

# Course Syllabus

[Jump to Today](#)

## THE AESTHETICS OF DECAY

Prof. Jorge Otero-Pailos

Mondays 2 pm - 4 pm / 655 Schermerhorn Hall [SCH]



New limestone supplements frame the original decayed stones of the ancient Roman theater in Arles, France. Photo: Jorge Otero-Pailos.

### Course Description:

This advanced seminar examines how ruins have been employed as a powerful aesthetic category through which preservationists, architects, artists and intellectuals have articulated social and political agendas. We will study this chronologically, beginning with the 18th century picturesque ruins and ending with the contemporary ruin aesthetic in architecture and the arts. Through weekly readings and guided discussions we will unpack the changing valence of the aesthetics of decay through history, paying special attention to its rhetorical role in shaping preservation, architecture and art history.

### **Evaluation:**

- informed contributions and participation in class discussion: 20% of grade
- 200 word summary of key argument in a book to introduce class discussion: 20% of grade
- a 1000 word abstract and bibliography: 10% of final grade
- a research paper (3000 words for Masters students, and 6000 words for Doctoral students): 50% of grade
- extra credit 10%: class presentation of your research.

### **Books:**

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

### **Readings**

#### **January 27**

Alexander Nagel and Christopher S. Wood, *Anachronic Renaissance*, (New York: Zone Books, 2010), p1-217.

#### **February 3**

Alexander Nagel and Christopher S. Wood, *Anachronic Renaissance*, (New York: Zone Books, 2010), 219-365.

#### **February 10**

Thomas McCormick, *Ruins As Architecture: Architecture As Ruins*, (Dublin, N.H.: William L. Bauhan, 1999).

#### **February 17**

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

## **February 24**

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

## **March 2**

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).

## **FRIDAY MARCH 6: FIELD TRIP**

### **Lyndhurst Mansion and John Jay Heritage Center**

Itinerary:

9:00 am departure from Columbia University

10:00 am arrival at Lyndhurst Mansion, Tarrytown, Westchester, NY.

12:00 pm lunch in Tarrytown

2:00 pm arrival at John Jay Heritage Center in Rye, Westchester, NY.

4:00 pm departure for Columbia University.

5:00 pm Arrival at Columbia University

## **March 9**

Andreas Schönle, *Architecture of Oblivion: Ruins and Historical Consciousness in Modern Russia*, (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2011).

## **March 16 SPRING BREAK**

## **March 23**

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

## **March 30**

Daniela Sandler, *Counterpreservation: Architectural Decay in Berlin Since 1989*, (Ithaca: A Signale Book, Cornell University Press and Cornell University Library, 2016).

## **April 6**

Paul Dobraszczyk, *The Dead City: Urban Ruins and the Spectacle of Decay*, (London ; New York : I.B.Tauris & Co Ltd., 2017).

### **April 13**

Lyons, Siobhan, ed., *Ruin Porn and the Obsession with Decay*, ed. Siobhan Lyons, (Cham: Springer International Publishing : Imprint: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018). (available as E-book)

### **April 20**

Christopher Woodward, *In Ruins: A Journey Through History, Art and Literature*, (New York: Vintage Books, 2001c).

or

Paper presentations

### **April 27**

Paper presentations

### **May 4**

Paper presentations

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Heeney, Gwen, ed., *The post-industrial landscape as site for creative practice: material memory*, ed. Gwen Heeney, (Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2017).

Carter, Michael, Peter N. Lindfield and Dale Townshend, ed., *Writing Britain's ruins*, ed. Michael Carter, Peter N. Lindfield and Dale Townshend, (London: British Library, 2017).

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