

# RUINS OF AARHUS: PLACES THAT LONG FOR TIME

RUINAS DE AARHUS: LUGARES QUE ASPIRAN AL TIEMPO

**RAFAEL FERREIRA-DE-SOUZA**

ORCID: 0000-0001-9563-3158

Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro

rafael.souza@fau.ufrj.br

**ETHEL PINHEIRO-SANTANA**

ORCID: 0000-0002-2357-6489

Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro

ethel@fau.ufrj.br

**NIELS ALBERTSEN**

ORCID: 0000-0002-5017-4645

Aarhus School of Architecture

na@aarch.dk

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## ABSTRACT

*This article proposes a phenomenological approach to the urban exploration of the ruined architectures in the city of Aarhus, Denmark, intending to explore the layer of time in the interpretation of architectures that once formed a material body, but which now face the uncertainty of their meaning for cities. This research seeks to present means for the reconstruction of the imaginary sphere of abandoned urban spaces through the interaction of bodily experience and photography. To achieve this, the research moves through methodologies based on visual anthropology and phenomenological models of multisensory apprehension, finally revealing intersubjective aspects of the material and immaterial elements of the environment that make up some ruined architectures of the city of Aarhus that create places of experience.*

## KEYWORDS

Aarhus-Denmark, phenomenology and architecture, ruins and architecture

## RESUMEN

Este artículo propone un enfoque fenomenológico para la investigación urbana de las arquitecturas en ruinas de la ciudad de Aarhus, Dinamarca, con miras a explorar la capa del tiempo en la interpretación de arquitecturas que alguna vez formaron un cuerpo material, pero que ahora enfrentan la incertidumbre de su significado para las ciudades. La investigación busca presentar un medio para la reconstrucción de la esfera imaginaria de los espacios urbanos abandonados, a través de la interacción de la experiencia corporal y la fotografía. Para lograrlo, la investigación se mueve a través de metodologías basadas en la antropología visual y modelos fenomenológicos de aprehensión multisensorial, revelando finalmente aspectos intersubjetivos de los elementos materiales e inmateriales del ambiente que componen algunas arquitecturas en ruinas de la ciudad de Aarhus que crean lugares de experiencia.

## PALABRAS CLAVE

Aarhus-Dinamarca, fenomenología y arquitectura, ruinas y arquitectura

### INTRODUCTION

The culture of ruined architectures has been experiencing a rupture of meanings in recent decades. If initially in the 18th and 19th centuries its nostalgic character was related to idyllic, sublime, and picturesque images, over the 20th and 21st centuries, the drastic changes in the architectural conformation of cities, together with the revolution in optical lenses, indelibly impacted the ruins culture. In this theoretical-argumentative research, therefore, we seek to broaden the understanding of the field of study of the culture of ruins, that is, of the ruinology that develops in the area of architectural theory, through analyses that consider not only the historiographical character of the ruins, but that can advance to an amplified sphere with a phenomenological method that considers the body's experience in the examination of its ambiances and tonalities.

For this, a phenomenological method of investigation is chosen, where aesthetics and the lived experience of architecture lead to a field action of infiltration in ruins in the city of Aarhus, Denmark. Developed along the lines of the urban exploration experience of the Urbex movement, the infiltration in ruins is operated from corpographies, through *in loco* experiences of climbing and crossing apexes, shattered windows, walls, ceilings, and misshapen masonry.

The phenomenological premises, therefore, serve as a framework to refine the experience of contemporary ruin, which goes through a different perspective of verification than that of the 18th and 19th centuries. In contemporary urban architecture, the apprehension of the meanings of ruins could be catapulted by the phenomenon of multisensory perception, operated from a repertoire of image records, located in urban corpographies. Above all, through the use of photography as a medium for communicating ambiances, tonalities, atmospheres, and the subsequent *découpage*; through chromatic change, as an inducer of diffuse temporality, the ethos of the ontological essence of ruined architecture and which, ultimately, reveals subjective elements that structure the aura

of its ghostly images. This paradigm shift would thus result, in a new visual culture of ruins, therefore indicating a passage from ruinology to ruinophilia: “Reflective nostalgias in the realm of architecture cherish a certain kind of ruinophilia in the public realm, a love and toleration for modern ruins that keep alive memories of destruction, and of multiple contested histories and coexisting temporalities” (Boym, 2017, p. 162), which ultimately heralds a different understanding of narratives in historically hegemonic ruins, dethroning the preponderant picturesque and patrimonialist conception in theoretical-historical approaches and, thus, replacing the discussion in the field of architecture and urbanism, in a theoretical- cultural perspective.

Investigating and exposing contemporary ruins in the city of Aarhus, Denmark's second largest city, initially seems like a nebulous goal, given the order of its urban spaces and the well-preserved architectures of both historical and contemporary buildings in different remodeled neighborhoods. Nonetheless, this paper emerges from the expectation that, even in the most ordered cities, ruined architectures are present one way or the other, and can be uncovered through urban explorations that look intensively and attentively for abandoned places and their visually striking elements, aspiring to the present time as discoveries from other times.

These ruins, located in metropolises, tell of broken places, often rejected, but still lived in the contemporary urban fabric and, therefore, places where time and memory work within the uncertainty of the future of cities. The impressions recorded show that the contemporary ruins of Aarhus appear as means for aesthetics, when the (ordered) city disappears. Such an aesthetic of disappearance bursts forth in the intermediate urban spaces, which appear to hide from the polished city and the refined architecture that shapes it—and is still city.

The ruins must be sought out, extended, imbued, impregnated with inversion, catalyzing an otherwise oblique movement that does not prevail when ordinarily circulating through the city is neither imagined nor possible. Hence, the contemporary ruins of Aarhus are located in opaque spaces, so they are figured as architectural remains clustered together and removed into a meaningless knot with its own aesthetics, yes, but meaningless as considered from the point of view of the ordered aesthetics of architecture and its urban ambiance.

Perhaps, the fruitful lapse of the monotonous waiting for yet another renovation of the city's architecture and, consequently, of its urban tone, is inadvertently seeking to accommodate the senses and, therefore, alleviate the disorder of the ruinous ambiance of neglected places.

In the present study, the compositional layers that structure the city of Aarhus and its adherent ambiances have been observed as a systematic methodological 'shock' in order to displace the ordering of its efficient network of urban connections, the aesthetic and functional ordering of its architecture, and the geometrical lines that easily take over the guidance of the experience of its urban exploration.

Such an approach to examining the contemporary ruins of the city of Aarhus is made possible by the *dérive*/drift method developed by the situationist movement in combination with the practices of the urban exploration movement known as Urbex, together with photography (Sontag, 2004). This method provides greater elasticity to the phenomenological experiences of the body in spaces, tending to blur what initially seems primordial in the path taken, opening up possibilities outside the itinerary itself.

Guy Debord, the self-proclaimed leader of the Situationist International, a group of radical Parisians in the 1950s who believed in taking back the city by any means necessary, writes in his iconic work *The Society of the Spectacle* that the modern world rigidly separates what is possible from what is permitted. The geographer Nigel Thrift further elaborated on this idea by calling the everyday city a 'security entertainment complex', that is, 'a mixture of control through surveillance and distraction through entertainment'. Urban explorers countermand those securitization and distraction efforts through trespassing, reporting back to the public with blogs, photos, videos and prose, bringing the hidden to the fore. (Garret, 2013, pp. 14-15)

In the specific case of the city of Aarhus, this expansion brought to the surface a city forgotten and little known by the local inhabitants themselves. The web of aesthetic protection, which comes in the wake of the accelerated urban reorganization the city has been undergoing, and which initially proved irrefutable, dissolved with the phenomenological reveries of the drift method.

The writings of Walt Whitman, Charles Dickens, Baudelaire and many other artists and groups, including the Dadaists, Surrealists, and Situationists, serve as inspirational figureheads for contemporary notions of the practice of urban exploration, with their passion for discovering dangerous, precarious, incongruous and absurd urban spaces. (Garret, 2013, p. 16)



### THEORETICAL BASIS

Entering a city with the intention of investigating is always a difficult task, which involves decisions that are sometimes methodological and sometimes intuitive. Cities, as products of human constructions over time, emanate ambiances that, within the social and human sciences, are characterized as an effect of the amalgamation of physical aspects and subjective aspects that divide experiences in urban spaces.

In order for immersion into the contemporary ruins of Aarhus to occur without the influence of pre-determined scripts, the multi-sensuous body became the main tool of application and disruption. “A focus on the phenomenological and sensorial aspects of place suggests that such a constitution of place through walking is also a multisensory activity” (Pink, 2021, p. 244). In this way, the shadows of the urban spaces relegated to oblivion could come to the fore and establish a discourse distinct from the usual one. Relocating the intention of searching for pristine architectures in the city led to the assumption of a kind of aesthetic-cultural anachronism, where the body encounters the experience of flow, in the gaps that are purposefully put aside from the routes and paths found in the city of Aarhus.

The ruins of this city exist, to the eyes, bodies and experiences of those who seek them, as Ingold (2014) would say. They are ghostly aesthetics that drain pre-disposed comfort and question the insipid that Farbøl (2021) would mention in his studies on imaginaries in architecture, urban experiences controlled and aestheticized to the extreme, a trend increasingly found in contemporary cities of the 21st century.

Defined as architecture in gradual decay, ruins are a sign of the passing of time. They correspond to a historical consciousness, a consciousness of time's past and of a distance, measured in time, between the present of the viewer and the remote past in which the building was erected and stood intact. As an artificial structure, a building is produced from natural blocks of stone given form, perfected, and delimited by the stonecutter, but as a ruin these blocks are partly reclaimed by nature in an implicitly long span of time, transforming the structure into something undefined or unlimited. Thus, a building in a state of decay is also a figure of temporality through the dynamic interaction it entails between art and nature. (Hansen, 2016, p.1)

Architecture in ruins is a fragment of the city, a derelict space on the urban conformation, an amalgam of time capsules that intertwines with its own concreteness, materialized in its debris. Scattered through uneven materialities, forming a unique structure in between the usual spaces requested by the dwellers' life in the city.

The abandoned remains of architecture are, however, available to urban explorers who, in response to their existence, make immersion into them an inescapable paradigm of bodily movement through the spaces of the city (Pink, 2022).

In this way, also placing the city dwellers at the center of the actions that guide their own wandering experience through the city and its constituent architecture, Pohl (2021) uses Jacques Lacan's concept of the Real (which is defined as 'what does not work in a world') to demonstrate how the ruins activate fragments of reality during the movement of citizens in search for the city's temporal and potential traces.

Such potential places —because they inspire something greater and beyond the present time— show through the absence, or the strength of the remains, the historical, political, and environmental reality of cities, allowing the materialization —through affinity or dissonance— of a personal relationship of certainty x uncertainty/ completeness x incompleteness, which defines all human nature. At this point, Smithson (2011) contributes to valuing the role of drifts with his 'walks through the monuments of Passaic, New Jersey', always reported in written lines or photos, where speech and images appear so strongly entangled and contaminated with each other that they are no longer separate: they are reality.

Urban explorers are fascinated by the flotsam of the built environment, locating sites of haunted memory, seeking interaction with ghosts of lives lived. When these places are located, their fragile deteriorations are captured in photos, the snap of the camera shutter like an exploding chemistry experiment where past, present, and future are fused. Taking the photo creates a moment of temporal juxtaposition, giving us, as the artist Robert Smithson once wrote, an 'illusion of control over eternity'. (Garret, 2013, pp. 30-32)

Flusser (1997) also indicates that every action implies a gesture, and that the truth of gestures of commitment and immersion/ submersion in ruins can produce certainties about the future of a city, even if they inspire a momentary lack of hope.

In this sense, Pohl (2021, p. 199) mentions that the "hopelessness expressed in ruin porn as a starting point to reflect on the possibilities of building a future in the ruins of the present." For the author, the idea of ruin porn is linked to the harshness of reality since "Ruin imagery does not simply offer us an escape from facing the actual conditions we live in, as often argued by ruin scholars, but is a 'real' image that represents the current state of our (non-)world." (Pohl, 2021, p. 201)

## METHODOLOGY

From the immersive research undertaken, wandering through different spaces downtown, and far from central areas in Aarhus, the submersion (deeper diving) into some places deserve to be highlighted as a methodological strategy. Based on interdisciplinary approaches derived from the fields of Anthropology and Communication, brought to the field of qualitative studies in architecture and urbanism, this paper stands as a mediator of the processes of recognition of contemporary cities, especially metropolises, using ethnographic tools —such as drifts and active observation (derived from the Participant Observation), in addition to a phenomenological approach, through photographs that serve as a medium for the drifts.

If the drift was defined by the Situationists as the ‘technique or locomotion without a goal’, it is also clear that this technique of wandering through cities may facilitate the encounter of places, randomly placed as a ‘Place’, through the power of agency of the ruined form with the aesthetics of walking and perceiving. Therefore, drift ‘gives Place to places’ and allows us to unveil a new aesthetic of immateriality, just as Wagner (2020, p. 72) says: “living with ruins prevents us from erasing, forgetting, or refusing to acknowledge our ghosts. To bulldoze, topple, or to replace, even as an attempt to cleanse ourselves of past wrongs, is also to deny ghosts their voices.”

Therefore, this research was developed in some places in Aarhus, always through wanderings guided by the mood and local atmospheres, and less by geographic realms, using photography as a support for deliberate contemplation (Sontag, 2004). The photographed places become dense lessons about different spheres of knowledge, as the eye that photographs changes the conditions of contemplation, “in other words, the image must exist in the photographer’s mind” (Sontag, 2004, p. 133).

It is prudent to consider that photography has played an important role in this new way of thinking about the world: “the abandonment of causal and linear thinking occurs spontaneously, there is no need to deliberate about it. We already think post-historically. The key concepts that support photography are already spontaneously embedded in our thinking” (Flusser, 1997, p. 39).

The locations found in Aarhus were: Godsbanen, Waste dump of the Botaniks Have, The old farm on the outskirts of Aarhus and the abandoned fabrics of Sydhavnen, Eskelunden, and Silkeborgvej. These places will not be presented in the chronological order of the urban exploration, nor are they related by taxonomies indicative of quantitative aspects of their importance. They are, on the contrary,

a revelation of their architectural elements that, ultimately, problematize and complete the links of physical and subjective concreteness present in every urban aesthetic experience, thus also bringing to the surface its tones and therefore, the key characteristics of its ambiance.

This photographic drift was titled “submersion” in this research—which means the necessary dive for a dense impregnation to the point of causing “bubbles of meanings” to submerge. “The effectiveness of the photographic report of losses depends on its constantly expanding the familiar iconography of mystery, mortality, and transience”, or even: “photography is the inventory of mortality. Now, a touch of the finger is enough to endow a moment with posthumous irony” (Sontag, 2004, pp. 42-43).

### **Submersion**

The area known as Godsbanen proved to be effective in incorporating submersion into the methodological process, with an emphasis on an impregnated approach that is necessary for deciphering the ambiance of urban spaces. This area, which is bordered by train tracks leading to the city’s central station, has been recently developed, with numerous newly opened residential facilities. However, large empty areas still remain on the site, with objects used in construction and/or fruits of the dismantling of surrounding areas. Despite the cultural use that is currently developing at the top of the northern section, such as the grassroots activities of Institut for (x), and the educational institution of the newly built Aarhus School of Architecture, to the south, a significant stretch exposes a forgotten city, or one that has been induced to oblivion. In this area, a *sui generis* landscape appears almost as a relic found in archaeological excavations of the city of Aarhus, a result, as Robert Smithson (2011) pointed out, of the dynamic relationships among city-landscapes in the spectrum of anti-aesthetics (Figure 1).

A second place of focus is the waste dump of the Botanical Garden (Botanisk Have). As ambiguous as it may seem, the relationship between two antagonistic spaces is subtle, and few city dwellers have been induced to explore this unhealthy place, exotically located within a public space with well-preserved fauna and vegetation, as well as attractions for recreational activities. However, it is in the northern part of the Botanical Gardens that a rather unusual gloomy place emerges. Investigating ruins is an act of disruption of normality and, often, it is necessary to open cracks so that the submersion can be revealed: “By experience, I understood, if not material adversity, at least psychological adversity—the shock of immersion in experiences that cannot be beautiful, the encounter with what is taboo, cruel, evil” (Sontag, 2004, p. 29).

**FIGURE 1**

*Architectural debris  
scattered across Godsbanen,  
Aarhus*



Source. Authors' own  
elaboration, 2024.

Here, the smell and multisensory perceptions of the spaces outlined a new path to be followed and, through a sort of *parkour*, the body is expanded from the everyday experience of the restrained step and encountering the unusual is made possible: a landfill with intertwined objects and textures. A persistent and revealing infusion of an aesthetic that is not very widespread in the city of Aarhus (Figure 2).



**FIGURE 2**  
*The material disorder in the  
 waste dump of the Aarhus  
 Botanical Garden*



Source. Authors' own  
 elaboration, 2024.

In academic conversations with associate professor Anders Gammelgaard Nielsen at the Aarhus School of Architecture, discussing the dilemmas and solutions for those who choose to work within the theoretical frame of phenomenology on architectural research, and taking into consideration our studies in contemporary ruins, he commented on the possibility of finding ruins in the outskirts of the city of Aarhus. Nielsen published in 2021 an important book on phenomenology, entitled *Atmosphere and Building Culture —Atmosfaere og byggekultur—* (The Architectural Publisher B), where he elaborates a work based on photos of rooms from different eras and construction techniques, accompanied by descriptions from the moment of visual perception of the space.

In the view of local inhabitants, the urban spaces and architecture of Aarhus are well preserved, and the city government or local developers quickly take charge of erasing any remaining ruins from the urban fabric, leaving the remains and rubble out of sight. However, it was common to hear about exploration in the rural areas, where ruins (*stricto sensu*) would be more common, given the flow of migration to developing urban centers. Fieldwork was then headed towards the southern end of the city, on winding roads that led to cities such as Odder. Although the 'direction' of the place was mentioned, no exact location of reference was given. Therefore, the fieldwork still took the *derive*/drift method to come upon the ruins in the rural area.

It was in this rural setting that the most impactful exploration experience took place, when coming across the semblance of an old farm, that probably had produced some input for the region. Its architecture emanated a particular ambiance due to the unusual conformation of its architectural remains. An imbrication of materials, a catalyzing disorder of a ruinous aesthetic. The ruin and its harmful dangers once again propelled an on-site analysis, where the body, impregnated with the contortions necessary for exploration, led to a mental imaginary of abject visual narratives (Figure 3, Figure 4).

**FIGURE 3**

*Entangled materiality in the remains: architecture of an old farm on the outskirts of Aarhus*



Source. Authors' own elaboration, 2024.

**FIGURE 4**

*Present, past, imaginary in the ruins of an old farm on the outskirts of Aarhus*



Source. Authors' own elaboration, 2024.

With each movement in the ruin, the body was submerged in a non-prospective catharsis, where the past, present, and future generated atypical injunctions. This context induced an irrefutable presence, a look at the rhythmic essence of a space in ruins, anchored in the multisensory perceptions of the body and the spirit of the place. With each image recorded, the photograph seems to capture in the presence the temporal state.

As Sontag (2004, p. 14) pointed out: “the photographs of the now devastated suburbs, of the disfigured and devastated rural regions, fulfill our portable relationship with the past.”

This scenario of analysis is quite different from theoretical-historical analyses of ruins, where the temporal and corporal distance leads to drawings and arrangements far removed from the presenced experience of the body-in movement.

In the ruined architecture of contemporary spaces, in a work perspective focused on the contingency of the phenomenon, the phenomenological approach emerges from the lived experience of architecture, through the aesthetic experiment and its forceful impact on the body, to the detriment of historical chronology based on a normative conception of past, present, and future. Ruins are a multitemporal space, embedded in an architecture built by time, over time, elapsing a profound elasticity in the tessiture that envelops our relations with time and space in society: “The past is not made in the image of the present, or seen as foreboding some present disaster; rather, the past opens up a multitude of potentialities, non-teleological possibilities of historic development” (Boym, 2017, p. 161). Beyond the mere idea of heritage, the repercussion of the body impacted by the ruins of a little-visited city produces the feeling that other places tell their story, and these places are as real and possible as the frenetic center of any capital.

The abandoned factories of Aarhus accounted for a considerable part of the fieldwork. The first were photographed in the port area called Sydhaven (Figure 5). However, this allowed little infiltration into the construction itself, except the warehouse in the eastern sector. But the ruinous ambiances are also exposed in elements, facades, surfaces, objects, and visual compositions that may indicate a ‘suffocating’ environment, which conveys a certain frightening moment due to the imagery it instills.

These are sinuosities that catalyze a medium for recording, communication and qualitative analysis in the area of architecture, with photography being listed here as a central tool in the study of ruins (Figure 6). Dusty facades corroded by the action of time



and lack of maintenance, in an area that is undergoing rapid urban transformation, and sees its former industries selflessly, and seduced into the fetish of high-cost housing.

In the meantime, the ghosts of the industries walk through the courtyards, feeling the 'sound' of the passage of time, or through the passages of times their own concreteness is established and inscribed in the city.

**FIGURE 5**  
*Shadows of the past in  
the abandoned factory of  
Sydhaven, Aarhus*



Source. Authors' own  
elaboration, 2024.

**FIGURA 6**  
*Post-industrial landscapes  
in Sydhaven, Aarhus*



Source. Authors' own  
elaboration, 2024.

The abandoned factory in the Eskelunden region (Figure 7, Figure 8) was a research object that took time and skill to infiltrate and conduct the investigation on site, inside the ruins. With fences all around it, its facades fill the field of vision of the city dweller who walks towards it. Full of residential houses on the streets in front and around it, the infiltration action could be risky in several aspects. But the aesthetics of an abandoned factory are striking and the possibility of entering it reverberated frequently. Ultimately, the disruptive act places us in an investigative state entangled in a nebulous 'non-system' of rules and coincidences. Through cracks and gaps, bodies squeeze through and reach internal spaces, which unfold into more than thirty industrial-scale rooms, completely dilapidated and filled with visual arts throughout their entire length, becoming a kind of hidden gallery of the arts that exist in the city of Aarhus.

The last factory gave the authors a fundamental understanding of the arduous task of applying theoretical concepts to the practical activity that produces the material, through which ideas are translated into new codification. The experience had already proven to be extremely complex, as it involved 8 km of cycling on a cycle path, next to a dense transport route. Only on the third attempted trip to the site did I finally succeed in infiltrating, which was quite delicate. The first time it was impossible to find the site along the road; the second time a flat tire on the bicycle prevented the logistics of access and finally, the third time, the authors were able to complete the fieldwork.

After finding a residential access road behind the main road, the abandoned Silkeborgvej Factory was seen (Figure 9, Figure 10), between the train line and the housing estates. Walking along the factory, which is completely fenced off, an 'employee' from some construction company approached, but he could not speak English. After he left the scene, we found an open fence and went inside. Little by little we got to know the terrain and, in time, we saw an entrance on the southern side, close to the train tracks. As soon as we entered by some stairs, we found ourselves in a large area full of mud, without light, quite dark and, reluctantly, we continued, curious about the images that would be fixed in the mind and also radiate to the images that we would see through the optical lenses of this research instrument.

Eerie figures, shadows, smells, and noises began to disorient the exploration, and the gloomy atmosphere mixed with the astonishment of the encounter with people, or of the encounter with explicit situations. The exploration unfolded through confrontation with the abject, with the walk towards the center of dilapidation, both in the sense of its construction material, as well as the aura that emanated from each space that was revealed, hidden by the brutal texture of an old abandoned factory, left to its own amorphous spaces.

The photographs of an industry in ruins tell not only about the changes in socio-economic modes and structures, but also serve as a panel for the design of an operational catharsis, because in it, the conformational envelope opens up in palettes, barely apprehensible and, therefore, revealing *sui generis* ambiances.

The usual projection of the intended predictability of the use of normative architectural spaces is stripped away, and the unusual takes over, which, through its precious insistence, charges the city dweller with the task of architecting his mental imagination with other features. They are the figures that counter the ordered friction of the city, providing tension in a vertex of kinesthetic perception, shaping a new aesthetic experience of the city, which is nevertheless still a city of ruins.

The exit from the Silkeborgvej factory was blocked by the closing of the fence through which we had infiltrated and, in due time, we needed a way out along with the bicycle. We then realized, in this experience, that the analysis of contemporary ruins includes the body, the method, the theory, the experimental action, and the subversive act as the basis for urban exploration.

**FIGURE 7**  
*Corroded facade of the  
abandoned factory in  
Eskelunden, Aarhus*



Source. Authors' own  
elaboration, 2024.

**FIGURE 8**

*Visual arts and  
destruction in the spaces  
of the abandoned fabric in  
Eskelunden, Aarhus*



Source. Authors' own  
elaboration, 2024.

**FIGURE 9**

*Rusty monuments of  
modernity, abandoned  
fabric in Silkeborgvej,  
Aarhus*



Source. Authors' own  
elaboration, 2024.

**FIGURE 10**

*Dilapidated walls through  
the exploration of the  
abandoned factory in  
Silkeborgvej, Aarhus*



Source. Authors' own  
elaboration, 2024.

The images brought by photography communicate ideas, values, and aesthetics distinct from times past; the idyllic and the sublime are restrained by a new aesthetic in the phenomenon of ruined cities, with their deconstructive imagery of enthroned, and yes, vulgarized myths and allegories.

### OUTCOMES

Emphasizing that ethnography “is based on the ethnographer’s own experiences” (Pink, 2021, p. 18), Sarah Pink is spearheading a strong emancipation of the visual gaze and temporally intersecting analyses, pointing to the visual field notebooks as means of reproducing the imaginary sphere.

Bringing together our philosophical, anthropological and photographic insights, the visualizations in Figures 1 to 10 may be understood this way: our choice of black and white photos is due to our intention to communicate one of the qualities of ruined architecture: its diffuse temporality.



By doing so, not only their atmosphere, but also their ambiance seems to achieve an intricate tonality. The chromatic change in the photographs grasps a certain 'multi temporality' that becomes engraved in our imaginations. As to the photograph itself, it captures—at the moment of picturing—the submersion in the moment and thereby also 'the eternal now' of the submersing experience.

By eternalizing once again the 'now-here' of the submersing experiential moment, the black and white photo turns the atmospheric-environmental experience of the ruin into a gesture that makes the experience amenable to being experienced by others in other times and places, even if we contemplate it with the disorders of the Anthropocene (Flusser, 1997).

In this research we have sought to reinforce the theoretical framework, taking into account the impact and paradigmatic rupture that images and photography have imposed on the visual culture of contemporary society and employing this into the theme of ruined architecture:

What is true of photographs is true of the world seen photographically. Photography extends the discovery of the beauty of ruins made by nineteenth-century literati into a genuinely popular taste. And it extends this beauty beyond romantic ruins, like those glamorous forms of decrepitude photographed by Laughlin, to modernist ruins—reality itself. (Sontag, 2004, p. 48)

Therefore, photography serves as a platform to communicate the 'ethos' of the architecture in ruins and its ontological essence, that is encompassed in its image and ghostly aura. It is an artistic endeavor born through inhabiting ruins, temporarily, to convey what's impregnated in its space and ambiance. The diffuse temporality would thus point to the idea of places that long for time, presented here, in the precise words that contain the title of this article, and so forth, it's conceptual proposal.

Embedded in what one could call a phenomenological search that investigates the ruinous ambiance of an abandoned architecture, the drift through city's space would form the crucial disposition that leads to the application of the theory in the fieldwork carried out in Aarhus, Denmark. The disruption of the action in the field seems to capture a grasp of tonality that would induce the influx of the dweller to a more 'raw' and 'dissenting' area of the city, where ruins erupt in between and amongst the subjective and also physical layers that envelop our existence in the city: "The ruins of modernity point at blunders of modern technology and teleology alike, reminding us

of our common worldliness and material history” (Boym, 2017, p. 161). Living amidst cities of ruins seems an experience haunted by an ambiguous and ambivalent state, which is carried out within the dense atmosphere and the aesthetic of an image and its ghostly aura. Past, present, future, times, places, images, they all tend to collide and result in a diffuse temporality that we represent here through black and white photographs —as the very first photos were shown, the products developed from the optical lenses that captured moments in time. This rupture reveals a cognitive apparatus connected to the knowledge of demise, finitude and, therefore, intersectionalized in ghosts of illusory wonders that permeate our core relationship in between architecture, image and place. The place of abandonment exists as a constituent, delineating distinct ways of inhabiting the city and its imaginary.

For the editors of *Arts of Living*, ghosts also live in stones and buildings, in earth and human-made ruins. Science can learn from these ghosts, ‘however unfamiliar their forms,’ but in order to learn from them, we must preserve them. They say: ‘Ghosts remind us that we live in an impossible present —a time of rupture, a world haunted with the threat of extinction. Deep histories tumble in unruly graves that are bulldozed into ‘gardens of Progress’. This passage, the latter sentence of which conjures the ghost of William Blake, makes the point that the landscape, the bodies of living and extinct creatures, architectural ruins, and other remnants of the past point the way to our future. (Wagner, 2020, p. 69)

## CONCLUSIONS

Ruined architecture forms a lexicon that is not always easy to assimilate. Often, its amorphous and gloomy aspects generate a distancing from the city dweller. Ruins expel feelings and reflections that exist in a mental and physical place of tension. If sensations and, therefore, what their immateriality and materiality emanate to the city dweller, are of utmost importance for their understanding, an addendum is made here that intends to underline the need to bring atmospheric studies closer to theories that deal with the abandonment of spaces that result in vacancies, voids, and eventually ruined architecture.

The persistent intention in the field of architecture to try to categorize what would in fact be a ruin has led to a disbelief that is quite tied to the material elements, or, in the case of ruins, the remains of their components. When we think about the effort directed at a technical-prospective diagnosis, regulations and systematization tend to guide the analyses that, by chance, become



manuals with methodologies and adjustment of procedures designed for the recovery, conservation, or restoration of the architectural construction under study. Nevertheless, countless ordinary ruins, which are scattered throughout practically all cities, continue to be relegated to oblivion, to obliteration, because they do not constitute part of the protocols that indicate a heritage that must be preserved. This approach not only standardizes and enthrones certain architectures in their heritage certificate, but also relates them to the regulations of heritage safeguarding institutions, which certainly play a role of utmost importance in the organization of the architecture and urban planning that make up a city.

However, ruins are components of cities and, at times, make up numerous and extensive spaces throughout the urban fabric. Therefore, here we indicate a less conventional proposal, linked to the activism of the Urban Exploration Movement Urbex, which would be, in our understanding, acting in a more effective and contemporary way in the investigation of ruined architectures present in contemporary cities.

Here, it is necessary to point out issues that involve the debate between ruin and abandonment. And perhaps the most successful path is to go to the core of this research, the sensitive ambiances in abandoned, ruined architectures. Now, if we consider the importance of the theoretical shift that the contemporary school of phenomenology has applied to architectural theory, especially in studies that dealt with the knowledge of architecture through aesthetic experience, in contrast to historicism, which has always predominated in theoretical studies on architecture; we can suspend the dictates of investigation and, in this space of openness, induce the approach to qualities that are inherent to the situated presence of our body in the derelict architecture dilapidated by time.

In this context, perhaps, we can assess that this study is not only interested in the ambiances of ruins, but rather, more precisely, in the ruinous ambiances contained in the spaces of the city and its architecture. Questions about concepts and theories, especially about Ambiance/Atmosphere.

One of the aims of this study was to characterize as concerning 'ruinous ambiances' rather than 'ambiances of ruins,' since the first concept can be found in other places, besides what can reasonably be called ruins. This would be especially appropriate in the case of Aarhus, apparently a well-ordered city. In this way, the categorization of 'ruin' or 'abandonment' is also suspended. Ruins are constituted by a process that, in different phases, exposes wrinkles, scars, and stains that give plot to the visual and aesthetic syntax that are part of

a systematic abandonment of an architecture by time. Abject, opaque, nebulous, gray, delirious, somber images, supplanted in the vortex of a void, contained in the traces of a city. In our proposal, ruins would thus be a process of temporal juxtaposition and in different gradations from the analyses most deeply rooted in the historically hegemonic conception of architecture in ruins.

This paradigm shift would result in a new visual culture of ruins, thus indicating a shift from ruinology to ruinophilia. This approach echoes a theoretical-cultural focus, to the detriment of the dominant theoretical-historical perspective that encompasses discussions around ruined architecture, thus refocusing the debate in the field of architecture and urbanism.

The ongoing research developed and partly expressed here, as mentioned above, focused on phenomenological contributions. This choice was made mainly with the aim of grounding the research on the visual culture of ruins in contemporary life, where the experience of urban exploration, along the lines of the movement known as Urbex, could act as the core of the analysis of architectures in ruins. The Urbexers or urban explorers investigate ruins inside their spaces, they take an insider perspective, a visceral approach, putting the body intertwined with architectural debris, and thus distancing themselves from the discussions of a patrimonial nature. This option is antithetical to the concerns of the basic theoretical-historical approaches to ruins, which dominated the debates in the 19th and much of the 20th centuries, especially in Romanticism. For the most part, the analyses had a predominantly preservationist and conservationist character.

Contravening this predominance, photography was chosen as a central tool and medium for recording, communicating and for qualitative analysis in the study of ruins.

Furthermore, the broadening that interdisciplinarity brought to the field of qualitative studies in architectural theory encompassed two disciplines that particularly enhanced research: philosophy and anthropology. The philosophy that permeates the entire phenomenological method can suspend the historical perspective on architecture and induce the lived experience of architecture as the basis for analysis.

Not only did philosophy serve as a sounding board for new models of thought; anthropology also provided important foundations for the methods presented here. Using photography as a research medium, ethnography and visual anthropology have provided an essential contribution to understanding the role of images in qualitative research and analysis.

Finally, research into the visual culture of ruined architecture has also been impacted by the development of the photographic apparatus, especially its optical lenses. The taste for the grotesque, the search for the mystical aura of ruins in their dark and hidden images, occurred and developed hand in hand with the infiltration of photography as a practice into the avant-garde activities of architectural culture, thus fostering new debates from angles and perspectives distinct from the visual arts of the past.

The search for these ruins, therefore, also delimits a search for models of beauty that become the reverse of the notion of a progressive city, turning non-places into figurative and possible places to understand our past. The ruins reside silently in discoveries of times gone by and in sublime sensations of each individual touched by the discovery of a (another) city.

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The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

#### **DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP**

**Rafael Ferreira de Souza:** Conceptualization, Research, Methodology, Formal Analysis, Writing – original draft.

**Ethel Pinheiro Santana:** Supervision, Methodology, Acquisition of funds, Writing – review and editing.

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