Course Syllabus

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**


**February 3**


**February 10**


**February 17**

February 24


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


March 16 SPRING BREAK

March 23


March 30


April 6

**April 13**


**April 20**


or

Paper presentations

**April 27**

Paper presentations

**May 4**

Paper presentations

**Bibliography**


Marguerite Yourcenar, "That Mighty Sculptor - Time," ..


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).


Patrick McGrath, "Transgression and Decay," in Gothic: Transmutations of Horror in Late Twentieth Century Art, (Boston: The Institute of Contemporary Art ; Cambridge, Mass. : MIT, 1997).


Petar Cvijović, Life in ruin temples: Deserted synagogues of Poland, (PhD Dissertation: Columbia University, 2016).


Tessa Matteini, Paesaggi del tempo: documenti archeologici e rovine artificiali nel disegno di giardini e paesaggi, (Firenze: Alinea, 2009).


Wolfgang Kemp and Joyce Rheuban, "Images of Decay: Photography in the Picturesque Tradition," in October, v. 54 (Autumn 1990), 102-133.