



The University of Western Ontario

**HISTORY 9835B**

**Rot and Ruin:**

**History and the Downside of**

**Material Culture**

**Winter 2024**

**Professor James Flath**

Hours: by appointment

Department of History,

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**Course Description:**

This is a graduate course in history intended for students who are interested in material culture.

**Prerequisites: none**

**Antirequisites: none**

**Course Syllabus:**

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.

**Course Materials (subject to change):**

All articles and book chapters will be made available on the OWL website. See weekly readings for specifics.

**Methods of Evaluation:**

The expectation is that students will be thoroughly prepared on a weekly basis, that they will conduct themselves professionally in debate and discussion, and that written assignments will be polished and completed according to disciplinary standards.

Seminar Participation: 25%

Attendance is mandatory. Unexcused absence and failure to actively participate will result in a reduced participation grade.

Final Paper Proposal 10%

Due February 27

Conference Paper and Presentation: 15%

Final Paper: 50%

Due April 6

Late assignments will not be accepted except by permission of the Graduate Chair.

### **Course Schedule and Readings**

\*All journal articles are available online. Unless otherwise noted, all book chapters will be scanned and made available through the course OWL website.

\*Readings are subject to change.

1. Introduction

2. Theory of Things

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

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.

Meyer, Morgan. 'Placing and tracing absence: A material culture of the immaterial', *Journal of Material Culture* 17 (1) 2012: 103-110.

3. Materials and Materiality

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

Tilley, Christopher. 'Materials in Materiality; *Archaeological Dialogues* 14 (1) 2007: 16 – 20.

Knappett, Carl. 'Materials with Materiality' *Archaeological Dialogues* 14 (1) 2007: 20 – 23.

4. Crumbling Heritage

Pétursdóttir, Þóra. 'Concrete matters: Ruins of modernity and the things called heritage'. *Journal of Social Archaeology* 13 (1) 2013: 31-53.

Lee, Haiyan. "The Ruins of Yuanmingyuan: Or, How to Enjoy a National Wound." *Modern China* 35 (2) 2009: 155-90.

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

Frederiksen, Martin Demant. 'Material Dys-Appearance : Decaying Futures and Contested Temporal Passage', in *Materialities of Passing: Transformation, Transition and Transcience*. Edited by Peter Bjerregaard (et al). Routledge, 2016.

Hauser, Susanne, “Wastes into Heritage: Materials in the Arts, Memories and the Museum”. In *Waste-Site Stories. The Recyclings of Memory*, SUNY Press, 2002.

## 5. The Dead

\*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.

Harries, John. ‘Of bleeding skulls and the postcolonial uncanny: bones and the presence of Nonosabasut and Demasduit’ *Journal of Material Culture* 15 (4) 2010: 403-421.

Verdery, Katherine. *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies: Reburial and Postsocialist Change*. Columbia UP, 1999. 1-53.

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

## 6. Urban Wastelands

Edensor, T. ‘Waste matter – the debris of industrial ruins and the disordering of the material world. *Journal of Material Culture* 10, 2005: 311–332.

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.

Steinmetz, George. ‘Colonial Melancholy and Fordist Nostalgia: The Ruinscapes of Namibia and Detroit’. In *Ruins of Modernity*. Edited by Julia Hell and Andreas Schonle, Duke UP, 2010.

Stoler, Ann, “Imperial Debris: Reflections on Ruins and Ruination. *Cultural Anthropology* 23 (2) 2008.

Mah, Alice, “Ruination and Post-Industrial Urban Decline”, *Sage Handbook of the 21st Century City*, eds. S. Hall and R. Burdett, Sage Publications, 2017.

## 7. Ghost Towns and Empty Places

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.

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

Armstrong, Justin. "Everyday Afterlife: Walter Benjamin and the politics of abandonment in Saskatchewan, Canada", *Cultural Studies* 25 (3) 11, 2011.

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, Routledge, 2014.

Stewart, Kathleen, *A Space by the Side of the Road*, Princeton University Press, 1996. (chapter 4, Chronotopes)

Flath, James, "Fielding: History, Memory, and Allegory in a Prairie Ghost Town", draft paper.

## 8. Disasters and Catastrophes

Gray, Peter. 'Memory and the Commemoration of the Great Irish Famine', in Peter Gray, Oliver Kendrick eds. *The Memory of Catastrophe*. Manchester UP, 2004. 46-64.

Kirschenbaum, Lisa A. 'Commemorations of the siege of Leningrad: a catastrophe in memory and myth' in Peter Gray, Oliver Kendrick eds. *The Memory of Catastrophe*. Manchester UP, 2004. 106-117.

Flath, James. 'Crack: Beichuan in Ruins', *Frontiers of Literary Studies in China* 2 (2) 2017: 239-262.

## 9. Ruin 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.

Von Moltke, Johannes. 'Ruin Cinema'. In *Ruins of Modernity*. Edited by Julia Hell and Andreas Schonle, Duke UP, 2010.

## 10. Ruin Art

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

Bois, Yve and Rosalind E. Krauss. *Formless: A User's Guide*. New York: Zone Books, 1997. 13-40.

Wu, Hung. *A Story of Ruins: Presence and Absence in Chinese Art and Visual Culture*. Princeton UP, 2012. 11-91.

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.

Stewart, Susan, *The Ruins Lesson: Meaning and Material in Western Culture*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019. Introduction.

Orvell, Miles. *Empire of Ruins: American Culture, Photography, and the Spectacle of Ruin*, Oxford University Press, 2001. Introduction.

## **11. Conference Day**

Each student will have 15 minutes to present a topic chosen in consultation with the instructor, presumably the same topic that has been chosen for the final paper. Papers will be organized into sessions, with assigned chairs and commentators.

### **Additional Statements**

#### ***Accessibility Options:***

You may also wish to contact Accessible Education (formerly known as Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD)) at 661-2111 x 82147 for any specific question regarding an accommodation. See: [Accessible Education - Academic Support & Engagement - Western University \(uwo.ca\)](https://www.uwo.ca/academic_support_engagement/)

#### ***Request for Accommodations/Medical Issues***

Students are entitled to their privacy and consequently they do not need to disclose personal information to their course professors. In the event that students feel the need to discuss personal information, they should see the graduate chair. Unlike undergraduate students, graduate students cannot be referred to Social Science Academic Counselling to have their medical or non-medical circumstances evaluated and to receive a recommendation for accommodation. Those facilities are for undergraduates only, and there is no process beyond the department to secure recommendations for accommodation. Our process is that faculty should deal with routine requests for extensions. However, a student's request for accommodation (on medical, non-medical, compassionate grounds) should go to the graduate chair, Prof. Eli Nathans ([enathans@uwo.ca](mailto:enathans@uwo.ca)) who will consult and communicate with faculty. Additionally, faculty and students should communicate with the grad chair about any case in which work is not submitted before grades are due. In the event that the graduate chair is also the course professor, then a request for accommodation can be taken to the department chair.

#### ***Copyright***

Lectures and course materials, including power point presentations, outlines, and similar materials, are protected by copyright. You may take notes and make copies of course materials for your own educational use. You may not record lectures, reproduce (or allow others to reproduce), post or distribute lecture notes, wiki material, and other course materials publicly and/or for commercial purposes without my written consent.

#### ***Plagiarism:***

Students must write their essays and assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea, or a passage from another author, they must acknowledge their debt both by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing such as footnotes or citations. Plagiarism is a major academic offense.

For more information on plagiarism and other scholastic offenses at the graduate level see: [https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic\\_policies/appeals/scholastic\\_discipline\\_grad.pdf](https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_grad.pdf)

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com (<http://www.turnitin.com>).

The following rules pertain to the acknowledgements necessary in academic papers.

A. In using another writer's words, you must both place the words in quotation marks and acknowledge that the words are those of another writer.

You are plagiarizing if you use a sequence of words, a sentence or a paragraph taken from other writers without acknowledging them to be theirs. Acknowledgement is indicated either by (1) mentioning the author and work from which the words are borrowed in the text of your paper; or by (2) placing a footnote number at the end of the quotation in your text, and including a correspondingly numbered footnote at the bottom of the page (or in a separate reference section at the end of your essay). This footnote should indicate author, title of the work, place and date of Publication and page number. Method (2) given above is usually preferable for academic essays because it provides the reader with more information about your sources and leaves your text uncluttered with parenthetical and tangential references. In either case words taken from another author must be enclosed in quotation marks or set off from your text by single spacing and indentation in such a way that they cannot be mistaken for your own words. Note that you cannot avoid indicating quotation simply by changing a word or phrase in a sentence or paragraph which is not your own.

B. In adopting other writer's ideas, you must acknowledge that they are theirs.

You are plagiarizing if you adopt, summarize, or paraphrase other writers' trains of argument, ideas or sequences of ideas without acknowledging their authorship according to the method of acknowledgement given in 'A' above. Since the words are your own, they need not be enclosed in quotation marks. Be certain, however, that the words you use are entirely your own; where you must use words or phrases from your source; these should be enclosed in quotation marks, as in 'A' above.

Clearly, it is possible for you to formulate arguments or ideas independently of another writer who has expounded the same ideas, and whom you have not read. Where you got your ideas is the important consideration here. Do not be afraid to present an argument or idea without acknowledgement to another writer, if you have arrived at it entirely independently. Acknowledge it if you have derived it from a source outside your own thinking on the subject.

In short, use of acknowledgements and, when necessary, quotation marks are necessary to distinguish clearly between what is yours and what is not. Since the rules have been explained to you, if you fail to make this distinction, your instructor very likely will be forced to regard your omission as intentional literary theft. Plagiarism is a serious offence which may result in a student's receiving an 'F' in a course or, in extreme cases, in their suspension from the University.

If a History graduate course professor suspects course work of possible plagiarism, or if a graduate supervisor suspects a cognate or thesis of possible plagiarism, the faculty member will meet with the student. If the issue is not resolved, the student then meets with the graduate chair to discuss this situation, and so that the student can present or respond to evidence. Afterwards the graduate chair will make a decision about whether misconduct has occurred and any penalties; this will be communicated in writing to the student within 3 weeks. The student may appeal this decision to the Vice-Provost (Graduate) within 3 weeks of the issuance of the chair's decision. If the student does not appeal, the Vice-Provost will review the case. The Vice-Provost may confirm, affirm, vary, or overturn the graduate chair's decision or penalty.

Information on the appeals procedures for graduate students can be found here:

[http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic\\_policies/appeals/appealsgrad.pdf](http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/appealsgrad.pdf)

### ***Support Services***

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health@Western, [http://uwo.ca/health/mental\\_wellbeing/](http://uwo.ca/health/mental_wellbeing/) for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

As part of a successful graduate student experience at Western, we encourage students to make their **health and wellness** a priority.

- Western provides several on campus health-related services to help you achieve optimum health and engage in healthy living while pursuing your graduate degree. For example, to support physical activity, all students, as part of their registration, receive membership in Western's Campus Recreation Centre. Numerous cultural events are offered throughout the year. Please check out the Faculty of Music web page <http://www.music.uwo.ca/> and our own McIntosh Gallery <http://www.mcintoshgallery.ca/>

- Information regarding health- and wellness-related services available to students may be found at <http://www.health.uwo.ca/>

- Students seeking help regarding mental health concerns are advised to speak to someone they feel comfortable confiding in, such as their faculty supervisor, their program director (graduate chair), or other relevant administrators in their unit. Campus mental health resources may be found at [http://www.health.uwo.ca/mental\\_health/resources.html](http://www.health.uwo.ca/mental_health/resources.html)

UWO has many services and programs that support the personal, physical, social, and academic needs of students, in a confidential environment. The Student Development Centre (SDC) has trained staff and an array of services to help students achieve their personal, academic and professional goals. See: [Academic Support & Engagement - Western University \(uwo.ca\)](#)

If you have any further questions or concerns, please contact, Heidi Van Galen, Department Manager, Department of History, 519-661-2111 x84963 or e-mail [yangalen@uwo.ca](mailto:yangalen@uwo.ca).