Debris
David Gissen

Consider the term debris. It originated in France in the sixteenth century as a verb, débris, meaning ‘to break down, to reduce to component parts’; ‘the order, ‘civilized’, ‘cultivated’, and ‘advanced’ became the nouns. It was a common practice to break down a structure, to demolish, to reduce to mere components, to scattering, the understanding of buildings and artifacts as mere ‘pieces’ (à la Vitruvius), and to reassemble them, to build anew on the remains of the old. This practice was widespread, and it became a cultural phenomenon, an act of destruction. It makes debris a tool of projection, and speaks of a potentially destructive future.

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Many of the structures examined by Le Roy were in ruins, as a result of the ravages of time and the occasional eruptions of nature, or as the result of a civil war. This is the reason why Le Roy and Viollet-le-Duc developed the concept of the debris. They saw the buildings as a collection of components, of parts that could be separated and reassembled. They believed that the beauty of the building lay in its individual parts, and that the whole was greater than the sum of its parts. This belief was based on the idea of the Renaissance, which held that the beauty of a building was in its perfect proportions, and that these proportions could be achieved by combining individual parts. This belief was also based on the idea of the Baroque, which held that the beauty of a building was in its dynamic movement, and that this movement could be achieved by combining individual parts.

The concept of debris has been used in many ways, from the Renaissance to the modern era. It has been used to describe the remains of buildings, the remains of cities, and the remains of civilizations. It has been used to describe the remains of the human body, and the remains of the mind. It has been used to describe the remains of the soul, and the remains of the spirit.

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Arata Isozaki, Hiroshima Aftermath: Electric City, 1948
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