

Out of the Ruins

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ABSTRACT: Our paper explores landscapes that have been neglected since the mass exodus from the country to large post-industrial cities. At some indefinable moment, abandoned buildings and settlements become ruins, and they adopt a new dialogue with nature. Ruins have another life in our imaginations, where nature plays a dominant role. The memory they contain provides continuity between past, present and future. We will examine locations where the land is no longer inhabited where there is clear evidence of past human occupation and put forward an argument for reassessment and strategies to reinvigorate them. Our concerns are with habitation, use, resources and sustainability. In three case studies we have looked at existing resources in depth, and speculated possible futures to produce productive landscapes out of the ruins.

INTRODUCTION

Ruined landscapes capture our imaginations. As fortunes change and populations shift, people's lives and livelihoods leave their marks behind, and the landscape connects us in time with them, bringing out 'the transitory nature of human achievement'. (Duffy 2009) Abandoned buildings and settlements become palpable ruins, and they adopt a new dialogue with nature. The memory they contain provides continuity between past, present and future. (Woodward 2002) The 'architectural ruin' in Europe has been present in our aesthetic imagination, particularly in painting and poetry, for many centuries and is now built into our collective consciousness, representing the relationship between nature, civilisation and our own mortality. Nature can be observed competing with the man-made, winning, but at the same time transforming the original architecture and giving it new life and meaning. Each of us is at liberty to 'supply the missing pieces' from our memory and imagination. (Woodward 2002)

Every era leaves its ruins. Those of ancient Greece or Rome have a compelling aura. Stone and wood come out of the earth and gradually return. Their destitution has been overlaid with our interpretations of their cultural significance, greatly influenced by 18th century interpretations. In the 20th and 21st century a new set of ruins have appeared as a result of industrialisation. Steel, concrete and products of the petrochemical industry leave a very different residue. The balance of nature and industry has been lost and we are left with scars and pollution. There are many places where the land, showing evidence of previous inhabitation, has just been left abandoned. These are the areas we are concerned with. We have been re-considering the landscape, its topographical qualities, what we have left behind from the past, and assessing its potential for providing a sustainable future. Building on to the idea of the romance of the ruin has been an important component of developing our approach to the possibilities that ruined landscape can provide. At the same time we cannot avoid seeing landscape in the light of a world of diminishing resources, and the knowledge that we have been the cause of many failing ecosystems.

Ruins can be left and returned to nature, and we can observe and enjoy them, or we can intervene and reassess the possibilities they hold for a new life. The challenge is to maintain the essential character of the landscape.

In the following case studies all locations show evidence of a landscape in ruins, abandoned land or shells of building. In each location, tourism has been a major instigator of change for the worse, drawing people away from the land and giving little back to the community. Proposals have been put forward to redress the balance.

MULINI VALLEY, AMALFI, ITALY

The Amalfi coast is a prime tourist destination. The spectacular coastal landscape and proximate attractions of the ancient world, such as Pompeii and Herculaneum, the fashionable resorts of Sorrento and Capri as well as Vesuvius, have been a constant draw since ancient times. The coastal road narrowly clings to the rock face, and it is this ribbon that contains the tourism that is both the lifeblood and leech of the landscape. Intrepid visitors who venture inland swap the elevated views of the sea with a few lemon groves and seemingly impenetrable woodland. Tourism offers little back to the land and many former inhabitants have found it hard to resist the lure of cities such as Naples and Salerno and the ambition to maintain a contemporary urban lifestyle.

The Mulini valley formed by the river Canneto, falls north to south from its source to the medieval coastal town of Amalfi. (Figure 1) In the 19th century the valley was the site for numerous paper mills, which subsequently became obsolete and are now in various states of decay. We became aware of a regional project to revitalise these mills, with a sustainable agenda that suited our own project investigations. By suggesting new uses for these sites, the valleys could be used as conduits for tempting visitors away from the saturated coastline.

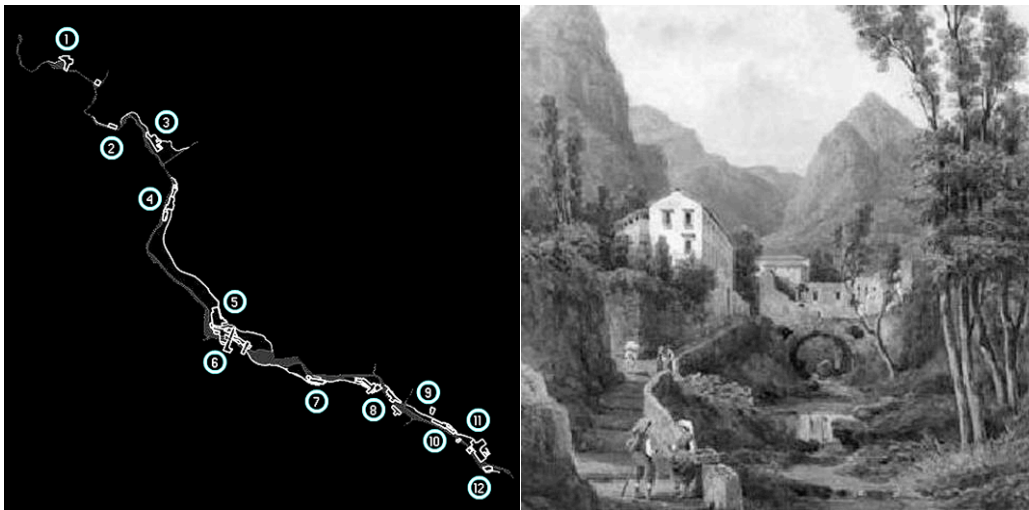


Figure 1 Mulini Valley: Ruined Mills

Our students researched issues of land use and tourism by comparing past and current usage. They concluded that by making relatively small changes to the activities available to visitors and broadening the land use there may be a means of staying the deprivation of the land instigated by the rise in popularity of leisure activities on the coast. One student suggested ways to combine abandoned buildings and landscape to become a means of inspiring the reuse of the land in other locations. He called this a Centre for Innovative Learning, specialising in how to develop the ruined land in similar situations. (Figure 2) The Centre was concerned with land use management and the many disciplines that can help to restore and rejuvenate landscapes that are in danger of being lost through neglect and abandonment. It comprised old and new buildings. A renovation of the old mill provided a means of exhibiting subjects about landscape, architecture, art, design that relate to ecology, horticulture and cultural heritage. Opposite, across the valley, a new building was to be built which focussed on education and agricultural experimentation. The two buildings were linked with formal gardens and a bridge. The gardens were to contain botanical specimens relating to the work of the Centre and be located so they could reflect and link into renovated terraces.

The project aimed to be exemplary in sustainability ideals, current ecological methodology and the ability to generate renewable energy. The power of the river would be harnessed as the paper mills once did, to provide hydro-electricity for the buildings' energy requirements, together with solar power. The deep flat roof of the Centre provided a reservoir of water.

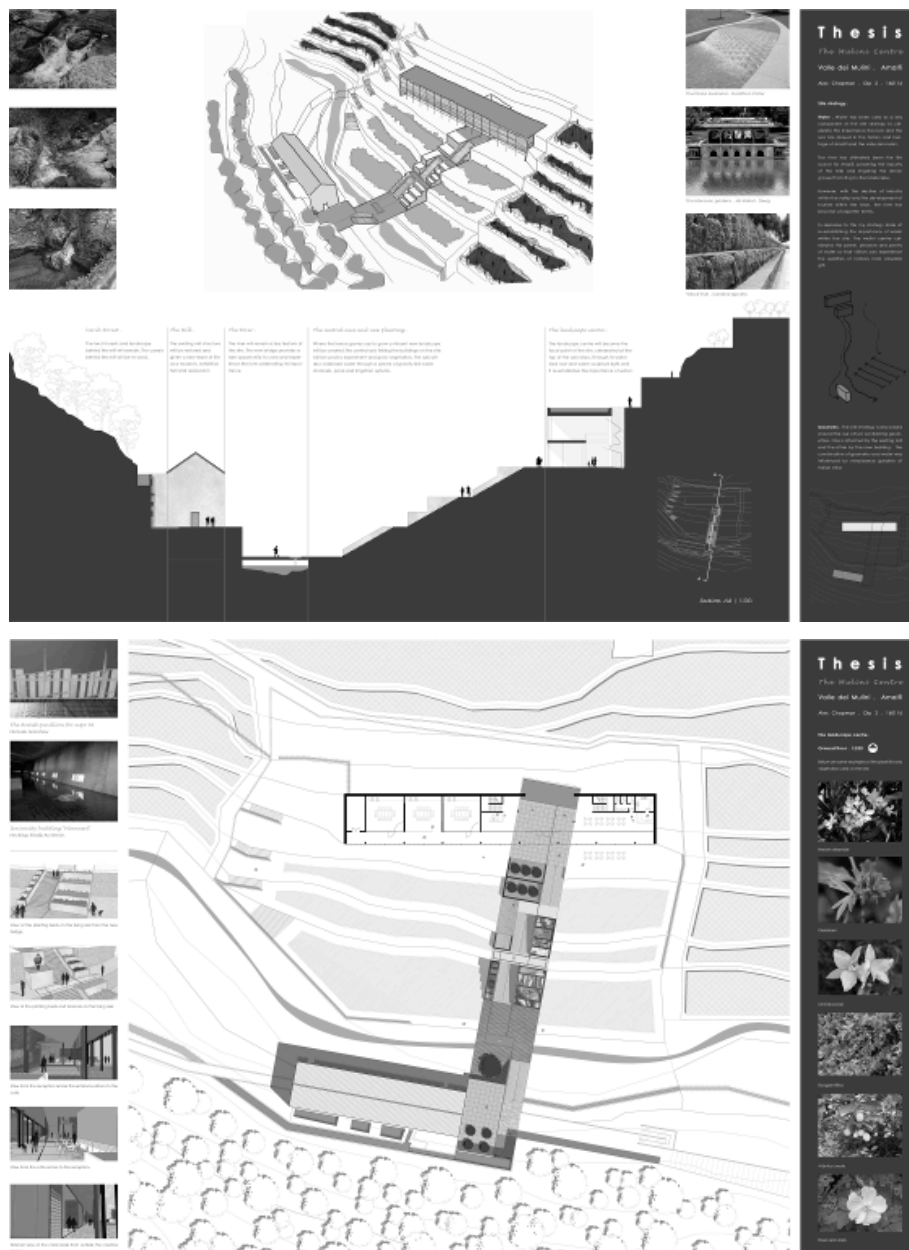


Figure 2 Scheme Design ‘Centre for Innovative Learning’

The site is inaccessible by vehicles, prompting not only inventive means of construction (much of the materials have to be brought via helicopter) but inescapable engagement with the land by visitors. In addition to walking, access by donkey and mule would be allowed! The walk into the valley from the coast was relocated to pass through the Centre, and cross the valley via the new bridge, involving tourists with a working landscape.

The underlying aim of the project was to consider the ruin as a ‘ruin’, and not to lose its romance by leaving much of the building to its reversion to nature. Some of the interior spaces that had lost their roofs were turned into courtyards such as the gathering space at the entrance to the complex. The intention was always to limit the amount of interference, thereby allowing visitors to respond to site as a ruin and the memories contained within. It was important to enhance the sense of history, but at the same time be a realistic by conversion to 21st Century uses.

EYGALIÈRES, PROVENCE, FRANCE

Eygalières is a small village that sits comfortably in the landscape to the north of St-Rémy-de-Provence, southern France. Thirty years ago this landscape was primarily used for small-scale farming. The smallholdings - narrow fields running east-west - are bounded on their northern edges by rows of Cypresses and Poplars that form windbreaks against “Le Mistral”, the forceful, prevailing northerly wind that shapes much of the unique character of the region.

The charm of the local vernacular and landscape has drawn tourists and secondary home hunters and a slow but inexorable change in the economic, social, physical make-up of the area has followed. The value of land within the village has risen dramatically, making property no longer affordable for local people. Much of the area is only inhabited for the holiday season. The inhabitants of the holiday homes tend not to integrate with village life, preferring to live behind closed gates and they use supermarkets rather than local amenities. Such rapid change has also put a strain on the existing infrastructure, increasing for example the demand on water and electricity. Although many old buildings have gained a new life as second homes, the community that lies behind it and the land it occupies is, to a large extent, in ruins. Shops in the village that once exclusively serviced the local community now sell luxury goods, with the more traditional shops priced out to the fringes. This change in the local economy is also evident through the creeping suburbanisation of the outskirts of the village at the expense of agricultural land. The extreme growth of second homes around Eygalières makes it reasonable to speculate that in another thirty years the landscape will have become overwhelmed by development.

Together with our students we reflected on the possibility of an alternative economic future to create a more harmonious relationship between the inhabitants and the landscape, exploring and testing the potential of architectural and landscape strategies, with the intention of stalling the trend of landscape misuse. A group of three students proposed a fresh identity for the village and the land surrounding it to combat the threat of creeping suburbanisation. An innovative agricultural strategy was proposed involving a series of comprehensive architectural interventions that would complement Eygalières’ surrounding landscape.

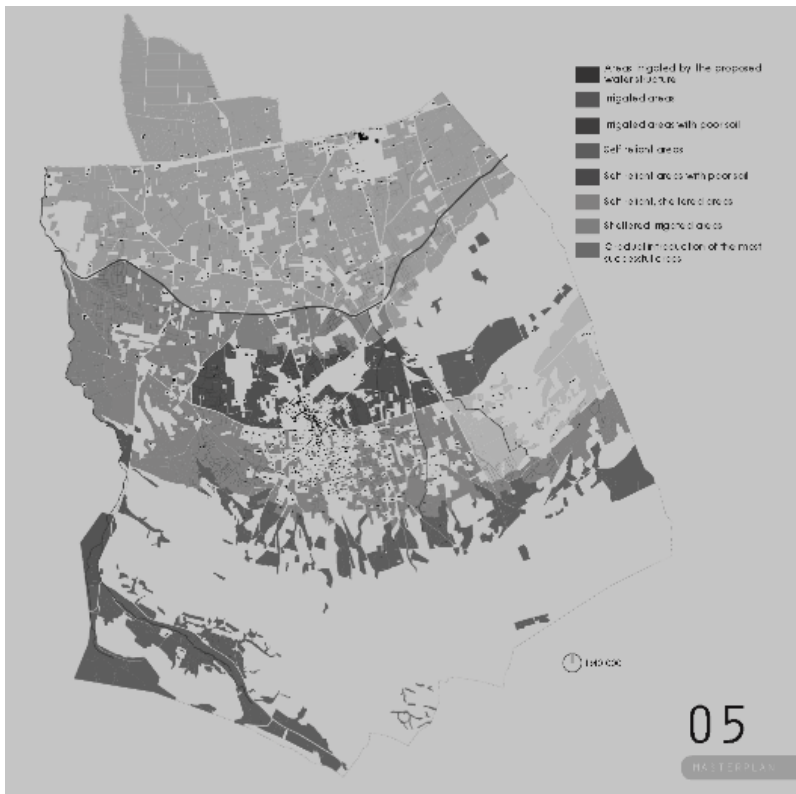


Figure 3 Eygalières: Plan of proposed crop zones

Their strategy was to divide the land into broad categories that would be planted with a range of suitable, under-developed crops, dependant on the local conditions of each category, such as soil quality, degree of shelter. By doing this the land pattern could be maintained and could showcase a wide range of neglected species of interesting, unusual, and in many cases, beautiful crops. This farming initiative would help form Eygalières' new identity as a centre for experimental crops while more mundane cash crops will be grown in their appropriate conditions further away from the centre. (Figures 3&4) To improve the irrigation around the village a water tower was proposed to extract and store ground water and distribute it to the fields when and where necessary. The tower was to be fuelled by wind power, taking advantage of 'le Mistral'. It was to be a structure that came out of the ruins of the old castle, indicating a change of power base, celebrating the significance and importance of water. The castle grounds also provided adequate space for a botanic garden and visitors centre, bringing back life into the heart of the town for the local community, experts and tourists.

SELF-RELIANT AREAS WITH POOR SOIL	SELF-RELIANT SHELTERED AREAS	AREAS IRRIGATED BY THE WATER TOWER	NEW FEILDS IN THE ALPILLES	RESEARCH CENTRE OR RESTAURANT
Peat Milk, Pigeon Pea, White-Salt, Acacia, Black Wattle	None	Fajol, Flax, Roselle	Cora, Fava, Strawberry, Caper, Sandalac	Bephan, Hefty yam, Hyacinth Bean, Lancepole, Winged Bean, Maroma Bean, West African Cora, Mustard Greens, Guinea growroot, Plumed Cockscomb, Boko, Cardoon, Arugula, Salad Rocket, Wild Spinach, Wood, Physic Nut, Calabash, Common Purslane, Soek, Custard Apple, Jackfruit, Salsaloon, Akee, White Sapote, Ether apple, Kaki, Mangosteen, Maric, Chicha, Sweet Wormwood, Beggar, Wild Yam, Evening Primrose, Sea Buckthorn, Nani, Nani, Calamus, Indian Beech Tree, Roselle
		Amwood, Plumed Cockscomb, Boko, Arugula, Salad Rocket, Soek, White Sapote, Seagrape, Clione, Salt	Guinea, Ake, radish, Salsaloon	

Figure 4 Eygalières: Categories of crops.

SETTI FATMA, OURIKA VALLEY, MOROCCO

The Berber village of Setti Fatma lies due south of Marrakech, Morocco, in the High Atlas Mountains. It sits on the north side of the Ourika river, which becomes a roaring torrent at certain times of year. Settlements have grown on both sides of the valley, despite the steepness of its sides. The concrete road from Marrakech stops at Setti Fatma, but continues as a track to villages further up the valley. The slopes of the eastern side are more undulating and accommodate a small amount of agriculture and many ruined and abandoned terraces. Improvised bridges are built across the river and there is an acceptance that many will wash away with seasonal flooding. Much thought and ingenuity is put into the construction of new bridges, made wholly from found materials.

Setti Fatma is loosing its young people, who are migrating to Marrakech. Nowadays, the valley is on the tourist map which provides some jobs and income. Guides with local knowledge of the hills are needed for their trekking expertise, but the trekking organisations themselves are based away from the village. There is the inevitable sale of merchandise, trinkets, jewellery and carpets. It was a great disappointment to realise that much of it, particularly the jewellery, is manufactured in the Far East. Fewer carpets are being made and many of the artefacts of indigenous Berber culture are in danger of disappearing. Craft skills, using materials found and processed in the area, whether for practical purposes or for artefacts, have not been nurtured or celebrated. There was an uncomfortable juxtaposition for us between evidence of Western cultural influence, and the Berbers heritage. The argument for and against development, conservation and progress is very complex, and we could only have a very superficial overview of the politics involved. However, as the land had always previously supported the village, there was scope for us to speculate over possibilities for re-invention and a more sustainable future than an over-reliance on tourism.



Figure 5 Setti Fatma: Section through Hamam

Our students devised a strategic plan that made use of its topographical and cultural uniqueness. This was carried out initially with students from the University of Rabat. Proposals were put forward to acknowledge a balance of Berber culture with new technology and tourism. Existing natural resources were to be used, celebrating skills such as carpet making, and detailed knowledge of the locality, with profits being ploughed back into the community.

There was much debate over infrastructure, and the possible need for more permanent roads beyond the village. Should there be more permanent bridging over the river where the semi-permanent bridges give it its character? One small bridge was to be proposed, high enough not to be affected by the swell of the river that would support new developments on the more fertile south side. One of the proposals was a co-operative farm. (Figure 6) Ruined high terraces on the upper slopes of the valley were to be renovated, and planted with indigenous crops such as the oil-rich Argan tree (specific to Morocco), citrus, lavender and saffron, all of which have a local, national and international market. There was to be a very simple modern shed that crossed the terraces, connecting them vertically, for processing and drying of the plants and their products. (Figure 7) The drop of hillside was utilised for handling each stage of the processing. Water was diverted at the upper levels for processing and irrigation.

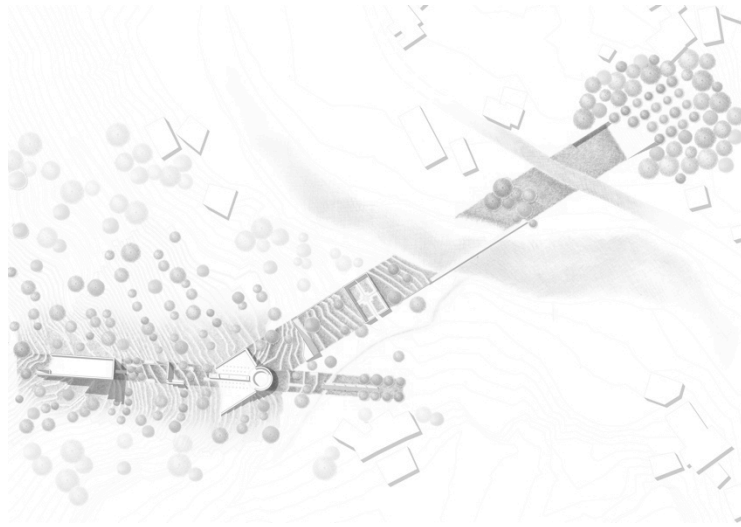


Figure 6 Setti Fatma: Plan of drying shed, Hamam and bridge.

A new Hamam (Figures 5&8) (communal bath) was also proposed on the lower slopes that would take advantage of the already harnessed river water, and products manufactured in the farm. The route through the farm would be integrated with the trekking paths.

Consideration for the land was at the heart of the project with the use of an abundant water supply and potentially fertile hillsides. By bringing the ruins of the terraces back to life and using new technology where appropriate for processing, the hope was to create sufficient yield and variety of products to create a viable income.



Figure 7 Setti Fatma: Interior of drying room



Figure 8 Setti Fatma: Exterior of Hamam

CONCLUSION

Evidence of man's impact on the land could be described as ruinous to the land. However, reading the landscape in this way will always give us a perspective on how human use of the land and the change that it has brought links us across time. A ruined landscape implies an unhappy relationship between human settlement and undervalued land use. We have sought to show that by understanding how ruination has occurred and investigating the potential the extant remains offer, there is a prospect of a happier balance. Sustainable use has been foremost in our minds but through the vehicle of speculation, ruins have been the foundation for the future.

The waterfalls, and bright sunlight falling onto ruins so often depicted in the romantic paintings of the nineteenth century can be seen in a new light. In each case the ruins of landscape and building were the springboards to establishing a series of proposals for re-invigorating the landscape. The management of water was an essential requirement for their success, although the method of using water was unique to each site. In Eygalières the medieval ruins at the top of the town were to house a new water tank for irrigating the 'ruined' surrounding land, In Setti Fatma, the river was bridged to aid access to the fertile side of the valley, and redirecting of water was proposed to reconstruct and enlarge the farmed terraces. The landscape is 'ruined' each year with the flooding, but is continuously reconstructed through temporary bridging and damming. In Amalfi the 'ruined' existing shells of the paper mills were converted into an agricultural educational institute, and water channelled to sets of new terraces for experimental crops, and as the valley is steep, the water could be used to generate hydroelectric power. The emphasis in the exercises was on analysing and speculating on the extant ruins, which were to be taken as *given*, exploiting what exists as a means of speculation for future sustainable land-use.

All three sites bore the burden of tourism. In Eygalières plans were needed to make agriculture as effective as tourism. This was also the case in Setti Fatma, where eco-tourism was encouraged together with an investment in local crafts specific to the area. By re-opening the valleys behind Amalfi the community would no longer be dependent on a mono-economy of tourism along the coastal strip.

These are exercises which we know have little chance of being implemented, but they have been important in understanding the layers of complexities of settlements, and the sensitivity required to create change for the better. Without these speculations, we are not able to understand the impact that we make through our marks on the earth. Constant evaluation is necessary to control, rather than simply allow, a way forward. We have found that examining the residue of human endeavour, which we have called ruins, provides a fruitful approach, combining the practical aspects with the romance of the ruin.

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Amalfi

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