Ruins:
The Aesthetics of Ambiguity
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**Hiraeth (Welsh Word, Original Source Unknown)**

Homesickness for a home to which you cannot return, a home which may never be; the nostalgia yearning, the grief for the lost places of your past.
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To study the present, one needs to keep in mind that the present is not fixed or inevitable, but it is always in the process of becoming or, as Harrison concludes, “it is active and ripe with potential.” This practicum is an itinerary that takes you through another life, a long journey in which you can understand the mortality, vulnerability, and mutability of the world we live in. You will be asked to push your imagination beyond its power to travel into the past, present, and future or as Yablon argues “to the ends of the earth.” Exploring ruins reminds us of the transient nature of life and that “everything comes to nothing, everything perishes, everything passes.”

Landscape of Ruins, Sublime, Landscape and Visual Arts, Hiraeth, Becoming Landscapes, The Anthropocene, Imagination
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“Let us beware of saying that death is opposed to life. The living is merely a type what is dead, and a very rare type.”

(Nietzsche, cited in Cox, 1999, p. 102)
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First Chapter:

Touching the History of Ruins Through Different Lenses
"Landscape outlives history; it superpasses it. Over Time - and almost as a function of its earth, its soil - landscape absorbs the events played out on its surface; it inters the marks of past practices as much as it also bears their traces ... Landscape is ideological insofar as it allows history to decompose."

(Dubow, cited in Scott, 2016, p.38)
Why do I find beauty in ruins? This is a question that I kept asking myself over and over. To me, these landscapes are places that are slowed down in time; places left behind. Places that could be a symbol of family, homeland and life that does not exist anymore. Places that are infused with memories and nostalgia. Empty spaces, cracks in the walls and objects that are left behind, all tell of destruction and abandonment from the inside out. Soon, they will exist only as a memory. A memory that is now a part of the form of the landscape itself, a metaphor for the record of human life, an absence that has become a presence. The beauty in ruins lies in the emptiness that can become so full. Ruins are associated with a sense of freedom of choosing one's own activities. When you are spending time in ruins, you create your place in your mind, and you have the chance to perform the task of a designer without being aware of the situation. Freedom of imagination and exploration challenge us to picture ruins’ potentials.

In this chapter I try to understand and answer the question of why ruins can be so compelling and fascinating. To answer this question, first one should know about the history of interest in ruins in order to become familiar with the reasons behind the captivation, interest, and overall the sublime quality of ruins. In this chapter, I am trying to relate the sublime aspects of ruins through an examination of Burke's definition of the sublime by exploring the vision of ruins in the visual arts, mostly in painting and cinema. Moreover, I am trying to find the aesthetics of decay and dilapidation that have been recast by different artists to reflect our most profound feelings and to draw a conclusion about how we as landscape architects could approach possible ruins of the future.
The Sublime Nature of Ruins
Focusing on Literature

“Eternity appears, not as such, but diffracted through the most perishable.”

(Adorno, T., 1973, p. 360)
The quality of suspended motion is something that Burke (1756) calls astonishment, a powerful passion that is an effect of the great and sublime that is followed by a sense of admiration. He continues with distinguishing different characteristics that would describe the sublime. Here, I describe some of the characteristics that I find most relevant to the topic of ruins.

Fig 03 | Joshua Reynolds, Edmund Burke, 1769.
Terror
Burke (1756) describes terror as “the ruling principle of the sublime” as it is associated with fear, the most powerful passion. When it comes to sight, the terrible nature of terror makes it a sublime experience; whether it is great in dimension or not, it is terrifying to look at. Ruins are mostly full of places with “magnificent destruction”, that may be considered as objects of terror as they produce both horror and fascination at the same time and arouse a range of emotions in the visitors.

Obscurity
Ruins are full of stories and traces of past occupants. An observer without any prior knowledge of the history of a ruin would still be able to realize and acknowledge the existence of a thrilling story with a sense of ambiguity. Burke (1756) believes obscurity is the key to making anything very terrible, as when we are aware of any danger, a lot of apprehension vanishes. He thinks that a vague idea can be more effective than a clear one, as it excites our passion and will result in our admiration. Then he relates obscurity to the concepts of eternity and infinity as we have so little understanding about them: ideas that can be easily found in ruins due to their ever-changing nature, where one is far from forgetting the obscurity which is embedded into ruins. The sublime, as Burke (1756) suggests, mostly occurs due to a terrible uncertainty of the things described or seen.

Power
In ruins, we are affected by strength and power, a “capital source of sublime” (Burke, 1756), which is natural power, where nothing acts in conformity with our will. Ruins are places in which the condition of our nature binds us through the medium of sensible images where it is hard for us to disentangle from our deepest emotions where self is lost, and we find ourselves in a sublime experience where the ideas of suffering and enjoyment are equal. A form of pleasure that is in some sense forced upon us, and a pain inflicted by a superior power. Then Burke continues with the ideas of strength, violence, pain, and terror...
that rush in upon the mind altogether. Nature itself, as Kant (Patrick Fuery, Kelli Fuery, 2011) points out, includes “the ideas of the sublime in its chaos, or in its wildest”, and the most irregular discourses as one witnesses in ruins, where you are exposed to the power of nature sucking life from the veins and the remains of the memories of the past.

**Infinity**

According to Burke (1756), infinity is another source of the sublime, as it is associated with a source of horror as he describes as delightful with a “genuine effect and truest test of the sublime.” “There are scarce any things which can become the objects of our senses, that are real and in their own nature infinite” (Burke, 1756, p.205). Visions of ruins draw the viewer with an infinite source of stillness that, as Weisenfeld (2012) pictures, evoke the sublime in their silent aesthetics of horror.

**Succession and uniformity**

Succession and uniformity, as Burke (1756) explains, can be a source of the artificial infinite. According to Burke “1. Succession; which is requisite that the parts may be continued so long and in such a direction, as by their frequent impulses on the sense to impress the imagination with an idea of their progress beyond their actual limits. 2. Uniformity; because, if the figures of the parts should be changed, the imagination at every change finds a check; you are presented at every alteration with the termination of one idea, and the beginning of another; by which means it becomes impossible to continue that uninterrupted progression, which alone can stamp on bounded objects the character of infinity” (Burke, 1756, p.207). Ruins are places where the edges of nature and relics of structures come together, and it is hard for one to distinguish the two from each other and where you can find no end to either.
**Insight**

All in all, the sublime objects, as Burke mentions, are vast in their dimension, rugged and negligent, and if deviated the deviation is substantial, it is dark, gloomy, robust and even massive. He thinks it is important to remember that there is an eternal distinction between the nature of causes of pain and pleasure to affect the passions. “In the infinite variety of natural combinations, we must expect to find the qualities of things the most remote imaginable from each other united in the same object” (Burke, 1756, p.278).

According to Burke (1756), if the pain and terror are altered in a way that they are not noxious, a sense of delight, not pleasure, but a sort of delight horror, and a tranquility touched with terror can be produced which he calls “the strongest of all the passions” as it belongs to self-preservation. A passion whose object is the sublime, astonishment would be its highest degree, that is followed by awe, and reverence that distinguish them from positive pleasure.

“Ruins represent the sublime power of nature in all its terrifying magnificence; they also embody the fragility of modernity’s gamble” (Weisenfeld, 2012). Weisenfeld mentions Immanuel Kant’s identification of the sublime’s ability which is “pleasure in the way that nature’s capacity to overwhelm our powers of perception and imagination is continued by and serves to vivify our power of rational comprehension” (p.133).
Fig 04 | Almatism Bellah, A reflection of War! n.d.
Fig 05 | Casper David Friedrich, Ruins of Eldena, near Greifswald, 1825.
Ruins through Time
Focusing on Visual Arts

“Landscapes are culture before they are nature; constructs of the imagination projected onto wood and water and rocks...it should be acknowledged that once a certain idea of landscape, a myth, a vision, establishes itself in an actual place, it has a peculiar way of muddling categories, of making metaphors more real than their referents; of becoming, in fact, part of scenery.”

(Schama, 1995, p. 61)
The Vision of Ruins in Paintings

The Renaissance was the birth of the aesthetics of the sublime. It swept through the valorisation of ruins by Romantics’ sense of the picturesque; it touches on the ruinous nature of Ruskin, and fades to the failed futurism and petulance of Modernist architecture’s utopianism (Stein, 2015). According to Vidler (1992), it was in the eighteenth century that the fear of the dark led to the fascination with shadowy areas and the “fantasy-world of stone walls, darkness, hideouts and dungeons” as opposed to the enlightenment movement whose focus was transparency and visibility. It was when artists such as Giovanni Piranesi and Hubert Robert were trying to provoke stronger emotion by painting things most somber in nature which was then later followed by artists like Casper David Friedrich in the nineteenth century.

According to Dillon (2012), depicting ruins was not only about picturesque maundering, but it was also evidence of fretful modernity. “It was in painting that the vexing timescale of the ruin was most accurately broached - ruins, it seemed, spoke as much of the future as of the past. For sure, romantic art is dominated by the sublime vistas of Caspar David Friedrich, whose lone figures look dolefully on the vacant arches of medieval abbeys” (Dillon, 2012). But the gaze might as quickly be turned on catastrophes to come.

In the following, I am trying to understand the perspectives of well-known artists throughout history with the intention of finding the reason behind their interests in ruins.
Fig 06. Joseph Mallord William Turner, Tintern Abbey: The Crossing and Channel, 1794.
Giovanni Piranesi | 18th century

Ruin-meister Giovanni Piranesi who introduced human figures into his “Views of Rome”, was not trying to “document the remains so much as translate them into a grand melancholic view” (Saunders, 2014). As Marguerite Yourcenar describes Piranesi, he was not only the interpreter but also “virtually the inventor of Rome’s tragic beauty.” Piranesi’s work was considered as a means for people to imagine the cultural background of the eighteenth century. When being in ruins like Piranesi’s figures, we wander among the fragments and eroded inscriptions of the past to access its mysteries. “We follow traces of memory and discover that memory itself is in a state of continuous decay, that we are our own ruins” (Saunders, 2014). It is like you are trying, as Saunders mentions, to “sequester not only the past but the catastrophic imagination that made it into an artifact, the ‘ruin aesthetic’ itself”. Before making any print, Piranesi would carefully observe and examine the site, he, as Stern (2003) mentions, transformed the seventeenth-century “theatres of nature” into eighteenth-century “theatres of history” by producing stirring paintings showing construction and destruction, rise and decline, growth and decay. As mentioned, interest in imaging ruins had peaked during the Romantic period of the eighteenth century when many artists such as Piranesi and Hubert Robert tried to privilege emotional turbulence and intense subjectivity associated with ruins “over the cold geometries of Enlightenment reason.”
Fig 08 | Hubert Robert, Imaginary View of the Grand Gallery of the Louvre in Ruins, 1796.
Hubert Robert | 18th century

Dillon (2011) relates Hubert Robert’s vision to a historical melancholy as it can be seen in his catastrophic projection of the Louvre into future dereliction and a state of collapse (Vue imaginaire de la Grande Galerie en ruines [Imaginary view of the Louvre’s Grand Gallery in ruins], 1796). Dillon (2012) mentions Diderot’s point of view about the Louvre painting: “The ideas ruins evoke in me are grand. Everything comes to nothing; everything perishes, everything passes, only the world remains, only time endures.” Robert’s work helps us to be mindful that the future will become the past at some point, as history has always reminded us of this daunting realization that everything passes.
Casper David Friedrich | 19th century

One of the most celebrated painters of the Romantic movement, or as Koerner (1990) mentions the most programmatic practitioner in the visual arts, was born in Greifswald, Swedish Pomerania, on the Baltic coast of Germany, on September 5, 1774. His work often includes lonely wanderers in melancholic landscapes that are an example of what Germans call Erlebniskunst, coming from two words "Kunst", art, and "Erlebnis", experience which refers to the art that is a result, or an expression of experience. Koerner (1990) defines experience as something that is “imagined as pauses within a journey through inhospitable nature”. What Friedrich was looking for in his framed images is the reasons behind these pauses. Friedrich himself depicts his paintings “not as what he sees before him, but what he sees within him”.

Ordered as if experience were belongings, Friedrich always demonstrates the fragility of such illusions. In his painting, Hut in the snow, which depicts an unremarkable nature: a ruined hovel in the heath, one experiences a passage between belonging and estrangement. By having the remnants of a ruined hovel taken over by vegetation in the landscape, he represents a passage from refuge to exposure, culture to nature, life to death. This transition is what Koerner (1990) calls a “metaphor of evanescence of human life itself”. One can find a great sense of emptiness and fear where we as visitors find ourselves witness to a dissolution of the subject of the landscape itself.

Overall, what is remarkable and momentous about Friedrich’s art is the way that he prefers to leave us, on the side of the fir grove in the winter, denied the view of the church, the divine, the idea, determinate meaning, belonging. His art and the subject of landscapes as Koerner (1990) puts it, is finally about the remnants and remains that are only “almost visible”. Friedrich’s landscapes are different itineraries where the landscape often turns back on the viewer and where the viewer is lost in thought.

According to Kohler (2018), artistic representations of natural landscapes in the nineteenth century render nature as both an unattainable wilderness and the source of rejuvenation and meditation. Friedrich’s paintings often include a lone figure gazing upon the vast and unreachable landscape experiencing a sublimity in which as Kohler (2018) describes “It is in the intense moments of observation that nature appears to facilitate the characters’ memories”. Memories that are essential for a person to maintain their identity, Kohler refers to Halbwachs’ explanation of memories where they “are continually reproduced; through them, as by a continual relationship, a sense of our identity is perpetuated”. In his point of view, nature would be only beautiful when it is infused with human nature.
“Before it can ever be a repose for the senses, landscape is the work of the mind. Its scenery is built up as much from strata of memory as from layers of rocks.”

(Schama, 1995, p.7)
I am curious about the sublime aspects of ruins and the quality of ruins that draw us to what we most fear. We should not just merely blunder across ruins, but should search them out to “linger amid their tottering, mouldering forms - the great broken rhythm of collapsing vaults, truncated columns, crumbling plinths - and savour the fission of decline and fall, of wholeness, destabilized” (Saunders, 2014). According to Saunders “This hypertrophied response to decay and dilapidation is what drives ‘ruin gaze’, a kind of steroidal sublime that enables us to enlarge the past because we cannot enlarge the present.” As mentioned, there have been artists who tried to look for ways to turn such “melancholic experience of loss into a form of satisfaction” (Saunders, 2014).

Dillon believes that it is “nostalgia in part for the aesthetics of ruin itself, for a Romantic or melancholic gaze that can resurrect the ruins of the near or distant past as consolations or warnings for the present” (Dillon, 2011). “There is some deep personal distillation of spirit and concept which moulds these earthly facts into some transcendental emotional and spiritual experiences” (Schama, p.9). In most paintings by the mentioned artists the view and the experience are depicted in a way that as Schama (1995) explains: “We see it as being outside of ourselves even though it is only a mental representation of what we experience on the inside” (p.12). He acknowledges the ambiguous legacy of nature myths where “landscape will not always be simple ‘places of delight’ - scenery as sedative, topography as arranged to feast the eye. For those eyes, as we will discover, are seldom clarified of the promptings of memory. And the memories are not all of pastoral picnics” (p. 18).
The Vision of Ruins in Cinema

Ruins are one of the rare cases where an environmental disaster can be devastatingly beautiful and where one can find a natural cycle of renewal. Exploring the cinematic landscape is an excellent opportunity to investigate the cultural and social aspects of these neglected spaces. “Cinema, through its modern vision of ruins, brought the sensibilities of classical antiquity and romanticism into the technological age” (Weisenfeld, 2012, p.154). I will now focus on the depiction of landscape in Andrei Tarkovsky’s *Nostalgia* (1983) in order to examine the relationships between ruins and the deepest emotions of individuals. I will explore the sublime aspects of ruins that raise the strongest feelings of this relationship. Pérez-Gómez and Parcell (1994) describe the spaces in *Nostalgia* as “scenes of time” and “erosion”; spaces that are integrated with traces of memories and scars; and that enable us to imagine and dream the forgotten memory. They believe that ruins can be more effective than new structures as they are far from being utilized or having a rational meaning. Ruins are landscapes that function as what they call “a skeleton of memory or a sheer melancholy presence”.

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“Tarkovsky for me is the greatest (director), the one who invented a new language, true to the nature of film, as it captures life as a reflection, life as a dream.”

(Bergman, cited in Sfetcu, 2019, p. 4)
**Andrei Tarkovsky | 20th century**

Tarkovsky is a Russian film director whose work is full of spiritual and metaphysical themes. It can be argued that he had a unique way of looking into the connection between landscape and people; by continually highlighting the landscape to understand the deepest emotions raised by them. To abstract the image and waken the illusion of reality, Tarkovsky used mist, rain, water, darkness, or shadows of colors to diffuse edges of figures and forms into space; by doing that he would give the landscape a painterly quality by reducing the depth and focusing on the pictorial flatness. It emphasizes Tarkovsky’s poetic view and inspiration from painting in his films. His use of sound and music and most of the time silence, stimulate the viewer’s sense of space and scale. Pérez-Gómez and Parcell (1994) believe that Tarkovsky’s use of sound-effects produces an extra element of terror and leads us to a “dimension of distance from the emotionally unbearable scene.”

In Tarkovsky’s movies, we find ourselves in flooded rooms into which rain pours including images with dramatic power; this is something that one rarely sees in reality in architecture. Pérez-Gómez and Parcell (1994) describe the impact of these images “based on the fusion of the exclusive imageries of building and water, protection and exposure, shape and shapeless, definite and infinite.” Tarkovsky’s lesson in architecture is full of scenes of erosion, decay, scenes that exude an astonishing beauty and the purest feelings. Scenes that “possess almost sacred or ecclesiastical presence” (Pérez-Gómez and Parcell, 1994). Tarkovsky’s use of light with regards to darkness immediately forces a strong visual impression. It leads us to Foucault’s point of view about the power of transparency and obscurity when they are coupled together; “for it is in the intimate association of the two, their uncanny ability to slip from one to the other, that the sublime as an instrument of fear retains its hold – in that ambiguity that stages the presence of death in life, dark spaces in bright spaces” (Vidler, 1996, p.172).

According to Sushytska (2015), “the genius of Tarkovsky consists in showing the reality or the meaningfulness of those aspects of the world that we normally discount as unreal or inconsequential”, to help us to be aware of the intensity and reality of apparitions of our world. Tarkovsky himself believed that “A film is bigger than it is - at least if it is a real film. And it always turns out to have more thought, more ideas, than were consciously put out there by its author.”
Nostalgia, 1983 | Memory and Ruins

Being a Russian, Tarkovsky spent the last years of his life away from home, years that made him make Nostalgia, a film that reflects Tarkovsky’s grief and yearning for his home, for his memories. In Nostalgia one can find a strong bond between the buildings and memory; this brings us back to Pérez-Gómez and Parcell (1994) who imagine ruins as being “a skeleton of memory or a sheer melancholy presence”. Nostalgia is the story of a man, Gorchakov, who finds himself alien to foreign conditions, feels lost, and is unable to maintain his identity. He is suffering from a sense of hiraeth as he searches for Russia in Italy, where as Sushytska (2015) suggests, “he fails to recognize that the past is not and never was”. At the same time, he likes Italy too much, yet he finds this beautiful country imperfect as he feels lost. “Gorchakov’s problem—his limitation or internal border revealed by nostalgia—is being separated from others; he is unable to be with another, to share the world, in this particular case, the world of Italy’s beauty” (Sushytska, 2015).

In his book Sculpting in Time, Tarkovsky writes, “My subject is a Russian who is thoroughly disorientated by the impressions crowding in upon him, and at the same time about his tragic inability to share these impressions with those closest to him, and the impossibility of grafting his new experience onto the past.” Gorchakov struggles to find the old self not the new person that he has become, Tarkovsky describes him as: “someone in a state of profound alienation from the world and himself” (Sushytska, 2015). He finds himself in a stage of being lost in nostalgia and wanting to go back to Russia, but at the same time, he is unable to accept himself without Italy. It is nostalgia that helps him to expand the limits of his self; Sushytska (2015) believes “the opening, and the final sequences, but also the numerous scenes in-between are the instances of the new oneness of the self and the other, of Russia and Italy”.

Time and erosion play a significant role in depicting the spaces in Tarkovsky's Nostalgia, spaces that feed our imagination. To gain inspiration from such spaces Pérez-Gómez and Parcell (1994) explain an ancient Chinese instruction in their essay: “when you look at a wall spotted with stains, or with a mixture of stones, if you have to devise some scene you may discover a resemblance to various landscapes... or, again, you may see battles and figures in action, or strange faces and costumes, or an endless variety of objects, which you could reduce to complete and well-drawn forms. And these appear on such walls promiscuously, like the sound bells in whose jangle you may find any name or word you choose to imagine.”
Tarkovsky’s movies are filled with scenes that invite personal memories. Ruins in *Nostalgia* are washed with water, that feed us with a sense of obscurity where the mind is challenged to reconstruct their history and meaning. Bachelard’s statement: “where a lamp once reigned, now reigns a memory” explains Tarkovsky’s attempt to highlight the personal memories associated with space (Pérez-Gómez and Parcell, 1994). In the closing scene, we see Gorchakov’s Russian home which turns out to be framed by the ruins of an Italian cathedral, open to the sky; where one can find a close similarity to Casper David Friedrich’s painting *Abbey at Eldena* (1824). The ruin in the final scene, where nature is taking over the floors and openings, makes one feel lost in times and places, and brings forward the sacred memory of home. Burns (2011) believes that the last scene and the “imaginary bridge over the incommensurable gap, both temporal and spatial, provides the culminating meaning of Tarkovsky’s exilic nostalgia.”
“Nostalgia gives rise to the phantasms that turn against us, mercilessly destroying the self. Yet, in doing so, they give us a chance of becoming more than ourselves.”

(Sushytska, 2015, p. 42)
**Insight**

Architecture and cities play an inevitable role when it comes to collective memory. Pérez-Gómez and Parcell (1994) believe that “the house is one of the greatest integration for thoughts, memories and dreams”; and that by watching a Tarkovsky film, one can experience discovering both collective and personal memories. But there is always an uncertainty about what memory could reveal; they continue with Tarkovsky’s saying that: “Hideousness and beauty are contained within each other”. Nostalgia helps us to relate to a world, where there is an absence, a world full of cracks, where you are constantly challenged to imagine things that are not: a home, a friend, a feeling. According to Sushytska (2015), it is important to always think about these apparitions as, if we ignore them, “we end up denying life”. On the other hand, Nostalgia helps us be aware of the existing order of the world, by constantly confronting us with creating a different self. Nostalgia is a journey to lost memories, lost home but also a journey toward a new place. Tarkovsky wrote in his diary that Nostalgia is about “the pain of solitary pleasure”, where Gorchakov finds himself unable to enjoy the beauty of Italy alone.

Ruins, I believe, are places that one can find “the bodily substantiality of the traditional monument and the palpable spatial identity of the controlling institution dissolve into a mirror of the projection of a disappearing subject. Space, that is, has operated as an instrument of monumental dissolution” (Vidler, p.173). It is the homology between subject and space, or what Vidler (1992) calls, “temptation by space” that mimics or offers so many analogies to human experience. “As in imitation in the arts, such mimicry depended on the distortion of spatial vision, on the breaking down of the normal process by which spatial perception situates the subject clearly in space and opposition to it” (Vidler, 1992, p.173). Where the subject feels completely lost in the space although they know where they are they are constantly in search of themselves. That is what one feels located in ruins where there is no distinction between inside and outside, and one feels lost in time and space. Experiencing ruins could put us in a state of apprehension, where “we are apprehended/held by a type of terror that is not inscribed with negativity but rather with a curious touch of beauty” (Patrick Fuery, Kelli Fuery, 2011). Therefore, we are always experiencing something internal to us, something that reveals us with a new “self”. Patrick Fuery and Kelli Fuery suggest “instead of the object, it is rather the cast of the mind in appreciating it that we have to estimate as sublime.”
**Conclusion**

“A perpendicular has more force in forming the sublime, than an inclined plane, and the effects of a rugged and broken surface seem stronger than where it is smooth and polished.”

(Burke, 2005, p. 204)
Although ruins can be compelling and full of untold stories, they could also be considered as a tragic sentiment behind the functional face of architecture. That is why as Pérez-Gómez and Parcell (1994) suggest: “Architecture must again question its functionality and existence on the level of materiality and practicalities to touch the deeper levels of consciousness, dream, and feeling, as revealed by Andrei Tarkovsky's *Nostalgia*.” I believe that in ruins we are confronted with a force greater than human, nature that always remains in some form even after humans become extinct; it exists keeping all the memories, traces and mysteries from the past.

Kohler (2018) argues that by analyzing cultural memory and later understanding “place and place-belonging”, we can gain an understanding about how people “form attachments to places ... and maintain them over time as an integral part of their identities”. Nostalgia and place-identity are two essential factors that contribute to a caring attitude towards the environment. Simon Schama (1995) in his book, *Landscape and Memory*, tries to illustrate how landscapes can be empowered by human memory, extended over generations. He tries to find new ways to look at the landscape by recovering “the veins of myth and memory that lie beneath the surface”, as he believes in the function of landscape as a memory object. Ruins are landscapes that remind us that when something is ancient does not mean it is interminable, and that something is silent does not mean it is mute.

“This sense of having lived on too late, of having survived the demolition of past dreams of the future, is what gives the ruin its specific frisson, and it still animates art and writing” (Dillon, 2012).

The anamorphic nature of the ruins can be linked to one of the Kantian qualities of the sublime that is “beyond reason and understanding” that means everything operates outside of meaning, but this does not make it “meaningless” (Patrick Fuery, Kelli Fuery, 2011). I used the examples of painting and film to illustrate the connection between memory and nature, and most importantly to find what it is about ruins that interest me. I started focusing on literature and Burke to explore this feeling that I have about ruins, to understand what a sublime experience is. I followed by examples in painting, as painters, in the eighteenth century, were some of the few people who desired
ruins; that helped me to understand the reason behind their obsession with ruins. Observing the two-dimensional images and trying to understand the experience the figures had in the paintings, I put myself in a three-dimensional space of a film. Now I could have a clearer idea about my feelings by constantly situating myself in different scenes and finding similarities between what the character was experiencing with my own experiences. All in all, exploring literature and visual arts made me think of landscape as the most complete art as it can include all forms of art. By visiting a ruin, one can imagine paintings either framed by the trees and nature or by the remains of buildings. Moreover, one can imagine a scene of a movie, explore a memory, imagine a song, make stories, or as I believe, experience being an artist.

Appleton (1975) explains how humans have continuously been looking for ways to find a more direct connection with nature through history. He mentions Uvedale Price’s comment on binding the artificial into the natural: “The more broken, weather-stained, and decayed the stone and brick-work, the more the plants and creepers seemed to have fastened and rooted in between their joints, the more picturesque these gardens become” (Appleton, 1975, p. 173). Appleton goes on by mentioning “the more romantic manifestations of landscape aesthetics reserve a special place for those devices which seek to link the architecture of civilization with the phenomena of nature untamed” (1975, p. 173). We can easily relate this statement to ruins as they can be considered as a medium and one of the rare cases where artificial and natural blend into each other; where the visitors can feel more connected to nature. Appleton (1975) is the founder of prospect-refuge theory where he explains how experiencing “savouring of danger which Burke called pain” would be essential for prospect and refuge to gain meaning. “To ‘abolish’ the hazard altogether is to deprive the prospect and the refuge of their meaningful roles, since they cannot be expected to react against a stimulus which is no longer there. Burke realized, and stated very explicitly, that exposure to a sense of the power of nature, or better still to a sense of the infinite, was indispensable to the experience of the Sublime, and this is simply stating, in eighteenth-century terms, that prospect symbolism and refuge symbolism also demand a hazard symbolism to make them work” (Appleton, 1975, p. 96). The
notion of Appleton about experiencing landscapes can be found in Peter Latz’s works such as *Landschaftspark Duisburg-Nord* (1991). Latz (1998) believes “the fear of historical burdens and contamination has given way to a calm acceptance of the structure”. *Landschaftspark Duisburg-Nord* is a “huge land art”, Latz explained, where the land is left to be elaborated by nature. Latz (1998) believes that the land “can be understood and interpreted only now, since only now can it be viewed and comprehended” through proposing the wide range of activities visitors experience in the site that would result in creating “another history”.

To seize on the sublime potentials of these ruined landscapes that have now become an image of specter, we can relate to what Vidler describes as “a monument to death that represented an ambiguous moment, somewhere between life and death, or, rather a shadow of the living dead” (1996, p.171). He also mentions that “Boullee’s death image, with its shadow inscription mirroring the shape of its dark facade or ‘ground’, plays insistently on this theme that, as Freud pointed out, has to do with ‘the constant recurrence of the same thing’, or repetition” (ibid). A design that, as Schama (1995) says, is made of “culture, convention, and cognition… that invests a retinal impression with the quality we experience as beauty.” We should find ways to memorize the silence and gnarled topography of ruins through our design. However, one should always keep in mind the risk of personal commentaries associated with different sites and stories. Dillon (2011) refers to ruins as “anachronistic monuments decorating a landscape that extends forever into the future through the past. Nothing is new; neither is anything old.” “What we need, says one such impassioned critic, Max Oelschlaeger, are new ‘creation myths’ to repair the damage done by our reckless mechanical abuse of nature and to restore the balance between man and the rest of the organisms with which he shares the planet” (Schama, 1995, p. 13). The whole purpose of this practicum is creating a journey through spaces and places that will, as Schama emphasizes, help us keep faith with a future on this tough, lovely old planet.
“Beauty in distress is much the most affecting beauty” (Burke, 2005, p. 255).
Second Chapter:

Becoming Landscapes

Ruins Now
Introduction

“A ruin is a sacred thing. Rooted for ages in the soil, assimilated to it; we consider it rather a work of nature than of art. Art cannot reach it... The magnificence of ruin was never attained by any modern attempt.”

(Gilpin, cited in Unwin, 2017, p. 223)
It can be argued ruins are beautiful. They have the power to resemble a place with an intuitive storytelling nature, which is preserving a piece of time. And time is inevitable when we talk about landscapes. The question that comes to mind is why we should preserve the stories within ruins and how? Landscapes have evolved and will continue to change through different stages. To understand the constant process of evolving, it is essential to explore these different stages of past, present, and future. As mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, Gilpin believes that ruins are “a work of nature,” so we should always keep in mind the role of natural vegetation growth in taking over decaying remains.

Ruins are a medium just like paintings, cinema, or any other form of art that is capturing an essence; they are educational platforms that preserve history as a museum does. They are multi-dimensional setups where one can obtain and realize the depth of an event in time. Ruins contain a message of the importance of not only preserving the memory of the land and any living creatures on it but also not to repeat our mistakes. Just like how we are devoted to exploring the footprints of human beings through the science of archaeology and research on buried sites, we should study ruins as unburied sites to learn about the past, present and future.

The science of archaeology refers to the study of a buried past. However, Rathje (1979) defines it as the study of “the interaction between material and culture and human behavior or ideas, regardless of time or space.” Harrison (2011) calls for a more “present- and future-oriented archeology” by moving from considering archaeology as “excavation” to an investigation as a “surface survey” as it would be more relevant to our contemporary society and any negative aspects associated with it. By researching the present or more recent past, we can relate our modern society to previous
and future ones. Harrison describes such archeology as “rescue archeology of contemporary life” as it would help us to address the possible future gaps in knowledge as the evidence of modern life is slowly vanishing. We have witnessed modernity relentlessly destroy the past. Ruins are filled with memories and stories that make you be amazed by the magnitude of disasters, which can be so astonishing that you would not apprehend the horrors of the situation. These significant monuments, ruins, can evoke the nostalgia of the time and place of humanity’s former glory by reminding us of their absence.

Ruins are a symbol of failure or a symbol of what Harrison (2011) calls “modernity in decline”; he believes in modernity as an active and unfinished project, and that researching it can lead us to an explicit future. It is the process of assembling and reassembling the surface, as Harrison describes, that helps us focus on material remains and ultimately engages us with what Morton (2013) calls the “Age of Asymmetry,” which refers to the agency of humans over the agencies of other elements of the world. Harrison defines assemblage as “a group of artifacts found in association with each other in a single context” that clarifies the relationship between past and present as it makes you wonder about the activities carried out in the past, and guides one in imagining the future (p. 155). It is essential to learn about distance and speed to understand the process of change; that can be achieved through an investigation of ruins by emphasizing their stories.

In this chapter, I investigate some recent examples of ruins by dividing them into three categories. The first category would focus on what I call “abandoned” places, sites that due to many reasons, have been left forgotten. This includes buildings, hardware, and monuments that once stood as symbols of progress and
are now purposeless, rusting relics seen against the sky. According to the National Geographic author and photographer Tkachenko (National Geographic, 2015), such relics represent “a metaphor of a post-apocalyptic future.” Some of these abandoned sites have been “repurposed” into places offering new or similar functions with a reflection of the originals. Some examples of these post-abandonment ruins are discussed in the second category that includes the work of Georges Descombes, Peter Latz, and Anselm Kiefer. I call the third category of ruins as “imagined,” which contains the works of architects and artists such as James Wines, and Gins and Arakawa, who have applied ruination in their work. Studying and introducing these types of ruins is meant to lead me to the approach that I will be illustrating for this project in the final chapter.
“It is unhelpful to imagine that the past is a substance that is secreted in dark places awaiting its recovery. The remains of the past are all around us, and we inhabit the past in important ways.”

(Harrison, 2011, p. 154)
Fig. 15 | Gohar Dashti, Home Series, 2017.
In this section, we will be travelling to some of the most mesmerizing sites around the world to remember their past and to trigger our imagination through their intense beauty lying in the presence of absence. These abandoned sites are filled with traces of the past and are so extreme that they evoke a wide range of emotions and feelings, from anxiety to a fascination that results in what Burke (1756) calls “delightful horror.” Emily Bradly (2010) believes that these extreme feelings help us to “be drawn out of our more comfortable ways of being” where terror is distant enough not to be painful in a strong sense (p.125).

Bradly (2010) explains Kant’s theory of the sublime that is divided into the “mathematically sublime,” where the seemingly infinite in nature pushes the sense of imagination beyond its power, and the “dynamically sublime” where feelings like anxiety and appreciation arise followed by a sense of freedom and moral response. Bradly talks about the existence of a place where the contemporary sublime can be found, a place with the same qualities as Kant’s sublime, where positive and negative feelings are complementary. In ruins, one can grasp the mightiness of nature that ends in the discovery of a self. Ruins are an example of the contemporary sublime, which demands our attention to be aware of qualities such as infinity, the threatening and the great.

The sublime today, as opposed to the legacy from the eighteenth century, is more than an aesthetic taste. Bradly (2010) explains the contemporary sublime is about the understanding of the material experience of a natural world where human desires and ambitions are confronted. For Bradly, profundity and limitlessness push one to go beyond the boundaries of phenomenal experience by advancing the mind through the power of poetic language. A language that can be achieved through “Kant’s transcendental sublime, Romanticism’s transformational sublime, and more recently, Lyotard’s sublime as encountering the ‘inexpressible’ and ‘unpresentable’” (Bradly, 2010, p. 130).
Further on, I am going to talk about examples that help us understand ruins as landscapes filled with expressive qualities and a sublime experience that is too complex but can be described through the sense of time. Ruins can present a kind of beauty that can be found among wreckage and devastation. I must add that the list of these forgotten ruins that have inspired me through my practicum is not limited to the examples I talk about, and it is extensive. It includes sites such as: Dome Homes in Florida, The Maunsell Sea Forts in England, Kolmanskop in Namibia, Power Plant IM in Belgium, Hashima Island in Japan, SS Ayrfield Shipwreck in Australia, Eastern State Penitentiary in Philadelphia, Deception Island in Antarctica, Al Madam in United Arab Emirates, and many more.
"Ruination is an act perpetrated, a condition to which one is subject, and a cause of loss."

(Stoler, cited in High, 2013, p.140)
Chernobyl | Ukraine

1945, a year that one technology, the discovery of splitting the atom, transformed the world. Later, in April of 1986, an explosion of a nuclear reactor in the town of Pripyat resulted in the quarantining of a thirty-mile perimeter known as the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone—a disaster that resulted in mass death and scarred bodies and landscapes, that was later followed by the abandonment of the city. Tsing, Swanson, Gan, and Bubandt (2017) believe that technology, as such, has changed our perception of matter in a way that something small can be too big, absent, too present, and inside or too outside. To them, radioactivity is an “eerie, powerful ghost” where, as Barad believes “every bit of spacetime-mattering is...entangled inside all others” (p. G8).

Roelstraete (2007) believes that Polidori’s images have changed the international opinion on this great catastrophe in Chernobyl. In his view, Polidori’s pictures remind us of the eighteenth-century paintings when the enjoyment of ruins was first explained as a cultural experience. The photographs of abandoned buildings and overgrown streets tell us about the power of nature over humans; where, as Yablon (2010) explains, “nature is so fecund it overwhelms man-made structure as violently as wars and revolutions had in Europe” (p. 22).

Images of extensive plant growth inside and outside of the buildings remind us of the triumph of nature. Aside from the vegetation growth, studies have shown that the wildlife population has been increasing within the Chernobyl site with an abundance of elk, deer and wild boar, wolves and many more exotic species such as lynx and the uniquely named Przewalski’s horse (Anon, 2019). Moreover, Galván and his colleagues (2014), at the Doñana Biological Station in Seville, found the first evidence of animals adapting to ionizing radiation. Their research included examining the blood sample of sixteen species of birds such as barn swallows (Hirundo rustica) in and around the Chernobyl exclusion zone. They came to the conclusion that birds located in more contaminated areas had a higher level of antioxidants in their blood that helped them recover faster from the damage produced by radiation exposure.

Ruins, as such, are a symbol of not only failed modernity but also a symbol of remembrance and forgetting. Roelstraete (2007) describes Chernobyl as a “terrifying monument to the lugubrious whims of nuclear power” whose sublimity has been captured by Robert Polidori in a way that tourism, exoticism and catastrophe unite to result in the sense of astonishment. Chernobyl is an excellent example of Kant’s dynamical sublime. Chernobyl’s post-apocalyptic landscapes are horrifying and unashamedly beautiful. They remind us of a dismal reality of life not by discomforting us but rather by their sense of obscurity and alleviation. Here, in Chernobyl, one can anticipate the possibility and the greatness of a nuclear disaster and be aware of the consequences of it.
“Architects can work against or try to work in harmony with nature. But gravity and weather work away to undermine foundations, collapse roofs, fracture walls.... And maintenance cannot be assured. The natural fate of all architecture is ruin.”

(Unwin, 2017, p. 237)
Varosha | Cyprus

One might think about Varosha as a perfect example of “Urbicide,” a term first used by author Michael Moorcock in 1963, that translates as “violence against the city.” The term became popular during the Bosnian War, and the massive destruction of buildings in 1992 and has been used since to refer to any large-scale urban ruin that is a result of human actions such as war. Urbicide denotes not only the destruction of the environment but also the destruction of a way of life (Dobraszczyk, 2015).

Cyprus’s Greek and Turkish communities were experiencing a constant state of violent conflict that began in 1931, right after the struggle to gain independence from the British. The battle ultimately resulted in the Turkish Army taking over the north of the island in 1974. Like many other examples of ruins, Varosha once was considered as a symbol of advancement, flourishing to become Cyprus’s premier tourist resort, where “the architectural and engineering achievements were framing the first seeds of decay and ruin” (Yablon, 2013, p.32). The resort town was completely abandoned during the invasion. Despite considerable attempts, reconciliation never happened, resulting in Turkey being the administrator of the island. Still, after more than 40 years, Varosha remains as a “Forbidden Zone” protected by fences and barbed wire; picturing time as frozen while model cars are rusting against the sky, and shops are filled with goods (Dobraszczyk, 2015).

Varosha remains to stand as a visible reminder of the cyclical theory of history. Dobraszczyk (2015) explains the level of the shock and fear; in other words, the sublime, that he experienced in his first visit of Varosha. This was produced by vastness and silence. As described in the first chapter, vastness, obscurity, repetition are all qualities that one can quickly encounter in ruins, and they lead to generating feelings of sublimity. Dobraszczyk believes these qualities are a significant part of the aesthetic of ruins, that trigger one’s imagination and lead to a sense of joy and pleasure as the destruction is maintained at a safe distance. For Burke (1756), such enjoyments evoke a feeling of compassion and sympathy that leads to a self-observation.
“To be sure, a cityscape is not made of flesh. Still, sheared-off buildings are almost as eloquent as bodies in the street.”

(Sontag, cited in Vetrocq, 2007, p.142)
New Orleans | USA

It used to be admired for its racy culture of old-fashioned jazz and Cajun cuisine before being destroyed in 2005 by Hurricane Katrina, a disaster that resulted in 160,000 homes being flooded. The city was founded in 1718, based on high hopes and with no attention to the sea levels and putting stress on Mississippi and Lake Pontchartrain. Hurricane Katrina demonstrated otherwise. A major American city was suddenly completely depopulated in a way that no war could do. According to Updike (2006), “many thousands of displaced have still not returned; an estimated 200,000 never will.”

Having lived there as a teenager, Roberto Polidori (2006), in his book, *After the Flood*, tries to highlight the aftermath of Katrina’s ruinous pass over New Orleans. To capture the change in the landscape, he visited the site in four different times over a period of one year. Rosenheim (cited in Updike, 2006) explains Polidori’s first visit to the site:

“When Polidori arrived in New Orleans on September 20…, 80% of the city was still underwater. The temperature was close to 90° F, and the smell of rotting flesh and food was putrid. Downed electric cables draped the streets and sidewalks. Toppled live oaks lay like fallen colossi, except there was no grandeur to the scene, just despair. Most traffic lights and streetlamps had long stopped working, and exhausted relief crews were still discovering and collecting the dead.”

Updike (2006) believes that Polidori’s photographs have the same quality as “the uncanny stillness” of some of Piranesi’s paintings, presenting eerie landscapes filled with an absence of people. Images that help us to experience the sublime nature of a disaster where thousands of people were driven from their houses, followed by the subsequent failure of the city. Vetrocq (2007) believes that Polidori’s images can help us understand the passage of time by presenting a city and a community out of individuals. She continues by describing Polidori’s work as “the most shocking evidence of lives interrupted” where “everything, but everything has been coated with mud” and where buildings represent “bodies in the street, visible proxies for the people whose anguish is ongoing, albeit endured elsewhere” (p.141). His images make us wonder about the stories of the land, and of exile, by scanning the wreckage, stories that are floating in the air and fading on the horizon. Roelstraete (2007) imagines work like Polidori’s use of the camera as a tool that makes everyone a tourist not just in other people’s reality but eventually in one’s own.
Fig 19 | Irina84, *Sand Quarry Autumn Scene in Rummu, Estonia, n.d.*
“Beauty, together with its relative, the sublime, is an incentive and a reward for our free activities in nature: hiking, camping, gardening, sightseeing” (Berleant, 2012).

Rummu prison is an abandoned prison located in Estonia, a perfect example of a place where an environmental disaster can be devastatingly beautiful, where stories and time play significant roles in creating a landscape. In the 1940s, this prison was built on the lip of a limestone quarry by the Soviet Union. Prisoners were forced to work on the quarry to dig out limestone. In 1991, following the collapse of the Soviet Union, many of their institutions, including the prison, were abandoned and left behind. Without having anyone taking care of the quarry, it soon turned to a lake naturally filled with groundwater. Many of the mining machines and some parts of the prison itself were soon drowned in the lake. Today, this site has turned into what, it can be argued, is a perfect place, with surreal and picturesque qualities, where adventurous people explore the mysteries within the walls, soil and the water through diving, climbing, and many more activities. Rummu is a site where people have the freedom to choose their activities, a place where previous actions and most importantly, time, played the role of the designer of the site.
“Sometimes the creation of even the most powerful architecture involves no more than recognition, choice and decision – no construction, no action...; and ruins are prime contenders for such conversions.”

(Unwin, 2017, p. 235)
Historically there have been some artists whose work constitutes an “aesthetic affront to nature,” as Crawford and Carlson mention (Bradly, 2007). Bradly believes such work can be considered as an aesthetic failure as they are “destructive of their natural setting within the aesthetic context” (p. 288). According to her, an aesthetic affront is not just about the appearance, but it is about altering an object’s nature that disturbs its aesthetic qualities. However, there have been some designers like Descombes, Latz, and Kiefer who have attempted to highlight and to bring out nature’s qualities through careful observation and attentiveness. These designers include the process of entropy and decay in their works, where one can see oneself as a part of the process rather than overcoming it.

Bradly calls for a sense of “regard” for nature, a concept to capture the aesthetic-moral sense that refers to the ways of observing, attending, gazing at something and paying careful attention. In other words, it is about engaging with various qualities through a range of senses. To regard something is about the respect that leads to a positive relationship between the artist and nature (Bradly, 2007). To achieve a sense of regard, it is crucial to find integrity for the narrative of any landscape through careful attention to human impact and the damage done by human actions. Strictly speaking, it is essential to look for ways to not cover the damage within a destructive environment but to highlight and make it visible by engaging with the site through the means of design.

The power of nature is inevitable and undeniable, it is a force not at a distance, but so close that it can impact human actions and structures. By highlighting the narratives and through an interaction with the process of entropy, growth, and decay, we can achieve a sense of regard for the intricate natural qualities and the triumph of nature. Here, “the neglected area of the unscenic,” as Bradly (2007)
remarks, ruined landscape, becomes essential in telling the stories. It is our responsibility, as landscape architects, to increase attentiveness to nature’s qualities by creatively emphasizing its stories. Such works, as Auping explains, reveal a “philosophy of extreme restraint and discretion towards the landscape, which the artist himself describes as ‘research’ in the form of a continuous dialogue with natural processes” (Cited in Bradly, 2007, p.294). Bradly continues by suggesting an approach of “artistic expression” in working symbiotically with nature’s qualities, instead of merely imposing an artistic vision onto them and changing them through our intervention. “I felt the need to yield to it, respect it, observe, learn, and then work with it” (p. 295).

Treib (2018), in his book, Doing Almost Nothing: The Landscapes of Georges Descombes, explains Corboz’s method adopted for the restoration of historic buildings that include: minimal, identifiable and reversible intervention. Through such methods, investigation and analysis, and most importantly, by focusing on time, the architect would be able to “further the past through the present and projecting it into the future” (p. 27). According to Treib, some landscape designers have been trying to enhance the notion of “as found” as an initiative to their projects. He describes the idea of “as found” as a term that refers to utilizing “the existing conditions as a sensible starting point for examining the potentials – or as Lancelot Brown would term them, the “capabilities” of the site (p.28). In other words, he believes in looking for a “sensible approach” through finding a balance between what a site offers and designer’s intentions. I continue by giving some examples where designers tried to understand deeply the existing landscape and its constant process of changing and reshaping.
“Descombes fully acknowledges the landscape as a
dynamic entity: always changing, always advancing
through growth or retreating through decay. His
interventions balance structure with organic change,
control with release, and personal with social interests.”

(Treib, 2018, p.19)
Minimal: Georges Descombes, *Voie suisse: L’itinéraire genevois, 1991* | Switzerland

Treib (2018) describes Descombes as a landscape architect with a unique technique whose focus is “neither on a constructed product alone, nor accepts the site exactly as it is, nor attempts to restore the site to a once-existing condition” (p.14). “Doing almost nothing” is the main character of Descombes’s work that shapes his technique, Treib explains. The initial idea for his projects derives from a meticulous investigation about the history of the site and what had once characterized it as well as looking for any evidence and remains. His research includes not only the natural context but also social, economic and political matters that guide his design process. Descombes himself explains how he looks for the best outcome by trying to “pay minute, almost maniacal attention to the scars of the world, how the world has changed, charged and modified itself. I also try to pay attention to what is less perceptible: flowers, different species of mice, everything that moves and should not be disturbed” (cited in Treib, 2018, p. 16). What he does, Treib believes, is to study “a layer of our own time,” and to make any shreds of evidence more apparent through minimal interventions.

*Voie Suisse* is one of Descombes’s best-known projects where one can quickly identify the characteristics of his methods. In this project, Descombes has tried to avoid adding any alien elements to retain the identity of the site through minimal and distinct interventions that render the existing conditions. In other words, in a project, like this one, the visitor can read both the previous conditions and those introduced by the architect. His main intention, I would say, has been to reveal and to preserve the stories of the landscape and any human activities that have impacted it. Treib (2018) considers Descombes’s landscapes in Robert Irwin’s category of site-determined interventions that can be realized at “*Voie Suisse* disappears into a fog of perceptual uncertainty” (p.18). Here, at *Voie Suisse*, the design and all the chosen materials have been derived from the site itself.

Natural process and ecological evolution play a significant role in shaping Descombes’s projects in a way that most of the structures become invisible over time. Thus, the process of entropy, growth and decay, as well as the consequences of any action, even to some degree, can be realized in his work. His designs are based on a “process in motion,” as Treib describes, a process that can be experienced by visitors to the site through the existing conditions. Conditions that not only help us understand the landscape as continually changing, but also refer us to oneself by noticing any social or human issues associated with landscape.
According to Treib (ibid), the resolution of landscape architecture for Descombes is “to construct a place where the field of force present in it finds a kind of relative momentary equilibrium which makes you want to stay there, makes you feel comfortable” (ibid, p.19). To find equilibrium is to look for, as mentioned earlier, a sense of regard for nature that results in not only respecting the past but also understanding the present, and visioning the future. Although Descombes’s story might be personal fiction through the existing facts, it can tell us about a specific order; an order that guides us through the process of design and realization (ibid). It is through patterns like this that we can produce designs most relevant for the present, designs that produce the future.

“The largest of territories can be irreducibly restructured through small, laconic interventions, as opposed to the unbearable excess of everything – objects, forms, materials.”

(Trakas, cited in Treib, 2018, p. 34)
Identifiable: Peter Latz, 
*Landschaftspark Duisburg-Nord, 1991* 
| Germany |

As mentioned earlier, in the first chapter, Latz (1998) believes that his work on *Landschaftspark Duisburg-Nord* is a “huge land art” as it is creating “another history.” This is a place where the visitors experience a sense of resistance, a resistance of place, materials, nature, through a shock of touch. *Landschaftspark Duisburg-Nord* is a meeting point, an example of what Bradly (2007) calls a place of “a collaboration between one’s own and earth’s nature.” A collaboration and a relationship that develops in closeness rather than in the distance. It is through offering a wide range of activities, and physical challenges in the park that one can experience a sense of escape, reverence, discovery, and ultimately learning. And Latz has achieved these all while preserving the stories of the site by emphasizing the scars and temporality of the landscape.

Latz, in this project, has tried to reanimate the devastated landscape of an industrial past. Like Descombes, Latz, too, first examines the existing conditions on the site before the design process. The abandoned landscape of a former coal and steel factory, now has turned into a place of many opportunities. According to Kirkwood (2001), *Landschaftspark Duisburg-Nord* presents a lot of new ideas about landscape and nature by paying attention to the fundamental ecological base of the landscape and the history of the site. His use of forty-nine cast iron plates with running water on top present the process of manufacturing iron in its molten and hardened stages. The process of erosion has played a big role in the production of these iron plates not only in the beginning but also by continuing to rust and erode over time (Kirkwood, 2001).
Latz applied the idea of fantasy and playfulness by proposing new activities and a new purpose to the remains of industrial structures, without destroying their past. His method includes adaptation, new interpretation, and metamorphosis of remaining structures. Now the site is not only acting as a museum, but also it is a playground offering a variety of activities such as climbing, diving, celebrations, and many more that are operating independently but side by side and as a part of the whole. Every section of the park is linked through specific visual, functional or only imaginary elements. “A huge land art” that continues to elaborate by its surrounded uneven gardens in the same way as “natural” landscape (Latz, 1998). Latz is one of the several designers who engage with the environment in which he works by employing the existing conditions and by bringing out the dynamic nature of landscape. His engagement is through his interest in decay, incongruity, contingency, and indeterminacy; that turns the ruined landscape of Landschaftspark Duisburg-Nord into a place that only now can be understood and interpreted through the means of design.
“It begins in the dark after an intense experience, a shock, at first it is an urge, a pounding. You don’t know what it is, but it compels you to act. At first, it is very vague. It must be vague, otherwise it would just be a visualization of the shock experience.”

(Kiefer, cited in Prodger, 2014)
Michael Prodger (2014) describes Anselm Kiefer as a “bewildering artist” whose work can be heart-sinking as it is infused with philosophy, poetry, magic and the spirits of materials. Kiefer is from a generation in Germany who have a better memory of the aftermath rather than the war itself. Being a child of rubble, he believes in the similarity between creation and destruction, and the constant presence of the past. He grew up in the Black Forest town of Donaueschingen, which, due to the existence of a military garrison and rail hub, was a regular target for allied bombers. Prodger argues that Kiefer’s art can be seen as a cycle, which reflects his idea of the present and the past. In his projects, Kiefer tries to confront the past rather than ignoring it by telling the stories of past Germans. He believes “No atom is ever lost,” so for him, the atoms that shape his work are about the remains of the history and the memory of the people long gone (Prodger, 2014).

The idea of becoming fascinates Kiefer; this is one of the reasons that he often dribbles acid on his art, or puts them out in the rain, so the piece continues to change even when it is placed in a gallery. Kiefer’s 200-acre project, La Ribaute, a former silk factory, is a perfect example of what he describes as “reverse architecture” (Prodger, 2014). He turned the factory into his studio and a site to display his sculptures and paintings that were often made of industrial materials to draw attention to the site’s industrial past. His series of concrete towers that are a result of assembling and reassembling of removed materials on the site adds to the haunted quality of this subterranean ruined landscape. Harrison (2011) describes the scene of Kiefer’s concrete towers as a “modern ruin” that refers to the idea of “archeology of the contemporary past.” The surface is full of traces as physical records “from the artifacts themselves to site reports and other forms of knowledge which are made and remade as a result of this engagement with the surface” (Harrison, 2011, p. 160). According to Harrison, this notion of archeology, on the one hand, tries to “make the familiar unfamiliar” by creating a distance between the observer and their material world. On the other hand, it attempts to reduce the gap between past and present by making the past more accessible and through making the unknowable, proximal and known. Such archeology and such projects, like Kiefer’s La Ribaute, as Harrison (ibid) continues, draw one’s attention to the work of the present as a surface in the production of the past and future.
“Ruins served not only as memorials to past civilizations and reminders of the transience and vanitas [emptiness] of all worldly endeavors but also as specific object lessons for the present.”

(Yablon, 2010, p. 258)
This chapter includes an introduction to the work of some designers who use the idea of ruination in their work. Although I have less to say about this category as it is in some ways peripheral to the subject of my practicum, I discuss it to clarify the distinctive characteristics of ruins further.

According to Dillon (2012), “in architectural terms, the most thoroughgoing visions of the city of the future were haunted by ruination”, that can be seen in projects such as Le Corbusier’s Ville Radieuse, or the notion of Albert Speer’s “ruin value” that was to be employed in the design of Hitler’s future Germania. Unwin (2017) explains the two forms of geometry that can be realized through the history of architecture: “ideal geometry” and the “various geometry,” and that it is the geometry of building that is affected by ruination in the most obvious ways. He believes in the existence of aesthetic values in the irregular forms created by “the actions of chance.” Ruination is an act of chance which disturbs regular geometry by the nature of irregularity that exhibits the forces behind them. There is picturesque potential, Unwin continues, in the defective forms that can be visually more engaging than the predictable rhythms and orthogonality of usual architecture.

Wabi-sabi is a concept in Japanese Aesthetics that values “asymmetry, roughness, irregularity, chance, incompleteness” (Unwin, 2017, p. 230). It is often evident as an effect of the actions of chance like natural growth, weathering, brush strokes, etc. that create a contrast as well as a mediation in their surrounding environment. There have been some architects like James Wines, and Gins and Arakawa, who applied ruination on their projects despite the possible sense of discomfort and unexpectedness of seeing a brand-new building in a state of ruin. Through their work, they have created “an architectural imagination that plays with sense and senseless” (Unwin, ibid). This is a form of architecture that forces the viewer to question their assumption about themselves by closing the distance between themselves and otherness, or as it was explained earlier in the chapter, to make the familiar “unfamiliar.” In a very real sense, I believe, such architects have sought through their work to draw attention to the “every day” by making it uncanny.
"If we begin to think of the surface as a metaphor for an unconstituted present, a space in which the past, present and future are combined and are still in the process of becoming, archaeological surface survey emerges as an allegory for a creative engagement with the present and the spaces in which the past intervenes within it."

(Harrison, 2011, p.154)
Fig 24 | Ali Albahri, A Destroyed Mosque in the City of Aleppo in Syria After the War, n.d.
“Making the familiar, unfamiliar” is the role of archeology, as Harrison (2011) describes, which makes us question ourselves as it becomes present-oriented and future-oriented, and it is no longer about “others.” All the examples mentioned show us that the solutions can be derived from the site rather than brought to it. In the end, we, as landscape architects, must morally approach any site, to draw attention to community and environmental peril. Vetrocq (2007) claims, “the residual beauty of decaying buildings is succeeded by outright devastation,” devastation that is being neglected by many authorities. This is where we can play a role in telling the stories before letting them vanish utterly to imagine the enormity of the loss as well as the power embedded in time and its urge for recovery.

Harrison (ibid), as mentioned, suggests studying the present through a surface-survey and a process of assembling/reassembling as it helps us towards understanding the current, past and future. He believes by having such an approach, one can notice that the present and the past as equally implicated within the production of each other, a process that will continue in the creation of the future. Studying the surface includes studying the present, and its material remains that result in an engagement with the surface. Harrison defines the process of assemblage “as a group of artifacts found in association with each other in a single context,” a formation that is a result of both ‘C-transforms’ (cultural transformation) or ‘N-transforms’ (natural transformation). According to him, a cultural transformation includes “a range of cultural processes, such as intentional or nonintentional discard, recycling or reuse,” and natural transformation, on the other hand, involves “processes such as biological and chemical weathering and decay” (ibid, p.155). By applying the assemblage theory, we can establish a link “between a contemporary external observer and a set of activities carried out by particular people and particular ‘things’ in the past” (ibid, 2011, p.155). To study the present, we need to keep in mind that the present is not fixed or inevitable, but it is always in the process of becoming or,
as Harrison concludes, “it is active and ripe with potential.” He further explains that studying the present as a surface means “to recognize the agency of humans, non-humans and the collectives themselves as charged with latent potential, as generative of new pasts and futures in the present” (p.157).

Ruins can be remarkable places where one can study the present, past, and future; in other words, the process of becoming. They can be projective of superior destructive powers that have shaped them, a kind of “form making without an architect” and as a result of the act of chance, as Unwin (2017) claims, and where time plays a significant role. Ruins have been a theme in almost all creative art and sciences. In the work of historians and archeologists, ruins are documents providing a lot of information on the past and present. Artists and architects, on the other hand, use them to offer phenomenological experiences for people interested in exploring ruins’ mysterious spaces, wandering through their broken walls. This is to say, ruins offer great opportunities in projecting and imagining the stories of the past, present and the yet-to-come, stories that show us unruly temporalities. Telling the stories in a creative way requires “the languages of both science and poetry to save us from merely stockpiling endless information that fails to inform our ignorance or our irresponsibility.” The language of science can increase our “moral sensitivity,” Poetry, however, “can move minds to the sense of fellowship that prevents careless usage and exploitation of our fellow beings, waste and cruelty” (Tsing, Swanson, Gan, and Bubandt, 2017, p. M16).

“It's just part of a story, actually quite a lot of stories / / if I'll only listen. Whiteness crossed the continent / a poison fog where it went / villages were vacant / hearths and ways forsaken” (Le Guin, cited in Tsing, Swanson, Gan, and Bubandt, 2017, p. M8)

It is in landscapes like ruins that we can experience what Bradly (2010) calls “difficult aesthetic appreciation.” An experience that involves “an uneasy
relationship with nature and reflects ways in which we find meaning and value in extraordinary places” (ibid, p. 125). She describes such experience as a kind of sublime experience, where a range of emotions are evoked in a way that “adds meaning to our experience of other humans, other creatures and things unlike ourselves”; that results in forming a relationship that is valued for its complexity and integrity (p. 135). “In this way, an aesthetic response might underpin an ethical attitude, where the epistemic value arising from ugliness leads to caring for what is otherwise passed over” (Bradly, 2010, p. 135). This is to say that emotion, just like imagination, is valued for its role in an aesthetic appreciation. “Nature is intensely beautiful and at the same time very unnerving, and at times deeply frightening. You feel it as soon as you go out to the land, where everywhere you go things are dead, decaying, fallen down, growing, alive” (Goldsworthy, cited in Bradly, 2007, p.81). Through design we can achieve a positive relationship between humans and nature whose principle consists of a sense of regard for nature.

“The ruins are thus re-envisioned as the sign of man advanc[ing] so quickly that the wilderness closes in again behind him” (Yablon, 2010, p. 23).

The line between real and imagined ruination is disappearing. Now, we are facing the Anthropocene, an ecological and geological experience in which many events are associated with a sense of unreality in terms of the intensity and the vastness of the scale of environmental disasters. Disasters lead to a dreamlike experience, where people and even countries seem like an illusion. Morton (2013) believes, “the threat of unreality is the very sign of reality itself.” This chapter is the evidence of examples that make us wonder about the very possibility of ruination in our homes and cities. Moving forward in chapter three, I am going to explore and imagine the possible ruin of a city, my home, in a way that lets us face up to the fact of that very possibility.
“Some kinds of stories help us notice; others get in our way. ... Unless we learn to listen broadly, we may miss the biggest story of life on earth: symbiogenesis, the co-making of living things. Practices of storytelling matter.”

(Tsing, Swanson, Gan, and Bubandt, 2017, p. M8)
“Writing a novel explores the respective contributions of character and circumstance in forming the present. By doing so, the novel suggests how we may explore the power of the present to produce the future.”

(Coetzee, Cited in Treib, 2018, p. 19)
Third Chapter:

Envisioning Disaster
A Story of Lorestan, Iran
Introduction

“Anthropogenic landscapes are also haunted by imagined futures. We are willing to turn things into rubble, destroy atmospheres, sell out companion species in exchange for dreamworlds of progress.”

We are living in an era of war, global warming, environmental disasters and constant urbanization that makes abandoned infrastructure an inevitable part of our lives. The number of these neglected sites is increasing; as LaGro (1999) suggests, it is our role as landscape architects to perform a substantial amount of research to improve the necessary knowledge and skills to influence communities and key decision-makers. Timothy Morton, in his book, *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World* (2013), talks about the necessity for some levels of shock and anxiety to alarm the ecological trauma of the Anthropocene age that we are currently addressing. Ruins could be the perfect place to remind the world of what Morton calls “the end of the world,” which is a result of denialism. Now, as we are facing various disasters in different forms around the world, architecture is expected, as Unwin (2017) explains, to “explore how settled orthodoxies - sense and order - might be exchanged for distortion and ruin” (p.229).

Garrett (2013) believes in ruins’ ability to imagine urban futures, and that exploring ruins privileges fantasies with a sense of authenticity. He also believes in uniting experience and fantasy in a way that honors one over the other. Ruins are filled with countless untold stories along with a capacity to estheticize pain and anesthetize the viewer. As discussed in the first chapter, Burke's characteristics of sublime, including obscurity, vastness, darkness, repetition, can all be realized for the qualities of ruination; that have been part of ruins’ aesthetics ever since it has been featured in cinema or painting. The three imaginative tropes of Dobraszczyk (2015) including the fantasy of urban annihilation, the fantasy of being the first/last witness in a post-apocalyptic ruined world, and lastly, the fantasy of disanthropy can be recognized in ruins. Experiencing ruins is essential as it helps us understand their contested histories and imagine the possibility of urban destruction. By telling the stories that lie within ruins, we can practice remembrance in ways, as Dobraszczyk explains, “to promote inclusivity, hold together contradictions and maintain the hope of healing” (p. 46).
Unwin (2017) believes that ruins can provide a framework for our imagination for their storytelling nature. Ruins can play an essential role in the narrative of natural forces for their manifestation of these forces on human creations. Sometimes, they can contribute to the creation of a new or better state of being; other times, however, they can be destructive to the ones who suffer by losing their homes and memories. Unwin thinks of ruins as places redolent with time and memories. Ruins can tell us the story of how something came to be destroyed as the history is embedded in their fabric and spaces. As mentioned, we are facing a geological epoch known as “Anthropocene” that refers to humans as significant forces determining the livability of the earth (Tsing, Swanson, Gan, and Bubandt, 2017). The enormity of the dilemma makes us wonder about the ways of addressing big stories of the tide of ruination. Tsing, et al (ibid) approach the problem by paying closer attention to overlaid arrangements of humans and landscapes. They believe that such notice allows us to fight the constant messages asking us to forget and ignore the existence of environmental devastation. Paying attention to the stories that ruins have to offer leads us to a better understanding of life on earth and the need to limit the destructiveness of the Anthropocene.

By studying the present and the past around us, we have the chance to describe landscapes. Ruins carry traces of past, present and future mixed in a graveyard of modernity that is taken over by invasive plants. These haunted landscapes can tell us big stories that take their form from “seemingly minor contingencies, asymmetrical encounters, and moments of indeterminacy” (Tsing, Swanson, Gan, and Bubandt, 2017, p. G5). Such stories remind us of an impossible present, or as Tsing, et al believe, a time of rupture haunted with the threat of extinction. In ruins, one can hear the whispers telling us the tales of many pasts and the yet-to-come. According to Tsing, et al the world has ended many times before. “Endings come with the death of a leaf, the death
of a city, the death of a friendship, the
death of small promises and small stories.
The landscapes grown from such endings
are our disaster as well as our weedy
hope” (ibid, p. G6). Ruins can disturb our
conventional sense of time through the
connectivity of the events happening on
their surface. They can tell us about a future
without us and the earth that continues to
survive even after we have disappeared
from the surface of the planet.

To know the Anthropocene, Tsing, et al
(2017) suggest a conversation with stones,
as the whole dilemma refers to humans
as geological forces. Poetry can help us
to learn about the stories of stones; such
listening is necessary as they lead to an
understanding of the Anthropocene. In the
midst of the disaster, poetry can bring us a
gift of hope and the possibility of noticing
the wonderful as well as the terrible and
terrifying. They continue by mentioning a
poem by Ursula K. Le Guin (cited in Tsing,
et al, 2017, p. M17) as follows:

THE MARROW
There was a word inside a stone.
I tried to pry it clear,
mallet and chisel, pick and gad,
until the stone was dropping blood,
but still I could not hear
the word the stone had said.
I threw it down beside the road
among a thousand stones
and as I turned away it cried
the word aloud within my ear
and the marrow of my bones
heard, and replied.
According to Tsing, et al (ibid), to survive, we need to relearn multiple forms of curiosity, that they describe as “an attunement to multispecies entanglement, complexity, and the shimmer all around us” (p. G11). I believe that practices of storytelling and vernacular knowledge can offer starting points to such curiosity. A practice, maybe so urgent in this moment of crisis, as it helps us notice the enormity of the events happening around us. “Living in a time of planetary catastrophe thus begins with a practice at once humble and difficult: noticing the worlds around us” (ibid, 2017, p. M7). Such practices require the art of imagination, a creative power that helps us reach beyond the given and to bring the non-present together with the present. Bradly (2003) thinks of imagination as a tool that allows for freedom of mind and ultimately leads to knowledge and discoveries. Yablon (2010) believes in an emerging genre of science fiction as the motif of ruins as it helps us imagine death and the hereafter. I believe art and memory are rooted in these timeworn landscapes and that they are the source of imagination.

“Imagination brings meaning into experience, which emerges from the interaction of live creatures with environment” (Brady, 2003, p. 149).

As mentioned in the previous chapter, this chapter is about the story, many stories in one perhaps, of a city, Lorestan, in my home country, Iran, that was tragically flooded in April 2019. In the second chapter, we explored the idea of archeology as a surface-survey; and to direct its attention more towards the present and future and its relationship with the past; in other words, studying the present as a ‘contemporary past’ (Harrison, 2011). Thus, I will start the story by looking at the current situation in the city so it can help me to bridge the present to the past and finally to draw an image of the future. In the second half of this chapter, I will turn to science fiction narratives so I can represent the city from the horizon of its afterlife. The investigation is based on the theory of assembling and reassembling the surface that, as Harrison mentions, includes people and things,
the living and the dead, the operative and defunct. According to Harrison, “It is not important whether these coincident persons and non-persons all belong to the same context or time, their coincidence is itself creative and generative of possible futures” (ibid, pp. 157-58). In the end, I will provide graphic traces of the evolution of the land, revealing natural and human operations that have happened upon it and presenting landscapes as ever-changing. As a result of such studies, we will be able to generate ideas about a possible future as it helps us engage with issues of contemporary and future social and ecological concerns.
Lorestan in 2019
A Surface-Study

“I do not access hyperobjects across a distance, through some transparent medium. Hyperobjects are here, right here in my social and experiential space. Like faces pressed against a window, they leer at me menacingly: their very nearness is what menaces.”

(Morton, 2013, p. 27)
In April 2019, at the time as the Persian New Year, more than two-thirds of Iran was suffering from days of heavy rain and devastating floods that resulted in thousands of homes being submerged. Nearly 70 people were killed, and thousands of people were forced to abandon their homes and memories, leaving them to be washed away by the flood. Lorestan province was the worst hit due to the destruction of many roads and bridges that could have provided access to the villages.

However vast this catastrophe seems, it is impossible to attribute it to a single cause. Witnessing the tragedy as it unfolded, many are wondering if it was natural or anthropogenic. Environmental experts, such as Kaveh Madani (BBC, 2019), believe that climate change is not the only reason for this disaster and that poor decisions in the past, like building a lot of dams, developing cities close to the river beds and deforestation also contributed to it. For example, there has been a reduction from 3.6 million to 1.8 million hectares of the northern forests over the past 40 years (ibid, 2019). A more immediate cause has been building roads over natural canyons, which also further amplified the disaster. Thus, it can be argued that this was a human-made disaster caused by unsustainable development. The event was extreme, but according to meteorological data, the total rain, 28.4mm, was far less than it had been in the past when over 100mm fell in one day (Euronews, 2019). Global warming might have intensified the rain, but we must understand that this was mostly a human disaster that was a result of not respecting the environment, and that now we must deal with the consequences.
Lorestan

Iran in April 2019

- Flood
- Water bodies

Fig 28 | Iran April 2019
According to Madani (BBC, 2019), floods at any depth may threaten public health. Based on an experimental study using human objects, he concludes that for a 50-60 kg person and flow depths between 9 and 16 cm, flow velocities of 2 m/s could result in loss of stability. Also, even 10 cm of high-velocity water can destabilize stationary passenger vehicles. He defines flood events with a flow depth more significant than 10 cm, and a velocity of 3 m/s or more as hazardous and potentially life-threatening. Madani believes that estimating flow velocity is not an easy task, and people often underestimate the force of water.

The ruins left behind as the result of the flood present forces beyond any human being’s control. Now the city and its buildings lie silent submerging and slipping further and further into ruin as concrete deteriorates and roofs collapse. The spooky presence of the past, along with the uncanny quality of the present, can be felt everywhere, in empty houses, objects left behind, in the water. Tsing, et al (2017) describe such qualities as “of the ghosts”, a condition that disturbs us in its indeterminacy; it cannot be seen despite all obtainable traces. Sometimes we can see the ghosts of relentless developments by looking at submerged buildings, but there are also ghosts that cannot be seen, the ones that we choose to forget. But they do not stay put, they will appear through cracks and traces in the landscape; “they tell us about stretches of ancient time and contemporary layerings of time, collapsed together in landscapes” (ibid, 2017, p. G8).

“Not confined to science fiction, floods were also evoked in nonfiction accounts to register the immensity and intensity of the city’s growth” (Yablon, 2010, p. 250). This devastated landscape, now, has become a symbol of failed modernity that speaks of now and the future, by providing a representational sublime that forces us to imagine a world beyond comprehension. Such events make us agree with Morton’s belief on the closeness of hyperobjects where “distance,” as he mentions, “is only a psychic and ideological construct designed to protect us from the nearness of things” (2013, p. 27).
Fig 30 | Mohammad Mohaimeny, Untitled, 2019
Now human-made structures have transformed the natural landscapes in a way that, as Yablon (ibid) believes, they resemble forces of nature, a force that can be as powerful as deluges or earthquakes. The Anthropocene is a dilemma whose product is an inevitable strain and dreadful devastation. The inundated city now can speak of the level and speed of change in a way that we can expect to see, as Gilbert-Rolfe (1999) says, “the non-visual components of the visual, clearly laid out and, as it were, in our face” (p. 120).

The sublime landscape of Lorestan now shares some qualities associated with the ugliness that, according to Bradly (2010), includes incoherence, disorder, irregularity, and bleakness. Bradly explains that sublimity and ugliness can both result in a mixture of positive and negative feelings with a degree of curiosity. Berleant (2012) talks about the necessity of broadening the idea of landscape to include the diversity of the appreciative experience of the environment. He believes to expand the notion of landscape; one must first realize that landscapes are never stationary but transitory, and that all living things follow, from inception through growth and ultimately to unavoidable decline and death. Some of the changes are predictable; others, however, are irregular and devastating such as floods, earthquakes, as well as human-caused environmental disasters. We need to start thinking about landscapes as settings where humans are actively engaged, and that “every landscape embodies and displays the effects of human action” (ibid, 2012). Spending time in ruins engages not just the visual but all our sensory modalities. The experience includes both built and natural environment where one can recognize the continuity of human presence and the existence of greater powers. Noticing the values presented in landscape of ruins attunes us to world otherwise.
Remembering the Past

“Each one believed that an understanding of landscape’s past traditions was a source of illumination for the present and future.”

(Schama, 1995, p.17)
We, humans, are constantly reshaping the landscape that we tend to forget what was there before us. Ecologists name this forgetting “shifting baseline syndrome,” a situation in which our knowledge of the natural world is lost as we are unable to perceive the changes that are taking place (Tsing, et al, 2017, p. G6). Tsing, et al refer to ruined landscapes as the newly shaped and the reality of our time. However, they believe that the act of forgetting itself can remake landscapes, as any living landscapes are infused with traces of the past that will remind us about our forgetting.

Lorestan province, with a population of 1.7 million, is located in the Zagros Mountains in the west of Iran. Lorestan took its name from the local people who called themselves “Lurs” and translates as “land of the Lurs.” Lorestan province, with a breadth of 294 km, extends for about 199 km from the north bordering with Kermanshah to Khuzestan in the south. Lorestan is within the range of the Zagros Mountains that feed some of Iran’s most famous rivers, including Jarahi, Karun, Karkheh, and Zayanderud. Well-watered districts, along with fertile plains, lie between the higher ranges. Oshtorankuh, with an elevation of 4050 m, is the highest point of the province and is mainly made of dolomitic limestone. The lower areas remain in the south at approximately 500 m above sea level. Oak, elm, maple, walnut, and almond are the main species of trees covering the province. In the west of Lorestan rests a series of fertile valleys, including the region of Pishi Kuh, in which there is evidence of human settlements during the Bronze Age (Izadpanah, 1984).

Generally, Lorestan province is a mountainous landscape with a few narrow valleys in between. Some of the most prominent mountains in Lorestan are Kabir, Dalich, Keyalo, Mala in the south; Garri, Pina in the North; Sefidkuh, Mapel, Veraz, Homyan, Yafteh, Hashtad Pahlu, Choweni, Chenara, Taf, and Ko-Kela stretching from the west to the east. First people arriving in Lorestan built their houses in the mountains and used a few fertile plains in between the high mountains to create farms and gardens. It was first in the 3rd and 4th millennium BC that migrant tribes settled in this section of the Zagros Mountains. They would feed themselves by hunting animals and picking the plants growing in the mountains. After a while, due to a drought period, people moved from the mountains to the valleys, which counts for the beginning of the first civilization in Lorestan province. By the mid-1980s, many Lur tribes had settled in towns, villages, and major urban centers with a few nomadic tribes still existing throughout the province (ibid, 1984).
Lorestan's Location

- Zagros Mountains
- Water bodies

Fig 32 | Lorestan, Iran
In terms of climate, Lorestan divides into three parts: the mountain regions including Boroujerd, Doroud, Azna, Nourabad and Alishtar with cold winters and moderate summers; the central region with spring season from mid-February to mid-May; and, the southern areas such as Pol-e-Dokhtar and Papi with hot summers and mild winters being influenced by the currents of hot air in Khuzestan. Annual precipitation in Lorestan is among the highest in Iran because of its location in the westernmost slopes of the Zagros mountains. In the past, the average precipitation was from 530 millimeters in the city of Khorramabad up to 1270 millimeters on the highest mountains. The dry season was considered to be from June to September (ibid, 1984). Unfortunately, the recent droughts and the excessive use of underground water led to the emptying of many aqueducts, followed by the destruction of many lush gardens that are now only specters in this ruined landscape.

Although the city has always been the center of civilization, arts, education, and culture, all these observations are evidence of its abuses and its failures. Lorestan is a landscape in the course of rapid change, first with land being drained and cleared for the use of agriculture, and afterwards in a stage of unstoppable transformation into suburb or city. All these degraded and denuded mountains refer to a history of abuse of nature that is a casualty of human misuse. Lorestan is a perfect example of such abuse where deforestation and uncounted dwellings crowding riverbanks and lakefronts are a significant issue today. As Tsing, et al (2017) mention, every landscape is haunted by past ways of life, and it is essential to return to multiple Pasts; otherwise, we are doomed to continue fouling our own nests.
“It is at this point, when environmental imperatives are invested with a sacred, mythic quality, which is said to demand a dedication purer and more uncompromising than the habits of humanity usually supply, that memory may help to redress the balance.”

(Schama, 1995, p. 18)
“Monsters are bodies tumbled into bodies; the art of telling monstrosity requires stories tumbled into stories.”

(Tsing, Swanson, Gan, and Bubandt, 2017, p. M10)
The final section of this practicum is an unpublished story narrating the buildings slipping further and further into ruins, roofs collapsing, and the uncanny nature of nature picturing anarchy, an end that anticipates the science fiction apocalypses of the province of Lorestan. Tsing, et al (2017) believe we are living in an era where the scale of an extinction event is comparable with the scale of the Cretaceous - Paleogene extinction event 65 million years ago that led to the disappearance of the dinosaurs along with 75 percent of all life forms from the face of the planet. However, they consider the modern industry responsible for all the extinction events currently taking place on the earth. Roelstraete (2007), in his article, On Catastrophilia, talks about immemorial arts recoiling from displaying misery or scenes of horror for two reasons of ethics and aesthetics. However, on many occasions and for ethical reasons, it imagined itself in depicting the exact scenes as it has the power of transporting meanings and bearing witness in ways that no reportage can do. It is through creating such experiences, however painful, that we can be convinced of the moral urgency of certain issues.

Catastrophes like the Lorestan flood can express the unpredictability of forces, disasters that can strike anytime, anywhere. I aim to show what Lorestan would look like after generations of neglect when the city is filled with overgrown creepers in between its fallen columns and crumbling walls and to depict the existing ruin in imagined recompositions where there are only specters of humans left. According to Unwin (2017), ruins can become elements in the scenography of dreams where human imagination is able to project and find itself in a surreal world within the atmosphere of otherworldliness. He believes that through the surreal setting ruins offer to our imagination, we can travel back in time or forward to a dystopian future. Through emulating these atmospheric characters of ruins and the emotions they can provoke, we can make the narratives and memories permanent.
Ruins are places with centuries of poor decisions inscribed onto their structures where life and death have shaped their landscape. According to Tsing, et al, “to track the histories that make multispecies livability possible, it is not enough to watch lively bodies. Instead, we must wander through landscapes, where assemblages of the dead gather together with the living” (2017, p. G5). They continue by referring to death, not as the end of life but a stage after which comes the strange life of ghosts. They believe that ghosts with their uncanny nature can disturb what separates life and death by creating an in-between world infected with strangeness. A strangeness that is now a product of the Anthropocene where “life persists in the shadows of mass death” (ibid, 2017, p. G9). What I want to do is to wander around these terrible, wonderful and complex landscapes, to imagine the worst, not only ghosts of the past but the ones yet-to-come, as ignoring them could only lead them to ourselves.

Bradly (2003) believes that imagination has the power of expanding our horizons and giving us different and new perspectives. Kant argues that imagination can lead to an aesthetic appreciation of nature as it helps us to release the mind from practical interests and to look for a more creative reflection of nature’s quality. Imagination helps us to avoid the clichéd ways of seeing, and as Bradly argues, makes us go beyond stereotyped modes of appreciating the environment. In addition to the context of appreciation, Bradly claims that imagination “as an important component of the integrated aesthetic” offers a more intimate relationship with our natural surroundings (ibid, p. 147). She refers to the imagination as “an unruly, irrational power that creates fictions and misleading representations of reality rather than truth” (ibid, p.148).

According to Bradly (2003), modes of imagination are divided into two categories of sensory and creative imagination. Sensory imagination leads to a unified experience of an object by ‘bridging the gap’ that exists between concepts and sense perceptions. Bradly explains that this category consists of a power “to bring
together past and present perceptions of the same object, and its imaging role in connection to memory and recollection” (ibid, p.148). Sensory imagination is also referred to as ‘reproductive imagination’ for its role in reproducing images of past perceptions that assist us with the identification of an object of present perception. On the other hand, creative imagination involves a creative power that, as Bradly mentions, is responsible for reaching beyond the ordinary. It is from this mode of imagination that we learn to be inventive, entertain possibilities, solve problems and create incredible sceneries. Creative imagination is also called the ‘productive imagination’ for its poetic quality that enables us to reach beyond the given.

In relation to nature, Bradly (2003) categorizes modes of imagination to metaphorical, exploratory, projective, ampliative, and revelatory imaginations. Metaphorical imagining is used in our aesthetic response in a way that it creates a novel connection between two different things that constitute a metaphor, where we can make sense of what we see. Not only does it direct our appreciation, but it also enhances our appreciation for aesthetic qualities through offering images for comparison. Exploratory imagination is the most deeply tied to perception, and it is where the mind searches for unity by supplying missing details or filling in what cannot be seen.

The other three modes of imagination that I will be exploring can be considered most relevant to the topic I am trying to explain. Projective imagination is when we intentionally replace or overlay something as seen by projected images to gain new perspectives on the object. This is where ruins become important in capturing our imagination for their mysterious quality that invites us to explore them. Bradly believes that spending time in ruins encourages us to “imaginatively live for a moment in the irretrievable past while simultaneously being aware of the power of time to negate the present” (ibid, p.155). Projective imagination is also vital for its participatory character, where through imagination, we can explore nature’s otherness that can establish a more empathetic relationship with nature.
Imagination, in its most active mode, appears itself in _ampliative_ imagination where inventive and creative powers are involved. Bradly defines _ampliative_ as “extending” or “adding to that which is already known”. “Ampliative imagination enables us to expand upon what we perceive by placing or contextualizing the aesthetic object with narrative images” (Bradly, 2003, p. 156). Bradly points to the sensitivity of imagination when it comes to temporal qualities of natural objects and environments by mentioning a piece from Yoshida Kenko regarding imagination and its role in Japanese aesthetics:

“As in a love affair between a man and a woman, ‘in all things, it is the beginning and the ends that are interesting’ because such stages of the phenomena are more stimulating to one’s imagination. In particular, we appreciate the exquisite contrast between the present condition and the imagined condition of the previous or following stage. Even when an object is at the peak of its beauty, the appreciation is deepened by pathos based upon the apparent contrast between its present appearance and what it will become later on” (ibid, p. 157).

Lastly, _revelatory_ imagination is used where _ampliative_ imagination leads to disclosure. In this mode, the power of imagination stretches beyond its limits and can result in new ideas and meanings. Through perceptual and imaginative engagement, this mode can lead to revelation; “It is through dwelling aesthetically and imaginatively on natural phenomena that we may achieve new ways of seeing” (Bradly, 2003, p. 157). Bradly refers to _revelatory_ imagination as reminiscent of poetic apprehension “here imaginative ideas – symbolic images, metaphor – open out new meanings beyond the limitation of literal language” (ibid, p. 157). Moreover, she argues that not all imaginative revelations can be pleasant or positive. Still, they can also reveal the horror and suffering of humanity and the natural world that requires us to search for meanings more deeply, however painful and challenging the experience is.
Bradly (2003) believes through all the mentioned modes of imagination, an aesthetic appreciation of nature can be achieved without altering and disrespecting it. She thinks our imagination and the division between irrelevant and relevant imaginings are guided by “the way the object’s qualities evoke and direct our imaginings”, “disinterestedness”, and “imagining well” (p.158). It is through practice, she argues, that we can accomplish the required skills to use our imagination positively. Developing such skills is “unquestionably a good thing” as it helps us “relate better to others, make moral choices, decide how to live one’s life, be creative, make discoveries, and so on” (ibid, 2003, p. 161). Moreover, she argues the power of imagination is not only limited to ‘fantasy’, but it is a much broader concept that involves valuable modes of engagement with the natural environment; and that entertains us with possibilities and can lead to appreciation, interpretation, and evaluation of objects.

In addition to imagination, emotion is another valuable source when it comes to aesthetic appreciation. “An emotional response is appropriate or inappropriate according to its object and aspects of the subject having the emotion, including particular beliefs surrounding the object” (Bradly, 2003, p. 174). Bradly argues that thoughts and beliefs cannot be only subjective, but also they can be shared by other people. And it is through this strategy that we can understand that “emotional responses are not subjective projections on to the landscape and how they relate to the whole aesthetic situation – subject, object and context” (ibid, p. 174). She thinks such understandings are not based on scientific knowledge, but they serve as background, common-sense beliefs that can blend with other people’s beliefs. She references _mono no aware_ (a Japanese aesthetics concept developed by Motoori Norinaga, in the eighteenth century that translates as “photos of things” or “sensitivity of things” or “tears of things”) to refer to the emotive affinity that can be developed between an object and appreciator; where it is the object that determines the type of identification that takes place (p. 179).
Going back to the topic of hyperobjects that Morton (2013) describes as the age of hypocrisy, weakness, and lameness, it is essential to start imagining the worst so we can develop a more intimate relationship with our surrounding environment. Morton mentions three forms of human reaction to the time of hyperobjects that includes: “the dissolution of the notion of the world”, “the impossibility of maintaining cynical distance, the dominant ideological mode of our age”, and lastly “the kinds of aesthetics experience and practice that are now thinkable in the time of hyperobjects” (ibid, p. 24). It is time to refer to ruins as a reminder of destructive powers, and to picture a place that “was hastily built, hastily abandoned, and almost as hastily reclaimed by nature” (Yablon, N., 2010, p. 20). Yablon believes in the intelligibility of ruins through a cycle of universal history. “According to historical laws of rise and decline that paralleled the natural laws of life and death, every great civilization is born, gradually approaches maturity, then succumbs to decrepitude and death” (p. 24). It is only through imagining an afterlife that we might be able to awaken the dreaming collectivity.

What happens if we could only imagine the world in blankness, absolute silence, without residents? Is this only when we can understand the depth of what is not there anymore? Gilbert-Rolfe (1999) believes that a blank sheet or a blank face can present themselves as already full of meaning through impassiveness and the absence of a mark. Are we able to communicate the incommunicable through imagining a blankness, one of an absolute spatiality? Gilbert-Rolfe suggests such absence can define what is out of human control: “inscrutability as the absence of putative empathy, the conversion of the trace from nature to technology” (p. 120).
"One must, as I have tried to do in funerary monuments, present the skeleton of architecture by means of an absolutely naked wall, presenting the image of buried architecture by employing only low and compressed proportions, sinking into the earth, forming, finally, by means of materials absorbent to the light, the black picture of an architecture of shadows depicted by the effect of even blacker shadows."

(Vidler, 1996, p. 170)
Conclusion

“It is a ‘domesticated’ nature that is imbued with human memory. At the same time, there is a permanence that the narrators in these novels ascribe to the earth and to nature. They portray nature as a force greater than humans (the idea being that after humans become extinct, nature will remain in some form).”

(Kohler, 2018)
I do not access hyperobjects across a distance, through some transparent medium. Hyperobjects are here, right here in my social and experiential space. Like faces passed against a window, they leer at me menacingly: their very nearness is what menacing (Morton, 2013, p.27).

In April 2019, at the time of the Persian new year, more than two-thirds of Iran was suffering from days of heavy rain and devastating floods that resulted in thousands of homes being submerged. Nearly 70 people were killed, and thousands of people were forced to abandon their homes and memories, leaving them to be washed away by the flood. Lorestan province was the worst hit due to the destruction of many roads and bridges that could have provided access to the villages.

Catastrophes, like the Lorestan flood, can express the unpredictability of forces, disasters that can strike anytime, anywhere. I aim to show what Lorestan would look like after generations of neglect when the city is filled with overgrown ivy in between its fallen columns and crumbling walls and to depict the existing ruin in imagined recompositions where there are only specters of humans left. According to Unwin (2017), ruins can become elements in the scenography of dreams where human imagination is able to project and find itself in a surreal world within the atmosphere of otherworldliness. He believes through the surreal setting, ruins offer to our imagination, we can travel back in time or forward to a dystopian future.

However vast this catastrophe seems, it is impossible to attribute it to a single cause. Witnessing the tragedy as it unfolded, many are wondering if it was natural or anthropogenic. Environmental experts, such as Kaveh Madani (BBC, 2019), believe that climate change is not the only reason for this disaster and that poor decisions in the past, like building lots of dams, developing cities close to the river beds and deforestation also contributed to it. For example, there has been a reduction from 3.6 million to 1.8 million hectares of the northern forests over the past 40 years (ibid, 2019). A more immediate cause has been building roads over natural canyons, which also further amplified the disaster. Thus, it can be argued that this was a human-made disaster caused by unsustainably developed development. The event was extreme, but according to meteorological data, the total rain, 28.4mm, was far less than it had been in the past when over 100mm fell in one day (Euronews, 2019).

“it is in the “afterlife” of a cultural object that its original value, intended meaning, and prescribed use crumble away, and its inner truths and contradictions are unmasked. Just as works of art and literature experience an afterlife in their posthumous “fame” or their subsequent reproductions and translations (the latter being the context in which he first employed this concept), so do commodities or even buildings assume an altered, posthumous existence once they have outlived their original function” (cited in Yablon, 2010, p. 245).

“Each one believed that an understanding of landscape’s past traditions was a source of illumination for the present and future” (Schama, 1995, p.17).

We, humans, are constantly reshaping the landscape that we tend to forget what was there before us. Ecologists name this forgetting “shifting baseline syndrome,” a situation in which our knowledge of the natural world is lost as we are unable to perceive the changes that are taking place (Tsing, Swanson, Gan, and Bubandt, 2017, p. G6). Tsing, Swanson, Gan, and Bubandt refer to ruined landscapes as the newly shaped and the reality of our time. However, they believe that the act of forgetting itself can remake landscapes, as any living landscapes are infused with traces of past that will remind us about our forgetting.

Lorestan province, with a population of 1,716,527, is located in the Zagros Mountains in the west of Iran. Lorestan took its name from the local people who called themselves “Lurs” and translates as “land of the Lurs.” Lorestan province, with a breadth of 150-180 km, extends for about 650 km from the north bordered with Kermanshah to Fars in the south. Lorestan is within the range of the Zagros Mountains that feed some of Iran’s most famous rivers, including Jarahi, Karun, Karkheh, and Zayanderud. Well-watered districts, along with fertile plains, lay between the higher ranges. Oshtorankuh, with the elevation of 4050 m, is the highest point of the province and is mainly made of dolomitic limestone. The lower areas remain in the south with approximately 500 m above sea level. Oak, elm, maple, walnut, and almond are the main species of the trees covering the province. In the west of Lorestan rests a series of fertile valleys, including the region of Pishi Kuh, in which there is evidence of human settlements during the Bronze Age (Izadpanah, 1984).

Fig 35 | Narratives of Ruin
This practicum is an itinerary that takes you through another life, a long journey in which you can understand the mortality, vulnerability, and mutability of the world we live in. Ruins are places with records of catastrophe revealing powerlessness with an inherited beauty that, as Roelstraete (2007) believes, has absolved from the sins of its former indifferences, creating an experience filled with an inextricable feeling of guilt. I am trying to picture a scenario of a future that is a result of what Tsing, et al (2017) call ruthless ambition, and the desire to participate in great projects of destruction while ignoring inevitable extinctions. “The terrain carved out by this future is suffused with bad death ghosts” (ibid, 2017, p. G7). Minakata Kumagusu argues the key in understanding nature involves eerie and strange stories of eccentric beings and shadow biologies (ibid, 2017, p. G10).

The story of Lorestan is a small example of the uncanny era we are living in, so we can learn the liveliness of landscapes, landscapes that “enact more-than-human rhythms”. “To follow these rhythms, we need new histories and descriptions, crossing the sciences and humanities” (Tsing, et al, 2017, p. G12). The Anthropocene is a new history where humans are considered as a geological force impacting the distinction between natural and human history. “Anthropos has become an overwhelming force that can build and destroy, birth and kill all others on the planet” (ibid, p. G12). In this new history, we must learn how to share our space with “the ghostly contours of a stone, the radioactivity of a fingerprint, the eggs of a horseshoe crab, a wild bat pollinator, an absent wildflower in a meadow, a lichen on a tombstone, a tomato growing in an abandoned car tire” (ibid, p. G12). These shared spaces are called haunted landscapes “that relentlessly trouble the narratives of Progress, and urge us to radically imagine worlds that are possible because they are already here” (ibid, p. G12).

In the indefinite conditions of environmental damage, we might be able to understand unfamiliar nature through the sensibility of science fiction. Maybe only then we can realize “life’s
enmeshment in landscapes, and monsters that point us toward life’s symbiotic entanglement across bodies” (Tsing, et al, p. M2). Tsing, et al believe in the possibility of learning the ghosts and monsters of our era through multiple practices of knowing, through inspiring observations and stories. Gaining such knowledge is essential as ghosts and monsters unsettle humans “from its presumed center stage in the Anthropocene by highlighting the webs of histories and bodies from which all life, including human life, emerges” (ibid, p. M2). In ruins, we can see the temporality of living and dying that have formed the landscape. It is through ruination that we might notice the connections between us humans and our surrounding environment, that might stop us from destroying it entirely.

Through the sublimity of the picture I am trying to draw, I intend to create an experience that involves a mixture of feelings from anxiety to astonishment. An experience so intense and deep that can elevate minds and lead to a greater awareness of our relationship with the natural world and our inability to control it. Through such experience, “we begin to see how humans are intimately bound up with nature yet also different from it: the ambivalence of feeling at home yet not at home in the world” (Bradly, 2010, p. 134). I hope we can spread a sense of respect as a result of such experience of the sublime that involves admiring features that extend beyond human nature. As mentioned, imagination opens new ways of seeing that we otherwise avoid. Imagination can lead to a sense of empathy by letting us situate ourselves in other positions. I explained the ways that we can harness our power of imagination in a way that helps us to overlook nature’s distinctive otherness and reach a deeper engagement with our surroundings. Such experiences are essential as they can bring attention to human responsibility for the environmental crisis through forming connections between different generations and establishing a relationship with nature based on nature’s interest.
Ruins, however stripped away from their historical culture, still present the triumph of nature over the “feebleness of man”, and the ineluctability of time (Yablon, 2010, p. 22). In this practicum, I have tried to show the power of ruins and their storytelling character by looking at its history, exploring more recent ruins, and imagining ones in the future; yet in a poetic way so, as Yablon mentions, we can “retreat into ourselves; contemplate the ravages of time, and in our imagination, we scatter the rubble of the very buildings in which we live” (p. 197). Thus, we might understand the general law of decay and that “everything comes to nothing, everything perishes, everything passes” (ibid, 2010, p. 25). Ruins help us, the ones that are mired in the present, to travel into the past and future, or as Yablon argues, “travelling to the ends of the earth,” however, through erudition (ibid, p. 27). I have intended to render an imagined ruin of an already ruined place not just to express a near future but also to present, as Alfred Dwight Sheffield suggests, the “past in the future” (cited in Yablon, 2010, p. 246). “In the strange light of the future interior, moreover, the present appears to contain latent traces of the archaic” (ibid, 2010, p. 246). Thus, I conclude my practicum with a quote from Walter Benjamin:

“It is in the “afterlife” of a cultural object that its original value, intended meaning, and prescribed use crumble away, and its inner truths and contradictions are unmasked. Just as works of art and literature experience an afterlife in their posthumous “fame” or their subsequent reproductions and translations (the latter being the context in which he first employed this concept), so do commodities or even buildings assume an altered, posthumous existence once they have outlived their original function” (cited in Yablon, 2010, p. 245).
Last words
When you leave your home and start a new life in a different country, there is always a feeling of displacement. Home and what it means in regards to your identity becomes more of a question. You are not quite the same person who left home, but you cannot precisely become a person of your new country either. You enter a third dimension in which you are never quite there nor here. It is a state of in-between with an identity of its own. Ruins, for me, are a metaphor for the life that was left behind. Ruins are so powerful as they are haunted by the absence of people and the lack of life, meanwhile leaving room for imagination. They allow you to look for and find signs of life and the story of how life cycles through.
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