoned categorisation. The closer we examine a ruin through this lens, the more the boundaries of such dualistic divisions begin to blur.

Simmel offers further insight into thinking beyond a dialectical framework. As we have seen, he (Simmel, 1958, p. 380) regards an architectural structure as a work of art (*Kunstwerk*). When the structure becomes a ruin, nature asserts itself as an active agent within the artwork. In this sense, a ruin is not merely evidence of time's passage; nature transforms it into a continuously evolving piece of art. This work-in-progress accumulates modernities and exists in a permanently unfinished state, as Nature - the artist - constantly alters its creation. A ruin is a natural artwork that defies framing. Images depicting ruins can only represent a fleeting moment in the ruin's evolution. For this reason, visual representations of ruins are inherently precarious. An image may capture the physical form but cannot encompass the underlying narratives and layers of meaning that give the ruin its unique character, whether through photography, video, or painting (Gervilla, 2023, p. 51). This limitation highlights a significant gap between the multi-sensory experience of being within a ruin and the flattened, simplified version presented in an image.

Another critical limitation in representing ruins is the loss of context. The historical, cultural, and emotional layers that imbue ruins with meaning are often stripped away in their visual representations. While an image might convey the physical attributes of a ruin, it fails to express the stories, historical significance, and emotional resonance tied to the site. Ruins are not merely physical structures; they are repositories of narratives and memories, and it is in capturing these intangible aspects that representation becomes especially precarious.

These considerations make it clear that representing ruins through images, videos, or paintings is inherently limited. These mediums can provide snapshots of a ruin at a particular moment, but they cannot encompass the dynamic interplay between structure and nature, the historical context, and the ongoing accumulation of modernities that define a ruin's essence. This complex natural artistic process demonstrates that in a ruined or abandoned place, the system of actions and objects is not suspended or incomplete but rather remains in perpetual motion.

5.11 Ruins and their Nostalgia

Previously, we have seen the possibility of understanding a ruin as a memory marker. Generally speaking, one might associate memory with the idea of something in the past, a former experience. Nevertheless, what if we think about a future memory related to the ruins and speculate about it? That would be what Svetlana Boym (2017a, p. 43) calls "ruinophilia". This phenomenon happens when we realise that "ruins make us think of the past that could have

been and the future that never took place, tantalising us with utopian dreams of escaping the irreversibility of time" (Boym, 2017a, p. 43). To approach her interpretation of ruinophilia, we must first take a deeper view of her ideas of nostalgia.

To begin with, it is essential to remember the etymological meaning of the word nostalgia. It is a composite name that comes from the Greek language. In a simple translation, *nostos* means "return to home" or "return to a place of origin", while *algia* means "will" or "wish". Therefore, we can assume that the meaning of nostalgia is something close to "the wish of returning home" (Boym, 2017b, p. 153).

Figure 118 - Musician playing in front of the Arch of Galerius (303 AC), Thessaloniki, 2024



Photography created by the auhor, 2024.

Boym states in her book *The Future of Nostalgia* (2001, p. 41) that there are two types of nostalgia: restorative and reflexive. The former "puts emphasis on *nostos* and proposes to rebuild the lost home and patch up the memory gap. Reflective nostalgia dwells in *algia*, in longing and loss, the imperfect process of remembrance" (Boym, 2001, p. 41). On the one hand, restorative nostalgia might be found along nationalist discourses, conservative thinking, and other attitudes that dream about a glorious past. For adepts of this sort of nostalgia, the past

profoundly impacts the present. The good old days are not a distant period in time but "a perfect snapshot" or an "original image" (Boym, 2001, p. 50).

On the other hand, reflexive nostalgia deals with the "irrevocability of the past and human finitude" (Boym, 2001, p. 50). If the restorative wants to reconstruct the house following the original blueprints, with high fidelity on the level of details and original parts, the reflexive nostalgia knows that it is not possible because any remaking would be an illusion. The reflexive nostalgia prefers a ruin rather than a restored construction.

Although reflexive nostalgia is not strictly attached to the past as restorative nostalgia, both kinds are still linked to a chronological sequence of past, present and future. In her posthumous book *The Off-Modern* (2017), the author presents a third type of nostalgia: the "prospective" (Boym, 2017, p. 39). The particularity of the kind is that it "is not merely a wistful acknowledgement that nostalgia would or should be what it used to be. Nor is it an escape from the complexities of the present" (Boym, 2017, p. 39). For her, it is not an attempt to recover the past but to look forward without forgetting the previous path. Simultaneously, the prospective nostalgia frees us from the linear vectors of past and future, which lock us in the present. Ruins could be a trigger for this sort of nostalgia, generating ruinophilia.

Ruinophilia thought is not a mere contemplation of ruins. It is "a material embodiment of the prospective nostalgia that goes beyond postmodern quotation marks" (Boym, 2017, p. 43). This feeling gets even stronger when we, living in the digital era of the 21st century, look to ruin from a modernity from the past century. Mainly when it refers to an architecture that represented - or should mean - a sign of so-called progress. A symbol of modernity that promised something that might never have been achieved or stood as a representation of power and technological advancement. The places depicted in *Rust, Mold, and Cracks* have considerable potential for being a scenario for ruinophilia.

A modernity end does not necessarily come due to a failure; it can happen because a new event or technology came up and altered the former spatiotemporal arrangement. The ruinophilie is aware of this clash of temporalities on a ruin and its surroundings. The desire of the ruinophile is to be provoked by this convergence of different times, he or she wants to be seduced by the ruins's charm, and they yearn for the displacement feeling of seeing a ruin as a heterotopia. The ruinophile realises the ruin as an active agent to incite his or her prospective nostalgia, understanding the gathering of simultaneous temporalities. Not willing to revive the past, nor dreaming about a utopian future, but understanding that the dualist relation of temporalities is gone and realising spaces, places, and times as a unity, challenging our linear perceptions of time and progress.

5.12 Landscapes in Ruins and Ruined Landscapes

When elements are arranged within a space, this composition forms a landscape. However, defining a landscape in a single sentence, as this one attempts to do, would be overly simplistic. Tim Ingold (1993, p. 153) proposes that before defining what a landscape is, we should first consider what it is not: "It is not 'land', it is not 'nature', and it is not 'space'. It is 'remembrance and remembering'" (Ingold, 1993, p. 152–153). Simmel (2009, p. 5) similarly cautions that when we observe "trees, water streams, meadows and cornfields, hills and houses and a thousand other alterations of light and clouds [...], we are not yet conscious of seeing a 'landscape'".

These perspectives remind us to move beyond clichéd depictions of landscapes: paintings or photographs often relegated to the decor of waiting rooms, computer wallpapers, or random screensavers in department stores. Upon hearing the word "landscape", it is also tempting to envision the iconic scenes of Western movies, with their vast rocky horizons, or the savanna teeming with wildlife frequently showcased on television.

Figure 119 - Fragment of the Byzantine Wall, Thessaloniki, Greece



Photography created by the auhor, 2024.

The landscape should be understood beyond the persistent dualisms of culture/nature, here/out there, near/far, and other pairs that have lost their relevance in spatial matters. Space remains a central concept; however, “landscape and space are not synonymous. Landscape is a set of forms that, in a given moment, express the legacies of the successive localised relations between humans and nature” (Simmel, 2021, p. 62). This perspective suggests that a landscape exists as an intermediary and/or a juxtaposition of physical or abstract layers.

A landscape encompasses not only objects but also temporalities and memories. It is “transtemporal, bringing together past and present objects in a transversal connection” (Simmel, 2021, p. 62). While this may seem contradictory - given the earlier assertion that landscape is not space - many characteristics attributed to landscapes overlap with those of space, as previously discussed. One potential distinction is that a landscape is - or can be - composed of diverse spaces. Just as a single space may incorporate varying temporalities, a landscape can encompass diversiform spaces and, consequently, several temporalities.

Expanding on this notion, “a landscape only exists when it is seen as a unit” (Simmel, 2009, p. 12). In this sense, a landscape is inherently post-dualist, representing the unity of all elements and temporalities, regardless of who (or what) created or arranged them. A landscape is not merely a portion of space captured within a squared frame or a panorama generated by a mobile phone. It is dynamic and ever-changing. In light of this, “our consciousness, beyond the elements, must enjoy a new totality, something unified, not linked to its particular meanings nor mechanically composed of them - only then is it a landscape” (Simmel, 2009, p. 5).

These preliminary definitions of landscape will serve as a foundation for exploring the subsequent considerations surrounding ruins and abandoned places. Nowadays,

> Our landscape is heterogeneous and shaped by the ruins and construction sites of different modernities - industrial, post-industrial, digital, and post-digital. We need to think beyond the directional arrows of time pointing at the Past or Future and to inhabit multiple temporal regimes of the Present, with their different pace, rhythm, and duration (Boym, 2017, p. 40).

The scenario proposed by Svetlana Boym aligns with Simmel’s unity and Santos’s notion of social actions within a landscape. A landscape marked by varied modernities, represented through ruins and construction sites coexisting. Following Boym’s suggestion, one might consider a construction site as the opposite of a ruin. However, as previously discussed, dualist oppositions should be avoided. In the modernities of our time, these two elements -

construction and ruination - are more interconnected than they may initially seem. Let us take a look into this relationship.

To summarise some earlier points, new modernities bring about new necessities, creating new objects. This rapid process accumulates objects while leaving no time for cultivating spatiotemporal rearrangements. Jameson (1991, p. 308) observes that postmodernism critiques ongoing modernities, characterised by a situation where "the survival, the residue, the holdover, the archaic, has finally been swept away without a trace. In postmodernism, then, the past itself has disappeared". Traditionally, ruins serve as evidence of the past. To accommodate the new, they are often erased from urban landscapes, creating a blank and hermetic scenery devoid of historical reference points. Yet, this erasure is not entirely achievable.

The landscapes of contemporary modernities are dynamic, encompassing systems of actions and objects driven by the frenetic pace and relentless accumulation previously described. Ingold (1993, p. 157) refers to this convergence as a "taskscape," a type of landscape where we are "participants, not spectators." In this framework, landscapes are not static terrains but spaces continually shaped by human presence and activities. Taskscapes are unique, as they embody the interplay of human and non-human actions, including the effects of past human endeavours, even when those individuals have long departed.

Through the concept of taskscape, we can expand our understanding of the cyclical interactions between human and non-human elements within landscapes. Human actions leave imprints, and nature responds, reshaping these spaces in an ongoing dialogue. This dynamic process blurs the boundaries between nature and culture, challenging us to rethink our role in shaping the world around us. Taskscapes are not mere backdrops for human activity but co-constructed spaces where all participants contribute to a continuous narrative of place, echoing Simmel's proposed unity.

To illustrate the interconnectedness of construction and ruination within modern taskscapes, let us examine the Suape Harbour. Located 40 km south of Recife in Pernambuco, Brazil, Suape is a port operating year-round. Designed as part of a Port-Industry integrated system, it was envisioned to transport fuels and bulk cereals, eventually replacing the Recife Port. Since its inception, Suape has been one of Brazil's largest and most technologically advanced ports, serving Pernambuco and parts of Alagoas and Paraíba states.

However, the Suape Industrial and Port Complex has faced significant controversies related to environmental and social impacts, including the displacement of local communities and the disruption of ecosystems. One emblematic incident occurred in 2019, when a massive

raw oil spill devastated a vast area of native flora and fauna - a stark example of forced spatiotemporal rearrangements.

These impacts, compounded by shifts in federal government priorities, led to an abrupt halt in investments, further disrupting local taskscapes. In 2022, during a visit with researchers and artists, I observed firsthand the intricate interplay between construction and ruination, challenging the binary notion of progress and decay. The site revealed the marks of ambitious projects interrupted, telling stories of modernities that remain incomplete.

Among these are the ruins of the Massangana train station, conceived to modernise the harbour area but left unfinished. Tracks, platforms, and a ticket office now face nature's revenge, with vegetation reclaiming the space. Across the road, colossal ruined concrete columns of an unfinished warehouse stand as symbol of interrupted modernity. Wet soil has already begun to erode the steel bases of the structure.

Figure 120 - Boarding platform of Massangana train station, Suape, Brazil



Photography created by the auhor, 2024.

Initially marked by dynamism, these spaces underscore a critical aspect of contemporary landscapes: the convergence of construction and ruination within the same temporal and spatial framework. The abandoned projects in Suape exemplify how modern development, driven by relentless pace, often leaves a trail of incomplete initiatives. These sites represent human

ambition while succumbing to economic, political, or environmental challenges. They illustrate the intertwined nature of construction and decay, embodying the fluidity of modernities described by Boym, Simmel, and Santos.

By recognising the symbiotic relationship between construction and ruination, we gain a deeper understanding of the complex layers within taskscapes, challenging us to rethink our role in shaping - and being shaped by - the landscapes we inhabit.

5.13 New Landscapes during the German Reunification

After this detour, let us go back to the landscapes of the places of *Rust, Mold, and Cracks* and a period in German history known as *die Wende* ("the change" or "the turn", in a free translation). It is the name given to the period when several events took place in the GDR and characterised the end of the socialist government. It does not have precise dates, but it is commonly understood that between the Autumn of 1989 and the official reunification of Germany on 03rd October 1990, when the leaders of both states - GDR and FRG - signed the definitive agreement to merge the two countries. The document was called the Treaty on the Final Settlement with Respect to Germany (*Vertrag über die abschließende Regelung in Bezug auf Deutschland*).

The *Montagsdemonstrationen* (Mondays Demonstration) in cities such as Leipzig, Dresden, and Rostock, a series of demonstrations in 1989 that became known as *Friedliche Revolution* (Peaceful Revolution) are some of the the actions which triggered die Wende. These sorts of episodes, however, did not start only at this time; throughout the history of DDR, other demonstrations took place. However, they were severely repressed by the government. One of the most emblematic cases is certainly the 1953 Uprising in East Germany, also known as the June 17 Uprising, was a major protest against the ruling communist government of the German Democratic Republic. It began with a strike by East Berlin construction workers on June 16, 1953, and quickly escalated into a widespread uprising across the country involving workers, students, and intellectuals. The protesters demanded political reforms, free elections, and an end to Soviet influence. The Soviet Union and GDR authorities responded with force, leading to violent clashes and dozens of deaths (Gedenkstätte Berliner Mauer, 2021). Although the uprising was brutally suppressed, it marked a significant moment of dissent against communist rule in East Germany.

In the autumn of 1989, the protests reached a level that called international attention and went out of the SED's[45] control. These events exposed the national dissatisfaction of a significant portion of the population of East Germany with the form of government at that time. Urgent demands marked the *Montagsdemonstrationen* and the *Friedliche Revolution* for democratic and social changes. Protesters called for freedom of expression and association, free and fair elections, respect for human rights and the rule of law, economic and social improvements, political reform and government transparency (Gedenkstätte Berliner Mauer, 2021). These actions played a crucial role in the end of the communist government and the process of German Reunification.

Many people's passage from East Germany to Czechoslovakia, the opening of the Wall of Berlin (09/11/1989) and the other borders between the two Germanys, currency unification, and many other actions during this time are also considered part of die Wende. Some lines of thinking believe that social-economic-political transformations in reunited Germany over the 1990s were also part of die Wende. As a very complex spatiotemporal rearrangement, it could not be ended with just a couple of signatures and hands shaking.

Reinhard Glöckner (1993, p. 03), the first mayor of Greifswald after the Reunification, considers that die Wende in the city started already in 1981, during the monthly meetings at the parish hall of St. Marien Kirche, when the church council used to discuss demonstrations taking place in other DDR cities. The author also states (Glöckner, 1993, p. 13) that each stage of the Reunification could be considered a different Wende, therefore instead of a unique Wende what happened was a series of *Wenden*.

In the following years of Reunification, many changes were carried out, and the territory of the now-former East Germany was reorganised by the capital of West Germany (Santos, 2013a, p. 172) to attend to the new financial necessities of the so-called free world. Among these transformations, several state properties in East Germany were privatised. Another outcome was an abrupt change in the relations between the reunited Germany and the USSR. Of course, at this point, the Soviet *Wende* was also taking place, but its official end of the USSR would be on 26th December 1991. This period witnessed the redefinition of relations between

[45] SED - *Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands* or Socialist Unity Party of Germany, was the ruling Marxist–Leninist political party in the German Democratic Republic. It existed from 1946 until 1989. It was formed through the merger of the Communist Party of Germany (KPD) and the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) in the Soviet-occupied zone of post-World War II Germany. The SED played a central role in the establishment and maintenance of the socialist state in East Germany, exercising tight control over political, economic, and social life.

the newly reunified Germany and the former republics of the Soviet Union, necessitating a renegotiation of diplomatic, economic, and political ties between the involved entities. This recalibration process extended over the subsequent years, as the countries went through the complexities of a new geopolitical landscape and adjusted to their altered roles on the global stage.

The spatial reorganisation following German reunification had profound and far-reaching consequences for the people and regions of East Germany. As state-owned industries were privatised and integrated into the capitalist framework, many enterprises that had been the backbone of the East German economy were shuttered practically overnight. This abrupt shift left countless individuals unemployed and entire communities confused by the sudden loss of economic stability and livelihoods.

Moreover, the dismantling of export oriented industries and the termination of advantageous trade deals with other Eastern Bloc countries severely affected the region's economy. Industries that had thrived under socialist central planning could not compete in the global market without the protectionist measures and subsidies that had sustained them. Consequently, more people were out of work, there was more poverty, and people were unsatisfied as the promised benefits of reunification failed to materialise for many residents of the former East.

This economic dislocation exacerbated existing inequalities between East and West, contributing to disillusionment and resentment among those who felt marginalised by the reunification process, seeing themselves as "second-class citizens" (Zimmermann, 1993, p. 226).

Guten Tag ich bin die Freiheit
So, jetzt kennt ihr meinen Preis
Leider könnt ihr ihn nicht zahlen
Auch wenn ihr Bundesbürger heißt[46]

[46] "Good morning, I am the freedom / Now you all know my price / Unfortunately you can't pay for it / Even when you are called German citizens". Song: *Worte der Freiheit*. Composer: Stephan Weidner. Artist: Böhse Onkelz. Album: *Schwarz*, 1993 © V.I.E.R. Ton & Merch GmbH.

Figure 121 - Small protest against the removal of parts of the Berlin Wall, 2013

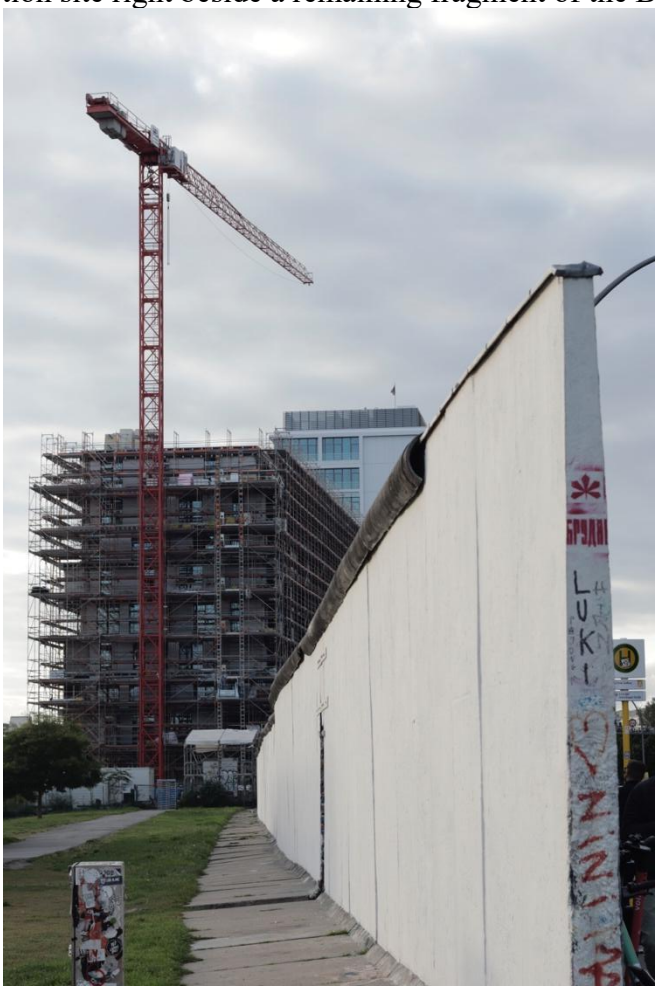


Photography created by the auhor, 2013.

Regarding the Soviet bases presented here, they began to be disassembled during this period. Soon; they became an actual no man's land; after all, the two States that could claim their possession were no longer there. An emblematic situation when a society is "transformed from within and adapt to pressures and influences from without" as a consequence "objective conceptions of space and time must change to accommodate new material practices of social reproductions" (Harvey, 1991, p. 419).

It was one of the most profound spatiotemporal changes in Europe since WWII. A case where the "reorganisations of space relations and spatial representations have had an extraordinarily powerful effect" (Harvey, 1991, p. 424-24). At this stage, I would like to introduce another system of actions related to this kind of place: real estate speculation. Although it does not have a proper face or could be embodied, its consequences are easily seen. It can be observed, for example, in some areas of Berlin, particularly those which belonged to the East Side, where it is easy to find massive empty spaces expecting to receive new constructions. Cranes and bulldozers are also part of the landscapes of the German capital, constantly reconfiguring the urban space. Old buildings are devoured by real estate speculation to make room for more modern facilities. Svetlana Boym (2001, p. 176) proposes that the ruins and construction sites coexist in Berlin; however, the former are getting more and more rare.

Figure 122 - A construction site right beside a remaining fragment of the Berlin Wall, 2021



Photography created by the auhor, 2021.

At the same time, Huyssen (2000, p. 80) talks about the “Berlin voids”, regions and terrains of the city which lie on a transitory stage between abandonment and appreciation. They found themselves in a liminal state - neither fully integrated into the burgeoning capitalist framework nor retaining their former socialist identities. The voids are clear signs of a changing city, spaces where the physical remnants of the past and plans for the future are temporarily stuck, waiting, amid the pressures of real estate speculation. It is not a privilege of Berlin but a common marketing strategy worldwide, from small towns to the megalopolis. Ruins are only welcome in the urban landscape if they can become a tourist attraction or another means to raise more money than a glassy skyscraper or a housing complex fancy of houses.

The Soviet bases of the video are no exception to this model. They are certainly under market speculation, waiting for the area to value, arousing the interest of investors. The signs of “No Entry” indicate they have an owner, whether a municipality, a corporation, or a private holder. However, the lack of maintenance reveals that no one is worried about the aspect or condition of the buildings, even less about the historical tenor they can carry. It is possible that

right now, when I am writing this text, they are not there anymore. After all, I am talking about places I visited almost more than years ago. It is a long period for speculative marketing. Considering the real estate speculation as an active movement, we have another plea to affirm that the system action was never gone in those places. They are like the actions of nature: they never stop and are continuously reconfiguring space. A ruined structure cannot become a memory marker within this context because this speculative gaze inherently prioritises envisioned futures over historical significance, often at the cost of erasing the physical remnants of the past that embody collective memories and cultural identities. In this light, ruins, as remnants of past social, economic, or political realities, are seen not as vessels of memory but as obstacles to be cleared for new developments.

Figure 123 - A typical “Berlin void” near the Jannowitzbrück train station, in the former East Berlin



Photography created by the auhor, 2022.

Harvey (1990, p. 429) points out that memory markers are constantly threatened with dismantling to make way for projects that promise higher economic returns. The speculative market’s dynamics, fuelled by the pursuit of profit, intrinsically devalue ruins’ historical and

cultural significance. As such, the potential of these ruins to act as memory markers is undermined by a system that favours economic utility over the preservation of collective memory and identity.

Moreover, transforming urban landscapes under real estate speculation often leads to a homogenization of space, where generic, market-driven structures replace unique historical features. This process erases physical markers of the past. It contributes to a sense of dislocation and alienation among communities, further diminishing the capacity of ruins to serve as anchors for memory and identity in the face of relentless urban development.

On top of that, the period following German Reunification saw a conscious effort to reshape the nation's identity, which often involved erasing or repurposing vestiges of the DDR era and the influence of the Soviet Union. This approach to dealing with the physical and symbolic landscapes of the past was exemplified by the demolition of significant structures like the *Palast der Republik* in Berlin.

The Palast der Republik - the headquarters of DDR's government, was a landmark of East German architecture and politics. Built in 1976, it stood on the site of the former Royal Palace in Berlin, known as *Berliner Schloss*, which had been destroyed after World War II. While the original palace symbolised Prussian monarchical power, the Palast was constructed to represent the people of the German Democratic Republic. With a modern and functional design, it housed the GDR's parliament as well as cultural spaces, including auditoriums, concert halls, a bowling alley, and restaurants. Thus, the Palast became a meeting and leisure space for the people of the GDR, contrasting with the oppressive power it once housed (Boym, 2001, 148).

Following the fall of the Berlin Wall and German reunification, the building lost its political function and was closed in 1990 after the discovery of asbestos and the need of maintenance. The fate of the Palast became the subject of intense debate, reflecting tensions between the socialist past and Germany's new identity (Boym, 2001, 153). Many Berliners, especially from the eastern side, advocated for its preservation, seeing it as a symbol of their daily lives during the GDR era. The building carried the sentimental memory of a time when opportunities for leisure and cultural gatherings were limited yet deeply valued by its visitors (Boym, 2001, 153).

Ultimately, the Palast was demolished in 2006 and replaced by a reconstruction of the former Royal Palace as part of a revitalization project for central Berlin. Despite protests and demonstrations from the East Berlin population, who argued that the building was part of their identity and accused its demolition of being a form of colonisation promoted by West Germans

(Boym, 2001, p. 153), the Christian Democrats[47] in the Berlin Senate managed to carry out their idea of "annihilating it as a symbol of GDR government and an 'eyesore' in the face of Berlin" (Boym, 2001, p. 153). In its place, the Royal Palace was rebuilt following the original plans and now houses the Humboldt Forum, a museum that proudly displays items reminiscent of the German Empire's colonial past. It was officially opened in July 2021.

This replacement symbolises a desire to reconnect with Germany's pre-socialist heritage, yet also underscores the complexity of dealing with the city's conflicting memories (Boym, 2001, p. 153). While some see the reconstruction as a revival of German cultural heritage, others interpret it as an erasure of the GDR's recent history and unique identity. This erasure symbolises a constant intent to distance the present from the GDR's legacy, aligning with a desire to forge a singular national narrative that minimises the complexities of East Germany's Soviet-influenced history.

Figure 124 - Reconstruction of the Royal Palace of Berlin, Schlossbrücke, Berlin



Source: Google Street View. Image captured: July 2008. Accessed: April 12, 2023.

[47] The *Christian Democratic Union* (CDU) is a major centre-right political party in Germany, known for its conservative, pro-business, and pro-European Union stance. It promotes Christian-democratic and liberal-conservative values. The CDU forms a long-standing political alliance with its Bavarian sister party, the *Christian Social Union* (CSU), often referred to jointly as CDU/CSU or *The Union*. The most prominent figure of the CDU is Angela Merkel, who served as Chancellor of Germany from 2005 to 2021 and led the party through four consecutive federal elections.

This tendency to erase or overlook aspects of the DDR's heritage and Soviet characteristics extends beyond individual landmarks to encompass wider urban and rural landscapes, including the Soviet military bases discussed earlier. In this context, ruins that could serve as memory markers of the DDR period or Soviet presence are often viewed as undesirable elements of a past that conflicts with the narrative of a unified, forward looking Germany. The taskscapes of our modernities shall not bring the presence of undesired temporalities.

5.14 Creative Processes of *Rust, Mold, and Cracks*

5.14.1 Artistic Embodiment and the Act of Being There

Artistic practices often demand an acute awareness of place, presence, and the intertwining of physical and conceptual dimensions. This intersection is beautifully articulated in Henry David Thoreau's *Walking* (1914), where the act of wandering (or sauntering) through wild nature becomes a form of creative and philosophical engagement. Thoreau views walking as an escape from societal constraints and a return to "absolute freedom and wildness" (Thoreau, 1914, p. 4). For him, walking is not simply a means of locomotion but a deliberate act of immersion, where one participates in the vitality of the environment rather than merely observing it. He argues that to walk in the fullest sense is to embrace the unpredictability and spontaneity of the natural world, transforming the act into a "crusade" (Thoreau, 1914, p. 05) that reclaims not only physical space but also the inner landscapes of the self (Thoreau, 1914, p. 6). In this way, walking becomes a creative process in itself, where every step embodies a moment of interaction and discovery.

Annika Schlitte (2018) expands this notion by situating it within the framework of Helmuth Plessner's philosophical anthropology. Schlitte emphasizes Helmuth Plessner's dual understanding of the human body as both a physical entity - "physical body" - and an experiential medium - "living body" (Schlitte, 2018, p. 142). This paradox underscores the unique human capacity to navigate and interpret spaces both as objects within the world and as participants shaping it. Plessner's insights reveal that the body is not a passive entity within space but an active agent mediating between internal intentionality and external realities. Schlitte highlights how this duality allows the body to transcend mere physicality, engaging in an ongoing dialogue with its surroundings to generate meaning and expression.

In the context of artistic practices, this embodied engagement transforms walking and similar acts into much more than preparatory activities; they become the artwork itself. By

walking through a forest, exploring an abandoned building, or navigating an uncharted landscape, the artist redefines the boundaries between creation and experience. The lack of preordained paths or established scripts in such spaces allows for a spontaneity that mirrors the creative process. Thoreau's observation on walking not as an "exercise" (Thoreau, 1914, p. 13) but walking to a place and getting there "in spirit" (Thoreau, 1914, p. 17) resonates in these moments of exploration, where the artist actively co-creates the meaning of a place through presence and movement.

Figure 125 - Picture made while I was lost in the surrounding forest of Vogelsang



Photography created by the auhor, 2021.

Moreover, abandoned spaces add another layer to this dynamic. The absence of pre-defined behaviors or societal norms in these settings amplifies the creative potential of the body as a mediator. The interplay of natural forces reclaiming the built environment - rust, mold, cracks, and vegetation - offers living evidence of the fluidity between culture and nature. These sites challenge the artist to move beyond rigid categorizations and embrace a more holistic, process-oriented perspective on creation. The artist's body becomes both the observer and the observed, simultaneously shaping and being shaped by the environment.

Ultimately, practices such as walking or exploring abandoned places blur the line between action and outcome, highlighting that the process of "being there" is an integral part

of artistic expression. This embodied interaction with space fosters a deeper understanding of place as a dynamic and collaborative entity, where meaning arises through continuous engagement rather than static observation. Through these practices, the artist not only navigates the world but also participates in its constant creation and re-creation, embodying the essence of art as lived experience.

5.14.2 From the Frustration to the *Kultivierung*: Personal Experiences

Just two days after my arrival in Berlin in September 2021, I chose the first abandoned place I would visit: the *Panzerkaserne* in Bernau, about 20 km northeast of the capital. The choice of this site - originally a military complex for producing and maintaining the uniforms of the German *Wehrmacht* before and during WWII, then later became a headquarters for a Soviet tank division during the DDR - was not by chance; this was the very first place I visited in 2013 when I was making *Abandonamento* and when for the first time I started to reflect on questions about countries that no longer exist. I know it might sound, and in fact is, contradictory: I wanted to avoid a remake of a former work but chose a key place of it, but so are the artistic processes sometimes.

On my way to the Panzerkaserne, I recalled my previous experiences there. In 2013, I visited the site twice. I remember seeing diverse vestiges of Soviet activities there: uniforms, gas masks, some tools and automobile parts in the garages; furthermore, at the time, the sports gyms were in relatively good shape. The basketball and handball pitches still had the baskets, goals, nets, and floor lines, besides the names and symbols of each sport written on the wall. It was snowing during the *Abandonamento* days. So I remember walking around the place and hearing the water drops because of the melted snow and other frightening and beautiful natural sounds. Eight years later, I was expecting, one way or another, to find the place in almost the same conditions. It might sound naive, especially after studying the ruinous universe for many years, but, again, so are the artistic processes sometimes.

I left the train at the same station, took the same path under a motorway, and walked through the same track through the woods. When I got there I found a different place. Most of the barracks and pavilions, as well the garages and a building that seemed to be a theatre hall, were demolished. A demolition team was working on-site, making my way inside the buildings more complicated than expected. Once inside, the feeling of frustration grew even stronger. There was nothing there, nothing. There were no traces of the building's former activities. Without knowing its background it would be impossible to to imagine what it used to be.

Figure 126 - Overview of the Panzerkaserne in 2021



Photography created by the auhor, 2021.

At this very moment, I understood that each visit to a place is a unique event. Our bodies mediate between our intellectual, sensitive and sensorial aspects of the places. However, as long as we develop countless "*Kultivierungen*" processes, our perception might change when we revisit a place. It is not the same place anymore because we can not assimilate it as before. On top of that, it could be the kind of situation when the place itself also changed physically, blurring even more the memories and the feelings we once had about that location. In this sense, the "being there" is a creative method; every visit is singular. The visit is an artistic process. It helped me deal with frustration and understand that it is also part of the ruinophilie.

Wondering about the shifting essence of the Panzerkaserne, I realised the dynamicity of such landscapes. They are not inactive; they are in a continuous state of becoming, shaped by both natural elements and human intervention. This realisation consolidates that our engagement with ruins and any place is not a passive experience but an active encounter. Each visit offers a new dialogue and narrative incorporated from memory and present perception. The sensation might be familiar, but it is a distinct experience every time.

After this point, I realised that I could "just" visit abandoned places without the obligation of taking pictures, recording videos, making video projections and simulating

situations that could be happening there, or any other activity. Somehow, everything became lighter.

For many years, I avoided using localisation technologies such as satellite images and GPS coordinates when exploring such sites. I used to write down on paper previous visitors' instructions and look at a regular map. Some places I have been, I got there after some observations passing through the road or locations that I recalled from other situations. Acting like this, I thought it could preserve the work's more "honest" aspect. It would be a contemporary ruin-pleasure amidst all the technology to find a ruin in an old-school way. I gave up on all of that. Using tools such as Google Maps depreciates none of my work. However, as many of those places are located in areas out of the urban space or into the woods, it used not to have signal reception there, so it was not possible to navigate using the GPS. Straightaway, I learned how to use and locate myself using a compass, like the characters of the action movies I mentioned in the preface. It saved me precious time. Instead of walking in circles, I could do it straight in the desired direction. Now, before we delve into the visits of *Rust, Mold, and Cracks*, I would like to share some personal experiences that I now realise impacted my process as an artist.

Figure 127 - Remains of Vogelsang military village found in forest



Photography created by the auhor, 2021.

When the Wall of Berlin fell in October 1989, I was just five years old, and names such as East Germany, Soviet Union, Communism, Capitalism and Cold War were not part of my daily vocabulary. I remember my parents watching the news on television and my father saying, "You are watching the history happening live." At that time, I did not understand what it meant. Just one month later, we experienced the first democratic elections for president in Brazil since the military coup of 1964 and I also did not really know what was going on. However, somehow, the televised images of both countries looked similar to mine.

The colours of the flags were different, yet the queues of cars crossing the German borders seemed identical to the endless lines at the Brazilian gas stations on the day before the readjustment of the petrol price, a widespread scenario on those days: possibly the period with the most extraordinary inflation in the country. The lines of East Germans waiting to spend their *Begrüßungsgeld*[48] ("welcome money", in a free translation) on Western products were similar to the Brazilians at supermarkets before the new prices. When I watched television, these diverse situations looked alike. During the following decade, these themes were always present in my primary education at school. All these scenarios, plus the fact that my father used to work as a truck driver for a German company in Brazil, helped me to create my imagination about the new modernities in Europe. Still, it all seemed very far away from me, literally on the other side of the ocean.

Almost two decades later, in 2008, when I had the opportunity to visit Germany for the first time for work, to participate in the "Brasil em Cena" festival, the very idea of an international work trip felt surreal to me, and all my previous imaginings resurfaced. As soon as I arrived in Berlin, a series of comparisons began. I tried to connect the images I had seen on TV, books, and newspapers with the reality I was experiencing. Of course, it is a complex task. This practice might cause a clash of temporalities. The Germany that I had imagined was no longer there. It probably never existed. Within my imagination, however, it was real for me.

On the other hand, everything seemed very different from what I had in mind. Indeed, my thoughts were based on my system of actions and objects, not those from Germany. The language, the sounds, smells, the air, the visual stimulus, everything was different from my constructed memories. The mediation between my imagination and the place was made through my body.

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[48] The "*Begrüßungsgeld*" was an initiative from the Federal Republic of Germany - or West Germany - that gave 100 German Marks to the inhabitants of East Germany, so they could buy whatever they wanted with this amount. The German photographer Sophie Kirchner created a photo series called *Träume aus Papier* (2022). An artwork that depicts some people who received this money, their purchases and comments from that time.

What made the experience even more interesting was that I was accompanying a trio of blind musicians from the group Blind Sound Orchestra[49], one of the festival's attractions, who were also on their first international trip. This added an extra layer of responsibility, as I was not only managing my adaptation to the new environment but also assisting them in navigating and connecting with a place unfamiliar to all of us. This dynamic turned the journey into a rich and remarkable exchange, where our unique perspectives were shared by every discovery and challenge.

Figure 128 - Still frame of the short-movie *Blind Sound Orchestra* with the musicians playing in front of the Brandenburger Tor in Berlin, 2010



Photography created by the auhor, 2008.

The sensation of temporal displacement in Germany got even more complex in 2013 when I visited the Panzerkaserne for the first time. There, the overlapping of temporalities were more numerous. Walking through the empty giant halls, long corridors, the Cyrillic writings on the walls, nature's revenge everywhere and the cold and humidity because of the snow created a post-dualist environment for me. I was not in a place where I could recall what they were one day from my imagination. It was not the USSR, East Germany, or the Berliner scenario near the cultural centre that I was hosted. Somehow, I was caught somewhere in time between all of it, in spatiotemporal confusion, which brings a feeling of displacement. "Ruins give us a shock

[49] The trip and the project culminated in the short film *Blind Sound Orchestra* directed by me and released in 2010. Available at: < https://youtu.be/W48aT1OWrl0>.

of vanishing materiality" (Boym, 2017, p. 43); it can be felt in a circumstance like this when it is hard to tell which exact temporary we are - a typical ruinophilia situation.

Visiting a complex landscape like this one is a multi-sensorial experience. Under this circumstance, it is not easy to find unity, as Simmel proposed. I was not able to do that during the visits. It was something that took some time to happen; it was my process of cultivation. Now, I have an imagination composed by the images I still can recall in my mind, the pictures and videos I created using a camera, and the landscapes created by my imagination mixing the two former ones. All of them exist and coexist; they have unity among them, creating a mental landscape. However, they are different every time I go back to these places in my head. They are constantly altering themselves behind my eyes.

The relationship between the physical body and memory plays a key role in the artistic process, particularly when considering the concept of being there. As the body moves through and interacts with the environment, it forms a sensory connection to the space, while memory builds upon this experience, offering its own layer of interpretation and meaning.This duality underscores the tension between the closeness of physical presence and the contemplative nature of memory, where the artist experiences and later revisits the space through imagination. As the body moves through a landscape, mainly one as undefined as an abandoned site, it mediates the creation of meaning. At the same time, memory adds depth, layering past impressions with present sensations. These elements shape the artwork, transforming raw perception into a subtle, multi-dimensional expression.

All these experiences and perceptions can not be detached from the artistic process. The artwork is already being created amidst this background. Image production is just one part of it, and being there has a central role. Artistic creation happens in the lacuna. One of the first ones is the gap between what the artist has in mind and what is materialised by him or her. Another gap is between the object of art itself and the audience's perception. It is not possible to foresee what happens amidst these experiences. What initially began as frustration gradually transformed into an understanding of the sensory dynamics of this type of experience. That is, simultaneously, the beauty and a potential tragedy of the Arts[50].

[50] More about the concept of tragedy can be found in Georg Simmel's *Der Begriff und die Tragödie der Kultur*. Alfred Krönner Press, Leipzig, 1919.

5.14.3 Visiting the Locations of the Video

The first of the three places of *Rust, Mold, and Cracks* I visited was the Flugplatz Schönwalde on September 15 2021. At that time, it was the biggest abandoned place I had ever been. After taking a train to Hennigsdorf, I had to walk for longer than one hour through a dirty road, which later became a straight track. When the track ended, I used the compass to find one of the entrances. A fence in bad condition had a *Betreten Verboten* sign near a fallen gate. It was not hard to get inside. Until I found the first building, I was unsure if I was at the right place; it could be any other property in the area. A few minutes later, I saw some old generator houses with caution signs in Russian; then I had the confirmation about it.

Figure 129 - Window frame with a sun format at Flugplatz Schönwalde, 2021



Photography created by the auhor, 2021.

Not so far from this location, I found the first house, which was empty. However, the grid in the window frame with a sun format was familiar to me; I saw some of those in Russia. Right away, I realised that if it was an airfield, it should be a vast place, so I should not spend so much time in “ordinary” buildings. Moving ahead, I found what should be a restaurant; it was possible to identify the kitchen facilities and the halls where the food should be served. In one of the rooms, some editions dated from 1982 of the famous Soviet newspaper *Pravda* (True)

and some editions of the *Krasnaya Zvezda* (Red Star), the official publication of the Soviet Ministry of Defense.

As it was the last days of Summer, the grass and vegetation were still green and very tall, so it was only possible to have a good view range around the buildings once I reached one of the main streets of the airfield. At this moment, I understood I was in a place like a town, with several buildings with diverse architectural styles, as said before. Some paths on the grass and new graffiti indicated that I was not only a recent visitor. Nature's revenge obstructed the access for some constructions; some other structures did not seem secure enough to get inside. To experience each one of the buildings would also take a considerable amount of time; for this reason, I decided to move forward, searching for more representative elements.

Near the landing strip were some small houses with furniture and instruction panels, possibly some barracks. Still, it was noticeable that almost every object had been removed, stolen or collected. Among the buildings, one had a different shape; it was undoubtedly the traffic control central, with a tower with a panoramic view of the airstrip. Along the landing strip, I saw huge hangars and massive iron gates. The roof tiles were gone, but the colossal iron structures of the roof looked like skeletons from a distant scientific future.

Figure 130 - Building interior at Flugplatz Schönewalde, 2021



Photography created by the auhor, 2021.

On the other side were three symmetric wooden hangars, smaller than the previous one. Their peculiar shape differs from the other buildings. After some hours of experiencing the place, the weather started to change, and the black clouds forced me to leave before the rain. It did not work, and the rain caught me on my way out. Using the compass, I found the exact entrance where I came through.

Three months later, on December 13, I returned to the Flugplatz. It was a different experience. For starters, it was wintertime (maybe not officially, but still) with significantly shorter days, so I decided to go as soon as the sun rose. The vegetation was already dry at this time, making it possible to see some hidden details during my first visit. For instance, I could find the whole playground in what should be the housing area of the complex, near the residential Plattenbau. Around it, some other structures, like kiosks, indicated that the perimeter should be an amusement area. This time, I tried something different for the first time: I brought some printed photographs of abandoned places in Brazil and left them in some spots where future visitors might encounter them. On the back, I wrote my email and asked the people to send me a picture if they found it. To this day, I have never received a message like that.

Figure 131 - Still frame from *Rust, Mold, and Cracks*, 2022



Photography created by the auhor, 2022.

Rust, Mold, and Cracks brings images and sound recorded on both occasions. The foggy and grey atmosphere of the second visit contrasts with the sunny and green vegetation of the first one. Once again, this variation might catch the ruinophilie stuck amidst different temporalities.

On September 09th 2021 I went to the Brotfabrik in Oranienburg. The access to the place was not so different from the Panzerkaserne: I took the train to Oranienburg - about 40 km north of Berlin - and then I had to walk for more or less one hour to get there. The rusty fence was broken, so getting inside was not an issue. At the entrance, there was a faded display with some information about the history of the building.

The general characteristics of the Brotfabrik were similar to the Flugplatz Schönwalde: paths through the grass, recent empty bottles, new graffiti, and "entrance prohibited" signs, all evidence of recurrent visitors on the site. On the ground floor of the main building, there were still two huge electric ovens in a state of constant corrosion. This sector was likely the most extensive production line of the factory. The semi-collapsed roof indicated the reason for some *Lebensgefahr* (Risk of death) advertising. The second and third floors were deserted, with no traces of human activity, just nature's revenge and its fascinating colours and textures. Knowing the place's history and the cruel context in which it was initially created makes the quietude of the area something disturbing.

Walking around the construction sites, I could distinguish what used to be the workers' locker rooms and toilets. Behind the main edifice were some smaller halls; I assume they once were some garage or maintenance place. There, I saw old home appliances, such as refrigerators and televisions. On the floor, I found old newspapers dated from late 1991 and early 1992, in other words, from the early period after the official Reunification, which coincides with the last period of the factory's activities.

On October 31st, I paid a second visit to the Brotfabrik with a different purpose: this time, I carried my portable video project to make some temporary interventions at the walls. The images I chose were shot in diverse abandoned places in Brazil, and the idea was to combine nature's revenge from both countries and to bring them together for a while through their abandonment, creating new layers on the natural patinas of the factory's walls. For some minutes, the videos created a visual displacement: those ambiences depicted neither Germany nor Brazil but places that could only exist during the projections. Except for myself, there was no audience; as soon as I turned the projector off, there was no trace of the intervention left.

Figure 132 - Video projection at the Brotfabrik, 2021



Photography created by the auhor, 2021.

The visit to Vogelsang required more detailed preparation, not only because of the distance - about 60 km from Berlin - but also because of the limited train schedule in that direction and also due to the lack of sunlight in November. It would not be a wise idea to be there in the dark. So on 12th November, I went there as early as I could. The nearest train station already looks abandoned. As mentioned, Vogelsang was practically a town, meaning its area was vast. I found the first remaining buildings after walking circa 40 minutes into the woods. The misty morning and the singing of the crows made everything more glooming. Even with the compass, it was not easy to find the buildings, and it was possible to notice that many structures had been demolished.

After a while, I found one of the bunkers and got inside it using a precarious iron ladder. Until today, when I look at the pictures, it was not one of the most intelligent things I have done in life. The place was empty, and the walls had piles of earth nearby as an attempt to reinforce the structure. I wonder if it was one of the storage for nuclear weapons; however, in this situation, it was just a detail. There are more bunkers around the terrain, but they are not easy to find; after all, that is the idea. When I left the underground, I walked through the forest until I realised I was lost. Of course, the concept of being lost in this kind of experience is relative, but this time, I was and rambled in circles for more than an hour. At least it was possible to see vestiges of the former inhabitants through the fallen leaves: military boots, rests of uniforms, kitchen pans and empty bottles were the most recurrent items.

Figure 133 - Bunker's entrance at Vogelsang, 2021



Photography created by the auhor, 2021.

When I finally encountered one of the dirty roads, I could navigate again using the compass, and soon I reached the area with the main buildings: the school, the theatre and the sports gym. It could have been more pleasant except for the schoolhouse. The edifices had an interesting aspect from the outside, but human actions wasted them inside. Graffities covering all the original murals, broken windows and garbage everywhere were traces that indicate that Vogelsang, at least these buildings, are currently receiving visitors. At the gym, it was worse; even the wooden planks from the floor were forced to be removed just for fun. The fresh footstep episode mentioned before also ensures that people are coming and going through the Soviet ruins.

Although it was totally empty, the school still had a stimulating atmosphere. Despite the lack of furniture, it was possible to identify the different ambient, as previously said. In front of this complex lies a big concrete mural with faded drawings and writings celebrating the Soviet Union's social, technological, and military achievements and cooperation with the DDR.

Reflecting now on the impressions I had when visiting these places almost three years ago, I am thinking about what I expected before going there. Why a tour in such places can be frustrating? I could not come up with a simple answer then; however, after this temporal

detachment, I felt comfortable pointing out an answer. If our experiences of the places are mediated and absorbed through our bodies, what I expect in abandoned places are sensory stimuli - visual, sound, olfactory, and tactile - or psychological, which triggers my imagination while there, like Boym's ruinophilia idea. The lack of elements to provoke me in any of these senses, preferably more than one, affects my experience negatively, and then I feel frustrated or disappointed.

Figure 134 - Military bunker at Vogelsang, 2021



Photography created by the auhor, 2021.

These experiences reinforce a physical and emotional displacement sensation, and that is what I expect when touring in such places. On the one hand, this feeling might sound like daydreaming; I instead use the German word "*Kopfkino*" (Movie or Cinehead in a free translation) to describe this emotion when our minds start to create scenes as if we were in a movie. On the other hand, when experiencing an abandoned site, I perceive a very high concentration level; sometimes, it is so intense that I only realise that after leaving it. Calling back on the answer to the introduction of this dissertation regarding the origins of my interest in such places, these two could be a reply: to experience a high level of concentration and to feel stimulated – or affected – by the place.

5.14.5 The Montage of the Video

In the last week of December 2021, I started the editing and montage of the video. The process took just a few days. I believe that one of the reasons for accomplishing the task in a relatively short time was that while I was recording the images and sounds, I was already doing some "mental assemblage"; imagining with sort of images and framing could be combined. Another cause was the intense immersion in the environment during the filming process. Each location's essence was captured through the lens and interlaced with my experiences there. This subjective montage during filming allowed for an organic flow of images and sounds to coalesce into a narrative that felt as organic as possible.

Except for one short sequence shoot, all the situations were recorded with the camera on the tripod. For most of the pictures, I used a wide-angle lens; my intent with that was to reproduce on the video a range of view similar to the one I had in loco, capturing the expansiveness of each site - a visual echo of my field of vision during the experience. When I finished the video, the title came up, and I noticed that these three elements are present in almost all takes. The duration of 05min55sec is just a coincidence; there is nothing cabalistic behind that.

In colour grading, I was careful to remain faithful to the authenticity of the hues and shades as they presented themselves in reality. It was a conscious effort to preserve the integrity of the visual experience, ensuring that viewers would see the landscape not as I could manipulate it to be but as it authentically is - a truthful representation of a moment in time. This fidelity to natural colors was not merely an aesthetic choice but also the desire to convey images similar to those I experienced on site. I share more details about the video in the next section.

5.14.6 The First Public Exhibition

In July 2022, *Rust, Mold and Cracks* was presented as part of a collective exhibition named *Singulares* at the Alcindo Moreira Filho gallery of the Arts Institute of São Paulo State University - IA-UNESP, in Brazil. The event gathered works made by visual arts undergraduate students during my teaching internship for the discipline Fundamentals of the Tridimensional Language. Due to the pandemic, the classes took place online. Within this context, the learning program was focused on site-specific art, with the students' homes as creative spaces and the only available place for the process of their creation. Amidst this shift, spatial issues emerged as a focal point of exploration, with students transforming their homes into ateliers or studios.

This unique circumstance sparked debates on the challenges and opportunities of adapting site-specific art to virtual platforms. Discussions centred on the intricate relationship between physical and digital environments, exploring how the domestic space could serve as a site of creativity and inspiration. Ethical considerations arose regarding the portrayal of personal spaces in the public digital sphere, prompting questions on privacy, representation, and the boundaries between public and private domains. Despite the constraints of distance and isolation, the online format fostered collaboration and innovation, offering a glimpse into diverse artistic expressions in an increasingly digital world.

By the end of the course, the students were encouraged to create their works in a domestic environment, incorporating the specificities of their homes and materials they could easily find. We had a digital version of the show in December 2021, under the name *Em Casas* (At Home, in a free translation), in which each participant presented their installations in their homes. *Em Casas* offered a compelling exploration of the intersection between domestic spaces and artistic expression. By encouraging students to create works within the confines of their homes, the exhibition highlights student artists' adaptability in the face of challenges. It provides an intimate glance into their personal lives. Each participant's installation reflects their unique environment, incorporating the specificities of their home and the materials readily available to them. This approach fosters creativity and underscores the importance of resourcefulness and ingenuity in artistic practice. Through the digital presentation of the show, viewers are invited into the artists' private spaces, confusing the boundaries between public and private realms. Ultimately, *Em Casas* provided an intense commentary on the transformative power of art and the resilience of creative expression, even amid adversity.

A few months later, we had the opportunity to attend the event in person, with 15 artists participating. The name of the exhibition was changed to *Singulares* which brings a wordplay: the word is the plural form of *singular*; meanwhile, just *lares* means homes in Portuguese. It was not only the first exhibition at IA-UNESP since the beginning of the isolation period in February 2020 but also the first exhibition for most students. The transition to an in-person exhibition format with *Singulares* opened a range of interactions that were not possible with the digital *Em Casas* exhibition. Firstly, visitors could engage directly with the artworks, experiencing them in physical space and exploring their textures, dimensions, and spatial relationships. This tactile experience added a new dimension to the viewer's understanding and appreciation of the artwork.

Additionally, an presencial exhibition allowed artists to interact with the audience, sharing insights into their creative processes, inspirations, and artistic intentions. Visitors could

ask questions, provide feedback, and engage in discussions with the artists, fostering a deeper connection between creators and their audience. Moreover, the communal atmosphere of a "regular" exhibition encouraged dialogue and exchange among visitors, creating a shared experience that enhanced the overall enjoyment and appreciation of the artworks on display.

Figure 135 - Installation *Rust, Mold, and Cracks* as part of the exhibition *Singulares*, 2022



Photo: Érika Ozako, 2022.

Rust, Mold, and Cracks was presented through an artistic installation format. Next to the video reproduced through a flat television positioned on the ground of the gallery, among objects - newspapers, screws, tiles pieces, small animal bones, and similar items - I collected in the Soviet bases. Objects can be seen as a materiality of culture, trace elements and witnesses of other modernities. Bringing them to the exhibition space was a form combining different temporalities. It is impossible to transmit to the audience the feeling of being in such places, as it is a personal experience; the objects, however, could give some clue about the ambience, offering a different look into the cultural and historical layers of the past. By integrating them into the exhibition space, I sought to bridge disparate temporalities, creating a dialogue between the present and the remnants of other modernities. Naturally, their displacement could interfere

with their significance. Without any context, they are not so different from objects that could be found in a junkyard.

On the other hand, these artefacts might be caught in the middle of a situation that is neither deficient nor full of meaning, as proposed by Simmel. Using the objects helps to reconstruct my imaginative route through the spaces. They work like personal memory markers and make me recall the day of the experience: to what place they used to belong, how the weather was on that day, the paths I took, and so forth. At the same time, this collecting practice might be questionable: Do I have the right to take these items, bring them back home, and later exhibit them as part of an authorial artwork? I do not have an answer to this query, but the question constantly confronts me. I am aware of the ethical aspect of taking away objects from the place where they belonged. That is a constant moral conflict in this work, as well as if it is right to trespass on private properties to create images. What are the limits of artistic freedom?

However, these items can be observed as a form to ground the video images to a temporality. Harvey (1991, p. 427) affirms that we live in a world "where image streams accelerate and become increasingly placeless". In a time when we can swipe from one image to another with our fingertips, the objects help slow down the audience's sight, inviting them to look at the artwork with less rush.

If we consider an artwork such as *Rust, Mold, and Crack*, it would be incomplete to believe that work is constituted just of the video and the installation. I understand that the whole process - before and after - of video editing and exhibition is also part of the process. From the choice of the places, the dislocation until them, the visit, and the "being there", all of these are different stages of the work creation. I want to discuss how it can be applied here.

Moreover, beyond the physical and logistical aspects of the artwork's creation, my conceptual and personal journey also constitutes a crucial part of the process. Going into the historical and socio-political contexts of the locations, dealing with the complexities of memory and identity associated with these sites, and engaging with theoretical frameworks and artistic concepts all contribute to shaping the final artwork. Thus, the artistic process extends far beyond the mere execution of a video or installation; it encompasses a wide base of research and creative exploration. Understanding and valuing these underlying layers enriches our interpretation of the artwork and emphasises the multifaceted nature of artistic expression.

This combination of temporalities and perceptions might require a slower thinking rhythm to help us process considerable information. Deceleration is also applied to *Rust, Mold, and Cracks* images. At first glance, they might look like photographs or static images. It happened because, during the recordings, the camera was on the tripod, and there were almost

no movement references inside the frame. However, it is always possible to notice some small action: a branch swinging due to the wind or the clouds passing through the sky. It is a form to represent the pace of nature activities on human architecture, creating a "documentary constructed time" (Jameson, 1991, p. 75).

This intentional juxtaposition of stillness and movement encourages viewers to deeply contemplate the interplay between human activity and the natural world; through this deliberate deceleration of visual narrative, *Rust, Mold, and Cracks* inspires us to reevaluate our perception of time and space within the context of modernity. By capturing the subtle shifts in the environment surrounding abandoned spaces, the artwork highlights the dynamic nature's revenge, underlining the inherent transience of all things. In essence, it encourages us to adopt a more contemplative view, allowing us to appreciate the intricate charm of the ruins and layers of temporalities.

Figure 136 - Installation *Rust, Mold, and Cracks* as part of the exhibition *Singulares*, 2022



Photo: Letícia Andrade, 2022.

Regarding the video sounds, what we listen to is not necessarily direct sound; it means there is no synchrony between sound and image all the time. In some situations, the sounds were changed from one image to another. Sometimes, they are remixed, and, for a while, they

are different from the exact location, creating a different soundscape. As previously discussed, this sound displacement represents the overlaying of different temporalities in the same space. It is also a way to go further from the pair of opposites, presence and absence: what we hear but do not see is there. Or is it only in our imagination? In determined moments, we hear a sound but cannot see its source, so it is impossible to affirm if it belongs to that image (after all, the audio source could be out of the frame). It is also not appropriate to say if that sound is real or fake; what matters is that it exists while the video is played. It could be a way to resignify the place. This kind of interpolation reinforces that the video has no hierarchy between sound and visuals.

The art piece proposes the creation of imaginary landscapes, manipulating sound, and the images' montage, which serve as key tools in constructing immersive environments within *Rust, Mold, and Cracks*. By altering and remixing the sounds recorded from the locations depicted in the video, the artist introduces a layer of ambiguity and mystery, mixing the limits between reality and imagination. This intentional disconnection between sound and image challenges the audience to question their perceptions and estimulates them to explore the depicted spaces more deeply. The sounds accompanying the visuals may evoke memories and emotions or create entirely new narratives, prompting viewers to construct their interpretations of the imagined landscapes.

Furthermore, the deliberate placement of sounds outside the visible frame enhances the sense of spatial and temporal dislocation within the artwork. By introducing sounds that seemingly originate from unseen sources, the artist encourages viewers to expand their perception beyond the confines of the visual frame, inviting them to imagine the unseen and contemplate the hidden layers of meaning embedded within the depicted environments. This interplay between seen and unseen elements fosters a sense of intrigue and curiosity, compelling viewers to actively participate in the construction of their subjective interpretations of the artwork. In this way, *Rust, Mold, and Cracks* transcends traditional notions of representation, inviting viewers to immerse themselves in a rich combination of sights and sounds that blur the boundaries between reality and fantasy.

Figure 137 - Installation *Rust, Mold, and Cracks* as part of the exhibition *Singulares*, 2022

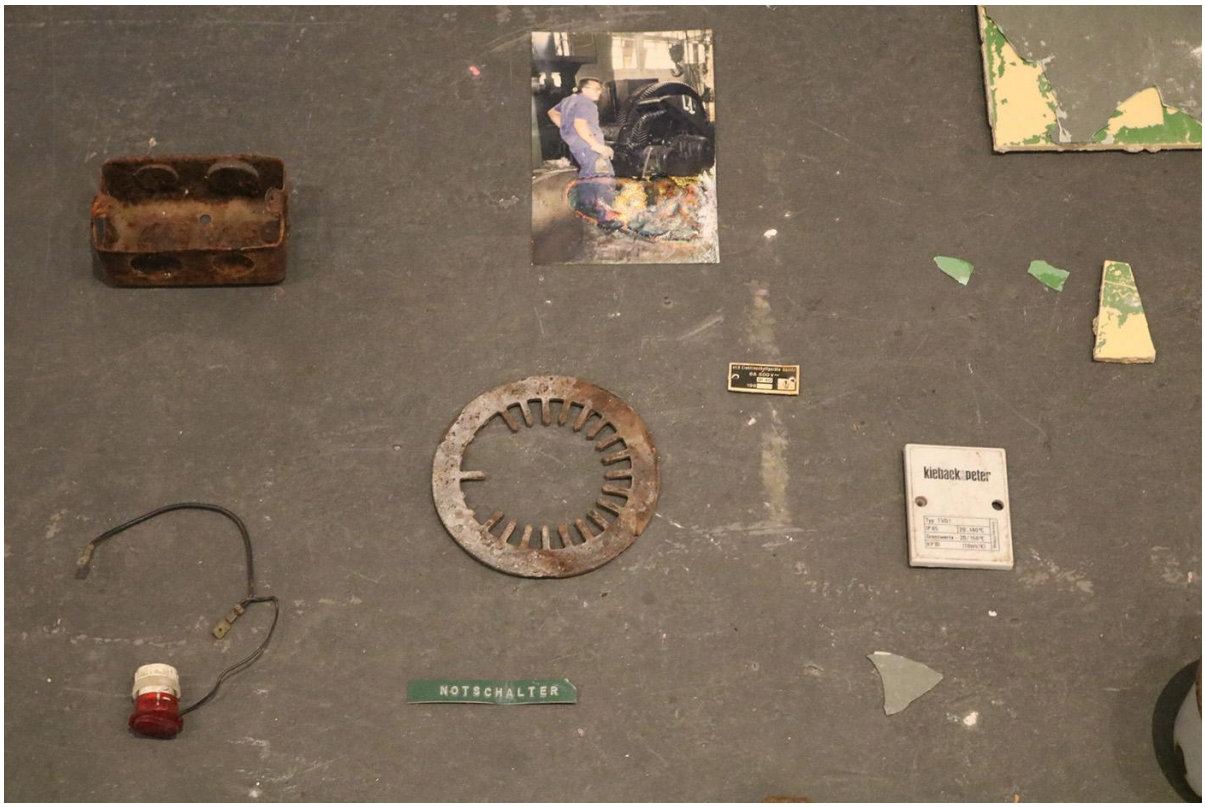


Photo: Letícia Andrade, 2022.

The artwork's images are incomplete; something is always missing inside the frame. We cannot see all systems of actions or objects simultaneously. The same incomplete scenario applies to the sounds because recording and reproducing all the frequency layers is impossible. What we hear is just a cut of the soundscape. The audience might notice this "incompleteness feeling" in the exhibition, as visiting an abandoned place is a unique and subjective experience that cannot be framed into images.

Each image presents only a fraction of the overall scene, leaving gaps in our understanding and inviting interpretation. These lacunas in visual information mirror the gaps in our sensorial experience, where we hear only a piece of the soundscape surrounding us and see just a fraction of the abandoned spaces. This inherent incompleteness challenges viewers to confront the limitations of representation and encourages them to engage actively with the work, filling in the blanks with their imagination and experiences. Furthermore, the subjective nature of visiting abandoned places stresses the impossibility of fully encapsulating their essence within an image, whether still or in movement. Each person brings their unique perspective and emotional response to the encounter, enriching the interpretation of the artwork and highlighting the complex interplay between perception, memory, and representation.

5.15 Considerations based on *Rust, Mold and Cracks*

This chapter aimed to demonstrate how space and place are complex and dynamic concepts. It should not be viewed merely as a location or a construction; its meaning emerges from distinct variables that are often mutable and interconnected. Santos' conception of dividing space into systems provides insight into how internal and external factors influence and transform spaces, creating layered temporalities. Malpas' idea of Placedness and Casey's approach to Situatedness add further complexity to the discussion, exploring the fluidity between space and place and how one transitions into the other. However, as Hünefeldt and Schlitte highlight through their etymological explorations, this fluidity has philosophical challenges. While enriching, the dazzling of definitional horizonts may hinder clarity and precision, complicating attempts to establish a cohesive framework for understanding the interplay of space and place. Their contributions remind us that these questions have been persistent across different societies, demanding careful consideration and a critical approach.

The complexity and diversity of spatial relations and temporalities can also be applied to ruins, converting structures that one could consider meaningless into active places. Simmel's approach to ruins demonstrates that Nature has a significant role in structures built by humankind. In a ruin, it is possible to watch nature's retribution while she claims back what was taken from her.

New arrangements of space and time create contemporary modernities that can share the same space. This spatiotemporal (re)organisation produces new objects, accumulating them. If we consider constructions as objects, they are also part of this accumulation process. Depending on the modernity we are discussing, this accumulation will leave behind places that, at first sight, could be treated as abandoned. However, through a non-dualist approach, it is possible to understand these places in another way, such as memory marks, as pointed out by Harvey, or an outcome of different modernities. In light of this situation, dualist terms such as abandoned/not abandoned, inhabited/uninhabited and modern/outdated prove insufficient to fully capture the intricacies of these spaces. These binary categories fail to address the fluid and overlapping realities that define them. Instead, spaces often exist in liminal states, where they embody elements of both sides of these dichotomies simultaneously, challenging traditional frameworks and inviting more nuanced interpretations. All these relations alter the landscapes or taskscapes of our days, as pointed out by Ingold.

An artistic work created within this context negotiates the fluidity of time and space - a dialogic engagement in which the artist's presence is both observer and participant. It offers a

post-dualist aspect inherent in Simmel's *Kultivierung* process, where one's cultivation of understanding is as much about personal experiences as it is about enriching the place's narratives. In these repeated encounters, one begins to grasp that ruins are not static entities; they are dynamic characters in a story continually being rewritten. They are elements of a bygone era and the evolving relationship with the present and possible futures.

The ruins, now a convergence of past imaginations and current realities, catalyse a renewed artistic vision that gathers the layers of time while proposing a path toward new expressions and artistic application in those places. Each structure, crumbling wall, and deserted corridor is imbued with the imprints of varied temporalities. As we realise this multi-layered aspect of the ruins, one might start to feel Boym's Ruinophilia.

Furthermore, the concept of being there, as reflected in Henry Thoreau's ideas and Annika Schlitte's interpretation of Plessner, highlights the centrality of embodiment and experience in our understanding of space and place. Thoreau emphasizes the creative potential of walking as an act of immersion, while Plessner's framework, as explored by Schlitte, reveals the interplay between the physical body and the living body as fundamental to navigating and shaping our surroundings. Together, these perspectives underscore that being there is not just about occupying space but about actively engaging with it, making it a cornerstone of artistic and philosophical inquiry.

Images created in these contexts are considered objects susceptible to accumulation. Moreover, they cannot frame all temporalities and modernities at once. In this sense, they shall always be precarious and carry an incompleteness. On top of that, the images of our days have an expiration date. Shorter and shorter. A convergence point between ruins, images, and memories is that they are in a permanent change, just like the places we inhabit.

6 DISRUPTED MODERNITIES AND THEIR INFLUENCE ON MY ARTISTIC PRODUCTION

6.1 The Ruins of Disrupted Modernies

The concept of modernity was discussed in the previous chapter. In our framework it is defined as a spatiotemporal rearrangement, which, on the one hand, might bring technological advances, such as innovative architecture and unprecedented uses of space, as a response for new human necessities; however, on the other hand, ruins and abandoned sites might be an outcome or a no longer desired element. Accumulation is an intrinsic characteristic of modernity.

Now, it is time for us to focus on the ruins of disrupted modernities. These are projects aimed at space-time benefit for society that were interrupted for some reason, and the ruins they left stand as evidence of those processes. To approach this artistically, I will use some pieces I have created since 2020, when this research began. Still, before we delve into this artistic aspect, we shall look at other aspects of modernity to grasp how it could be interrupted, suspended or even discontinued.

First of all, what would a modern society be like within this scope? Again, I propose a combination of concepts to figure it out broadly. Santos (2013a, p. 30) affirms that nowadays, we live in a "technical-scientific environment" (*meio técnico-científico*), a geographic setting which is neither natural nor totally artificial but the progression of human control over the ambience from direct dependence on nature to active modification through technology, and finally to an era where science and advanced technology are dominant, which leads us to a society living in a "sociotechnical network" (*rede sociotécnica*) (Santos, 2006, p. 22), a scenario where the social relations are mediated by technological tools, from the electricity to the instantaneous communication. The faster these technologies can influence human everyday life and interpersonal, economic and political relationships, the faster the spatiotemporal arrangement will also change, resulting in a more advanced modernity, at least in a technological aspect.

As mentioned, there is more than one modernity or current modernity. In a sociotechnical society, the term modernity "has as many meanings as there are thinkers or journalists", as mentioned by Bruno Latour (1994, p. 15). According to the author, through the adjective modern, "we indicate a new regime, an acceleration, a revolution in time" (Latour,

1994, p. 15) and all the definitions that one may apply to encapsulate the idea of what modernity is are accurate, one way or another, pointing "to the passage of time" (Latour, 1994, p. 15).

Latour goes further and states (1994, p. 51) that "modernity never began. There was never a modern world". He bases his statement on arguing that, for modern thinking, a separation between society - which means the human being - and nature was never accomplished; on the contrary, this junction grew stronger (Latour, 1994, p. 46), it means that the interconnections between society and nature became more evident, rather than separate; due to the increasing complexity of technological, environmental, and social interactions, which highlighted the inseparability of human and natural systems. So, if modernity means the triumph of humans over nature, then we have never been modern. He challenges the idea that modernity has created a clear separation between nature and society, science and culture; arguing that this disconnection never existed and that we have always lived in a world of hybrids that intertwine these domains. If there was never a modernity, a "post-post-post-modernism" (Latour, 1994, p. 51) does not also exist, and post-modernism is, in fact, a "symptom instead of a new solution" (Latour, 1994, p.50) a result that we realised in these complications around "modernity".

Calling up once again to Svetlana Boym (2010, p. 58), we might notice that in "our increasingly digital age, ruins appear as an endangered species, as physical embodiments of modern paradoxes reminding us of the blunders of modern teleologies and technologies alike". The author uses her experience to propose a multifarious approach to ruins. Born in 1959 in Leningrad, USSR, she immigrated to Boston in the United States at 19 after living in a refugee camp in Simmering, a district of Vienna. After the end of the USSR, she returned a few times to her hometown, now re-baptised as Saint Petersburg, the city's original name. Confronting the remembrances from her early life in the city inspired her to develop her ideas.

Facing a many-sided panorama, as she found in Saint Petersburg, we can have a shock of temporalities and modernities represented by ruins and "it is up to us to decide whether this is a Ruinscape or a utopian construction site" (Boym, 2008, p. 04). These sites represent the unfinished or abandoned projects of modernity, embodying its aspirations and failures. They are spaces where the visions of the past confront the realities of the present, revealing the fragility and impermanence of human endeavours. Boym (2008, p. 04) introduces the concept of the "off-modern" as a way to explore alternative modernities that diverge from the dominant narrative of linear progress. The off-modern allows for a reexamination of historical narratives and highlights the potential for different temporalities and futures that could have emerged but were sidelined. This perspective is not about rejecting modernity but exploring its "side alleys and lateral potentialities" (Boym, 2010, p. 23). The off-modern approach seeks to understand

modernity in its plural forms, recognizing the diverse and often contradictory experiences that constitute the modern condition. The off-modern is an active way of reflection, engaging us in a committed exploration of the complexities of modernity.

In her view, ruins are not merely relics of destruction but spaces ripe with creative potential and historical continuity. They prompt us to think not only about the past but also about the futures that might have been. This aligns with our broader discussion of disrupted modernities, where incomplete or abandoned projects stand as evidence of the complexities and interruptions inherent in the process of modernization. As Boym notes, "ruins are not a return to the past but a meditation on history, a way of using the remnants of the past to imagine new possibilities" (Boym, 2010, p. 58). Boym's off-modern perspective inspires us to see these ruins not just as symbols of decay but as opportunities to rethink and reimagine our relationship with time and space and to be hopeful about the transformative power of ruins.

The idea of "modernity in ruins" can be understood literally and metaphorically, as suggested by Huyssen (2010, p. 15). Literally, it refers to the physical remnants of modern architectural and infrastructural projects that have fallen into disrepair. Metaphorically, it denotes the ideological and cultural disintegration of the grand narratives of progress and modernization that have characterised modernity as a "palimpsest of multiple historical events and representations" (Huyssen, 2010, p. 17). The ruins of the 21st century differ from those of previous eras. They often result from failed modernist utopias and the rapid obsolescence of technological advancements and economic shifts. Amidst this context, ruins could be seen as "screens on which modernity projects its asynchronous temporalities" (Huyssen, 2010, p.19), challenging the notion of progress and serving as vivid reminders of the limitations and failures inherent in the modern project(s). Unlike the classical ruins of antiquity, which often evoke a sense of nostalgia and romantic decay, modern ruins highlight the fragility of contemporary structures and ideologies, particularly those from the late 20th and early 21st centuries. They stand as "monuments of a failed future" (Huyssen, 2010, p. 18), demonstrating the disjunction between past aspirations and present realities. This shift in perception underscores the evolving relationship between society and its built environment, where the rapid pace of technological and economic change leaves behind a trail of abandoned and decaying sites.

In examining these disrupted modernities, Huyssen emphasises the importance of considering both ruins' material and symbolic dimensions. He notes that while physical decay is evident, there is also a symbolic erosion of the ideals and promises of modernity. This interplay is crucial for understanding the in-between role of these spaces. As he states (Huyssen, 2010, p. 19), "the ruin as a site of memory is a reminder of the transience of all human endeavours"; thus, these

ruins serve as symbols of both the aspirations and failures of modernity, depicting the impermanence of human achievements and the continuous dialogue between past, present, and future.

The idea of progress, often intertwined with the notion of modernity, carries a manifold nature. Rahel Jaeggi (2023) explores this intricacy by questioning that progress (*Fortschritt*) always equates to positive development. She asserts (Jaeggi, 2023, p. 45) that progress is a "normative concept *sui generis*" (*normativer Begriff sui generis*), which implies that while we associate it with improvement, it is not dependent on a pre-existing understanding of what is good or right. Instead, the concept of progress itself contributes to defining what is considered better. This understanding challenges the traditional view of progress as a linear path toward a predetermined goal and instead frames it as a dynamic process of learning and transformation.

Figure 138 - Entrance Gate of the Progress Community Garden in Greifswald



Photography created by the auhor, following Annika Schlitte's suggestion, 2022.

Jaeggi further elaborates on moral progress, citing the abolition of slavery as an example. She argues that moral progress involves a societal transformation that underscores a learning process and a shift in values. She notes (2018, 15:05 min.) that the era of slavery

brought economic progress to the metropoles; however, the same cannot be said in moral and social terms for the former colonies. In other words, one society's advancement came at the expense of another's regression.

For this reason, the author (2018, 01:01:30 min) points out that the concept of progress does not necessarily is associated with something good and that it is always relative. For instance, technological advancements, such as certain innovations in energy production, may initially seem like progress but often result in unforeseen environmental and social consequences, challenging the idea of progress as inherently positive (Jaeggi, 2018, 01:05:20 min). Environmental and social issues are directly connected to this idea. Jaeggi (Jaeggi, 2018, 45min) discusses, for instance, the invention of the washing machine, which at first glance seems an unquestionable progress due to the ease it provides in washing clothes. On the other hand, this technology carries an environmental cost, including the amount of water required for each wash, the electricity consumed, and the soap residues released into the environment.

Although a common understanding of progress implies something that has been improved (Jaeggi, 2018, 27:50 min), this idea is always relative. The author (Jaeggi, 2024, 11:18 min) reminds us that speaking of progress - and its opposite, regression - is not necessarily about what is good or bad, but about understanding the dialectical relationships between them. Moreover, much of the notion we have of what constitutes progress stems from Eurocentric, imperialist, or colonialist conceptions that legitimized their actions through their presentation of progress (Jaeggi, 2024, 14:00 min).

Jaeggi continues (2018, 17:25 min) and suggests applying this same type of analysis to human rights, proposing, for example, that in recent decades, women have gained various equality rights in many countries, while simultaneously being deprived of rights they already held in others; thus raising the question of whether there has truly been any progress in this regard.

Given the complexity of what might constitute progress, Jaeggi (2023, p. 45) proposes that progress is a "term in process" (*Prozessbegriff*), indicating the quality of a development (*Qualität einer Entwicklung*) as part of a constant process of learning and experience within social transformations (Jaeggi, 2023, p.45). This perspective aligns with her broader thesis that progress involves a continuous re-evaluation and re-definition of societal norms and practices, suggesting that what is considered progress at one moment may be reinterpreted in light of new understandings and contexts.

Jaeggi's idea of progress as a "term in process" connects well with the concept of interrupted modernities. By viewing progress as flexible and shaped by context, Jaeggi

highlights how social advancements are always open to change and reinterpretation, much like the incomplete or disrupted projects found in interrupted modernities. These modernities reflect efforts at progress that were paused, redirected, or redefined by outside forces, leaving traces of an ideal that was never fully achieved. Both views suggest a path where progress does not just build up over time but is shaped by shifts, setbacks, and new interpretations. In this way, interrupted modernities show the uncertain and delicate nature of progress, revealing the twists and contradictions within the modern project itself.

Figure 139 - Poster for a boxing tournament between the teams Lokomotive Greifswald and Fortschritt Neustadt Glewe, in 2012



Photography created by the auhor, 2023.

Integrating Jaeggi's views with Hartmut Rosa's concept of "acceleration" (*Beschleunigung*) (Rosa, 2009, p. 20), we see a nuanced picture of modernity and progress. Rosa discusses how modernity is characterised by an ever-increasing pace of life, driven by technological advancements and the pursuit of efficiency. This acceleration leads to what he describes (Rosa, 2009, p. 56) as "desynchronisation" (*Entzeitlichung*) where different spheres of life, such as work, family, and politics, operate at incompatible speeds, causing friction and stress. The pressure to keep up with the accelerating pace can undermine the very notion of progress by creating conditions that are unsustainable and detrimental to individual and societal well-being.

Rosa (2016, p. 13) introduces the concept of resonance (*Resonanz*) as a possible solution to the problem brought about by acceleration. He goes further (2016, p. 37) exploring the concept of a "good life" (*gutes Leben*), contrasting it with the modern pursuit of unrestrained

growth and control over the world. For Rosa, a life that could be considered "good" involves more than economic success or continual advancement; genuine, reciprocal relationships with people, nature, and the broader environment characterise it. In this context, Resonance is an active, dynamic connection that allows individuals to feel a sense of belonging and engagement with the world around them, a "global relation" (*Weltbeziehung*) (Rosa, 2016, p. 14). In this light, Rosa argues that the unending acceleration in modern society, driven by technological and economic "progress," often undermines these resonant relationships by prioritising efficiency and speed over depth and connection.

In an environment centred on progress, where growth and accumulation are constant goals, the risk is that individuals lose the capacity for resonance. Rosa suggests that under such conditions, life becomes instrumentalized, meaning people are valued primarily for their productivity and ability to contribute to this cycle of progress, rather than for their personal or relational qualities. This instrumentalization reduces the potential for meaningful experiences, making the good life difficult to attain. According to him (Rosa, 2016, p. 59) , this lifestyle ultimately fosters a sense of alienation and detachment, as the relentless push for advancement leaves little room for individuals to cultivate fulfilling connections with their surroundings.

Combining Jaeggi's and Rosa's perspectives, we understand that progress in modernity is not only about technological or economic advancements but also involves a critical examination of the impacts of these changes on human life and societal structures. The relentless push for acceleration can lead to disruptions and crises that challenge the sustainability of progress. Therefore, a more reflective approach to progress, one that considers the moral and social dimensions highlighted by Jaeggi, is essential for achieving a balanced modernity.
Expanding our spectrum of authors who approach this discussion, Kevin Bücking's insights on the aesthetics of ruins complement our understanding of disrupted modernities by highlighting the dual nature of ruins as both physical decay and symbolic erosion of modern ideals. He notes (Bücking, 2023, p. 13) that ruins are tangible remembrances of interrupted pasts, carrying disparate and often contradictory meanings, stating that ruins "are symbols of a past that was interrupted" (*Symbole einer unterbrochenen Vergangenheit*).

Furthermore, Bücking emphasises that ruins serve as intersections between past and future, embodying human ambitions and their failures. He mentions (Bücking, 2023, p. 31) that ruins are "places where the past and future meet" (*Orte, an denen Vergangenheit und Zukunft aufeinandertreffen*). The aesthetics of ruins proposed by Bücking critiques the linear narratives of continued progress and focuses on the complexities and contradictions inherent in the notion

of progress. He describes this as “a critique of the continuous narrative of progress” (*eine Kritik an der kontinuierlichen Erzählung des Fortschritts*) (Bücking, 2023, p. 45).

When debating the relation between ruins and progress, one must recognize a brief but significant text by Walter Benjamin. In Section IX of a collection of writings from April and May 1940, later compiled under the title *Über den Begriff der Geschichte* (On the Concept of History), Benjamin offers an interpretation of Paul Klee’s artwork *Angelus Novus* (1920). The author states (Benjamin, 2003, p. 12) that the Angel of History (*Engel der Geschichte*) resembles the angelic figure depicted by Klee. In his analysis, the author (Benjamin, 2003, p. 12) describes a storm blowing from paradise, so strong that it propels the Angel forward and prevents him from closing his wings. As the storm advances, it triggers a chain of catastrophes, piling heaps of debris (*Trümmerhaufen*) upon one another. Standing on these piles, the Angel of History sets his feet.

Here, we can revisit the discussion from the second chapter about the distinction between debris and ruins. As the Angel is pushed forward, he gazes at something outside the frame: the future, while his face turns toward the past. According to Benjamin (2003, p. 12), this storm which continually drives the Angel forward, creating piles of ruins - now transformed into the very paradise - is what we call Progress (*Fortschritt*). Thus, progress, far from being a mere linear advancement, is marked by the accumulated destruction that the Angel observes as he looks back at the past. This tension between gazing at the past and being inexorably propelled toward the future grasps the complex relationship between memory, ruins, and modernity. If we understand this moment when progress ceases, through a process of deindustrialization, for example, as the end of history, then we arrive at a temporal impasse where it becomes impossible to think outside the model of advancement and decline proposed by Benjamin (Dawney, 2019, p. 06).

In her exploration of the contrasted temporalities of decommissioned and deactivated infrastructures within post-industrial environments, Leila Dawney (2019, p. 02) argues that the ruins of these landscapes perpetuate the different modernist temporalities of progress and decline. The geographer (2019) uses the example of Visaginas, a city in Lithuania created in 1975 by the Soviet government to serve as an *atomgrad*, or a worker’s city, built around a nuclear power plant constructed during the same period. 2004, Lithuania applied to join the European Union, and as a condition for membership, it had to deactivate the plant. The process

began in 2009 and is expected to take approximately 30 years to complete (Dawney, 2019, p. 02).

With the industry's closure, Visaginas gradually transformed into a ruinous yet still inhabited city. In this context, its residents became "ruin-dwellers," trapped in a temporality between "looking at" and "dwelling in" the ruins (Dawney, 2019, p. 2). In a setting like Visaginas, narratives of progress and failure are constantly intertwined and reinterpreted, where "dreams of progress - and their necessary decline - obscure other stories that interrupt these tales" (Dawney, 2019, p. 14).

When examining interrupted modernities like Visaginas, where the place remains inhabited, ethical considerations are crucial to avoid the "well-known traps of romanticism and post-industrial pastoral" (Dawney, 2019, p. 15). These traps involve focusing solely on the aesthetic beauty of the ruins and analyzing only economic factors to justify changes in the trajectory of capitalist development while ignoring the social dimension and the people not privileged by these transformations. On the contrary, they become prisoners of a suspended temporality.

Drawing from this constellation of thinkers, it becomes noticeable that interrupted or eventually failed modernity projects - though failure itself can be a relative concept, much like progress - tend to leave behind literal and metaphorical ruins increasingly. As Jaeggi and Rosa suggest, the very nature of modernity's progress and acceleration often produces these ruins. While generally perceived as positive, the concept of progress encompasses a dynamic and ongoing process of reevaluation and redefinition, as highlighted by Jaeggi. This unceasing transformation can lead to the erosion of previously held ideals and promises, leaving behind a landscape of ruins symbolising both material decay and the symbolic collapse of modernity's aspirations.

The repeated processes of modernisation, occurring at an ever-accelerating pace, mean these ruins and abandoned places are constantly re-signified. Huyssen notes that ruins are not merely remnants of the past but active sites of memory and representations of human endeavours' transience. Boym reinforces this by proposing that ruins also suggest us to contemplate the futures that might have been, making them potent symbols of both loss and potential.

In this light, modernity itself can be considered a ruin, a project constantly interrupted and redefined, never fully achieving its idealised state. The accelerated rhythms of modern life contribute to this continuous cycle of creation and decay, forcing us to reconsider our relationship with time and progress. These perspectives align with Milton Santos' idea of a "technical-scientific environment", where human interactions with the environment are mediated by advanced technology, leading to a complex sociotechnical network. As Bruno Latour argues, the supposed triumph of humans over nature is an illusion, a concept that further complicates the narrative of modernity. Moving forward, the next section will delve into a poetic approach to these concepts by analysing my artistic works, offering an off-modern view to look at and engage with the ruins of disrupted modernities with which I had contact.

The idea of visiting as a method was fundamental to the creation of all the works presented in this chapter, both in Brazil and Germany. This approach reflects a deeply personal process transformed into an artistic practice. Through each visit, my physical presence in these spaces became a form of inquiry, allowing me to engage with their temporalities and narratives. This methodology not only informed my exploration of ruins and abandoned spaces but also bridged the gap between these places and my own experience of displacement. As a *Fremde*, or foreigner, in Germany, this practice was a way to navigate and make sense of my surroundings, transforming the act of being there into a creative process. The goal was to share this perspective with the audience, inviting them to go through the intersections of memory, identity, and space that underpin these works.

6.2 A ruined and abandoned artistic production since 2020

6.2.1 Part I: Disrupted Modernities in South America

I do not consider it redundant to recall once again that this research started practically during the Coronavirus Pandemic, which forced a constant re-planning in an instant modernity. However, it was still possible to produce artistically amidst this complicated moment. The works I analysed in this part were accomplished in Brazil between 2020 and 2022.

The art pieces I have studied here share common characteristics that transcend their specific location and time of creation. The ruins depicted in these works symbolise disrupted modernities, a global consequence of neglect and unbridled environmental exploration. These outcomes have severe implications for the unity between humanity and nature, some of which are practically irreversible.

6.2.1.1 *Caléndulas*

Caléndulas[51] is a collaborative work - a video art piece - with the Argentine artist Soledad Rolleri. The video footage was captured in April 2019 in the ruins of the ghost town Epecuén, in Argentina's interior. Epecuén, once a thriving resort town by the namesake lake in Buenos Aires Province, about 540 kilometres from the capital, was tragically submerged in 1985 after the dam broke, only to resurface in 2009 when the waters began to recede. This desolate yet evocative setting served as backdrop for our artistic exploration.

At the time of creation, both artists were immersed in the *Residencia Epecuén*, a program that encourages artists and researchers to explore the theme of desolate architecture. Our partnership was born within this context. Memory and nostalgia, recurring themes in our work, form the foundation of our shared artistic journey. A year later, amid social distancing measures, the artists, each in their respective countries, began editing the video remotely, completing the process in April 2020.

The footage shows an action in which Rolleri plants some marigold seedlings in an abandoned planter. Her red clothes and the orange flowers create a striking contrast with the grey tones of the ruins and the pale sand, evoking a sense of strangement. This type of flower was chosen due to its solid orange coloration, which contrasts with the less saturated colours of the local landscape. The setting seems to have come out of Samuel Beckett's work "*Sin*": "*Aire gris sin tiempo tierra cielo confundidos mismo gris que las ruinas lejanía sin fin*" (Beckett, 2005, p. 07). Alone, the artist works systematically: first putting fresh soil in the planter, then stirring it, and finally planting seedling by seedling. The action has its own time, the time of the "endless distance" (*lejanía sin fin*) proposed by Beckett (Gervilla, 2021a, p. 80). The strong winds - perceptible throughout the images and sounds - interfere with the gestures but do not prevent all the flowers from being planted and finally watered.

[51] Available at: https://youtu.be/NXLKN3Fght4

Figure 140 - Still frame of *Caléndulas*, 2020



Source: Lucas Gervilla and Soledad Rolleri, 2020.

The work evokes a nostalgic air, but it is essential to define the type of nostalgia being discussed. The previous chapter emphasised the nostalgia models proposed by Svetlana Boym. According to her ideas, the nostalgia presented would not be of the restorative type; a return to the original home would not be possible - neither literally nor metaphorically - in a situation like that of Caléndulas.

The desire to return home can be a delicate emotion. The Russian filmmaker Andrei Tarkovsky (1998, p. 29) cautions about the potential risks of revisiting the house where we spent our childhood but have not visited in years. Often, we hold onto and recreate the memories of that place in our minds. However, upon returning, Tarkovsky (1998, p. 29) suggests that the idealised memories may be shattered by the reality of the place itself, as "the poetry of memory is destroyed by the confrontation with that which gave rise to it", potentially leading to a traumatic experience.

This confrontation between memory and reality can evoke a sense of nostalgia, especially when we consider the non-linear and unpredictable nature of human memory. To illustrate the lack of a clear pattern in our ways of remembering, Tarkovsky (1998, p. 21) draws an analogy between recalling a happy day and the image of a tree shrouded in mist: while the trunk remains visible, as our gaze moves away toward the branches, the limbs become blurred, and their tips vanish into the fog; this is how the memory of a particular event works, like that

happy day: we may remember the main occasion, but details gradually fade with time. Memory is essential to human existence; without it, we become “prisoners of an illusory existence” (Tarkovsky, 1998, p. 65), disconnected from the external world.

The construction of memory is directly tied to our perception of time; one cannot exist without the other (Tarkovsky, 1998, p. 64). Time, memory, and the feeling of nostalgia form a tripartite relationship as we realise that nostalgia is not about a specific place or thing but rather “a longing for a different time” (Boym, 2017, p. 154), perhaps childhood or a period when time seemed to move more slowly, as in our dreams (Boym, 2017, p. 154). The great trap, however, is that in those past times we long for, we lacked this same awareness of the tempo of time - and it is likely that even then, we might have yearned for an earlier period. The only way to break this incessant search for an idealised past is to understand that the time we long for never actually existed, much like the pictoresc childhood home.

In an era like the current, where the temporal duration of the “present” is shortened by the sheer volume of objects (Huyssen, 2000, p. 75), our perception of memory is drastically altered. The less we experience the present and the fewer future perspectives we hold, the more we tend to turn to the past; after all, we constantly see the promise of a bright future crumble before us; this stirs a longing for a slower pace, while simultaneously generating frustration with the current flow of time, creating a fertile ground for nostalgia to arise. As our spatial-temporal relations become increasingly unbalanced, this unease becomes stronger, as “the nostalgic feel suffocated within the conventional limits of time and space” (Boym, 2017, p. 154).

Tarkovsky (1998, p. 242) also associates nostalgia with a lack of air, an “asphyxiating feeling of longing”. The nostalgic who fail to recognize the impossibility of reversing time may feel trapped in a temporal dimension that is neither present, past, nor future as if suspended indefinitely.

The ruins of the tourist resort of Epecuén, situated on the shores of a lake renowned for its medicinal waters and in close proximity to Carhué, a neighbouring city considered the border between the pampas and the Argentine desert, have a unique role. They stand a few kilometres away, serving as a bridge between sacred Indigenous territories and the route of Argentine modernist architecture. This is the historical and geographical context in which the work

Calendulas is developed, where all these factors function as nostalgic elements, connecting us to the past and the present.

Figure 141 - Still frame of *Caléndulas*, 2020



Source: Lucas Gervilla e Soledad Rolleri, 2020.

Caléndulas is in the realm of reflective nostalgia, as the artists understand that "fortunately, however, the past cannot be resurrected" (Tarkovsky, 1998, p. 98). The flowers planted, indeed, did not survive for many days. Moreover, reflective nostalgia, a concept that deals with "the home is in ruins or, on the contrary, has just been renovated and gentrified, beyond the possibility of being recognized" (Boym, 2017, p. 161), highlights the consciousness of those who are aware of this situation. Instead of trying to exorcise the ghosts of the ruins, these kind of nostalgics choose to coexist with them and cope with the past in one way or another.

Still about the artistic happening, the high salinity level in the waters of Lake Epecuén generates a breeze unsuitable for plants of this type. The lake's tide is constantly changing, and the flower box may have been submerged again in the days following the intervention; rain is also scarce in the region. For the artists, the longevity of the flowers is not what mattered but rather the action of using art as a mediator of all these issues surrounding the unclear relationships between the ruinous universe and memory, transitioning into the field of possible futures of prospective nostalgia.

In the previous chapter, we were introduced to the concept of ruinophilia proposed by Svetlana Boym. When we go back to representations of ruins in arts, specially in the Renaissance and Romanticism, ruins could be seen as references to the glories and knowledge of the classical era; nevertheless for the 21st century ruinophilia ruins might symbolise the possibilities of other futures, be they utopian, dystopian or lost.

Visiting an abandoned place can awaken different sensations, and one of the most striking is the perception of silence. "*Lejanía sin fin tierra cielo confundidos sin un ruido nada móvil*"[52] (Beckett, 2005, p. 08). In addition to describing a desolate landscape as a place devoid of any sound, the Spanish version of Samuel Beckett's text also employs the term *lejanía*, which can be translated as an endless distance, remoteness, or absence (Gervilla, 2021a, p. 82).

In late Gothic painting, *lejanía* was the term used for natural elements depicted far from the main subject of the painting (Muguiro, 2017, p. 64). These elements were only visible through windows or architectural gaps reproduced in the paintings. This unique characteristic of lejanía, particularly the way it utilised architectural apertures, coupled with the emergence of monsters and demons from the background and gaps of the images, never from the foreground, has always shrouded it in mystery. In *Caléndulas*, Soledad Rolleri's actions are observed with the ruins as scenery elements of the lejanía. However, what emerges from these ruins is not fantastic beings, but imaginations (Gervilla, 2021a, p. 83).

The sensation Beckett refers to does not pertain to necessarily something physical or supernatural. Instead, it relates to a situation of temporal sublimation, where the linear markers of past, present, and future become imprecise in describing the displacement in time or, in other words, through time.

This confusion of the senses attracts the *ruinophile*, who, as he or she walks, hears the sound of his footsteps and breathes, joining the abandoned soundscape and becoming part of it. In some situations, such as in *Caléndulas*, the silence is replaced by the sound of the wind, which reinforces the sensoriality of ruinophilia: in addition to hearing it, we almost feel it on our skin. In the work, the wind is visible in all the images. Other sound elements, such as walking on the sand or handling seedlings, are covered by the gusts of air. Only the singing of some distant birds can be heard. The constant wind reinforces the idea of the suspension of time,

[52] "*Endless distance earth sky confused without a sound nothing moving*" (Beckett, 2005, p. 08, our translation).

generating lejanía in an “abandonscape”. The work can be shown linearly, like a traditional film, or in a loop. This second option reinforces the idea of the suspension of time since it is impossible to state how long the action lasts.

Figure 142 - Still frame of *Caléndulas*, 2020



Source: Lucas Gervilla e Soledad Rolleri, 2020.

The Epecuén region is part of the Argentine Modernist Route, an informal path showcasing architectural constructions influenced by European modernism from the first half of the 20th century. Approximately forty of these structures, designed by the Italian-Argentine architect Francisco Salamone (1897-1959), remain today. In the 1930s and 1940s, the Buenos Aires Provincial Government launched an architectural plan to modernise and develop the province’s interior, prompting questions about the nature of modernity.

Salamone was responsible for several projects, including the Carhué City Hall and an old municipal slaughterhouse along the road connecting Carhué and Epecuén, two of the most iconic edifices of the region. While the Carhué City Hall remains active until nowdays, the *Matadero* was not as fortunate. Though it was not submerged by Lake Epecuén’s waters, it ended up isolated like on an island. The impracticality of transporting cattle to this location, combined with advancements in meat production, led to the cessation of its operations. Today, the building stands distinct from the ruins of Epecuén, its modern features and machete-shaped tower starkly contrasting with traditional peasant architecture.

Figure 143 - Caruhé Slaughterhouse



Photography created by the auhor, 2019.

The founding of Epecuén coincided with the era of Salamone's works and other modernist projects, naturally influencing the resort town's construction. Witnessing a modernist project literally in ruins adds new layers of ruinophilia to Epecuén. The remnants of a style that seemed to guide a new societal phase can now be seen as a metaphor for forcibly interrupted modernity, in this case by nature's actions. It is as if nature's revenge on Epecuén began even before the architectural downfall. Human factors and governmental neglect also play a significant role here. The modernist buildings in the Argentine pampas resemble spacecraft from another space-time dimension, waiting for an opportunity to return to their origin. Nevertheless, the era they came from no longer exists, if it ever did.

When art mediates between ruins and memories, exploring their tensions, the "aesthetics of abandonment" (Gervilla, 2021a, p. 84) emerge. This aesthetic does not prioritise beauty or attempt to revive a glorious past but uses abandonment to imagine new possibilities. The artist uses reality as raw material during the creative process, shaping it according to their perception.

Often, reality is a shadow of a memory. The aesthetics of abandonment in contemporary art seek different ways to remember - or forget - and combine them with ruinophilia, transforming ruins into contemplative elements and abandoned places into spaces occupied by imaginations of another time. They simultaneously refer to our failures and achievements, reminding us of our human condition concerning time. The relationship between art and ruins will likely continue as we live in a digital, post-industrial capitalist era - a period characterised by specific economic and social features that leave behind architectural structures as a kind of fossil, questioning our paths and decisions.

Caléndulas is an example of an artistic work that deals with this type of aesthetics, evoking different sensations in the audience. It is an audiovisual piece that traverses various languages, from cinema to visual arts to performance. The work can spread across many media, whether on a video monitor, projector, or mobile phone, much like the ruins of Epecuén spread across the grey sand.

6.2.1.2 *Belem Street, 58*

The video art piece *Belem Street, 58* (*Rua Belém, 58*) (2020) also starts with a return to a ruined home. Firstly, we need to provide some relevant context of the work circumstances. Belem Street, 58, is the address of my paternal grandparents' house in the Agapeama neighbourhood, in my hometown of Jundiaí, in São Paulo, Brazil. My father and his six siblings were born and lived there for many years. When my parents - Edmur and Elisabete - married in 1980, they moved into a very small and newly built - mainly by my father and some other relatives - house in the property's backyard. I was born in 1984; that was the first place I lived until we moved ten years later. Some of my uncles, my father's siblings, lived temporarily in our old back house after we moved out in 1994. Currently, I don't know if anyone still lives there.

My grandfather Manoel passed away in 1986; my grandmother Virgínia in 2004. Since then, the main house of the property has been abandoned due to family disputes over inheritance and legal issues, which have left a lasting impact on our family.

Although I moved out of Agapeama over 30 years ago, I have never stopped visiting the neighbourhood, whether to see other relatives, shop at local businesses, or occasionally attend to appointments at the local public health clinic. After all, the house I moved to with my parents, where they still live today, is in a nearby district.

The theme of memory runs through nearly all of my work; perhaps I was already working with this theme even before I realised it. As part of this body of work, in 2016 I started filming the short documentary *Edmur and his Truck* (*Edmur e o Caminhão*). The film follows my father, a retired truck driver, and me as we search for his first truck: a Chevrolet C-60 that he bought in 1979 and sold in 1999. In 2018, the Brazilian TV channel Canal Futura recognised the potential of the project and commissioned it.

The documentary was then broadcast nationally, reaching a wide audience and impacting significantly. It is a personal work that brings back fond memories as the truck triggers family recollections. Even today, people in our hometown who watched the movie on TV often approach my father to ask if he has found the truck.

The film navigates between the styles of quest documentary and first-person documentary, exploring different narrative and aesthetic approaches. In the quest documentary, the narrative is driven by an investigation or an attempt to uncover something - whether a truth, a story, or a hidden meaning - often placing the author or production team in an active search. Meanwhile, the first-person documentary offers a personal perspective, where the author becomes the narrator or protagonist, sharing their direct experiences and perceptions, creating a more intimate and subjective connection with the audience.

As a subjective type of film, the elements presented are always subject to reinterpretation due to the emotional relationships established with them (Gervilla, 2021c). This characteristic reinforces the idea that the narrative and visual construction not only document realities but also interpret and transform them, enabling new readings and emotional connections with the places and objects depicted.

One of the first days of shooting involved a visit to my grandparents' old house. The purpose of the visit was to search for documents or photos that could help in the search for the truck. During the visit, I recorded my father walking through the house, searching for clues. The images captured the ruined state of the house, with part of the roof collapsed and exposed to the rain and almost all the furniture rotted. The mouldy walls indicated the dampness of the

rooms, which were cluttered with junk. Nature is slowly reclaiming my father's childhood home in the Agapema neighbourhood, a former working-class area near the railway of Jundiaí. The recorded images vividly show how "returning to a house in ruins is like going to a cemetery" (Brissac, 2010, p. 98). Despite our search, we found nothing to help locate the truck. Although this material did not make it into the film's final version, I kept it, imagining it might be helpful in the future.

Years later, in 2020, I revisited my archive of images. Amongst the raw material collection, I stumbled upon footage from that day. It was then that I decided to work with this content. I again involved my father in this project, inviting him to join me in watching the original footage, then I recorded his reactions and comments in audio as he watched the footage from the 2016 recording for the first time.

Even though we were physically together when the original recordings were made, I could not anticipate his reaction to those scenes. As Tarkovsky (1998, p. 204) notes, "the meaning of an artistic image is necessarily unexpected, as it is a record of how an individual saw the world in light of his idiosyncrasies". This unpredictability in his response underscored how memory and perception constantly reshape past moments, making each revisit a unique experience. The recording captured not only his view of the past but also how time had transformed his connection to those images, reflecting the fluid nature of memory.

Witnessing my father's spontaneous response to the footage was a curious experience. Through his perspective, I got a different perspective of the moments that had been recorded. Inspired by his thoughts, I started editing the material, blending it with the audio of his thoughts. This collaborative effort culminated in creating *Belem Street, 58*. This project stands as an intersection of past and present of familiar memories, weaving together moments captured in different moments, resulting in an evocative visual narrative that bridges generations of our family.

In the artwork, the low-saturated moving images are slowed to about 5% of the original speed, proposing a temporal dilation, much like our memories (Gervilla, 2021b, p. 266). The scenes are overlaid, blurring the images and making the content almost unrecognisable. It is possible to see in a subjective camera view a gaze that travels over objects left in the house: old

photos brought close to the lens, decks of playing cards, trophies from *truco*[53] tournaments, images of Catholic saints, liquor bottles, and other ordinary items that are part of my family's imagery. The audio reproduces sounds captured during that day of filming; you can hear birds outside the house, drawers being opened, voices of passersby on the street, and our footsteps over the remnants of wood and dry leaves covering the floor. The intent of combining these resources is to represent the fragmented way we archive our memories and to show that some memories are like fleeting shadows or voices that fade into the distance.

One of the objects found in the abandonment draws special attention: a black and white photograph. It is imprecise to affirm when exactly it was taken, but I assume it was around the 1960s. The author of the shoot is also unknown. The image shows an ordinary scene in any part of Brazil: a group of men make their *Feierabend* in a simple pub. It is curious how I can not think of another word to describe the situation, not even in Portuguese. On the left side, the man wearing a white shirt and holding a glass is my grandfather Manoel. The picture was likely taken in the neighbourhood.

Figure 144 - Stillframe of *Belem Street 58*, 2020



Photography created by the auhor, 2020.

[53] Truco is a popular card game in Brazil, especially among the working class. Played by two pairs competing against each other, it involves strategic bluffing and is often played for hours in a lively - and sometimes controversial - atmosphere.

Throughout the work, my father reminisces about moments from his childhood: how the backyard used to be and when the neighbourhood underwent basic sanitation works, transforming the street into a playground for children. He comments on how his perception of time back then was different from today, enabling different types of interpersonal relationships with his parents and siblings.

In this sense, the work proposes an overlap of temporalities, where it is impossible to distinguish precisely whether Edmur is talking about the past or how he remembers the events many years later. Some of his comments are also about memories constructed from the images he saw on the computer screen while I recorded his thoughts, blurring the concept of authenticity (Gervilla, 2021, p. 267). The thin boundaries between past, present, and imagined futures dissolve in memory, making it impossible to assert precisely what we are discussing.

My father's considerations have both the restorative and reflexive aspects of nostalgia. In the end, he expresses his desire to renovate and preserve the physical house, leaning more towards restorative nostalgia. Although my father suggests a literal restoration of the house, he acknowledges that it cannot bring the past back to life.

Figure 145 - Stillframe of *Belem Street 58*, 2020



Photography created by the auhor, 2020.

Belem Street, 58 has an experimental principle, evoking personal and familiar experiences to create an art piece in which the result was initially unpredictable. Despite living in my grandparents' backyard for ten years, I have very few memories of their home. Perhaps

this is why it is easier for me not to want to repair the house they lived in, as my memory is not directly tied to the physical space. One way or another, “we all live in an imaginary world created by ourselves. And so, instead of enjoying its benefits, we are victims of its flaws” (Tarkovsky, 1998, p. 289), allowing ourselves to be tormented by images created - or recreated - by our memory. Whether restorative, reflective, or even prospective, we all carry some nostalgia and deal with it in our ways. Trying to rid ourselves of it can be exhausting, leading to even more images in our minds that cannot be easily erased. On the other hand, we can live with our nostalgia and appreciate the images it produces, helping us fill the lacunas in our memories.

6.2.1.3 Hydroelectric Dr. Geraldo Tosta: Abandoned Clean Energy

Despite the restrictions of social distancing during the COVID-19 pandemic, the opportunity to explore abandoned sites during this period became an important part of my research. The case of the Dr. Geraldo Tosta hydroelectric plant was one such opportunity. At the end of 2020, I visited my parents in my hometown to check on them, and as we all share a sense of inquietude, they suggested that exploring an abandoned site together would be a good way to spend quality time as a family. My father, already intrigued by the idea, had researched an abandoned hydroelectric plant in Bragança Paulista, a town close to Morungaba. In this region, we spent much of our time in the late 1980s and early 1990s. This connection made it the perfect destination for our exploration.

The old plant, by the Jaguari River, shares a curious fortune with me: the licence granted by the Brazilian Federal Government to the Bragantina Electricity Company to build the hydroelectric and explore its energy was stated on my birthday: 14/06/1984[54]. It was a 30-year concession for the utilisation of hydraulic energy. The construction was accomplished in a short period, and still, in 1985, it started to provide electricity to some neighbourhoods and farms in the region.

[54] Decree No. 89804 - Federal Executive Branch - Published in the Federal Official Gazette on 14/06/1984. Available at: <https://www.diariodasleis.com.br/legislacao/federal/39694-declara-de-utilidade-publica-para-fins-de-desapropriauuo-area-de-terra-necessaria-a-operauuo-da-usina-hidreletrica-dr-geraldo-tosta-da-empresa-eletrica-bragantina-s-a-no-estado-de-suo-paulo.html> Acessed on 30 Sep. 2024.

Figure 146 - Hydroelectric Dr. Geraldo Tosta, 2020



Photography created by the auhor, 2020.

However, due to a significant reduction in water flow caused by increased upstream water usage, particularly for the Cantareira Water System, the plant ceased operations in 1995 (Aneel, 2005). Following this, it was only maintained in a conservation state, without any active generation procedures, and the substation was disconnected from the grid. In the early 2000s, attempts were made to negotiate the revitalization of the plant. Nevertheless, by 2005, Bragantina Company requested the deactivation of the plant and the reversal of the property to the Union due to the infeasibility of its continued operation. Subsequently, ANEEL (Brazilian National Agency of Electricity) conducted inspections, and it was determined that the plant's conditions were inadequate for reactivation without significant improvements. ANEEL officially revoked the licence in 2013 (Aneel, 2013), and as of today, the facility remains abandoned, which is still a Brangantina's property, as the Union denied the proposal to take back the area.

In recent years, Brazil's hydroelectric energy model has faced challenges, particularly for smaller plants like this one. The Brazilian hydroelectric model remains one of the largest globally, but its share of the energy mix has been shrinking due to the integration of intermittent sources, like wind and solar energy (Forster, 2024). This shift means that smaller hydro plants

are often disadvantaged in a market where water flow regulation increasingly benefits larger plants with reservoir capacity (Forster, 2024). The Dr. Geraldo Tosta plant's operational challenges were exacerbated by the lack of a regular reservoir, typical of "run-of-the-river" plants, which depend solely on consistent river flow for generation (Forster, 2024). With reduced river flow, often due to increased upstream water consumption and environmental licensing requirements that mandate minimum downstream water levels, the plant's economic viability declined (Forster, 2024).

In 2021, following reports of theft, access to the Dr. Geraldo Tosta Hydroelectric Plant was blocked by municipal authorities in Bragança Paulista to prevent further criminal activity (Jornal +Bragança, 2021). There is a collective proposal by the Municipality of Brangança and the Brangantina Company to transform the area into an environmental protection zone with a museum to foment the region's ecotourism (DOSP, 2021, p. 08). However, this idea has yet to be realised and remains on paper.

Back to our visit in 2020, we accessed the area through a dirt road that cut through a nearby farm, which led us to the main dam. The dam partially collapsed, with water strongly spilling through the cracks. Once part of the plant's active operations, the stone structures now stand as a monument of a bygone time. Covered in greenery and showing signs of wear and erosion, these structures reveal the influence of nature reclaiming the space. The remains of the water flow mechanism, rusted and overtaken by vines, blend seamlessly with the surrounding foliage, creating a contrast between the industrial past and the present. Sturdy yet weathered dam walls still show the force of water running through them, a reminder of the energy that this place once produced. The paths that once connected different plant sections are now obstructed by wild vegetation, suggesting that, over time, the boundaries between human construction and natural landscape have blurred. In some areas, the water has turned into still pools covered with aquatic plants, emphasising the site's current state of abandonment. The overgrowth of vegetation and trees make it clear that nature has taken over, adding to the sense of isolation and forgotten history.

Following the course of the river through a water canal, finding the plant's main building was not hard. Inside, it was the basis of the two central generators. As it is possible to imagine, the walls were full of humidity and mould. The atmosphere at the site is one of serene desolation, where the sound of water trickling through the remaining channels mingles with the rustling of leaves, evoking a sense of time standing still.

Figure 147 - Hydroelectric Dr. Geraldo Tosta, 2020



Photography created by the auhor, 2020.

Rusted gears, metal railings, and old machinery were all covered in green. This interplay of human-made structures and natural elements shows the plant's evolution from a hub of clean energy production to a ruin, where nature gradually reclaims its domain. Despite being a symbol of sustainable energy, the Dr. Geraldo Tosta plant ultimately fell victim to the evolving demands of energy management and environmental regulation, which favour larger plants capable of regulating water flow (Forster, 2024).

The collapsing dam, the overgrown landscape, and the decaying structures brought a haunting beauty to human achievements. It was clear that, left to its own devices, the plant was transforming into a ruin where a disrupted modernity and nature coexist, offering a glimpse into a future where such places might one day return to their original state. In an era when climate change and the urgent need for clean, renewable energy dominate global discussions, abandoning a facility that once produced such energy is mark of a disrupted modernity.

In 2020, a photographic series created from the images captured that day was incorporated into the collection of the Diogenes Duarte Paes Art Gallery in Jundiaí; while some of the videos were included in the film *Rache*, which will be discussed shortly.

Figure 148 - Hydroelectric Dr. Geraldo Tosta, 2020



Photography created by the auhor, 2020.

6.2.1.4 *Iron, Mud, and Copper*

The third case of South American disrupted modernities, the art installation *Iron, Mud, and Copper* (2022), also deals with two previously mentioned matters: the impossible return to home and a consequence of the human unbridled exploitation of nature. The artwork explores the aftermath of the environmental disasters in Bento Rodrigues and Brumadinho, in Minas Gerais state, Brazil. These tragedies, caused by the collapse of dams owned by Vale Mining Company, unleashed toxic mud that devastated landscapes and displaced communities. This work captures the remnants of these events, focusing on the ruined landscapes and their broader implications within the local ecosystem.

In Portuguese, *Minas* means mines. The state has this name because it was where the Brazilian Gold Rush took place between the 17th and 18th centuries amidst the colonial period. At the time, the discovery of gold in the state was seen as the salvation of the Portuguese crown, which was mired in debt and spared no effort to extract the most significant possible quantity of the precious metal, caring little about the human lives involved - often by force - in the process, nor about the local nature. Centuries later, the exploratory mindset introduced by

Portugal still resonates in Brazil. It guides the operations of Vale Mining Company, initially a state-owned enterprise and now the largest private mining corporation globally.

Over the past decade, Vale Mining Company's practices have led to two catastrophic disasters that drastically altered the landscape of Minas Gerais. The collapse of two massive dams released a deluge of toxic mud over more than 100 square kilometres. The first disaster struck Bento Rodrigues in 2015, followed by Brumadinho in 2019.

Nearly 300 people perished due to these environmental crimes. The survivors were forced to relocate to temporary shelters, many of which have become permanent due to a lack of alternatives. Attempts to return home have been hampered by job shortages and ongoing environmental damage. As I write this part of the text, between October and November 2024, hearings are taking place in London for a lawsuit brought by local residents, Indigenous groups, and others from the affected region against Vale. The lawsuit is being held in the UK because Vale is listed on the London Stock Exchange, which grants British courts jurisdiction over international corporate accountability issues. Additionally, the plaintiffs argue that the Brazilian judicial system has been slow and insufficient in addressing their claims, prompting them to seek justice in British courts, where they hope for a faster and more impartial trial. The case aims to hold Vale accountable for the environmental, economic, and social damages caused by its operations, raising important discussions about corporate responsibility and the rights of local communities in the context of global mineral exploitation. Almost 10 years later, no one has yet been held legally accountable for the incident, and the reparation agreements signed between Vale and the state and federal governments fail to address the needs of those truly affected.

Bento Rodrigues - district in the Mariana region, about 140 kilometers southeast of the state capital, Belo Horizonte - once home to around 600 inhabitants primarily engaged in farming and fishing, was inundated with contaminated mud within minutes of the dam's collapse, destroying homes and killing 19 residents. Survivors now live in hostels and communal shelters while Vale Mining Company constructs *New Bento Rodrigues* - a district of modern two-story houses disconnected from the original community by both location and spirit. This new development remains incomplete, leaving the displaced residents in a state of limbo, caught between their ruined homeland and an uncertain future in the construction site. In other words, they are directly connected to the past while simultaneously living in "futureless times" (Dawney, 2019, p. 06).

When I first encountered the region of Bento Rodrigues in 2021, the complexity immediately impacted me. At that time, I was developing a field study with the artist and

researcher Monica Toledo, who grew up in Minas Gerais. Since the accident, the state government has handed the whole area to Vale, which has strict access control to the former district. After several frustrating contact attempts with the firm to get into the area, we decided to do it on our terms. Crossing a stream, we got into the former perimeter of Bento Rodrigues. Before we were spotted and driven out by security guards, I was able to record a few images.

In 2022, shortly after my return to Brazil from an exchange program at UdK Berlin and before beginning my period at the University of Greifswald, I had the opportunity to visit the region a second time, this time with two fellow researchers from the group Tales from the Brazilian Anthropocene: Life and Endurance in the Ruins of Neo-Extractivism, Aécio Amaral and Leila Dawney. Together, we explored the area and spoke with affected residents to better understand the situation and see how these people have organised independently in response to this spatial-temporal shock, which directly impacts their notions of identity and sense of belonging to the place.

Figure 149 - *Iron, Mud, and Copper*, 2022



Photography created by the auhor, 2020.

In the same year I was invited, along with colleagues from the Institute of Arts at UNESP, to participate in a group exhibition at FAMA Museum in Itú, São Paulo. The exhibition titled *Aurora Imprevisível* provided the perfect opportunity to present a new work inspired by my experience in Minas Gerais the previous visits. Thus, the installation *Iron, Mud, and Copper* was conceived and named after the three elements that characterise the disrupted modernity of the region.

The installation consists of a mound of red soil, symbolising the landscapes covered by the toxic mud, which is reddish due to mining waste. This mound is placed in a corner of the gallery. On top of the soil, an old CRT television displays a looping video via a DVD player. The footage, captured in Brumadinho in 2021, shows the ruins of village houses destroyed by the mudslide following the dam collapse. Some structures were already being overtaken by vegetation at the time.

Figure 150 - *Iron, Mud, and Copper*, 2022



Photography created by the auhor, 2020.

A central feature in the footage is the facade of the old municipal school in Bento Rodrigues, one of the largest buildings in the district. The walls, once green, bear the mark of the mud's reach. The school's name is still visible at the top of the building. The intentional use

of a domestic television to display the footage was an artistic choice; it reflects the interrupted modernity in a way a more advanced monitor would not. The television appears to be sinking into the soil, metaphorically representing what happened to the town.

The installation's auditory component includes ambient sounds recorded in the devastated areas, such as birdsong, rustling leaves, and distant voices. These sounds immerse viewers in the environment, reinforcing the presence of these ruins in the landscape and memory. The aim is to create a multi-sensory experience that underscores the ongoing impact of these environmental crimes.

The exhibition also includes a photograph taken in a peasant house in the Bento Rodrigues region. The elements within the frame suggest that the house was abandoned in haste, under the threat of being engulfed by the mud. A stove, a refrigerator, and a sink indicate that the house had an external kitchen. Although not visible in the image, inside the house, clothes and personal belongings remained in the closets, possibly left behind with the hope of returning one day or due to lack of time to retrieve them. This house is now situated on land owned by Vale.

Figure 151 - *Iron, Mud, and Copper*, 2022



Photography created by the auhor, 2020.

The photograph is framed in an old frame found in a dumpster in São Paulo. The faded golden ornaments are characteristic of a type of frame popular in Brazil decades ago. They evoke domestic imagery, a type of frame that could be found in the home of any Brazilian from a simpler social class. The abandoned house in the image, with its familiar elements, could easily belong to a peasant family from any region in the country, turning what happened in Brumadinho into a shared human experience.

Situations like those in Minas Gerais evoke the "guilty pleasures of the ruins" (Dawney, 2019, p. 07), going beyond the "clichés of 'ruin-gazing'" (Dawney, 2019, p. 04). Any glamour or allure that might surround the ruins of Brumadinho and Bento Rodrigues come from the reckless exploitation of natural and human resources in a neocolonial way, which led to the death and displacement of hundreds of people in the name of progress.

The theme of interrupted modernity runs through the works *Iron, Mud, and Copper Caléndulas* and *Belem Street, 58* as well as seen at the Hydroelectric Dr. Geraldo Tosta, highlighting the fragility of human endeavours against the relentless forces of nature and time, and the tragic consequences of capitalist exploitation. Each piece delves into returning to a place - metaphorical or literal - marked by ruin and memory, challenging the viewer to reconsider the concept of home and belonging. As the Brazilian philosopher and indigenous chief Ailton Krenak (2020, p. 32) firmly states, we persist in viewing the "Earth as humanity's backyard", an outlook that underscores our complex relationship with nature and our often misguided sense of dominion. The examples illustrate an abandonscape that differs from the ruined charm of the former artistic vanguards, such as the Renaissance and Romanticism, or the ruins' appreciation of antiques. These works collectively emphasise that while modernity may bring progress, it also leaves behind a trail of disrupted ruins and landscapes, urging a mediative and imaginative engagement with the past and future.

6.2.2 Part II: Before and After *die Wende*: Disrupted Modernities in the former DDR

The second part of my artistic production developed during this research, based on interrupted modernity projects, combines works completed between 2022 and 2024 during my exchange program at the University of Greifswald. Before exploring the productions, I believe it essential to present other factors that I consider significant to the discussion.

During my six-month exchange at the UdK Berlin I lived in Lichtenberg, the largest neighbourhood in former East Berlin, in which I could observe distinct traces that still differentiate the two sides of the capital. Even though 35 years have passed since the fall of the

Berlin Wall and 34 years since German reunification, the differences remain. I am not only referring to urban features like the presence of *Plattenbauten* and taller residential buildings on the eastern side. Nor do I mean the charming *Ampelmann* pedestrian signal, a symbol of the city's East, now adorning bags of tourists around the city. I am talking about subtler signs, ones not immediately noticeable, especially on the bustling streets near Potsdamer Platz and Checkpoint Charlie - Eastern Berlin areas close to the wall, which were quickly gentrified after reunification.

The public transport system already hints at these contrasts. Tramlines - overground trains reminiscent of the old trolley cars - operate mainly in the city's East, as these lines were a characteristic under the DDR government due to their lower construction costs and faster completion compared to the underground system. Speaking of the metro, only one line connects the city centre to the East, the U5, which I regularly used. Some stops on this line, such as Reichstag, Unter den Linden, and Museumsinsel, are among the city's newest stations. With elegant, spacious designs, they provide access to some of the capital's trendiest - and priciest - areas. It is not unusual to hear a variety of languages within a single train car, accompanied by shopping bags from Hugo Boss and Massimo Dutti and the latest iPhones.

Figure 152 - Berlin Tram Map, 2015



Source: Mapsberlin.com, 2024.

As the train moves further from the centre and heads toward the outskirts, further East, the scenery changes drastically: stations appear less maintained, and train intervals lengthen. Often, trains do not travel the entire line, forcing passengers to switch to another train on the same route. Designer shopping bags become less common, and certain stations still display maintenance hole covers marked “Made in GDR” on their platforms.

Whenever I travelled along the U5 line, it often reminded me of CPTM’s Line 7[55] in São Paulo - the line that connects the capital to Jundiaí, the farthest and last station in the CPTM network. During my undergraduate years (2003-2006), financial constraints prevented me from living in São Paulo, so I commuted daily by train to the capital, spending a total of four hours on the journey. Outdated trains, frequent delays, and a lack of maintenance along the line were part of my routine. Experiencing this situation in East Berlin not only brought back memories but also created a sense of connection, at least in my mind, with East Germany.

This feeling of closeness grew even stronger after I moved to Greifswald. Caspar David Friedrich’s hometown belongs to the state of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, as we discussed in the third chapter while exploring the region of Pomerania and Vorpommern. However, what is the reason behind the state’s hyphenated name? Until the end of World War II in 1945, Mecklenburg and Vorpommern were separate states (Politik MV, 2018), which, despite shared historical ties such as Slavic ethnic roots, had distinct political histories. For instance, the last Slavic dynasty to rule Vorpommern ended in 1637 when Duke Bogislaw XIV of the House of Griffins died without an heir. In contrast, Mecklenburg was governed by a Slavic dynasty, the House of Niklot, until 1918, when World War I and the German monarchy ended (Politik MV, 2018).

Shortly after WWII, Germany was divided into four Allied-controlled administrative areas and both states were placed within the Soviet sector. In 1945, the two were merged, becoming Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. Two years later, however, the Soviet temporary government reversed this decision, again separating the regions once again. In 1952, the newly established East German government implemented an administrative regime that replaced states (*Bundesländer*) with districts (*Bezirke*), leading Mecklenburg and Vorpommern to form the districts of Schwerin, Rostock, and Neubrandenburg. This division persisted throughout the DDR era, and with German reunification, authorities revived the Soviet-era concept, re-establishing the unified state of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern (Politik MV, 2018).

[55] CPTM (São Paulo Metropolitan Trains Company) is a public transportation system in São Paulo that operates commuter rail services connecting the metropolitan area with the city centre.

As mentioned, the formation and dissolution of territories is complex and cannot simply be reduced to signatures on official documents. Although Mecklenburg and Vorpommern regions are a single state, distinct differences persist to this day. An official acknowledgement of these distinctions is the establishment in 2016 of the Parliamentary State Secretariat for Vorpommern and Eastern Mecklenburg (*Staatssekretariat für Vorpommern und das östliche Mecklenburg*), aiming to promote economic, social, and cultural development in this region. This office also seeks to strengthen ties with Poland's border regions through initiatives promoting cross-border cooperation, especially in the metropolitan area of Stettin, reviving the collaborative spirit that once helped the region thrive and shape its identity during the Hanseatic League. In 2022, the Council for Vorpommern and Eastern Mecklenburg (*Rat für Vorpommern und das östliche Mecklenburg*) was established to support the implementation of these initiatives (Regierung M-V, 2022). Among the 16 German states, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern currently has the lowest GDP[56] and the lowest per capita purchasing power[57].

This very brief historical commentary about a region with an official existence of over a thousand years is important to me because understanding the historical contours of this state - one that has, especially in its recent history, been a battleground for political disputes between great powers and now deals with the consequences - helped me build a connection with it.
Again, a train journey serves as a tool for observation and connection-building. Boarding the RE3, the regional train that connects Berlin to Stralsund, passing through Greifswald, it is impossible not to notice the changes in the landscape over the nearly 180 km route heading north. in the initial stations, like Buch, Eberswalde or Angermünde - practically satellite towns of the capital - little changes. However, as the journey progresses northward, one begins to see the transition from an urban landscape to a more rural environment with vast pastures and fields. Perhaps the most drastic shift occurs between the stations Nechlin and Pasewalk, precisely as the train crosses the border between the states of Brandenburg and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. From this point on, abandoned structures begin to appear along the line. At some stops, like Anklam and Ferdinandshof, it is possible to see derelict buildings right at the stations. Longer wait times, segments where the train travels at reduced speed, and electrical failures are also common; with rain or fog, the chances of these issues increase, just like on São Paulo's CPTM Line 7.

[56] Source: https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/the-richest-and-poorest-states-in-germany.html#:~:text=While%20the%20state%20of%20North,at%20the%20GDP%20per%20capita.
[57] Source: https://www.statista.com/statistics/1283952/purchasing-power-per-capita-in-german-states/

Figure 153 - Abandoned building at train station of Barth, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, 2024



Photography created by the auhor, 2024.

It is not just a train journey and infrastructure issues that fostered my sense of connection with the region. In German, the pejorative term *Ossi* arose shortly after *die Wende* to refer to people from East Germany, labelling them as second-class citizens, as mentioned previously, quoting Zimmermann. The term comes from the word *Ost*, east in German, like in *Ostdeutschland*. *Ossi* has its counterpart *Wessi* (from *West,* as in *Westdeutschland*), although it perhaps lacks the same impact. *Ossis* are *Ossis*, while *Wessis* are "normal" or "typical" Germans.

Both terms have been used to refer to two nations within the same state but none of them are still there (Boym, 2001, p. 146). Over time, *Ossi* has been somewhat adopted as a form of cultural identity by people initially born in the GDR and younger generations born after reunification in the former country's territory, who feel themselves excluded or put aside the

standards. “Hooray, hooray, we are the shit *Ossis*, we ruin your day [...] we are those no one ever asks about”, raps Marteria, a Rostock native singer, in the song *Scheiss Ossis*[58].

Figure 154 - Sticker with the badge of Hansa Rostock Football Club and the DDR Coat of Arms side by side, 2024



Photography created by the auhor, 2024.

In Spanish from Spain, the term *Sudaca* is equally pejorative, used to refer to people from South America as inferior. The word derives from *Sudamérica*, South America in Spanish. Again, geographic origin is used to demean the other, suggesting that nothing from South America is good enough for the standards of the former colonial power. Our universities are not good enough; our art is not refined enough, and our workforce is not skilled enough. However, where did the gold adorning the crowns of the Spanish and Portuguese royal families come from?

Just as with *Ossi*, the term *Sudaca* has been appropriated by South American culture and, in certain contexts, is used as a marker of cultural identity - a semantic retribution against the coloniser. A retaliation (Soares, 2024). For example, this reclamation can be seen in *Verein*

[58] In the original: “*Hurra, hurra! Wir scheiss Ossis, versauen euch den Tag [...] Wir sind die, die keiner fragt, Wir scheiss Ossis*”. Marteria’s song is part of a collaboration with the punk rock band Die Toten Hosen. Originally from Düsseldorf, the quintet composed *Scheiss Wessis*. Released in 2022, both songs serve as a critique of the lingering perception of a divided Germany. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L2fzb7NPvdo>.

Sudaca[59], an organisation founded by Latin Americans in Leipzig to facilitate cultural exchange between Latin and German cultures through film festivals, workshops, and seminars. The podcast *Conexão Sudaca*[60] also uses the term to cover current events in South American football and politics (which some still view as incompatible). In 2020, the Brazilian-Mexican band Francisco El Hombre, together with the Chilean group Moral Distraída, composed the song *Baile Sudaca*, where the term is reclaimed as a form of cultural resistance. "Let me show you what Latin blood is made of! [...] In this continent, happiness protests!"[61] proclaim the lyrics. As for me, I have *Sudaca* tattooed on my left wrist, the lead hand in boxing.

As I settled into daily life in Greifswald and Vorpommern, making connections, exploring new places, becoming acquainted with the region's different routines, progressing in my German, and accessing deeper layers of the local culture, I came to realise that every *Sudaca* has a bit of *Ossi* in them.

Thus, the artworks presented in this section, mostly created in Vorpommern, aim not only to explore abandoned places and interrupted modernities but also to reflect a personal connection between the artist, his personal references, and the place he is situated.

6.2.2.1 New *Cotidianos* in Alt-Hohenschönhausen

In February 2023, I attended an event in Berlin called *Ruderal Winter Residency*, promoted by a German artistic collective named Operation Himmelsblick. The idea was to develop an artistic residency for a weekend in a deserted apartment block in Alt-Hohenschönhausen, in Lichtenberg. The complex of *Plattenbaueten*, was constructed during the early 1980s. These nine massive concrete structures were initially designed as a housing complex for contract workers, primarily from Vietnam. Each building, standing six stories tall, housed small apartments with communal kitchens and bathrooms, showcasing the utilitarian approach of the epoch.

However, since the early 2000s, these buildings have stood vacant, passing through several ownership changes. Despite occasional hopes for redevelopment, little progress was made due to issues of ownership speculation and bureaucratic complications. The site became a haven for graffiti artists and temporary occupants seeking shelter. At the same time, the

[59] To see: https://sudaca.de/
[60] Too see: https://www.central3.com.br/category/podcasts/conexao-sudaca/
[61] In the original: "*Deixa eu te mostrar do que se faz o sangue latino! [...] Nesse continente a felicidade protesta!*" Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ztvOSztR9Mk>.

structures themselves fell into disrepair, with deteriorating ceilings and weather-worn interiors - an abandoned area with more than 06 hectares. An evident case where the infrastructural remnants of modernity serve as leftover cultural and material resources, enabling the development of practical ontologies and the construction of new worlds (Dawney, 2021, p. 407).

Figure 155 - Abandoned housing complex in Alt-Hohenschönhausen, Berlin-Lichtenberg



Photography created by the auhor, 2023.

The residency program proposed to bring together ten artists from different nationalities and backgrounds to dwell in the place for two days, using the complex as a starting point for their creations. Sharing a communal improvised heated room as a base in one of the buildings - after all, it was in the wintertime - each artist was encouraged to develop a work commenting whether the origins of the place, their current state, or even their future which lies, on the hands of the real estate speculation in Berlin. The following weekend, the group promoted an open exhibition through the buildings. With groups of visitors organised in turns, the artists led the guests through a walk to visit the artistic works and installations.

The group added and performed several *cotidianos* to the place during the residency and in the exhibition. One day, while we were working through the property, a small group of workers was gardening and preparing the place for investors' visits. The Berlin Municipality was looking for opportunities to tear the place down or to sell it to a big construction company,

adding more layers of complexity and mixing the temporalities. The artistic interventions took the narrative of decay and wove it with threads of contemporary relevance to these structures, likely doomed to demolition.

During the program, I carried out a series of temporary interventions using projections aimed at questioning issues surrounding real estate speculation, a market practice directly linked to residential complexes after reunification. The video was produced using floor plans extracted from apartment sales catalogues in São Paulo and footage I recorded in decorated apartments (showrooms) typical of such developments in the city. Alongside the accelerated images, the video displays words like *Fortschritt* (Progress) and *Geldanlage* (Financial Investment). Words commonly found in the vocabulary of this universe were brought to place which may represent "the lost promises of the good life" (Dawney, 2021, p. 410).

Figure 156 - Video intervention at Alt-Hohenschönhausen



Photography created by the auhor, 2023.

The projections lasted only a few moments, as the cold weather reduced the battery life of the projector. The video was projected for about 20 minutes on the exhibition day until the battery ran out. Incorporating this technical limitation into the execution and reproduction of the work served to reinforce its site-specific nature. The documentation of the intervention is the only way to view the work. Its ephemerality is also intentional, drawing a parallel with the

buildings themselves, which, after demolition, can only be accessed through photographic records.

Figure 157 - The German artist Herkusho leads a guided tour with the visitors through the exhibition *Vanishing*, resulting from the *Ruderal Artistic Residency.*



Photography created by the auhor, 2023.

6.2.2.2 Biennale #09 - Abandoned Artworks

One of the things I appreciate most about being an artist - sometimes even more than the art itself - is the opportunity to explore new places and meet new people. These two experiences are often intertwined. In this regard, social media can be a helpful tool. Over the years, I have discovered significant locations for my work and connected with people through these online platforms, even if we have never met in person. The ongoing discussion about disrupted modernity began in a situation just like this.

In mid-2024, I noticed a series of likes on my Instagram account from a person who did not want to be named here. What caught my attention was that she liked nearly all of my photos featuring abandoned places tagged in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. Curious, I checked her profile and discovered that she had an impressive collection of photos from abandoned places,

particularly in Vorpommern. Naturally, this led to a conversation about our shared interest, during which she generously shared some valuable tips about ruined sites in the region.

Among the places she recommended to me was an old building in Klein Zetelvitz, a small *Dorf* between Greifswald and Demmin. In the summer of 2024, I visited the place and found a massive abandoned construction; some sectors were well-preserved, and some collapsed. Later, I found out that the location was the head office of *VEG Saatzucht Baumschulen Dresden, Betriebsteil Klein Zetelvitz, Kreis Demmin*, created by the government of the German Democratic Republic in the late 1960s (Rosenstädt, 2021b). This name refers to a division or branch of an agricultural enterprise that operated in the former East Germany. The acronym VEG stands for *Volkseigenes Gut*, which translates to People's State-Owned Property. These were state-owned farms managed by the government in the GDR.

Figure 158 - Interior of the abandoned Baumschule in Klein Zetelvitz



Photography created by the auhor, 2024.

The *Saatzucht Baumschulen Dresden* was dedicated to seed production and tree nurseries, with its main headquarters in Dresden. The enterprise had several branches spread across East Germany, including the one in Klein Zetelvitz, in the district (*Kreis*) of Demmin in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. *Betriebsteil* indicates that Klein Zetelvitz was a subsidiary or subdivision of the larger Dresden unit. Historically, VEGs were an integral part of the socialist

planned economy in East Germany, where the government-controlled and managed agricultural production. These units produced a wide range of agricultural products, including seeds, saplings, and trees, distributed to farms and used in reforestation projects throughout the GDR. The unit in Klein Zetelvitz was operational from around 1969 until 1989 (Rosenstädt, 2021b).

Following the reunification of Germany in 1990, many of these state-owned properties were privatised, decommissioned, or repurposed for other operations. Regarding the mentioned one, it took much work to find more specific information, as many of the governmental documents of the DDR went missing during *die Wende*, especially in small towns and villages. It is known that a private owner assumed the Baumschule in Klein Zetelvitz in 1994 when its name was changed to *Vorpommersche Baumschulen*. The enterprise was active until 2022, when the owners ended its operations due to a lack of specialised hand workers and weak sales (Rosenstädt, 2021a). However, the building I visited was not part of the Vorpommersche Baumschulen; it was dismembered sometime after 1989. I could not find more precise information about it, but we will soon return to this matter.

The former main building is located in the village's central, practically only, road. Looking from the outside, it is similar to old public constructions from East Germany, with the same architectural characteristics. As I entered the building, the external sounds were substituted by the typical silence of such space. The walls, once covered with floral wallpaper, now peeled and curled under the weight of time. The small windows, coated in dust, allowed only a sliver of light to seep in - just enough to illuminate what remained of a space that had once been active and had trained more than 50 professional gardeners each year (Rosenstädt, 2021b).

In another room, I found faded blue tiles, some still clinging to the walls, others fallen, forming uneven piles on the floor. The ground was covered in debris and moss, suggesting that nature had already begun reclaiming the space as its own. Further in, what was left of an industrial kitchen appeared before me. Rusted and broken equipment lay disassembled around. In another corner, an improvised living room with faded, old, torn furniture caught my eye. The curtains, partially torn down, still hung from the windows, moving slightly with the breeze that entered through unseen cracks - empty bottles and scattered papers on the floor like fragments of lives that once filled this space. Near them, there was an old tube television on a wooden hack, some playing cards on the floor and neo-nazi inscriptions and symbols on an old blackboard.

As much as these visits have always fascinated me, until this point, I have not seen anything so much different from what I am used to in this kind of exploration. However, it was

about to change. As I continued digging the space, I started to notice something unexpected. Scattered throughout the rooms were various artworks - paintings and drawings that seemed to have been abandoned along with the building. The walls, still adorned with peeling wallpaper, held traces of the past, yet the presence of these artworks truly captured my attention.

As I moved from room to room, I discovered labels and tags attached to walls with the names of the possible artists, hinting at the creative activity that once filled these now abandoned halls. It was as if the building had become a gallery, showcasing remnants of the artistic lives that had passed through it. The juxtaposition of these artworks against the decaying environment only deepened the sense of loss and abandonment that permeated the space.

Figure 159 - Abandoned artworks at the former Baumschule in Klein Zetelvitz



Photography created by the auhor, 2024.

For a moment, I felt lost between time layers, in an unknown temporality, looking at those artworks, some partially hidden behind layers of dust, like cave paintings of disrupted modernity. They seemed to have become part of the construction, and now nature reclaimed them. This confusing feeling only started to settle down when I found a dusty postcard on the ground with a picture of the main hall of the building - in a well-preserved state - and the title *1. Mecklenburg-Vorpommern Biennale - Biennale #9*. On the back was a list with dozens of

names and dates from 31/07 until 09/08/2009. That was the key to this artistic enigma: the place received an arts festival 15 years ago.

After the visit, I started researching Biennale #9, and my first impression was that it never existed. There were no references to it on the internet. Then I talked with art curators, gallery owners and workers of the Greifswald Municipality; no one knew about that. Even the ChatGPT could not find any intel on it. So I searched for information about the artists one by one, and then I tried to reach many of them by asking for any details about the event. Just one replied to me: Martina Minette Dreier. She said she was part of Biennale #9, although she did not attend in person, and that one of the curators was Spunk Seipel. After reaching him, I finally understood how it had happened and we had a pleasant conversation about it.

Figure 160 - Abandoned artworks at the former Baumschule in Klein Zetelvitz



Photography created by the auhor, 2024.

The Biennale #9 was born out of an artistic scene in Berlin at the time. With Edmund Piper, Seipel published a monthly art magazine called *Kondensat*, which later evolved into *Berlin Art Info*. Both of them also ran uncommercial project spaces in Berlin - Piper co-directed *Engler und Piper* on Kastanienallee in Prenzlauer Berg, and Seipel operated *Expo 3000* on Kopernikusstraße in Friedrichshain. These were hubs for the thriving independent art scene informally *Off-Szene* (Seipel, 2024), which brought together artists from all over Berlin.

Piper had long dreamed of purchasing a house in the countryside for an artistic commune. When the opportunity arose to buy the main building of the former Baumschule in Klein Zetelvitz, Piper saw it as the perfect place. He quickly gathered a group of fellow artists interested in joining him in this rural experiment. The collective included the painter Malte Brants, the artist Samuel Wiesemann, Piper himself, and Eiko Sabela, an artist from Köln and Seipel. When the artists first arrived at the building, early in 2009, it was in much better condition than today (Seipel, 2024). Though some windows were broken and there was mould, the structure was still intact, and nothing had yet collapsed.

Figure 161 - Abandoned artworks at the former Baumschule in Klein Zetelvitz



Photography created by the auhor, 2024.

However, the members' financial situations varied, and only a few owned cars, making regular travel to the site difficult. Seipel, deeply involved in Berlin's art scene, admitted that he was never particularly interested in regularly living at the site, and the logistical challenges only added to the strain.

Tensions emerged from the very beginning. According to Seipel (2024), Piper and Eiko struggled to communicate with their neighbours. In fact, rather than negotiate, they quickly resorted to legal threats, particularly concerning leftover farm equipment on their land. Seipel was frustrated by this approach, especially since it exacerbated their already difficult

relationship with the locals. He states (2024) that he as a *Wessi* was able to establish a better communication with the neighbours better than the *Ossis* of the group, which contributed to some issues between the artists, “because, according to the cliché, as a *Wessi* you are not not supposed to be familiar with the East” (Seipel, 2024). As a result, they faced issues like not having access to water, which made it even harder to establish themselves in space.

Despite these challenges, Seipel saw potential in the site and devised the idea for the Biennale. He had always been drawn to abandoned places, believing in the transformative power of art, especially in rural areas. He also wanted to breathe life into the empty building, and organising an arts festival seemed the perfect way. Together with Piper, they reached out to everyone they knew in the art world, inviting them to participate. Thanks to their involvement in the *Kunstsalon* art fair and network, they attracted diverse artists willing to contribute.

Figure 162 - Abandoned artworks at the former Baumschule in Klein Zetelvitz



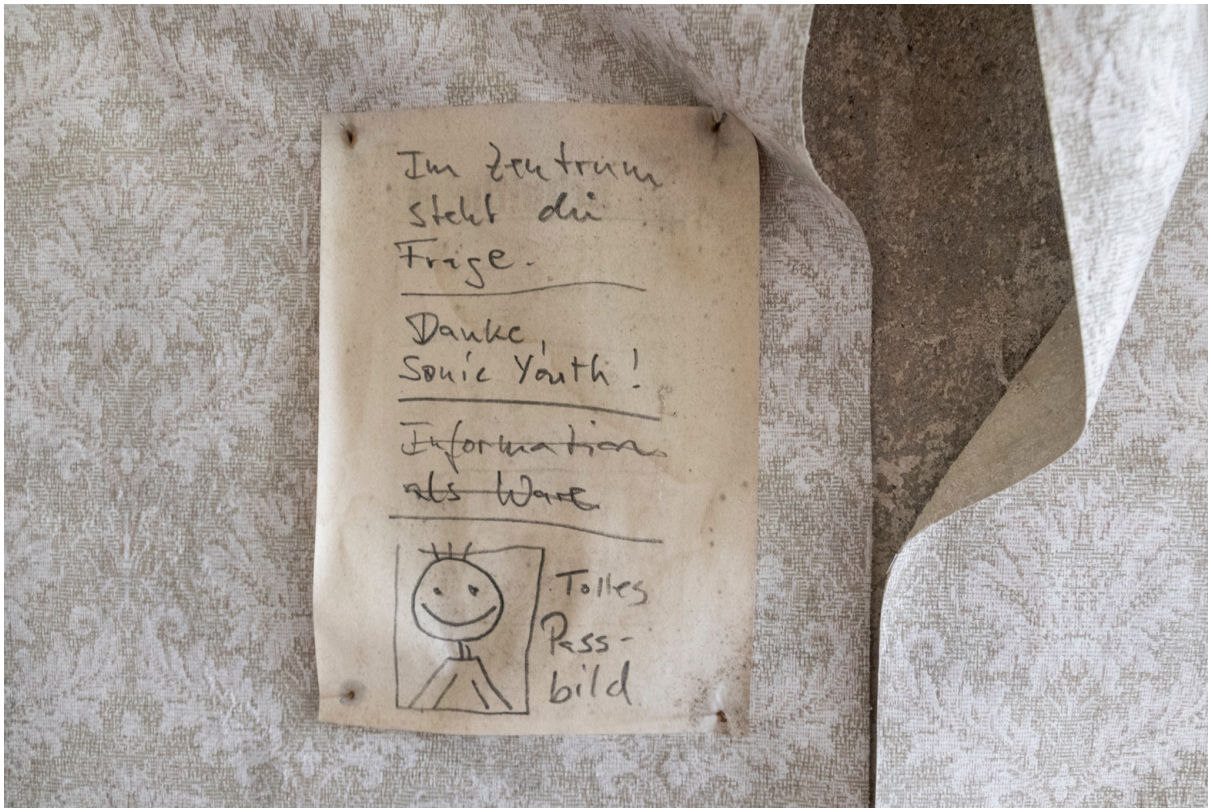
Photography created by the auhor, 2024.

Seipel (2024) noted that the final execution of the Biennale largely fell to him and Brants, as the other members of the collective provided little support. They filled the rooms with artworks, some of which were created directly on-site, as artists worked in the space before and during the event. A portable toilet was set up in the courtyard, and many artists stayed overnight at the venue, adding to the immersive, communal feel of the experience. People from

the surrounding village and visitors from Greifswald and even Berlin came to see the show. Though the event was a modest success, Seipel reflected that they needed more expertise to establish the Biennale within the local context better. Still, “it was a beautiful weekend, a small triumph for the artists involved” (Seipel, 2024).

Nevertheless, this achievement was soon overshadowed by mounting tension. Unbeknownst to Seipel and Brants, Piper and Eiko had begun negotiating the sale of the building behind their backs. For them, the Biennale became a way to showcase the property to potential buyers. This betrayal deeply hurt Speil, as he felt that the artistic efforts of the collective were being used for personal gain. The situation grew even more complicated with personal disagreement issues that began to surface within the group, prompting Seipel to withdraw from all shared projects with Piper. The friendships that had once held the collective together fell apart. Seipel (2024) recalled, “it was a difficult time, and the group broke apart after that”.

Figure 163 - Abandoned artworks at the former Baumschule in Klein Zetelvitz



Photography created by the auhor, 2024.

In his recent visit to the site, Seipel (2024) was shocked by its current state - the building had deteriorated significantly, with one wing completely collapsed and the garden overtaken by weeds. However, amidst the ruins, there were still traces of the Biennale. He noted that a few

of Malte Brants' paintings remained scattered throughout the space. One of Seipel's charcoal drawings, clinging to a wall, could still be found. Most poignantly, several of Samuel Wiesemann's large paintings were still in the main hall. Wiesemann had expressed a desire to retrieve them, but as Seipel (2024) explained, "he lacks the resources to do so, and frankly, I keep forgetting that I promised to help him with it". Despite the disrepair, Seipel (2024) seemed to find some solace in the fact that these artworks still lingered in this forgotten place, "waiting to be rediscovered".

Figure 164 - Abandoned artworks at the former Baumschule in Klein Zetelvitz



Photography created by the auhor, 2024.

Thus, the story of Biennale #9 is not just one of ambition, collaboration, and conflict but also a reflection of the layered history of disrupted modernities that this site has witnessed. Originally designed under the ideals of the DDR, the building once represented a state-driven effort to modernise agriculture in the region, aiming to develop and industrialise local farming practices. However, with the fall of the DDR, this project was partially interrupted, leaving behind a symbol of unrealised socialist modernity. Twenty years after Reunification, the artists' intervention brought a new wave of modern aspirations, transforming the space into a site of artistic experimentation and potential. Yet, like its predecessor, this project was also disrupted by financial and personal conflicts. Today, the abandoned building of the *Baumschule* stands as

a trace of these different modernities, offering visitors a tangible sense of the disrupted dreams and ideals that once sought to shape its future.

In parallel with my artistic career, I have consistently developed a professional practice in documenting exhibitions and artistic projects, creating records that are not merely documentation but also carry a creative approach. In fact, this practice allowed me to pay my bills for over a decade. Documenting the remnants and abandoned works of the Biennale #09 felt like returning to this craft while integrating it with my exploration of ruins, combining different temporalities—not only of my personal trajectory but also of the site itself.

6.2.2.3 The exhibition *Ruinös*

2024 marked a particularly significant year for Greifswald as the city celebrated the 250th anniversary of its "most famous son: Caspar David Friedrich" (250 Jahre Caspar David Friedrich, 2024a). While his exact birth date, September 5th, 1774, may seem like a mere detail, it is the cornerstone of over 500 cultural events spanning the entire year. Music, visual arts, performances, theatre productions, seminars, and lectures are just some of the many forms of expression set to praise his legacy. To ensure a fitting celebration, the city established the *Jubiläumsbüro*, tasked with organising what is arguably the largest cultural event in Greifswald's history: the festival *250 Jahre Caspar David Friedrich - Von Greifswald in die Welt* (or, in free translation, 250 Years of Caspar David Friedrich - From Greifswald to the World).

In the Hanseatic city of Greifswald, Friedrich's presence is unmistakable: his name graces a street, a primary school, the university's art institute, and an artistic centre in his former family home. There is also a monument in his honour in the city centre. The celebration of his 250th anniversary highlights that Greifswald is not merely Friedrich's birthplace but also "the first city of education for the leading figure of Romanticism" (250 Jahre Caspar David Friedrich, 2024). It was a bold idea for a small city in Vorpommern, especially considering that major museums in German metropolises like Berlin, Hamburg, and Dresden had already made large-scale exhibitions to honour the painter's legacy. It is worth noting that these three capital cities hold the most significant collections of Friedrich's works, further underscoring their role in commemorating his contribution to art history. Anett Hauswald, the manager of the Jubiläumsbüro, states (2024, p. 314) that doubts like "Will people travel to Northeast Germany?" or "Is it possible to show something new and interesting about him for a year-long?"

were always in her team's mind. Instead, undermining these questions made the project more robust.

The concept was so welcomed by the residents and artists, evoking a rich miscellaneous effect of Friedrich's influence on the local society. This variety, combined with the number of selected projects, led to the celebrations lasting until 2025. It underscores the idea that "without Greifswald, there would be no Caspar David Friedrich"[62] (Hauswald, 2024, p. 315), making the city and its surroundings the "greatest Open-Air Museum" (Hauswald, 2024, p. 315) about the painter.

In 2023, through Prof. Schlitte's mediation, I presented my portfolio to Susanne Papenfuß, a specialist in David Friedrich and member of the Jubiläumsbüro. One year later, I had the chance, although I would rather say privilege, to participate in the celebrations and an exhibition named *Ruinös*[63] with the artist Torsten Rütz between July and August 2024.

Figure 165 - Exhibition *Ruinös*, 2024



Fotografia: Lucas Gervilla, 2024.

The Spielhalle KUNST, a former casino (or *Spielhalle*, in German) in the Mühlenstraße, one of the oldest streets in Greifswald's old downtown, was chosen for the event. The name

[62] In the original: "*Ohne Greifswald gäbe es keinen Caspar David Friedrich*".
[63] To see: <https://youtu.be/2tCvU6nO0uo>.

means Windmill Street, which certainly refers to the access to this infrastructure in the town's earlier days. One of the walls of the edifice uses the Old Wall of the city as structure, which reinforces the link of the construction with the local history. On the occasion of the *Jubiläum*, the space was temporarily converted into an art gallery. In other words, the place already discusses the diverse uses of space and gathers different modernities.

The name *Ruinös* aptly represents the works presented in this exhibition. The photographs by Torsten Rütz, an engineer, capture Greifswald in the 1980s, before the *Wende*. These images focus on the old town, conveying the melancholy of decay and the harshness of its destruction. In the late 1980s, the local government implemented a plan to demolish many of the historic buildings in the old town, which had fallen into disrepair, and replace them with *Plattenbauten*. The transformation documented by Rütz turned the entire area into a vast demolition and construction site, signalling both the end of the downtown's old architecture and the beginning of a modernization project. Despite these changes, an attempt was made to preserve the town's identity in residential and commercial buildings. The GDR government employed a similar strategy in Hanseatic cities such as Stralsund and Rostock.

Figure 166 - Lucas Gervilla at the exhibition *Ruinös*, 2024



Photo by: Iris Mendes, 2024.

The artworks I presented were created between 2020 and 2024. The exhibition comprises photographs and videos captured in Brazil, my home country, and Germany -

particularly in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern and other parts of the former GDR, where I lived for more than half of my studies.

The touching of places and spaces from both countries facilitates an exploration of the political and social transformations in the 1990s. At the same time, the exhibition proposes viewers to use their imagination, creating new and imaginary landscapes where conventional notions of time and space are distorted and blurred. In addition, I have included objects found at these locations, which, through a process of aestheticization, acquire new or different meanings. These elements function as traces of other modern projects.

Figure 167 - Exhibition *Ruinös*, 2024



Photography created by the auhor, 2024.

Georg Simmel (1908, p. 685) discusses the concept of the foreigner (*Fremde*), not as a traveller “who arrives today and leaves tomorrow”, but rather as someone “who arrives today and stays for tomorrow” (Simmel, 1908, p. 685). The sociologist asserts (Simmel, 1908, p. 685) that although this type of migrant or immigrant has chosen not to move on - at least for now - they have not yet fully overcome the “detachment of coming and going” (*die Gelöstheit des Kommens und Gehens*). The foreigner’s position within this specific circle or region is defined by the fact that they do not belong - nor could they belong - due to their different qualities (Simmel, 1908, p. 685).

On the other hand, the *Fremde* is someone who transcends the dualistic opposition between proximity and distance, as they become close to something that was previously distant, be it physically or culturally. The *Fremde* embodies the “unity of proximity and distance” (*die Einheit von Nähe und Entferntheit*) (Simmel, 1908, p. 685). This perspective can be understood both literally and metaphorically, and can be interpreted in relation to different temporalities. This is one of the goals of the works I presented in *Ruinö*s: to propose to the audience a feeling of estrangement among different times and spaces. The images portrayed are neither Brazil nor East Germany, but rather somewhere in between, layered with imaginary time and space. The proposal was also to share with the audience a glimpse of my personal displacement - both physical and cultural - by embodying this duality as a *Fremde* in Germany.

Figure 168 - Exhibition *Ruinös*, 2024



Photography created by the auhor, 2024.

At first glance, connecting my personal experience of displacement with Simmel’s concept of the *Fremde* may seem unrelated. However, this sense of being in-between - of balancing the tension between proximity and distance - was transformed into an artistic process central to my work. The artworks presented in *Ruinös* sought to bring together this disorientation, inviting viewers to engage with these layered landscapes and explore the blurred

boundaries of memory, identity, and place. Through this process, I hoped to transform the personal into the universal, offering a narrative that resonates not only with my experience but also with the broader themes of migration and belonging.

The artworks in *Ruinös* were deliberately arranged non-linearly, reinforcing the exhibition's core concept of disorienting and blending locations. Rather than guiding visitors through a structured path, the layout encourages them to move freely, allowing for a more personal space exploration. This arrangement mirrors the thematic blending of time and place in the artworks, where the boundaries between Brazil, East Germany, and imaginary landscapes become indistinct. By disrupting the traditional flow of a gallery, the exhibition lures viewers to lose themselves in a maze of images and objects, much like the way ruins themselves confuse and distort the sense of time and place.

Figure 169 - *Ruinös* setting up, 2024



Photo by: Iris Mendes, 2024.

One of the key challenges in curating *Ruinös* was effectively occupying more than 100 square metres of the gallery space. Ensuring the space did not create a sensory interruption for visitors was crucial. The open layout was carefully designed to allow the artworks to communicate with one another while maintaining a sense of continuity and immersion. By avoiding a rigid, linear progression, the exhibition sustains a fluid experience where viewers

can move organically between different works, reinforcing the idea of fragmented yet interconnected histories and landscapes. This curatorial approach aligns with the exhibition's overarching themes, fostering an environment where past, present, and future collapse into one another.

Figure 170 - *Ruinös* setting up, 2024



Photography created by the auhor, 2024.

An exclusive video work titled *Rache* was also featured in the exhibition, adding a new dimension to the narrative. With 9 minutes and 10 seconds, the video brings together a series of abandoned locations filmed over the past four years in Brazil and Germany, particularly in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. Inspired by Georg Simmel's previously discussed concept of "nature's revenge" (*Rache der Natur*), the video explores the idea that, as structures decay, nature reclaims what once belonged to it. Through carefully composed imagery and sound, the video portrays the merging of culture and nature, a dynamic that continuously shifts at its own pace. In this work, the ruins become places where natural forces and human history intertwine, creating a haunting yet mesmerising portrayal of the constant tension between memory, nostalgia and decay.

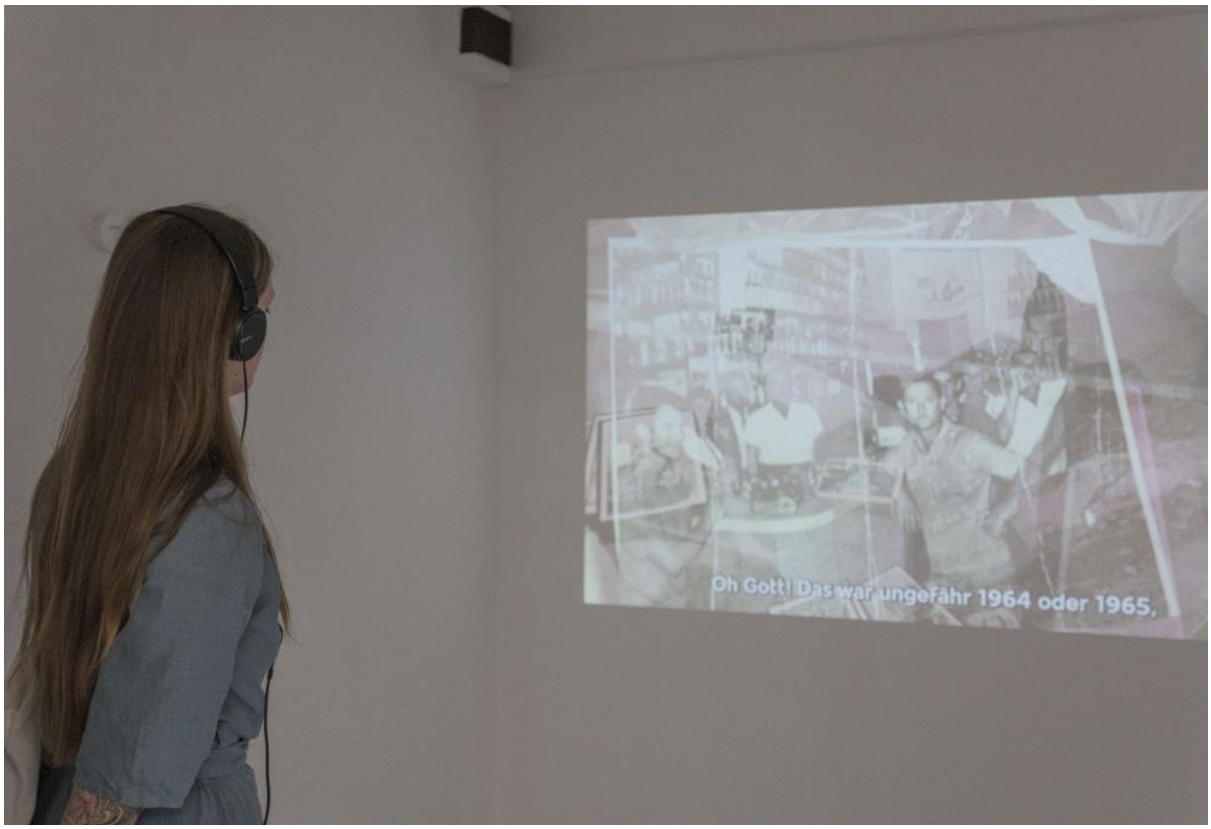
Figure 171 - Exhibition *Ruinös*, 2024



Photography created by the auhor, 2024.

One of the visitors, who was born in the DDR just one year before the *Wende*, shared with me that, although she does not have vivid memories of that period, the images felt strangely familiar. The degraded wallpapers, the old sockets on the walls, and even the furniture left behind in the locations depicted in the photographs and videos resembled those she had seen in relatives' homes. This observation highlights how these ruins and abandoned spaces are not merely leftovers of the past but remain within personal memories, subtly embedded in individual and collective histories. It underscores how the traces of these fragmented modernities are not entirely lost but persist in unexpected ways, allowing viewers to reconnect with elements of their own lives through the art. In this sense, the exhibition does not just present ruins as symbols of decay and access to shared experiences, where personal memories intersect with broader historical narratives.

Figures 172 and 173 - Visitors at the exhibition *Ruinös*, 2024





Photos created by the auhor, 2024.

On another occasion, I overheard two visitors talking to each other, mentioning that although specific details in the images allowed them to identify whether the places depicted were in Brazil or Germany, it no longer seemed to matter. In the work, these spaces blended into a new landscape, much like the concept of an imaginary landscape, where nature served as the unifying element, bridging the gaps between different locations. The way vegetation, light, and signs of decay echoed across both realities suggested that, ultimately, these spaces belonged to the same narrative - reimagined and reinterpreted. Ruins transcend time and geography.

Figure 174 - Exhibition *Ruinös*, 2024



Photography created by the auhor, 2024.

The exhibition also featured a brief and experimental video titled *Fenster*, which lasted just 54 seconds. Recorded at the Sporthotel und Kongresszentrum des Sportforums Hohenschönhausen in Lichtenberg, Berlin, the piece captures the gentle fluttering of an old curtain as the wind blows, evoking a sense of quiet transience, of presence and absence. The Sportforum Hohenschönhausen was a notable sports complex in East Berlin, historically known for its extensive facilities and role as a significant training centre for athletes during the DDR era. What enhances the intimacy of the work is that it is played on the same device on which it was recorded - an iPhone 4, an obsolete model by the time of the recording (2021) - further emphasising the questions of obsolescence and decay. Even devices that, until recently,

represented the cutting edge of technology are swiftly overtaken by progress, transforming into a kind of technological ruin. The are also subject to decay and obsolescence, becoming artifacts of a not-so-distant past.

The videos *Caléndulas* and *Belem Street 58* were also featured as part of *Ruinös*. Both works had already been previously discussed and analysed, but it was fascinating to witness their temporary recontextualization in a different country and cultural environment. Displaying these videos in Germany allowed for new layers of meaning to emerge, particularly in *Belem Street, 58*, a deeply personal and familial video. This work blurred the notions of proximity and distance, as previously proposed by Simmel, evoking the disorientation typical in the spatial experiences of immigrants. The overlapping of personal memories with unfamiliar settings proposed viewers to consider how spatial and emotional positions can shift, reinforcing the exhibition's central theme of dislocated and reimagined landscapes.

Figure 175 - Visitors at the exhibition *Ruinös*, 2024



Photo by: Iris Mendes, 2024.

The exhibition concluded with a guided tour, during which I could explain some of the concepts behind my work, engage in dialogue with the visitors, and answer their questions. It

was a moment to reflect on how memory, place, and identity themes resonated with the audience. I also heard insightful comments that deepened the discussion around the works. As an immigrant artist, participating in this exhibition and the broader Caspar David Friedrich *Jubiläum* further blurred my own notions of proximity and distance, mirroring the dislocation central to my work. As Svetlana Boym (2001, p. 198) suggests, even when immigrants navigate new languages and cultures, small traces of their origin - like an accent or misplaced prepositions - continue to betray their background. Similarly, my artistic practice grasps this tension between belonging and estrangement, offering a space where these dualities are constantly negotiated.

Figure 176 - Visitors at the exhibition *Ruinös*, 2024



Photography created by the auhor, 2024.

6.2.2.4 Regierungskrankenhaus Berlin-Buch

In the Autumn of 2021, during my period in Berlin, I was surfing on Instagram and searching for hashtags related to abandoned places in the city when I found a profile named "jump_z3r0" with some pictures from places I had been back in 2013. We added each other as followers, and a few messages later, we arranged an exploration for the next day. The person behind the profile is Justus Wolfgang. We are friends to this day, and I had the pleasure to collaborate with an interview for his Master's dissertation.

The chosen place for our tour was the *Regierungskrankenhaus* (Governmental Hospital) in Buch, a borderline district in northeast Berlin, circa 20 kilometres from the city centre. Built in the middle of the Buch's forest, the hospital had about 3.000 beds destined for the political elite of the German Democratic Republic, including members of the government, the Central Committee of the Socialist Party (SED), which explains its original name.

Figure 177 - Frontal overview of the Regierungskrankenhaus Berlin-Buch, 2021



Photography created by the auhor, 2021.

The historian and researcher of East and West Germany health systems, Jutta Braun (RBB Fernsehen, 2024), recalls that the hospital's original location was at the corner of Invaliden and Scharnhorst streets in Berlin. However, this area was directly adjacent to the

Berlin Wall. According to her (RBB Fernsehen, 2024), it was possible to see over the Wall through the hospital windows and vice-versa. To avoid espionage and any risks to the high-ranking members of the Party, the SED decided in the early 1970s to relocate the facility to a safer area. The original site is today the Invalidenpark, located in the heart of the capital.

In 1976, a new facility was inaugurated in Buch to provide both seclusion and security, besides the better air quality away from the downtown. The new Regierungskrankenhaus boasted modern technology that was otherwise unavailable in the rest of East Germany, including advanced medical equipment imported from the West, such as one of the only two CT scanners in the country (RBB Fernsehen, 2024). In 1989, for the first time, a television crew from DDR-Fernsehen, the official state broadcaster, was granted access to film inside the facility. The report aimed to provide a rare glimpse into the hospital's activities, and one of the key moments was an interview with Dr. Lothar Kant, the hospital's director at the time. When asked whether patients received preferential treatment based on their status within the government, Dr Kankt (RBB Fernsehen, 2024) firmly denied any claims of favouritism, insisting that all patients were treated equally regardless of their rank.

Figure 178 - Regierungskrankenhaus Berlin-Buch, 2021



Photography created by the auhor, 2021.

On the other hand, it was well known that Erich Honecker, the General Secretary of the SED, had a private suite within the hospital, complete with direct access to an underground bunker. This special arrangement highlighted the significant privileges afforded to high-ranking officials. In the same interview, Dr Kankt (RBB Fernsehen, 2024) lamented that the cutting-edge technology available at Regierungskrankenhaus was not yet accessible to the rest of the country, further underlining the exclusivity of the hospital. Despite his reassurances, the disparity between the healthcare provided to the political elite and the general population remained evident, reinforcing the hospital's reputation as a symbol of inequality within the East German health system.

Figure 179 - Regierungskrankenhaus Berlin-Buch, 2021



Photography created by the auhor, 2021.

After the Reunification and the dissolution of the SED, the hospital's administration transitioned to the Berlin Senate. In 2001, Helios Kliniken, one of Europe's largest private hospital operators, purchased the facility and the entire complex. Despite high expectations for continued operations, the hospital faced financial difficulties and was permanently closed in 2007 (RBB Fernsehen, 2024). Since then, the place has remained abandoned, managed in the following years by the BIM - Berliner Immobilienmanagement, a state-owned company overseeing public real estate assets in Berlin. This shift unveils the "failing promises of progress

modernity" (Dawney, 2021, p. 407) where instead of paving the way for progress, the collapse and dismantling of such sites grasp the unfulfilled promises of modernity.

Figure 180 - Regierungskrankenhaus Berlin-Buch, 2021



Photography created by the auhor, 2021.

Over the years, as medical equipment was gradually removed from the place, the security system began to loosen. Ensuring the isolation of such a large area and building would have required a significant security team, which became increasingly difficult to maintain. This lack of oversight eventually led to thefts, particularly of valuable electrical materials and other remaining assets. Vandalism soon followed, leaving the building marked by graffiti and structural damage.

The peak of this decline occurred during the Corona pandemic, when illegal parties were held in the abandoned hospital, further contributing to its deterioration. These unauthorised gatherings hastened the destruction of the site, and today, virtually no trace of its former status as a prestigious medical facility remains, as stated by Dr. Kankt (RBB Fernsehen, 2024). The hospital now stands as a near-total ruin, with any remnants of its once-modern structure almost completely vanished.

Figures 181 and 182 - Regierungskrankenhaus Berlin-Buch, 2021





Photos created by the auhor, 2021.

On September 25, 2021, I visited the site with Justus, exploring the remains of what was once a highly classified facility for the East German elite. The size of the hospital itself was overwhelming, with long, echoing corridors now marked by chaos. As we moved deeper into the building, the sense of disorientation grew. The heavy vandalism and gradual decay had transformed the space into a labyrinth, where rooms and hallways blended, making it difficult to remember where we had been or were going.

Figure 183 - Regierungskrankenhaus Berlin-Buch, 2021



Photography created by the auhor, 2021.

The original function of the hospital was still traceable in subtle ways. For example, names of medical sections were inscribed on glass doors, and some offices still bore plaques that identified former doctors and departments. Despite its current state, there were clear reminders of the state's level of control over the facility. Documents left behind, such as one from another VEB, illustrated the deep involvement of state-run entities in every aspect of the hospital's administration. This control extended not just to medical operations but also to ensure no external competition and maintain a sight over the patients.

Nevertheless, as we continued walking, the strange contrast between the building's former precision and its current disorder stood out the most. The feeling of getting lost in this deteriorating modernity was inescapable. Wires dropped from the ceiling where high-tech

equipment had once been installed, and rooms that likely held state-of-the-art medical devices were now stripped bare, leaving only faint impressions of what they once were.

Figure 184 - Overview of Regierungskrankenhaus Berlin-Buch, 2021



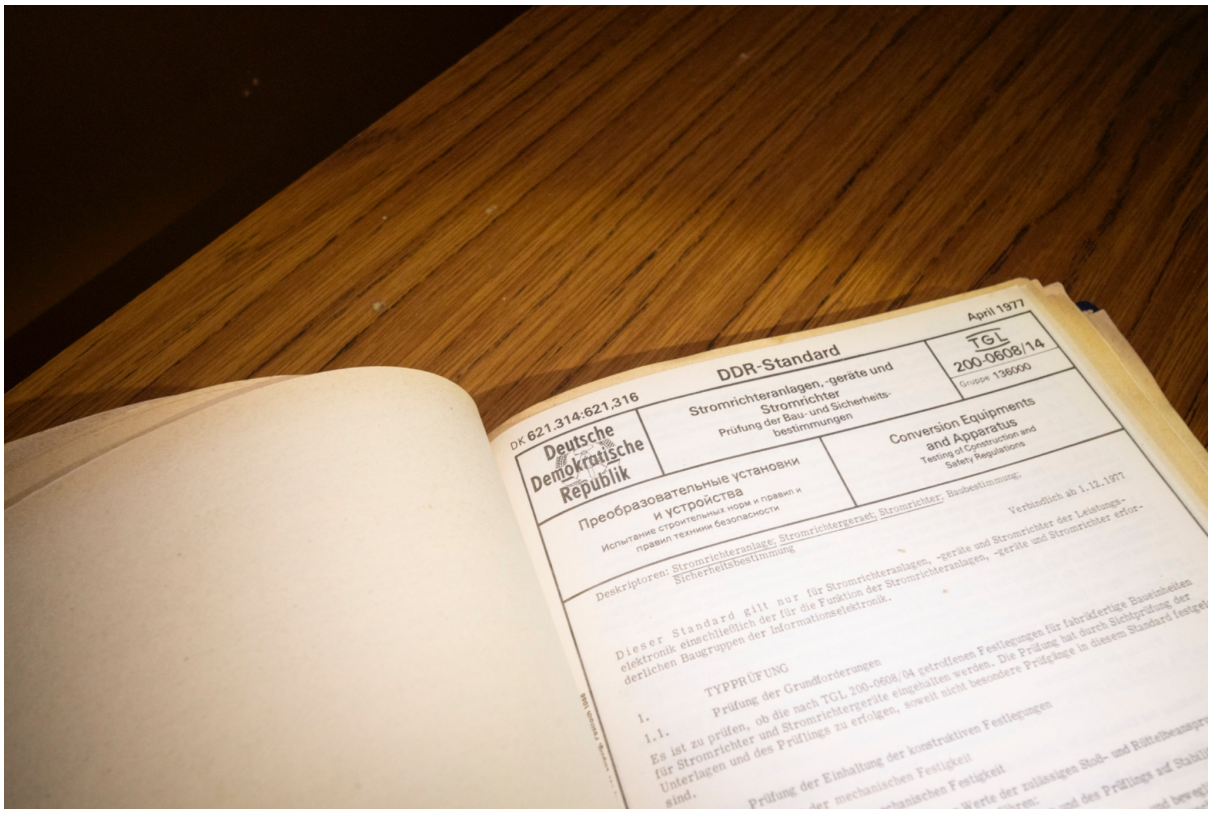
Photography created by the auhor, 2021.

The case of the Regierungskrankenhaus is perhaps one of the most prominent examples in this research of the visit and the concept of “being there” as an artistic practice and experience. The hospital's dilapidated state constantly forces visitors to maintain heightened attention. As seen in the images, virtually none of the hundreds of windows remain intact, leaving the floor covered in shards of glass. The precarious conditions of the ceilings and slabs further increase the risk of objects falling on visitors’ heads. Holes in the floor and walls were also frequent, and the elevator shafts were open on some levels. In a complex of this size, it is also risky to claim that there are no remaining sources of electricity, making every exposed wire a potential hazard. Furthermore, it is uncertain whether all hospital waste, such as radiographic materials and other chemical components, has been entirely eliminated.

In such a hostile environment, developing poetic thought with the necessary calm is impossible.On the other hand, the heightened focus and attention required to make every minute of the visit a fully lived experience. Spending several hours at the Regierungskrankenhaus

significantly contributed to my artistic practice, particularly in understanding that my body's presence is a creative and generative process.

Figure 185 - Document dated from 1977 found at Regierungskrankenhaus Berlin-Buch, 2021



Photography created by the auhor, 2021.

This hospital is a clear example of how a single location can embody the varying shifting visions of modernity. Initially constructed to represent the prime of East German medical innovation, it was part of a broader political project to demonstrate the state's control over healthcare and technology. Over the decades, however, these ambitions were abruptly halted and redefined by spatial and temporal shifts - first through the fall of the GDR and later through the hospital's gradual abandonment and transformation into a forgotten ruin. Each layer of its history reveals its era's aspirations and how larger socio-political forces can disrupt and re-arrange such plans, leaving behind a complex interplay of modernity, decay, and the traces of time.

6.2.2.5 Workshop *Imaginäre Landschaften*

In May 2024, as part of the Caspar David Friedrich Jubilee celebrations, I had the opportunity to lead a workshop titled *Imaginäre Landschaften* (Imaginary Landscapes), which I designed

and conducted on the 24th and 25th of that month. The workshop was a collaborative project between the Jubiläumsbüro and the Volkshochschule Vorpommern-Greifswald[64]. Drawing inspiration from Friedrich's painting *Ruine Eldena im Riesengebirge*, explored in Chapter 03, the workshop aimed to revisit the Romantic notions of ruins and fragmented landscapes within a contemporary framework. The concept of unity (*Einheit*) present in a landscape as proposed by Georg Simmel (2009, p.06), previously introduced, was also discussed with the attendants during the activity. This discussion was essential to their creative process, as it provided a framework for thinking about how seemingly fragmented elements of a landscape can come together into a cohesive composition. By introducing this idea, the aim was to encourage participants to consider how different times and spaces can still be connected by an underlying unity, reflecting the continuity between past and present in their upcoming works.

Figure 186 - Imaginary Landscape by Lucas Gervilla, 2022



Photography created by the auhor, 2024.

The goal was for partakers to create imaginative landscapes by combining videos, photos, and sound recordings from key locations in and around Greifswald. These media

[64] A *Volkshochschule* is an adult education centre in Germany that offers a wide range of courses and workshops on various topics, including language learning, arts, technology, and culture, aimed at fostering lifelong learning and community engagement.

elements were then merged to consider how the city's past, present and the imagination of the attendants coexist, much like Friedrich's ability to evoke timelessness in his work. Participants were encouraged to consider how modern landscapes carry layers of historical and contemporary meaning, even if some of the structures had fragmentation or decaying aspect.

After briefly introducing the themes on the first day, we explored various locations in Greifswald to capture images and sounds. It was a unique experience to walk through sites that had inspired Friedrich's work over 200 years ago, such as the mediaeval streets of the city's downtown, the Ricky River, and the surrounding swamps. These historical and natural elements, like the railway - with was built after Friedrich's day - were juxtaposed with modern ones, highlighting how the city has evolved while still bearing traces of its Romantic past.

The second day was focused on editing and compiling these media elements into digital compositions. Using editing software, the participants produced various works, from digital collages merging real and imagined ruins to soundscapes contrasting natural sounds with human interventions. These hybrid landscapes allowed participants to engage with how ruins and landscapes transform over time and how modernity disrupts yet remains intertwined with historical spaces.

Figure 187 - Imaginary Landscape by Kerstin Trölsch-Breitsprecher, 2024



Source: Kerstin Trölsch-Breitsprecher, 2024.

Four months later, in September, the outcomes were presented during the *22. Greifswalder Kulturnacht*, a city-wide cultural event that showcases various artistic and cultural projects, from lectures, exhibitions, and guided tours to concerts, dance performances, and live installations. The participants' works were displayed in the form of a single-channel video accompanied by sound compositions that included recordings from Brazil and some other places I have been to, creating an intercultural dialogue between my home country and the city I currently reside in, like proposed by Friedrich on his painting. During the presentation, I had the chance to discuss the creative process and engage with the audience, answering questions and discussing the workshop's themes.

Figure 188 - Imaginary Landscape by Karina Kreß, 2024



Source: Karina Kreß, 2024.

One notable moment of the presentation was when a local audience member, who grew up in Greifswald during the DDR era, commented on how the workshop's imaginative landscapes transformed his perception of the city. He recalled the downtown area as a place dominated by grey and concrete. Regardless, he remarked that the colourful and vibrant

landscapes created during the workshop added new layers to his memory, offering a more joyful and dynamic interpretation of the city.

The *Imaginäre Landschaften* workshop exemplifies how different visions of modernity can converge within a single space. Drawing from Friedrich's poetic landscapes and using digital art, the participants created glimpses of potential modernities, reimagining the city through the lens of its present and elements from the fragmented past. The outcomes dialogue with Boym's (2017, p. 39) idea of "prospective nostalgia," where the images created are like field glasses through which we might look to a different future based on our previous experiences. These imaginative landscapes serve as metaphors for the interrupted modernities discussed in this chapter, where time and space collide to form new, yet temporary, configurations. Much like Friedrich's art, which invites viewers to contemplate the past, present, and future in a single frame, the workshop's outcomes encouraged participants to think about the possible landscapes of imagined modernities and how they manifest - sometimes as fleeting glimpses - often as layers upon layers of history and imagination.

Figure 189 - Imaginary Landscape by Iris Mendes, 2024



Source: Iris Mendes, 2024.

6.2.2.5 Exhibition *SpaceTimeMaterial*

Between September and October 2024, I participated in the collective exhibition *SpaceTimeMaterial* with the artists Andreas Lange and Gordana Schmelzer aka GORDANA at the cultural centre Strahlwerk in Stralsund, within the event *Kunst-Heute MV*. The Strahlwerk occupies a historic site that once served as a shipbuilding and repair facility dating back to the 19th century. During the DDR era, it operated under the name *VEB Schiffbau- und Reparaturwerft*. Strahlwerk has transformed into a creative space dedicated to circular thinking, art, and cultural activities, preserving its industrial heritage while fostering contemporary artistic expression. The Kunst-Heute MV is an annual art event in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern that offers the public access to various cultural spaces, including studios, museums, galleries, and historic buildings. Organised by associations such as the MV Professional Association of Visual Artists, it aims to provide a platform for contemporary art and foster connections between artists and established cultural venues. The 2024 edition ran from September 28 to October 6, offering a broad range of exhibitions and opportunities for artists to engage with the public.

Figure 190 - *Rache* as part of *SpaceTimeMaterial*, 2024



Photography created by the auhor, 2024.

As Andreas Schöttke, one of the directors of Strahlwerk mentioned during the *SpaceTimeMaterial* opening ceremony, the event brings together three artists with diverse origins and backgrounds: Andreas Lange, a photographer born in East Berlin who moved to Northern Germany shortly after the *Wende* due to the lack of work; GORDANA, a Croatian painter who has lived in various German cities since the 1970s; and myself. Despite our different paths, we are connected in space and time, with memories and imagination serving as the core material of our works, as noted by Mr. Schöttke - hence the exhibition's title.

The photographs by Andreas Lange explore the possibilities of unequal exposures, presenting different variations and angles of the same place. At first glance, recognising or identifying these locations might be possible, but the overlapping images transform them into entirely new landscapes. GORDANA's work, on the other hand, consists of paintings and drawings on paper and canvas, blending figurative and abstract elements. Her themes revolve around inner and outer landscapes, exploring the dynamics of nature and relationships. She uses acrylic and oil paints, often incorporating wax as a conserving and healing material.

Figure 191 - *Rache* as part of *SpaceTimeMaterial*, 2024



Photography created by the auhor, 2024.

For this occasion, I presented the video *Rache*. Showing this artwork within the Strahlwerk's historical setting added a new layer of meaning to the work. The building itself, which had remained abandoned for several years after reunification, served as a fitting backdrop for a piece that deals with themes of decay and ruination. The chosen projection wall still bore traces of its previous uses, with faded layers and patinas revealing glimpses of the past. These textures blended with the imagery of *Rache*, creating a dialogue between the building's history and the narrative of nature reclaiming forgotten spaces.

Figure 192 - Live cinema performance at the opening of *SpaceTimeMaterial*, 2024



Photography created by the auhor, 2024.

During the exhibition's vernissage, I performed a live cinema[65] piece, mixing and projecting footage recorded in abandoned locations I visited over the past four years. Many of

[65] Live cinema is a performance art form that involves the real-time editing and mixing of video, sound, and other media, often projected onto a screen or surface. Unlike traditional film screenings, live cinema is spontaneous and dynamic, allowing artists to create an evolving visual and auditory experience in response to the music or environment, making each performance unique.

these places were also featured in my video*,* *Rache*. This marked my return to this artistic language after over a decade, making the experience both nostalgic and invigorating. The performance was accompanied by Stralsund-based guitarist Marco Blasi, who improvised live, following the rhythm of the edited visuals. His music created an atmosphere enhancing the sense of timelessness and decay.

For the live cinema performance, I chose to use handheld footage, contrasting with the more static shots of *Rache* and *Rust, Mold, and Cracks*, which were primarily filmed with a tripod. This decision added a sense of movement and immediacy to the visuals. Despite the handheld approach, the speed of the images was reduced, and diversified layers were overlaid, resulting in abstract, dreamlike landscapes. This live mixing of Brazil's and East Germany's decaying spaces blended into a fluid narrative, reinforcing the themes of fragmented modernities and shifting temporalities.

After the performance, a visitor approached me to share her impressions of the work. We ended up meeting again on another occasion to talk more about it. She mentioned feeling especially touched by the images of the abandoned amusement park - the same one featured in *Rust, Mold, and Cracks*. "I was born in Rostock in 1979," she said. "That kind of amusement park, with a *Plattenbau* in the background, was the setting of my childhood, but now it no longer exists. My school does not exist anymore either; it was demolished after reunification. It is as if part of my childhood has been erased".

We continued discussing this process of tearing down traditional DDR sites and monuments, eventually arriving at the topic of the Palast der Republik. "Sixteen million people lived in the DDR", she explained, "and many of them took their first trip on a school excursion to Berlin to visit the Palast. You cannot just destroy a place like that; it could have been transformed into something else: a museum, a library..." she added, "a political system might change, but the memories of the people living in that place remain".

As we talked, we both recognized parallels between this sense of "not being good enough" shared by South America - or what is often mistakenly called the Global South - and the former East Germany. More established centres frequently view both regions with scepticism or even disdain.

Figure 193- Live cinema performance at the opening of *SpaceTimeMaterial*, 2024



Photo by: GORDANA, 2024.

When we discussed the video *Rache*, she commented on how the furniture and wallpaper in the abandoned places resembled those of her childhood spaces, now accessible only in her memories, as they no longer exist. “Right after reunification, people wanted to replace traditional wooden furniture with the plastic pieces common in the West, and the streets were filled with discarded furniture. Nevertheless, a few years later, people started feeling *Ostalgie*[66], a nostalgic longing for the DDR times”.

This feedback helped me realize that the connections I had previously imagined between *Sudacas* and *Ossis* are plausible. Art can effectively mediate between abandoned places, ruins, and memories.

The *SpaceTimeMaterial* exhibition at Strahlwerk brought together the works of three artists, each with distinct backgrounds, yet all united by the themes of memory, time, and space.

[66] *Ostalgie* is “the Eastern variant of the universal ailment [...] the biggest fetish of GDR nostalgia” (Boym, 2001, p.157).

The combination of Andreas Lange's layered photographs, GORDANA's evocative paintings, and my video *Rache* created a dialogue between past and present, decay and imagination. The setting of Strahlwerk, with its history of abandonment and remodelation, enhanced the exhibition's narrative. Through live cinema, music, and layered imagery, we explored how real and imagined landscapes could merge into new, shared experiences.

6. 3 Remarks on Disrupted Modernities

Within five years, I had the chance to visit numerous abandoned places in my home country and Germany, especially in former East Germany. The ruins and forgotten structures explored throughout this chapter serve as remains of disrupted modernities. They are evidence of the complex interplay between progress, decay, and politic-economic-social changes. Although every country has its particularities and political-social actors, it is still possible to connect them through such constructions, establishing that different projects of modernity come and go. Some of them last longer, others just a few years; however, none disappear without leaving behind spaces that one day were a symbol of progress. As I explored these environments, I found myself not just as an observer, but as an interlocutor using different artistic languages to mediate relations between ruins, abandoned places, and memory.

The act of being present in abandoned spaces allowed me to physically experience the environment, not only through sensory stimuli, such as sight and smell, but also imaginatively. These spaces reveal different layers of modernity, where each new patina of time adds a unique historical aspect.

This experience was not limited to such places; during my daily life in Vorpommern, as a foreigner, I noticed and made connections between the region and my homeland. Similarities that initially seemed scarce - whether in geographic or cultural aspects - became more apparent as I established parallels between the two countries, not only through their histories but also through my personal memories and experiences.

Throughout this process, meeting people who share this perspective transformed my experience in the Greifswald region into something even richer. These connections brought me closer to local cultural aspects that would otherwise be difficult to access or notice for a visitor who doesn't actively seek such connections or pay attention to small details.

Actively participating in cultural events celebrating the 250th anniversary of Caspar David Friedrich allowed me, even in a subtle way, to culturally connect my *Heimat* with my *Wohnort*, much like Friedrich did in his imaginary landscapes.

7 POSSIBLE FUTURES INSTEAD OF FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

From the beginning of this work, it seemed difficult to arrive at a conclusion or present a final section. In my understanding, such an approach would suggest that the research had come to an end, which is far from reality. For this reason, I propose the title *Possible Futures*, as I have spent the last 300 pages demonstrating that the words “end” and “ruins” do not necessarily belong to the same vocabulary.

Within a dichotomy, for something to have an end, it must have a beginning, and this is precisely what the first chapter of this thesis addresses: it shows that, following Rose Macaulay's ideas, it is not possible to pinpoint when human interest in ruins and abandoned places began. We can hypothesize and imagine, but we cannot affirm a precise point on the timeline. The theory that one of the first ruin-related pleasures was the *ruin-triumph* proposed by the author seems plausible, as it is equally challenging to think about the first time someone derived satisfaction from witnessing the ruins of their enemy. Here, the famous opening sequence of Stanley Kubrick’s *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) serves as a helpful reference, depicting a group of hominids celebrating victory over their opponents after using a bone as a weapon. With *Homo sapiens*, it was likely not much different.

Equally challenging is imagining when and how art began to engage with this ruinous universe. Whether as a form of documentation or celebration, different artistic languages have accompanied ruins, possibly since the emergence of both. In literature, sculpture, and painting, there have always been examples of this proximity throughout the centuries. It does not seem exaggerated to suspect that songs inspired by ruins were composed and, somehow, forgotten due to the impossibility of being recorded. For this reason, the new technologies of each historical moment became allies of the pleasures of ruins, as discussed in the first chapter. When representing someone else’s ruins ceased to be sufficient, they began to be transported from one place to another and exhibited in museums as works of art - or trophies.

The re-signification and preservation of ruins over time were also central to this research. What might initially be considered mere rubble can become a marker of memory, as David Harvey points out, symbolizing an entire story behind the context that generated that ruin. They can transform into monuments and memorials, carrying elements of the past into the future. In this context, end and final are words difficult to apply.

The constant reinterpretation of ruins and abandoned places in visual arts over time was examined in the second chapter, where dozens of works from different periods were discussed, offering various ruinous approaches. Used to represent religious values, social and natural

changes, or existential questions, ruins have always been present in the artistic universe, evoking a fantastic imagination that blends the boundaries between sacred and profane, old and new, earthly and spiritual.

Johann Heinrich Roos and Carl Blechen envisioned ruins as places of refuge and rest, where visitors could enjoy some quiet time away from urban regions. Hubert Robert imagined contemporary buildings in ruins, provoking the observer to reflect on the future of structures that symbolized (and some still symbolize) forms of power. Arnold Böcklin and Ernst Ferdinand Oehme explored ruins as mysterious settings, inviting us to imagine what might happen next in the scenes they depicted. Giovanni Antonio Canal followed this imaginative direction, creating fantastical ruinous landscapes in his *capriccios*. The representation of ruins as a convergence of documentation and poetry can be seen in the works of artists like Piranesi and Hendrik Hondius, where, beyond being recorded, ruins convey a sense of displacement, combining the glories of the past with the melancholy of the present.

From the Middle Ages to Romanticism, passing through the Renaissance, ruins gradually moved from occupying a distant point in the background of paintings to taking a prominent place in the foreground. This shift reached its peak with the German Romantic painter Caspar David Friedrich and his imaginary landscapes. By combining elements from his hometown, Greifswald, with places he visited, Friedrich composed scenes where ruins became the protagonists, with actions unfolding around them. Melancholy, nostalgia, the longing for times and places that no longer exist, and the prospect of a supernatural life converge in his paintings. His personal experiences also resonate with the ruins, engaging the audience in an imaginary yet plausible universe.

The combination of *Heimweh* and *Fernweh* - homesickness and wanderlust - together with his ability to depict places with topographical precision, established Friedrich as one of the greatest names of his generation. His influence extends to artists of various styles and mediums even today. To honor his legacy, Greifswald celebrated his 250th anniversary for an entire year, commemorating not only his past and works but also his presence in contemporary society and his influence on future creations. Here again, it becomes difficult to draw a definitive conclusion.

The ways in which ruins can alter space and the different interpretations of what constitutes an abandoned place - or, more broadly, what defines a place - led to a discussion on the distinctions between space and place: when one transforms into the other and when both coexist. Drawing on the ideas of Milton Santos and Georg Simmel, this research revealed that these definitions can easily escape us, as our spatial relationships are, for the most part,

subjective. To better understand the nuances of human relationships with places, newer concepts like *placedness* and *situatedness* emerged, illustrating how we can simultaneously have multiple connections to the same place and how these connections are always in flux.

The relationships between space and place are constantly subject to arrangements and rearrangements - changes that are not necessarily new. The ways these arrangements alter the spatial-temporal relationship are what we might call modernity. When one modernity succeeds another, the organization of the system of actions and the system of objects - the way Santos defines space - also changes, often initially causing disorientation among those inhabiting that place. This disorientation deprives us of *Kultivierung* (cultivation), as Simmel points out.

Considering ruins as objects within this system, they too are subject to change. One way ruins can be altered, both physically and symbolically, is through nature's intervention, leading to what Simmel calls the "revenge of nature". Here, nature interferes with architecture - a human endeavor - to reclaim what was taken from it and transformed into raw material. When we observe nature acting freely, without patterns, upon a ruin, we witness what the sociologist describes as the "seduction of ruins".

To illustrate the discussion surrounding these questions, my audiovisual work *Rust, Mold, and Cracks* (2022) is analyzed. Considering that the work was created in locations built by the USSR within the former DDR, both of which no longer exist, we are confronted with a new series of questions that arise from the continuous succession of modernities and how they coexist. Michel Foucault's concept of heterotopia helps us analyze how places can (co)exist within other places without necessarily being physically or emotionally accessible.

Using Henry D. Thoreau's idea of walking as an active experience and Annika Schlitte's interpretation of Helmuth Plessner's concept of the body as a mediator, the experience of "being there" was discussed as part of the creative process for *Rust, Mold, and Cracks*. The spatial changes undergone by the locations featured in the video are part of a period in German history known as *die Wende*. My perspective as an artist and foreigner observing the aftermath of this period more than 30 years later is also integral to the research process.

The transition from one modernity to another does not always occur gradually. It is not uncommon for a modernity to be abruptly interrupted. In this context, places can be instantly abandoned and later transformed into ruins, which can be read as evidence of a modern project left behind. In such cases, a linear notion of progress becomes questionable. This was precisely the starting point for the fifth and final chapter of this work, combining ideas from thinkers like Rahel Jaeggi and Bruno Latour. Scholars such as Hartmut Rosa and Leila Dawney also contributed to the discussion on interrupted modernities.

Using artistic works I created between 2020 and 2024, I thought about some modern projects that were abandoned or discontinued and with which I engaged during this period. The ruins of these different modernities served as inspiration for my artistic production, whether in Brazil or Germany, particularly in the Vorpommern region, where half of this research was conducted.

Building on Georg Simmel's proposal that the foreigner is someone who unites the concepts of distance and proximity, I used my personal experience to draw connections as a South American living as a foreigner in Vorpommern, recognizing similarities between the two regions. This personal displacement was, in many ways, absorbed into much of the work discussed in this final section, where personal experiences become integral to the work, as proposed by Svetlana Boym.

The artistic and theoretical material presented in this thesis is just a portion of what was collected over the past years. It would take much more time to fully incorporate it, and even that assumes I were to stop producing new content today. This investigation does not end here.

I began this work by acknowledging its many gaps. Over these five years, some of these gaps may have been filled, but I am certain that even more have opened. It is this continuous process that fuels my poetic and theoretical production.

What can be concluded at the end of this work is that art can indeed mediate between ruins, abandoned places, and memory. This combination forms the aesthetics of abandonment, which are always subject to reinterpretations and re-significations. It is precisely at this point that the idea of *possible futures* emerges. The combination of works, artists, thinkers, and places presented in this research encourages us to see ruins not as an end, but as a beginning full of possibilities and gaps.

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