Gallatin School of Individualized Study  
New York University  

Interdisciplinary Seminar:  
*Ruins, Fragments, and Archives*  
IDSEM-UG 1748  

Fall 2013  
Wednesday 6:20-9:00  
25 West 4th Street, Room C5  

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Introduction  

Traces of time passing, ruins are time that has turned into space, duration ossified and broken up into fragments. Fragments are things we carry out of ruins, relics rescued from the abyss of lost time. We create archives to organize the rescued and the abandoned, compiling catalogs and designing systems that are often ruins themselves. Drawing on painting, landscape architecture, psychoanalysis, philosophy, lyric and epic poetry, film and installation art, this class will explore the entanglement of nature and history and of the recent and deep past in representations of architectural and social decay—in the art and literature of ruined cottages, "picturesque" abbeys and castles, partially buried woodsheds. We will examine representations of objects redeemed from the ruins of history as well as the ruined sites in which such objects find refuge (arcades, museums, libraries). And we will consider what it means for something to outlive its usefulness, to survive itself and live on in its own afterlife. Students will write several analytic essays, building toward a research project in which they will explore and interpret a ruin of their choice.  

Course Objectives  

- To explore the philosophical, political, and psychological meanings of the aesthetics of ruin and decay, of the lingering persistence of the past in the present  

- To contextualize the production and redemption of the partial and the obsolete in specific moments of Western cultural history, particularly Romanticism and Modernism  

- To closely read a constellation of theoretical texts with a view to applying and extending their arguments beyond their immediate field of examples
To conduct individual research into particular ruined sites (literary, visual, or geographic), guided by the materials discussed in class

Assignments and Grading:

Over the course of the semester, you will write 2 formal essays. In the first (4-6 pages), you will explore a specific question related to the topic of ruins through an analysis of one or more texts on the syllabus. In the second (8-10 pages), you will choose a ruin, in any medium or location, in art, literature, or life, and explore and interpret it, drawing on your own research and on one or more of the theoretical perspectives introduced in class. Be sure to choose topics and texts that truly interest you. Essays will be graded for the form as well as the content of their analysis.

In addition, you will write 4 response papers of 250-500 words, which you will post to NYU Classes under “Forums.” You can choose any six classes and write the responses on any of the texts due for those days; do try to spread out your posts over the course of the semester. Please post your response at least 24 hours before the class, to give all of us time to read it before we meet. Part of the assignment for each class will be to read the responses posted for that day (there should be about two per class). Rather than grading each response individually, I will assign one grade for all four at the end of the semester.

These responses are designed to prepare you for class discussion as well as generate ideas for your essays. While you are welcome to include personal reflections in your responses, you must organize your comments around an analysis of the assigned text, which should include quotes from and references to specific passages. As the author of a response to a particular text, you will be responsible for helping to direct the discussion about it by raising questions, introducing passages, suggesting interpretations.

I will also ask you to do an oral presentation on a visual work (in any medium) not on the syllabus. You will briefly explain its origin and historical context, offer some interpretive thoughts, and pose one or two discussion questions. You will also, of course, show the class an image of the work. You can do this presentation by yourself or in a small group of up to 3 people.

From time to time, I may assign brief, informal pieces of writing to be done at home in preparation for our discussions. I may not collect them, but you will often be sharing them in class. Your work on these will figure into your participation grade.

This course is a seminar, so your regular, active participation in our discussions is crucial. I will expect you to come to class prepared with questions and comments on the day’s reading.

Response Papers (1-2 pages) and Presentation: 25%
Essay 1 (4-6 pages): 25%
Essay 2 (8-10 pages): 35%
Participation: 15%
Attendance

If, due to illness, emergency, or religious holiday, you cannot attend class, please be in touch with me directly as soon as possible so that you can be prepared for the next class. You will also need to get the notes for the day you missed from one of your classmates; once you’ve gotten the notes, I would be happy to meet with you and go over what you missed. Please be aware that more than two unexcused absences will jeopardize your course grade.

A Note on Plagiarism

As a Gallatin student you belong to an interdisciplinary community of artists and scholars who value honest and open intellectual inquiry. This relationship depends on mutual respect, responsibility, and integrity. Failure to uphold these values will be subject to severe sanction, which may include dismissal from the University. Examples of behaviors that compromise the academic integrity of the Gallatin School include plagiarism, illicit collaboration, doubling or recycling coursework, and cheating. Please consult the Gallatin Bulletin or Gallatin website www.gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/policies/policy/integrity.html for a full description of the academic integrity policy.

Required Texts

You can buy all our books at the NYU Bookstore. All other readings will be posted throughout the semester to the Resources folder of our NYU Classes site. Please print these out and bring a hard copy to class.


Schedule

Wed, Sep 4

- Introduction: “The whole is the untrue,” or the mimetic ruin
- John Keats, “Ode on a Grecian Urn” (1819)

I. What is a Ruin?

Wed, Sep 11

- Brian Dillon, “Fragments from a History of Ruins” (2006)
- Georg Simmel, “The Ruin” (1911)

**II. The Ruined House**

Wed, Sep 18
- William Wordsworth, “The Ruined Cottage” (1800)
- Virginia Woolf, “Time Passes” (from *To the Lighthouse*; 1927)

Wed, Sep 25
- Edgar Allan Poe, “The Fall of the House of Usher” (1840)
- *The Fall of the House of Usher* (film; dirs. James Sibley Watson and Melville Webber; 1928)
- Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920); from *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930)

**III. The Crumbling Landscape**

Wed, Oct 2
- William Cowper, “Yardley Oak” (1791)
- Theodor Adorno, from *Aesthetic Theory* (1970)

Wed, Oct 9
- Percy Bysshe Shelley, “Ozymandias” (1818)
- Walter Benjamin, from *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (1928)
- Optional reading: Walter Benjamin, “Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century” (1935)

Wed, Oct 16
- **Essay 1 due (4-6 pages)**

**IV. The Broken Text**

Wed, Oct 23
- Samuel Taylor Coleridge, “Kubla Khan” (1797)
- John Keats, “Hyperion” (1818); “The Fall of Hyperion: A Dream” (1819)

Wed, Oct 30
- Marguerite Yourcenar, “The Dark Brain of Piranesi” (1962)

V. Memory Machines: Memorial, Library, Museum, Archive

Wed, Nov 6
- Friedrich Nietzsche, On the Use and Abuse of History for Life (1874)

Wed, Nov 13
- Jorge Luis Borges, “The Library of Babel” (1941)
- Michel Foucault, “The Fantasia of the Library” (1967)

Wed, Nov 20
- Theodor Adorno, “Valéry Proust Museum” (1953)

Wed, Nov 27
- Virginia Woolf, Between the Acts (1941)

Wed, Dec 4 (last class)
- Between the Acts

Wed, Dec 11
- Essay 2 due (8-10 pages)