rough around the edges:

SUBLIMINAL TASTE AND DECAY IN THE RESUSCITATION OF THERuINS OF MODERNITY

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for my father.
ABSTRACT

What is it about the old that possesses the potential to inspire emotional and reflective states? Whether to do with embodiments or symbols of the past, or of our embodied reactions to the materialities born of time and use, that which evades our direct reflection empowers architecture to effect us in physical, social, and abstract dimensions of space.

The dialectics of ruination have profound significance in the project of modernity in which architecture has become the embodiment of the human resistance against the process of aging and the procession of time. Modernist ideologies have struggled against nature in the denial of mortality, and in this negation of time risk a discontinuity with the past, a repetitive state of newness and a perpetual present.

The ruin is perhaps our most apt resource for resistance to this acceleration of the new. Our approach to their embodiments is of profound significance to the welfare of aesthetics.
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This discourse is inspired by my observations of a degradation in physical, social, and abstract dimensions of space in the process of modernization, and as such, is a reaction to the contemporary state of society, culture, and architecture. I have encountered similar sentiments, which have encouraged this resistance, notably in the work of Walter Benjamin, Kenneth Frampton, Frederic Jameson, Marco Frascari, and Juhanni Pallasmaa, among others. Such themes as fetishization, autonomy, commoditization, craft, and technology are interwoven in what is essentially a discourse targeting the transgression of aesthetics in architecture.

The intention of this work is to assess the spatial dimensions in which such atrophy has occurred and to develop a theory of the conditions that have been instrumental in arriving at the perceived situation. From this will be developed a methodology towards the relevant spatial dimensions and a potential means of resistance to such conditions, towards a resurrection of said aesthetic values.
We will explore this notion with particular respect to the ruin as an embodiment of temporality in architecture. From this physical dimension, we will expand into the social dimensions of ruination in relation to the process of modernity with an emphasis on the twentieth century. Central to this will be the dichotomy between the ruin as an embodiment of the past and the modern as the representation of the perpetual newness of the present.

In these dimensions we will establish a typology of ruination, examining the roles and potentials of ruins in modernity. Here, a general narrative will be drawn of the process of modernization and its dialogue with ruination. Modernism will be discussed as both a periodizing concept as well as an ideological approach in architecture. From this, a theory of the significance of the ruin in contemporary space will be developed towards a methodology of approach to their appropriation and resuscitation.
This project intends to explore observations made from my own experiences towards the development of a discourse on the use of the old in contemporary architecture. Although inspired by the personal story, paramount to this project will be an approach which seeks the extension of relevant themes from the individual into the universal subject of experience. To achieve this, I propose to begin with the body and its perceptual processes as a foundation upon which to construct this theory of experiencing space. From this exploration in perception, the concept of bodily mimesis is set in dialogue with the concept of ruination, which will serve as a symbol representing the qualities that contribute to a fascination with the old. Here the ruin is explored as an object of experience effective at both conscious and unconscious levels of perception. This dialogue between the physical and the psychological will frame the mimetic process as one which enables the mirroring of environmental states by the body.
This theory of experiencing the ruin is accompanied by the extension into contemporary architecture and associated implications. Here the dialogue between the physical and the psychological is complicated by its location in the contemporary. In this context ruination is explored as a process which resists the control of modernist ideology and practice, and as a social facet of such a discourse, expands the potential of the ruin in the contemporary. This focus on the interaction with the ruin is towards the identification of the potential subjugation of the subject as a result of this mimetic dialogue. The intention of which is to locate the possibility of a subliminal encounter with ruination that may temporarily dislocate the subject from reality, forcing an empathetic reconciliation with the mimetic process.

Such an exploration intends to locate qualities of ruination that have such effective potential towards their appropriation into the contemporary. The practice of this project lies in the development of a methodology of approach to the resuscitation of the ruin through the re-framing of such qualities.
Perception is centered around the body which performs negotiations of space through all of its sensory capacities. This process sees a unity of mind and body, which forms holistic images of experience, composed of physical sensations, memory, and emotion. This mode of perception enables a collaging of the body and its environment that enables space to have profound effect on physical and emotional states.

Ruins in this regard possess unique abilities in effecting our mind and body. Their inherent characteristics blur the boundaries of architecture and in turn force similar effects upon the viewing subject. Subconsciously, in their decay and disintegration, ruins blur the boundary between fragment and whole, confronting us with similar notions of our own mortality. In conscious
reflection of the ruin, there occurs a blurring of the boundaries of time. A collaging of the past and the present engenders a temporal awareness; its perseverance in time, embodied in material, confronts our temporary existence.

Such effective capacities of the ruin are in open conflict with drives inherent in modernity. In the context of modernism's negation of time and struggle against aging, the ruin serves as a reminder of the immanence of a return to nature. In this the ruin also comes to symbolize the past either displaced by modernism or cast from its program in the wake of its acceleration. This socio-cultural embodiment of the ruin empowers it against the transitory nature of modernization; its constant drive towards newness and re-invention is confronted by the perseverance of the ruin.

This allegory between modernism and ruination engenders the ruin as an architecture of resistance to notions of modernization in contemporary space. In their capacity to provoke reflections as such, ruins offer a perspective from which to question the present image of the world. As a critical postmodern lens, ruination attains significance as an embodiment of the reality which modernist ideology strives to control.
In this context, critical capacities of the ruin, though inherent, have succumb to normalization; similar to the way that modern art and architecture were assimilated into cultures and societies which initially thought them shocking and perverse, the uncanny characteristics of the ruin have lost their ability to shock us in this way. To attain to their critical potential, ruins in contemporary space must be motivated in ways that frame such contradictions. Characteristics that evoke the dimensions of temporality, mortality, and culture must be resuscitated for the ruin to empower it as an architecture of resistance in modernization.
In all of its interactions with space, the body performs a dynamic sequence of evaluations and judgments. This mode of perception is constant and instantaneous. It is a process inherently unconscious as it is a function of our body as an apparatus, biologically programmed at both the individual and collective level; modes of perception evolve from both ontogenetic and phylogenetic development. In this perceptual mode, the apparatus of the body performs an immense and varied multitude of evaluations and judgments that are fused into a holistic and dynamic image of existence. The body as a synesthetic receptor of environmental stimuli forms these images from all of its sensory capacities – visual, haptic, auditory, olfactory and gustatory – into a dynamic collage of experience.

The concept of bodily projection is founded upon this means of negotiating physical space. The biological process of perception is implicitly tied to the language of the body through the projection of bodily states in a constant relational process seeking identifications. This mode of perception sees the body able to identify with environmental states and further to feel them holistically via the collaging of experience before they become consciously evident.
In experiencing and mapping its environment the body is used as an instrument, a mediator between the mind and space. The body constitutes itself as a means of qualifying and quantifying space, as a measure to evaluate form, materiality, and scale. The body sees and feels in its own inherent language – the language of flesh. All sensory experience in this sense is founded upon relationships interpreted with the body. Much of this dialogue occurs predominantly visually, with great dependence on the haptic memory formed of translations in the dialogue between sight and the other senses.

This process is a collaging of the percept of the body with the image of the world, an overlapping or fusion that combines to form one single existential experience; “There is no body separate from its domicile in space, and there is no space unrelated to the unconscious image of the perceiving self.” In experiencing ruins, our subconscious reactions are contingent and dynamic, and in the process of perceiving, activated by the translation of emotion. Ruins confront us on a subconscious level – our corporeal mind is strongly affected by the blurring of boundaries in the physical environment, which characterizes states of ruination. Their profound appreciation is at an emotional and intuitive level. These subconscious responses
evade our conscious perception; they are below our threshold of identification. Subliminal taste is composed of responses dependent on memory and emotion formed of mind and body. Haptic memory informs our perception in the physical dimension while social dimensions are reflective of personal and cultural experiential memory.

Georg Simmel’s dialectic of ruination is based on a balance between the soul in its upward striving and nature in its gravity. In this, the spirit’s efforts to control nature through the re-forming of its material in his own image is balanced by the persistent forces of gravity, erosion, and decay, dragging man’s efforts towards a return to their original state. Simmel illustrates this notion comparing the growth of patina as the growth of skin natural to the material, similar to a process of healing. “This shift becomes a cosmic tragedy which, so we feel, makes every ruin an object infused with our nostalgia; for now the decay appears as nature’s revenge for the spirit having violated it by making a form in its own image.”

The break of this dialectical balance signifies a destabilization of the architectural image and helps to define the ruin as a loss of equilibrium in submission to nature.

Destabilized images contradict contemporary architectures normative language; their notions of violation, destruction, and death stand to shock and threaten us. Such shock has potential to estrange us from reality through an unconscious...
bodily mimesis in which we empathetically mirror physical states of our surroundings. In identifying with such images of incompleteness and demise, we are temporarily dislocated from the supposed completeness of normality. Such a rupture caused by an unconscious bodily response distracts our consciousness into empathy with such degradation. Because of this, architectural images with notions of abandonment, destruction, and the like, potentially evoke stronger emotive associations in their contrast to normative expectations of buildings. It is this genre of image that stands potentially to destabilize the viewer, redirecting their attention and encouraging an altered state of consciousness.

In contrast to the resolved, closed narrative of the ‘perfected’ building, this more visceral image provides a scene ripe for the elaboration and completion by the imagination, an opportunity for play, for empathy.

In their states of degradation ruins blur the boundaries between wholeness and fragmentation. The potentials possessed in ruins are founded in our embodied responses to the materialities born of time and use and present an authentic uncanny. The image of disintegration and ambiguity is evocative of the leveling universality of death, potentially subverting modernity’s perceived control over nature. In this contradiction, ruins come to symbolize an
implicit resistance to the imaginary of modernism. Images wrought with ruination confront, contradict, and destroy notions of control – the inevitable destabilization of architecture reflects that of the self. Such images, which confront our sensibilities, expectations, and assumptions, can serve to belittle us, destroying the narcissistic traits of our being, and in this displacement, inciting our empathetic drive towards resolution and understanding.

The mimetic process of bodily projection and identification enables images of decay and degradation to become embodied. Via the mimetic faculty, the body mirrors such states, empathetically feeling into the object in the throes of death. Here it is not architecture that performs a violation of the subject, it is rather, the body in reading such a visceral state, mirrors this violation, imaginatively performing the same violence onto itself.  

This empathizing of the image of death occurs at unconscious levels and has potential to affect any subject with an essentially similar confrontation. Ruins also instigate a particular temporal awareness in the blurring and overlapping of the past and the present. They perform a transcendence of the linearity of time becoming something absolute, attaining meaning beyond the significance of an embodied passage of time. This palimpsest also inspires a fragmentation of time, of the past, towards an admonishment, again, of our mortality.
The typologies of ruination are separated by causality. Passive ruination is that which occurs naturally by the processes of erosion and decay. Active ruination is that performed by man, whether in his destruction or in his creation of facsimile. This dichotomy of passive and active ruination generally corresponds with connotations of nostalgia and shame, respectively.\(^{10}\) The authenticity of the ruin is contingent on this distinction, in particular to the notion of facsimile. Such fabricated ‘ruins’ are void of true embodiments of aging and serve rather as kitsch representations.\(^{11}\) Similarly, acts of restoration and reconstruction risk the loss of decay and disintegration and in this their embodied identity. Such denial of visible mortality reflects a denial of self-mortality.

The implicit weakening of the architectural image through weathering and ruination strips away from buildings layers of the image of utility, rational logic, and detail, pushing their structure in space towards uselessness, nostalgia, and melancholy.\(^{12}\) This loss of function or meaning defines the ruin as an embodiment ripe for appropriation by the imagination; the arrogance of perfection is replaced by a harmony of vulnerability.
Ruins serve as embodiments of the anxieties associated with the inescapability of aging and the immanence of death; a fear born of the reminders of the constancy of decay as a physically embodied architectural memento-mori. Ruins as remainders also serve as reminders of the displaced, forgotten, and wasted efforts of our political and cultural endeavors, their failures as such, and in this have potential to evoke a kind of collective atonement. As such, the ruin is a powerful trope of modern reflexivity precisely because of its embodiment of loss.  

4. Pallasmaa, Eyes of the Skin.  
5. Juhani Pallasmaa, Eyes of the Skin.  
6. Pallasmaa, Eyes of the Skin.  
8. Cannata, “The Ruins of Memory and the Memory of Ruins.”  
9. Ibid.  
10. Ibid.  
11. Ibid.  
12. Pallasmaa, Eyes of the Skin, 134.  
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THE IMAGE OF HIGH-MODERNISM
VILLA Savoye, Le Corbusier (1931)
THE IMAGE FADES

VILLA SAVOYE, LE CORBUSIER (1999)
The twentieth century began with utopia and an optimistic belief in the future inspired by the emergence of modernist ideologies providing grand visions of the betterment of life. Oppositional in nature, many of these new approaches were reactions against established forms and were voiced as provocative challenges to the reigning reality.\(^1\) The majority of these ideologies were inherently individualistic: predicated on the invention of personal and private styles linked with the conception of a unique self and private identity.\(^2\) Many of these movements in architecture championed the synchronic emergence of new technologies as the potential miracle prostheses for humanity.\(^3\)

With this technological and ideological revolution in architecture, the “process of building” began to transition towards a “process of design” and in this architecture as the expression of human ideas about form, space, surface, and culture became elusive.\(^4\)

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2. Ibid
The development of new materials and technologies continually sought to refuse the subjugation of architecture to nature and ruination. Modernism exhibited aspirations of domination over nature in the procurement, processing, and production of materials re-formed in man’s abstract images. This abstraction of material ultimately signified a negation of time in favor of the intensity of the present. This temporal mode was congruous with modernism’s negation of history and represented what could be diagnosed as the voluntary amnesia of modernity.

As this movement progressed, the proliferation of modernism eventually succumb to the dissolution of any ideological unity and a descent into pluralism as a direct result of its individualistic tendencies. This accumulation of modernisms saw the assimilation of its once provocative ideologies into the mainstream, normalized and institutionalized. The technological developments of the period continued independently from the movement, as modernism was out-moded and the twentieth century ended with an addiction to its potentials and a nostalgia for its vision.

The traditional passing of embodied knowledge and experience has endured continued degradation due to obsolescence and displacement within the modes of production that have seen the development of modernity. It is a concern in architecture for these developments
to be countered, for a reversion to values of space discarded in the wake of modernity. There is a displacement of history and cultural experience in new buildings, which fosters a forgetting of the past and its lessons, an out-modding of the past in the way of capitalist consumption. This has been founded in the repetitious drive for the new; in technological innovation disguised as the movement towards utopia. This form of modernization epitomizes the disembodiment of architecture in the capitalist modes of production.

“In their inherent tendency towards rationality, perfection and timelessness, buildings tend to remain outside of our emotional and empathetic reactions. The layering of traces of use, wear and time usually enriches the architectural image and invites our empathetic participation. Architectural ruins offer particularly potent images for nostalgic associations and imagination, as if time and erosion would have undressed the structure of its disguise in utility and reason.”

In this way ruins engender a resistance to the erosions of the amnesia fed by the velocities of consumption. Decay and disintegration are instrumental in revealing the tectonic relationships beneath the skin of architecture. This undressing imbues the ruin with potential for profound imaginational reflection. Autonomy in architecture is crucially dependent on the tectonic language of building and the comprehensibility of the act of construction to the senses. We organize and articulate our experiences around our entire

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9. JUHANI PALLASMAA, THE EMBODIED IMAGE (WILEY, 2011) 74
10. Ibid
constitution, which is strongly influenced by the subconscious. The absence of such vocabulary in architecture breeds abstract images of materiality and space while ultimately denying the role of the body in architecture. Further, the abstraction and commodification of architecture leads to the abstraction and commodification of the self.

“The fundamental meaning of architecture ... is in open conflict with the ideology of consumption. In fact, the normally long lifespan of building and other material constructions is in evident conflict with the ideas of momentary consumption, designed aging, and repeated replacement.”

In the subjugation to such drives, architecture risks a reduction to simulacra. Facsimile, faux-materiality and deception have engendered architecture as fiction in their commercialization. The rationalized and constructed geometric nature of architecture now coordinates an aestheticized assembly incapable of evoking images of poeticized life. The fragmentation of information and space, the accelerating speed of production, and an increasingly short attention span have contributed to a reduction of nuances and associations in the production and interpretation of images. There is occurring a flattening of the individual space of the imagination, a weakening due to *image conditioning*, which has similarly led to a degradation of both empathetic and emotional senses.

A PROCESS DISCUSSED BY PALLASMAA, IMAGE CONDITIONING DESCRIBES THE INFLUENCE OF PHOTOGRAPHY AND THE REPRODUCTION OF IMAGES HAVE HAD ON CULTURE AND SOCIETY. HIS OBSERVATIONS ARE CENTRED AROUND THE GROWING DEPENDENCE ON THE IMAGE, WHICH HAS CAUSED A REDUCTION, OR SUPPRESSION, OF THE BODY’S CAPACITY TO INTERACT WITH AND PERCEIVE SPACE. HE SUGGESTS THE CAUSE OF SUCH AS A HABITUAL REDUCTION OF SPACE TO THE FLATTENED PLANE OF THE PHOTOGRAPHIC IMAGE. THIS FORM OF CONDITIONING HAS INCREASED DEPENDENCE ON THE TWO DIMENSIONAL REPRESENTATION OF SPACE WHILE ALSO DIMINISHING THE ABILITY TO INTERACT WITH REAL, THREE-DIMENSIONAL SPACE.

11. PALLASMAA, THE EMBODIED IMAGE.
12. Ibid.
The dominance of the eye in the mode of perception has steadily developed into a *hegemony of vision*. Image has been stripped of meaning and of deeper associations of imagination, reduced to a shallow substance obsessed with notions of fashion and the purely visual. Primal elements of architecture and building have seen transformation in various waves of modernism. The inherent essences that define the role of the primary elements of architecture have been diluted as the importance of the poetics of bodily interaction have been set aside and forgotten, reduced to simple forms of function. This signifies a loss of essence in architecture, that the elements with which we are to come into real haptic interaction with have been reduced to elements motivated by mere function and fashion. In this aestheticization the poetics of bodily interaction have been displaced by the dominance of the purely visual image and in this have reduced the elements of architecture to mere extension of a grander simulacra. The dilution of primary elements of architecture into immaterial imitations of their former selves denies authentic dialogue between the body and buildings in preference for an awkward, lifeless synthesis of fashion and economic interest.

There is a need in architecture for these hard images of rationalized building to be countered. Such idealization must be balanced with softer notions of ephemeral ideologies. Hard, authoritarian manifestations of space
are composed of certain arrogance, which is overly didactic in its demonstrative images of life. Such images must be countered with softer dynamic metaphors of a consciously democratic disposition in awareness of the need for space to be equally produced by the experiencing subject.

Modernity has seen a steady degradation of such poetic embodiment. The images it has produced move further and further away from such towards abstract images of materiality and space void of authentic forms of bodily interaction. Poeticized images formed of embodied readings are in constant struggle with elements of instrumentalization and aestheticization. They are threatened by materialistic, quasi-rational, and economical interests manifest in purely visual, instantly seductive aestheticized images devoid of any desire for life. 

Such images have developed with the acceleration of technological innovation and the commoditization of architecture.

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FUN PALACE, CEDRIC PRICE (1961)
THOUGH NEVER CONSTRUCTED, FUN PALACE IS ONE SUCH EXAMPLE OF A DEMOCRATIC ARCHITECTURE. CONCEIVED AS A PROJECT OF FLEXIBLE SPACE, FUN PALACE EXPLORED NOTIONS OF A BUILDING WHICH COULD BE CHANGED OVER TIME, A USER-PROGRAMMABLE ARCHITECTURE. THIS CAPACITY FOR RE-PROGRAMMING EMPOWERED USERS TO POTENTIALLY BECOME A PART OF THE BUILDING AND ITS NARRATIVE, TO CONTRIBUTE TO ITS AUTHORITY. THE DESIGNED APITUDE TOWARDS APPROPRIATION IN THIS SENSE CHARACTERIZES FUN-PALACE AS AN INHERENTLY TWEAK ARCHITECTURE
Svetlana Boym, in her reflections on ruinophilia, suggests a particular mode of experiencing ruins, a “ruin gaze,” as a prospective dimension of reflective nostalgia, which dreams upon potential futures rather than imaginary pasts.¹ A state of reflection set in the physical space of the ruin, provoked by the embodiment of dichotomies, is also inspired by the reflection of imaginative narratives of the ruin and where they may lead in time to come. In this mode of seeing, the present becomes the lens through which the story of the ruin is projected. The reflection upon the ruin as an object of the past is crucially dependent on the context of the present. This imaginative play empowers the ruin as a critical venue for the present; the ruin embodies an otherness to the contemporary and an older, more familiar context. Ruins, in this sense, offer something beyond the dichotomies of time and mortality. Though

¹ SVETLANA BOYM, “RUINOPHILIA” IN THE ATLAS OF TRANSFORMATION (JRP RINGIER, 2010) 555
dependent on embodied reactions in physical space, these perceptions are intertwined with mediation, referencing the realm of experience, memory and social space. Ruins in this sense offer something other to the notions of the picturesque, which would see them restored and preserved, encased in glass and concrete. There is an inherent dimension of compassion evoked by the ruin, which engenders a way of looking at modernity, offering a perspective from which to question the present image of the world.

Images of the past stored in ruins force our reflections in such. They serve as “physical embodiments of the modern paradoxes reminding us of the blunders of modern teleologies and technologies alike, and the riddles of human freedom.”

Such images manifest in the signs of aging, in the sensual and intellectual shock experienced in the embodiment of vanishing materialities and their submission to reality. Reflection as such is inspired by images of incompleteness and destruction, which initiate and stimulate a form of dreaming. This dreaming constitutes a liminal state induced by the environment in the reflection of the ambiguous state of the ruin. The allegorical character of the ruin evokes a similar state via the subject’s

* RUINATION, ESPECIALLY THAT OF MODERN OR CONTEMPORARY ARCHITECTURE, SERVES AS A REPRESENTATION OF THE ARROGANCE OF MODERNIST IDEOLOGIES, PARTICULARLY IN REGARDS TO THE BELIEF IN PROGRESS THROUGH TECHNOLOGICAL INNOVATION. THIS RELATES BACK TO SIMMEL’S DIALECTIC AND MAN’S EFFORTS TO DOMINATE NATURE AND CONTROL IT THROUGH HIS ABSTRACTIONS.

2. BOYM, “RUINOPHILIA” IN THE ATLAS OF TRANSFORMATION, 555
3. PALLASMAA, THE EMBODIED IMAGE, 74
efforts to rationalize or imagine a narrative of the ruin. In this way ruins and their unique image capacity possess an element of *weak structure* and in their incomplete and destroyed states empower the viewing subject to bridge the gaps in their discontinuous narratives, providing a space and time for alternate interpretations and rationalizations. In the process towards such understanding, the imagination is invoked to negotiate the blurred boundaries of time, culture, and mortality embodied in the ruin. Thus the ruin is transformed into a site ripe for a reflection of modernity and its characteristic resistance to modernism critically charges these negotiations.

Much in the same way that ruinophilia is affected with the personal story, nostalgia is represented as a longing for home or for an identity that comes together with a care for the world. Nostalgia has its origins in notions of a similar homesickness that the uncanny is partially founded on. It is a longing for a home, which no longer exists or never did. It is representative of a lost or displaced image of the past, which is intangible and as such unpresentable. Born of a form of estrangement as a natural consequence of a conception of history, nostalgia represents an imaginational longing for an image displaced by the procession of history, an individual sickness or our age. Such longing is evocative of a diverse field of image, collaged and non-specific, potentially triggered by minute details of the everyday.

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4. SVETLANA BOYM, “NOSTALGIA” IN *THE ATLAS OF TRANSFORMATION* (JRP RINGIER, 2010) 401
5. Ibid. 401
Nostalgia is not inherently anti-modern, though it is coeval with the modern project; it is best understood as a reciprocal of the processes of modernization, a result of an understanding of space and time in the assimilation of the local into the universal.⁶ Nostalgia festers as reaction to the perceived displacement of the old into the new in the constant drive for innovation and re-invention. In this way nostalgic reflection assumes an ideologically *postmodern* approach. As a reciprocal response to modernity, nostalgia yearns for a *restructuration* that revives elements of the past suppressed or displaced in the present.

Such a temporalization of space provides a methodology with which to approach the appropriation of ruins. As a reaction to the present composed of images of the past, nostalgia composes, from imagined lessons of the past, subjective and non-specific images of being. Such images encompass responses to that which has been botched or lost in the procession of time, transposing them back onto reality.

Reflective drives as such are founded in images of the world that are at once retrospective and prospective. There is an implicit element of fantasy and play in the imagination of the past relative to the needs of the present, which has a direct impact on the realities of the future. Here
is the utopian dimension of nostalgia, where reflection and estrangement coincide; there is a longing for images of the past associated with good life to be revived in the present. This reflective nostalgia yearns for a return of values - ideologies associated with and as such imbued upon built space - an imaginational conception of life and being as evoked through the object. Restorative nostalgia assumes a certain futility - the drive to re-establish these images, in an objective sense - as if to believe that restoration breathes life into these images, which it cannot. There is often a very different effect with restoration, which has to do with the loss of craft and homogenization of building in modernity that results in the inability to achieve the essence that gave birth to the nostalgia. This restorative impulse is found in the somewhat kitsch mimicking of old technology by the new.

The resurrection of nostalgic images cannot be achieved through such objective means. This is also because of the difficulties presented in its inherently individual and subjective nature; the unity of algia (longing), is severed by the nostos (return home) that defines our sense of displacement. This distortion within nostalgia is what, at once, makes it so potent and simultaneously elusive. This gap severs
the unifying and utopian potential of longing.
However, utopian imagination does have a need
to be interpreted through the material objects in
which it found its expression, for it is upon this
transformative mediation of matter that the hope
for utopia ultimately depends. In this, the ruin
has unique potential as a physical embodiment of
spatial permanence.

Artifacts and ruins present a unique quality in
this regard as they bear authentic embodiment
of time, which endows them with such nostalgic
association, almost irrevocably. In this, such
objects of the past are invaluable to cultural
and historical education and continuity. Such
spolia are indispensible material for the
motivation of authentic aesthetic architectures in
modernization.

1. SVETLANA BOYM, "RUINOPHILIA" IN THE ATLAS OF TRANSFORMATION (JRP RINGIER, 2010) 555
2. Ibid, 555
3. PALLASMAA, THE EMBODIED IMAGE, 74
4. SVETLANA BOYM, "NOSTALGIA" IN THE ATLAS OF TRANSFORMATION (JRP RINGIER, 2010) 401
5. Ibid, 401
6. Ibid, 402
ARCADIES PROJECT (MIT PRESS, 1989) 108
Though there can be no certainty in an architectural methodology towards emancipation from the drives inherent in modernity, there do exist spaces that keep such images alive. In their ability to provoke reflection of the past, ruins provide potential for cultural and historical continuity towards the survival of authenticity. This implicitly characterizes ruins as a symbol of resistance to the drives inherent in modernity. Ruins though, have fallen victim to the same normalization that has rendered many modernist creations sterile. As a result of the numbing of bodily mimesis caused by modernization, the potential effects of the ruin have been suppressed by the assimilation of the uncanny into the vocabulary of culture and society.\textsuperscript{1} The conditions of the present require that the ruin be re-motivated to achieve its reflective potential.

\textsuperscript{1} GREGORY ULMER, "THE OBJECT OF POST-CRITICISM," IN \textit{THE ANTI-AESTHETIC}, ED. FOSTER, H, (BAY, 1983)
The resuscitation of ruins in postmodernity becomes somewhat of an exercise in *pastiche*. The appropriation of the ruin itself becomes a statement in the context of the present, potentially transforming its existing architecture into a critical response to the modes of the present. The evocative dichotomies of the ruin are harnessed as a mask or language of modernism through which a re-contextualization of physical elements has potential to embody social and cultural significance. Methodologies of approach to such transformations can be found in collage, which are predicated on the synthesis of meaning through de-motivation and re-motivation.²

In architecture, such concepts are present in the work of Gordon Matta-Clark. His explorations into the dissection, dismemberment, and fragmentation of built space were pioneering in the re-motivation of the existing. His works engendered perspectives of built space that framed notions of tectonics, mortality, and obsolescence. His re-motivation of architecture through acts of cutting, chiseling, dissection, and excision unmasked architecture, stripping notions of function and utility, revealing its underlying material nature. His methodology assumed a critical stance on the ruin as out-moded, with which he seized the opportunity to appropriate discarded spaces, returning them to us as critical works of art. His acts of destructuration served to re-motivate existing space playing on notions

of fragment and whole, culture and nature, and life and death. Though successful in their own intentions, the works of Matta-Clark, in the context of resuscitation, rendered architecture as sculpture, relinquishing use-value and ultimately relegating his buildings to the realm of objects of art.

The active ruination through means of destruction and deconstruction critically re-frames architecture, renouncing notions of function and use, serving to enrich the architectural image; incompleteness raises awareness through a contrast with normative expectations. This effective capacity reaches beyond passive ruination as it must be read as an intentional act of intervention. Active ruination produces an additional layer in the story of the ruin, which the experiencing subject must rationalize, imaginatively seeking to understand such intentions. This layer potentially engenders a new perspective, reviving the critical potential of the ruin; restructuration motivates the ruin as a contemporary trope of reflexivity.

Strategies for the appropriation of ruins that intend to revive or expand use-value tend to be reliant on some form of *prostheses*. These, typically of a pragmatic nature, have to do with envelope, circulation, and program. Cutting and excision in this form of adaptive re-use is also of a pragmatic nature, though often a certain effort is afforded to the preservation of all salvageable
building elements. There is often very delicate attention paid to details of the interfacing of the old and the new in such projects, though it is quite rare for the existing structure of the ruin to be relied on in the interfacing of such prostheses.

In this dialectic of appropriation there is a separation between the pragmatic elements of reuse and the critical elements of reviving. Although the use-value is in many ways contingent on prostheses in the appropriation of ruins, the preservation of their intrinsic spatial and material qualities is paramount. Beyond preservation, the active motivation of these qualities transforms the ruin into contemporary space, and exacerbates its embodied notions of time, culture, and mortality. The harnessing of the critical potential of the ruin as an implicit resistance to modernist ideology potentially empowers the ruin to shock us from the new, provoking a socio-cultural reflection. In the same way that contemporary of postmodernist art becomes about art itself, the appropriation of ruins in architecture becomes about architecture itself.³

3. Gregory Ulmer, "The Object of Post-Criticism"
In the experiencing of architecture our perceptual modes perform a collaging of the self and its environment, instinctively mirroring states of our surroundings, enabling our entire constitution to become acutely aware of material states of our surroundings. This mimetic processing of the environment causes physical characteristics of space to elicit strong embodied responses. Such responses engender space and material with great potential to affect physical and mental states of being.

Through these embodied channels uncanny images provide a means of shocking us into liminal states in which we are forced to negotiate the foreign stimulus of otherness. In this confrontation we are estranged momentarily from our perceived realities and conditions of normalcy, confronted with images that threaten our familiar understanding of the world. We have discussed such notions of the uncanny in postmodernity, notably its assimilation into normative culture and society. Modernization has paralyzed the critical potential of the ruin; the repetition for the new has forced the ruin to recede to the cultural background.
Ruins, in this sense, are icons of ambiguity representing play about the boundaries between the old and the new, a dichotomy in which neither state is absolute, though inextricably intertwined. This ambiguous identity relegates the ruin as an near incorporeality; a dissolution of separate states as a transitional embodiment of liminality defined by the collage of contradictions which characterizes it as an allegorical identity.

Through the mimetic faculty, distinction between the self and others becomes flexible and porous. Rather than dominating the environment through understanding based on knowledge, mimesis opens a tactile dialogue with nature, blurring boundaries between the self and the environment. The origins of mimesis can be located between states of life and death; the drive of the mimetic faculty is tied to survival in the efforts to identify with eternal or immortal elements of the environment. In essence the assimilation of the self into the appearances, characteristics, and behavior of objects in the environment founds the mimetic faculty in the instincts of survival. Thus, mimesis is predicated on making oneself similar, a process by which subjects assimilate themselves into the objective world rather than anthropomorphizing it in their own image.
If we are to view the ideology of Enlightenment science as one which sought to dominate nature through classification and categorical understanding as a process which lead to the reduction of nature to image, we can locate an effort which began to repress bodily interaction with nature.¹ This worldly consciousness suppressed the natural behavior of man and his mimetic dialogue with the world around him as such faculties began to be directed towards efforts of socialization and rationality.² This form of aesthetic mimesis assimilates social realities without the subordination to nature providing potential for the resuscitation of the mimetic faculty. Michael Kelly suggests that the work of art as a potential venue for such a dialogue. In the experiencing of the work of art the mimetic faculty is resuscitated in the subordination of the self, encouraging the assimilation of the self into the world of the piece. In this capacity, the artwork acts as a subliminal stimulus, which re-opens the sensuous dialogue with the environment, potentially allowing for a reconciliation with bodily mimesis.³

In an era wrought with notions of conditioning it is only natural for such repression to breed a reciprocal drive of emancipatory poetic and artistic response; a dependence on authority.
reciprocates a drive towards self-dependence. The essence of architecture is in many ways founded on such resistance in the production and maintenance of the real in the spheres of perception and experience. In the biologically programmed drive towards the betterment of life “architectural space becomes the site of resistance against the collapse of desire that drives modernist technological utopias.”

If bodily mimesis is repressed in modernity as a result of such conditioning, and there is potential for aesthetic mimesis to find refuge in the work of art, potentially inciting a resuscitation of the mimetic faculty in the experiencing of nature and environment, can such stimulation be found outside of the work of art?

Ruins offer such a site of resistance. As embodiments of dichotomies between the spirit and nature, past and present, and life and death, ruins are an inherent resistance to modernization. In the experiencing of architectural remnants we are very literally confronted with images of death and decay, which reciprocate such violation and degradation imaginatively onto our own being. This coupled with the romantic reflection of nostalgia evoked by the embodiment of time serves to engender a state where we are at once threatened by a violence to our body while also provoked by images of the past which directly confront our sense of being-in-the-world.

4. ALBERTO PÉREZ-GÓMEZ, INTRODUCTION TO INTERTWINING, BY STEVEN HOLL (NEW YORK: PRINCETON ARCHITECTURAL PRESS, 1996) 9
Ruins in this way are evocative of the sublime as they blur spatial and temporal boundaries, simultaneously threatening and pleasing us. The liminal state of the ruin - its ambiguous place somewhere between an object of man and a process of nature - reflects upon the viewing subject. We are thrust into a similar liminality, which potentially evokes a mimetic dialogue as we negotiate this ambiguity. Much in the same way mimetic dialogue with the work of art potentially initiates a reconciliation of that with nature, the sublime encounter is equally capable.

This genre of imagination, born of estrangement and identification, is of great importance in modernization. Such encounters can serve to break us from our realities and reflect upon us greater categories of life and being. In this potential provocation of awareness there lies potential possibilities for emancipation from the hard structures and abstractions of our reality. In architecture, the ruin is of dire importance in this respect. It is of great importance that such images be treated as parts of our collective bodies - mutilated, dying, and rotting but still a part of our being and not to be discarded by efficient, functional, or economic motives.
At this point, it is important to clarify that this project is not a manifesto or any type of prescriptive ideology meant to save architecture. This is an exploration. Its intention is not to revolutionize architecture, but to remind it.

The practical aspect of this thesis inherently lends itself to a certain ambiguity. As the argument could be made that such a methodology could be applied to any architecture in a state of ruination eliciting a similar effect; although the essence of this project relies on the sublime encounter, such instigation is potentially found in any ruin.

Thus, such a practice becomes more about the identification of existing qualities and their appropriation; however, it is the act of appropriation which is crucial to such a methodology. Such actions must re-frame existing qualities, exaggerate and celebrate them so to give them new life, to resuscitate them into the contemporary.

The practice of such an architectural method provides license to destroy, albeit in a calculated way. Though dealing with the destruction of architecture, there does exist a spectrum between effect and efficiency, which must balance the aesthetic experience of the subject with function. The intention being to heighten the subject’s awareness of their environment without relegating the object to sculpture.
find
OUTMODED/UNUSED SPACE

IDENTIFY
visceral
CHARACTERISTICS/QUALITIES

IDENTIFY
function
POTENTIAL USE/PROGRAM

IDENTIFY
strategies
AUGMENTATION/INTERVENTION

collage
VISCERAL QUALITIES/INTERVENTION/PROGRAM
The practice of this project will be the application of the methodology developed in the appropriation of the Department of Sanitation’s West 135th Street marine transfer station located on the Hudson River at West 135th Street, in Harlem, New York City. Built in 1954, the site served over 40 years as the main Upper Manhattan marine transfer station, processing over 1,000 tons of waste per day. Due to air pollution concerns, the public supported the site being formally de-commissioned in 1999. The facility has been vacant ever since. A recent competition has prescribed a program of three elements. The first was for green space with a preference for community gardens and small-scale farming. The second was for a community resource center, which could support and coordinate these green spaces. The third, predicated on the site location on the Hudson River, was for a marine transit hub for water taxis and a ferry service.

Given the original context of this out-moded ruin as a systemic element of modern modes of consumption, there is potential for a poetic reversal, which can contribute to the critical aspect of the project. The de-motivation of the ruin as an embodiment of wastefulness and its re-motivation as something opposite however is an issue of re-programming, which has prescribed and will program the prosthetic intervention of the project.
The prerogative of this aspect of the project is to assess the visceral qualities and characteristics of the existing space. We have established a dialectic of bodily interaction with such elements of physical space, and will now seek to identify such in the chosen architecture. Relevant to this exploration will be scenarios of legible tectonics, materiality, and states of ruination.
Most immediately evident in the assessment of the existing space is the space framed by the network of steel which forms the building envelope. This exposed structural framework exposes the tectonic relationships and resolution of load which forms the space. The exposure of these structural elements also presents a strong sense of materiality, which is intensified by the signs of degradation and corrosion. The states of ruination are legible in the patina created by corrosion and peeling paint, giving the elements of the steel frame a strong visceral quality. Below this lies the concrete slab, visibly punished by use and the elements. Cracks and missing portions are highlighted by the corrosion of its underlying steel framework. These two elements embody the existing states that form the visceral character of the space, which the project intends to harness.
IDENTIFICATION

SIGNS OF CORROSIONS AND EXPOSURE OF STEEL COLUMNS AND BRACING (ABOVE)

SIGNS OF CRACKING AND DEGRADATION OF SLAB AT OPENING TO PIER LEVEL (BELOW)
VIEWS OF CONDITIONS OF PIER LEVEL BELOW MAIN SLAB
IDENTIFICATION

VIEWS OF PIER LEVEL AT PIER LEVEL MARINE ENTRANCE
As a large aspect of this project relies on the material and tectonic fascination with the steel frame, an exploratory model was constructed with similar materiality. As much a fetishization as a study of the materiality and tectonics of such a structure, the model sought to represent, as closely as possible, all major structural relationships of the existing space. Each element was crafted by hand from scraps of sheet metal and wire towards achieving a materiality representative of existing conditions.
find
OUT-MODED/
unused space

identify
visceral
characteristics/
qualities

identify
function
potential use/
program

identify
strategies
augmentation/
intervention

collage
visceral qualities/
intervention/
program

legible tectonics
materiality/patina
ruination
The methodology that has been developed focuses on the re-framing into the context of contemporary space towards the motivation of the qualities inherent in such a ruin. Such a re-authorship will depend heavily on techniques adopted from the work of Matta-Clark. Aspects of his vocabulary of destruction will be employed in an effort to attain a celebration of the embodied dichotomies of the existing towards their re-motivation.

As discussed, the method of this project involves the augmentation of the existing space through calculated acts of destruction. The techniques of destruction and cutting will be coupled with the re-use of some excised elements as part of a re-structuration of space. In conjunction with more pragmatic applications of prostheses, the intent of such appropriation is to attain a balance between the potential efficacy of such techniques in relation to actual use-value or function.


**CUTTING**

1. Diagonal cut at south-west corner opens envelope to Hudson Vista.
2. Horizontal cutting of envelope through mid-section of building isolating three building volumes.
3. Longitudinal excision of envelope exposing interior to south-west.
4. Excision of structural members outside diagonal axis.
5. Excision of structure along horizontal axis isolating three building volumes.
6. Removal of all structure along south-west portion of building.
7. Excision of slab along diagonal axis at south-west corner.
8. Excision of slab along horizontal axis.
9. Longitudinal excision of slab.

*Structural members remain intact in all slab excisions.*
EXTERIOR VIEW REPRESENTING PROPOSED CUTTING OF SLAB AND EXCISION OF STEEL STRUCTURE
CIRCULATION

Insertion of elevator providing access from marine level to upper truss level. Mirrored at opposite end of building by spiral staircase. Additional staircase connects marine level directly with access ramp to meet circulation volume for marine transit component.

ENVELOPE

Establishment of envelope after cutting to facilitate practical requirements of environmental separation for community centre and interior farming components.

PROGRAM

Additional infrastructure and structure forms prosthetic intervention as insertion of community centre program. Installation of farming beds in exposed structure of floor plate with visual connection to below. Addition of elements to facilitate transit program at marine level.
EXTERIOR VIEW DISPLAYING PROPOSED CUTTING, RESTRUCTURATION, AND PROSTHESSES
MAP OF POTENTIAL ROUTES FOR FERRIES AND WATER-TAXIS
As prescribed by the competition brief, the functional program of the appropriation consists of three elements: a marine transit hub, community gardens, and a community resource centre.

Given the location of the site on the Hudson river, which is opposite the New Jersey shore, the first potential function defined is for a ferry service facilitating the daily commute and travel on and off of the island of Manhattan. This aspect of the program is reinforced by the site’s direct access to a pathway for pedestrians and cyclists which extends north and south along the Manhattan shoreline. Also, recent development of this shoreline further south provides an opportunity for the facility to function as a hub for water-taxis, which provide transportation along this developing area.

The call for community gardens and a resource centre lends itself to be developed as a unified aspect of the program: a facility that provides spaces for community farming coupled with a resource centre which provides education in said farming and culinary arts. This aspect of the program is to extend into a culinary school which, in conjunction with the resource centre, forms the primary tenant of the facility.

An opportunistic overlap between the two major programs manifests on the main level which features a sort of food court, composed of stations for students of the school, functioning both as a practical venue for commuters to grab bite, as well as a tourist destination for a unique food experience.
(Above) Section showing levels and program

1. Pier Level - Marine Transit
2. Main Concourse - Farming and Food Vendors
3. Truss Level - Culinary School and Resource Centre
APPROPRIATION 69

VIGNETTE OF TRUSS LEVEL - CULINARY SCHOOL AND RESOURCE CENTRE
APPROPRIATION

VIGNETTE OF PIER LEVEL - GARDENS ADJACENT MARINE ENTRANCE
The culmination of this project is a collision of the identification and appropriation of the existing architecture. The out-moded and discarded life has been processed, its visceral qualities identified and celebrated through acts of augmentation and intervention. These acts towards the re-framing into the contemporary have been balanced so as to intensify a mimetic dialogue with the subject, while maintaining a functional program. In this collage, the existing architecture has been transformed into a reminder of the visceral qualities of architecture, potentially serving to raise awareness of such in the subject.
SECTIONAL RENDERING OF FINAL PROPOSAL
This project began with a rather personal question involving an elusively defined fascination with things old, aged, and ruined. The ambiguity of such an obsession seemed to be related to, and perhaps founded upon, what I concede to be a generally pejorative perspective on what I have referred to as the process of modernization. This aesthetic fascination appeared to manifest as a critical response to an array of perceived transgressions existing in contemporary society, culture, and architecture.
Given the apparent ambiguity and potential complexity of such an endeavour, I assumed it only logical to begin with the body as a point of departure. In doing this, in basing my investigations in the realm of perception, my study was situated in the rather nebulous space between the physical and the psychological. This divergence, though necessary as the foundation for such a query, left a large gap to be traversed from the realm of psychology, involving complex concepts of the perception of space and of the self as mediated by the body, towards the development of a science of this fascination and an architectural methodology.

In essence, this entire exploration, became less of strategy to be exclusively applied to architecture, and more of a methodology to be applied to any act of making. This method is founded, quite basically, on the drawing of aesthetic qualities that are not reproducible towards their employment in the creation of something new; a method that cherishes the authentic fragment as an original object formed by its unique context.
The ruined object, in this sense, possesses an aura born of its story. It is this specific quality which engenders the object as something non-reproducible.

Here arises something I wish to clarify.

It is not specifically modernism or modernity that this methodology is responding to, but rather particular drives which have manifested symbiotically alongside them. The modernist belief in progress through technological innovation and invention lends itself to a perpetual state of obsolescence and replacement. This repetitive state of newness has provided an environment for capitalism to manifest, intent on profiting from such a cycle. The aspect of this which I find frightening is the intersection of these two drives - the modernist drive for progress and the betterment of life, and that of financial motivation. I fear that such a collusion has potential to render modernist ideals mute, leaving a machine incapable of production. I fear this because such a machine would rely solely on reproduction of images ever more dislocated from that which they imitate. It is because of this fear that I cherish the ruined.
I would like to express my gratitude to...

the teachers whom have assisted,

the mentors that have guided,

the friends whom have stuck by,

and,

my parents for supporting such an endeavour.

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