

[SLIDE OF CASPAR DAVID FRIEDRICH]

The impact of an event, especially of life-shocking proportion, embroiders into memory not only the event itself, but also the location of where one was when the event or news thereof became known. Memory-time-space creates a duality; a being-in space at a particular time, and also an reverberance-of - each time we consciously and physically return to the threshold of that space. This relationship of memory-time-space is individual and fragile, a construction of scintillas, of ruin, in and of memory; fragmentary, immersive, flush with meaning, yet scant on details. It is a space in between - where we dream in measurements of the wistful, the regretful, and the '*could have been*', we live our lives atop our ruins of memories.

This internal space bears many similarities with our external and collective living spaces. In our external world we equally live amongst the ruin, drawing from these spaces inspiration, citation, fear and the notional complexities of the sublime. From the ruin *extra corpus* we project ourselves into space and time through narrative, reflection, and myth. These strangely empty spaces are a window on the phantastic, a window from which we have peered from since our collective infancy.

[SLIDE OF BABALONIAN CLAY MAP]

Preserved in early Babalonian artefacts are the earliest mappings of the ruin. The clay map of the world includes the ancient, and vanquished Sumerian cities of Ur, Uruk, and Nineveh, establishing our first relationship between the abandoned and fragmentary with the uncanny. It is a lens onto the unknown, and arena of the supernatural; from the translations of the Brititish Museum the inscription to the map reads:

"... ruined cities whom Marduk watches the ruined gods who ... in the midst of the sea ...
serpent, great dragon, between Anzu, scorpion-man ..."

[SLIDE OF SOD&GOM AND TOWER BABEL]

This relationship between the ruin and the otherworldly has endured although gradually mutating in position as allegorical agent. The gradual play between uncanny and the aesthetic has been manifest throughout millenia of cultural practice through the mechanisms of narrative, reflection and myth; from the ghost stories of Xenophon, we progress from the ruin-in-waiting of the Tower of Babel to the meta-ruin of Sodom and Gomorrah as agent of carnal human failings.

[SLIDE OF ARABIC RUINS]

From the architecture of damnation to a dilapidation for dreams; first century Arabic poetry situates a motif of 'stopping by the ruins' (wuquf 'ala al-atlal) as a proposition of time standing still, of the ruin becoming an ephemeral and spectral agent in the recollection of the salad days of youth.

[SLIDE OF GIANTS BUILDING STONEHENGE 1325]

From the middle ages, the rank of the ruin is elevated again through Authurian legend; completing a transit from horror to heroic. Although still demarcated as a place out of time the ruin arrives as an index and focal point between the historical and revelatory, a threshold to a state of knowing and marker to the temporality of all human effort. This we can observe in the dissection illustrations from the 1543 publication of *De humani corporis fabrica* by Andreas Vesalius.

[SLIDE OF VESALIUS]

Vesalius is credited with a profound shift in our understanding of anatomy. Through the highly uncommon practice of dissection and direct observation he debunked the theories of the prior authority - Galen. Vesalius lived in the renaissance period - one that was equally preoccupied by the rich history of the strictly ordered, yet fragmentary classical past, and one that was captivated by the possibilities of new discoveries in all fields. That Vesalius asked Jan Van Calcar, a student of the painter Titian, to render the figure in a ruined landscape is no act of whimsy - it speaks of the greatness yet fragility of the past and our own fleeting presence in a world of profound possibilities.

[SLIDE OF CAPRICCIO]

However, once a taste for associating antiquity with contemporary human endeavour had been established, it was inevitable that through the emotional entropy of sentimentality that the ruin transitions from a signifier to a subject; this transit spanning both the Renaissance and Baroque is evidenced through the works of Alessandro Salucci, Marco Ricci, and Giovanni Paolo Panini. This style of painting, known as *capriccio*, is a contrived artistic composition, it is of the ruin ideal, once out of time, and now also out of place.

[SLIDE OF PIRANESI]

This fantasy view of ever increasing splendor attains complete pictorial saturation as observed in the reconstructions of the ancient Vias Appia and Ardeatina of Piranesi. Painted multiple times from 1761 these works, through the continued challenge to time and space, begin to anticipate the considerations of Walter Benjamin's ninth fragment within *On the History of Philosophy*, where history is considered as a backward facing supernatural being:

“Where we see the appearance of a chain of events, he [history] sees one single catastrophe, which unceasingly piles rubble on top of rubble and hurls it before his feet”

This rubble upon rubble; unending decadence of detail, flush of ornament becomes by 1796, a ruin not of the past but a collapse of the present, as if the critical mass of ornament is omen to the demise of the future self.

[SLIDE THE Robert de Ruin]

This is demonstrated by Hubert Robert's painting the future ruins of the Grande Galerie of the Louvre and culminates in Gustav Dore's 1872 sketching of *The New Zealander* the first touchstone of our collaborative work ***The Sound of the Floor***.

[SLIDE THE NEW ZEALANDER]

The New Zealander presents us with a post apocalyptic vision of London, a desolate ruin frozen under a brooding sky being sketched by a tourist, denizen of the newest of the new world. This sketch is not situated as a document of the present; neither a fantasy of the ideal, a mode of wayfinding, or a symbol or subject of the fragility of previous human grandeur but instead as a stark warning. That downfall is inevitable, and that whatever mourning immediately befalls cataclysm, will become idle entertainment or enchantment for future generations to come.

This prime motivator for *The Sound of the Floor* instigates a locus of research practice that explores this implication of the ruin as harbinger of doom, wrought by the post-optimal effect of late-stage capitalism. In this space we propose an animated representation of an architecture of disaster in art.

The recent industrial / suburban ruin is a different beast - It represents a kind of intoxicating mix of potential, wonder, imagination, pleasing and anarchic difference on the one hand, and on the other the palpable unease of loss, production or cultural dissolution, a dissonant fear of the fragility and vulnerability of all things. It acts as an index of the impermanence of things that are borne of the past and project into the future- asking us to consider what has been and *what will happen here*. *What will happen here* is the pertinent issue of our times in the emergency that is climate change and neo liberal corporate colonization. *The sound of the floor* is fundamentally concerned to pre visualize the future ruin or future erasure, a condition of absence that is coolly grotesque in its unnaturalness. It is a concoction of imagined and real scapes in the Tamaki / Auckland environment. Imagining future disasters in art and architecture is not so much a quest for accuracy forthwith but an uncanny interference with the prevalence of the atemporal time of now.

The context in which the work is shown is fleeting and ever changing in direct contrast to the solidity and solemnity of the forms portrayed. The window from which we have peered becomes the frame of the screen (or frame of the projection) through which we see the work.

Temporary wasteland spaces can become a site for occupancy outside of normalized, homogenised and sanitized spaces of our larger institutions- schools, prisons, hospitals, malls. The ruin is an aesthetic deregulation, which engenders a deregulation of the occupancy. Interaction is not scrutinized, it might be playful, it might be destructive, it might be illicit, it's likely to be temporary, and rather different in nature at different times of any given day. As Edensor states in *Industrial Ruins*“ ... [R]uins act as spaces which address the power embodied in ordering space“.¹ Interventions are made, marks are left, the site becomes one that is teeming with these traces, the relationship between inside and outside might be quite reshaped by the degradation of the structure, the patination of the materials is a comforting salve to gentrification. Gentrification consolidates and aestheticizes the homogeneous, the minimal, the clean, the hygienic, a kind of militarization of culture.

The site of an industrial or suburban ruin is not just a place of freedom . Structures deemed not fit for purpose, abandoned and disheveled, become an eerie echo inside the capitalist illusion of ever advancement and ever increasing profitability of industry, land and production. Sites left to slowly deteriorate in stillness, quietly contest the acceleration of capitalist advancement. Quite unlike a monument of an ancient culture or even the fabricated ruins of the picturesque, the late modern/ post modern ruin is borne out of redundancy not longevity. It is not concerned with philosophical vanitas and notions of emperhamilty. Instead the redundant structures represent a haunting disparity of neglect, where the individual and community are alienated from opportunities for cultivation, production (employment) and occupancy by the modes of corporate and consumerist colonization.

The sound of the floor 2019 is hypothetically posited as a local setting, albeit homogenised, exaggerated and devoid of occupancy. The site, the history of its occupancy, post colonial and corporate colonial trauma of the past are reconfigured as an architecture of disaster, in art. Militarisation of culture and a terrifying *horizon of expectation* is in regard to Virilio symbolically embedded in stockpiled yet redundant forms - bombs, confidence courses, water towers and silos are held in a quiescent state, while the viewer (or camera) like Benjamins anthropomorphisation of history, moves only backwards through the sublime disaster. The viewer confronts the myth of future via the legacy of the past. They are toured through a kind of accelerated archaeology where recent past becomes ancient history in the endless production of new.

Looking backwards:

Francois Cusset said "After all, we are the children of modernity, a modernity that laid out the insolent project of overtaking and destroying tradition in the 19th century. This tradition, pushed out the door, is now coming back through the window, like so many other things. Modernity was a project that was meant to impose, at best, a progressive dogma and a continuous programme to improve living conditions. In its hysterical version, it imposed permanent, potentially apocalyptic change and a tearing from ancient foundations that was all the more violent given that it was compulsory and unanimously praised." 64

Looking forwards:

Virilio states : " We are in fact waiting for something, in enormous expectation of something, and present horror films are not just the formulaic products of Hollywood cinema and the desire to frighten viewers, as though there were a hell at the heart of the world . No, what we are seeing here is the recent emergence of a sense of the end of the world - in no sense an apocalyptic or millenarian End, synonymous with an End of History but, more simply , an end of geography, as though the all-too- famous consumer society had ended up consuming planetary space- time, a role in which it has been duly replaced by the recently developed communication -based society" 109

Hal Foster in his recent book *Bad News Days* determines that there are a number of ways in which artists have anticipated, resisted and protested violent manifestations of dischord over the last 25 years. Foster argues that the condition of neo liberal dominance that saw wholesale market deregulation, an unswerving assault on the modern social contract, welfare slashed, and unions gutted, the distortion and strangulation of the plausibility of truth and the ever present normalised emergency post 9/11, can be located in four tenets. These are; the abject, the archival, the mimetic and the precarious. These make for useful approaches in considering work that challenges and predicts emergency (and while a full blown discussion of these approaches as espoused by Foster is beyond the extent of this paper) we would like to posit another subheading, touched on in part, by Foster's exposition on *precariousness* in Thomas Hirschorn's work .

The addition we would like to posit is the state of *dispossession*. Art that deals with the purgatory like state Dispossession lay bare wider global malaise, where corporate agendas triumph over the occupants, where the individual (or community) is arrogated from the land, from cultural specificity, from self determinism, in a post truth and post critical paradigm. *The sound of the floor* is a land reimagined as dispossessed from all but the viewer and perhaps even them. For as Cusset says -*When the conditions for the collective management of conflicts, when unions or parties no longer offer credible recourse, when interpersonal relations no longer exist outside of generalized competition, it becomes difficult to exit from the invisible supposedly benevolent and stimulating prison that is mandatory individuality*" Cusset 35

Joshua Comaroff and Ong Ker Shing locate a new found horror in the form of shock . Indeed they argue that shock is the central force in the economic political and cultural order - ' *In this form a sounding of our souls functions in the service of intimidation and pacification. It becomes in effect a new weapon of social control. Its use gives rise to a collectively sanctioned state of emergency or sovereign "exception" in which centralized authority can be*

expanded in the name of security. The continual threat of destabilisation, of chaos and anarchy, justifies the incremental seizures of the public sphere by capital and its facilitators"²¹

Structures built (both in the world and virtually) embody in their construction a quotient of failure, an inherent preposition to it's ultimate destruction, a proclivity to lay open to redundancy and erosion and for that intrinsic vulnerability to in turn make way for something else, however far from its origin. This failure in the stability of things forms a type of horror, but the halting of this process draws out the uncanny.

The sound of the floor is a projected future ruin of stasis- a dispossessed dream that questions in its architecture of disaster what becomes of the en masse industries now redundant in purpose and partial in form, what becomes of the ever present foreboding of the emergency, when the forever now of an atemporal world becomes the future disaster of a memory yet to be had.

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