

Theses

The primary focus of my dissertation is the phenomenon of "ruin gazers"—as the admirers of ruins are referred to in the English-speaking world. The aesthetics of ruins cannot be scrutinized in a generic fashion, regardless of age and the personality of the given "ruin gazer." Ruins are objects frozen in a borderline aesthetic position; they are indispensable elements of our cultural orientation. They are agents in our understanding of history and our perspectives of the world around us, in other words: they are carriers of our identity. In this thesis I will present the aesthetics of ruins based on the differences of their viewers' era and personalities, and I will examine their changing attitudes to time and space. A ruin, as an entity representing the concept of absence, is quite like a narrative: it conveys not only the notion of stripped down privation, but this sense of deficit is also dressed in different garbs and employed for different purposes depending on the era, and each ruin gazer as individuals.

In the course of my artistic practice I have been doing a lot of collecting. Earlier I collected drawings and scribbles with texts, nowadays I prefer taking photos. Waste, scrap deemed useless by others become useful fragments or fractions of visual information to me, inducing a creative process within me. I consider this processing of waste and fragments as the adequate way of thinking for an artist. Therefore, I reached for reduction as a radical (and often painful) method in guiding me to substance. I tried to unravel and distinguish the repetition of others from authentic creative gestures.

Ruins are specific objects to which the elusive concepts of the sublime, presence and absence are connected. Our attitude to them can be either positive and negative. We can be sorrowful about transience at the sight of decay, observing the nature of disintegration in devastation, but we can also see the unfolding structure behind the degrading facade, the essence behind the finery.

How come ruins exist at all? Why do we leave a building in ruins? Why not renovate it or completely eliminate it from the face of the earth? Ruins are symbols of prolonged conversion. A building that has been abandoned by its inhabitants and became defunct and deserted collapses. The building has an impact on its environment as well. Locals walk past it every day, and it might bother them that it is vacant and crumbling down, but they do not know what to do with it. General will would be necessary for its demolition. They consider it ugly, because it is a constant reminder of dissolution, because the past is present in the ruin. The larger and more famous the building in ruins is, the more difficult it gets to decide what to do with it. People must go on living with the monumental ruin. It becomes part of the mythology, stories get attached to it, it gets to be part of the cityscape. It becomes a symbol of the past living with us, a metaphor of inevitable dissolution. We struggle every day to ensure that our narrow world, which we can still influence, does not fall apart. We maintain our relationships, we keep our promises, we clean up our apartment. We work against entropy. Cultural and aesthetic interest in ruins might also be considered as fatalism. We stop and admire what we long fought against tooth and nail. We switch to contemplation rather than activity and release the reins otherwise tightly clenched. In this respect, contemplation is a gesture of acceptance and resignation. There are times when there is nothing to do, we just give ourselves over to presence. Ruins are the cultural footprint of this specific state of consciousness.

In my dissertation I will primarily specify that ruin gazing led to the understanding of artworks operating with the sense of absence in modern art. Secondly, I would like to point out that the transitory and borderline nature of ruins define our relationship to time. As a consequence, I relate the aesthetic definition of the sublime also to the transitional, to the borderline, the unspecified state of consciousness. In this state of consciousness absence is linked with the sublime and the fragmented which, in my opinion, define a major part of contemporary artworks. Thirdly, I will associate ruin gazing with the development and changes of the modern concept of the "self". The modern concept of the "self" was born in the age of Enlightenment and Romanticism, and we witnessed its fragmentation during the time of the world wars.

The ruin gazer of the age of Romanticism represents a behaviour which was virtually unknown before. The concept of openness appears together with the ruin gazers of the 18th century. This

concept considers absence as part of the artwork both in its creation and its reception. Deficiency is increasingly becoming an essential part of art, and becomes one of the cornerstones of the concept of modern art. However, absence does not exist in itself, it can only be defined as a once-lost fullness.

For us, absence, presence and the concept of the sublime intersect in the ruin, as a borderline situation between different states of consciousness. The essence of this aesthetic object (that occasionally even goes beyond aesthetics) is that our relation to it is not theoretical, but it offers an indescribable, indefinable, yet personal experience. For the contemporary ruin gazer, ruins provide a sense of presence which drags them away from a seemingly unstoppable drift of time by its unfathomable nature, and thus they inspire them to remain silent. This mental state starts a series of associations while, oddly, we are present, but also very far from ourselves at the same time. We can contemplate ourselves, our past and desires objectively. In this silent, emotionless mental state we really sense that we are just one eye, a gape that sees all and through all existing entities. Why should not we sense the melancholy of dissolution while feeling an inexplicable joy? We can be born again as explorers among ruins. When our imagination completes a ruin to become a whole, we become part of the ruin through our creative interaction. Looking at ruins fills us up with nostalgia. We long for something that maybe never existed at all, for a never-existing place, for a time that never was.