UNVEILING THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL ESSENCE: AN AESTHETIC EVALUATION OF MIR'S ARCHITECTURAL VISUALIZATIONS

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ABSTRACT

UNVEILING THE ROMANTIC AND PHENOMENOLOGICAL ESSENCE: AN AESTHETIC EVALUATION OF MIR'S ARCHITECTURAL VISUALIZATIONS

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This thesis investigates "the Mir way" in architectural visualization. The study begins with a comprehensive literature review on Romantic Landscape painting and architectural phenomenology to establish a theoretical foundation for an aesthetic analysis. It is an in-depth investigation and aesthetic critique of Mir's works, a distinguished visualization studio based in Bergen. Mir is known for their collaborations with renowned architectural firms such as Jensen & Skodvin, Snøhetta, BIG, and Zaha Hadid. By examining MIR's architectural visualizations through the lenses of romanticism and phenomenology, this study uncovers valuable insights into how these representations intentionally adopt these approaches. This research delves into the connections of theory and practice, to contribute to the advancement of discourse and criticism in architectural visualization.

Keywords: Sublime, Phenomenology, *Genius Loci*, Architectural Visualization.

ÖZ

ROMANTİK VE FENOMENOLOJİK ÖZÜ ORTAYA ÇIKARMAK: MIR'İN MİMARİ GÖRSELLEŞTİRMELERİNİN ESTETİK BİR DEĞERLENDİRMESİ

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Bu tez mimari görselleştirmede "Mir'in Yolu"nu incelemektedir. Çalışma, estetik çözümlemeye yönelik bir temel oluşturmak amacıyla Romantik manzara resmi ve mimari fenomenoloji üzerine kapsamlı bir literatür taramasıyla başlar. Bergen merkezli seçkin bir görselleştirme stüdyosu olan Mir'in çalışmalarının derinlemesine bir incelemesini ve estetik eleştirisini içermektedir. Mir, Jensen & Skodvin, Snøhetta, BIG ve Zaha Hadid gibi ünlü mimarlık firmalarıyla yaptığı işbirlikleriyle tanınır. Mir'in mimari görselleştirmelerini Romantizm ve fenomenoloji merceğinden inceleyen bu çalışma, söz konusu görselleştirmelerin bu felsefi ve estetik yaklaşımları nasıl yorumladığını çözümlemektedir. Bu araştırma, mimari görselleştirmede söylem ve eleştiriye katkıda bulunmak üzere, kuram ve uygulama ilişkisine odaklanmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Yücelik, Fenomenoloji, Yerin Ruhu, Mimari Görselleştirme.

To my Family

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Mir is an architectural visualization studio that has had a significant impact in today's architecture's image with the atmospheric and phenomenal intensity in their work. The atmospheric properties of their work, the integration of nature, context and environment can be considered as the qualities through which Mir's architectural visualizations are distinguished.

Mir's work, or their 'portraits of unbuilt architecture' as they call it, has had a significant impact not only in the architectural visualization industry but also in the image of architecture they picture. Most of the recent winning architectural competitions won by major firms such as Jensen & Scodvin, Snøhetta, BIG, and Zaha Hadid's images are produced in MIR's office in Bergen, where, for the majority of the days in a year, the sun is low in the sky and hardly rises above the mountains.[1]

Architectural visualizations are the most impressive tool that architects use to present their work. They are used to convey not only the spatial properties of the design but also, its relation to the environment in which they take place.

Many architects center their work around conceptual ideas, using them to craft visually striking imagery. However, the founders of Mir think that this can cause them to overlook the authentic character of a space. Mir aims to capture the instinctive, sensory qualities of a space, rather than solely focusing on conceptual

[1] Andersen, T.G. (2022) *The mir way*. Bergen, Norway: Mir Media.

notions. They want to engage the viewer's natural, childlike wonder, unencumbered by assumptions.[2]

At Mir, the goal is to create architectural imagery that engages the viewer's intuition and emotions rather than focusing solely on abstract concepts.[3]

Aside from all the impact that Mir' s images have had on today's architecture, this thesis proposes that in their work there exists a perspective, an œuvre of the north, which carries the traces and influences of Romanticism, as well as their compatriot Christian Norberg-Schulz's interpretation of phenomenology. MIR seems to place great importance on Norberg-Schulz's concept of *Genius Loci*, the spirit of a place, which they strive to embody in all their images.

This thesis brings forth an attempt to understand the philosophical and practical depth of MIR' s approach to visualizing architecture with the intention of exploring their position. The objective of this research is constructed on the basis of two main hypotheses:

The philosophical background of Mir is founded on the spirit of 19th century Romantic movement. In their book *The Mir Way* published in 2022, MIR gives clues about how they share some similarities and attitudes with Romantic landscape artists. Concepts such as childhood, nature, authenticity, Nordic attitude, atmospheric images, and depiction of the sublime are all common philosophical notions and approaches that MIR shares with the Romantics.

Secondly, MIR's work develops around a framework which they connect phenomenology to architectural visualizations. Mainly, the phenomenological aspects of Christian Norberg-Schulz. Mir seems to apply similar notions such as

[2] Ibid., p. 128
[3] Ibid., p. 303

trying to capture the spirit of place, the existential attributes, the true character, and atmosphere.

This thesis suggests a field of research in the processes of architectural visualization and its articulation through the conceptual realm that MIR puts forward. It is aimed to understand the interaction of *Mir Way* with the Romantic Landscape artists and Christian Norberg-Schulz' s interpretation of phenomenology around the notion of *Genius Loci*. It is proposed to open a perspective for exploring how Mir practices these concepts in their work.

Within the scope of the thesis, an aesthetic research will be conducted through the lenses of Romantic Landscape painting and the Phenomenology of Genius Loci.

The study that starts with an exploration of Mir's approach to making architectural visualizations, aims to delve into the background and philosophical approach of Mir. The second chapter begins with an introduction to the childhood and background of Mir's founders, and their first approaches to architectural visualizations, which they still carry today.

The final section of the second chapter concentrates on Mir's philosophical approach to the aesthetics of visualizations. The aim is to evaluate their search for the unthinkable.[4] The founders of Mir believe that intuition is a powerful tool, and it is essential to trust instincts. Throughout their practice, developed over 20 years, Mir captures the instinctive, sensory qualities of a space to activate the intuition and emotions of the viewer. Mir's work is characterized by atmospheric images of mist, fog, rain, water, trees, moss, and light play, which raise the sense of the sublime. A crucial idea in Romantic philosophy is that the child learns from nature, and he/she is the epicenter of creativity and ingenuity. Their approach celebrates the grandness and beauty in nature, which inspires a sense of wonder and leads to a more

[4] Ibid., p. 34

harmonious existence. They seek a balance, embracing the natural state of things without imbuing them with any additional significance. Sensory clues and location play a critical role in their work, transporting viewers to another place and time. Intuitive and sensory-driven, Mir invites the viewers to reconnect with the elements of earth in harmony between the built and natural environment. This is not a trend or style-oriented project, but rather one born of an instinctive relation with nature and the outside world. It is by no means a static aesthetic understanding; instead, the Mir style is a dynamic, evolving perspective that marries architecture with landscape with the intention of making the cities greener, quieter, and less frenetic.[5] Mir creates images that are imbued with the spirit and essence of the place, much like Christian Norberg-Schulz's phenomenological approach. A step beyond this is intimation: Mir's work reminds us that one's relation to nature plays a significant role in shaping their perceptions, emotions, and environments.

In the third chapter, a comprehensive literature review of Romantic philosophy, Picturesque, and Romantic Landscape Painting will be carried out to form the theoretical basis for further analysis. The first part investigates the philosophy of Romanticism. The Romantic movement emerged in the mid-1700s in Western Europe and quickly gained popularity. It finds its origins in artists, poets, and thinkers who, with new forms of expression, felt emphatic reactions against the Enlightenment's rationalism, and against the consequences of the French Revolution.[6] Romantic artists believed that the society's overemphasis on rationality and order had cost the human spirit. With their art, they were able to reconnect with nature, express their individuality, and reclaim the sense of wonder and spiritual vigor they felt modernity had lost. Through investigating common themes, such as the natural innocence of childhood, the noble savage, and the sublime, one can gain

[5] Ibid., p. 16

[6] Tekiner, D. (2000). *Modern art and the Romantic vision*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America.

insight into Romantic philosophy and identify its influence in various art forms. It was a necessary counterbalance to the rationalist and revolutionary impulses of the time, and it stood for the human spirit of emotion, creativity, and closeness to nature. In this sense, Romantic art sought to restore a sense of beauty, transcendence, and spiritual integrity.

In the last part of the third chapter the Picturesque and the Romantic Landscape Painting will be specifically studied. While investigating the Picturesque two main figures of the movement, William Gilpin's, and Sir. Uvedale Price's contributions will be examined. In the 18th century, they played crucial roles in defining, popularizing, and theorizing this aesthetic movement, influencing artistic practices, landscape design, and cultural conceptions of nature and art. William Gilpin represents what is called the first phase of the Picturesque where he significantly contributed in promoting Picturesque tourism, offering texts and illustrations that provided instructions for evaluating landscape scenery, including its composition, arrangement of elements, and overall visual quality. Gilpin helped transform rural regions into appealing aesthetic destinations.[7] One of the leading figures of the second phase of Picturesque was Sir Uvedale Price. Price was both an amateur landscape designer and a contemporary of Gilpin. Price employed and extended Gilpin's ideas while introducing his own theories about landscape aesthetics. Price defined Picturesque in terms of irregularity, roughness, and variety in the scenery of nature, differentiating the Picturesque from the Beautiful and the Sublime. For Price, the Picturesque involved the less refined, asymmetrical, and intriguing in the landscape. Finally, while examining Romantic landscape painting three major figures of the movement will be investigated specifically, John Constable, William Turner and Caspar David Friedrich. All of them possess unique characteristics that

[7] Hawes, L., & Barbier, C. P. (1965). William Gilpin, His Drawings, Teaching, and Theory of The Picturesque. *The Art Bulletin, 47*(3), 383. https://doi.org/10.2307/3048288

resonate with the central themes of Romanticism, and to identify some of these features will be attempted in this chapter.

The fourth chapter will investigate Christian Norberg-Schulz's phenomenology of *genius loci*. This examination will focus on his major book *Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture*. By doing this, it is aimed to explore in which way Christian Norberg-Schulz's Phenomenology provides a common ground for Mir's thinking and making of images. Christian Norberg-Schulz was a Norwegian architect, author, educator, architectural theorist, and critic who explored the relationships between architecture and phenomenology. Norberg-Schulz, who imparted an existential attribute to architecture, emphasized the contextualization of human existence in the world through concepts such as space, place, and existence. By distinguishing between qualitative and quantitative forms through phenomenology, he separated from modern architecture and introduced phenomenological contexts to architecture, such as gathering, participation, and arrival.[8]

In the light of the research that are conducted throughout the second, third and fourth chapters, in the fifth chapter, MIR's interpretation of the picturesque and the Romantic painting, and the notion of Sublime, and the influence of Norberg-Schulz's Phenomenology on MIR's work are discussed. Through a series of case studies, the chapter examines how MIR employs techniques reminiscent of historical art movements to create images that are not only visually striking but also deeply connected to the cultural and environmental context of each project. The chapter also discusses the role of atmospheric conditions like fog, and light as tools for mood creation, further enhancing the narrative power of these images. Ultimately, this chapter illustrates how MIR's imagery goes beyond conventional architectural

[8] Norberg-Schulz, C. (1980). *Genius loci: Towards a phenomenology of architecture*. New York: Rizzoli

visualization, positioning itself as a bridge between architecture and its image, where the man-made is seen in dialogue with the natural place, contributing to a richer, more nuanced understanding of place.

CHAPTER 2

THE MIR WAY

MIR is a Bergen-based visualization studio with a unique approach in the field of architectural visualization, characterized by artistic independence and phenomenal intensity of their work. Mir is a small design studio that makes images for many of the world's most prolific architectural works. The properties of their images and the way they present architecture started what today is known as ‘MIR style’. The "MIR style" is a term used by 3D artists to describe images with rich atmospheric quality, and evocative natural settings. Rather than a constant style, MIR has a distinct approach that embraces context, nature and environment. Their images resemble photographs taken by ingenious observers of architecture.[9]

MIR introduces us to their approach in their 2022 book, *The Mir Way*. The Mir Way is a belief system, a biased, non-scientific perspective on life and work. It is neither the ideal nor the correct path. However, that is Mir’s unique. It's about seeing and feeling life with all of your senses. Oddly enough, it also has to do with moss and fog. The Mir Way is about dealing with sorrow and hardship as well as bright summers and dark winters, excitement, and happiness. Their images depict living locations rather than just architecture.[10]

In this chapter of the thesis, rather than aiming to formulate or make a clear statement on Mir’s working process, it is aimed to introduce and understand *The Mir Way*.

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[9] Grozdanic, L. (2022, May 31). *Are These the Most Atmospheric Renderings in Architecture?* Journal. https://architizer.com/blog/practice/materials/the-art-of-rendering-mir/

[10] Andersen, T.G. (2022) *The mir way*. Bergen, Norway: Mir Media.

2.1 Mir’ s Background.

"Mir means World or Peace[11] "[12]

In 2000, Mats Andersen and Trond Greve Andersen established MIR. Both of them were raised in a little town on Norway's west coast, surrounded by mountains and fjords.[13] In their book the Mir Way they tell how they grew up "next to a beautiful forest that was guarded by two enormous oak trees," Trond recalls his early years as being closely connected to nature. The long summer nights were spent playing outside with friends till the sun would refuse to set at almost midnight. Instead, the winters were wet, cold, and dark; they were spent skiing and playing before warming near the fireplace.[14]

As technology entered their lives, they became disconnected from the natural world and retreated indoors, often spending time alone in front of screens.

Then they began studying at the Art Academy. It is during this period that they started Mir when still living downtown in a small, rainy city. They went to art school in the day and built Mir at night.[15] explains Mir on how it was born.

The name 'Mir' was chosen in 2000, shortly before the retirement and crash of the Russian space station of the same name.[16] Mir was a groundbreaking long-term orbital research station that the Russians operated using seemingly basic analog technology. It seems like that from the beginning the aim was to make MIR a unique

[12] Ibid., p. 12
[13] Ibid., p. 16
[14] Ibid., p. 16
[15] Ibid., p. 16
[16] Ibid., p. 12

and innovative workplace that explored uncharted territory. MIR sees itself as pioneers trying new approaches, when other offices followed the same path.[17] The office itself started in a small, 4-square-meter room decorated like a space capsule.

Mir explains that initially, they received feedback that their images appeared excessively depressing. There may be something fundamentally different about Nordic temperament and experience. To them, the low light and fog felt comforting and safe. They just don't have the capacity to feel alone in the outdoors; they are in the company of the landscape.[18]

Anderson describes their studio in Bergen as being located in a region where the sun remains low in the sky for much of the year, with the mountains often obscuring its view. The Nordic sky has a dark, somber quality that can lend an almost ominous feel to the environment, with deep, shadowy contrasts. Yet, the limited, narrow shafts of sunlight that do penetrate this landscape have a striking, almost fiery brilliance when they alight upon objects.[19]

As they began making these kinds of images, they started longing for the natural world of their childhood. They had become disconnected from it, seeking fulfillment in urban pursuits. But they realized they were still the same people who had grown up surrounded by nature. They felt the pull to slow down and reconnect, so they moved to the outskirts of the city, immersing themselves in the mountains and forests. They rediscovered the beauty of their natural environment, engaging in activities like fly fishing, mushroom foraging, and photography.[20]

This is how MIR describes their approach:

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[17] Ibid., p. 12
[18] Ibid., p. 16
[19] Ibid., p. 16
[20] Ibid., p. 16

> ‘‘An image can show the way. Our images showed us that we wanted the world to look different.
>
> Different to what most architects are turning it into. If we can squeeze trees, water, rain, fog, and moss into an image, we will do it.
>
> We want cities to be greener, more alive - but less hectic. We want the earth to win over the asphalt and we want the air to be filled with birds and insects.
>
> Our images are no longer images of buildings, but of places that are alive. This is what we have inside. A dream about a slower, more natural world. Where buildings are reminders of how lucky we are to be alive.’’[21]

The story of MIR is characterized by both rediscovery and a return to roots. From their humble beginnings in a small, rainy city in Norway, Mats Andersen and Trond Greve Andersen established MIR as a reflection of their deep connection to the natural world. Their journey from urban isolation back to the embrace of nature is represented in the evolution of their work, which has grown to embody a dream of a world where nature and humanity coexist harmoniously. Through their images, they envision a future where cities are alive, where the landscape and natural environment is not merely a backdrop but a central character in the story of human existence. MIR's work serves as a reminder that the beauty and serenity of the natural world are not just inspirations for art, but essential qualities for our very being, urging us to create spaces that honor and celebrate the planet we *dwell* in.

[21] Ibid., p. 16

2.2 Mir's Philosophy

One aspect of MIR's approach is its quest for the unthinkable. 'We believe it exists, but you won't recognize it until it's right in front of you'[22], they say. According to Mir, the unthinkable is like a hidden creature, only found through exploration—much like children searching for crabs in rock pools. Darkness envelops it, but fear need not be present. Fear makes you focus on problems, while sense and reason only take you to familiar places, blocking your intuition. [23]

Mir argues that we should just keep it simple. Just keep turning over stones—thousands of them—and see what we find. To find something truly unexpected, we must be adventurous and optimistic. Being open allows us to trust our instincts: "Let's see what happens and what we can create!" [24]

As Mir explain, 'intuition' is a powerful tool. Sometimes, the best is not to overthink on things, as too much analysis can paralyze you. Just let whatever is under the stones reveal itself.[25]

This aspect of the child learning from nature is crucial to Romantic philosophy also, the 18th century philosopher, Jean-Jacques Rousseau in his book "Emile, or Treatise on Education" emphasizes the child as the original rebel, the embodiment of everything innocent, unschooled, and free of human control. It is the epicenter of creativity and ingenuity.[26] These concepts will be further elaborated in the thesis to unveil this influence.

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[22] Ibid., p. 34
[23] Ibid., p. 34
[24] Ibid., p. 34
[25] Ibid., p. 34
[26] Rousseau, J. J. (2010). *Rousseau's Émile: Or, Treatise on Education*. http://ci.nii.ac.jp/ncid/BA21740133

Another characteristic of Mir's work is that, Mir creates atmospheric images; here, the mist, trees, fog, rain, water, moss, and play of light play a crucial role. The insertion of these architectural images into natural landscapes evokes a sense of the sublime. The sublime was one of the key themes of the 19th-century Romantic landscape paintings. the British politician and philosopher Sir Edmund Burr developed a theory of Aesthetics that became influential to the Romantic Movement. He made the case that psychologically there were two types of artistic aesthetic that satisfied the human being. One of these was the aesthetics of beauty, the other was that of the sublime. This concept also will further be explored in the upcoming chapters.

For more than 20 years, Mir has developed a unique perspective rooted in their upbringing and the natural landscapes of their childhood. Rather than focusing on conceptual ideas or trends, they aim to capture the instinctive, sensory qualities of a space and engage the viewer's intuition and emotions. Their approach celebrates the grandness and beauty of nature, inspiring a sense of wonder, and a more harmonious existence. The Mir perspective is not about developing a stylistic brand but rather expressing a genuine point of view that resonates with their values and experiences.[27]

The first 20 years of Mir have been about finding the way back to something more personal, intuitive and, in a sense, spiritual. The Mir Way is about finding a flow and letting things be what they are, rather than augmenting them with additional meanings. That which is beautiful enough as it is.[28]

Here also, like the philosophy of Romanticism was that of a personal response to things, a personal response to landscape, a personal response to the events where each artist produced work which, whilst belonging to a romanticist ideal, was

[27] Andersen, T.G. (2022) *The mir way*. Bergen, Norway: Mir Media.
[28] Ibid., p. 172

individual to themselves. Romanticism is about the self-portrait, about journals, it is about emotion.

Mir also explain that, a successful image can transport you to another time and place. This begins with positioning. By creating a clear and defined perspective, viewers naturally feel like they are standing in a specific spot within the scene, subconsciously placing themselves there.[29]

A strong horizon line helps make the image instinctively comfortable, while well-crafted lighting guides viewers to sense the direction of the sun, helping them mentally map the environment. [30]

They use sensory cues like temperature and moisture to trigger emotional and memory responses in viewers, making them feel as if they were truly present in the scene. Positioning the camera low—close to asphalt, gravel, or grass—can evoke tactile sensations, such as the crunch of gravel or the feel of wind, further enhancing this sense of being "there." [31]

‘Place’ is another characteristic theme of Mir images. To emphasize this concept in their book The Mir Way they use the French term "terroir"[32], which describes how the geography in which a place is situated influences the qualities of what grows there. For instance, the rainfall, the soil type, and the sunlight in a region influence the taste of wine. In architecture, there is always an interaction between a building and its environment. “Capturing this connection accurately is one of the most challenging aspects of our work.’’[33] they state. In digital design, where anything is

[29] Ibid., p. 253
[30] Ibid., p. 253
[31] Ibid., p. 253
[32] Ibid., p. 47
[33] Ibid., p. 47

possible, it is easy to lose sight of a project's "terroir" or connection to its surroundings.

For instance, the sky in France looks different from the sky in Norway. In Norway, the ground is dark and wet from constant rain, giving us a dark blue sky and sharp contrasts in sunlight and shadow. In southern Europe, the dry, dusty soil warms the light and softens contrasts. Christian Norberg-Schulz's Phenomenology of *Genius Loci* touches upon all these characteristics[34] and it will be further investigated to understand his influence.

Mir states that, their approach involves incorporating a place's unique qualities into the image, allowing the environment to be an integral part of the design.[35]

In conclusion, the philosophy and the work of MIR, as explored in 'The Mir Way', reveal a deep connection between architecture, nature, and the human experience. The Bergen-based visualization studio, founded by Mats and Trond Greve Andersen, reflects the co-founders' deep-rooted connection to the Norwegian landscape of their childhood. The natural world—its moss, fog, forests, and play of light—serves as both inspiration and context for Mir's images, which transcend the conventional architectural visualization by emphasizing the place and the atmosphere. Their images are not mere architectural renderings; they are evocative depictions of spaces that feel alive, resonating with the sublime quality of nature.

Mir's work is characterized by an intuitive, sensory-driven approach that invites viewers to reconnect with the primal elements of the earth, promoting a harmonious coexistence between the built and the natural environments. This vision is not about following trends or stick to a specific style; instead, it emerges from a personal and

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[34] Norberg-Schulz, C. (1980). *Genius loci: Towards a phenomenology of architecture*. New York: Rizzoli.

[35] Andersen, T.G. (2022) *The mir way*. Bergen, Norway: Mir Media.

instinctive response to nature and the world around them. In this way, Mir’s philosophy echoes the Romantic ideals of individuality, emotional depth, and a profound appreciation of nature's beauty and grandeur.

The Mir style is not a fixed aesthetic but a dynamic and evolving perspective that blends architecture with the environment, aiming to make cities greener, more serene, and less hectic. Their images envision a future where nature reclaims its rightful place alongside human structures. By focusing on the terroir—the unique characteristics of a place—they create images that capture the spirit and essence of their surroundings, much like Christian Norberg-Schulz's Phenomenology of *Genius Loci*.

Ultimately, Mir’s work is a reminder of the vital role that nature plays in shaping our perceptions, emotions, and environments. Their approach celebrates the beauty of simplicity, urging us to look beyond urban isolation and reconnect with the natural world, thereby creating spaces that honor both humanity and the earth.

CHAPTER 3

FROM PICTURESQUE TO ROMANTICISM

Romanticism is a major movement in history that introduced new ideas, attitudes, and ways of expression. Beginning in Western Europe in the mid-1700s, it thrived through the creative efforts of artists, poets, and thinkers, and eventually expanded globally.

In the 18th century, the Enlightenment and the French Revolution impacted broad social reforms throughout the Western world. The Enlightenment strove to free human thought from religion and superstition, instituting reason as the foundation of society. The French Revolution intended to remove the monarchy regime and establish a republic. Romanticism was a response to the negative effects of these movements. But where the Enlightenment's focus on reason ignored human needs for spiritual expression, the Revolution's forceful pursuit of a perfect state led to despotism and extreme violence. These movements, Romantics believed, had stripped life of its blest, wonder, mystery, and love, so that the world became disenchanted. Romanticism meant to revive spiritual life, with art playing a key role in awakening the spirit and saving society. [36]

During this period, artists reacted to these unsettling situations in different ways. However, there were certain common themes that these artists collectively expressed. Investigating these common themes will allow us to gain insights into the main ideas of the romantic movement, and consequently identify these ideas on Mir’s works.

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[36] Tekiner, D. (2000). *Modern art and the Romantic vision*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America.

3.1 Romantic Philosophy.

Firstly, we will dive into the idea of the spirit of the Romantic child. In 1762, Swiss philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau publishes "Emile, or Treatise on Education" a treatise about parenting children. The first Treatise to suggest how a natural education, unlike the artificial and formal education of society could lead a child to become social, moral, and rational while remaining true to his original nature. It features diatribes against the repressive world of adults. It praises young children's inherent goodness, spontaneous nature, and intelligence. Rousseau begins by stating, "Everything is good; once it leaves the hands of the author of things, everything degenerates into the hands of man.''[37] According to Russeau's theory, when we are born, we are what he refers to as a natural man; we possess a certain level of freedom and self-care, but as a child receives education and integrates into society, this natural man gradually disappears.[38]

The world around Rousseau was becoming more rational, scientific, and technologically advanced. It was becoming more reasonable, organized, sterile, and bureaucratic. Against all of this, Rousseau emphasizes the child as the original rebel, the embodiment of everything innocent, unschooled, and free of human control. It is the epicenter of creativity and ingenuity. For the first time in Western history, the emphasis on attraction shifts away from reason and adult self-control in favor of liberation from tradition and the natural innocence and sweetness of childhood.

Another important common idea to the Romantics is that of noble savage. This idea can be traced in Goethe's novel The Sorrows of Young Werther, which was one of the foundational works of the Romantic movement. The novel tells of how young Werther, who is unable to reconcile his inner, poetic fantasies and ideas with the

[37] Rousseau, J. J. (2010). *Rousseau's Émile: Or, Treatise on Education*. http://ci.nii.ac.jp/ncid/BA21740133
[38] Ibid.

demands of the everyday world, moves into a rural community and is enchanted by the simple ways of rural life—this 'return to nature' motif is going to be at the center of Romanticism. He falls in love with a girl called Charlotte, but unfortunately for Werther, she is married to another. So, the love is impossible from the very beginning. But that does not stop Werther, who can think but one thing: the impulses of his heart. Eventually, he is unable to bear the heartbreak and takes his own life. However, rather than judging Werther as foolish, Goethe encourages readers to sympathize with and admire Werther's passionate, impractical approach to love.[39]

For a romantic, it is always right and noble to follow your heart. Romantics saw artists as geniuses with incredible creativity, expressing individuality and spirituality. They perceived art as an expression of a pure heart and poets as inspired visitors who convey their spiritual power through dreams and visions. Tekiner explains that, Romantic art aimed to restore balance to a willful world, with artists serving as gifted visionaries who awakened and revealed the language of the divine. Romanticism sought to imbue the world with its spiritual vision, emphasizing people's uniqueness and spiritual integrity despite modern practical demands.[40]

For Romantics, there is also a universal transcendental undeniable line that runs from the natural world, through man's senses and into his feelings, man feels nature, needs to be at one with it, craves it.

According to Tekiner, Romanticism and nature are deeply connected through sentiment. In his 1795 essay "Naive and Sentimental Poetry", Friedrich Schiller examines two ways of experiencing nature. He idealizes the classical era, suggesting that ancient civilizations lived in harmony with nature, which he describes as simple.

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[39] Von Goethe, J. W. (2012). The Sorrows of Young Werther. In *Oxford University Press eBooks*. https://doi.org/10.1093/owc/9780199583027.001.0001

[40] Tekiner, D. (2000). *Modern art and the Romantic vision*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America.

In contrast, modern people feel disconnected from nature due to limited interaction. Schiller believes that appreciating nature's beauty and harmony makes people aware of their detachment, which diminishes their ability to fully appreciate beauty. This beauty agitates a strong desire to overcome this sense of alienation. Schiller viewed this awareness of separation as a "sentimental" experience unique to modern individuals. He likened our relationship with nature to an ill person's desire for health, highlighting the search for emotional connection to overcome separation and restore a deep spiritual engagement with nature. This longing for sentiment aims to bring back the enchantment of life.[41]

Another aspect that needs to be pointed out, is that Romanticism is a child of the Noth. French writer and art critic Charles Baudelaire asserts that the North, where color, dreams, and fairy tales emerge from the mist, is the origin of Romanticism. England, Flanders, and parts of France are shrouded in fog, while Venice is immersed in its lagoons. The Spanish painters focus on contrast rather than color. In contrast, the South celebrates nature, which is so beautiful that nothing can surpass it. Art there thrives in the open air, but further north, the deep dreams of the studio and the wandering gaze emerge from the gray horizons.[42]

Finally, the most common idea for the Romantics is the idea of the Sublime. The idea of the Sublime dates back as far as the philosophical theories of Longinus. "Sublimity is the note which rings from a great mind," he wrote, and "true sublimity raises the soul; it gains a proud step upwards; it is filled with joy and exultation, as though itself had produced what it hears."[43] This idea was carried through time to the eighteenth century, where the Sublime had its most significant effects.

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[41] Ibid., p. 14-16

[42] Baudelaire, C. (1965). *Art in Paris, 1845-1862* (J. Mayne, Ed.). Phaidon Publishers; distributed by New York Graphic Society Publishers, Greenwich, Conn.

[43] Murray, P., & Dorsch, T. S. (2000). *Classical literary criticism* ([New ed.]). Penguin Books.

The two philosophers most associated with the ideas of the Sublime are Edmund Burke and Immanuel Kant. Many prior philosophers had written essays on the ideas expressed by Longinus, but it was Burke followed by Kant who took these ideas to their logical conclusions. Consequently, the ideas expressed by Burke in his essay *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of our ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* in 1757 were considered the foundations of the Romantic movements of art, literature, and music.

Edmund Burke's treatise, "A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful," had a significant impact on aesthetic theories of the time. One of its key contributions was establishing an aesthetic framework where the ideas of the beautiful and the sublime could coexist. Burke believed that the beautiful and the sublime were distinct aesthetic concepts that could never be combined.[44]

According to Burke, his theory of the beautiful and sublime focused heavily on the role of sensation. He believed that the aesthetic experience emerges from both physiological and psychological factors, which helped determine how beautiful or sublime an object appeared. The key mechanism he used to evaluate this was the pleasure and pain principle, a concept that, while not new in the 18th century, took on new meaning in the context of his inquiry. Burke linked pleasurable sensations with beauty and painful sensations with the sublime.[45]

Burke's conception of beauty was associated with qualities like smoothness, smallness, delicacy, gradual variation, and gentle colors—qualities he associated with the female form. However, it was not his theory of beauty that proved to be the most influential, but rather his ideas about the sublime.[46]

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[44] Finley, G. (1979). The Genesis of Turner's "Landscape Sublime." *Zeitschrift Für Kunstgeschichte*, *42*(2/3), 141–165. https://doi.org/10.2307/1481973

[45] Ibid.

[46] Ibid.

Burke's concept of the sublime instead emphasized fear or terror, whether real or imagined, as the most powerful source of this emotion. He believed that obscurity could evoke feelings of dread and danger and that sensible obscurity in painting could enhance its effect. Burke also believed that privation, which includes 'vacuity', 'solitude', and 'silence', was another source of the sublime. Both the absence and presence of sound were considered sublime, with excessive loudness from vast waterfalls, storms, thunder, or artillery overwhelming the mind and filling it with terror. Burke also argued that the vastness of an object was a quality of the sublime and that infinity, related to vastness, filled the mind with delightful horror. He referred to this as the "artificial infinite," which he illustrated with sounds like waterfalls or hammering, where noises seem to remain in the imagination long after they stopped.[47]

Burke's inquiry is on aesthetic feelings, with the goal of identifying and understanding them, as well as detecting the properties of objects that trigger these emotions and comprehending how these properties generate their impact. He argues that the aesthetic response is immediate and that both nature and works of art directly impact our sensibility with little intermediaries between the stimulus and the emotional experience.[48]

Burke' s theory was vital to the Romantic both because it emphasized the suggestive quality of art and because it gave a new importance to the disturbing. The artist who concentrated on this now had become an explorer. Burke's notion of the Sublime emphasized that man was disconcerted primarily by that which lay beyond his

[47] Ibid.
[48] Quinton, A. (1961). Burke on the Sublime and Beautiful. *Philosophy*, *36*(136), 71–73. http://www.jstor.org/stable/3748935

control or comprehension. Ultimately, repulsion could become a new means of intimating the i*deal* which, for the Romantics, was always unknowable.[49]

In all, Romanticism was a powerful response to the rationalism of the Enlightenment and to the turbulent changes of the French Revolution, a movement to return to an alienated world, a sense of magic, mystery, and spiritual life. By reveling in the natural goodness of childhood, the authenticity of rural life, and the transcendent capacity of art, the Romantics spoke to the emotional, spiritual, and imaginative aspects of human life. The sublime allowed Romantics to express those aspects of nature that were both astonishing and terrifying and reflected a desire to reach out toward forces beyond human explanation. Finally, Romanticism refashioned how artistic expression used individuality, nature, and the indiscernible of life in a world modernizing at rapid speed.

3.2 Picturesque and Romantic Landscape Painting

As it is emphasized in the previous discussion, during the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries, significant changes occurred in European aesthetic understanding and practices. These changes led to the perception of landscapes as aesthetic objects, which resulted in new practices such as landscape painting, naturalistic landscape design, and aesthetically oriented nature tourism.[50] It can be argued that the history of landscape painting is the history of conceptions of nature. A landscape painting is a record not only of a place but also of the painter and of the age that made him.[51]

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[49] Vaughan, W. (1978). *Romantic Art*. Oxford University Press, USA.

[50] Paden, R. (2015). Picturesque Landscape Painting and Environmental Aesthetics. *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, *49*(2), 39–61. https://doi.org/10.5406/jaesteduc.49.2.0039

[51] Rees, R. (1982). Constable, Turner, and Views of Nature in the Nineteenth Century. *Geographical Review*, *72*(3), 253. https://doi.org/10.2307/214526

At this point to further elaborate our discussion, the characteristics of the two main movements of the period, the Picturesque and the Romantic Landscape Painting, will be examined.

3.2.1 The Picturesque

The concept of the Picturesque played a significant role in landscape painting, and in the general aesthetic understanding of the time. Indeed, the picturesque emerged as a distinct British phenomenon in response to the broader Romantic movement sweeping across Europe, partially inspired by the ideas of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Significantly, his emotional comprehension of nature and society had a profound impact on German romantics throughout the 1770s. However, in Britain, the Romantic pursuit to capture the essence of the natural world did not occur before until Wordsworth introduced it in the early 19th century. In the meantime, a new aesthetic movement known as the Picturesque emerged. This artistic approach especially emphasized the visual elements of nature that were considered appropriate for painting.[52]

According to Vaughan, Burke saw emotions that depend only on "interest" rather than love and hate as without aesthetic value. However, there were individuals who dedicated their lives to cultivating an interest in various matters, and they tended to hold a different opinion. They found the term 'Picturesque' appropriate to stand between the beautiful and the sublime, as it suggested something that was ‘worthy of picture’.[53]

Before Picturesque, Neoclassicism dominated artistic practices and theories with its idealized and stylized way of representing nature. It was a transition from

[52] Batey, M. (1994). The Picturesque: An Overview. *Garden History*, *22*(2), 121. https://doi.org/10.2307/1587022

[53] Vaughan, W. (1978). *Romantic Art*. Oxford University Press, USA.

neoclassical imitation to Picturesque, where irregularity, asymmetry, and natural imperfections became principal elements of British landscape painting. The picturesque movement encouraged artists to relate themselves with nature in a more personal, expressive manner, leaving rigid English conventions for a subtler, individualistic art of landscape representation.[54]

There are several key figures of the Picturesque, but two of them will be specifically investigated here. One of them is William Gilpin and the other is Sir Uvedale Price. During the 18th century, they were instrumental figures in defining, popularizing, and theorizing this aesthetic movement, guiding artistic practices, landscape design, and cultural perceptions of nature and art.

William Gilpin was a clergyman, educator, author, and amateur artist. During the 1780s and 1790s, he wrote multiple books on the aesthetic appreciation of landscapes with titles following the format *Observations on* [location]*…relative chiefly to Picturesque Beauty.* In these Books, he documented his travels as a journal, and he also created pen and wash sketches of various scenes. They played a key role in promoting Picturesque tourism, offering text and illustrations that provided guidance for evaluating landscape scenery, including its composition, arrangement of elements, and overall visual quality. They helped turn rural areas into appealing aesthetic destinations.

During the first period of the picturesque, which Gilpin initiated, a landscape view was bound in a frame, emphasizing composition and construction in accordance with the classic ideas of beauty as even and slightly varied. However, by the 1790s, Gilpin began to emphasize that smoothness should, in fact, be avoided in picturesque composition. This reflected the shift in the popular aesthetic taste toward the rugged

[54] Townsend, D. (1997). The Picturesque. *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, 55*(4), 365. https://doi.org/10.2307/430924

and diverse presentation of nature. This shift in Gilpin's method represents the degree to which he adapted to the emergent taste for the Picturesque and presumes a break with more traditional notions of beauty associated with smoothness and gentle variation.[55] This new phase, which replaced concerns of composition and artistic structure with placing center stage rough and rugged textures integral to any Picturesque aesthetic, identified a range of subjects suited to the Picturesque depiction: old cottages, decayed mills and abbeys, aged oak trees, decaying gates and fences, as well as lowly figures such as beggars and gypsies.

One of the leading figures of this later interpretation of Picturesque was Sir Uvedale Price. Price was both an amateur landscape designer and a contemporary of Gilpin. In his work, *An Essay on the Picturesque, as Compared with the Sublime and the Beautiful*, Price employed and extended Gilpin's ideas while introducing his own theories about landscape aesthetics. Price defined Picturesque in terms of irregularity, roughness, and variety in the scenery of nature, differentiating the Picturesque from the Beautiful and the Sublime. The Picturesque for him was a compilation of such things as rugged, various, and textured that were in opposition to beautiful and polished in their flowing beauty and sublime in its greatness and awfulness. For Price, the Picturesque involved the less refined, asymmetrical, and intriguing in the landscape.[56]

To have a better understanding of these concepts let us have a look at a series of watercolor illustrations that Thomas Hearne produced to compare a Brownian style improved landscape to a Picturesque alternative ideated by Uvedale Price. (Fig.3.1.)

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[55] Miall, D. S. (2005). Representing the Picturesque: William Gilpin and the Laws of Nature. *ISLE Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, *12*(2), 75–93. https://doi.org/10.1093/isle/12.2.75

[56] Ross, S. (1987). The Picturesque: An Eighteenth-Century Debate. *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, *46*(2), 271. https://doi.org/10.2307/431865

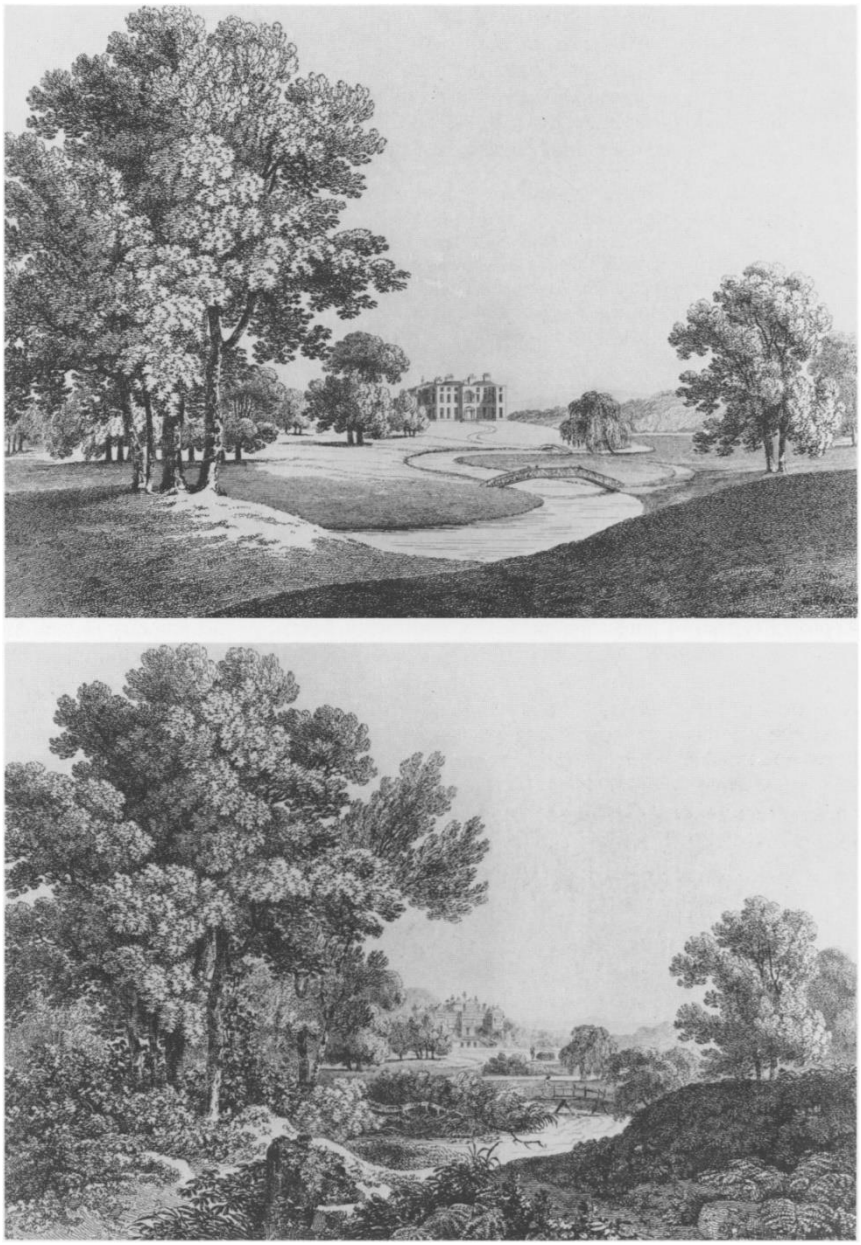

Figure 3.1. Thomas Hearne ‘improved’ and ‘unimproved’ Landscapes, 1794.

The first image depicted a Palladian house situated in a carefully manicured landscape with smooth lawns, well grouped trees, a serpentine brook with even banks, and a Chinese bridge - the type of landscape design that Price criticized as reflecting formulaic "ready-made taste." In contrast, the second illustration embodied Price's conception of the picturesque, featuring an irregular house nestled

close in a wooded setting with fallen trees, exposed roots, rocks, a natural stream, and a rustic bridge, all set against a foreground of thorns, thistles, and docks, conveying a sense of complexity and variety.[57]

3.2.2 Romantic Landscape Painting

By the late 1700s, British landscape painting began to change, aiming for greater truth and emotional expression. The conventions of the Picturesque were challenged as artists sought more immediate and compelling ways to capture the sensual impact and rapidity of nature. This can be seen in paintings and watercolors of the sublime. Artists tried to convey the stunning presence of observed nature, mirroring the sensationalist approach of Burke's Enquiry.[58]

Many landscape painters, known as Romantics, possess unique characteristics that resonate with the central themes of Romanticism. Three main figures of this movement will be examined within the framework of this study: John Constable, William Turner, and Caspar David Friedrich. And an attempt to identify some of these features will be conducted.

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[57] Miall, D. S. (2005). Representing the Picturesque: William Gilpin and the Laws of Nature. *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, *12*(2), 75–93. http://www.jstor.org/stable/44086430

[58] Finley, G. (1979). The Genesis of Turner's "Landscape Sublime." *Zeitschrift Für Kunstgeschichte*, *42*(2/3), 141. https://doi.org/10.2307/1481973

3.2.2.1 John Constable: Naturalism and Clouds

John Constable was an English painter born in Suffolk in 1776, who introduced new ways of studying and representing nature. His main achievement was to persuade people to appreciate the simpler, humbler aspects of nature. Constable drew inspiration from the Dutch landscape tradition, including elements like a winding path, overgrown vegetation, detailed trees, and a dramatic sky. His compositions were often based on careful observation of nature, but he also employed compositional techniques to create a sense of balance and harmony. Constable aimed to strike a balance between detail and a sense of spontaneity. While his works exhibit a high level of detail, he avoided excessive meticulousness, preserving a sense of freshness and immediacy.[59]

Constable endeavor to capture the essence of the scene before him, portraying light, atmosphere, and natural forms with a sense of authenticity. He saw nature as the tangible world of field, stream, and flower: the graphical reality. He approached it both as a poet and as a natural scientist (Fig.3.2.). Constable had a working knowledge of geology, meteorology, and botany, and, like Romantics, he believed that form should be studied through an understanding of structure and process, not by reference to classical models. He viewed painting as a scientific endeavor, an inquiry into the laws of nature, and considered landscape painting a branch of natural philosophy, with paintings as experiments.[60]

[59] Rees, R. (1982). Constable, Turner, and Views of Nature in the Nineteenth Century. *Geographical Review, 72*(3), 253. https://doi.org/10.2307/214526

[60] Ibid.

Figure 3.2. John Constable, *Dedham Vale: Evening*, 1802, oil on canvas, 31.8 x 43.2 cm, Victoria and Albert Museum, London, UK.

Constable was a prolific sketcher, he uses these studies to capture fleeting moments of light and atmosphere, which he later incorporated into his larger works. He employed loose, expressive brushwork, often leaving visible traces of his hand in the final painting, adding a sense of immediacy and movement. Constable was a master at depicting the nuances of light and shadow, creating depth and atmosphere in his landscapes. He used subtle gradations and contrasts to bring his scenes to life.[61] However, the element that he studied the most were clouds. He produced over a hundred oil paintings depicting the foggy sky he saw from Hampstead Heath. His

[61] Kitson, M. (1957). John Constable, 1810-1816: A Chronological Study. *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, *20*(3–4), 338–357. https://doi.org/10.2307/750786

goal was to become conversant in the complex language of clouds so that he could represent them scientifically. In a well-known letter dated October 23, 1821, Constable challenged the conventional wisdom that suggested treating the sky in the painting as a plain white background for the other parts. Rather, he thought that the sky dominated the entire picture and served as the main source of light in nature. The sky had to be a crucial component of the image for Constable, acting as the "key note," the "standard of Scale," and most significantly, the "chief Organ of sentiment."[62]

Constable identified the varieties of clouds with great care. The definitive classification of clouds into cumulus, stratus, nimbus and cirrus was published by Luke Howard shortly before Constable's cloud studies. While Constable did not use this terminology, his library contained a book that discussed Howard's cloud classification. More importantly, Constable applied the principle of "cloud perspective" (Fig.3.3.). The idea was to depict the sky so that it appeared to stretch into the depths of the image and arch over the terrain, with the clouds looking larger in the foreground. Constable also aimed for scientific accuracy in the composition of light and shade, recording details such as the date, the time of day, and weather conditions in his cloud sketches.[63]

[62] Jackson, D. (2017). *Romanticism in the North: From Friedrich to Turner*. Waanders.

[63] Ibid.

Figure 3.3. John Constable, *View on the Stour near Dedham*, 1822, oil on canvas, 129.5 x 188 cm, The Huntington Library, Art Museum, and Botanical Gardens, London, UK.

Despite being highly influenced by advances in the natural sciences, Constable believed that their approaches could only lead him so far. His ultimate objectives were spiritual rather than scientific, and in order to reach them, he believed that introspection was more crucial than empirical study. Similar to William Wordsworth, Constable felt that nature was holy and could reveal moral and spiritual aspects if it was studied with enough devotion. "The landscape painter," he once

advised a group of students, "must walk in the fields with a humble mind. No arrogant man was ever permitted to see nature in all her beauty."[64]

3.2.2.2 William Turner: Imagination and Reality

Throughout his career as an artist, Joseph Mallord William Turner was fascinated by visions of a dramatic natural world. Mountains, waterfalls, avalanches, fire, and storms were among the many elements that he drew inspiration from. Such overwhelming natural wonders formed the themes of his sublime landscape paintings.[65] While Constable and the natural scientists were concerned with visible and tangible form, Turner's interests lay "behind the phenomena," i.e. in the underlying structures. He was interested in basic, natural forms of mountains, seas, and atmospheric phenomena in violent motion.[66]

Turner's early paintings combined imagination with reality, as manifested in Buttermere Lake. (Fig.3.4.) The scene, though perceptively real, had a poetic quality to it and was appropriately accompanied by lines of poetry in the catalog. His style later became bolder and more imaginative, best manifested by *The Fifth Plague of Egypt*, (Fig.3.5.) which combined impressions from nature with Poussin's style to create an imposing presentation of the Sublime. Turner combined his ambition and style in depicting a hostile nature in which everything goes from dramatic storms to *Hannibal's Crossing of the Alps* (Fig.3.6.). Turner gave equal attention to the

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[64] Rees, R. (1982). Constable, Turner, and Views of Nature in the Nineteenth Century. *Geographical Review*, *72*(3), 253. https://doi.org/10.2307/214526

[65] Finley, G. (1979). The Genesis of Turner's "Landscape Sublime." *Zeitschrift Für Kunstgeschichte*, *42*(2/3), 141. https://doi.org/10.2307/1481973

[66] Rees, R. (1982). Constable, Turner, and Views of Nature in the Nineteenth Century. *Geographical Review*, *72*(3), 253. https://doi.org/10.2307/214526

picturesque landscape, creating that compelling duality of subject matter. Mastery over light and the elements was central to Turner's artistic vision and achievement.[67]

Figure 3.4. J.M.W. Turner, *Buttermere Lake, with Part of Cromackwater, Cumberland, a Shower,* 1798, oil on canvas, 88.9 x 119.4 cm, Tate Britain, London, UK.

[67] Gowing, L. (1966). *Turner: imagination and reality*. Distributed by Doubleday, Garden City, N.Y.

Figure 3.5. J.M.W. Turner, *The fifth plague of Egypt*,1800, oil on canvas, 120 x 180 cm, Indianapolis Museum of Art, Indianapolis, Indiana. US.

Figure 3.6. J.M.W. Turner, *Snow Storm: Hannibal Crossing the Alps*,1812, oil on canvas, 146 x 237.5 cm, Tate Britain, London, UK.

Turner's paintings slowly freed themselves from the bonds of convention in landscape. He focused on the arrangement and impact of the image, aiming to surpass his forerunners. Turner reconstructed visual concepts through a powerful, imaginative method. In his work, one sees a profound confidence in his abilities and a disregard for conventional self-expression.[68]

Turner extracted the essence of a painting, as one would separate cream from milk, and reconstitute it with new vigor. While he sometimes embellished with superfluous information, he ultimately recognized that his creations required none. Turner's mind was unsatiable, able to harness any artistic style or approach to fill his unique vision, which neither art nor nature could fully attain.[69]

Claude deeply influenced Turner in both his study of radiant, serene light and in his turbulent and dramatic subjects. While he recognized the value of studying nature, Turner preferred to paint from his memory and imagination rather than direct observation, seeking to create an "arrangement of remembrance." His output of over 19,000 drawings reveals his tireless study, but his true gift was his distinctive perspective—a belief that art should inspire and shape one's perception of nature.[70]

Turner had a deep, driving enthusiasm for his art, studying nature intently in contemplation of how everything fitted into the whole. He admired the force and the utility of nature, and he judged his art based on these perceptions. For Turner, art should inspire and shape one's perception of nature rather than merely serve it. Perhaps his thoughts are more in harmony with the psychology of perception than

[68] Ibid.
[69] Ibid.
[70] Ibid.

with the prevailing aesthetic, and he was a practical, skeptical artist who loved art for its own sake. Turner instinctively grasped the true nature of painting.[71]

Yet another characteristic of Turner's development is his use of watercolor. He contradicted his early critics, who sensed implication that his paintings were a new form of style and reality. As early as 1816, Hazlitt noted that the developing style of Turner was clashing with the classical tradition and, by the 1830s, it was fully developed. A background in topographical draftsmanship and watercolor, which offered lighter tones than traditional oil paintings, influenced his work. Sir George Beaumont attacked the tendency of the age to make oil paintings look like watercolors, which he felt diminished their strength. As oil paintings became less salable, Turner turned to watercolors and engravings, and success was assured. Unlike many Romantics, he was empirical and improvisatory in his relation to art, trusting the hand of chance and spontaneity. As he once said to Farrington, "Turner has no fixed process; he just moves the colors around until he expresses his idea."[72]

[71] Ibid.
[72] Ibid.

Figure 3.7. J.M.W. Turner, *Venice, Looking East from the Giudecca at Sunrise*,1819, watercolor on paper, 28 x 22 cm, British Museum, London, UK.

Figure 3.8. J.M.W. Turner, *Sunset, Returning from Torcello,*1840, watercolor on white wove paper, 24.4 x 30.4 cm, Tate Britain, London, UK.

Before Cézanne, Turner's innovative use of watercolor significantly impacted painting. Throughout his career, Turner often achieved effects with watercolors that surpassed those of his oil paintings. On his first trip to Italy in 1819, he used watercolor to capture real scenery instead of the typical classical landscapes. Turner preferred to focus on beauty and realism rather than local color, rejecting the rigid color schemes of artists like Poussin and Rubens. He approached painting with a

realistic and skeptical mindset, fully understanding the strengths of the medium he was using.[73] (Fig.3.7.-3.8.).

These drawings suggest that the details of a real place emerged from the color itself, rather than color being added to the details. Some of these drawings show that this process actually occurred. In the Venice and Como sketchbooks, pages with just parallel bands of color, painted horizontally, appear alongside the finished subjects. These bands were likely the beginnings of future drawings and experiments in using pure color to create light and reality. In these bands, one can almost see the elements of earth, sky, stone, and water glowing in the cool morning light. These color studies had the freedom to express themselves and waited for the right moment to take form. The color studies in the Venice and Como books represent the earliest that remain, in pale and watery radiance compared to later, richer examples. On the other hand, other drawings from this journey confirm the developing approach of Turner. It was Turner who reversed the traditional hierarchy, allowing color to come into being first, and provide the imaginative matter needed to depict the outward world.[74]

For Turner, reflections became more than just representations; they became a subject of deep exploration, revealing fundamental principles. His fascination with reflections led him to view the world as a place where every surface both receives and emits rays of light, creating a continuous interplay of light. This idea of infinite, intermingling light was not only a perspective on nature but also a key concept in painting, foreshadowing the Impressionists' view of the world as a field of shifting, interacting colors and tones.

Turner was particularly interested in how reflections appeared in various metals with different degrees of polish. He studied how reflected light creates images in mirrors,

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[73] Ibid.
[74] Ibid.

window panes, and on the surfaces of both exterior and interior spheres. These images, composed of light and colored by the medium they were seen in, fascinated him. Turner observed these reflections in nature and noted their appearance in the works of old masters. He created illustrations showing light filtering through glass balls filled with colored liquids and captured the reflection of his painting room on polished metallic spheres. The rounded shapes of these reflections intrigued Turner, and he became deeply absorbed in studying this visual property, even when it was not the main focus of his work. This concept of non-rectangular images later reappeared in some of Turner's most original paintings.[75]

Turner's later works were influenced by his belief in the artist as a unique genius, whose creativity was beyond mere skill and could not be taught. He admired renowned masters and sought validation for his own artistry. A pivotal experience in his life—*The Houses of Parliament burning down*—shaped his ultimate artistic vision (Fig.3.9.-3.10.). Turner's paintings were dramatic, capturing the drama of flames and water, and he found a deep connection between his personal experience and the scene he depicted. Turner concentrated on the light that color naturally generates within a painting, necessitating a uniform, diffuse consistency that upheld its objective value. This approach created designs that radiated outward from the center, expressing his vision of artistic freedom and independence.[76]

[75] Ibid.
[76] Ibid.

Figure 3.9. J.M.W. Turner, *The Burning of the Houses of Lords and Commons*, 1834, oil on canvas, 92 x 123 cm, Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland, Ohio, US.

Figure 3.10. J.M.W. Turner, *The Burning of the Houses of Lords and Commons,* 1834, oil on canvas, 92 x 123 cm, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, US.

At 66, Turner reconnected fantasy and form, transforming his earlier images of peril into an expanding spiral. He questioned the perception of the sea, resulting in "Snowstorm," a depiction of his endurance and defiance. The movement of water influenced his subsequent paintings, with circular images in the Goethe series showing a shifting focus. Turner sometimes masked the corners of his canvases, illustrating the evolution of his creative process.[77]

[77] Ibid.

Late paintings like *Snowstorm* (Fig.3.11.) immerse the viewer, pulling them into the heart of nature's violent seizure of wind and vapor. Like his other late works, Snowstorm exemplifies Burke's notions of the sublime, particularly 'obscurity' and 'power.' In this final phase of Turner's work, shaped by his deep connection with nature, reflective thought, and prior artistic experimentation, he recreates the external world as an apocalyptic vision of power and process. While Turner still pursued truth to nature, it was now a different kind of truth—one where nature is portrayed as the embodiment of elemental forces. These forces, rather than nature's physical forms, became the central focus of his artistic exploration.[78]

[78] Finley, G. (1979, January 1). The Genesis of Turner's 'Landscape Sublime'. Deutscher Kunstverlag, 42(2/3), 141-141. https://doi.org/10.2307/1481973

Figure 3.11. J.M.W. Turner, *Snow Storm: Steam-Boat off a Harbour's Mouth,* 1842, oil on canvas, 91 x 122 cm, Tate Britain, London, UK.

3.2.2.3 Caspar David Friedrich: The soul of Nature.

Caspar David Friedrich is often regarded as one of the most prominent artists of the early Romanticism. But what constitutes the "Romanticism" of his work? Scholars usually look to a number of traits characterizing the Romanticism in his work. First, his paintings often feature a figure that the viewer stands behind, yearning for the landscape they are viewing and feeling overwhelmed by the emotions it evokes. The second aspect is the spiritual quality of his landscapes, which may express longing for something otherworldly and reveal a soul trapped in this world of material things. Last but not the least, Friedrich expresses great religiosity in many of his works. Such religiosity is normally quiet, inviting to prayer and deep meditation. He skillfully emphasized this serene state of reflection through careful color selection, encouraging the observer to immerse themselves and surrender to the allure of the nature.[79]

Caspar David Friedrich's works, including those in the Dresden Gallery, Berlin National Gallery, and Hamburg, are considered among the greatest landscape painters of all time. Friedrich was a revolutionary in his visualizing landscape and discovered a new kind of landscape: the landscape full of romantic feeling, 'die romantische Stimmungslandschaft'. Born in 1774, Friedrich began as a draftsman and started painting pictures at the age of thirty-three. His first painting, *The Cross in the Mountains*, (Fig. 3.12.) was commissioned as an altarpiece for the private

[79] Jackson, D. (2017). *Romanticism in the North: From Friedrich to Turner*. Waanders.

chapel in Schloss Tetschen in Bohemia. This one-of-a-kind piece represented nature as sacred, with the Crucified Saviour appearing as a work of art set in the scenery.[80]

Figure 3.12. Caspar David Friedrich, *Cross in the Mountains*, 1808, oil on canvas, 115 x 110 cm, Galerie Neue Meister, Dresden, Germany.

[80] Beenken, H. (1938). Caspar David Friedrich. In *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs* (Vol. 72, Issue 421, pp. 170-173+175). https://www.jstor.org/stable/867281

Friedrich's work, like his contemporary architect Schinkel, aimed to awaken the sensitive spectator's mind to a presentiment of infinity and suggest that which cannot be presented. Friedrich's Cross in the Mountains attempts to reveal Divinity directly to the spectator, as if it were not an image but the real experience of one wandering in the mountains.[81]

Friedrich's work oversteps an aesthetic boundary that had previously held good but has often been overstepped in painting subsequently. However, the clarity and simplicity of his pictorial conception are undeniable. The mountain with the fir trees and the Cross is placed like one dark mass, sharp, without transition, flat against the sky. In this infinity, there is movement, with the radiation of great beams of light representing the sinking sun cutting across the rose-red heavens. The immaterial arms of light seem to extend far beyond the confines of the picture itself, introducing an entirely new conception of infinity into the landscape.[82]

Friedrich's *The Monk by the Sea* (Fig. 3.13.) is one the most outstanding paintings of the German Romanticism. *The Monk by the Sea* does not follow the usual techniques of painting, as there is no depth perspective and only a small, vertical figure of a black-clad man, seen from behind. A low horizon meets the dark expanse, with the cloudy sky occupying about five-sixths of the canvas. This transforms the painting's self-contained layers into an innovative, boundless experience of space, brought forth by the wonderful quality of the translucent glaze. In his place, the man reflects upon the power of the universe.[83]

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[81] Ibid.
[82] Ibid.
[83] Wolf, N. (2003). *Caspar David Friedrich: 1774-1840 : the Painter of Stillness*. Taschen.

Figure 3.13. Caspar David Friedrich, *The Monk by the Sea*, 1808-10, oil on canvas, 110 x 171,5 cm, Alte Nationalgalerie, Berlin, Germany.

In 1810, Heinrich von Kleist, Clemens Brentano, and Albert von Arnim described the painting as having an "apocalyptic featurelessness" and "boundlessness," comparing it to having one's eyelids cut off. Friedrich's novelty drew on Dutch Baroque painting precedents but left the exposed individual confronting the desolate universe without the stabilizing elements found in Dutch paintings. Kleist identified the solitary figure as a monk, while Friedrich described it as a Faustian thinker meditating on the unknowable hereafter.[84]

In his painting *Wanderer above a Sea of Mist* (Fig.14), a rear-facing man stands on a black granite outcrop rising sharply in the foreground. He looks out over the valley's mist, past the naked rock pillars erupting into the pure air, and toward the far

[84] Ibid.

summits and mountain ranges. A cloud bank is shown above. The artwork evokes the sublime, as Carns wrote in 1835:

> "Climb up to the mountain's crest, look out over the vast chains of hills... and what sensation do you feel? You are overwhelmed with silent devotion, immerse yourself in boundless space, and purify your whole being. Your ego-self dissolves, and God becomes everything. Friedrich's rearview figure may be a patriotic memorial to a deceased individual. The mist symbolizes nature's cycle. In the middle of the 18th century, Jean-Jacques Rousseau described the high mountains as the nearest spot to the ether, the fabric of heaven, the fifth element, or quintessential, which purifies. Friedrich's "wanderer of the world" likewise seeks the heavenly epitome that provides calm beyond mist and mountain summits. The rear-view figure, typical of Friedrich's work, conveys meaning within the composition and mediates between the viewer and the painting, both formally and conceptually." [85]

[85] Ibid.

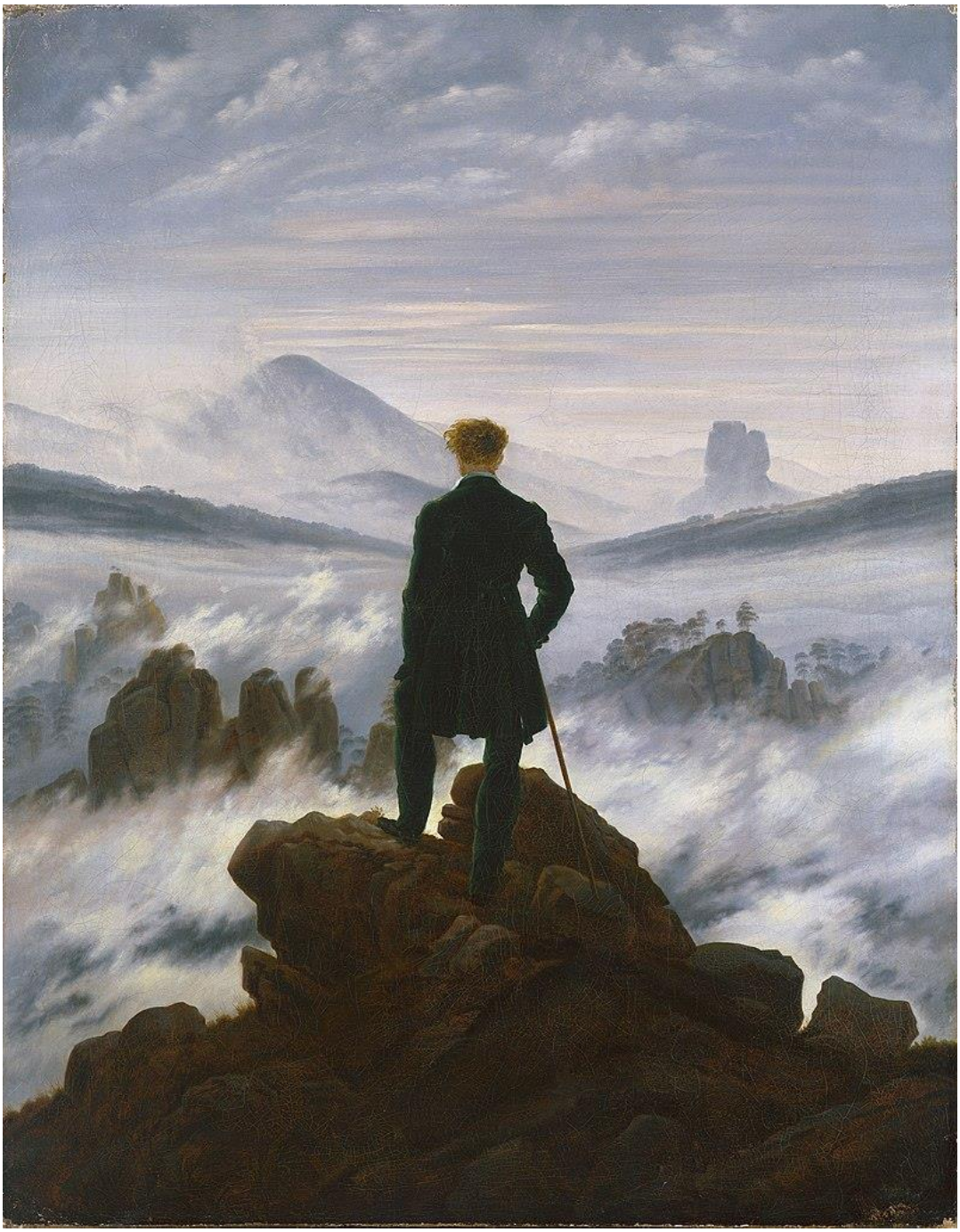

Figure 3.14. Caspar David Friedrich, *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog,* 1818, oil on canvas, 94.8 x 74.8 cm, Hamburger Kunsthalle, Hamburg, Germany.

In conclusion, Caspar David Friedrich's art embodies the core ideals of Romanticism through its deep emotional resonance, spiritual symbolism, and innovative approach to landscape painting. His works, characterized by a profound sense of longing and awe before nature, often depict solitary figures that serve as intermediaries between the viewer and the sublime landscapes they observe. Friedrich’s ability to infuse his compositions with a spiritual depth, inviting quiet reflection and contemplation, sets him apart as a visionary. Through its work, Friedrich masterfully captured the infinite and transcendent, pushing the boundaries of traditional landscape painting while evoking a timeless sense of the sublime.

CHAPTER 4

NORBERG-SCHULZ' S PHENOMENOLOGY OF ARCHITECTURE: *GENIUS LOCI*

" The Mir Way is to let the place be a part of the image.'[86]

This is how Anderson defines The Mir Way. In his book, he talks about terroir, a French term that refers to how a product's place of origin affects its unique character. He uses this metaphor to illustrate the constant conversation between architecture and its environment. 'This is one of the most challenging aspects of our work'[87], he says. For Mir, capturing the authentic atmosphere of a location is crucial. In their images, there is a clear phenomenological approach to trying to capture the spirit of place.

In this chapter the fundamental features of Christian Norberg-Schulz's Phenomenology of Architecture will be examined. This examination will focus on his major book *Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture*. By doing this, it is aimed to explore in which way Christian Norberg-Schulz's Phenomenology provides a common ground for Mir thinking and making of images.

Christian Norberg-Schulz was a Norwegian architect, author, educator, architectural theorist, and critic who explored the relationships between architecture and phenomenology. Norberg-Schulz, who imparted an existential attribute to architecture, emphasized the contextualization of human existence in the world through concepts such as place, space, and existence. By distinguishing between qualitative and quantitative forms through phenomenology, he separated from

[86] Andersen, T.G. (2022) *The mir way*. Mir Media, Norway.
[87] Ibid., p. 47

modern architecture and emphasized the phenomenological context of architecture, through the notions of gathering, participation, and arrival.

In the year 1980 Norberg-Schulz introduced his book, *Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture* as a sequel of the author's previous theoretical works, including *Intentions in Architecture; Existence, Space, and Architecture*, and his historical text *Meaning in Western Architecture*. A common theme across these works is the view that architecture provides a means for humans to establish an *existential foothold.* In *Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture*, the philosophy of Heidegger has been the catalyst for understanding architecture as a concrete phenomenon, and that architecture means to visualize the *genius loci*, or the "spirit of place," which has been recognized as the concrete reality man has to face and come to terms with in his daily life, and the task of the architect is to create meaningful places whereby he helps man to dwell.[88]

4.1 Place

Norberg-Schulz states that the existential dimension is not determined by socio-economic conditions, but rather by the structures of our *being in world*. The concretization of the existential dimension depends on how things are made, that is, on arms and technology, and on the "how" of the natural environment. In his book, the existential dimension is approached in terms of place, as the place represents architecture's share in truth and the concrete manifestation of man's dwelling.[89]

[88] Norberg-Schulz, C. (1980). *Genius loci: Towards a phenomenology of architecture*. New York: Rizzoli.

[89] Ibid., p. 5-6

4.1.1 The Phenomenon of Place

For Norberg-Schulz, place is man's concrete dwelling, and man's identity has depended on their belonging to places. Place is a concrete term for the environment, as well as an integral part of our existence. It consists of concrete elements: material, substance, shape, texture, and color, which combine into an environmental character. Therefore, place is a qualitative total phenomenon that loses its concrete nature when we reduce it to a single property, such as spatial relationships. Different actions require different environments in order to *take place* in satisfactory ways.[90]

As Norberg-Schulz explains, there is a lost connection between the various elements that constitute our world, but thankfully, a method known as phenomenology provides a way out of the deadlock. Phenomenology, conceived as a ‘’return to things," lies therefore in reviving the poetic dimension of ‘concrete images’ that constitute our experiences as represented by poets, architects, and artists.[91]

To elaborate on the constituting elements of a ‘Phenomenology of place’, Norberg Schulz uses as a keynote the poem of Georg Trakl, *A Winter Evening.* The poem distinguishes between the outside and the inside. The first two verses depict the outside, which is composed of ‘natural’ and ‘man-made’ components. Winter, night, and snow are natural elements; they create a sense of space, as well as the presence of earth and sky. A vesper bell connects the private interior to the public. The vesper bell is more than a utilitarian device; it symbolizes our common beliefs.[92]

The next two verses present the inside: a house offers shelter and security to a man, while the window enriches the view from outside to within. The table is the gathering place that defines the interior more than anything else. The inside's character is

[90] Ibid., p. 6
[91] Ibid., p. 7
[92] Ibid., p. 8

difficult to describe, but it is always present. In contrast to the cold darkness outside, it is bright and comfortable.[93]

The following verses delve into the meaning of place. The poem depicts the man as a wanderer from the outside world and life path, which corresponds to his attempt to navigate a new environment. But nature also has another side; it offers the grace of growth and blossom. The golden tree, blue sky, and earth symbolize the world. Man's labor brings this world inside, transforming it into bread and wine, thereby "illuminating" and giving it meaning. Without the sky and earth's "sacred" fruits, the inside would be "empty." The house and table serve to welcome, gather, and bring the world "close".[94]

Trakl's poem reveals the essential features of our lived experience, particularly the fundamental properties of place. It shows that every situation has both local and universal aspects. The winter evening it describes is a specific, Nordic phenomenon, yet the notions of inside and outside it evokes are universal. The poem makes the general visible through a concrete, local situation, moving in the opposite direction of scientific thought. Poetry brings us back to the material world, uncovering the inherent meanings of our lived experience.[95]

Trakl's poem also distinguishes between natural and human-made elements, suggesting a foundation for an "environmental phenomenology." While places are typically defined geographically, "place" signifies more than just physical location. Philosophical concepts like Heidegger's "earth" and "sky" provide a more fundamental understanding of how the natural environment forms an encompassing "place" with a distinctive identity or "spirit." Within this landscape, human-made

[93] Ibid., p. 8
[94] Ibid., p. 9
[95] Ibid., p. 10

elements transform nature into a "cultural landscape" that condenses and explains the environmental character.[96]

Overall, the structure of places can be understood through the distinction between natural and human-made phenomena or in concrete terms between ‘landscape’ and ‘settlement’, as well as the categories of earth-sky and inside-outside. These categories have spatial implications, reintroducing "space" not primarily as a mathematical concept, but as an ‘existential dimension’. Finally, the notion of "character" is crucial, as it grounds the investigation in the concrete phenomena of our lived experience and allows us to fully grasp the *genius loci* or the "spirit of place" that the ancients recognized and that humans must come to terms with in order to dwell.[97]

4.1.2 The Structure of Place

Christian Norberg–Schulz ‘s analysis revealed that we can understand a place's structure in terms of "landscape" and "settlement," examining them using the concepts "space" and "character." Space refers to the three-dimensional arrangement of a place's components, while character represents its overall atmosphere. [98]

Norberg-Schulz points out that it is practical to distinguish between space and character, even if we use a single concept like "lived space." Depending on the treatment of space-defining elements, such as boundaries, similar spatial organizations can have very different characters. Architectural theory has extensively discussed the concept of "space," often distinguishing between "space" as geometry and "space" as a perceptual field. However, these abstract definitions

[96] Ibid., p. 10
[97] Ibid., p. 10
[98] Ibid., p. 11

fail to capture the intuitive, multi-dimensional totality of our everyday lived experience, which we might call "concrete space." [99]

Norberg-Schulz continues to specify that, in concrete space, human actions occur in a space defined by qualitative differences, not a homogeneous, isotropic void. Architectural theorists have attempted to define space in more concrete, qualitative terms, using concepts like "inside-outside," "node," "path," "edge," and "district." Heidegger's view that spaces take their existence from specific, lived situations corresponds to the understanding that space grounds itself in specific, lived situations. For the identity of both, the figure-ground relationship is crucial between settlements and landscape, and their enclosures provide "centers" insofar as space extends itself through them in various degrees of continuity. The spatial properties so far pursued are of a "topological" kind and correspond to principles of Gestalt, whereas geometrical modes of organizing things are often developed later to meet specific human needs.[100]

Boundaries define any enclosed space, whether built or natural. Heidegger and the Greeks recognized that a boundary marks where something begins to be present, not where it ends. Floors, walls, and ceilings define built spaces, whereas landscapes define the ground, the horizon, and the sky. It is these structural similarities that form the heart of the relationship between natural and human-made places. Boundaries in the enclosure depend on the function of openings like windows, doors, and thresholds. Overall, through continuous or discontinuous extension, direction, and rhythm, the boundary, above all the wall, makes the spatial structure visible. [101]

To Norberg-Schulz, the concept of "character" is broader and more concrete than that of "space." Character signifies the general and comprehensive atmosphere of a place and the concrete form and substance of the elements defining the space: the

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[99] Ibid., p. 11
[100] Ibid., p. 12-13
[101] Ibid., p. 12-13

material and formal constitution of a place, such as the ground, the sky, and the boundaries, defines its character. Especially worth noting is that the so-called lateral boundaries, such as walls, contribute a great deal to the character of a place. Furthermore, time has an impact on character because it changes with the seasons, daytime, and weather. Modern architectural theory, however, has often neglected this concept and is therefore disconnected from real life. Any phenomenology of place that aspires to provide a sound basis for architectural theory must turn to basic modes of construction and their relation to formal expression. [102]

Norberg-Schulz specifies that, humans create built environments related to nature in three main ways: visualizing and expressing their understanding of nature, complementing the given situation by adding what it lacks, and symbolizing their understanding of nature. These relationships involve gathering experienced meanings to create an "image of the world" or "microcosm" that concretizes their lived environment. Visualization, complementation, and symbolization are essential aspects of settling and dwelling. [103]

Thus, the fundamental purpose of building is to transform a site into a place by uncovering the meanings that are potentially present in the given environment. The structure of a place is not fixed or eternal, but its identity is maintained over time. To preserve the *genius loci*, a place should have the capacity to accommodate different uses within certain limits and be interpreted in various ways. [104]

In conclusion, place is both the starting point and the goal of Norberg-Schulz's structural investigation. At the beginning, place is presented as a spontaneously experienced whole, but by the end, it appears as a structured world, illuminated by the analysis of aspects of space and character.

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[102] Ibid., p. 13-16
[103] Ibid., p. 17
[104] Ibid., p. 18

4.1.3 The Spirit of Place

The concept of the "Genius Loci," or "Spirit of Place," originated in ancient Roman beliefs that every being has a guardian spirit or "genius" that gives life to people and places. Ancient people recognized the existential importance of understanding and connecting with the *genius* of a specific locality where living takes place. [105]

Norberg-Shultz explains that dwelling refers to the comprehensive human-place relationship, which involves two key psychological functions: *orientation* and *identification*. A person needs to establish an existential foothold by orienting themselves, understanding their location, and identifying with their environment to comprehend their relationship with a place. [106]

Identification and orientation are fundamental aspects of human existence for Norberg-Schulz, providing the basis for a person's sense of belonging and enabling mobility. Modern humans prioritize the role of the wanderer, desiring to be "free" and conquer the world. However, true freedom requires a sense of belonging, and "dwelling" means belonging to a specific place. [107]

For Norberg-Schulz, architecture is akin to poetry, helping people dwell poetically and giving meaning to human existence. By concretizing a place's *genius loci*, architects design buildings that gather its properties and bring them closer to people. This method protects the earth and transforms it into a comprehensive whole, recognizing humans as an integral part of the environment. Belonging to a place means establishing an existential foothold—a tangible, everyday sense of connection. [108]

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[105] Ibid., p. 18
[106] Ibid., p. 19
[107] Ibid., p. 21-23
[108] Ibid., p. 23

4.2 Natural Place

4.2.1 The Phenomenon of Natural Place

According to Norberg-Schulz, to be able to dwell between heaven and earth, one must understand the interaction of these elements. This understanding goes beyond immediate sensations, as nature consists of interrelated elements that express fundamental aspects of being. The landscape embodies meanings and structures, leading to mythologies that form the basis of dwelling. A phenomenology of natural place should take these mythologies as its starting point, asking which concrete categories of understanding they represent. [109]

Norberg-Schulz argues that, the perception of the natural environment originates in ancient experiences of nature as a manifold of living forces where the world is presupposed as "Thou," rather than as "it." Man's mental faculties develop from an understanding of such diffused qualities into more articulate perceptions, which again are determined by the specific regional environment.[110] To him, there are five primary types of mythical comprehension, carrying different weight in different cultures.[111]

The first mode refers to the forces and their relation to the natural elements, with creation often envisaged as a marriage between heaven and earth. The earth is the "serving bearer" of life, the sky something high, inaccessible.[112]

It is from this marriage of heaven and earth that the differentiation of "things" takes place. Mountains, being of earth yet rising towards the sky, are "centers" through which the axis of the universe passes. They gather various properties, including the

[109] Ibid., p. 23
[110] Ibid., p. 23
[111] Ibid., p. 24
[112] Ibid., p. 24

hardness and permanence of stone as a material. Mountains are often seen as distant and frightening, and in Romantic landscape painting they signify "wilderness". The trees, reaching up and growing, symbolize the unification of heaven and earth, while the vegetation speaks to living reality. The forest, in particular, has served as a "wilderness" with strange and threatening powers. Water as primordial material takes a crucial place in the majority of the ancient cosmogonies. Most landscapes of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries often present water as a life-spending element, with a river or lake at their center. Later, we understand this as a local element of primary characterizing importance; in the Romantic landscape, it reappears as a dynamic chthonic force. [113]

Being the primary natural "things", rocks, vegetation, and water make a place meaningful or "sacred". These places are discovered by humans and serve as centers, orientation, and identification. They form a spatial structure, recognizing the origin of the concept of space as a system of places, making a truly human life possible. [114]

Another mode of natural understanding consists in abstracting a cosmic order from the flux of occurrences, usually based on the course of the sun or on local geographical structure. Such an order presupposes a structured "space" in which different courses have different "qualities" or meanings. Concrete images and abstract axes expressing the cosmic order have been developed in ancient cultures such as Egypt and the Nordic countries. of occurrences, typically based on the course of the sun or local geographical structure. This order implies a structured "space" where different directions have distinct "qualities" or meanings. These primary elements of orientation vary across cultures. [115]

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[113] Ibid., p. 25-26
[114] Ibid., p. 26
[115] Ibid., p. 28

The third mode of natural understanding involves the definition of the character of natural places, relating them to basic human traits. The Greeks could attain this, by means of ordered variety, clarity, and scale of their landscape. The third mode of natural understanding involves the definition of the character of natural places, relating them to basic human traits that balance out the relationship between man and nature. [116]

Nature encompasses a fourth category of a less perceivable phenomenon: light. Light has always been a fundamental aspect of reality, but ancient civilizations tended to focus on the sun as a physical object rather than the broader concept of light. However, in the Ancient Greek culture, light was understood as a symbol of knowledge, both artistic and intellectual, and was associated with the god Apollo. Light also became the very focus of Christianity, representative of God's unity and love. This holy light has often been expressed in Byzantine art as a gold aura around the holy figures. The Renaissance subsequently took a different perspective: the world was seen as a microcosm of God, and the landscape painters portrayed the environment as an interconnected totality of facts, here elevated by the expression of love. Light is the most pervasive natural phenomenon and hence a prime determinant of this artistic approach to capturing the changing conditions from day into night and the rhythms of the seasons. These temporal variations in light are highly contributive to the character of a place, the *'genius loci*', which is often mirrored in local myths and legends. From the 18th century onward, landscape painting handled light and the rhythms of time as the most important factors, culminating in the Impressionist movement. [117]

[116] Ibid., p. 28-31
[117] Ibid., p. 31-32

Time, finally, is the dimension of constancy and change, and makes space and character parts of a living reality, which at any moment is given as a particular place. [118]

The basic categories of concrete natural understanding are things, order, character, light, and time. Things and order are spatial dimensions, while character and light refer to the atmosphere of a place. Things and character are aspects of the earth, while order and light are determined by the sky. Time is the dimension of constancy and change that makes space and character part of a living reality, manifested in a particular place or Genius Loci. These categories represent the meanings humans have abstracted from the flux of phenomena. Philosopher Willy Hellpach refers to these meanings as "existential contents" that originate in the landscape. [119]

4.2.2 The Structure of Natural Place.

Norberg-Schultz Argues that natural places range from continents and countries to shaded areas under a tree. The earth and sky possess concrete properties, with the ground serving as the most stable element. Extension is what gives each landscape its most distinctive quality, which then determines its character and spatial properties. To Norberg-Schulz the landscape can broadly divided into three levels: micro, medium, and macro, based on the structure and scale of the relief. [120]

According to Norberg-Schulz, through the interaction of surface, relief, vegetation, and water, characteristic places are formed, which constitute the basic elements of landscapes. A phenomenology of natural places should systematically survey concrete totalities of this kind. The variations of the surface relief generate a series

[118] Ibid., p. 32
[119] Ibid., p. 32
[120] Ibid., p. 32-34

of distinct places: plains, valleys, basins, ravines, plateaus, hills, and mountains, each having its own proper phenomenological features.[121]

Norberg-Schulz defines, the sky as crucial aspect of landscapes, with its appearance and impact varying depending on the surrounding environment. In open, flat areas, the sky appears as a vast, embracing hemisphere, while in landscapes with pronounced relief or dense vegetation, only a portion is visible, creating a more intimate feeling. The size and character of the visible sky are determined by the boundaries and contours of the surrounding landscape. The appearance of the sky is influenced by the local climate and acts as a counterpart to the general spatial properties of the landscape. [122]

The sky's appearance is influenced by the local surface relief and the quality of light. In areas close to the coast and Nordic areas atmospheric conditions constantly change, and light becomes a dynamic and poetic element. In northern France, the landscape opens, and the extended sky becomes a comprehensive "stage" for the continuously changing quality of light. In southern Europe, the strong and warm sun fills the space, bringing out the sculptural qualities of natural forms and objects. [123]

The structure of natural places exists on multiple levels, with a whole country being identified as a distinct place due to its structure. The naming of regions and landscapes in all countries reflects the existence of natural places with structurally determined identities. The *genius loci* is part of a hierarchical system and must be understood in this context. [124]

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[121] Ibid., p. 34
[122] Ibid., p. 34
[123] Ibid., p. 34-40
[124] Ibid., p. 40

4.2.3 The Spirit of Natural Place

As Norberg-Schulz explained, the natural environment is characterized by various factors, often related to the earth or sky. In some regions, the sky dominates, while in others, the earth is primary. In these locations, the environment manifests as a balanced whole on a medium scale, allowing for easy and complete identification.[125]

Romantic Landscape

The Nordic Forest—the vast area comprising Central Europe and Scandinavia—is an archetypal natural place with diversified phenomena. The ground is rarely continuous, as varied relief subdivides it into a rich microstructure. Clouds constantly alter the sky, constricting it between tree and rock outlines. The sun is relatively low, creating a varied interplay of light and shadow, with clouds and vegetation acting as enriching filters. Water is present as a dynamic element, with flowing streams and quiet, reflective ponds. Air quality varies from moist fog to refreshing ozone.[126]

The Nordic landscape is characterized by a mutable, often incomprehensible environment where surprises are commonplace. The contrast between seasons and frequent weather changes emphasizes the general instability. Every hillock and rock unveil a fresh landscape. Nature, impressions, and moods are the leading themes in literature, art, and music in Nordic countries. The Nordic people deeply embed various mythical creatures, such as gnomes, dwarfs, and trolls, in their folklore.[127]

Dwellings in the Nordic landscape presuppose an intimate relationship with nature, whereby human beings try to participate directly in nature rather than abstracting or ordering the environment. While the specific methods of achieving this vary by

[125] Ibid., p. 42
[126] Ibid., p. 42
[127] Ibid., p. 42

region, they typically require living amidst the microstructure of mounds, trees, and flowing water that defines the landscape.[128]

Cosmic Landscape

The desert, on the other hand, is a representation of the absolute and timeless order. The sun divides the expanse into distinct realms by following a course that forces light to be shadowless. The sun, moon, and stars introduce order to the heavens, while the earth does not give man adequate existential grounding. It thus creates an existential situation that is the basis for the Arabic proverb, "The further you go into the desert, the closer you come to God." We no longer understand the desert as "death," but rather as a basis of life. It is in an oasis, a snug place within the cosmic macroworld, that the abstract order of horizontals and verticals appears for the Arabic people to settle.[129]

Classical Landscape

As defined by Norberg-Schulz, the classical landscape, which lies between the South and the North, has an intelligible composition of elements: strongly distinct, clearly outlined hills and mountains; natural space; and distinctly, equably diffused light with transparent air. Concrete objects standing out in the light and absorbing it without losing their tangible presence compose the forms in these specific environments. The classical landscape allows for human fellowship, with each part maintaining its identity as a whole while performing the basic aspects of dwelling.[130]

In the classical landscape, the "classical man" relates to nature as an equal partner; he considers nature as a friendly complement of his or her being. This forms a simple and stable relationship that heightens human vitality. Practical land uses, such as

[128] Ibid., p. 42
[129] Ibid., p. 45
[130] Ibid., p. 45-46

agriculture, express the union between man and nature, accentuating the landscape's structure by assembling relative, independent, individual places.[131]

Complex Landscape

Complex landscapes, such as romantic, cosmic, and classical landscapes, are archetypal natural places generated by the basic relationships between earth and sky. These types rarely appear in "pure" form but participate in various kinds of syntheses. Dwelling in nature is not simply a matter of "refuge" but rather understanding the given environment as a set of "interiors" from the macro to the micro level. In the classical landscape, man finds himself in a harmonious "middle," able to reach both "out" and "in."[132]

In conclusion, Norberg-Schulz's research into natural environments reveals specific archetypal landscapes that depend on the relationship between earth and sky. In this respect, the Nordic landscape of romanticism is dynamic and mutable because the changing seasons, weather, and natural elements such as forests, water, and light make a difference in human beings' connection to nature. The desert is a timeless order that occurred on a cosmic landscape, where huge expanses and heavenly bodies ordain—that is, command or decree—the spiritual relationship between humans and the environment. In contrast, the classical landscape, which occurs between North and South, displays a harmonious partnership in which the terms of a human-nature relationship are underlined, emphasizing clear, well-defined spaces and human vitality. These different landscapes rarely, if ever, occur in pure forms, but taken together, they represent the deep-seated relationship of man to nature, not only in a cultural and existential way but also practically regarding the way one dwells within it.

[131] Ibid., p. 46
[132] Ibid., p. 47-48

CHAPTER 5

AN AESTHETIC EVALUATION OF MIR'S WORK

In this final part of the thesis, it is aimed to conduct an aesthetic evaluation of the Mir way. This chapter explores how Mir's work is inspired by the traditions of the Picturesque and Romanticism, blending architectural forms with natural landscapes to evoke a sense of the sublime and *genius loci*—the spirit of place. Through a series of case studies, the chapter examines how Mir employs techniques reminiscent of historical art movements to create images that are not only visually striking but also deeply connected to the environmental context of each project. The chapter also discusses the role of fog and lighting as tools for simplification and mood creation, further enhancing the narrative power of these images. Ultimately, this chapter illustrates how Mir's imagery goes beyond conventional architectural visualization, positioning itself as a bridge between architecture and its image, where the man-made is seen in dialogue with the natural place, contributing to a richer, more nuanced understanding of place.

5.1 Mir's interpretation of Picturesque and Romantic Landscape Painting

The Picturesque and Romantic landscapes, as subtly interpreted by MIR, combine atmospheric realism and emotional depth in a manner that conveys both the aesthetic ideals of the Picturesque and the philosophical spirit of Romanticism in their visualizations. MIR captures the rugged, irregular beauty of Picturesque landscapes, in which nature's rawness and arbitrariness are primary features. Texture often follows roughness, and pervades their compositions with a harmonious integration between architecture and surroundings, very much in tune with the 18th-century Picturesque movement, which preferred natural irregularity over formalized beauty. Their work is also in tune with those of Romantic landscape painters as Caspar David

Friedrich and William Turner, where an evocation of the sublime appealed. Delicate mist, light, and shadow create an atmosphere of awe and mystery, paralleling the Romantic ideals of nature's greatness and emotional power. Images created by Mir, like the Romantic painters who sought to represent in their works, the spiritual and transcendent qualities of nature, seek a deeper emotional response from the viewer, placing architecture within its greater natural and atmospheric setting to create a more contemplative and immersive experience.

5.1.1 The Nunavut Inuit Heritage Centre

This Image is made by MIR for Dorte Mandrup Architects. "The Nunavut Inuit Heritage Centre is located at the northern edge of the territorial capital Iqaluit, Canada. The goal for the project is to promote greater awareness of Inuit culture and support cultural healing and reconciliation between Inuit and non-Inuit.''[133] (Fig. 5.1.)

Figure 5.1. Mir, *The Nunavut Inuit Heritage Centre*, for Dorte Mandrup.

[133]Mir. (n.d.). *The Nunavut Inuit Heritage Centre — Dorte Mandrup*. https://www.mir.no/work/the-nunavut-inuit-heritage-centre

The setting of the image is within a conversation between artificial and natural environments, reminiscent of themes related to imagery from Romanticism and Picturesque landscapes. The manner, in which the architectural form is placed into its existential setting might even suggest a kind of living harmony between human and nature, as in Romantic sublime where man-made acknowledges his place in the grander scheme of the natural world.

The raw, unspoiled landscape is dominated by rocks and mosses, with distant water and under the vast gray sky. This recalls the Romantic interest in nature at its rawest and most powerful, when the viewer is invited to consider the sublime beauty and innate wildness of the natural world. The low colors—muted greens, grays, and earthen shades—further push the idea of a landscape untouched by time, where one loses themselves in introspective thought, much like those solitary wanderers described in the work of Caspar David Friedrich.

The image, conforming to the picturesque tradition is well balanced. The structure, though contemporary, does not intrude upon the landscape but rather complements it, much like the idealized ruins or follies found in Picturesque gardens.

The human figures placed on the roof of the structure, are small and almost insignificant against the vast landscape. They serve as a reminder of the human scale in relation to nature's grandeur. This evokes a typical Romantic theme: the tension between human endeavor and the overwhelming power of the natural world. The architecture here, coexisting with its surroundings, could be seen as a contemporary interpretation of the Romantic longing for a return to nature, where man-made places serve to frame and enhance our experience of the natural sublime rather than trying to rule it.

To sum up, the image represents themes that were central to Romantic and Picturesque aesthetics: the wonder of nature, the quest for accord between man-made and the natural world, and the delicate interplay of beauty, scale, and emotion.

5.1.2 Varden

This project is " a proposed expansion of the iconic Fretheim Hotel. The site is immediately adjacent to the Nærøyfjord UNESCO World Heritage site in Flåm, Norway. The project name Varden means Cairn in English, called as The Troll by Mir.''[134] (Fig. 5.2.).

Figure 5.2. Mir, *Varden,* for Jansen and Scodvin.

This image also presents a dramatic interplay between the natural and the built environment, set against the backdrop of a rugged, snow-covered landscape. The architecture, embedded directly into the cliff's rocky face, evokes themes central to Romanticism, particularly the sublime, where the power and majesty of nature are

[134] Mir. (n.d.). *Varden — Jensen & Skodvin*. https://www.mir.no/work/varden

dominant forces that both awe and humble human beings. The scene also engages with Christian Norberg-Schulz's concept of *genius loci*, emphasizing a deep connection to place and the spirit of the environment.

In the Romantic tradition, this image could be likened to the landscapes of Caspar David Friedrich, where the overwhelming presence of nature is usually used metaphorically to refer to the condition of humankind—isolated yet intimately connected to the world.

In return, the structure with its sleek, modern glass surfaces stands in contrast to the rough ancient rock—a dialogue between the temporary nature of human undertakings versus the enduring permanence of the natural world. The reflective surfaces of the building merge into their surroundings, mirroring the snowy landscape and further blurring the lines between the artificial and the natural.

The sheer drop of the cliff and the expansive view of the fjord below amplify the sense of the sublime, a key element in Romantic aesthetics. The vastness of nature dominates man-made structures, confronting the viewer. This perspective evokes a profound respect for the natural world, one that is both beautiful and terrifying in its scale and power.

From the perspective of *genius loci*, this architectural intervention is an embodiment of place, rooted in the physical and metaphysical characteristics of the location. Norberg-Schulz's phenomenology of place emphasizes the importance of architecture responding to the environment's specific qualities. It looks like the design grew organically from the rock, like it was always there. The use of materials and the way the building nestles into the cliff suggest a deep understanding and respect for the site's unique qualities.

The choice to integrate the structure into the cliffside also speaks to a certain humility in design—a recognition that the architecture must not dominate the landscape but rather complement and enhance it. Perched precariously on the edge, this building

offers breathtaking and contemplative views that foster a deeper connection with the natural surroundings, thereby reinforcing the concept of genius loci. This image evokes a sense of how architecture can connect with both the sublime forces of nature and the spirit of place. It is a structure that resonates with the timeless qualities of the landscape and demonstrates, in a sensitive yet dramatic way, the relationship between the human-made and the natural. This interplay follows not just the aesthetic principles of Romanticism but also the philosophical ones of *genius loci*, which designates the work as much part of the landscape as the mountains and fjords that surround it.

Another image also made for the same project (Fig.5.3.), depicts a massive structure in violent, almost surreal light against the whirling night sky. It evokes instant associations with dramatic and emotionally charged landscapes by J.M.W. Turner. Turner's art, in fact, captures the sublime and dynamic forces of nature by exploiting light, color, and dynamism in leading compositions for a deep emotional response.

In this image, the structure appears as a monolithic, almost otherworldly presence, its form rendered in bold strokes of red and teal that contrast sharply with the deep blues and blacks of the surrounding night. This use of color, particularly the fiery reds, evokes the kind of turbulent energy that Turner often sought to convey in his paintings, where nature is not just a backdrop but a force with which the viewer must reckon. The red light here could be seen as symbolic of both danger and vitality, much like the blazing sunsets or storms in Turner's work.

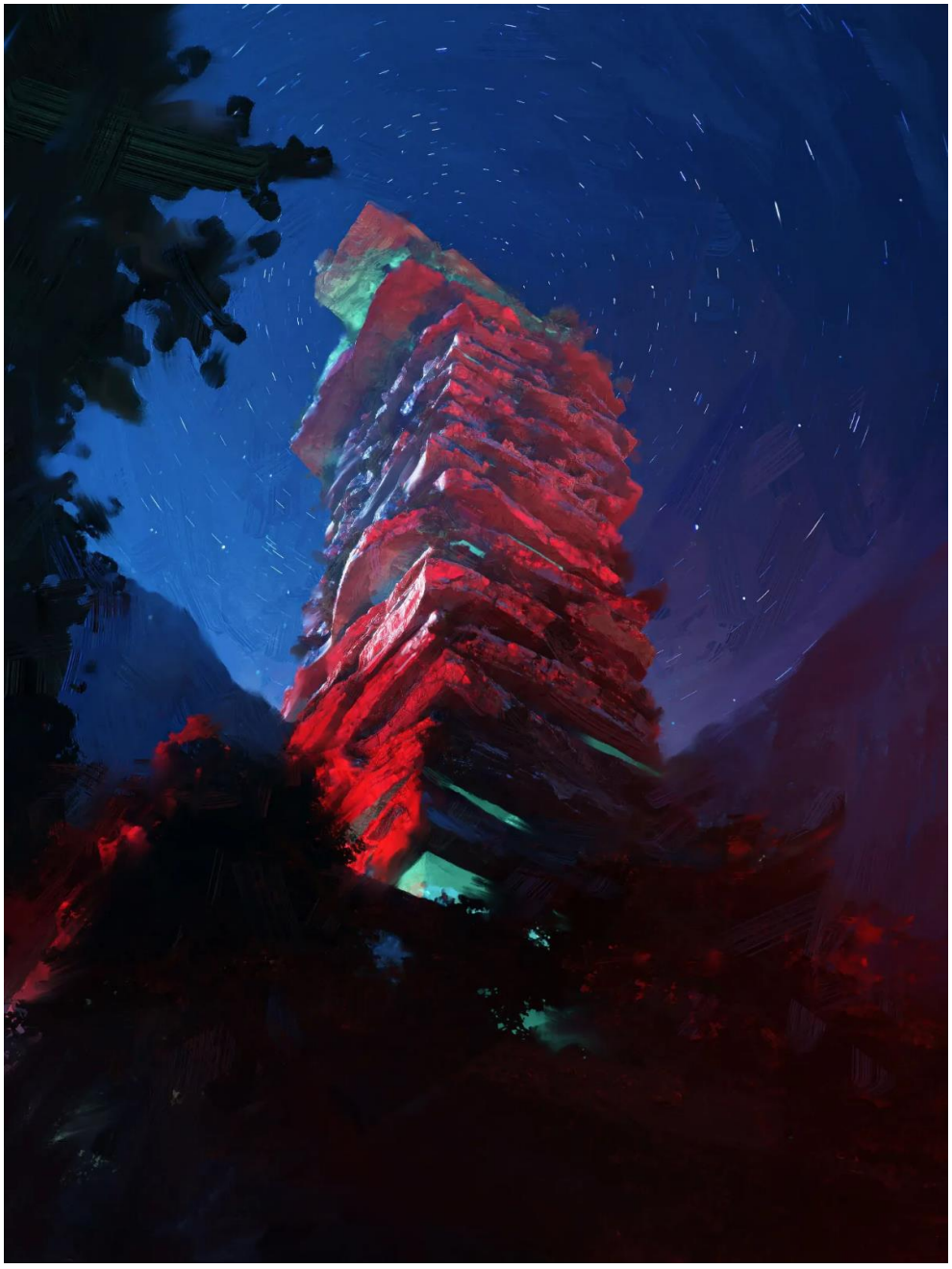

Figure 5.3. Mir, *Varden,* for Jansen and Scodvin.

The night sky, with its swirling, star-filled depths, echoes Turner's fascination with the infinite and the unknown. The stars are not depicted as static points of light but as dynamic, swirling forms, suggesting the passage of time or the movement of

cosmic forces. This lends the image a sense of both mystery and grandeur, as if the structure is not merely man-made but a part of a larger, natural or cosmic order. Turner's skies often serve a similar function, enveloping his scenes in an atmosphere that is as much about mood as it is about the physicality of the world.

The composition of the image, with the structure rising into the night, draws the eye upward, much like many of Turner's compositions that lead the viewer's gaze into the sky or the depths of a stormy sea. The structure has a sense of timelessness, perhaps due to the way it interacts with the light and the surrounding darkness. It feels as though it could be a remnant of some ancient, forgotten civilization or a futuristic dwelling.

5.1.3 Hytteprosjekt - Troll

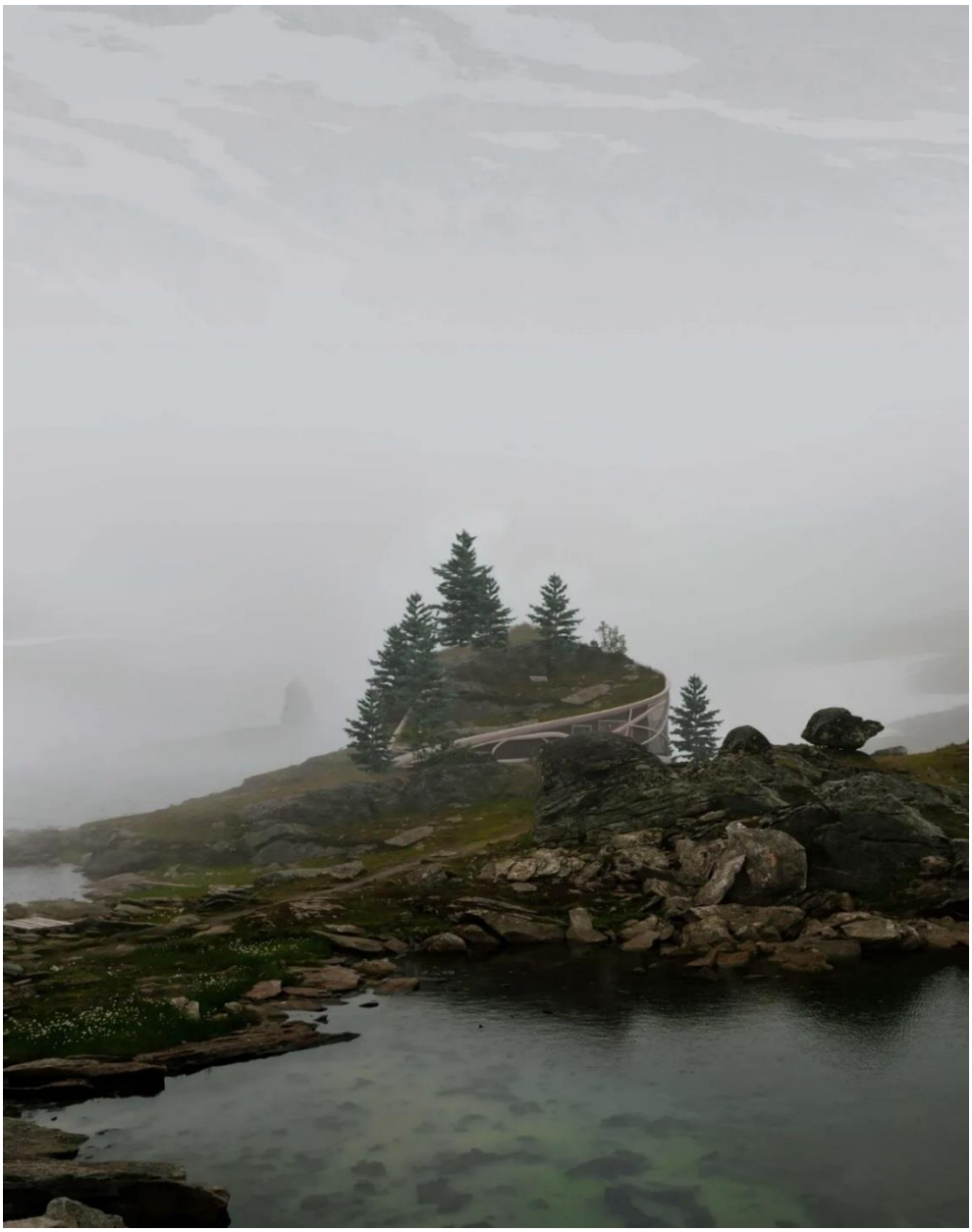

Figure 5.4. Mir. *Hytteprosjekt – Troll*, Undisclosed.

This image, with its mist-shrouded landscape and solitary structure, resonates deeply with the Romantic landscapes of Caspar David Friedrich. Friedrich's work often features solitary figures or structures set against vast, mysterious landscapes, invoking themes of introspection, spirituality, and the human experience in the face of the natural world.

In this image, the scene is dominated by a dense fog that obscures much of the background, creating a sense of mystery and the unknown. Such a treatment of landscape is characteristically Friedrich's, where the veil of mist is a metaphor for the unimaginable and transcendental, suggesting that what lies beyond our immediate perception is both vast and unknown. The viewer is invited into a contemplative state, much like Friedrich's solitary figures who stand on the cliff of the sublime, staring into the infinite.

The solitary structure settled among the rocks and trees is reminiscent of the Gothic ruins that often appear in Friedrich's works, where human creation is submitted to time and nature. In this, however, it does seem to act organically, almost as an extension into the landscape itself. The arched shape spills into surrounding tree and rock masses, suggesting some implication of efficiency within the man made and the natural world. It retains the sense of isolation and introspection central to Friedrich's compositions.

The trees stand in a mist, evoking the verticality and solemnity common to much of Friedrich's work, as in *Monk by the Sea* or *The Abbey in the Oakwood*. It expresses something toward the existence of spiritual being—again, nature is a cathedral, isolated and withdrawn to a place of communication with the divine. Muted colors and soft, diffused light add to this impression of quiet reverence. The water of the foreground is calm and reflective and acts as a mirror to the soul. This is one of the many interpretations of water in Friedrich's works, both as depth and reflection, or as a threshold between the known and the unknown. The rock outcroppings leading up to the structure provide a kind of pathway to draw the viewer's eye and invite

them to mentally traverse the landscape, much like the pathways that lead to the distant castles or churches in many of Friedrich's paintings.

5.2 Mir's interpretation of *Genius Loci*

Mir's interpretation of *Genius Loci*, or the spirit of a place, is deeply rooted in their belief that architecture must reflect and harmonize with its environment. Influenced by Christian Norberg-Schulz's phenomenology, Mir emphasizes that architectural visualization should capture not just the physical structure of a building, but the essence and character of the place it inhabits. Their visualizations go beyond mere representation, seeking to evoke the atmosphere, mood, and sensory qualities of the landscape. Through the careful use of light, weather, and natural textures, Mir's images create a profound sense of place, where buildings feel organically integrated with their surroundings. This approach underscores the importance of context—both natural and cultural—in architectural design, as MIR strives to depict how a building interacts with its environment on a deeper, existential level. By embodying the *genius loci*, MIR's work invites viewers to experience architecture as part of a living, breathing landscape, where the built and natural worlds exist in harmony, enhancing the emotional and intuitive connection to the space.

5.2.1 The Making of the Wale

It used to be MIR's belief that all of the images in a competition set had to have the same style. their experience with branding and graphic design is what gave them the idea. MIR was taught to approach problems in terms of consistent brand perceptions. What they have found is that it is not always the case, the project can appear more multidimensional the more differences there are in the look and feel of the visual presentations. [135]

Mir creates numerous sketches for every project from every possible perspective. The building may appear best from one side in low light and dense fog, while it may appear best from another side in bright sunlight. They need to decrypt the code and work it out.[136]

[135] Andersen, T.G. (2022) *The mir way*. Bergen, Norway: Mir Media.
[136] Ibid., p. 55

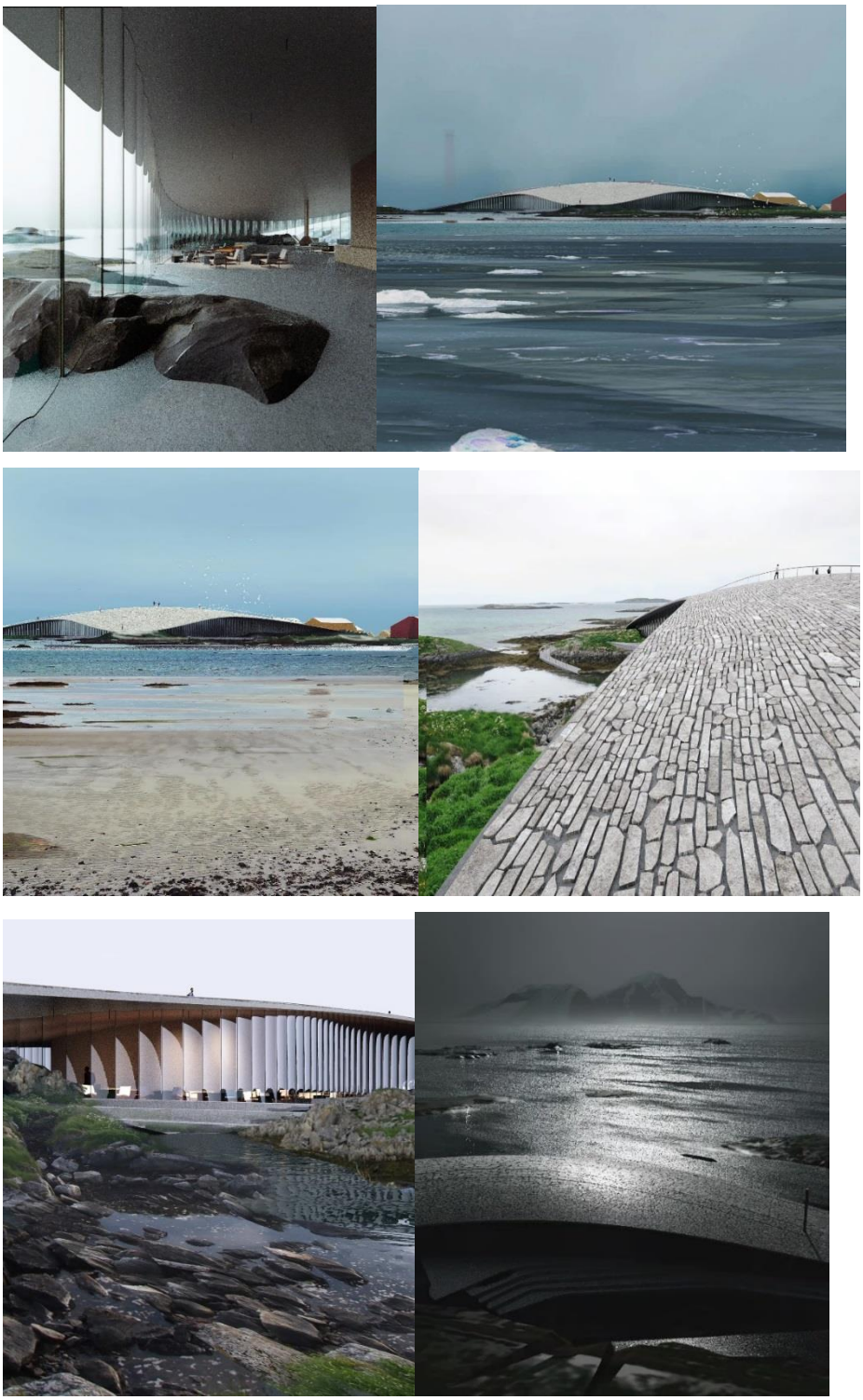

Figure 5.5. Mir, Primary sketches for *The Whale*.

Mir explains how they are working on designs for a Whale Watching Museum. They had good images, but realized they needed one standout image that really captured the essence of the project - like a "catchy pop song" as they call it.[137]

Anderson explains that while looking at sketches, he noticed the building's shape was inspired by whales. The windows looked like baleen or water dripping off a whale. Then he thought, "What if we made the museum actually look like a whale?" It seemed silly, but it might be the memorable image they needed.[138]

> "At home, after some wine and late-night brainstorming, he suddenly saw it - from far away, the building looked like a whale's tail breaking the ocean's surface! he was amazed I hadn't noticed it before."[139]

This approach is like theater, where the audience agrees to see simple props as complex objects. Mir often design images with a theatrical flair to show they are working in the realm of dreams and ambition, not just photorealism.[140]

Let's have a look at the package of the complete images that Mir delivered for the competition. All of them echo the themes that were investigated on the third chapter of the thesis. They deeply touch the phenomenology of Norberg-Schulz.

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[137] Ibid., p. 55
[138] Ibid., p. 55
[139] Andersen, Ibid., p. 55
[140] Ibid., p. 55

Figure 5.6. Mir, *The Whale larger than life,* for Dorte Mandrup.

In (Fig. 5.6.) the dark, expansive sky and the reflective water evoke a sense of the sublime, a theme deeply rooted in Norberg-Schulz's interpretation of natural place. The sky, vast and mysterious, contrasts with the calm, reflective water, creating a space that feels both expansive and intimate. This duality—where the natural elements of earth, water, and sky come together—creates a setting that is rich in existential meaning, offering a place where one can find both orientation and identification, key elements in the phenomenological experience of dwelling.

The image presents a sleek, almost otherworldly structure floating serenely on a body of water, under a vast and darkened sky. The building, with its smooth, curved form

and reflective surfaces, seems to rise naturally from the water, merging with its environment in a way that respects and enhances the natural setting rather than dominating it. This resonates with Norberg-Schulz's emphasis on creating architecture that responds to the unique qualities of a place, embodying the spirit of its location.

Figure 5.7. Mir, *Norwegian Mindset and relationship to nature,* for Dorte Mandrup.

The title of this image leads the way at MIR's approach. The dramatic sky, heavy with clouds and filled with the energy of an impending storm, adds a sense of the sublime to the scene. The contrast between the dark, turbulent sky and the warm, inviting light within the building creates a tension that is both exhilarating and comforting. This tension reflects the duality often present in Norberg-Schulz's understanding of place, where the natural world is both awe-inspiring and nurturing, and the role of architecture is to mediate this relationship, offering shelter and a place of dwelling within the vast, unpredictable forces of nature.

Figure 5.8. Mir, *The end point of a voyage. A promise.*, for Dorte Mandrup.

Figure 5.9. Mir, *Harmony with surrounding*, for Dorte Mandrup.

In (Fig. 5.9.), the image presents a view of a coastal landscape where architecture seamlessly blends into the natural environment, embodying the principles of Christian Norberg-Schulz's phenomenology of architecture, particularly the concept of *genius loci* or the "spirit of place."

The structure in the image appears as an organic extension of the rocky, rugged shoreline. Its roof, covered in a stone pattern that mirrors the natural textures of the surrounding land, rises gently from the earth, resembling a natural landform rather than a man-made intervention. This design choice is a clear manifestation of Norberg-Schulz’s idea that architecture should emerge from and respond to the specific character of a place, creating a dialogue between the built and the natural worlds.

Figure 5.10. Mir, *Quiet, poetic and a place to be,* for Dorte Mandrup.

In (Fig. 5.9.), the large, curved glass wall blurs the boundary between the inside and the outside, allowing the natural light and the expansive views of the landscape to flood the interior space. This openness to the outside world invites the vast, sublime character of the natural surroundings into the interior, much like how Trakl's poem allows the sounds and feelings of the outside world to permeate the safety of the home through the ringing of the vesper bell. The interior space, though enclosed and sheltered, does not isolate itself from the world but instead embraces its connection to the broader landscape.

The way the natural rock formations are integrated into the floor and walls of the interior space echoes Trakl's depiction of the house as a place that gathers and shelters, while still being part of the greater world. The rocks, like the house in Trakl's poem, are not merely decorative elements but are fundamental to the character and meaning of the space. They ground the interior in the physical reality of the landscape, creating a direct and tangible connection to the earth, which is reminiscent of the poem’s themes of earth and sky, inside and outside.

The interior space, while offering shelter and comfort, maintains a profound connection to the natural world outside, creating a harmonious balance between inside and outside, between the human and the nature. The integration of natural elements within the interior and the expansive view of the landscape emphasizes this connection, making the space not just a place to dwell, but a place that resonates deeply with the spirit of the place.

5.2.2 Icefjord Center.

Kangiata Illorsua – Ilulissat Icefjord Centre is located 250 kilometres north of the Arctic Circle, on the edge of the UNESCO protected Kangia Icefjord. It has views to the most active glacier, Sermeq Kujalleq.[141]

Figure 5.11. Mir, *Icefjord Center,* for Dorte Mandrup.

Starting with the natural setting (Fig. 5.10.), the scene shows a bleak, snow-covered landscape with mountains in the distance bathed in warm sunset light. This provides quite a contrast between the rather harsh, cold environment and the almost ethereal beauty of the light. The open and expansive space here evokes a sublime sense of awe, slightly intimidating in its scale.

This is a long, low structure with an angular form. It would appear that its shape has emerged from and merged within the snow landscape, where the built environment has married the natural environment in a harmonious relationship. The building's

[141] Mir. (n.d.). *Icefjord Center — Dorte Mandrup*. https://www.mir.no/work/icefjord-center

horizontal emphasis connects with the flat expanse of snow and distant mountain ridges. Its sharp edges and clean lines contrast against the organic shapes displayed in the natural setting, and its low profile belies any hint of overpowering the landscape.

Here, the play of light is important. This warmth radiates from the warm light of the building's windows against cool blue tones in the snow and sky, thus making a little microcosm of warmth and shelter in the inhospitable environment. A sunset behind distant mountains adds a dramatic effect to the scene and emphasizes the building's role as a platform from which to view the landscape.

The tiny, solitary figures visible near the building add scale and point to the landscape's vastness. They are also describing the human experience of this place: a sense of solitude and connection to nature, which the architecture facilitates.

Norberg-Schulz asserts that architecture has the ability to create an "existential space"—a space that infuses human existence with meaning. This image seems to offer a contemplative space where one can experience the raw beauty and power of the natural world.

As a result, this image is a strong representation of Norberg-Schulz's concept of genius loci. The architecture doesn't dominate the environment; instead, it enhances our capability for experiencing and understanding the qualities particular to this place. Thus, it is a mediator between the human and nature, creating in its interior the space within which one feels simultaneously sheltered and exposed to the sublime qualities of the landscape. The building integrates with the genius loci, enhancing our perception of the "spirit of the place" and becoming more than just an occupied space.

Figure 5.12. Mir, *Icefjord Center,* for Dorte Mandrup.

In (Fig. 5.11.), the image powerfully embodies Norberg-Schulz's concept of *genius loci*, or "spirit of place," through its harmonious integration of architecture and landscape. The scene captures the raw, primordial beauty of what appears to be a coastal Arctic landscape. Rugged terrain in the foreground gives way to massive icebergs on the horizon, creating a sense of vastness and sublime natural power.

The architectural structure is a striking, angular building that seems to emerge organically from the landscape. Its design is bold yet respectful of its surroundings. The building's form echoes the angular shapes of the rocky terrain and icebergs. Its low profile and earth-toned materials help it blend with the natural environment rather than dominate it. The structure acts as a viewing platform, orienting visitors

towards the spectacular ice formations. This deliberate framing enhances the experience of the place's unique qualities. The building's materials appear to complement the surrounding rock, creating a visual dialogue between the natural and the built elements.

The architecture creates a space for contemplation and connection with the elemental forces of nature, fulfilling Norberg-Schulz's idea of architecture as a means to understand and dwell meaningfully in a place. The clear light emphasizes the stark beauty of the landscape, with the building providing a warm contrast to the cool tones of ice and sky.

This image exemplifies how architecture can enhance rather than detract from a location's inherent character, creating a powerful sense of place that connects visitors to the unique qualities of this Arctic environment.

5.3 Fog as the ultimate tool for simplification

5.3.1 Adventure Island

This is " a self-sufficient, off-grid residential island project in Nova Scotia, Canada. Designed by BIG architects, the buildings are made from a wide variety of materials including seaweed, hempcrete, and 3D-printed concrete. The Island is fully powered by carbon-neutral energy and was auctioned via Sotheby's Concierge Auctions in 2023.''[142] (Fig. 5.12.)

[142] Mir. (n.d.). *Adventure Island — BIG*. https://www.mir.no/work/adventure-island

Figure 5.13. Mir, *Adventure Island*, for BIG/Volleback.

The image captures a deeply atmospheric scene within a dense forest, where fog plays a central role in shaping the viewer's experience of the landscape. The misty air, combined with the towering trees and the barely visible structure in the background, creates an ambiance that is rich in both mystery and serenity. The scene resonates with the aesthetics of Romantic and picturesque landscape paintings, while also embodying the concept of *genius loci*—the spirit of place.

Fog acts as a natural filter that simplifies the complex forms of the forest. The trees, which in clarity should be full of their details, are softened and unified by the mist, reducing the scene to its most essential elements: vertical lines, shadows, and fine variations in light. This simplification focuses the viewer's attention on the interplay between light and dark, the silhouettes of the trees, and the muted colors of the environment. All this creates a sense of depth and mystery. The fog blurs the boundaries between foreground and background, emphasizing the delicate quality of

the landscape and inviting the viewer into a space that feels both intimate and expansive.

The structure visible in the distance, with its warm glow penetrating through the fog, adds a picturesque element to the scene. It serves as a focal point, drawing the eye through the mist and providing a sense of scale and perspective. The contrast between the warm, inviting light of the structure and the cool, subdued tones of the forest creates an emotional impact of the image, suggesting themes of shelter, solitude, and the human connection to the natural world. This contrast is a characteristic of Romantic art, where the interplay between light and shadow often symbolizes the dualities of life: warmth and cold, safety and danger, civilization and wilderness.

The image, also captures the essence of the forest as a place of both refuge and mystery. The fog, by obscuring details and creating a sense of envelopment, reinforces the idea of the forest as a living entity, one that has its own character and spirit. The structure, small and almost hidden within the vastness of the trees, acknowledges the dominance of the natural world, allowing the *genius loci* to remain undisturbed.

5.3.2 Under Restaurant.

Figure 5.14. Mir, *Under Restaurant*, for Snøhetta.

In this example (Fig. 5.13.) presents a dramatic and powerful scene where architecture meets the raw and untamed forces of nature. A massive, monolithic structure emerges from the stormy sea, set against a backdrop of turbulent skies and rugged cliffs. The composition, lighting, and atmosphere evoke a sense of awe and sublimity, reminiscent of the Romantic tradition in art, where nature's grandeur often overwhelms human creations.

The sky, heavy with storm clouds, dominates the upper half of the composition, its dark tones contrasting sharply with the lighter surface of the structure. The dramatic lighting, with beams of light breaking through the clouds and striking the structure, highlights its stark, geometric form, adding to the sense of tension between the

natural and the artificial. This contrast of light and dark, calm and turmoil, echoes the emotional intensity found in Romantic landscape paintings, where nature is often portrayed as a dominating force that challenges human presence and understanding.

The structure, with its raw, unadorned form, appears to be an extension of the rocky landscape, as if it has been carved from the very stone of the cliffs. This connection between the architecture and its environment speaks to the idea that buildings should not merely occupy space but should emerge from and respond to the specific qualities of a place.

The structure's interaction with the sea suggests a close relationship with the natural elements, where it is not merely situated by the ocean but is an integral part of the seascape. The waves crashing against its base and the sea spray rising into the air enhance the sense of dynamic interaction, as if the building is both resisting and being shaped by the forces of nature. This relationship embodies the essence of *genius loci*, where the architecture reveals and amplifies the spirit of the location, making it more tangible.

The lighting in this image is crucial in establishing the mood and enhancing the narrative. The dark, stormy atmosphere, combined with the illumination of the structure, creates a sense of close drama. The light, which seems to come from a break in the clouds, serves to both highlight the structure and emphasize the power of the surrounding natural elements. This use of light is reminiscent of the techniques used by Romantic painters like Turner, who often employed dramatic lighting to evoke emotional responses and highlight the sublime power of nature.

The atmosphere, thick with moisture and energy, adds to the tension of the scene. The viewer can almost feel the wind and hear the crashing waves, which enhances the quality of the image. This sensory engagement is a hallmark of the Romantic aesthetic, where the viewer is not just a passive observer but is drawn into the scene, experiencing the power and beauty of nature firsthand.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

The main objective of this thesis was examining the philosophical depth of Mir' s architectural visualizations in relation to the Picturesque and Romantic landscape paintings and the phenomenology of Christian Norberg-Schulz.

Mir's architectural visualization work represents a profound shift in how unbuilt architecture is presented and perceived. Rather than merely producing images that document the form and function of architectural designs, Mir creates visualizations that resonate with the deeper, more sensory, and emotional dimensions of the environments in which these buildings are situated. Through a combination of Romantic philosophy and aesthetic principles and Christian Norberg-Schulz's phenomenology, Mir has developed a unique approach that elevates architectural visualization to a form of artistic expression.

At the core of Mir's philosophy, there lies the Romantic ideal. Emerging in the 19th century as a response to the rationalism of the Enlightenment, Romanticism sought to reconnect art with the nature, the sublime, and emotions. This movement emphasized the importance of individual experience, emotional depth, and the awe-inspiring beauty of nature. Similarly, Mir's work moves away from the boring presentations of architecture. Their visualizations are infused with a sense of wonder, akin to the Romantic appreciation for nature's grandeur. Like the Romantics, who believed in the power of nature to stir emotions and awaken creativity, Mir integrates natural elements into their images—trees, fog, water, mist—creating atmospheric, almost dreamlike representations of architectural spaces.

One of the defining characteristics of Romantic art, especially in landscape painting, was the portrayal of the sublime—the overwhelming, awe-inspiring forces of nature that evoke both admiration and fear. Mir's work often evokes this sense of the sublime. Their use of light, shadow, weather, and natural textures in their visualizations creates a mood that is not just visually appealing but emotionally stirring. This is particularly significant in an architectural context, where the goal is often to engage the viewer's senses and imagination, transporting them to a place that feels both real and ethereal. By doing this, Mir not only showcases architectural designs but also taps into the viewer's innate connection with nature and space, aligning with the Romantic tradition of invoking deep, often ineffable, emotions through artistic representation.

In addition to their alignment with Romantic principles, Mir's work is also deeply influenced by Christian Norberg-Schulz's concept of *genius loci*, or the spirit of a place. Norberg-Schulz's phenomenology of architecture emphasizes the existential relationship between human beings and the environments they inhabit. He argued that architecture should not be viewed as an isolated, abstract exercise in form-making, but as a practice that is deeply connected to the cultural, historical, and natural context of a place. Mir has taken this idea to heart in their visualizations. Their images do not merely show buildings; they convey the atmosphere, mood, and spirit of the places these buildings inhabit. By integrating the natural landscape so closely with the architecture, Mir's visualizations emphasize the harmonious coexistence of the built and natural environments.

This concept of *genius loci* is particularly evident in how Mir uses sensory cues in their visualizations. Through their expert manipulation of light, weather, and texture, they evoke the feel of a place—the dampness of fog, the warmth of sunlight breaking through clouds, the softness of moss underfoot. These sensory details are not just aesthetic choices; they are integral to conveying the spirit of the place. In this way, Mir's work does not simply document architecture—it invites the viewer to inhabit

the space emotionally and sensorially, offering a more profound understanding of how a building interacts with its surroundings.

Moreover, Mir's philosophy of incorporating natural elements into their architectural visualizations is also a response to the growing concerns about urbanization, environmental degradation, and the disconnection between humans and the natural world. Their visualizations often present cities and buildings in harmony with nature—quiet, green, and serene. In a world where urban spaces are often seen as chaotic and disconnected from the environment, Mir's images offer a hopeful vision of human settlements where nature reclaims its place alongside built structures. This is more than just an aesthetic choice; it reflects a deeper philosophical commitment to creating spaces that foster a sense of well-being and connection with the natural world.

Mir's work also challenges the conventional boundaries of architectural visualization. Traditionally, these images have been viewed as technical tools—ways to communicate design concepts to clients, planners, and the public. However, Mir's approach redefines the role of architectural visualization. Their images go beyond mere representation and become immersive experiences that engage the viewer on an emotional and sensory level. This artistic, almost poetic approach to architectural visualization positions Mir at the intersection of architecture and art, where the image itself becomes a critical part of how architecture is understood and experienced.

In this way, Mir's visualizations can be seen as a modern continuation of the Romantic tradition of landscape painting, which sought to reveal not just the physical beauty of nature, but its deeper, spiritual significance. Like the Romantic artists who used landscapes to express emotional and philosophical ideas, Mir uses architectural visualizations to evoke a sense of place and atmosphere that goes beyond the physical structure of the building. Their work reminds us that architecture is not just about designing buildings; it is about creating spaces that resonate with the people

who inhabit them, that tell stories about the environments they exist in, and that inspire a sense of wonder and connection with the world around us.

In conclusion, Mir's approach to architectural visualization represents a significant evolution in the field, blending Romantic philosophy, phenomenology, and a deep respect for the natural world. By drawing on the sublime and the spirit of place, Mir creates images that do more than simply depict architecture—they evoke a sense of presence, emotion, and connection. Their work invites us to rethink how we engage with architecture, encouraging us to see buildings not as isolated objects, but as integral parts of the landscapes and environments they inhabit. Through their images, Mir offers a vision of architecture that is in harmony with nature, that honors the spirit of place, and that reconnects us with the fundamental human experience of space and atmosphere.

In a world where architecture is often viewed through the lens of function and utility, Mir's visualizations are a call to slow down, to reconnect with nature, and to see architecture not just as a collection of forms, but as a living, breathing part of the world we inhabit. Ultimately, Mir's images offer a powerful reminder that architecture, like all great art, has the potential to move us, to inspire us, and to bring us closer to the natural world around us.

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