

## DIALECTIC OF PERFORMATIVE SPACE: THE LIMINOID CHARACTER OF THE RUIN

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DOSSIER WORLDS IN PERFORMANCE: 20 YEARS  
NAPEDRA

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### ABSTRACT


The article reflects on the social trajectory of spaces, focusing on the ruins of a hotel from the 1940s. First, the role of geographical displacements in the material and symbolic elaboration of space are explored. Then, space is analyzed through the way people transform it based on what they do. Space is presented as a product of action, social relations and performative practices. Finally, the space's dialectical aspects are discussed: the ruins emerge in the present from the clash of temporalities, the performative space is taken as a dialectical space.

### KEYWORDS

Memory; Ruins;  
Performative space;  
Dialectical space;  
Anthropology of space.

### 1 INTRODUCTION

In 1989, Richard McGuire (2017) published the first outline of his graphic novel *Here* in the *Raw* magazine, edited by Art Spiegelman. McGuire tells different stories of how human (and non-human) relations are constructed in the same space and how these relations transform it. The novel is an interesting reflection on time and space. Time is fragmented, advances and returns, always from the same point in space.




Spatial continuity is a contrast to temporal fragmentation. Simultaneous plots, interspersed and superimposed, arise from the space—daily scenes of a family between 1950 and 1980, the life of an Indigenous village, the building process of a colonial house in early eighteenth century, scenes from a remote future or the landscape in 500,000 BCE. The plots reveal infinite possibilities of narratives on the same space. The corner of the living room is portrayed as an infinite and intricate entanglement of relations.

Considering the impressive extension of a single space that shelters a multiplicity of human practices, *Here* intends to investigate the possible productions of the space: the accumulation of relationships that thicken their meaning while new layers superimpose themselves to concentrate aspects that unfold in time. Qualitative attributes are inscribed in the space by such practices.

Domestication of space and its production as an inhabitable and possible world is part of the utopia's genealogy: the transformation of nature into culture, savage into domestic, unknown into known. Humanity's history can be told by means of the various manners in which we relate with each other and with the world around us: the perception and construction of the world as a humanly organized space.

Tim Ingold (2002) discusses the perception of the environment and how social relations can define the construction of the world. Ingold emphasizes the idea of skills for an active engagement with the environment. His dwelling perspective is the foundation for the reflection on the forms of occupation and creation in a world full of various human and non-human beings. In this regard, relations between humans—which we are used to call social—are only a subcategory of the relations between us and the whole ecosystem that surrounds us. When Ingold discusses dwelling, he is interested in approaching both consciousness and activity as rooted in the engagement between people and the environment. This engagement is the foundation for our understanding of perception and cognition. Such a comprehension also extends to architecture, built environment, mapping, landscape and temporality (Ingold 2002, 5).

In this regard, McGuire and Ingold help us to adjust our eyes: the object of this text is a ruin. Regardless of every ruin's historical specificity, the ruins of the Termas Yara Hotel are an interesting subject for a reflection on memory and heritage in the region known as Pioneer North (North-east Paraná) and Central North, in cities such as Bandeirantes, Cornélio Procopio, Londrina, Rolândia, Apucarana and Maringá. The ruin of Termas Yara Hotel reveals the presence of something that no longer exists. Its absence is the fruit of an accelerated process that rapidly transformed an



exclusively Indigenous territory (mostly of the Kaingangues people, but also of Guarani and Xetá peoples) into occupation in the first half of the nineteenth century and more intensely in the beginning of the twentieth (Tommasino 1995). These cities, whose growth process was intensified during the coffee economy, were founded mainly in the decades of 1930 and 1940.

This text focuses on the materiality of the relation between humans and the environment, presenting Termas Yara Hotel<sup>1</sup> and the production of liminality in a post-industrial world (even in a rural context). There are some possible paths to think about the performativity of space (Feenstra and Verzero 2020). Based on fieldwork, ruins are mobilized to discuss the possible reflections on the performative space as a dialectical space. To this end, reflections on the empirical materials are based on the concept of “dialectical image” (Benjamin 2007, 48, our translation). This concept is the tool for the comprehension of history as the confrontation of antagonistic polarities.

## 2 THE GODDESS OF THE WATERS

The history of Termas Yara Hotel begins with the investments made by Paolo Domenico Regalmuto Coffa. He was born on January 13, 1880, and died on October 19, 1961. Son of Paolo Regalmuto and Luigia Scinardo Tenghi, he was born in Capizzi, a little village in the city of Messina (Sicily, Italy). He was first married to Beatrice Brassi and then he married again with Catherine Erderlyi in 1959, in São Paulo.

When he was naturalized as a Brazilian citizen, his name became Paulo Domingos Regalmuto Coffa. After making a fortune selling wood, Paulo Domingos invested in land in Northern Paraná. Paulo Domingos acquired 1210 hectares in a region situated at 9 kilometers from the city of Bandeirantes, where he opened a sawmill in the beginning of the 1930s. In this region, there was an area of waterlogged lands where the Laranjinha River and Cinzas River met. Paulo Domingos noticed this water had a specific smell and appearance.

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1. Fieldwork and registration of material took place in the context of COVID-19 pandemic. The old photographs were collected on the Hotel's official social media page. The ruins' images were photographed by Janaína da Silva Alves and the researcher in September 2021.

**FIGURE 1**

Sawmill built by Paulo Domingos Regalmuto Coffa to exploit cedar and peroba trees. Source: Fazenda Yara (n.d.).



Published in the Official Diary of the Union on December 31, 1941, with Getúlio Vargas's signature, the Decree 7543 presents in its first article the authorization to "Brazilian citizen Paulo Domingos Regalmuto Coffa to research sulfurous waters in his lands of the Fazenda S. Domingos" (Brasil 1941, 1, our translation). The authenticated document that entitled Paulo Domingos to exploit the lands cost 360 thousand reis.

In 1942, Paulo Domingos ordered the services of analysis and emission of a report made by the Federal University of Paraná (UFPR). The report showed the water's specificity: potentially therapeutic and hypothermal at 32°C. Then, Paulo Domingos started to invest in building the first well for commercial exploration of the waters and began to sell bottles of what he called "Água Yara," a reference to the African-Amerindian goddess of waters.

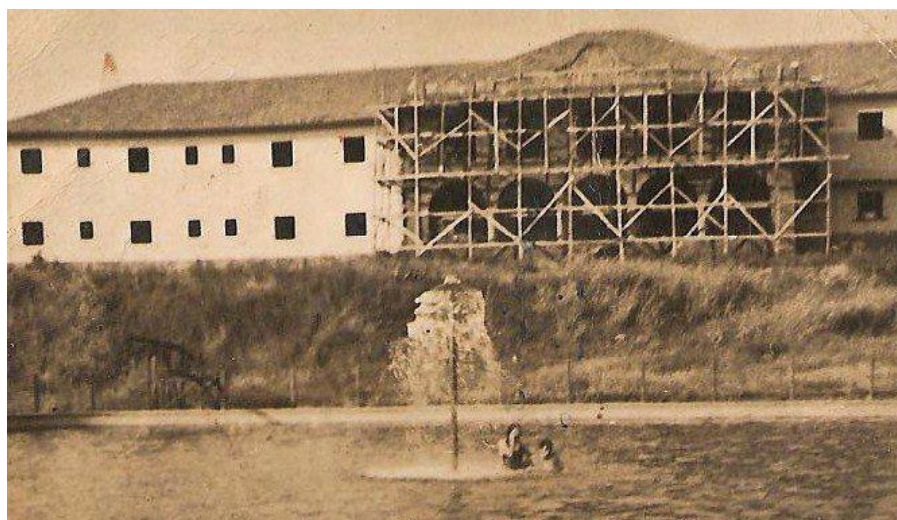
Besides wood selling and the commercialization of bottled water, Paulo Domingos' ambitions were even greater. Two projects were outlined: a part of the land would become a great hotel complex, and the other part would be subdivided for the foundation of a new city (Figure 2). The city's project failed, but the hotel thrived. The sawmill and the bottles of water supported his dream. This is how Termas Yara Hotel was born. The 5-star hotel was meant to host up to 200 people, who could enjoy not only the virtuous water pools, but also a casino and fine dining.

**FIGURE 2**  
Advertisement  
of "Água Yara"  
announcing the first  
Northern Paraná's  
balneary city, the  
Yara city. Source:  
Fazenda Yara (n.d.).



The construction of the hotel began from its reference, the well perforation. The foundation stone is, in this case, the fountain where the pool was set. The waters that gush at 32°C from the central fountain in the pool come from the over 100 meters-deep drilling site. The building of the complex (Figure 3) was challenging because transportation and communication networks were practically nonexistent by that time. Due to challenges, the main edifice's construction was slow until the inauguration of the hotel in 1948 (Figure 4).

**FIGURE 3**  
Photograph that  
shows the building  
progress in 1947.  
Paulo Domingo's  
son and wife bathe  
in the thermal  
waters gushed by  
the fountain. Source:  
Fazenda Yara (n.d.).





**FIGURE 4**  
The fountain and  
Termas Yara Hotel's  
façade in the  
beginning of 1950.  
Source: Fazenda  
Yara (n.d.).




During the 1950s, the hotel was the stage for historical meetings, memorable carnival parties and gambling; famous artists, singers, politicians of all ranks and soccer players were hosts. According to Walter de Oliveira, who worked as a clerk at the notary's office that served Paulo Domingos Regalmuto and then worked at the hotel for seven years:

The restaurant even had a maître. The carnival was the best in the region. Dozens of buses arrived bringing people for the weekend. The Douglas DC-3 planes from Real Aerovias that travelled between São Paulo-Maringá would come down on the landing field Regalmuto built on the hotel's grounds. (Água medicinal 2010, our translation)

Walter de Oliveira researches the region of Bandeirantes and writes the column "Fragments of History" for the newspaper *Folha do Norte*. He says that the owner faced an unexpected turning point in 1958: he was diagnosed with thrombosis, which rapidly took his legs. After the amputation, Paulo Domingos committed suicide inside the hotel in 1961 (Água medicinal 2010).

Paulo Domingos Regalmuto Filho became the heir at the age of 20. Paulinho—his nickname—was used to full and rich life, having motor racing as his hobby. He participated in races at Interlagos (SP) with his Jaguar. On December 6, 1963, while driving to São Paulo to meet his wife, he was involved in an accident 30 km away from Bandeirantes, dying in the city of Cambará. After the accident, Catherine Elderlyi, Paulo Domingos Regalmuto's first wife, inherited the property. The hotel was then managed



by João Pedro Crosato, who died during a surgery in São Paulo shortly after. In the early 1970s Catherine sold the hotel to Paschoal D'Andrea, a real estate salesman. Shortly after, in 1973, Catherine also passed away.


As narrated by Oliveira, the decade of 1970 was marked by the work of D'Andrea, who knew hotel's potential and that of its waters. He worked to regularize the 660 lots that formed "Yara City," also extending lots in the rural area. By the end of the decade, D'Andrea got sick and died. The hotel was then inherited by his children, who exchanged the area for another farm in Cornélio Procopio. A property of Matsubara family, descendants from Japanese migrants in the region. In the early 1980s, the hotel closed its doors and ended its commercial activities.

The place entered a process of ruin. Slowly, it deteriorated due to the weather, plunder and depredation. Two fires of huge proportions also damaged the hotel. Plunders became constant: bathrooms' pieces and tiles, lamps and chandeliers, roller shutters and doors, hinges and iron were all taken. Nothing was spared from plunder, time and fire.

In 2002, the Matsubara family sold 116 out of 237 hectares. The couple who bought the hotel's lands were Cláudio and Rafaella Delgado. Cláudio is a farm-worker's son who worked with his father at cotton plantations for Sueo Matsubara. He returned to the city after working as a stockbroker and living in São Paulo for many years. In an interview, he explained:

I grew up in Bandeirantes, where I saw the treasure that the Yara is. This is a strange sensation. I dreamt with that diamond and today it is mine. I want to cut it, but I can't. Today, I manage the stock of a German group that holds R\$ 35 million to invest in the restoration and transformation of Yara into a touristic complex. I already have the project. Only the legal aspects remain. (Água medicinal 2010, our translation)

Regardless of the anxiety for touristic exploration and proposals for the municipalization of thermal waters—supported by local society, public figures and the Regional Council of Architecture and Engineering (CREA/PR)—the project for turning the place into heritage and the building of a complex is a reality. The project foresees the construction of a museum, revitalization of the area, construction of new pools and other enterprises, including a craft brewery. Besides the financial support, an issue regarding the selling is pending. Attorney Frederico Vidotti de Rezende explains (Água medicinal 2010): "the farm was auctioned by Banestado due to previous owners' debit." This debt was paid through credit by Serafim Meneghel, who signed an agreement with the Bank of the State of Paraná (Banestado),



keeping part of the land. However, the auction process was embargoed by the Matsubara family, and is yet to be judged because of a missing precatory letter whose recipient was the Bandeirantes's city hall. Due to this pending legal issue, 237 hectares of land belong to Serafim Meneghel.

Another issue that complicates the context is the set of ex-workers suing the Matsubara family. Portions of land were auctioned, except from 116 hectares owned by Claudio Delgado. Inside the auction processes, the remaining 121 hectares were recently bought by Rafaela, Cláudio's wife.

These ruins are interesting to think about transformations in and of space, but also about social relations that imply transformations. The specificity of Termas Yara Hotel is its fast transformations. Such a characteristic reveals the production of memories (and the oblivion), as well as the importance of how performativity is inscribed in space, as Feenstra and Verzero (2020) suggested. Performative practices and its relations with space are considered a way of knowing. Space and its dialectical qualities are the foundation for the understanding of performative practices. Space conditions the practices and it is conditioned by practices. On the one hand, the space creates the conditions for the enactment of practices. On the other hand, instigated by their practices, people modify the space in order to create the conditions to enact practices.


Space is constituted by relation networks that happen in it. Not only constituted, space is also modified, destroyed and, eventually, built again by relations and determinations of its agents. Regardless of its inescapable absence found in the present, we are interested in the practices inscribed in space as the superimposition of layers submerged in time. Over mere seven decades, an insensitive dream was erected upon the barbaric genocide of Indigenous peoples.

Nevertheless, it is important to reflect on the role that geographic displacements play in the elaboration of the environment's material and symbolic aspects in human perception and the field of ritual. Our reflection draws upon the work of Van Gennep (1908/2018) and Victor Turner (1974; 1982/2015). The former contributes with his consideration on the material aspects of rites of passage and the latter with his discussion on anti-structure and liminality in contemporary societies.

### **3 LIMINAL AND LIMINOID SPACE**

Arnold Van Gennep authored a systematic and morphological approach to the ritual. According to his reasoning, "the passage from one country to another, from one province to another within each country, and, still





earlier, even from one manorial domain to another was accompanied by various formalities” (Gennep 1908/2018, 33, our translation). The author reflects on the universe of small societies where some sites are distinctive in relation to the occupied territory. The distinctions are produced by the knowledge regarding territorial limits in which determined rights and prerogatives prevail. Such limits are often marked by an object, as a stake, a stone or even a porch.

Considering that a specific space is determined and appropriated by the occupation and transit of a specific group, Gennep (1908/2018) remarks that foreigners’ presence within this perimeter is as dangerous as the transit outside these limits. Given the risks involved, diverse rites are performed during the movements of coming in and out those spaces. On the one hand, rites that forbid foreigners from coming in and, on the other, rites that forbid belongers from coming out. These rituals concern interdictions which are physical and material, but also symbolic, magic and religious.

Spaces and territories outside occupied zones are considered dangerous and risky: desert, swamp and primeval forest are this kind of special case. Surrounded by care are also canyons, cliffs, narrow passages, mountain chains, rivers, among others. All are understood as liminal places. Gennep (1908/2018) remarks on the fact that any subject who transits between these two zones is in a special situation, given the risk and vulnerability to potential dangers. Such specificity is defined by what he calls margin (or *limen*), where the subject floats between two universes.

On the one hand, this specificity is given by the transit; on the other, it is given by characteristics and qualities found in each zone. Danger and risk characterize what is beyond the occupied frontier. Occupied zone is characterized by the known, the established and safe. Occupied zone is a product of human action, whereas the external zone is surrounded by indeterminations and ambiguities, being then relegated to the unknown realm of nature. The external zone is not only an unoccupied space, but also a neutral zone disputed and litigated between groups.<sup>2</sup>

The neutral zone, among occupied zones, diminished with the years until it became only a mark, a stone, a beam or a porch. These marks determine the limits between the known and the unknown, between the domestic

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2. The expression “*no man’s land*” was used during the First World War to designate the space between two rival trenches. This was a risky territory, a neutral (although disputed) place in the battlefield. Outside the trenches, it is considered the most dangerous zone in the war.

world and the stranger world.<sup>3</sup> The diversity of rites concerning the transit between spaces and the modification of spaces' uses and functions expresses the relevance of these situations. Qualitative aspects tied to the margin highlights its potentialities (Gennep 1908/2018). Regardless of its ambiguity, indeterminacy and risk, the margin as a transition space has its differentiated status in relation to the established aspects of occupied, domestic and structurally organized zones. These qualitative aspects are also considered by another meaningful author for the studies of the ritual.

Among liminality's qualitative attributes and aspects, Victor Turner (1974) emphasizes ambiguity and its imprecision in terms of classification. Transitions and margins are consecrated positions. Ambiguity and indeterminacy are elaborated through a wide range of symbols, especially in contexts where transition is ritualized: "liminality is frequently likened to death, to being in the womb, to invisibility, to darkness, to bisexuality, to the wilderness, and to the eclipse of the sun or moon" (Turner 1974, 117, our translation). Among these various elements listed by the author, the references to the space or displacement in space are meaningful because they relate to the material passage mentioned by Gennep (1908/2018).

Three analogies may help. First, just as the neophytes are often those who do not have status, property, insignia, clothes, class or social role, the liminal space can also be considered as indeterminate, unoccupied and free from conventions that determinate social coexistence. Second, just as social life can be understood as a dialectical process that defines relationships, forms and frontiers in terms of structure and anti-structure, the displacement in space can be defined by means of a dialectics between the known and the unknown: the familiar and the ignored, the domestic and the savage, culture and nature. Finally, just as liminal subjects are seen as a kind of *tabula rasa* in which the group's knowledge and wisdom are inscribed, the liminal spaces are also full of potentialities, forms of organizing the occupation and access to resources. From the point of view of those who organize the familiar spaces' occupation structures, the liminal space represents danger and chaos. Placed in the middle of classificatory frontiers, the liminal space is often perceived as "contaminant."

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3. Arnold van Gennep (1908/2018) considers that material rite of passage becomes a spiritual (symbolic) rite of passage. According to the author, spaces can be considered by means of their profane or sacred characteristics. A new home, for example, is considered taboo until rites convert it into something known and familiar (Gennep 1908/2018). The rite separates the practices enacted in spaces. The house becomes habitable by means of a process that withdraws the space from its unknown condition in the realm of nature. In the same way, releasing a space for a new function can also be subject to the construction of ritual procedures.

Drawing upon these analogies used to think about liminal spaces, the potentialities of agencies are now considered. Turner's argument regarding liminal subjects can be extended to liminal spaces insofar as they have similar qualities and attributes (Turner 1974).

When Turner (1974; 1982/2015) reconsidered Gennep's *Rites of Passage*, he illuminated other aspects of ritual. Turner is interested in the elements that enable the construction of another field within and outside the profane social structure. According to Turner, there are two "models" of human relation: the society and its structured, differentiated and hierarchical system that separate people; and, on the other hand, the "model" considered as a form of "unstructured or rudimentarily structured and relatively undifferentiated comitatus" (Turner 1974, 119, our translation). Expressing his preference for the word *communitas* instead of *community*, Turner considers this a modality of social relation in an "area of common living" (Turner 1974, 119, our translation). This modality takes place in times when societies operate through the "model" of anti-structure.

Anti-structure's particularity is the suspension of social roles, status, rights and duties, namely the suspension of norms that regulate ordinary social life. The reflection on this "model" leads to the consideration of how such suspensions are integrated into social life. Thus, Turner qualifies *communitas* as a very specific form of social relation. It is characterized by a kind of level zero for the status of subjects integrated into certain rituals. Nevertheless, some aspects linked to the small societies' anti-structural rituals are loosened from exclusively ritual contexts and appear in other realms of post-industrial social life. These realms are understood as liminoid products or genres.<sup>4</sup>

Drawing upon the distinction between leisure and work activities, Turner qualifies some attributes of liminoid genres. The author considers them as "an independent and critical source" and "independent domain of creative activity" (Turner 1982/2015, 43 and 75, our translation). He argues that they do not construct an inverted image of the world of work because that would just praise and reinforce the *status quo*. Turner is interested in the attributes because they support the definition and comprehension of how liminoid genres operate in post-industrial society.

Leisure is constructed as an opposite of work, regardless of its autonomization and the constitution of a field of work: participation is not an

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4. Later, in *From ritual to theatre*, Turner wrote: "technical innovations are the products of ideas, the products of which I will call the 'liminoid' [...] what Marx assigned to a domain he called 'the superstructural' – I would prefer to talk about the 'anti-', 'meta- or' 'proto-structural'" (Turner 1982/2015, 43, our translation).

obligation, however, work in the field of leisure is equivalent to other work activities.

As leisure and entertainment are genres also affected by the vocational and systematic character of protestant ethic, they also integrate the process of specialization, segmentation and rationalization: “Thus, we have a *serious* division of labor in the entertainment business” (Turner 1982/2015, 52, our translation). This is only possible in industrialized or post-industrialized and urbanized societies. Apart from compulsory obligation, leisure work is defined by freedom. In this respect, option is a characteristic of liminoid phenomena, whereas obligation rules the liminal (Turner 1982/2015).

From this definition, it is possible to establish relations between these models and the process involved in the ruin production in order to think about some characteristics tied to liminoid genres (considering the field of entertainment industry as a reference) and some aspects tied to activities and practices. The process of creation, proliferation and complexification of liminoid genres is conditioned by organic solidarity, limited to the contractual relation of general reciprocity. Even though the liminoid can be born in collective contexts, it is generally defined in relation to its individual aspect. Being directly connected to leisure, the liminoid is rarely associated with the main economy and political process. Liminoid is placed in parallel to the structure, on the margins, in the interstices; it explores the fragmentary character of the post-industrial world (Turner 1982/2015).

The option and creation of new conventions are only possible after the rupture of the structure constituted by mechanical solidarity. Liminoid is in the world like a commodity: it is produced, sold, selected and paid for; it is subject to the variations of supply and demand; and it depends on the material conditions of its production. In such a context, Victor Turner (1982/2015) emphasizes the liminoid spaces and scenarios. He mentions the space where liminoid genres of leisure and entertainment are enacted. Insofar as the space is simultaneously constituted as a place of work and as a commodity—from soccer stadiums to theater, arena or church—other meanings are created.

Following Turner’s reflection in the book *From ritual to theatre* (Turner 1982/2015), this research focuses on the abandoned spaces, ruins and deteriorated buildings as examples of the liminoid categories adapted from Gennep’s studies regarding small and pre-industrial societies. If ruins before ancient times were exclusively connected to extinct civilizations, now we also have contemporary ruins. The recent ruins express the process of precocious fossilization due to the intensification of rapid transformations in modern times.

Termas Yara Hotel's ruins are associated with leisure, touristic visits, and leasing for photo shoots. These are all aspects of liminoid genres. Nevertheless, most importantly, the ruins are put as a parallel for the social structure: they question juridically constituted models of space organization and the productive uses of the land as a business model. Hence, the waters' qualities are highly precious and need to be exploited as a resource. There are projections for restoration and a new touristic business with foreign investment. However, there are controversies: some people say that public administration must own the lands and guarantee access to the water—Termas would represent more than a lucrative business because people cannot be prevented from enjoying its medicinal properties.

These ruins are subproducts of a post-industrial world in which the initial purposes of such buildings no longer exist. Thus, new processes transform these spaces' attributes and uses, and, consequently, transform them into something else. When new sets of relationships are constructed, they modify the abandoned space into a space of presence. In this respect, it is important to ask how this space is constituted, namely how the relations established in this space define and qualify it. We then have the creation of another qualitative aspect and numberless unfoldings due to the specificity of what is enacted in the space.

Two important authors who discuss space and emphasize its dialectical aspects are Michel de Certeau and Henri Lefebvre.<sup>5</sup> Their reflections enable the articulation of complementary perspectives on space and place. Lefebvre conceptualizes space as historical time, considering it as perceived, lived and conceived (Lefebvre 2013a). Lefebvre's conception of the social production of space simultaneously considers these different spheres as moving categories that overcome the dichotomy between synchrony and diachrony.

Lefebvre associates each sphere to the individual and collective aspects: it is a social and individual triad. In this respect, the three categories centralize people. Each mode of living is related to a categorization of time/space (spaces of representation, representations of space, spatial practice), a period (agricultural age, industrial age, urban age) and, finally, a specificity of the space (absolute space, abstract space and differential space) (Matias 2021).

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5. Regarding the "dialectics of space" and "dialectical space", see Georg Simmel (1903/2013), Milton Santos (1977; 1991; 1997), Michel Foucault (1984/2013), Michel de Certeau (1980/2014), Edward W. Soja (1989), Pierre Bourdieu (1991/2013), Fredric Jameson (1991), Henri Lefebvre (2008; 2013a; 2013b), Martina Löw (2013), Luis Carlos Tosta dos Reis (2000) and Breno Maciel Souza Reis (2013).



Michel de Certeau (1980/2014) has also put people in the center of his reflection on space and the distinction between space and place. Like Lefebvre, Certeau thinks space from practice, namely space is understood through the ways people transform places by means of their occupations and appropriations. Thus, peoples' practices modify the use of the places.

There is *space* when vector of direction, quantities of speed and the variable time are considered. Space is the crossing of mobiles. It is in a certain way animated by the set of movements unfolded in it [...]. In sum, *the space is a practiced place*. (Certeau 1980/2014, 184, our translation)

This distinction between space and place can be interesting when it comes to performative aspects. Regardless of determinations that space impose upon people, practices fill the place with certain meaningful qualities. The ruins of Termas Yara Hotel enable the inquiry on the dialectical aspects of space, considering the relations and performative practices as well as the ways they determine the processes of space production.

#### 4 PERFORMATIVE SPACE

Pietsie Feenstra and Lorena Verzero (2020) coined the concept of *performative cities* to think about the multiple dimensions of cities and their relations to arts and memory. Their book discusses the production of memory by means of practices in relation to space. It draws upon the work provided by 15 researchers, whose ethnographic materials come from three different countries (Germany, Spain and Argentina). The authors are mainly interested in artistic practices and their intervention in the construction of places. Nevertheless, "artistic" practice is only one among the multiple performative practices that directly affect the qualitative production of space.

Stretching Feenstra and Verzeros' conception, the idea of *performative space* seems more adequate to reflect on Termas Yara Hotel. The hotel is now a set of ruins surrounded by stories of ghosts and curses (Figure 5). The ruins are the materiality of what happened there. The ruins accumulate layers of practices that entangle memories. The ruins decompose not only the materials with which the place was constructed, but also memories. However, new narratives are composed upon the ruins too. Action (of human beings and time) also produces (un)memory (Feenstra and Verzero 2020).

**FIGURE 5**  
Left lateral of the  
hotels' façade.  
Degradation and  
time action in  
windows and walls  
can be observed.  
Source: Janaína  
da Silva Alves,  
September/2021,  
private archive.



The process of ruin can be understood by means of the uses—or their absence—of a certain space. Therefore, this process depends on the practices, finalities, and objectives. Drawing upon the ideas of Michel de Certeau (1980/2014), we can consider space, simultaneously, as producer and product by means of what people enact in space. The relations turn the space into a “stage.” In this regard, space is the producer of performance. On the other hand, space is also performed because it is produced through the performance inscribed in it, namely the space is also the product of a human action (or its absence) (Gapper n.d.).

As mentioned, it is for this reason that performative practices can be understood as a way of knowing. Space creates conditions for the production of knowledge through practice. On the other hand, people modify the space, instigated by practices and ways of knowing, recreating new conditions for other practices and other knowledge.

Regarding memory, ruins and monuments are asymmetrical. The built monuments are the cult of memory: characters are summoned daily, their deeds and dates; they seek perennity. Ruins, as spaces for the production of (un)memory, materialize the destroyed, the almost forgotten, the neglected, the disused; they evoke the layers of faded memories. Monuments summon up heroes and their great deeds, whereas ruins evoke failure. Both create memories, but differently. The performative space must be conceived through synchronic and diachronic dimensions.

Ruins have a huge capacity to lead us to the past; an opaque past though. One of their most important attributes is the surpassing of their possible uses and initial purposes. Such places seduce our imagination and arouse

paradoxical curiosity. They are taken by fascination and mystery. It is no coincidence that ghost stories proliferate in such places. Regardless of their relation with the almost forgotten past, the materiality of these places is found in the present. Not uncommonly, other realities appear through abandonment, disuse, and surpassing of their initial objectives.

**FIGURE 6**

This image shows lateral arches in the rooms' balconies. The exploration of tactile aspects in the interior reveals a little of ruins' (un)memories. Source: Janaína da Silva Alves, September/2021, private archive.



Georg Simmel (1903/2013) also thought about space and even formulated a “Sociology of space”. In 1911, Simmel (1911/1998) wrote a text regarding ruins and their characteristics. Searching for the particularities of architectural art in relation to other works of art, he argued that the ruin is a more meaningful phenomenon than the fragments of other destroyed works of art. Such a relevance is given by the evidence of a confrontation between what he calls “forces of spirits” and “forces of nature.” The ruin indicates that the forces of nature constitute a new totality in the destruction of the work of art’s pieces. In the ruin, the work remains alive by the impositions of nature. The crumbling form constitutes a meaningless accident. Nevertheless, only a new meaning can embrace this accident, which is no longer based exclusively on human finality, but rather on a deeper finality that overcomes the common roots of nature and culture.

## FIGURES 7 AND 8

In the interior of ruined rooms nature retakes its processes.

Nature claims its right and new guests are present in the Hotel's ruins. Source: Janaína da Silva Alves, September/2021, private archive.



From humanity's point of view, abandonment is part of a positive passivity. In other words, human inaction becomes an accomplice of nature and, in a certain way, agent of nature's action (Figure 6). This is what Simmel considers the seduction of the ruin: human work is finally perceived as a nature's product. The original work that is the fruit of human action over the place is now perceived as a nature's product. Ruins' actual appearance is given by the corrosive and devastating power of nature (Figure 7 and 8). And Simmel goes further: there is a second seduction regarding the inversion of the typical order in which the material returns to nature (Simmel 1911/1998).

This second seduction, according to Simmel, derives from nature's right over all things that had never been completely expired in the work.

[...] Regarding its matter, its reality, the work has always remained nature, and if nature retakes its dominance, it only executes its right that has not been used, but one that nature has never renounced. For this reason, the ruin strikes us so often as tragic – but not as sad – because destruction here is not something senselessly coming from outside but rather realization of a tendency inherent in the deepest layer of existence of the destroyed. (Simmel 1911/1998, 139, our translation)

Entropy has never diminished, it is the ever-renounced right that nature claims and executes in the ruined fragments.



**FIGURES 9, 10, 11  
AND 12**

Through pitted walls  
other perspectives  
are seen in the  
interior of ruins.  
Rubble and out  
of place things  
resize space.  
Source: Janaína  
da Silva Alves,  
September/2021,  
private archive.



Simmel finishes his reflection presenting the antagonism between the principle of “spirit” (read “nature”) and the principle of “good mother” (read “nature”). This inconclusive antagonism, which conditions all existent forms, cannot be evenly reconciled. One side prevails, while the other sinks in annihilation, offering a new image.

According to Simmel, the aesthetic value of the ruin is exactly the balance of the antagonism for the production of a new meaning (Figures 9 and 12). Now the ruin is the site of human action from which this very action has been separated. With this new meaning, the ruin now has the capacity of creating the present form of a past life; not through its remains or degraded memories, but rather through its past as such: “[...] finality and chance, nature and spirit, past and present loosen this tension between opposites, or rather save, preserve this tension, leading to an unity of external image and internal action” (Simmel 1911/1998, 140, our translation).

Like all the processes of decay, ruins show the encounter of contrary aspirations. In this respect, ruins in itself, and in its symbolic aspect, can be understood as a performative space, a site where practices are decanted through time, producing (un)memory and materializing the antagonism between nature and culture. The ruin’s unresolved lies in the unification of imbalance.



## 5 DIALECTICAL SPACE

The ruins of Termas Yara Hotel awaken a reflection. It is possible to observe the presence of something inexistent. However, this absence is the byproduct of an accelerated process of occupation in the beginning of the 1930s and 1940s. The production of a liminal space in the post-industrial world happens in a fast and intense manner. The concept of “dialectical image” (Benjamin 2007, 48, our translation) supports the approach of historical aspects as the confrontation of antagonistic polarities. By means of the ruins, we discuss the possibilities of performative space (Feenstra and Verzero 2020) as dialectical space.

The specific manner by which the ruins (and other byproducts of the post-industrial world) produce this unification of the imbalance suggests a reflection on the possibilities of the “new meaning” mentioned by Simmel. On the one hand, it stimulates a project to understand the ways of ruin’s seduction; on the other, it suggests other possible worlds (Prisco 2020). In this respect, the ruin resonates with the now not only as performative space but also as a dialectical image.

Drawing upon these instigating elements, we see proximities and distances between some concepts mentioned above. Thinking about a material and dialectical historiography with anthropological characteristics, we can consider the image as an “antediluvian fossil” (Benjamin 2007, 503, our translation) that reveals, through dialectic, the myth as ancient past and nature as primeval history. The aforementioned fragment resonates with Simmel’s considerations on nature and culture (Simmel 1911/1998).

In the manuscript “On the theory of knowledge, theory of progress”, Benjamin (2007) presents the image as the point where past and now meet. As a kind of node of relations that form a constellation. The clash of temporalities is a characteristic of the dialectical image. Hence, the legibility of an image is given by its temporal index (the diachronic aspect). This temporal index presents its belonging to a certain period, but it also presents the possibility of reading and interpreting. The ruins are read in the present as the point wherein past and now meet.

The dialectical image can be understood as an analytical tool integrated in an epistemological method that conceives history as the confrontation of antagonistic polarities. Alexia Bretas (2008, 177 and 178, our translation) affirms that the concept of “dialectical image” resonates with the concept of “idea,” for the author Benjamin describes it as the “configuration of the extreme that meets the extreme”. Created through the interpretation of collective dreams, dialectical images can be mobilized to think about a society numbed by the delusional promises of capitalism and the narratives of bourgeois historiography. The remedy for this narcotic effect is the

rupture with the dream of the commodity society. The critical moment of reading the images can represent the rupture with such effects.


Emphasizing the visual aspects of historical configurations, Benjamin argues that dialectical images are born where “the tension between dialectical opposites is greatest” (Benjamin 2007, 518, our translation). The multiplicity of the real, the otherness of temporalities and the critical sensibility can be understood through a procedure that grasps the unfinished, the inconclusive, and the fragmentary. Saturation of tensions seen in the dialectical image enables us to break the history *continuum* through the artifice of *montage*. Therefore, the origin of the dialectical image can be considered as sudden and non-chronological (Bussoletti 2010, Lima 2021).

Thinking about ruins through the presence of dialectical opposites emphasized by Arnold Van Gennep (1908/2018), Victor Turner (1974; 1982/2015), Henri Lefebvre (2013a), Michel de Certeau (1980/2014), Georg Simmel (1911/1998) and Walter Benjamin (1989; 1994; 2007)—namely through this “saturated configuration of tensions”—it is possible to raise the possibility of a “new meaning.” In the ambiguities of the ruins, we can find the dialectical image for the possible understanding of a collective dream (Benjamin 2007). Drawing from such perception, *performative space* forms the lines of a *dialectical space*.



**FIGURE 13**

Great hall on the upper level, above the foyer. Source: Janaína da Silva Alves, September/2021, private archive.



Termas Yara Hotel's ruins are the ruins of a rural bourgeoisie whose guidelines was the extractive exploitation of natural resources.

The ruins of the Church and Nobility, the ruins of Middle Age and Feudalism are sublime and today they inspire the winners, who get astounded; but the ruins of Bourgeoisie will be ignoble detritus of paperboard, colored plaster. (Benjamin 2007, 126, our translation)

The search for the new meaning preserves the tension of ambiguity and the antagonism of the opposites. Finality and chance, nature and culture, past and present find a new meaning in the occupation of Pioneer North (Paraná). The place where it all began—exploited by the conditions and feasibility of extracted wood for the buildings and the therapeutic waters—is now under the renewed control of nature. Detritus of paperboard and plaster are exposed like scars (Figure 13). Over Kaingang territory, the “pioneer bandeirantes” carried out a developmental project. In their ambiguities, images have utopic elements. Now the once abandoned ruins are the property of a farm-worker's son. New protagonists bring other elements to this historical configuration.

At first, it seems that anti-structural aspects stand against oblivion; against (un)memory and erasure of the forgotten—those who shed blood and sweat to build the images of the capitalist dream. Behold the ruins that are used as liminoid space; devoid of collective and communitarian occupation. This is now a place open for visits upon payment. These ruins are spectacularized by their aesthetic aspects.

**FIGURE 14**

Transversal passage  
that interconnects  
ground floor's  
rooms. Source:  
Author's,  
September/2021,  
private archive.




Currently, the site is open for visitation. Curious people, anthropologists, photographers who want different settings for couple photos, audiovisual producers, bloggers and youtubers who explore the curse stories to capitalize on trip tips and tourism in Northern Paraná. In the meanwhile, the farm-worker's son tries to avoid the municipalization of the thermal waters and glimpses new images of desire and dream by means of a new developmental endeavor that already "do have a project." In the depth of their ambiguities, images also contain dystopian elements (Figure 14). The ruins find a home in a new narcotic dream, the glimpse of new oneiric imagery.

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