

DESIGN FOR NEXT

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edited by
Loredana Di Lucchio, Lorenzo Imbesi, Paul Atkinson

AESTHETICS
ECONOMY
EDUCATION
ENVIRONMENT
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Loredana Di Lucchio,

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Paul Atkinson

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Keynote speakers

Nicolas Nova is an ethnographer and design researcher, working both as a Professor at the Geneva School of Arts and Design (HEAD – Genève) and as co-founder of The Near Future Laboratory, a research organization based in Europe and California. His work focuses on observing and documenting digital and new media practices, as well as creating design fictions, i.e. speculative designed objects exploring the experiences of near future. He holds a PhD in Human-Computer Interaction from the Swiss Institute of Technology (EPFL, Switzerland) and was previously a visiting scholar at Art Center College of Design (Pasadena), ENSCI - Les Ateliers (Paris) and Politecnico di Milano.

Maurizio Montalti. Strongly rooted in a collaborative, research-based and experimental approach, Maurizio Montalti's work tends toward the exploration of the design discipline, aiming to investigate and reflect upon contemporary culture, thereby creating new opportunities and visions for both the creative industry and the broader social spectrum. Maurizio's practice, "Officina Corpuscoli", seeks to reveal unorthodox relationships among existing paradigms, aiming to promote the growth of critical thinking, through the development and materialisation of tangible alternatives. Maurizio holds a Master in Industrial Engineering from the University of Bologna (IT) as well as a Master in Conceptual Design in Context from the Design Academy Eindhoven (NL). His work has been widely shown in multiple museums, exhibitions and festivals, both nationally and internationally.

Gavin Munro is an artist and designer from Matlock, Derbyshire. Gavin has lent his hand to a number of different skills, from furniture to houses, and everything in between. Inspired by a childhood experience with a bonsai tree, and constantly encouraged throughout his life, Gavin finally made growing furniture his full time profession. He now lives in Wirksworth, Derbyshire, with his loving wife Alice, and their full-time boss, Lina, the lurcher.

Arturo Vittori is an Italian Artist, Architect and a Designer. His work is internationally known for merging cutting edge technologies together with ancient traditions resulting in projects on the edge between Art and Science that answer our society's most urgent needs. After graduating he gained experiences collaborating with Santiago Calatrava, Jean Nouvel, Future Systems, Anish Kapoor. He was Manager of Aircraft Cabin Design at Airbus and involved in Yachts and Cruisers design at Francis Design. Vittori, since 2002, is directing the research and design studio Architecture and Vision, Italy, he is also the CEO of the American NGO Warka Water Inc.

Derrick De Kerckhove (born 1944) is the author of *The Skin of Culture* and *Connected Intelligence* and Professor in the Department of French at the University of Toronto, Canada. He was the Director of the McLuhan Program in Culture and Technology from 1983 until 2008. In January 2007, he returned to Italy for the project and Fellowship "Rientro dei cervelli", in the Faculty of Sociology at the University of Naples Federico II where he teaches "Sociologia della cultura digitale" and "Marketing e nuovi media". He was invited to return to the Library of Congress for another engagement in the Spring of 2008. He is research supervisor for the PhD Planetary Collegium M-node directed by Francesco Monico. Since 2008 he oversees global art projects for Solstizio, co-founded by the artist Giuseppe Stampone.

Anna Pellizzari is the Executive Director at Material ConneXion Italia, is an expert on materials design, with more than 25 year of experience in the field. She has attended short courses at Domus Academy in Milan, Central St Martins of London, and the Fashion Institute of Technology in New York and worked in graphic design, textiles, design of materials, CMF. Her collaborations include several major brands in the sectors of sporting goods, automotive, interiors, packaging.

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A second life for Contemporary Ruins. Temporary Adaptive Reuse strategies of Interior Design to reinterpret vacant spaces

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Abstract: The numerous examples of newly constructed disused or unfinished (and therefore unused) buildings represent an important issue in the contemporary era. The significance of these structures is in the impact they have on the environment and on the life of citizens living around them. With the increasing awareness of the shortage of space, resources and structures, this phenomenon has now become an emergency. The goal of this analysis is to identify the role of *Interior Design* within *Temporary Adaptive Reuse* strategies geared to benefitting from *Contemporary Ruins*, preserving their identity and their memory in recent history. The aim of the paper is to envisage new future scenarios based on a creative and holistic Design approach, enabling *Contemporary Ruins* to become once more accessible and to bring them back to life by imagining how their social and cultural connections could be locally and globally renewed.

Keywords: change of use, adaptive reuse, contemporary ruins, urban demands, environmental sustainability

1. Introduction

The incompleteness of historical ruins and disused areas is a major subject in the creative activity and imagination of designers.

One relatively unexplored issue, however, is that of *Contemporary Ruins*, which represent an extremely important phenomenon in modern times.

In this paper, the word 'ruin' is used in its original meaning deriving from the Latin *ruĕre* – to collapse, to fall down, while 'contemporary' suggests a dynamic concept referring to our modern-day context. The term here refers to a recently built structure, dating back to no more than 100 years, in which humans are no longer present but are directly involved in the reasons for its disuse and abandonment.

The expression *Contemporary Ruins* refers to two macro categories: unfinished and abandoned buildings. The fundamental difference is that, while the latter have had a lifespan ending with abandonment, the former have never been finished and used. These, we might say, are born as ruins, they have no history and have never known human presence. The causes that lead to the abandonment of buildings, whether under construction or having once been once inhabited, may be many, such as natural traumas or socioeconomic factors. These may cover unavoidable events of a

technogenic or natural emergency nature, or even human choices, such as the closure of a local industry, the end of the activities that led to the original development (of an area) or the conclusion of a major event. Indeed, large-scale international events can generate new decommissioning processes due to the abandonment of the structures which, once the event ends, are no longer needed. Contemporary society coexists with an enormous number of ruins all over the world. These might be public or private, designed for handicraft or productive purposes, residential, military, business or green parks, and they may also be on vastly different scales, ranging from small buildings to infrastructures to whole ghost cities.

2. Ruins as a resource

The impact that ruins have on the place where they are located is undeniable. While it is true that historical ruins are respected as valuable heritage, the *contemporary ruins* discussed in this paper tend to provoke a very different reaction from the population. They are often seen as negative elements that disfigure the context, which bring about a tendency towards detachment and problems of various kinds. The main issues regard security, ownership negligence, maintenance and demolition costs, the spreading of depreciation through surrounding suburbs, and updated legislation. The other important issue is the lack of a general framework regulating the spreading of *contemporary ruins* on a local, regional or even national scale.

At the same time, the incompleteness of ruins, whatever the cause, becomes a stimulus for creativity produced by the dialogue between an incomplete reality and the imagination of the viewer. This is how a building survives in the limbo between two temporal requirements: not yet distant past, as in the case of a historical ruin, and no longer present, as a contemporary human habitat. Its future is unclear and mysterious. This appeal lies largely in the concept of gradual decadence, slow abandonment, the inexorable flow of time. The sight of ruins evokes different feelings; nostalgia for an impossible return to the past and the discovery of an inaccessible past tend to attract a perverse type of tourism. Intervention strategies include actions based on an approach which is similar to that of the restoration of historical buildings, resulting as a chance to complete, preserve, reconvert or demolish. The decision may be to demolish the residual testimonies and recreate a new urban fabric without any restrictions, or choose to preserve the ruin, building a new relationship between past and future.

Some theorists regard the opposition between reconstruction and complete destruction as a false problem because, since we cannot erase the past, eliminating ruins would mean denying history (Woods, 1993). On the other hand, highlighting the void of ruins, the space of loss, may constitute a valid alternative. Vacant buildings exert as much attraction as historical buildings. There is something intriguing about being able to enter and even touch ruins that are 'out of bounds'. There is no doubt that the size of the space and the evocative power of the place and its atmosphere, when processed by our imagination, create that sense of fascinating mystery that might be the cause of our interest.

3. A second life?

The natural destiny of ruins is their decline, the decay of their finishings, interiors and structures. This process goes on until ruins are perceived as 'other' places, places that do not necessarily have to welcome and interact with humans. They become like a parallel and alien world. This condition of 'alienation' plays an important role and makes ruins highly attractive, arousing our interest, curiosity and imagination. Ruins generally remain attractive as long as their decommissioning is maintained, becoming protected areas in which nature has the possibility to prevail again. Unused buildings and structures, whether finished or unfinished, may thus be contaminated and re-introduced in the natural cycle of life, exposed to constant change, until their decay and death. This process recalls

Gilles Clément's thoughts and his perception of the world as a big 'global garden' where humans 'leave space' to the natural flow of nature. With the same attitude, which shifts human from the centre of the scene, we wonder how far it is possible and appropriate to operate on the spaces of the ruins, interfering in their natural journey toward decay. Clément urges us not to stiffen the framework of the garden, or of the public space, but to act so that it can absorb the changes of the 'living' world (Clément G., 1999).

This paper focuses on the close relationship between us, the people of today, and *contemporary ruins*. This relationship is even more engaging than that with historical ruins, and it affects us directly because such structures were designed for us. Indeed, today's people are often directly responsible for the spread of *contemporary ruins*, interrupting the process of construction and abandoning places that are no longer useful. People are still involved in the existence of *contemporary ruins* and therefore have the opportunity to intervene more directly in the interpretation of their possible future.

When and why would human beings intervene to restore a space to usefulness?

The reason that triggers the re-functionalization processes of disused or unfinished spaces lies in the possibility of making them profitable once again through various approaches and methods. The best-known type of intervention, on which literature has focused more in the past, is the *change of use*, or *conversion* process. This approach does not necessarily require preserving traces of previous functions, but its main objective is to reintroduce the rehabilitated space into the economy cycle. This process often involves the creating of efficient and profitable new functions, which frequently leads to giving the place a new identity. *Change of use* has given rise, in history, to various types of spaces, often very similar, created, for example, by the re-functioning of industrial spaces, port areas or waterfronts. Such interventions can actually introduce elements of uniqueness and individuality, especially when they are spontaneous, as in the case of the industrial loft, or tend to reinterpret and exploit the traces of the past. The success of these processes is often found in the quality of the original interior, given by their size, light or materials, interpreted within the new functions.

Is the *change of use* process, conceived as a change towards a 'more effective final use', still profitable in respect to the short duration and specific needs of the modern era? Might this be one of the reasons for the spreading of *contemporary ruins*?

The practice of *change of use*, viewed as a 'final solution', is a strategy that is close to modern thought, which is geared to seeking permanent solutions, dimensional standards and clear categories (Branzi A., 2006). Instead, the mutability of the contemporary era leads us to flexible proposals that have a limited validity in time and then follow one another in more or less programmable sequences. The origin of the spreading of *contemporary ruins* is often the reduced duration of a function, the period in which a function keeps its value. This observation underlines the importance of the economic assessment of costs and benefits to be performed before any change of use operation. This is the reason why *change of use* and re-functionalization processes are sometimes blocked.

Adaptive reuse is the English term often internationally used to describe *change of use* processes. It has a richer meaning than *change of use* because it refers not only to the 'change' in function but also to the concept of 'restoring' to functionality following a previous decommissioning condition. The term 'adaptive' introduces an even deeper meaning, relating to the field of biology, which indicates the ability of living beings to adapt themselves to changes in their habitat.

Indeed, the term 'adaptive' also introduces the variable of 'time', assigning to the spaces the ability to deal with subsequent requirements of upgrading, and generating a sequence of different functions of temporary duration. These functions may follow fragmentary sequences or small upgrades, with different gradients of change or with a renewed dynamism over time.

This observation is very close to the concept of *resilience*, which is used in many different fields of research and which has been recently applied in architecture to indicate the ability of buildings to recover their efficiency after traumatic events, particularly of natural origin.

4. Designing with temporality and duration

The contemporary debate has shown that the efficiency of *change of use* interventions may be limited over time and that structures and spaces are constantly exposed to the risk of abandonment and vacancy. Therefore, the duration of re-functionalization projects is becoming emerging popular topic today and the term *temporary city* confirms the widespread diffusion of *temporary adaptive reuse* interventions (Bishop, Williams, 2012) within the urban environment. The importance of this approach to temporality, when pursued with the appropriate methods, is twofold:

- to test functions which are new to an urban context or innovative in an absolute sense;
- to interpret the local needs, being highly responsive, and to be able to easily update answers, together with the change of demand.

The value of short-term solutions lies directly in an awareness of their limited duration. If, before intervening, they are not programmed to be temporary, they often lead to a waste of resources. This is why increasing research has been carried out over the past 10 years on the management and implementation of these measures. Based on the above observations and the analysis of case studies from different countries and of different types, sizes and origins, we propose three categories representing various approaches to the temporary re-functionalization of *contemporary ruins*:

1. *Event*;
2. *Sequence*;
3. *'Interim'*.

These three approaches all start from the concept of *intermediate use* (Haydn, Temel, 2006), which means that they are dealing with structures from when they start to be a vacant space until they change their status. None of the three approaches, in any case, necessarily brings structures to their final and permanent use.

The first approach, defined as *event*, shows a unique and unrepeatable opportunity to access the site. It helps to convey the *contemporary ruin* values. This unique event could be a party, a concert, an art installation, a rave party, etc. It may last a short time, but it can help to highlight the potential of the site and activate both the other two strategies, *sequence* and *interim*. The interior design approach, which is close to the set design discipline, allows the creation of accessible spaces, welcoming users in safe conditions, and especially assigning a new meaning, a new identity, to the space, or enhancing the existing space without intervening on the architectural structure.

Sequence, the second approach defined here, refers to a succession of interventions, which may also be unrelated and carried out for different purposes. This sequence may remain 'open', not necessarily geared to a final use or demolition; it could be either programmed in advance or updated in progress. This approach, however, is likely to produce an 'alibi' for endlessly postponing projects that involve the responsibility of important design decisions with major duration assumptions and allocation of considerable funds.

The third intervention, *interim*, could be triggered when the space is vacant and prolonged until a supposed final solution is set, either a renovation or demolition. Ronald Rietveld, architect and member of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts, founder of the Master's Program 'Studio Vacant NL' at the Sandberg Institute, introduced the expression 'interim strategy', from the Latin expression 'ad interim', which means a transition lasting a defined time (Till, 2011). It refers to short-term interventions that allow a given space to be made active while waiting for a more significant, perhaps permanent, final state. The so-called 'interim' space loses the meaning of 'sequence' of short term solutions, as it is filling a temporal and spatial gap between two conditions of an area of which the last condition is often considered the final one. The term 'fast post' Expo has been used in Italy to indicate the intervention of temporary *change of use* of the Expo 2015 site in Milan, while waiting to decide on and finance a final intended use. The main goal of this type of intervention was to

gradually introduce the place and the people to a new use, without losing the familiarity gained while frequenting the site during the six months of EXPO.

5. Interior Design for the Future of Contemporary Ruins

Such temporary measures will not change the primary features of the existing vacant spaces, as *renovation*, *re-development* or *refurbishment* are meant to do within the discipline of architecture. Instead, these interventions are related to the *Interior Design* discipline, close to the setting design approach, characterized by light and reversible technology, without providing for deep changes to the existing structures (Kincaid, 2002). More specifically, *Interior Design* could help the structure to be 'open' to new possibilities, even when unexpected events occur over time (these temporary interventions could make *contemporary ruins* accessible and visible, thus revealing their true potential.) They can help to develop new ideas or directions for possible use, testing them in real time. Indeed, as asserted above, we cannot assume that the *change of use* process will always lead to stable scenarios.

From a wider point of view, the *Design Approach* is acknowledged as fundamental in the transformation processes of the contemporary world, thanks to a holistic view geared to imagining and building (Manzini, 2015) the future through the joint actions of various players. Designers, in fact, are able to think systemically and put together heterogeneous sectors of intervention that can work in synergy. They also have the ability to work closely with the local and social context, thus enabling them to respond quickly to needs that arise over time, contemplating reversible solutions, breakage or updating.

Therefore, the Design discipline can highlight the potential of the three *temporary reuse strategies* described above – event, sequence and interim – defined by different intervention gradients, durability and perspectives of use for the future.

Contemporary ruins can be compared, from certain points of view, with the famous social housing projects by architect Alejandro Aravena, winner of the Prizker Prize in 2016. He envisioned a system of incremental social housing buildings where the additional part can be more relevant to the identity of residents. He designed only half of the homes, the 'hardware' half with the basic elements, using state resources and left the other half to the inhabitants, to be completed according to their own needs and financial situation.

In a similar way, *interior design* can provide the 'second half', a direct physical interface between humans and *contemporary ruins*, even when ruins - by definition - have lost their original usefulness to humans. Interior space, therefore, may change constantly to adapt to humans when they decide to use the space again for new purposes, and *interior design* becomes the buffer, the lubricant, which allows these changes to be absorbed. *Temporary adaptive reuse*, as an 'open project' approach that does not necessarily lead to a permanent conversion of use, introduces setting-up strategies of intervention (Branzi, 2002) providing an additional system of elements that create new internal environments in the existing structure without changing it. In addition to this, the relationship between the new interior features and the original features of the structure often leads to a new interpretation of converted spaces. This relationship can introduce new future perspectives, envisioning changes that this new use could trigger in many different sectors, such as social, economic, urban, etc. By recovering certain categories defined by Graeme Brooker - professor of Interior Design at the Royal College of Art (UK) and expert of adaptive reuse strategies - for the reuse of vacant spaces, such as 'superuse' or 'reprogramming', the spaces of ruins can be activated, deactivated and updated over time. They provide a privileged place of experimentation for several recombinant strategies that confirm the importance of connecting the site-specific context with its cultural meaning.

Even when no substantial changes are to be made to the structure, the *interior design* project dealing with *contemporary ruins* starts with a meticulous site-specific analysis, combined with an understanding of the site's cultural value and its relationship with the surrounding area (Rietveld, 2014). This knowledge allows the designer to devise systems aimed at reuniting ruins with their local culture. *Interior design* can indeed convey narrative content about the relationship with the recent past, recovering the memory of the place, preserving traces of the past, predicting new future uses while retaining the traces of the passage of time. A narrative on the history of the surroundings connected with spaces rendered newly accessible to the public, through meaningful goods and services, encourages attendance and familiarity with the site. The opportunity for people to recognize their own identity in these spaces, through socially engaged and creative processes, fosters social cohesion and strengthens the local community. These observations highlight the importance of a *sense-making* activity that can combine design and culture through a profound knowledge of the society and local area at hand, building a *scenario* consisting of actions and uses of spaces. The case study project is EMA in Moscow. The goal of the project was to find the most economical and socially responsible way to deal with abandoned post-industrial land and to create a new identity, based on the history of the site. The plant had been producing electromedical apparatus since 1941; about a decade ago the company relocated and vacated the premises. The derelict factory site in the city centre was transformed by KOSMOS, a team of young architects, into a cultural centre for six months, before its demolition and commercial redevelopment into a new apartment block. The project comprised three elements: the existing buildings were wrapped in pipe insulation foil, creating one unique and distinctive backdrop. A "sky" of lights, electric cables and acoustic systems was set up in the courtyard, to allow the space to be adapted for different functions. The third element was a freestanding sculptural disk, which was used for projections. KOSMOS compounded various creative spatial interventions with a social media strategy, re-anchored an urban fragment in the public memory and enhanced its use as a space, although it was useful as a form of public relations for the project.



Figure 1. Project EMA, 2015.

Contemporary ruins are part of recent history; these recently vacated structures recognized by local people as a part of their own recent history, can recall either periods of fervent activity or decline, sometimes meaningful pieces in the history of a community. *Contemporary ruins* are bound up in a recent history that often has not yet been written - historicized - or disseminated; a history the complexity and detail of which risks being lost. The *Adaptive Reuse* process can thus provide an opportunity to reunite local culture with vacant structures, even though they are reinterpreted through new functions and meanings. This process allows the designer to establish and manage new functions, first of all in the local context, both connecting with the roots of the place and responding to the needs of the local people.

Not only does the narrative strategy apply to the local community as a target audience; it also promotes the site's use for an advanced type of tourism, coming to the surrounding environment from afar. Such tourists are interested in visiting lesser-known places of local history, which cannot usually be accessed.

Indeed, *contemporary ruins*, like *classical ruins*, are sometimes visual evidence of a failure or a traumatic event - as in the case of a nuclear power plant or the headquarters of a major company gone bankrupt – the appeal of which extends beyond the local community. Such relevance is often reinforced either by the iconic power of the abandoned structure, or by its uniqueness in terms of form and function. These features allow *contemporary ruins* to become part of a network of transnational interest and to become just as relevant and engaging as a still-functioning landmark building, such as for example the Guggenheim in Bilbao.

6. Conclusion

The Design approach provides some effective strategies for the reuse of *contemporary ruins*. It can protect their original nature, respecting their unique atmosphere while at the same time restoring their important connection with their surroundings.

Interior Design allows access to *contemporary ruins* without touching their original architectural structures or changing their identity, but by assigning them new meanings and attracting new visitors. We can thus re-establish a relationship with the site and the local community, and on a larger scale too, and give a second life to such spaces, creating a new life cycle, the duration of which varies in each case. *Temporary Adaptive Reuse* is actually a tool for testing innovative functional and social concepts, and it can absorb the margin of error within its strategies of intervention, such as the *sequence* or the *event*.

The open question of the paper is to understand to what degree the three aforementioned categories - *event*, *sequence* and '*interim*' - can be planned a priori, without losing sight of immediacy and its relevance to meeting the changing needs of a society and managing the ongoing changes to a ruin itself. It might be also relevant to define to what extent it is appropriate to design temporary solutions for the interiors of *contemporary ruins* and when a permanent solution may be more effective in respect to contemporary requirements.

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