

Course Syllabus

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David Caspar Friedrich, "Monastery Graveyard in the Snow" (painted 1819, destroyed 1945)

THE AESTHETICS OF DECAY

Prof. Jorge Otero-Pailos

Tuesdays 4-6pm, 412 Avery Hall

From the Romantic picturesque to contemporary Ruin Porn photography, decay has functioned as a powerful aesthetic category through which architects, artists and intellectuals have articulated social

and political agendas. This seminar critically examines the aesthetics of decay, paying special attention to its rhetorical role in shaping the understanding of historiography, modernity and postmodernity within architectural discourse and related disciplines.

Format:

The seminar format is structured discussions. Students are expected to do the readings before class and bring observations and questions about the readings to the discussion.

Grading:

Students will conduct independent research and present their ongoing work first as a written draft (20% of final grade) then as a presentation at the end of the the semester (30% of final grade) to present their findings to the group. Each student is also expected to write a research paper not to exceed 6000 words excluding footnotes (50% of final grade). For instructions on each assignment please refer to the assignments section of this website.

Books:

We will reading one book per week. Students are encouraged to purchase the books, or check them out from the library.

Readings

Class 1 / Tuesday Jan 16

Karen Lang, "The Dialectics of Decay: Rereading the Kantian Subject," in *Art Bulletin*, n. 3, v. 79 (September 1997), 413-439.

Class 2 / Tuesday Jan 23

Alexander Nagel and Christopher S. Wood, *Anachronic Renaissance*, (New York: Zone Books, 2010).

Class 3 / Tuesday Jan 30

Elizabeth Wanning Harries, *The Unfinished Manner: Essays on the Fragment in the Later Eighteenth Century*, (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1994).

SITE VISIT / Friday Feb 2

ESSEX COUNTY JAIL, Newark NJ

Class 4 / Tuesday Feb 6

Nick Yablon, *Untimely Ruins: An Archaeology of American Urban Modernity, 1819-1919*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010).

Class 5 / Tuesday Feb 13

Mike Gubser, *Time's Visible Surface: Alois Riegl and the discourse on history and temporality in fin-de-siècle Vienna*, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2006).

Class 6 / Tuesday Feb 20

Rudy Koshar, *From Monuments to Traces: Artifacts of German Memory, 1870-1990*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000c).

Class 7 / Tuesday Feb 27

Nicola Lambourne, *War Damage in Western Europe*, (New York: Oxford University Press Inc., 1996).

Class 8 / Tuesday Mar 6

Guy Debord, "Editorial Notes: The Meaning of Decay in Art (1959) ," and "Editorial Notes: Once Again, on Decomposition (1961) ," in *Guy Debord and the Situationist International: Texts and Documents*, ed. Tom McDonough, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002).

Robert Smithson, "Entropy and the New Monuments," and "A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic," in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Essays*, ed. Jack Flam, (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1996).

Kai Vöckler, "The disappearance of architecture as an artistic theme," in *Modernism as a Ruin: An Archeology of the Present*, (Nürnberg: Verlag für Moderne Kunst; Wien : Generali Foundation, 2009).

Class 9 / Tuesday Mar 13

Pamela Lee, *Object to be Destroyed: The Work of Gordon Matta-Clark*, (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 1999).

Mar 17—SPRING BREAK

Class 10 / Tuesday Mar 27

Book to be chosen by class

Class 11 / Tuesday April 3

—Paper presentations

SITE VISIT / Friday April 6

Visit to Lyndhurst

Class 12 / Tuesday April 10

—Paper presentations

Class 13 / Tuesday April 17

—Paper presentations

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Cioran, Emile M. *A Short History of Decay*, Translated by Richard Howard. . New York: Viking Press, 1975.

Clement, Maria. "Limpiar el Vaticano con bacterias entrenadas para 'comer' suciedad`." In *El Mundo*.

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Hirst, Damien. *I Want to Spend the Rest of My Life Everywhere, with Everyone, One to One, Always s, Forever, Now*. New York: Monacelli Press, 1998.

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