

-----Draft-----

**This syllabus is a work in progress. Some weeks will have more readings assigned to them, some may have less. It is my intent to have 4-5 articles/book chapters assigned each week. These may be supplemented by websites and films on some occasions.**

### **Rot and Ruin: History and the Downside of Material Culture**

“I went on looking at the filthy window above his head, and I thought, I must have *things*. I know a dirty window is an ancient and well-worn trope for intellectual dissatisfaction and scholarly blindness. The thing is, that the thing was also there. A real, very dirty, window, shutting out the sun. A *thing*.”

-A.S. Byatt, *The Biographer's Tale*. Alfred A. Knopf, 2000.

#### **Description**

This is a course about things -- rotten and ruined things. More importantly, it is about how history has been shaped by loss and decay, and how we understand the past in terms of what it leaves behind as fragments and remnants of objects and collections, decomposing matter and ruined spaces and places. Finally, we will question how we structure the past by managing what it leaves behind.

#### **Grading Structure**

Seminar Participation:	25%
Conference Paper and Presentation:	15%
Final Paper:	60%

#### **Readings and Weekly Topics**

##### **January 8**

Introduction

##### **January 15. Broken Things**

Brown, B. ‘Thing theory’ *Critical Inquiry* 28(1): 1–22. 2001

DeSilvey C. ‘Observed decay: Telling stories with mutable things’. *Journal of Material Culture* 11(3): 318–338. 2006

Andersson, Dag T. 'Trusted vagueness: the language of things and the order of incompleteness' in *Ruin Memories: materialities, aesthetics and the archaeology of the recent past*. Edited by Bjornar Olsen. Routledge, 2014.

Strasser, Susan. *Waste and Want: A Social History of Trash*. Henry Holt and Company, 1999

### **January 22.** Decomposing Material

Ingold T. 'Materials against materiality'. *Archaeological Dialogues* 14: 1–16. 2007

Tilley, Christopher. 'Materials in Materiality; *Archaeological Dialogues* / Volume 14 / Issue 01 / June 2007, pp 16 - 20

Knappett, Carl. 'Materials with Materiality' *Archaeological Dialogues* / Volume 14 / Issue 01 / June 2007, pp 20 - 23

Edensor, T. 'Waste matter – the debris of industrial ruins and the disordering of the material world. *Journal of Material Culture* 10: 311–332. 2005

### **January 29.** Crumbling Heritage

Lowenthal D. *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

Pétursdóttir, Þóra 'Concrete matters: Ruins of modernity and the things called heritage'. *Journal of Social Archaeology* 2013 13: 31

Lee, H. "The Ruins Of Yuanmingyuan: Or, How To Enjoy A National Wound." *Modern China*: 155-90.

Stille, Alexander. *The Future of the Past*. New York: Picador, 2002. (Chapter 1, 'The Sphinx, Virtual and Real').

Website, *Ruin Memories*: <http://ruinmemories.org/about/project-description/>

### **February 5.** Dead Bodies

\*please note that material covered this week is viscerally disturbing and may force you to confront your mortality. Participation, therefore, will be optional and an alternate assignment will be made available upon request\*

Domanska, Ewa. 'Toward the Archaeontology of the dead body'. *Rethinking History: The Journal of Theory and Practice*, 9:4, 2005. 389-413.

Violi, Patrizi, 'Trauma Site Museums and Politics of Memory: Tuol Sleng, Villa Grimaldi and the Bologna Ustica Museum. *Theory, Culture & Society* 29, 2012. 36-75.

Verdery, Katherine. *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies: Reburial and Postsocialist Change*. Columbia University Press, 1999.

Ragon, Michel. *The Space of Death: a Study of Funerary Architecture, Decoration, and Urbanism* by. University Press of Virginia, 1983.

Websites:

<http://www.yale.edu/cgp/>

<http://sallymann.com/selected-works/body-farm>

### **February 12.** Ruins and Lost Spaces

Edensor T. *Industrial Ruins. Space, Aesthetics and Materiality*. Oxford: Berg. 2005

Hudson, Joanne. 'The affordances and potentialities of derelict urban spaces' in *Ruin Memories: materialities, aesthetics and the archaeology of the recent past*. Edited by Bjornar Olsen. Routledge, 2014.

Anderson, Dag. 'No Man's Land: the ontology of a space left over' in *Ruin Memories: materialities, aesthetics and the archaeology of the recent past*. Edited by Bjornar Olsen and . Routledge, 2014.

Lucas, Gavin. 'Conduits of dispersal: dematerializing an early 20th century village in Iceland' in *Ruin Memories: materialities, aesthetics and the archaeology of the recent past*. Edited by Bjornar Olsen. Routledge, 2014.

### **February 26.** Purged Collections

Chow, Rey. 'Fateful Attachments: On Collecting, Fidelity, and Lao She' *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 28, No. 1, Things (Autumn, 2001), pp. 286-304

Bjerk, Hein. 'My Father's Things' in *Ruin Memories: materialities, aesthetics and the archaeology of the recent past*. Edited by Bjornar Olsen. Routledge, 2014.

Stewart, Susan. *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1993.

### **March 5.** Natural Disasters and Catastrophes in General

De Meyer, Dirk. 'Catastrophe and its Fallout --- Notes on Cataclysms, Art and Aesthetics, 1755-1945' in *Tickle Your Catastrophe!: Imagining Catastrophe in Art, Architecture and Philosophy*. Gent: Academia Press, 2011.

Gray, Peter, Oliver Kendrick eds. *The Memory of Catastrophe*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004.

### **March 13.** Catastrophe in Film and Fiction

Schuppli, Susan. 'The Most Dangerous Film in the World' in Frederik Roy (ed). *Tickle Your Catastrophe!: Imagining Catastrophe in Art, Architecture and Philosophy*. Gent: Academia Press, 2011.

Noe, Eli. 'Mapping the Present Through Catastrophe --- On Philip K. Dick, Science Fiction and the Critique of Ideology' in Frederik Roy (ed). *Tickle Your Catastrophe!: Imagining Catastrophe in Art, Architecture and Philosophy*. Gent: Academia Press, 2011.

We'll probably watch a movie too.

### **March 19.** Ruins in Art

Smithson, Robert. 'Entropy Made Visible' (Interview with Alison Sky), 1973. In *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, edited by Jack Flam, 301-309. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996.

Bois, Yve and Rosalind E. Krauss. *Formless: A User's Guide*. New York: Zone Books, 1997.

Wu, Hung. *A Story of Ruins: Presence and Absence in Chinese Art and Visual Culture*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012.

### **March 26.** Field Trip – to somewhere rotten. TBA

### **April 2. Conference Day**

Depending on how many people enrol in the course, we will have 10 – 15 minute individual presentations on a topic chosen in consultation with the instructor, presumably the same topic that has been chosen for the final paper.