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Research paper

# A Queer Autoethnography through Epiphanies in/of/from Ruin

Uğur Sarışen *, Ayşe Şentürer

*Istanbul Technical University,* TURKIYE

*Corresponding Author: sarisenu@itu.edu.tr
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## ABSTRACT

This article asks how the lived memory of a queer body can reshape what we know about ruins and spatial justice. The article stages theory through embodied scenes, to trace how exclusion and small acts of refusal unfold in everyday spatial practices. I argue that spatial justice emerges in cracks and gestures, and that personal disorientation can be a source of knowledge. Here, I queer autoethnography with a methodology I call ruinous autoethnography; writing that emerges from ruin as its ontological condition. I develop this by using mnemohistory and autotheory to stitch life and theory, and by treating images and their absences as sites of inquiry (engaged ekphrasis v.2). Together, these moves offer a toolkit for reading spatial justice through the memory of queer bodies and ruins. Drawing on theory-stitched life-texts and epiphanies from Fikirtepe (Istanbul/Turkiye) and Volissos (Chios/Greece), I show how memory, space and body meet in moments of epiphany and make space thinkable anew. From these encounters I propose three spatio-temporal concepts -outlined conceptually, but left implicit in the epiphanies-: mnemonic space (a swinging door within the present that opens to what has been), epimnemonic projection (collisions where once-was spaces re-form the happening), and epiphenomenal space (a queer in-between that is temporally entangled).

**Keywords:** epiphany, queer memory, ruin, ruinous autoethnography, spatial justice

Dear reader,

This article takes the ruin as a way of writing.

This text is no straight line; it breaks and slips.

Like a ruin, the inside leaks out and the outside dissolves into it; boundaries blur as fragments surface and voices clash and fold. Take these as thresholds to other ways of making sense, while the images you meet are already re-made in your mind, colliding with what you read.

As you read, notice not only what is said but the way the article insists on saying it.

My "I" speaks as an epistemic subject.

You may get lost here.

In that disorientation, the role given to you as reader, to grasp correctly, to find one truth, breaks apart. You slip off the line. You queer yourself with the text.

When you misunderstand, when you think you fail, it is your own echoes that merges with these lines. And maybe, through an epiphany, your own epiphenomenal spaces crack open.

And at that point the article is no longer mine alone.

I began; you, reading, rewrite it.

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In what spaces, in what times, did you meet injustice? How did you resist? What did you take, what did you give?

Together we assemble a shared archive. Knowledge made from where we stand. We ruin this article, ruin-ing it with our stories soaked in spatial injustices.

## I WRITE FROM A DISPLACEMENT

As someone forced to migrate from Fikirtepe1, my memories of that neighborhood remain like a closed box; always waiting, never gone. In abandoned places, in ruins, the box opens and traumas rise like dust, sudden and sharp. I have epiphanies.

In the summer of 2024, walking through the streets of Volissos2, these boxes opened again [**Figure 1**]. The ruins pressed on me and I wrote the epiphanies in my sketchbook as they came.

It was there I sensed the entanglement of my queer memory, the ruin and justice. My queer academic identity made that sense legible, from which this article emerged.

How can the lived memory of a queer body reconfigure our understanding of ruins and spatial justice?

How can the fractures of ruins, both material and mnemonic, reshape the ways we imagine queer lives and spatial justice?

How can struggles for spatial justice open through the cracks of queer memory and ruination, unsettling normative orders of spatio-temporalities?

What forms of academic writing and methodology might engage queer experience at the intersections of ruin and justice?

The article carries questions together; but fragment by fragment, in a dramaturgy where body, space, memory and ruin echo and interrupt one another.

To hold these entanglements, I write through ruinous autoethnography3, which I offer as a new methodological approach.

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[1] Fikirtepe is a district in Istanbul that grew as a squatter house settlement through rural migration in the mid-20th century. Later it became the site of Turkiye's largest urban transformation project, where an entire neighborhood was demolished and replaced by high-rise residential blocks.

[2] Volissos is one of the villages on the Greek island of Chios, known for its medieval castle and surrounding ruins. Today it carries traces of abandonment and seasonal life.

[3] Ruinous autoethnography is a methodological mode that moves between embodied autoethnographic knowledge, temporal and orientational queer drift, and the fractured ontology of ruins. It is politically attuned to questions of justice; and operationally enacted through the fissures of memory, entanglement of theory and self, and the epistemics of visual/non-visual imagery. This is a writing practice that takes its ontological ground from ruins themselves. A ruinous mode here lets fragments remain fractured. It accepts gaps, interruptions, and unfinished edges as part of knowledge.

It emerges by bringing together three genealogies that are related yet porous:

The first is the ground established by feminist and performative autoethnography, where embodied, situated, and fragmented subjectivity becomes an epistemic source. It takes shape through works that approach the body and performance as sites of knowledge (Spry, 2001; Denzin, 2013); that treat lived experience as theoretical practice (Holman Jones et al., 2013, 2015); that understand multiplicity, contradiction, and fracture as epistemic conditions (Gannon, 2013; Anderson & Glass-Coffin, 2013); and that focuses on the situated nature of all knowing (Haraway, 1988).

This ground is then bent by queer theory into a second lineage; through understandings of disorientation and strangeness as epistemic openings (Ahmed, 2000, 2006), accounts of non-linear and interruptive queer temporalities that unsettle normative chronologies (Halberstam, 2005), articulations of queer epistemic drift and narrative instability that reconfigure how method itself unfolds (Holman Jones & Harris, 2019), and approaches to visual and phenomenal ambiguity as a site of queer knowledge-making (Engel, 2018). Reflections on spatial micro-resistance frame this queer becoming within a political horizon (Pile, 1997).

The third lineage emerges when this queer-inflected method encounters the ontological possesions of ruins; through accounts that frame ruination as a collapse of temporal order (Trigg, 2006, 2012; Parry, 2019); readings of ruination as a politically produced process (Stoler, 2013); approaches that position ruins as sites of ontological incompletion and encounters with otherness (Gabriel, 1993; Lavery & Murray, 2019); that treat decay as an epistemic surface where erosion, absence, and material residue generate knowledge (Ginsberg, 2004; Somhegyi, 2018); and examinations of ruins as modernity's residual archive (Hell & Schönle, 2010).

The political horizon that connects these genealogies is shaped by readings of justice e as the redistribution of spatial inequalities (Harvey, 1996); as a struggle for recognition, representation, and participatory parity (Fraser, 1996, 2009; Young, 1990); as a spatial condition tied to the right to inhabit space (Soja, 2010); and as an ethics grounded in vulnerability, livability, and relational obligations toward others (Butler, 2004).

The genealogy becomes methodologically operative through mnemohistory, autotheory, and engaged ekphrasis. Mnemohistory takes shape through accounts of memory as a spatial and temporal palimpsest (Huyssen, 2003), cultural and collective memory as processes of re-assemblage (Assmann, 2011; Megill, 2011), and trauma as a recursive temporal rupture marked by uncanny returns (Caruth, 1996; Laub, 1992; Trigg, 2012).

Autotheory operates through feminist articulations of entanglement of theory and life (Fournier, 2021) with relational and performative modes (Brushwood Rose & Nelson, 2016; Lorentzen, 2015; Prickett, 2015). In this mode of writing, my voice and the theorists' voices do not appear as separate entities; their concepts enter the article as resonances within my own voice. References do not stand outside the argument but co-write it.

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**Figure 1**

*In volissos, i asked around about these ruins*

As queer presence in scholarship opens new epistemologies, I believe it matters for academia.

By taking personal disorientation seriously, and folding it into theoretical reflection, my article tries to show how lived experience is already conceptual work; which makes it occur as an academic work naturally.

I believe in the necessity of writing a queer article in a form that is fragmented, broken, and open to disorder. For me this is an ontological demand of queerness itself.

At the same time, I have to admit that I have often worried that the knowledge produced here, and what I find valuable to share with academia, might fall into the background if clarity and readability are abandoned altogether.

During the writing process I struggled with myself; between staying faithful to queer ontology and making the article followable.

I see this struggle as part of the very presence of queer positions in academia; finding ways to exist within a normative system of academic production.

I also believe that these struggles will open the ground for future academic works to be even more daring, to let the ontological demand of queer writing unfold more fully.

In the end, I chose to respond to the ontological demand as much as possible, while also keeping a fragile overall structure that the reader can still navigate.

The overall structure I speak of is porous.

Each layer leaks into the others and holds an intentionally unstable whole. A reader may well ask why a certain narrative sits under one layer rather than another or may reimagine their own flows across them.

In *Ruins of Thought*, I explore the ontological ground.

This part has three layers; *Crack, Threshold, Ash*.

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Engaged ekphrasis expands the methodological field by treating visual and non-visual imagery as epistemic events (Engel, 2018).

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In *Crack*, I show how a queer is tied to the stranger inside and how dis-orientation becomes an ontological beginning.

In *Threshold*, I bring epiphany to the center as the crack of queer memory. From there I develop three concepts that carry the article forward: *mnemonic space* (the swinging door inside becoming), *epimnemonic projection* (the collision of spaces of what has been with the happening), and *epiphenomenal space* (a queer in-between that is neither only now nor only residue).

Epiphanies let the reader sense them; sometimes as mnemonic spaces with their epimnemonic projections, sometimes as epiphenomenal archives where collisions open queer spatialities.

In *Ash*, I link epiphany to trauma and lay down the ethical and epistemic ground of the work.

In *Writing the Ruin/Ruinously/as Ruin Itself*, I turn to methodology.

In *Autoethnography*, I explain why I write from myself and why this is an epistemological stance.

In *Queering Autoethnography*, I show how my queer position bends the methodology and makes its political force clear.

In *Ruinous Autoethnography*, I reveal the operational structure of the methodology through three axes: *mnemohistory*, *autotheory* and *engaged ekphrasis v.2*.

In *A Dramaturgy of Epiphanies in/of/from Ruin*, I stage theory, method, life-texts and epiphanies together through embodied scenes. Spatial justice, queerness, and ruination leak into one another here.

*I oriented* shows how justice emerges through micro-gestures of the body. *I collided* and *I ruptured* tell of clashes with normative spatio-temporality, the making of the stranger, and the slip from the line. *I resisted* turns to tactics of unintelligibility, small refusals, and spatial micropolitics. *I migrated* expands these experiences across personal, familial, and urban scales, interwoven with the large transformation of Fikirtepe.

## RUINS OF THOUGHT

### Crack

I am an other.

The self exists entangled with the stranger inside. The other is inseparable, irreducible. In its excess, queer comes into being.

Queerness, then, arrives from the fracture already within.

Queer names what does not belong to the line. To slip from the line is also to open new orientations and extensions, like the body widening its reach by touching what feels strange to itself (Ahmed, 2006, pp. 115, 135, 161). Queer becomes an orientation born of alterity.

The ruin is where my body, my sense of time, and myself knot together. It pulls me toward movement, toward weight; its presence calls for a response. A folded fragment, the ruin is tucked into my identity.

This folding is never stable; the self holds its cracks as openings, passages where time and space begin to bend toward queer orientations.

When the other settles into these cracks, they open toward queer spatio-temporality. Queer reorganizes it; space through the subject's ways of making place, time through temporalities that refuse normative reproductive patterns (Halberstam, 2005, pp. 6, 167). This queer attunement of time remakes space.

Queer interrupts linear progression, bending the line to carve out room for itself. And in that bend, memory starts to lean, resisting the smooth path of chronology and settling instead into thresholds of tension.

I am queer; my identity, my spatio-temporality, queer. Linear time does not hold me.

My memory rests in the stubborn tension between what has been and what is becoming. I stand on the fragile seam, on a plane that will not reconcile (Huyssen, 2003, p. 10; Trigg, 2006).

The seam is a silent ruin where narratives collide; where the marginal rewrites the dominant, where accounts overlap (Gabriel, 1993, p. 218). A space holding identities, memories and experiences; a place setting a journey toward memory in motion.

What collides in the ruin also collides in me. Memory, unable to hold its line, scattering into knots of time and space.

I am queer. When I remember, the familiar folds into the strange, my experience splinters (Trigg, 2006, 2012, pp. 189, 215). What I recall belongs to what is becoming; what has been re-made in the now through memory's work (Megill, 2011, p. 196; Assmann, 2011, p. 210).

In my memory, then, what has been and what is becoming collapse into each other, a co-being that generates itself.

### Threshold

There are moments of memory that strike suddenly. At the most unlikely times, a place delivers its slap; the body slides into another time, another space. This is *epiphany*.

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The strike leaves a crack, and through it another surface begins to show.

I am in the space of what is becoming. When it turns into a surface that wraps my body and memory, epiphany is born, carrying me into the spaces of what has been. The space shifts into a place of reminding. A door within what is becoming. I call it a *mnemonic space*.

The door keeps swinging, sometimes brushing skin, sometimes scraping wall.

At times epiphany flares in a bodily fold, at times in the space itself. The relation my body weaves with space overlays folds, orientations, surfaces, textures of familiarity… Epiphany is this sudden binding of layers; a radiance that cuts the line of time and carries me wholly elsewhere.

What binds also slips apart; light leaking through the gap names what is missing.

Epiphany takes shape through absence; the space once embodied in what has been no longer here. The absence holds a transformative potential, creating new presence. It diffuses into the spaces of what is becoming (Trigg, 2012, p. 17) and is re-assembled through memory and body.

But the gap offers only shadows in place of return.

I cannot remember the spaces of what has been, the ones epiphany emerges, in their real presence. They are not here in what is becoming; I left them long ago, they are over, done. Only through a photograph or another record can I glimpse that frozen reality: *the space of once-was*.

Still my body leans in, like a bridge that holds only while trembling.

My body becomes an interface that crosses the physical absence of the space of once-was. As memory takes form within the materiality of what is becoming, the traces of what has been blur the boundary between my body and space, binding temporal slices together (Trigg, 2006, p. 59). Spatial traces of becoming thus merge in my memory with traces of what has been (Huyssen, 2003, p. 7).

The tremor unsettles the line; nothing keeps pace.

Epiphany disrupts the continuity of the familiar. Struggling to grasp the experience, I am drawn into a liminal state of rupture. In this moment, time slips from linearity and experience thickens into layers (Denzin, 2013, pp. 132, 135). The relation between me, space, and time is re-attuned; I move from one space into another.

From this limp, folds gather; walls bend into one another, past and present pressing close.

Epiphany carries me into a space of what has been, re-made in what is becoming through memory's form. This space dissolves through the epiphanic fissure opened by the mnemonic. Flowing into becoming, colliding with it. I call this collision an *epimnemonic projection*. Spaces collapse onto one another; details, affects, times, traumas, the orientations of my body… all tangle together.

From the press, something leaks sideways; no longer wall, not yet air, a drift without anchor, unhomed.

The shadow of what has been and the texture of what is becoming merges into reality. From this collision a trans-temporal spatiality is born, what I name the *epiphenomenal space*. Neither the freshness of the mnemonic nor the residual presence of the once-was. A slurry, strange, foreign. Queer.

**Ash**

Epiphanies may trigger trauma (Adams et al., 2015, p. 27), suddenly surfacing the sediments of pain etched into the mind.

What rises does not disappear at once; it hangs in the air, fine, unsettled, waiting for the next breath to stir it.

I am queer. I carry traumas; inscribed in the folds of my identity, in the spatio-temporalities my body bears. They linger at the threshold of remembering and forgetting (Huyssen, 2003, p. 8); breaking into my temporal experience, making me lose time (Caruth, 1996, p. 61; Laub, 1992, p. 69).

A delayed, uncontrollable return that repeats when it finds its chance (Caruth, 1996, p. 11). It waits for the blurred intervals of epiphany, and when a mnemonic space jolts memory, it leaps out.

Like a ghost.

A ghost that settles into space. Wearing the pain of what has been like a cloak, projecting itself onto what is becoming. And it reminds me, that despite everything, I have survived. My struggle to claim that survival (Caruth, 1996, p. 64).

Some of it clings, laying a thin layer across surfaces, faint but persistent, marking what it touches without weight.

Epiphany is not mine alone; it is a shared scene, a rupture. The gap opened by my writing becomes a space where other voices can seep in. My words fall into the fabric of culture, the cracks of history, the silences of society. Not only my voice; here echo stories once suppressed, silenced, denied (Holman Jones et al., 2013, p. 22).

Drifting further, it does not choose where to land. Carried by currents, it slips into other mouths, other breaths, other throats.

I am queer. In reading my traumas, you are reading the traumas of others. This is a narrative where wounds intertwine (Caruth, 1996, p. 8). Mine, Fikirtepe's, Volissos's…

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## WRITING THE RUIN/RUINOUSLY/AS RUIN ITSELF

### Autoethnography

My article is queer. It places me at the center of research, making me carry its epistemological and ontological weight (Spry, 2001, p. 711). It opens room for my experience to speak and offers an epistemology from within (Adams et al., 2015, p. 31).

Here I am not fixed; I am performed and queered again and again. Fixed definitions imposed on me are unsettled, revealing a self that is fragmented (Anderson & Glass-Coffin, 2013, p. 73).

It turns me into a site where connection loosen between self-reader-text (Gannon, 2013, pp. 229–232).

My article is autoethnographic.

In writing, I find myself mirrored in ruins; never whole, always layered with what has cracked and what persists.

To live among ruins is to accept that we inhabit different forms of subjectivity. From here grows a sensitivity to what is unseen, what is temporary and what has been (Gabriel, 1993, p. 215).

My article is queer, like my othered self. In autoethnographic performance, I am at once self and other (Spry, 2001, p. 716). I position myself as both observed and observing, both narrated and narrating. The knowledge of a body positioned as queer.

With the other internalized within the self, my identity turns into a bundle of impulses (Harvey, 1996, p. 63); clashing voices, conflicting drives, inherited others mixing together.

Who speaks as I narrate? Which side resists? Even I cannot always tell. This chaos pushes me to question the political and ideological ties between self and other and the relations of power that bind us. It makes visible how my reality is built (Spry, 2001, pp. 706–716).

### Queering autoethnogprahy

I am a queer academic. My work aims to join in the recoding of queer culture (Halberstam, 2005, p. 174). To write from this position is never neutral; my identity bends the method before the words even begin.

Autoethnography, carried through a queer body, cannot remain intact. What emerges is a method unsettled by its own excess.

Queer moments demand to be re-archived, etched into memory at those fragile intervals where objects slip and orientations shake (Ahmed, 2006, p. 171; Halberstam, 2005, p. 176). From here, queering autoethnography becomes both a methodological and political gesture; writing bodily disorientations, slippages and fragmentations into the text (Holman Jones & Harris, 2019, p. 7).

Such writing refuses to stabilize knowledge. Instead, it unsettles assumed forms, making space for experiences left outside culture to surface as valuable epistemologies (Holman Jones & Harris, 2019, p. 4; Love & Peltonen, 2017).

In this frame, to think like a ruin is to craft a philosophy of outsideness, one that unsettles the divides between self and other, inside and outside, nature and culture... The ruin makes these boundaries visible. It positions itself as an identity that gathers ontologly, politics and ethics together (Lavery & Murray, 2019, p. 251).

I take this visibility further: to queer autoethnography through ruin is to let the method crack. Time falls in layers of sediment, theory and self scatter as shards, description hovers like dust. Nothing whole, everything leaning, as ruins do, ruinous.

### Ruinous autoethnography

#### *Sediments of ruinous temporality/mnemohistory*

The ruin blurs the boundaries of time and space (Hell & Schönle, 2010, p. 8). It never fully settles into context, never fully breaks away; distant, yet close to the present (Trigg, 2006).

Its absences transform the gaze of me (Parry, 2019; Trigg, 2012, p. 17). With its disjointed fragments, it expands what has been, freeing it from being trapped in a singular, ordered narrative (Trigg, 2006).

My article is queer. Like my body; leaping, stumbling, sometimes colliding with a wall and veering off. My thoughts slip, escaping their own weight, seeping onto other surfaces. In writing I do not hide these slippages; I make room for them instead (Gannon, 2013, p. 233).

Each fracture leaves a trace, each fragment touches another context. Fragments speak at once; the silence of Volissos collides with the noise of Fikirtepe. Suddenly, what has been spills into the happening, body into space, ruin into queer.

Not toward what has been itself, but toward its remembered form I move; its echoes, its reflections within what is becoming (Assmann, 2011, pp. 209–210). *This is mnemohistory.*

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To write with mnemohistory is to let time itself collapse in ruins; fragments of what has been leaning into what is becoming, each return a queer temporality re-constituted through its cracks.

Scattered, my article turns and turns again, re-assembling its fragments into a new order. To tell the traumatic is already to speak through fracture (Laub, 1992, p. 78).

### *Fragments of ruinous textuality/autotheory*

The ruin stands between nature and the human-made, even staging its own resistance to nature (Ginsberg, 2004, p. 2). Yet it is incomplete; it confronts the subject with the birth of absence.

As it slowly collapses, the absence swells (Somhegyi, 2018, p. 16). In this way it forges a link between the materiality of my body and the temporality of myself (Trigg, 2012, p. 171).

My article is queer. I stitch it with autotheory; bringing together the personal and the conceptual, the theoretical and the autobiographical (Fournier, 2021, p. 19; Zacharias & Shleykina, 2021). A theory born from the self (Lorentzen, 2015, p. 45).

I move back and forth between self and theory, as if crossing a ruin where each step shifts the ground. I read it as performative life-writing (Brushwood Rose & Nelson, 2016).

Memory here works alongside theory as material; an in-between position that unsettles the line between recollection and writing (Prickett, 2015).

My life becomes a life-text; its fragments rest beside theory and the traces of other lives (Fournier, 2021, p. 177). Each shard unsettles the boundary of autobiography and concept.

Citations turn into intertextual intimacies (Fournier, 2021, pp. 161–176); cracks through which other voices dissolves into, binding my own life with the thoughts of others.

### *Dust of ruinous inscription / engaged ekphrasis v.2*

The ruin appears as a stage where form is abandoned, existing only in its own materiality (Ginsberg, 2004, pp. 1–15). Knowledge of its surroundings is buried within the process of ruination; every trace of erosion leaves its record in the material (Parry, 2019, p. 1084). Clinging to its details, its texture, its color; the ruin halts us in its silent wholeness, even as it remains bound to its walls (Ginsberg, 2004, p. 9).

Like dust, these traces are never whole; they settle differently each time they are touched.

My article is queer; like my body seeping through absences, through spaces without image. Some images are present; photographs and visual records that I take up as sites of knowledge, read through detail, texture, and silence.

Others are absent. Mnemonic spaces and epiphenomenal scenes arrive without image, only through words. Here description insists; it compels the reader to imagine, to exceed the page, to conjure their own mental images and so to extend the article beyond its given limits.

Engaged ekphrasis here becomes a queer gesture. Description moves beyond depiction to act as a subject of knowledge and theoretical construction (Engel, 2018, pp. 2–3).

Yet in this version, v.2, engaged ekphrasis stretches to include what is unseen as well. The queerness of my article emerges in this fragile yet resistant relation to the visual; sometimes anchored in the dust of what is visible, sometimes drifting in the ghost of what cannot be seen.

I take the visual, or its absence, as a site for transforming entrenched power relations; its presence, or its ghost, lets me reconstruct space through its diagnostic and transformative force (Engel, 2018, pp. 1–2).

## A DRAMATURGY OF EPIPHANIES IN/OF/FROM RUIN

### I oriented

I understand justice as a multilayered process at work in the recognition and representation of identity and space.

It is tied to the recognition of the individual (Butler, 2004, pp. 3–4) and to the organization of spatial practices (Harvey, 1996, p. 330). Some subjects are rendered invisible in spatial practices, while representation decides who organizes space and how (Fraser, 1996, pp. 3–7; 2009, pp. 16–20). Justice, then, lives in these gaps; between what is visible and what is erased, between who gets to stand in space and who is left out.

The norm is what ties itself to the body and sets the rules for being seen.

Norms usually work quietly, fixing what counts as intelligible, deciding which gestures and lives are allowed to appear (Butler, 2004, pp. 41–42, 58). They are the lines bodies are asked to follow, and following them already bends justice toward what is allowed.

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Orientation begins in the body's hereness, its wavering "where," the first skew with space (Ahmed, 2006, pp. 7–8). It is a leaning, a turning, deciding what pulls our energy, what claims attention (pp. 3, 6). Repeated, these turns sediment into dwelling, but never without slippage (pp. 9, 11).

Dwelling is the stretch of the body into space, forming folds where traces of the body and traces of space press onto each other (Ahmed, 2006, p. 11). Over time, space feels layered into the body; repetition builds familiarity, and familiarity shapes what the body can do (p. 7).

In this loop, justice is lived in the weight of posture, in textures that return, in the small ways space gives or denies capacity.

To be on the line allows bodies to extend into space; alignment means being in line with others. To step into a line is already to become oriented (p. 15).

I had drawn my own line somehow before it ever met the lines of the outside world. This existence was shaped through the folds of my body and the familiar layers of space.

At four years old, with the toy sofa set and dolls my father bought, I staged my first version of it in the glass-fronted cabinet. I placed the sofas in my own order, chose the toys, arranged scenes. The space was mine.

Sitting cross-legged in front of it, my being felt aligned in the line, through the fold of my posture, the angle of light, the texture of fabric, the placement of toys (**Figure 2**).

**Figure 2**

*Wooden bunk bed, a small desk and chair below*

*wooden bunk bed, a small desk and chair below. beside it a dark cabinet, toys and lace lined up behind glass. stuffed animals arranged on top of the television, small figures tucked into shelves. faded flower patterns on the walls, artificial flowers in the corners. the bend of posture. come together. a small universe with its own order, its own scale, its own rule. a self hidden yet present.*

I stood inside a room whose roof had fallen in. Stone walls, plaster had peeled, corners unraveled. Above, a few beams clung half-broken, sky spilling through their gaps. Light hung in shafts, holding the dust mid-air; coolness coming from the walls, sliding down my back.

The gap above pulled my eyes upward, the narrow strip of sky drawing my body into its line. Dust followed the light, tugging me forward. I oriented.

The absence of the roof folded into the narrow strip of sky; Volissos's half-remnant room became the apartment void of childhood in Fikirtepe. A corridor appeared between two buildings, compressed and dark. From above drifted television voices, slamming doors, cooking smells.

There, we played house. Dividing the narrow space into rooms, we set rules from the sounds around us. Chalk lines on the ground, dust pressed into our knees. A house smuggled between buildings.

Stone wall. rubble gaps. plaster flaked. moss thick at the base. roof collapsed. beams skewed. cable shadows across a slit of sky. shafts of light. dust suspended. laundry-line shadows. clothespins midair. soil and concrete fused. weeds sprouting. broken stones at the threshold. wind's moan. metallic clang. television murmur. smell of cooking. heavy damp air.

In 1960 my grandfather left a forested mountain village in Anatolia for Istanbul, with my grandmother and their four children. He worked in a bakery, she cleaned houses (**Figure 3**).


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**Figure 3**

*The lines of my grandfather's face*

*the lines on my grandfather's face. the closing of his hands over the bread. the fingerprints on the dough. the missing walls of the house in fikirtepe, built with bare bricks and covered with nylon sheets. the dark void inside the oven. the draughty openings of that house without windows or doors. the warmth of the bread, the cold of the house. the rhythm of a life built with migration.*

In Fikirtepe, they bought a plot, still registered as farmland.

With savings gathered bit by bit, they built a squatter house. A well in front, bare bricks, no windows or doors. The nylon sheets stretched across the openings, the wind seeping through.

Over time the children worked, floors were added, until by 1989 it was a four-story apartment, three years before I was born.

The surrounding squatter houses grew the same way. Layer by layer. Between plot lines and walls lay voids where cats slipped through and children hid.

Families from villages. Struggling, surviving, holding on. Solidarity lived in the street.

Mothers gathering in gardens, knitting, talking. Children outside all day, playing hide-and-seek, dodgeball, nine stones, hopscotch. Games stretching into screams and laughter, lasting deep into the night air.

I climbed the stone steps of Volissos. Edges fractured, my foot almost slipped. Beside me a wall leaned into rubble. Fig leaves cast their shadow; branches stirred, and the shadow stirred too.

A heavy, sweet scent spread, my body sinking into its coolness. My knees pressed into the stone's chill, and without thinking, my body aligned.

Habit meeting surface, familiarity folding me into into Fikirtepe. We sat at doorsteps, half-open doors spilling food smells, fig branches bowing into the street. Perched on the garden wall, legs dangling, knees brushing.

Playing charades, our ears filled with the murmur of neighbors.

steps rounded. threshold fusing stone and iron. ivy tangled. stone patched with concrete. garden wall low. blurred boundary. whitewash blistered. rubble beneath. door jamb incomplete. fig trunk pressed to wall. branch wedged as buttress. ground sloping. weeds sprouting. sound chamber holding echoes.

The ruin is queer.

An other the body turns toward but cannot fully grasp. A surface unfamiliar yet calling, a void to lean into, an edge to cross, a trace beyond touch. Through its otherness the ruin shapes the queer body; an extension that transforms without closure. The body reaches to relate, but the ruin resists. Its silence carries a cool, insistent distance; a tension of almost-being, a refusal of full arrival.

## I collided

Normative systems leak, they warp.

Suppression twists into strange political forms (Stoler, 2013, p. 7). The very production of truth already carries the weight of exclusion (Butler, 2004, pp. 41–42). Knowledge, then, is always from a body, always entangled (Haraway, 1988, p. 590). Justice follows the same ground; situated, spatial (Harvey, 1996, p. 330).

If truth is never neutral, then neither is space.

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Space itself is stitched through with ideology, its surface uneven with inequalities (Soja, 2010, p. 19). Even spatio-temporality is imposed, pressed down through domination, yet always restless, always open to struggle (Harvey, 1996, p. 241).

White space decides who is seen, who counts (Ahmed, 2006, pp. 133–134). Time tightens around reproduction, looping bodies into the rhythms of bourgeois life (Halberstam, 2005, pp. 4–6). Empire stitches difference into its own skin (Stoler, 2013, pp. 24–25). Thus the ordering of space and time grounds difference and otherness. Spatial divisions regulate where bodies belong. Spatial difference underpins the very measures of justice.

And into this ordering, my body collided.

At home I had my own order, a safe, repeating play. I decided how things would be. But on the street the rules were already written. How a boy should play, speak, appear. My knowledge did not count there.

My thin voice, my fragility, the push to "be a man". My body fell outside a map already drawn. From the safety of home I entered spaces I could not claim (**Figure 4**).

**Figure 4**

*Decoration for my circumstances celebration*

*decoration for my circumcision celebration. ribbons glittering on the ceiling. gifts arriving one after another. cars, racetracks, toy guns. presenting meant for a boy, for the boy i was told i had become. my face already refused them.*
*the outside world had entered our home. delivering its masculine script onto my body. yet in this white and queer circumcision dress, with its sash and shine, i found a fragile relief. as if the garment could shield me. for a moment.*

This corner was not mine; that game was closed to me. On the street, time and space belonged to others.

Home opened a field of being; the street was exclusion. I grew up caught between my own situatedness and what the street demanded.

Childhood taught me early that space and time are maps of power. And outside those maps, my difference was exposed. Why was I not like them? (**Figure 5**).

Fikirtepe's boundaries were organic, its life porous. Carpets washed in the street, children picnicking by the roadside, toys sold by them on makeshift stalls. From outside it looked like disorder; from within, it was the neighborhood's lifeblood (**Figure 6**).

Unaligned with the normative frame, it was judged unsafe, uncanny, a stray glimmer, and for that very reason, a target.

I slipped between two stone walls, my shoulders colliding with the rough surfaces. A stair trace left unfinished, my foot slid on the sloping ground. Above, the sky narrowed into a single strip.

From the base of the walls rose the smell of moss; the air inside was heavy, damp. Silence compressed, even my breath echoed. My body collided with the narrowness, folding into its squeeze.

In that collision, Fikirtepe surfaced. Hidden passages appeared between buildings; tight corridors only children knew. Places where I held my breath in games, pressed myself against the walls to escape bullies.


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There too the sky showed only as a strip, sounds leaked from above, but no gaze could reach me.

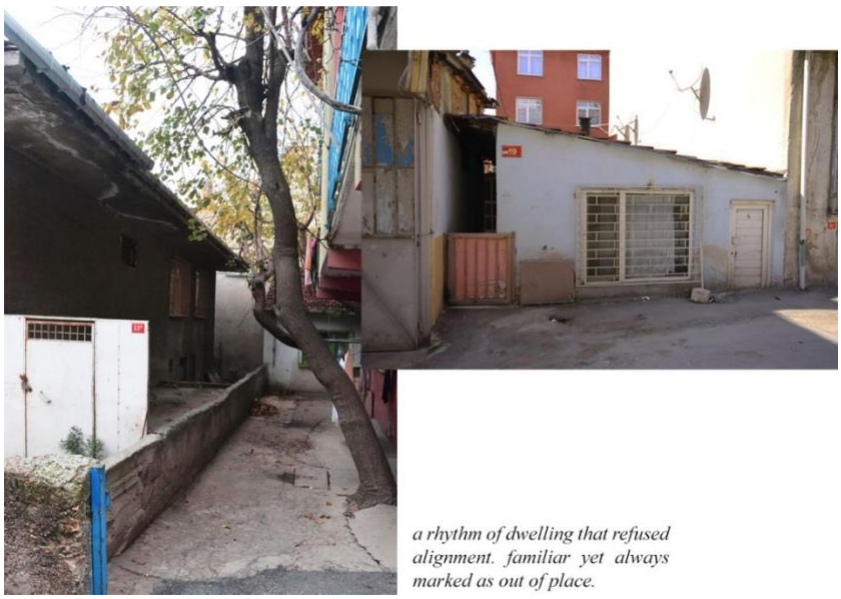
stone and concrete joined. muffled sounds. plaster hollowed. stair trace half-formed. gutter fragment. scrape of metal. rusted downpipe. broken tile. opening narrow. threshold stuffed with stone. lintel cracked. passage compressed. friction polished. sky a thin strip above. damp air heavy. children's laughter. echoes colliding. recess at shoulder height. just enough for a body to slip.

**Figure 5**

*The swing moved with their joy, but not mine*

**Figure 6**

*A rhythm of dwelling that refused alignment*




**I ruptured**

Normative systems make life livable or not through conditions of recognition. The subject is intelligible only within these bounds.

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Recognition affirms yet also constrains, even undoes the subject (Butler, 2004). Subjects at the threshold are lives sacrificed at the edge of recognizability (Halberstam, 2005, p. 162).

Outside norms, existence is actively othered; made invisible, excluded, stripped of authority, and left vulnerable to marginalization, disrespect, and violence (Young, 1990; Fraser, 1996).

The stranger's body is built through incorporation and expulsion, redrawing inside-outside boundaries (Ahmed, 2000, pp. 54–74). It becomes an object of knowledge, recognized only through the observer's authority. The stranger's own ways of knowing are erased, even as the body marks the limit the normative cannot cross; the edge of what counts as home.

As a child I was a stranger. In the normative world of childhood, I appeared as excess, as deviation. I was not understood, treated as something to be solved; knowledge of me came not from my own voice but from the images others made.

I was pushed to the edges of play spaces, to unseen corners, to gaps between garden walls, sometimes to the stairwells of apartment entrances. Kept outside the "we," I became the figure targeted by rules. Nicknames, being mimicked, mockery… Bullies marked my body and identity as other.

Now I see. To be cast as a stranger is shaped both by difference itself and by how that difference is told. And when the telling is not yours, strangeness hardens into otherness.

In Volissos, at the center of the ruin, a wall stood alone. Rising at the corner of a near-square plan, abandoned without roof or neighboring walls. Its surface washed in blue; bright under sun, grey in shade.

The wall was both trace and erasure. Paint unable to hold, memory scored into time only to flake away. Drawn into its blue, my body tilted, pulled toward what was no longer. Ruptured, I slipped across.

The streets of Fikirtepe appeared. Hopscotch etched on asphalt, squares side by side and diagonal, a diagram for play. Our knees dusted in grit, chalk in our hands, lines sharp, white. Until rain arrived: marks swelling, darkening, then flowing away.

Within minutes the squares blurred, the field of play erased.

three meters tall. corners crumbled. shadow slipping. blue wash peeling to expose coarse stone. hollow niche. cobweb thick. hopscotch line faint. ground scattered with plaster and dust. seam with sky wavering. blue flaring. dissolving into flakes. chalk merging with blue. rain stain darkens.

When my grandfather migrated from Anatolia, Fikirtepe lay at once at the city's edge and in its heart, neither fully inside nor out. Migrants formed networks here, first visible only as labor, recognized by the city not as as workforce.

Over time the neighborhood itself was treated as a foreign body, a boundary endlessly redrawn. In reports it was marked as problem, to be solved or erased, though lives were built here, children raised, memories sedimented.

Recognition was always conditional. Crisis, earthquakes, or real-estate pressure could cast it out again.

Next to the center yet never counted as part of it. A workers' district in the 1980s, an investor's dream in the 2000s.

For the city's normative fantasy, Fikirtepe was kept as other, accepted but never equal, its labor taken, its future mortgaged.

What is not-ruin, once it ceases to serve the normative order, is abandoned to ruination, made architecture's other, punished in its present and left to disappear.

Ruins expose assumptions of agency, community, and progress (Hell & Schönle, 2010, p. 6). Ruination is a political project that corrodes people, relations, and things (Stoler, 2013, pp. 11–13). Its traces on material and social micro-ecologies are uneven. Some sites ignored or remade, some dismissed as waste, others hardened into permanence.

The ruin is queer.

In ruination it remembers who is ruined, bearing the weight of exclusion, refusing to forget. Its silence is evidence; its carries injustice. It is a layered archive, memory inscribed in matter.

**I resisted**

It is not enough to trace the ties between knowledge and power that fix the limits of intelligibility; one must follow where they split, where discontinuities tear the surface (Butler, 2004, p. 216). Justice begins there, in seeing how difference itself is produced, so that solidarities might cross spaces and stitch what power has torn (Harvey, 1996, pp. 6–360). These fractures flare into struggles for spatial justice, even as institutions hurry to plaster them over (Soja, 2010, p. 20).

Justice, then, is born from the cracks of systems. As ruins lose wholeness and open new meanings, so too do queer and spatial justice sprout from fissures.

If recognition within norms can undo the subject (Butler, 2004, pp. 3–4), then refusal may become a tactic to inhabit unintelligibility as survival. In unreadability, the subject unsettles the norm and generates a justice of its own.

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The body can exceed norms and transform realities (Butler, 2004, p. 217). The stranger's body destabilizes the spatial-temporal embeddedness of the normative "clean" body (Ahmed, 2000, p. 52), marking its limits and producing tension. In this tension, strangeness becomes a force to disrupt normative spatio-temporality.

As a child I was strange. I discovered the freedom of strangeness early, which let me build a persona to shelter behind. I left traces where I was not allowed to reach, kept playing in the streets, refused erasure.

Hidden corners, narrow corridors, boundary walls, coal sheds… Sites I occupied through a strategy of touch. In spaces others called unsafe or useless I made games; discarded bricks, wood, and broken doors became part of play. Apartment gardens were my stage. Songs under laundry lines, sudden vanishings behind them. I was visible, but always at the edge (**Figure 7**).

**Figure 7**

*Once read as neglected*

My laughter breaking through silence, leaving mid-game, being the mother in house-play; these were small deviations, fractures in the boy-norm. With my hand gestures, looks, clothes, I refused to conform, and I did not retreat. Resistance grew from here.

Resistance is a way of diagnosing power and living through or around it (Pile, 1997, pp. 3–17). Space, too, was part of this negotiation; a shifting ground where boundaries were always redrawn. Power itself is fluid, incomplete, ambiguous (Pile, 1997, p. 14). So, resistance could not be fixed either, found instead in folds, quiet refusals, delays. My resistance was about living in contradictions of spaces, re-positioning myself again and again within them.

I remember the entrance to our apartment. To the left an iron door, ahead a narrow corridor, stairs rising on the left, and on the right a passage leading back. That passage opened to two flats, then a dim coal cellar and a storage room. Wedged against the plot line, the corridor was dark, with rats and cockroaches roaming, the shadows of walnut and vine trees falling across it.

Climbing the stairs brought you to the second-floor corridor. Opposite stood another iron door, behind it yet more stairs to the upper floors.

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In the side corridor near this door, I played with the girls; my mother watching from inside. Above, the stairwell was open, the gap with the neighboring building forming a shapeless courtyard.

On the upper balconies hung laundry, in summer carpets, with families eating outside. At the back façade things grew stranger. The first two floors built in brick, the upper two in reinforced concrete, so the columns did not rest on the walls below but stood a meter forward. From the rear corridor they seemed to lift off the ground, rising into the air (**Figure 8**).

**Figure 8**

*A building that refused the grammar of norms*

In Volissos I stood before a collapsed house. Massive blocks piled high, seared red by sun, radiating dry heat. I climbed their edges; stone shifted beneath me, my body lurched. Suspended, I resisted; legs straining, arms reaching for balance. From within diffused a draft of cool air, yet the weight above pressed heavy, threatening to fall.

There I was in Fikirtepe. We climbed onto the flat roofs of the coal sheds behind the gardens; feet slipping on rusted sheet metal. Coal dust smeared across my pants, the surface hard yet about to give way. From above there was pride in the view, and at the same time the unease of falling; an exhilaration laced with fear.


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blocks scorched red. fractured edges. gaps in shadow. stone moaning. mass stacked. order uncertain. rusted sheet metal slanted. coal dust smeared. balance suspended. cool draft rising. hot vapor pressed. ground uneven. cracked junctions. solid and hollow at once. sheet ringing metallic.

The ruin is queer.

Its refusal to vanish opens ruptures that reshape what space can become. Fragmented, incomplete, insistent; it dwells by deviation, holding on through refusal of alignment.

I am ruin.

As I diminish, I layer, as I fragment, I multiply. My voids show me what lies beyond loss. My stones missing, my walls broken; I exist through absences. Each absence opens another door in memory; each missing multiplies me. Every crack point to a new story. Lost spaces line up in my body, neither fully present nor entirely gone.

The ruin is queer.

A fragile state, a threshold where everything keeps unraveling. The insistence of what is breaking, oscillating between inside and outside, between visibility and erasure.

I am ruin.

Too distant to grasp what I am, yet close enough to reflect what I have lived. I merge with what has collapsed onto me and where I have collapsed. Stone seeps into my muscles, memory into my veins.

Where I collapse you step on me; when I collapse onto you, I am born from you.

Disappearing, I become visible.

The ruin is queer.

It speaks with delay, with scatter, with rupture. With no fixed beginning or end, it holds remnants in a simultaneous existence, unfinished, rewritten, sometimes excessive, sometimes lacking. Blurred.

**I migrated**

Migration is a pulling of the body from settled orientations into undefined zones, producing at times failed alignments (Ahmed, 2006, pp. 9–12, 160). A reach toward a home lost or never fully possessed. A migrant orientation.

It, then, is a suspended process of reorientation after temporal and spatial dislocation (Ahmed, 2000, pp. 90–91).

Perhaps this was my first migration: from home to street, my place the same but my orientations displaced. Suspended between safety and rule, I lived where the line broke, carrying in my body the weight of not-belonging.

The ruin is queer.

Like the queer body, it draws strength from its dislocation. It carries something that resists assimilation, a wound opened in space, an echo of the queer.

For me, migration is not only leaving Fikirtepe but confronting its fragility each time I return in memory. The homes and streets I recall are gone. My memory calls, but no house remains.

In the new apartments I moved, my body never felt in place. My memory lingers in Fikirtepe's squatter houses, backyards, and shared rhythms, while the new spaces leave me outside.

Since leaving, I cannot say "this is my place." Migration is an unstable threshold. Between what Fikirtepe was and what the present is, I sway.

Migration, in this sense, is collective. The undoing of familiar orientations in the name of progress. It exposes the fragility of memory; the body feels estranged even where assigned (Ahmed, 2000, pp. 9–12). A disloyalty between time and space, where exile unsettles being-at-home (Trigg, 2006, p. 59).

Urban transformation repeats dislocations at the scale of communities. It promises equality while redrawing justice. Plans rename space, reports define truth, residents fall silent.

Life is compressed into demolition-construction-delivery, erasing memory and belonging, shifting wealth upward.[4]

Rumors lingered for years. Which street will fall? Who will count as owner? Residents of Fikirtepe delayed life decisions under the weight of uncertainty on urban transformation.

Eventually blocks merged and deals with contractors became unavoidable. Some left, some stayed, many were displaced even before demolition. The neighbourhoods became both inhabited and ruinated at once. For several years.

Abandoned buildings cracked and emptied, later sheltering Syrian refugees who stretched tarps and sheets to rebuild life -remember the nylon in 1960-.

Today the luxury housing built here is marketed to wealthy investors on international platforms.

[4] In Turkiye, neoliberal reforms of the 1980s set the stage; the 1999 Marmara earthquake legitimized risky-area designations; by the 2000s, state-developer alliances institutionalized reconstruction under the rhetoric of safety and modern living.

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I returned to Fikirtepe one last time before demolition. Our building stood empty, ruinated; windows, doors, railings stripped, wires hanging loose. The central stair opened to the sky, exposed when the neighboring block was torn down.

I still remembered where we once hung curtains. Staring at that cold wall from afar, I felt how far the past had already moved on (**Figure 9**).

**Figure 9**

*The cruelest palimpset*

In Volissos I climbed the stone slope. The middle of each step was polished by feet not mine, edges tufted with grass. Each step carried a history of passage, and with every lift of my body I felt displaced, moving through lines already drawn. At the crest a ruined façade opened; its window hollow, staring back like a dark eye. Behind it the sky split into pink and blue, the church dome glowing red in the light of dusk.

The warmth of the stones had drained, their chill pressed into my bare feet. I migrated.

A summer evening in Fikirtepe, gathered at the fronts of apartment blocks. By the garden wall a stove burned; on its grate corn charred over coals. Wooden crates stacked beside plastic basins overflowing with husks. Neighbors crouched on low stools, hands quick, husks crackling. Smoke from the coals rose, mixing the bite of coal with the sweet heat of corn.

window void like an eye. sky split pink and blue. dome glowing red. stove round. grate tilted. embers glowing. steps polished by feet. knees almost touching. edges sprouting grass. wooden crate. husks heaped. fragments scattered. wall darkened. neighbors gathered close. circle formed at the threshold.

Some ruins are lucky. Even born of trauma, they slip through the cracks of the normative, opening freedoms, becoming fluid existences, staying queer. The ruins in Volissos are like this; within loss, new possibilities sprout.

The ruins of Fikirtepe were not so lucky. For some time they stood as a ruined neighborhood, but without giving birth to new worlds. They were demolished; in their place rose towers and gated blocks. Silenced before they could multiply their cracks, before they could carry their potentials.

And as I write, I mourn their silence, our silence.

## NO CLOSURE IN RUIN

My article was an experiment in two ways. I tried to show how queer bodies and ruins can generate epistemologies of justice and to queer methodology by writing them ruinously.

In my article I offered a new methodology, ruinous autoethnography, to build a way of writing from the spatio-temporal experience of a queer body, in ontological relation with ruin and opening toward questions of spatial justice.

It emerged like the ruins it studied.


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I believe, this showed that writing from queer positions can queer form, methodology, and epistemology. When the broken condition of the ruin is carried into the article, the academic form loses its normative expectation of completeness.

With justice theory meeting queer theory, I saw justice as bend and friction: who can stand, who is erased, whose presence counts. In my reading, cracks became the places where queer spatial justice begins; orientations the small gestures of fairness; migration a queer disorientation.

Fikirtepe's stories of migration and marginalization became evidence of how recognition and erasure carve themselves into the city.

The contrast between Volissos and Fikirtepe proves this fragility; one set of ruins slipped through cracks and opened life, the other was silenced before it could multiply.

Ruination is political. But the fate of ruins is political as well. Which ruins are allowed to endure, and which are silenced or erased; it is decided by politics on social, cultural, economical aspects.

I tried to ground this theory in life-texts; myself and the stories of Fikirtepe and Volissos. Through the dramaturgy of epiphanies, also, I tried to make theory tangible. In Volissos epiphanies on Fikirtepe, *mnemonic space*, *epimnemonic projection*, and *epiphenomenal space* could be sensed.

Writing became a site of witnessing-with. I refuse to keep pain private or to silence it. What rises in my throat, I hope, will reach other throats.

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This study is based on autoethnographic reflection and does not involve human participants requiring ethical approval.

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The author declares no competing interests.

**Author contributions**

Uğur Sarışen developed the study and wrote the manuscript. Ayşe Şentürer provided supervision and critical review.

**Data availability**

No external dataset was used.

**AI disclosure**

No generative AI tools were used in the production of this manuscript.

**Biographical sketch**

*Uğur Sarışen* is an architect and researcher based in Istanbul, Turkiye, a research assistant at the Department of Architecture at Istanbul Technical University (ITU). His research critically examines the ontological dimensions and transformative potentials of space, with a focus on architectural otherness, queer spatiality, and post-anthropocentric thought. His ongoing PhD in Architectural Design at ITU develops the concept of ruinous autographies as transdisciplinary methodology to investigate the spatio-temporal dynamics of architectural otherness.

*Ayşe Şentürer* is Professor of Architecture at Istanbul Technical University (ITU), Faculty of Architecture. Her research focuses on architectural design, theory and criticism, representation, and aesthetics. She has been a visiting scholar and studio instructor at institutions including Harvard Graduate School of Design, the University of Cincinnati DAAP, RMIT University, Eastern Mediterranean University, and The New School. She has participated

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in numerous international conferences, panels, exhibitions, and juries, and has published widely on architecture and architectural education.

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