

Dive with Me!

Democratic Architectural Experience in the Age of Media

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Abstract

Unlike Heidegger's claim that architecture reveals its meaning through presence and direct experience, today such encounters are increasingly mediated by images. Architecture circulates first as fragments, photographed, hashtagged, and digitally reshared, before or after being physically experienced. This research introduces *Jansang*, a Korean term meaning «afterimage», as a lens through which architectural memory is constructed both prior to and following physical encounter, particularly in the context of ruins and fragments. Focusing on the Ruïnekerk, a fifteenth-century church ruin in Bergen, the Netherlands, the study maps how online imagery generates symbolic constellations—windows, crosses, sky openings, and the contours of earth and sky. These recurrent motifs reveal a process of digital recollection through which the ruin is continually rebuilt within shared perception. The project develops a «kit of parts», a design tool derived from mapping analyses of social-media posts, to translate these visual memories into spatial strategies for adaptive reuse. The approach, inherently project-specific, emerges from how people perceive, document, and share architecture. By shifting focus from material preservation to participatory perception, *Jansang* proposes a democratic paradigm for reuse: architecture understood not as a fixed object but as a living afterimage, continually shaped by the ways we frame, share, and remember space.

Keywords: *Jansang*; Adaptive Reuse; Media Archaeology

Introduction

Architecture has long been understood as an experience grounded in presence. As Martin Heidegger reminds us, to build is to dwell, and to dwell is to be present in the world through material, place, and care (Heidegger 1971). Yet in the age of networked images, the first encounter with architecture often unfolds through a screen rather than through space itself. The image precedes the visit; perception arrives already framed by algorithms and repetition. Before it is built or visited, the building preexists as a constellation of mediated fragments.

This condition calls for an expanded notion of architectural experience. The Korean term *Jansang*, literally «afterimage», offers a conceptual frame to understand this phenomenon. It describes not only the optical and clinical residue of vision but also the emotional resonance and collective cultural understanding. Unlike the clinical English afterimage, *Jansang* bridges the perceptual, the emotional, and the cultural. To view architecture in the frame of *Jansang* is to acknowledge that buildings endure not solely through their materiality, but also through

the afterimages continually generated and re-circulated by collective acts of imagination. Recent scholarship on adaptive reuse has increasingly shifted from purely technical conservation toward cultural, social, and experiential dimensions. Authors such as Bullen and Love (2011) and Plevoets and Van Cleempoel (2019) emphasize reuse as a process of reinterpretation rather than restoration. In parallel, studies on digitally mediated heritage highlight how memory and meaning are co-produced through networked images and participatory media practices (Cameron, Kenderdine 2007; Giaccardi 2012). *Jansang* extends this discourse by foregrounding architectural afterimages as an operative layer through which adaptive reuse can be conceived, experienced, and shared.

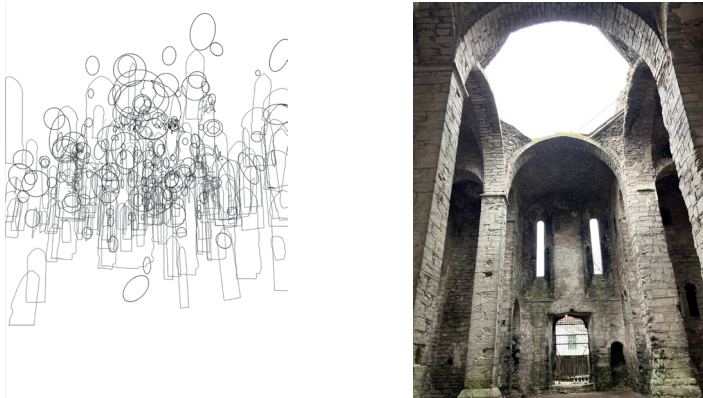


Fig. 1. Social-media collage of Ruïnekerk, Bergen (NL). Repetitions of the collected viewpoints forming a collective afterimage (Hyunggyu Kim, 2025); Fig 2. St Lars Ruin, Visby (SE). Sky as active architectural element transforming absence into continuity (Hyunggyu Kim, 2022)

Methodology and Research Journey (2017–2025)

This research arises from continuous fieldwork between 2017 and 2025 across eighty-two church ruins throughout Europe, Germany, Belgium, France, Sweden, and the Netherlands. The objective was not to catalogue ruins as static entities, but to interpret them as living containers of perception, in which fragmenting material decay and collective fragmented perceptions coexist. Each ruin was documented through photography, with the close attention to the possibility to be developed into an architectural language.

Recurring motifs—arches, windows, ivy, light shafts, and sky openings—appeared not only at particular ruins but repeatedly across locations. The research expanded into digital ethnography, tracing hashtags and image clusters that reveal how users re-compose the same spatial frames. These repetitions form what Maurice Halbwachs calls collective memory (1992, 38): a dynamic network in which shared perception continually reshapes the identity of place.

Through this iterative process, the project identified what may be termed a distributed monumentality—a monument not inscribed in stone, but sustained through the continual act of seeing and sharing.

Case Study—Ruïnekerk, Bergen

Among the studied sites, the Ruïnekerk in Bergen stands as a paradigmatic case. Built in the fifteenth century and ruined during the Dutch Revolt of 1574, it remains the civic centre of the town—a spatial void turned communal heart. Its incomplete walls and open ceiling invite the sky to participate architecturally, transforming absence into continuity.

Alois Peitz (2002) describes such European church ruins as transformations between sacrality and publicness—spaces that mediate between remembrance and re-use. The Ruïnekerk exemplifies this transformation. Markets, concerts, and festivals inhabit the void once devoted to worship, generating a form of post-secular coexistence in which the sacred and the everyday overlap. Beyond its physical role, the Ruïnekerk functions as a digital landmark. Thousands of images replicate its same visual rhythm—the west façade, the cross-shaped openings, the interplay of brick and sky. Each repetition, far from redundant, reinforces a collective image. Through constant documentation, the ruin becomes both material site and immaterial network—an architectural double exposure.

Theoretical Framework—From Foucault to Derrida

Michel Foucault's concept of heterotopia (1984 [1967]) describes spaces that mirror and invert others—real yet imaginary, ordered yet subversive. The Ruïnekerk can be understood as such a heterotopic field: an architectural fragment simultaneously embedded in civic life and dispersed across digital media.

Derrida's *Khôra* (1993) furthers this reading. As a receptacle that holds and transforms meaning, *Khôra* offers a metaphor for the in-between space of *Jansang*—the interval between presence and absence, material and image. Here, perception itself becomes a site of transformation.

Walter Benjamin's reflections on reproduction (1968) also resonate: the loss of aura in the reproduced image is not merely impoverishment but redistribution. *Jansang* reframes this process as creative participation; aura is not lost but diffused. In this sense, adaptive reuse shifts from the conservation of substance to the renewal of perception.

Collective Memory and Subjectified Jansang

Within this theoretical horizon, *Jansang* differentiates between the objectified and the subjectified afterimage. The former describes stabilized global icons—the Eiffel Tower—whose images are fixed and institutional. The latter encompasses unstable yet affective perceptions, continuously reshaped through collective authorship.

The Ruïnekerk belongs to this latter category. Its identity emerges not from official preservation but from everyday gestures of photographing, posting, and sharing. The repetition of these gestures transforms viewing into ritual, echoing Deborah Lewittes's (2018) notion of contemplating ruins as acts of civic imagination rather than nostalgia. Each act of framing reactivates the ruin as a participatory monument.

To translate this process materially, a flip-book was composed from hundreds of public images, scaled to the smartphone screen ratio (19.5:9). This tactile object converts scrolling into touch, restoring temporality and bodily agency to an otherwise immaterial practice. The act of flipping transforms digital attention into embodied memory.



Fig. 3. Ruïnekerk Bergen (NL). Fifteenth-century church ruin transformed into civic square (Hyunggyu Kim, 2025)

Adaptive Reuse as Re-experience

The kit of parts does not function as a universal design catalogue, but as a project-specific translation device. Derived from recurring visual motifs—such as framed sky, partial enclosure, and material porosity—it informs adaptive reuse strategies by privileging openness, temporal use, and perceptual continuity. In the case of the Ruïnekerk, reuse is therefore enacted not through reconstruction but through maintaining incompleteness as an active spatial condition. Adaptive reuse is commonly understood as the technical adaptation of existing structures for new functions. Yet in the case of the Ruïnekerk, reuse unfolds primarily as re-experience. The ruin's social life depends on imaginative participation, not on reconstruction. Its preservation as an open shell invites what Benjamin might call constructive remembrance—a form of remembering that builds rather than restores. In this sense, adaptive reuse becomes an ethics of perception: a shared attentiveness through which communities sustain the spatial traces of their past. Architecture thus operates as a living interface between visibility, emotion, and care.

Conclusion—Toward a Democratic Architecture of Perception

Habermas's argument that we live in a post-secular society (Habermas 2001) is vividly embodied in the Ruïnekerk. Once a sacred enclosure, it now serves as a site of cultural gathering and civic celebration. Its incomplete form invites rather than excludes. Heidegger's notion of dwelling returns here: to dwell is to remain open to the world, to allow presence and absence to coexist. The ruin's porosity allows both transcendence and everydayness to inhabit the same frame. Light and sky become theological and phenomenological agents at once. Each photograph that captures this interplay performs what this research calls 'digital contemplation'—a dispersed yet sincere ritual of seeing. The Ruïnekerk, thus, is not only

reused physically but spiritually reoccupied through the attention of its beholders. Through the framework of *Jansang*, adaptive reuse emerges as a continual process of re-activating memory. The Ruïnekerk exemplifies how architecture persists through the interplay of matter and imagination, presence and circulation. Between 2017 and 2025, this research has traced a movement from physical ruins to digital constellations, from solitary viewing to collective authorship. In Kasack's post-war vision of *Die Stadt hinter dem Strom* (1947), the city beyond the river exists as a metaphysical reflection of our world—real yet refracted. Likewise, the digital ruin becomes the reflection of its material self: a city behind the stream of data. To dive with the



Fig. 4. *Jansang* flip-book. Translation of digital afterimages into tactile experience (Hyunggyu Kim, 2025)



Fig. 5. Winter light through Ruïnekerk walls. Architecture as living afterimage (Hyunggyu Kim 2025)

afterimage is to engage this doubled reality, where architecture lives simultaneously as stone and as memory, as ruin and as rhythm.

Jansang thus redefines adaptive reuse not as preservation but as participation—a democratic art of perceiving, remembering, and rebuilding the world together.

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