





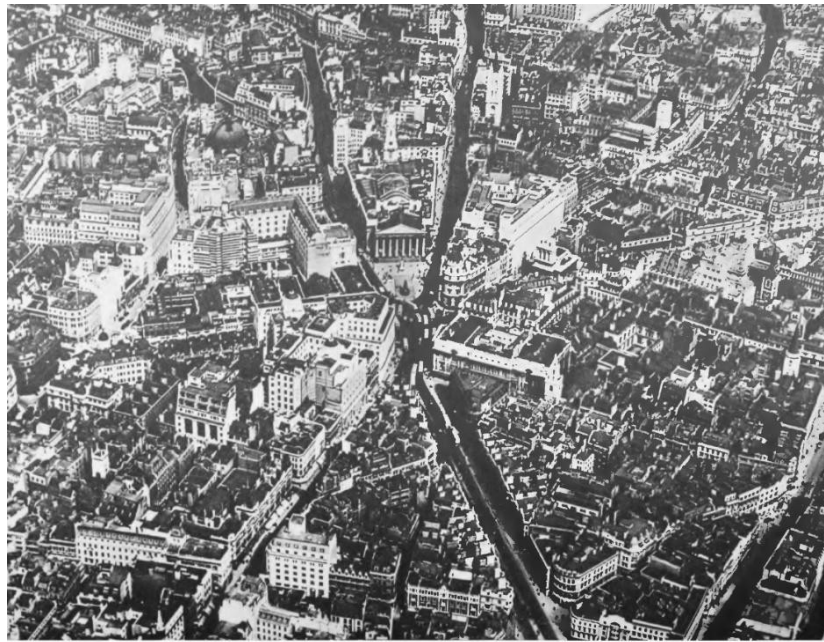




**Lessons from the void**

**A plea for the brownfield**

## 1.Chapter: Past



The eye of the airplane is pitiless. This time we have the actual record of reality. What an appalling thing !  
Do human beings live here ? Do they consent to do so ? Will they not revolt against it ?

Figure 1

*The eye of the airplane is pitiless. This time we have the actual record of reality. What an appalling thing! Do human beings live here? Do they consent to do so? Will they not revolt against it?*<sup>2</sup>

These lines are written by the modern architect Le Corbusier under an aerial photograph of the London Stock Exchange and its surroundings. The architect looks questioningly into an indeterminate future; he does not want to believe that people live voluntarily in such cities. Le Corbusier could do nothing with such urban planning, but he was fascinated by the airplane. At the request of the London publication *The Studio*, he wrote a text on the subject of aviation in 1935. Le Corbusier appeared extremely enthusiastic about the new prospects and possibilities that the airplane would bring to architecture and urban planning. His text with the

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<sup>2</sup> Le Corbusier, *Aircraft* (New York, N.Y.: Universe, 1988).

The title *Aircraft* always reads like a manifesto. A manifesto that is fervently directed against the old architecture, against the universities, against common curricula, against the professors and against the lecture halls. Le Corbusier, inspired both by the shape of the airplane [3] and by the new perspectives it allows on the cities [4], is therefore vehemently in favor of the workshops, of the engineers, of the machines and of the functionality. The airplane plays a key role and becomes the architect's hope.

In the same year as *Aircraft*, Leni Riefenstahl's Nazi propaganda film *Triumph of the Will* is released in Germany. The film opens with a scene filmed from an airplane showing various German cities from the air.

The plane flies low to impressively stage the mass marches of the National Socialists taking place on the ground for the film. All of Germany appears mobilized and in a mood of departure. A nation appears on the move, the message of unstoppable change is propagated to the population. At the same time, Le Corbusier also foresaw great changes and stated in his text what the

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[3] *Le Corbusier, in Vers une architecture extolled the characteristics of the plane and its aerodynamic struts, adopting their forms for the entrances to villas (the Villa Stein at Garches) and the legs of dining tables. For the early functionalists there was an unbroken path between the precise contour of a flight machine and the aesthetics of modernity. The journal L'Esprit Nouveau between 1918 and 1923 published articles on houses built by the Voisin aircraft factory, houses conceived like airplanes, built on assembly lines like airplanes, moved to their sites like airplanes, and that were, in Le Corbusier's terms, fit for the upbringing of tomorrow's engineers and technocrats. Airplanes were, after all, simply "houses that fly". Vidler, Warped space.*

[4] *We desire to change something in the present world. For the bird's-eye view has enabled us to see our cities and the countries which surrounds them, and the sight is not good. We knew quite well that our cities were steeped in indignities abhorrent to men; that our cities made martyrs of men, and that we are deprived of "essential delights," huddled and shut up in tanneries which at every day and at every hour are undermining us, ageing us, destroying the species, and making us serfs. The airplane is an indictment. It indicts the city. It indicts those who control the city. By means of the airplane, we now have proof, recorded on the photographic plate, of the Tightness of our desire to alter methods of architecture and town-planning. There is a degree of error that cannot be exceeded. It is the moment when the conditions which have plunged persons and society into apathy, misery, and misfortune, must be revolutionized. The brief and rapid history of aviation, so close to us, explains to us the hostile elements surrounding us, and provides us with the certainty that soon the very laws of life will justify us. Corbusier, Aircraft.*

new perspective from the air means: "The eye now sees in substance what the mind formerly could not subjectively conceive. It is a new function added to our senses. It is a new standard of measurement. It is a new basis of sensation. Man will make use of it to conceive new aims. "<sup>5</sup> And almost casually he adds: "Cities will arise out of their ashes. "<sup>6</sup> As if infected by the pioneering spirit that prevailed in the still young aviation, Le Corbusier longs for a different urban planning, even if this meant the destruction of the present and the old. For him, the architecture of his time is nothing more than the expression of old capitalist power structures that do not allow for an organic life that corresponds to the nature of man [7]. As philanthropic as these words may sound at first, his criticism of inhumane urban structures must be taken with extreme caution. What Le Corbusier wrote in 1935 as an optimistic and positive plan for the city of the future reads in retrospect like a gloomy vision of the future.

In 1941, just six years after the disparaging remarks about the aerial view of the London Stock Exchange, the capital of Great Britain was attacked from the air by German bombers. *Aircraft*, as they still appear aesthetically staged in numerous illustrations in *Aircraft*, razed entire cities from Europe to Japan to the ground during the Second World War, creating precisely the space for new things that Le Corbusier had previously dreamed of: "In order to

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<sup>5,6</sup>Le Corbusier, *Aircraft* (New York, N.Y: Universe, 1988).

[7] *With its eagle eye the airplane looks at the city. It looks at London, Paris, Berlin, New York, Barcelona, Algiers, Buenos Aires, San Paulo. Alas, what a sorry account! The airplane reveals this fact: that men have built cities for men, not in order to give them pleasure, to content them, to make them happy, but to make money ! Thus all that is dearest to the heart, the very atmosphere of daily activity, love, friendship, sorrow the house and the view on which its window opens all this is a morose and brutal environment without character or attraction.*  
Corbusier, *Aircraft*.





His there would also have been widespread flooding. Paris only narrowly escaped this catastrophe and [13].

### Utopias for Yesterday

One can only speculate whether Le Corbusier regretted his sympathy for fascism and Hitler after the war, but in the end the architect's destructive visions were realized. The reshaping of Europe that Hitler had embodied for him until then now took place even without his victory.

Cities lay in ruins and modern architecture and its representatives realized their visions of modern life in the gaps left by the war. They became the celebrated architects of the post-war period. The extent to which these new buildings lived up to the utopian ideals of a better organic life is questionable, and it seems more likely that Le Corbusier also ultimately adapted to economic conditions and that his great urban planning and social visions remained limited in the postwar period. Le Corbusier's architectural ideal of urban planning beyond dense and chaotic streets full of traffic, noise and bad air were not realized even after the Second World War.

The situation was similar for modern architects in Germany. There, the construction industry was booming in the 1950s, and the large housing estates of Gropius or Taut were mainly realized on the outskirts of cities. In the destroyed cities, on the other hand, the centers were not infrequently reconstructed instead of completely redesigned. This was partly because the residents wanted the old familiar back and partly because the responsible authorities were still working with the same people.

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13] Why Paris was spared in the end is not completely clear. The direct order from Hitler was to destroy Paris, but this did not happen. The German General Dietrich von Choltitz, who was stationed in Paris and in command at the time, presents the rescue of Paris in his book *...Brennt Paris?* as his merit. In Volker Schlöndorff's film *Diplomatie* (2014), this view is partly supported, although here it is a Swedish diplomat who persuades the general to spare Paris. Others think it was the Resistance that forced von Choltitz to surrender before Paris could be destroyed.

were occupied as they were at the time before the war, and so these people were able to have a significant influence on the reconstruction. Although the *Association of German Architects* pursued a modern course, the great new beginning failed to materialize and the modern buildings merely blended in with the old ones instead of replacing them. As in other cities in Europe, there was no fundamental redesign of urban planning.

So the question arises, what became of the utopias of modernism? The apartments of Gropius, Corbusier and Taut have meanwhile become objects of speculation and from today's point of view they also seem aged, as if from another time and at most still like a utopia that could not be redeemed [14].

*It can be quite disconcerting, I think, to recognize just how fast this has happened, to acknowledge that high-modernist forms have become historical ones. By this I mean that we can no longer fully identify with them, as they belong to a different time, to a different knowledge, and finally, of course, to a different ambition.*<sup>15</sup>

### The void afterwards

Must city dwellers resign themselves to living in the clutches of real estate sharks and in the constantly outdated utopias of others? Must history repeat itself over and over again and always leave the city to those who have the will and the power to destroy it and plan it?

Are there no alternatives that include the inhabitants of the cities as creative forces? Would something like this meet the organic

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14] The artist Mark Lewis describes in his text *Is Modernity our Antiquity?* how a building, the moment it is built, is already obsolete again. Lewis speaks of an antiquity in modernity, of a contradiction that no modern architecture, however seemingly timeless, can escape. On the contrary, such distinctive architectures reveal even more clearly that they are the ideals and utopias of a bygone era. Cf. Lewis, *Documenta magazine. Reader*.

<sup>15</sup> Mark Lewis et al, *Documenta magazine. Reader* (Cologne: Taschen, 2007).

and natural ideals of a Le Corbusier not much closer? What would an architecture look like that does not age, that leaves freedoms and does not block paths, but leaves them open? Does truly utopian architecture consist neither of buildings that have already been built nor of the modern visions of powerful architects? Is it, in the end, the empty spaces on which the homeless, Roma, young people, etc. reside? The powerless, whose behavior would meet with rejection elsewhere or whose needs the built architecture does not and does not want to take on.

These empty spaces, gaps or brownfields are characterized by an absence of architecture, ideology, power, plans and ideas within a city. As a result, they are accessible and allow us to pause. There is no code of conduct for the brownfield. In this sense, an architecture of emptiness would have its own function within the city, a function that has not yet been considered because it makes no sense from an economic point of view, open space as a function. Only the wasteland can embody such an absolute free space. From the emptiness it harbors also arises its openness and its philosophical and extremely instructive potential. Lessons from emptiness question the oppressive mechanisms of architecture, because when architecture escapes its function and becomes indeterminate, it is no longer oppressive.

*In this sense (...) it is also outside the consumerist onslaught, bombardment and encroachment of meaning, signification, and messages. The void claims a kind of erasure from all the oppression, in which architecture plays an important part.*<sup>16</sup>

The Palast der Republik in Berlin, for example, was such a place in the years before its demolition [17]. It was only a hollow space where now low-threshold actions and events like concerts and exhibitions could take place, the palace was in this

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<sup>16</sup> Koolhaas, Rem, and Sanford Kwinter. *Rem Koolhaas : conversations with students* (Houston, Tex. New York: Rice University, School of Architecture Princeton Architectural Press, 1996).

[17] The building was closed in 1990 due to asbestos contamination. In the years from 1998 to 2003, the building was then cleared of asbestos and could then still be used until demolition work began in February 2006.

de-bureaucratized and disempowered state has finally, and only finally, become a real palace for the people. In a kind of accessible emptiness now lies the key to an expanded concept of architecture that offers space for doubting the built structures.

### Architecture fails

Architect Rem Koolhaas, who has harbored a fascination for the divided Berlin since the 1970s, sees the Berlin Wall as an expanded and pure form of architecture. He draws the comparison to a film strip in the course of which a multitude of dramatic events can be read. For Koolhaas, the wall even becomes a work of art, he compares armored crosses with minimalist sculptures by Sol LeWitt, and the entire death strip becomes for him an architecture of absence and emptiness. For him, this emptiness is more powerful than any built architecture.

*In fact, in narrowly architectural terms, the wall was not an object but an erasure, a freshly created absence. For me, it was a first demonstration of the capacity of the void-of nothingness-to "function" with more efficiency, subtlety, and flexibility than any object you could imagine in its place. It was a warning that-in architecture-absence would always win in a contest with presence.<sup>18</sup>*

But the Berlin Wall is also an architecture without morality or reason, an architecture born of an emotional reaction, the result of enmity, a symbol of human abyss and failure. From such architectures of emptiness one can learn something about the human condition. In this sense, Koolhaas' comparisons to art actually make sense. In Andrzej Żuławski's 1981 film *Possession*, the Berlin Wall also becomes both a metaphor for a failing relationship and the real backdrop to that story. The levels of reality begin to blur. In one scene, this becomes very clear. A watchtower is shown, where real guards look on with

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<sup>18</sup> Rem Koolhaas, "Field Trip. A(A) Memoir" *S,M,L,XL* (1997).

binoculars out, directly into the lens of the film camera. The camera zooms out further and now you can see the surrounding wall, then even further and you notice that it is a view from an apartment through a window, a clock hangs on the window knob and the main actor Sam Neill enters the picture. He marks the transition to the fictional plot of the film, which repeatedly juxtaposes the divided cityscape with the relationship problems of the protagonists. In this way, the Berlin Wall actually becomes a filmstrip in the course of which the protagonists' relationship also turns out to be a metaphor for the political situation in Germany. In this sense, the Berlin Wall is a profoundly human architecture in which the emotions, the dramas and the problems of societies are revealed.

## II. Chapter: Present



*Figure 2*

Such conditions of the society also reveal themselves on the fallow areas. There, everything can take place that is not allowed elsewhere or is unwillingly seen, but which, despite all this, is inherent in human nature. The fallow land offers the space, the

to help shape society where it is otherwise made by others. And just as the Berlin Wall led to an expansion of his concept of architecture for Rem Koolhaas, so the wasteland did for me. In the following chapter, therefore, I would like to address the state of these fallow spaces in my present.

## Berlin

*Berlin's identity is closely related to the concept of the urban void. History has become imprinted so brutally on the physical presence of the city that, besides the well-known ideological monumentality, there is an underlying stratum of ghostly present absences that recall the city's past.*<sup>19</sup>

Berlin is a suitable example for dedicating oneself to these areas. Of course, you could also look at it the other way around, the topic just forces itself on you in this city. If I hadn't grown up here, I might have a different relationship to the city, because it doesn't look the same today as it did when I was a child in the early 1990s. At that time, Berlin was already in the process of becoming a metropolis as it once was before the Second World War. A city with sprawling nightlife, endless shopping miles and a wealth of art and culture that was to become known around the world. At that time, not everything had been rebuilt that had been destroyed before. Berlin was still poor and creative. I grew up in the Berlin of the 90s and the traces that history had left behind were still very visible. You didn't really need monuments to feel what had happened here. The Berlin Wall was still very present at that time and even where it had already been removed, you could still guess where it once stood by looking at the immediate surroundings. The death strips were not yet built on and I remember that as a child I was afraid of stepping on a mine somewhere. At that time, I often went to flea markets that were held on fallow land.

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<sup>19</sup> Richard Shusterman, "Aesthetics of Absence," *Lettre Internationale* 43 (1998).

On the way home, I used a shortcut across the wasteland, cross-country. At that time, the paths through the city were still like discovery tours. The wasteland is more unpredictable than the rest of the city, where everything is meticulously planned and regulated. There are no rules of use on the wasteland. In the shopping center, the school, and even the parks, on the other hand, there is a code to which one must adhere, a structure that can hardly be changed. On the wasteland it's different, the emptiness is a structure that people in Berlin have become accustomed to, that they have learned to use.

*To many, it is Berlin's layering of present absences that holds the city's deepest meaning and fascination. Contradictory as it may seem, absence does not only characterize but even structure the city. The now absent Wall, as being the enigmatic absence of Berlin, remains in many ways a structuring principle for the united city in the same way as the divided city parts were defined by the absence of their counterpart.*<sup>20</sup>

The director Wim Wenders had, at the end of the 80s, the film *The sky over Berlin* shot, among other things, also on Potsdamer Platz, which is still to be seen there as a huge wasteland. In the film, two angels play the main role, looking down from heaven on a Berlin that is still full of empty spaces. The Berlin Wall also appears in the course of the film and there are other references to the city's past; on the back of a building, for example, is written in black paint "*Whoever builds bunkers, throws bombs.*"<sup>21</sup> Wim Wenders succeeds in capturing the melancholy wasteland of this Berlin, and wastelands like Potsdamer Platz seem almost like sacred places on which angels walk. Before the war, this empty Potsdamer Platz had once been the bustling center of Berlin, and it was to become so again at the end of the 1990s. The modern architect Renzo Piano was appointed and Potsdamer Platz became the largest construction site in Europe.

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<sup>20</sup> Richard Shusterman, "Aesthetics of Absence," *Lettre International* 43 (1998).

<sup>21</sup> Wenders, Wim, *Der Himmel über Berlin*. BRD and France: Road Movie, Argos, WDR, (1987).



The artist and filmmaker Hito Steyerl, still an art student in the 90s, shot a film at that time on this construction site, exactly where a few years later shopping malls and cinemas were built and where large corporations now maintain their offices. The film, *Die leere Mitte* appears like a documentary snapshot of this place at that time. However, Steyerl works with cross-fades of footage from different times, filming repeatedly from the same perspectives. Thus, the construction gap at Potsdamer Platz can be seen one moment with green grass and a wall and the next moment completely covered in snow and without a wall. Only the perspectives and the buildings in the background still indicate that it is the same place. Steyerl points out, however, that there was already a wall here at a completely different time, hundreds of years earlier. She brings into play a time from which there are no pictures. One now gets a sense that this place has experienced much more than what is visible, that borders, fences and walls have been shifting here for much longer and will continue to do so in the future. The city appears in constant change, structures crumble, borders shift and the reasons for this are manifold, wars, dilapidated buildings that have to be demolished, lack of housing etc., old things crumble and new things are built again and the time in between is always the time of fallow land. The fallow land allows only fleeting uses and, according to common opinion, it only develops real value when something is built there. There must be a concrete use, whether that is a building, a park or a playground; there is little understanding in this country for a wild and unused wasteland.

## Harappa

In Japan, on the other hand, there are several positive terms for the wasteland. In the term *Harappa*, which means *open space*, there are several

or *wild field*, for example, is co-inscribed with a nostalgic reference to the wild and overgrown wastelands [22].

After the Second World War, Japan also had a large number of wastelands where children in particular went on discovery tours in the post-war years. As a result, an understanding and appreciation for such places developed. This can also be seen, for example, in the films of Kiyoshi Kurosawa. In almost all of his films, abandoned buildings or wastelands play a role. His protagonists often hide in such places. Sometimes from enemies, sometimes from their own wives, from the constraints of society or from themselves. On the Harappa, human conditions express themselves, unlike in the office, at home, or on the street, where people are controlled by rules of conduct and duties and can only reveal their innermost feelings to a limited extent. In the film *Stalker* by Andrei Tarkovsky, a writer and a scientist, in search of knowledge, are led into a forbidden zone by a so-called stalker. In the course of their journey through this mysterious zone, it becomes increasingly clear that both the writer and the scientist are driven by their own plans, desires and ideas about life, only the stalker appears sensitive and fragile, his self-sacrificing helpfulness and his belief in the triumph of weakness and flexibility over hardness and strength coincides with the landscape of the zone, an abandoned wasteland with decayed and overgrown building structures. Such wastelands are places that make you think, places of youth that do not age themselves but around which everything ages. They are abysses where one can seek shelter from the mundane and whose existence is desirable.

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[22] *While contemporary vacant spaces are not on the radar of the wider public audience, the Japanese people still have fond memories of Harappa (open field, wild field). Harappa is frequently cited in association with void spaces and seems to function as a code for instantly grasping the capacity the spaces offer: playgrounds for exploration and games. The term reflects a cultural nostalgia: an innocent childhood memory of the abundance of overgrown, open, and vacant spaces dispersed through cities after World War II, which children would conquer for play and adventure.*

Jonas and Rahmann, *Tokyo Void*.

*As a place of sensually perceptible decay, the wasteland is an empty space in the functional thicket of the city. As a physical sign of a not-more and not-yet, it generates momentary perplexity and situational openness.*<sup>23</sup>

## Dérive

In 2018, more than 80 years after the publication of Le Corbusier's *Aircraft*, I flew over Berlin for the first time with a drone, a steerable eye, in search of the last brownfields. The development of Potsdamer Platz in the 90s of the 20th century had only been the beginning, in the following decades urban construction boomed, housing became scarce, rents rose immeasurably and one brownfield after the other disappeared. First it was the ones in the center, first there was often only an inconspicuous fence, then signs announcing a construction project, then digging, building and sometimes only a few weeks passed and there stood a finished shell where before there was nothing for ages.

Fixed on the display of the remote control I look down on Berlin, it is full down and the drone meanders between cranes, somewhere behind the main station, there is just building, the gap between Mitte and the district Wedding is just closed. the Federal Intelligence Service sits here, where opposite once stood abandoned factories in which exhibitions were held. Before the factories, there were sandy floors where people could sit and eat and drink together. Now there are futuristic facades and condominiums. At most, you sit on benches anchored into the ground or in front of expensive cafes, if you walk along there at all, there's really no reason to anymore. I drive by there today only by car, there are

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<sup>23</sup> Hasse, Jürgen in *Nicht-Mehr/ Noch- Nicht*, Berlin, Filminstitut UdK, (2006).

there are no more exhibitions. Now other people walk along there. I fly south again, past Potsdamer Platz, towards Schöneberg. I once filmed a fallow area there, there was an opening in the fence and suddenly you were standing on a field with tall grass, various plants, sandy soil and a lot of garbage, used syringes, condoms, etc. I had started a project there. There I had started a project. A project possibly reminiscent of a situationist wandering or *dérive* [24]. At that time I drove my Opel Astra J criss-cross through Berlin. On my trips to work or to visit family, I kept noticing the fenced-in brownfields. I wrote down the addresses and at a suitable time I visited the wastelands again with my film camera and briefly documented their condition. The apparatus, an old 16mm film camera, had a peculiar defect that caused any light sources to run in long wisps toward the bottom of the frame. A piece of sky thus flowed down over a roof or a ridge of houses, or a red lighted traffic light became a horizontally running red line, light pushed through gaps between houses and ran down like a small waterfall. There was something wrong with the synchronization of the film transport and the aperture, and so this blurring of light resulted in a manifestation of temporality even on the single frame. The movement was no longer given only by a fast sequence of images, but also on the single still there was now an effect that suggested temporality and movement. There was something painterly about the way differently colored areas of light flowed downward. This surprising defect/effect, however, made the camera an adequate device for documenting something as ephemeral as wastelands. In general, the interplay between film and wastelands now resulted in interesting overlaps.

In the narrative of facades lining up one after the other, the wasteland represents a longer break. If one sees the rows of houses of a

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[24] Guy Debord, "Theory of the Dérive" *Situationist International Online*, <https://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/si/theory.html>.

street blocks as a sequence of images then the wasteland marks a pause, a blank space, and a difference. In film, it is the space between the images on the film reel, that is, the small black barrier between the exposed frames. It lies completely fallow, free and undescribed. You never see it, however, because at the exact moment when this barrier slides over the projection lens, it is dimmed so that the film strip can appear as a timed sequence of its individual frames. Driving a vehicle along rows of houses, a narrative of facades emerges, of different architectures and times and contrasts from luxury and poverty to decay. Each house becomes a single image flying by. A new house means a new image and the transition to the next house is expressed in the rupture of the successively appearing facades. In the case of film, as mentioned above, this is the barrier between the individual frames, where later the film editing also takes place. This blank space between the frames and between the houses and this pause is necessary in order to mark a difference between the images at all and thus ultimately to be able to set them in motion. If we didn't have this limitation, we wouldn't be able to perceive the film or even the different houses, but would only see the rush past of a single long image in the form of a horizontal motion blur. In the case of the city, this would then appear as a single endless facade. In the play of image and non-image of house and void, light and shadow, material and opening, emulsion and permeability are also terms that illustrate the similarities between film and city, wasteland and film material. And in the case of cities with a large number of gaps between buildings or wastelands, interestingly enough, there is also talk of the *perforated city* [25]. Now, at the latest, the analogy of perforated film strips and perforated rows of houses becomes handy.

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25] The concept of the perforated city is to be understood here in the true sense as a negative development in the context of shrinking cities. Here, the city develops more and more into a wasteland, while in growing cities this perforation disappears more and more.  
Cf. Altrock and Schubert, *Growing City*.

For an exhibition in Berlin's Alexanderplatz subway station, I exhibited six film stills from my archive of wastelands in the form of large-format posters. They showed six wastelands which, now lined up, provided an insight into a perforated city. On the edges of the posters the perforation of the scanned film strip is still visible. The posters were placed in groups of three instead of the usual billboards and now also provided information about what was happening to the city above ground. Five of the six stills were subtitled with texts by me, thoughts on the meaning of emptiness and memories of the wastelands from my youth. There was the flea market at *Tacheles*, for example, which brought back memories of swapping video games. Various generations of game consoles here testify to the period when I was there [26]. On the sixth film still, completely without subtitles, one sees at the lower edge of the picture, slightly blurred, a concrete mixer driving past an already fenced-in wasteland, the messenger of a soon to be hermetic city.

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26] I only noticed this wasteland again after a few years when it was converted into a parking lot and finally barricaded with boards and released for construction. I filmed it there one last time before this gap would also close and only the memory and the film document would exist.

### III. Chapter: Future



*Figure 3*

The final chapter will now take up what began with Le Corbusier's destructiveness, which then, as a result of a failure of modernism, identified the brownfield as a possibility for utopian or heterotopian architecture in the city, and now raises the question of possibilities for a future.

*For us, void is an ephemeral object, a site- yet not only a space- but also a possible future and a counter-perspective on a predictable city.<sup>27</sup>*

The disappearance of wastelands in Berlin marks a dangerous tendency. The threatened city now appears in double version, once by destructive wars and once by total building. The space for a future appears threatened in both cases.

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<sup>27</sup> Marieluise Jonas, and Heike Rahmann, *Tokyo Void: Possibilities in Absence* (Berlin: Jovis, 2014).

## Solidified cities

In the science fiction film *La jétée* (1962) by Chris Marker, the city is brought to an abrupt end by the atomic bomb, following on from the destruction of Paris in 1944, which was averted at the last moment [28]. The film, described by Marker himself as a photo-novel, consists of a series of photographs and a voiceover, through which the story is told from the protagonist's point of view. The film begins with a scene at an airport, the protagonist remembers that a man was shot there, he remembers the face of a woman at that moment. Then a photograph with the outline of an airplane appears in the sky, possibly a fighter plane. The plane appears once more as a bringer of doom and Paris is destroyed by an atomic bomb. The surviving population lives underground and a time machine is developed to prevent the start of this third world war. The protagonist is the one who is sent to both the past and the future in the course of the film, hoping to find a way out of the situation. However, the protagonist does not pursue this goal, but instead pursues his love for the woman from his memory, knowing that the war is approaching again he passes a good time. The film ends with the scene at the airport with which it began. It turns out that the protagonist himself is the man who was shot at the airport at the beginning. The war cannot be prevented again and everything starts from the beginning. The film could theoretically run itself in an endless loop. It creates a gloomy finality that is reinforced by the use of photos instead of moving images.

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28] Marker's gloomy vision of the future appeared in February 1962, three years before Le Corbusier's death and in the midst of the Cold War, eight months before the Cuban missile crisis. The latter gave a broad public to understand that humanity was not far from the reality of nuclear war. *La jétée* was therefore also a film that was contemporary in the extreme, addressing an absolutely real danger.



There is no more movement and everything is reduced to memories. There is no present and no future anymore, everything has already happened and will happen again and again.

I juxtapose Chris Marker's fantasy of a continuous and eternal destruction, an eternal above-ground wasteland, with eternal and absolute building. The atomic uninhabitability and the flight into the underground of Paris, is contrasted with a metropolis used to the last square inch. My exhibition of film stills of past wastelands in the underground station now merges with the dystopia of *La jétée*. The snapshot of approaching doom, in the form of the concrete mixer in front of the brownfield from the previous chapter, becomes the equivalent of Marker's image of the doom-bringing airplane, just before the destruction of Paris. Le Corbusier's aerial view of London also appears related here.

Time seems petrified in such pictures and the city seems petrified as well. And my drone over Berlin, like the head of Medusa detached from the body, it hovers above the city and everything it looks at is petrified. Architecture is a photo-novel, it appears motionless until a next building appears and replaces the old image. Such solidifications and petrifications now also point to the sculptural of the city.

In the work *House* (1993), the British artist Rachel Whiteread fills the interior of a three-story house in London that is about to be demolished with concrete. After the exterior walls have been demolished, the actually hollow and empty interior now appears as a massive concrete structure. Whiteread uses the house as a mold. The resulting inversion of spatial emptiness results in inaccessible mass, an architectural wasteland. At the outer edges of this solid void, one still finds the imprints of windows and doors, suggesting a different kind of past. Through these holes one could once look into the interior of a room and from the interior out into the open. Now they are reliefs and all that has become impossible. The void is petrified and the space unusable. Whiteread puts the monstrosity of architecture on display by taking the air out of us, the inhabitants of such spaces, and filling the space with the material that otherwise surrounds it.

The development of the wastelands exudes a similar oppressive charm as *House*, but at the same time blocks any artistic aspirations. A hermetic city in the style of Brutalism would possibly be an appropriate and honest aesthetic for such a massive development as is currently taking place in Berlin, for example. Even the most playful-looking new buildings, ecologically designed and with integrated cultural measures, cannot replace the characteristics of the wasteland. Such buildings therefore always seem like a fraud.

### Urban Protected Areas

However, the question arises whether the wasteland can be protected at all or whether it is in its autonomous nature not to be protected and to always submit to its fate.

In *The missing house* (1990), the artist Christian Boltanski refers to the history of the former inhabitants of a house destroyed by bombing in 1945. The wasteland and the empty space become a work of art. Only plaques with names and occupations of the former inhabitants are attached to the walls of the surrounding houses. The artwork was initially intended only as a temporary action, but the gap with the plaques has survived to this day, even though it is located in what is now an exclusive residential area of Berlin-Mitte. The gap most likely owes its existence solely to Boltanski's work of art created there, although it should be noted that today it is no longer a wild and freely walkable wasteland, but a completely tidy gap that resembles a monument rather than a wasteland. Here, ultimately, a work of art has made the space its own and the wasteland appears enclosed as if in a museum showcase.

In one scene of Cynthia Beatt's film *The Invisible Frame* (2009), the protagonist, Tilda Swinton, looks at an artificially preserved piece of the death strip around which tourists gather. The past also appears here as if preserved in a showcase.

and a feeling of alienation sets in. This piece of well-kept and barely aged death strip seems too real to be true. A ruin, an old watchtower, a photo or a film from that time would be more credible witnesses.

In the film, Swinton rides a bicycle along the former Berlin Wall. She is on a search for clues of the division. At the same time, the film is a sequel in the form of a remake. In *Cycling the Frame* (1988), Beatt already sent the actress on the same bicycle tour through Berlin, at that time along the still-standing Wall.

In the interplay of both films, interesting superimpositions of time emerge, as they did, for example, in Hito Steyerl's *Die Leere Mitte*.

If one can no longer see or find the past, but it only has to be artificially preserved, then this past hardens and appears as if petrified, like a monument. Monuments are quite necessary where traces have disappeared or will disappear. The imminent development of Berlin's last wastelands marks a turning point in the city's history. Where from now on only built architecture will determine the past and the future, monuments will possibly be erected in honor of the wastelands. A solution to the problem seems impossible. Artificial preservation of wastelands would immediately transform them into something that would contradict their unplanned and unplannable nature.

In the end, it is probably not about conserving or saving the wasteland, but rather about being able to remember it and create an awareness of its significance. On the one hand, because this form of temporary architecture has become rare in ever-growing cities, and on the other, because something about the nature of the city can be experienced there. Something that buildings cannot express and that one might otherwise only get told by contemporary witnesses, in texts or films, moments of truth.

## Architecture vérité

Such moments are already known from the *cinéma vérité*, the cinema of truth. The theorist and former architect Siegfried Kracauer remembers in one of his texts a film scene he had seen as a small boy, he describes a street scene where sky and house facades are reflected in a puddle [29]. an amalgam of film, architecture and a sky from which, many years later, cities were to be filmed and destroyed and filmed again. Such an observation of real but ephemeral states of cities is only possible through their recording. In this sense, wastelands could also be called *architecture vérité*, that is, architecture of truth, which is at least as much an expression of everyday human conditions as its built counterpart. With their disappearance, a piece of truth would be lost. The emptiness of the wasteland offers an architecture on which a multitude of human needs, problems are expressed and on which no rules prevail, on which everyone has access, on which no style is fixed and no function is inscribed. An architecture oriented to the truth, because it does not hide anything, does not try to take people hostage, to direct or to shape, it is an architecture without an authoritarian narrative voice. An architecture that adapts to all circumstances and does not shrink from its own disappearance. *Architecture Vérité* also coincides with the Foucaultian heterotopia, a utopia of a utopia of the many.

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[29] *Among the most rigorous of the new realists, Siegfried Kracauer, himself a former architect, was consistent in his arguments against the "decorative" and artificial, and in favor of the critical vision of the real that film allowed. From his first experience of film as a pre-World War I child to his last theoretical work on film published in 1960, Kracauer found the street to be both site and vehicle for his social criticism. Recalling the first film he saw as a boy, entitled significantly enough "Film as the Discoverer of the Marvels of Everyday Life," Kracauer remembered being thrilled by the sight of "an ordinary suburban street, filled with lights and shadows which transfigured it. Several trees stood about, and there was in the foreground a puddle reflecting invisible house facades and a piece of sky. Then a breeze moved the shadows, and the facades with the sky below began to waver. The trembling upper world in the dirty puddle-this image has never left me."*  
Vidler, *Warped space*.

*Utopias are placements without a real place: perfection of society or inversion of society- in any case effective places drawn into the establishment of society. Counter-placements and counter-campings, so to speak, in which the real places within culture are simultaneously presented, contested and turned over. I call them the heterotopias in contrast to the utopias.*<sup>30</sup>

It is an architecture that points to an indeterminate past and to an indeterminate future and can thus embody the utopias and visions of many. It is elastic and flexible, where, on the other hand, built architecture represents only the builder or the most assertive utilization concept and thus can no longer offer any space for a different future; it is hard and rigid.

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<sup>30</sup> Michel Foucault: *Andere Räume* (1967), in: Barck, Karlheinz (ed.): *Aisthesis: Wahrnehmung heute oder Perspektiven einer anderen Ästhetik; Essais* (Leipzig: Reclam, 1993).

*What hardens will never be able to win.*<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Tarkovsky, Andrei, *Stalker* Soviet Union: Mosfilm (1979).

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## Movies

*Cycling the Frame*, directed by Cynthia Beatt. 1988; BRD: Sender Freies Berlin, 1988. film

*The Sky over Berlin*, directed by Wim Wenders. 1987; BRD and France: Road Movie, Argos, WDR, film.

*Die leere Mitte*, directed by Hito Steyerl. 1998; Germany: HFF Munich, 1998. film

*Die letzten Brachen*, directed by Lars Preisser. 2016; Germany, Lars Preisser, 2016. film

*Diplomacy*, directed by Volker Schlöndorff. 2014; France and Germany: Gaumont, 2014. film

*La jétée*, directed by Chris Marker. 1962; France: Argos Films, 1962. film

*Nicht-Mehr/ Noch- Nicht*, directed by Daniel Kunle and Holger Lauinger. 2006; Germany: Filminstitut UdK, 2006. video

*Possession*, directed by Andrzej Żuławski. 1981; France, FRG: Gaumont, 1981. film

*Stalker*, directed by Andrei Tarkovsky. 1979; Soviet Union: Mosfilm, Vtoroe Tvorcheskoe Obedinenie, 1979. film.

*The invisible Frame*, directed by Cynthia Beatt. 2009; Germany: Filmgalerie 451, 2009. video

## Images

Figure 1 Photograph from Le Corbusier. *Aircraft*. (1935) Figure 2

Film still from Lars Preisser. *The last wastelands*. (2016) Figure 3

Film still from Chris Marker. *La jétée*. (1962)