

9_Design and History (Modernity and tradition)

Ruins and new narrations. Design strategies for urban re-appropriation of spaces in ruin in the contemporary city

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Observing contemporary urban scenarios it is possible to see that the city is the space of fragmentation and conflict, of the simultaneous coexistence between places that remain unchanged over time and places that are continuously in transformation. On the one hand, there is the preservation of the ancient heritage, which sometimes is too strict, on the other hand there is often the "destruction" of the heritage of a more recent past, that it is not supposed to have a value. These are two attitudes which, although opposites, both can lead to the condition of abandonment in the city. According to Anthony Vidler, the abandoned places, play a primary role in narrative landscapes: they show a break in the time of the narration. In contemporary cities we can often identify incomplete forms and unresolved narratives, we can find different Ruins: archaeological ruins, unfinished, recent ruins.

The past, for Walter Benjamin, is made of "ruins upon ruins" and Ruin is a perpetual and inevitable condition. In every epoch, time, wars, natural disasters have produced and continue to produce ruins. The etymology of the word, from Latin "ruina", "ruere", that means "to precipitate" reveals the changing essence of ruin, which is the result of a transformative dynamic triggered by different causes that produce a decay of the form and the role of architecture, but also the development of new balances which open to new design's interpretative imagination. According to different interpretations of Ruin, we can say that it is a shape of time: a condition characterized by an incomplete form, a form in progress, which continuously changes itself combining several pasts. It is a form that has hybrid and incoherent narrative abilities and that brings together contrasts: between artifice and nature, beauty and horror, memory and metamorphosis. It is also a "place of the imagery".

If the concept of ruin contains itself the idea of new imagination and new possibilities, today, instead there is an attitude to freeze and isolate the ruins of the past or to destroy what it is not supposed to have a value, like the ruins of recent times. The spaces in ruin are becoming more and more a problematic issue for the city. On the contrary, Ruin can be interpreted as a narrative text in which, through innovative architectural design, it is possible to create new narratives. These places constitute an "opportunity" for the contemporary architectural project, in order to "graft" new visions onto the city and from abandoned places, they can be transformed into places of urban reversal. In this way, it is possible to achieve a contemporary re-appropriation - physical, social and cultural - of spaces in ruin. In this direction, there are some architectural projects that try to rediscover spatiality, temporalities, old perceptions, lost relationships - among the site, the layers, the edges - acting through a continuous process between memory and metamorphosis, imagination and pragmatism. The paper tries to trace a framework of some contemporary design strategies and techniques which create new narrations for ruins: the re-composition of the fragments; the re-interpretation of layers and strata; the *montage* of different times and parts.