

Ruins capture the essence of human ambition and the relentless passage of time. In their fractured forms, we encounter a dialogue between creation and destruction, between what once was and what remains. These spaces, marked by weathered stones and crumbled archways, speak not of silence but of endurance, transformation, and the beauty of impermanence. The photographs in this collection are more than portrayals of ruin; they are invitations to explore the layered complexities of human civilization. Each site is a palimpsest, a canvas where history, memory, and imagination converge. The scars of age and erosion reveal time's dual role as both destroyer and creator, inspiring us to see ruins not as remnants of loss but as vibrant entities alive with possibility. Ruins transcend their material deterioration. Like Piranesi's engravings, they awaken visions of transformation and future imaginings. The interplay between destruction and renewal reminds us of humanity's fleeting ambitions and the inevitability of change. Each photograph invites you to read the textures of stone and shadow, to imagine the hands that built these spaces and the forces that reclaimed them. This book does not seek to preserve ruins in stasis but to celebrate their dynamic spirit. From ancient temples to abandoned industrial husks, these images reveal ruins as liminal spaces, bridges between past and present, erosion and rebirth. Let their fractured beauty inspire you to embrace the stories etched within and the infinite potential of what comes next.



ATLAS OF RUINS

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Industrial rust

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Cities have experienced periods of growth and decline throughout history, with consistent experiences of collapse and shrinking. The ruins of cities, from the Greek to the Romans, have long been regarded as sites of contemplation on the ephemerality of civilisations. Postindustrial cities were the latest to experience such decline as a result of the shift from Fordism to post-Fordism and from Keynesianism to neoliberalism (Bell 1973), along with the disruptions following the global financial crisis of 2008 (Cairns and Jacobs 2017) and the more recent COVID-19 pandemic (Pallagst et al. 2022).

Once emblematic of Fordism strength and prosperity, innumerable pieces of industrial architecture, mostly warehouses and other disused production facilities, experienced a decline in maintenance and human habitation during the process of deindustrialisation (Lever 1991). These structures, which were usually designed by renowned architects with avant-garde construction and design techniques, were once celebrated due to their pivotal role in economic prosperity and growth during the 19th and 20th centuries, but are now regarded as ‘caverns of gloom’ (Campo 2024), a stark reflection of their current state of neglect and disuse. This resulted in significant alterations to urban structures and presented a range of challenges for urban development in terms of new jobs, tourism, leisure, new forms of production and work and new ways of life that eventually should relaunch the affected local communities socially and economically.

The transition from Fordism to post-Fordism, shaped by economic globalisation and subsequent political interdependence due to the expansion of global markets, has precipitated a pervasive restructuring of manufacturing, labour markets and consumption paradigms. The Fordist model of standardised

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production, exemplified by the Model T, was not merely an economic paradigm; it also constituted a standardised mode of living and a promise of greater prosperity for all. Debates surrounding the prospective post-Fordism and post-industrial eras have frequently evoked sentiments of nostalgia, resentment, optimism and apprehension concerning the future of work and its concrete remains (Safransky 2023, 7). The future of a society that was previously industrial has been a topic of great concern in discussions surrounding the potential impact of factory closures, and the advent of the information economy (Castells 1996). A debate that has gone far, reaching us today through industrial rust lying still abandoned and planning discourses acting as powerful material, cultural, and symbolic forces in the production of the built environment (Carter 2016). The discussion was also contingent upon questions pertaining to the repositioning of urban real estate and infrastructure, particularly in view of the restructuring of urban areas in accordance with the imperatives of financial capital, as well as the challenges posed by climate change (Ravaz et al. 2024).

The vast variety of issues facing post-industrial territories are often approached as problems of economic paradigm shift, depopulation and failed property markets requiring technical fixes (Savitch 1988). But while industrial abandonment is often presented as a story of industrial decline, the comprehension of the complexities and challenges of this phenomenon can be found in the interrelation between the urbanisation process and how the 'politics of abandonment' shape spatial planning and governance decisions by technocratic and/or growth coalitions (Molotch 1976).

This is why dealing with the abandonment suggests different ways of responding. The functional lifespan of industrial sites coming to a halt confirms the never-ending quest for ever greater profitability (Abramson 2016, 38–40). The future of industrial rust ranges from a possible bias towards demolition and new construction without regard for historical and cultural elements (i.e., urban renewal) to

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adaptive reuse (i.e. repurposing the existing remains for new uses and users). The decision towards demolition or repurpose mostly relies on the recognition of a heritage value of certain industrial remains. Their listing or exclusion defines also the conservation standards to apply in the planning of their transformations based on heritage conservation or urban development approaches (Overmann & Mieg 2014). The conflicts emerging from opposite interests on the new uses can also imply the stand-by of any initiatives and the long-standing abandonment of the industrial sites, compromising their potential for reuse (Lynch 2022, 5). Urgent are thus the alerts about the preservation of industrial heritage, which «is highly vulnerable and often at risk, often lost for lack of awareness, documentation, recognition or protection but also because of changing economic trends, negative perceptions, environmental issues or its sheer size and complexity» (The International Committee for the Conservation of the Industrial Heritage 2011). Nevertheless, the preservation of historical industrial structures remains a crucial but still unsolved aspect in the fostering of cultural identity and community resilience in response to the ongoing economic and social changes that the world is currently experiencing. Reframing the problem suggests different ways of responding. Firstly, in order to better understand the pressures, reactions, visions and complex architectural and planning questions that arose as plans to demolish and reuse/redevelop industrial sites unfolded, the current research agenda evoked the very idea of derelict land in need of rethinking (Gastaldi and Camerin 2022, 165–80). Secondly, narratives of neglect can shape the way architectural and urban problems are conceptualised and practical solutions and clear guidelines imagined (Luger and Schwarze 2024). Thirdly, the absence of defined actions may result in ambiguity among policymakers regarding the optimal approach for advancing these initiatives (O’Callaghan 2023). As a result, the notion of industrial rust as an immense range of abandoned and emptied boxes pervaded popular and academic

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narratives. This tendency has reached a peak up to the point that abandoned industrial areas –officially or not classified as brownfield or derelict sites– are colloquially engaged as ‘dead zones’ typical of the post-industrial landscape. Yet, for those who deeply entered in the genealogy of the discourse, such as Doron (2000) and Lopez-Pineiro (2020), a void cannot be labelled because it is impossible to define what should have no precise definition. Knowing how and why this faulty or deceptive perception occurred is a mandatory task to fulfil. In fact, when each of these boxes is thoroughly analysed, their contents result not empty but densely “storied”, being places that once were and that could still be.

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