



Strati: il tempo come deposito. Immagine dimostrativa

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The Ruin as a Form of Time

Simmel, Benjamin and the afterlife of decay

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ABSTRACT

This essay rereads Georg Simmel's short text on the ruin (1907) as a theory of historical time: in the ruin, nature reclaims what the spirit had built, and the result is not a loss but a new form. Through Walter Benjamin, it asks what this idea can tell us today, when ruins are no longer only ancient but also industrial, digital, and very recent.

RIASSUNTO

Il saggio rilegge il breve testo di Georg Simmel sulla rovina (1907) come una teoria del tempo storico: nella rovina la natura riprende ciò che lo spirito aveva costruito, e il risultato non è una perdita ma una nuova forma. Attraverso Walter Benjamin, il testo discute che cosa questa idea possa dire oggi, quando le rovine non sono più soltanto antiche ma anche industriali, digitali, recentissime.

Parole chiave: ruin, Georg Simmel, Walter Benjamin, historical time, decay

In 1907 Georg Simmel published a short essay on the ruin that would later find its place in his collection *Philosophische Kultur*.¹ Its argument is deceptively simple. Architecture, for Simmel, is the art in which the human will most completely masters matter. The ruin is the moment in which that balance is reversed: the forces of nature, gravity, rain and vegetation, begin to take back what had been shaped against them.

A NEW FORM, NOT A LACK

What makes the ruin philosophically interesting is that this reversal does not simply destroy. The ruin has a unity of its own. It is neither the building that was nor the heap of stones it will become, but a form in between, in which past intention and present decay are visible at once.

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Un colonnato in rovina al tramonto. Immagine dimostrativa

BENJAMIN'S TURN

Walter Benjamin would push the figure further. For him, the ruin is less an aesthetic object than a way of reading history: allegory, he argued in his book on the German *Trauerspiel*, is in the realm of thought what ruins are in the realm of things.² History appears not as progress but as an accumulation of fragments.

RECENT RUINS

Today the ruins that surround us are mostly modern: factories, shopping malls, abandoned servers. They decay faster, and they lack the patina of the centuries. Yet Simmel's intuition still holds. Every ruin makes time visible as a layering of incompatible presents.

NOTE

1. G. Simmel, «Die Ruine» (1907), later in *Philosophische Kultur*, Leipzig, Klinkhardt, 1911.
2. W. Benjamin, *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels*, Berlin, Rowohlt, 1928.

COME CITARE

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