



Contemporary Ruins - Introduction

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Introduction

Introduction

Hélène Ibata

- 1 “Ruins Lust”, the name of a 2014 Tate Britain exhibition and the subject of a growing number of academic publications,¹ may be fashionable, but it is far from new: meditations on the ravages of time or narratives of destruction – through wars, divine intervention or natural forces – may be found from Mesopotamian city laments and Hebrew scriptures to 19th-century warnings about the fate of modern empires. Early modern Europe, in particular, found in the ruins of Rome, and then those of Greece, a significant cultural matrix, which provided architectural models while conveying a multiplicity of allegorical messages, for instance about the triumph of Christianity, the cycles of history, or the vanity of all human endeavours. In the 18th century, ruins were idealized and acquired a predominantly aesthetic interest, with Giovanni Battista Piranesi showing how the remains of Roman antiquity could serve as building materials for architectural fantasies, while Diderot wrote about the “poetics of ruins” in his *Salon de 1767*, in praise of Hubert Robert’s ruins paintings, and Bernardin de Saint-Pierre discussed the “pleasure of ruins” in his *Etudes de la nature* (1784). Even then, aesthetic appreciation remained combined with the sense that ruins could convey moral lessons, notably about the transience of all things, and arouse a range of sentiments that included nostalgia, humility and foreboding.²
- 2 In the wake of World War Two, Rose Macaulay could still write about the “pleasure of ruins”, the eponymous theme of a large volume which offered a literary tour of the world’s ruins (mostly those of Mediterranean antiquity, admittedly) and of artistic responses to them over time. Yet, the shadow of a brutal war, which had caused destruction on an unprecedented scale, prevented an unmitigated celebration of the sight of past vestiges. In the last pages of the book, Macaulay acknowledged that the experience she described was not possible without temporal or artistic mediations: “Ruin pleasure must be at one remove, softened by art, by Piranesi, Salvator Rosa, Poussin, Claude, Monsù Desiderio, Pannini, Guardi, Robert, James Pryde, John Piper, the ruin-poets, or centuries of time.” (454) Even though Macaulay’s list included Piper, who had notably depicted the devastation caused by German bombs in Britain in 1940, she

was implying that the ruins of her own times were still too immediate, too deeply intertwined with the actual experience of their viewers, to be appreciated in an aesthetic manner.

- 3 Macaulay's acknowledgment could also be understood as signaling a shift in the perception and practice of ruins around the middle of the 20th century, as processes of destruction appeared to accelerate, questioning the temporalities traditionally associated with architectural decay.³ While the atomic bomb offered the prospect of complete annihilation, post-war constructions driven by fast urban development and the logic of quick return on investment did not appear destined to last, leading Robert Smithson to formulate his famous notion of "ruins in reverse", "the opposite of the 'romantic ruin' because the buildings don't *fall* into ruin *after* they are built but rather *rise* into ruin before they are built" ("The Monuments of Passaic" 50). Architectural debris was no longer considered as the sign of a distant past, buildings could disintegrate in the lifetime of those who had seen them rise, and their remains did not seem to have the aura that had been conferred, for example, on the ruins of antiquity.
- 4 Are the ruins of our own time meaningless or illegible, as has been claimed, and if so, are they still ruins? In *Obsolescence des ruines* (2022), Bruce Bégout argues that the architectural productions of late capitalism are incapable of leaving anything other than meaningless rubble. Yet, the current fascination for contemporary ruins is attested by numerous publications from fields as diverse as cultural geography, literature, philosophy, memory studies or visual studies, which emphasize their potential to question and subvert normative practices and spatial orderings, as well as articulate the temporalities of our times. As Diane Scott hypothesizes, at the turn of the 21st century, ruins seem to have acquired a new status: instead of being objects of aesthetic contemplation, they have become critical tools through which one may analyze the culture of our time (19-20).
- 5 The articles in this issue demonstrate the various ways in which contemporary ruins provide insights into today's cultural representations and practices. The authors especially show how such ruins articulate the accelerated temporalities of contemporary societies, our discontinuous relation to an increasingly intractable past or the way we envision our possible futures, as well as changing engagements with the natural world at a time of environmental crisis. They also argue that these ruins partake of the creation of new meanings, by providing marginal, unregulated sites that undermine normative practices of space, and may become catalysts for "alternative aesthetics" and creative activities (Edensor 18, 22-42).

Illegible cyphers of our times?

- 6 The ruins representations of previous centuries generally relied on the assumption that the destroyed monuments and edifices of the past could teach their viewers valuable lessons, not only of an architectural or historical nature, but also of a moral kind.⁴ This was especially the case in the ruins paintings and prints of the early modern period, which endowed the vestiges of antiquity with a variety of allegorical meanings and moralizing didactic functions. Even when, in the 18th century, ruins were transformed into sensually pleasing motifs within picturesque compositions, they retained a form of legibility, being part of recognizable narratives, which generally included human figures (known as staffage) looking at the ruins, pointing at them, or meditating among

them, sometimes in order to comment about recognizable political or social events. Reading and interpreting the architectural traces of history was not considered an idle activity, especially for someone with a liberal education, and a knowledge of the classics.

- 7 Contemporary ruins do not seem to call for such legibility. In fact, a contrast often underlined by the current reflection about ruins is that which opposes the monumentality, durability, beauty and meaningfulness of vestiges of the distant past, to the banality, ephemerality, unsightliness and semantic vacuity of modern remains (see for instance Janowitz 1-2, Yablon 7-9; Bégout 17-21, 35-90). As Robert Smithson suggested in his ironic comparison of the “monuments” of suburban Passaic, New Jersey, with those of ancient Rome – asking whether Passaic had “replaced Rome as The Eternal City” (“The Monuments of Passaic” 48) – , contemporary constructions seem to be much more obviously subject to entropy, and to the ultimate leveling of all things, than their antique counterparts. Wanting the dignity bestowed by the passing of time, the disintegrating forms of industrial infrastructure or hasty urban development appear deprived of the spiritual, political or social purposes of earlier ruins. Even from the logic of a capitalist economy, they have become non-functional sites, which may not be invested with productive use and are of no interest to property developers. As Tim Edensor explains, they are spaces which are seen as problematic by governmental and planning authorities, caught as they are “between abandonment and potential future redevelopment.” (8)
- 8 One could argue, however, that this in-betweenness and indeterminacy of contemporary ruins is also what makes them relevant emblems of our times, allowing them to articulate our complex temporalities, while providing spaces of creative freedom. As several articles in this volume underline, contemporary ruins may be understood as a cypher of disorder and disruption, a “weird dislocation” (Orvell), a “perturbation” in our everyday environment, which calls for a critical reflection about our way of life (Parisi). The authors argue that far from being sites of illegible disintegration, contemporary ruins may be seen as a hermeneutic device, multiplying semantic possibilities by questioning the normative readings and uses of spaces that are imposed by political and economic authorities. They may also be the complement to a reflection about the Anthropocene, as proleptic devices allowing us to imagine an incommensurable future of ecological devastation that has yet no perceptible, tangible shape (Aubry-Morici; Tichit). More generally, as ruins have always been, they are privileged “critical objects” to reflect on “time and entropy” (Manolescu), and to explore and question the experience and perception of past, present and future.

New Temporalities

- 9 The very notion of “contemporary ruins” implies that as a result of accelerated processes of ruination in the 20th and 21st centuries, due to “producing practices which destroy urban space ever faster and more efficiently” (Edensor 8), the ruins of our times have to be experienced by the very generations that produce them. Bruce Bégout, who writes about “instant ruins” (87-90), even argues that during one human lifetime, several generations of edifices will disappear (19). Symptomatic of this phenomenon, which may be seen as emblematic of our societies’ consumerism and waste, is the fact that many of these decomposing constructions are unfinished buildings (a point which

is underlined here by Parisi, Manolescu and Tichit). The existence of such recent ruins not only subverts our perception of the past and the work of memory, but also the ways in which we can imagine the future, since one may wonder which traces our own societies will leave for later generations. Today's architectural endeavours, for the most part driven by short-term economic imperatives, do not seem to be meant to stand the test of time or escape oblivion. In the construction sites of Passaic, Smithson observes "monumental vacancies that define, without trying, the memory-traces of an abandoned set of futures." ("The Monuments of Passaic" 50) Even the most confident productions of authoritarian regimes, as suggested by the example of Chernobyl and Pripyat – the model Soviet workers' town built next to the nuclear power plant, deserted a few years after completion –, seem to defy ambitions to construct them as heritage for future generations (Orvell). In this precise case, in the long term, invisible contamination seems to be a more likely legacy than monumental vestiges.

- 10 In the reflection about contemporary ruins, questions about the future of humanity seem to prevail over retrospective perspectives, and imaginary ruinscape of today's cities have become a topos of science-fiction cinema and television series. This forward projection is not new: a shift in this direction had already occurred at the dawn of the industrial age, when writers and artists like the Comte de Volney, Hubert Robert and Joseph Gandy used ruins imagery as a proleptic device, to imagine how future centuries would view their own, tumultuous times (Stewart 213-220, Junod, Dubin, Yablon, Ibata). But as several articles in this volume underline, the trope of the "ruined present, seen from the future" (Tichit) has become particularly relevant, and disturbing, as the ability to see our own ruins goes together with the intimation that we may be the only ones to experience them, and as one projects onto them the anticipated disintegration of the world we live in (Aubry-Morici). The remains of our recent industrial past are more pressing forewarning signs of civilizational collapse than the ruins of antiquity, especially when they are the first signs of ecological collapse, as in the case of contaminated or radioactive sites (see Orvell on Chernobyl).
- 11 The postapocalyptic and dystopian futures associated with the ruins of industry and urban expansion are one important dimension of the temporalities they articulate. But for many observers and recorders of such sites, the possibility to invest them as "places of memory" remains vital (Tichit), even though this endeavour might mostly highlight what Pierre Nora has described as a form of urgency and desperation to appropriate a past whose traces disappear increasingly rapidly, and to capture identities that have already vanished (16-18).
- 12 One way to overcome the temporal vertigo induced by contemporary ruins is to use them as critical objects, questioning the relentless progression of linear time. Monica Manolescu thus shows in this issue how the artist Nancy Holt attempts to deal with the "inexorable temporality of decaying ruins" by "articulat[ing] ancient and contemporary ruins" to underline the historical layeredness and "ramified temporalities" of places and, beyond that, to align human time and cosmic time.
- 13 It is also possible to view ruins as emancipated from the flow of history, as their disintegration means that they become part of deep, geological time. More than a century ago, Georg Simmel described the process through which the ruins of human constructions were gradually absorbed back into their natural environments, abolishing the will of the makers of architectural forms, and thereby reversing historical intentionality. He wrote:

This unique balance – between mechanical, inert matter which passively resists pressure, and informing spirituality which pushes upward – breaks [...] the instant a building crumbles. For this means nothing else than that merely natural forces begin to become master over the work of man: the balance between nature and spirit, which the building manifested, shifts in favor of nature. (379)

- 14 Simmel saw this process of ruination as going against “[t]he whole history of mankind,” which he understood as “a gradual rise of the spirit to mastery over the nature which it finds outside” (379). The process was tragic, but not sad, since matter, momentarily used by human will, was returned to nature and “cosmic” time, rather than human time.

Markers of the Anthropocene

- 15 Can the same be said of contemporary ruins? In an age which has been called the Anthropocene, because of the apparently irreversible impact of human extractivism and industrial production on the natural world (Crutzen and Stoermer), nature itself is often said to be in the process of collapsing, and the “unique balance” described by Simmel seems compromised. Whether they are derelict industrial sites with long-lasting polluting effects, the sprawling remains of short-sighted urban development (Smithson’s “ruins in reverse”), or landfill sites containing the waste product of rampant consumerism, the ruins of our own times cannot be dissociated from irreversible ecological devastation. Far from promising the return to nature that according to Simmel was fundamental to the pleasure of ruins, they can be seen as an index or a symptom of the Anthropocene, and a concrete means to visualize humanity’s imprint. Aptly, they also provide a metaphor for the degradation of natural areas – for instance as a result of extractive activities or intensive farming – which are seen in their turn as ruins of their former selves. The harmonious cycle of matter and spirit that Simmel described seems to have been broken, and a pattern of inescapable and irremediable ruination is understood to have been substituted to it. As a result, ruined landscapes are no longer perceived as a place to welcome a melancholy reflection about the passing of time, but hostile environments that reflect back to our societies the destructiveness of short-term economic speculations, and from which human activity has estranged human observers themselves. Contemporary ruins are often contaminated sites, which should remain inaccessible to future generations, as Miles Orvell and Marine Aubry-Morici remind us in this volume.
- 16 To a lesser extent, however, a form of “shift in favor of nature” is still possible. The area around Chernobyl, for instance, has paradoxically been reclaimed by non-human forces precisely because it has become a threat to certain forms of life, including human life. “Human effort, in the context of such relentless natural power, seems irrelevant, fragile, easily overcome. Yet against that respectful view of nature’s power, there is the fact of nuclear power—a power of nature, and yet a power that is not ‘natural.’” (Orvell) While Simmel’s analysis may no longer be relevant to account for the vestiges of large-scale or toxic industrial activities, the early 21st century may find in Gilles Clément’s conception of the Third landscape (“Tiers paysage”) a way to reflect about the new negotiations that may take place between the natural world and the human world. Damien Darcis and Maud Hagelstein, in this volume, underline the value of these marginal spaces, within urban spaces, industrial wastelands or even mechanized rural areas, where nature and humans coexist: the former by

demonstrating its resilience, its ability to adapt to the degradations caused by human activity, the latter by acknowledging responsibility for environmental degradations and engaging in new forms of dialogue with the non-human world.

New meanings, new practices

- 17 Artists play a central role in these new articulations and renegotiations. Not by aestheticizing ruins as objects that will eventually blend into the landscape – in fact, much contemporary ruinist art is resolutely anti-picturesque –, but by revealing the long-lasting damage of human production, focusing on waste products with long decomposition or decontamination cycles, or reflecting on the place of industrial and consumer waste within broader cycles. Thus, artists like Keith Arnatt, Tacita Dean, Edward Burtynsky, or Gilles Clément – whose work is discussed here by Hagelstein –, photograph plastic waste in order to force an awareness of objects that are considered to degrade natural environments, and yet will outlast us for centuries. Others, like land artists Robert Smithson and Nancy Holt, discussed by Manolescu, explore ways in which “[a]rt can become a physical resource that mediates between the ecologist and the industrialist” (Smithson, *The Collected Writings* 379), and artistic intervention can compensate for ecological damage, not so much by undoing it as by giving new significance to what seems initially to be meaningless waste.
- 18 Today’s artists have also learnt to fuse the specificities of contemporary ruins – their greater transience, at least in terms of tangible presence, their association with post-apocalyptic imaginings, but also their subversive function as a negative mirror of the consumer society – into innovative practices. One can think of site-specific art, often commissioned by local authorities, that engages with in-between sites and impermanent environments like disused buildings or vacant lots before they are repurposed (see for instance Gould and Manolescu 2018). The ruins of industry and uncontrolled urban development are especially associated with aesthetic transgression, subversive practices that use them as a means to reclaim public spaces from their derelict margins. More specifically, in the last few decades, they have provided a privileged ground for the development of street art, allowing it to contest the representations of space of political and economic elites as well as partake in the creation of new meaning and usages, thus suggesting ways to exercise what Lefebvre has called the “right to the city” (Lefebvre 95-108; Zieleniec). As Parisi, Tremblin and Jauréguiberry show in this issue, these ruins provide in-between spaces, “urban interstices” that liberate creativity, precisely because they allow one to work outside of the normative spaces traditionally ascribed to artistic practice: “unsanctioned graffiti and street art make use of pre-existing architecture in a parasitic manner, by subordinating it to their own aesthetic (dis)order” (Parisi). According to Tim Edensor, industrial ruins are “sites in which the becomings of new forms, orderings and aesthetics can emerge”, notably through the immanent experience of encountering the textures, atmospheres and temporalities of decay (15-16). Parisi, like Edensor, suggests that such practices call for new aesthetic categories, and while the connection of contemporary ruins with “a sort of modern gothic” is well-established (Edensor 13-15), he offers to look at them through the prism of the “weird”, as defined by Mark Fisher.
- 19 In these site-specific practices, contemporary artists explore new paths for artistic expression, making the most of the disorder found in the now formless forms, using

ruined sites as a canvas for explorations, often of a palimpsestic nature, but also questioning the commodifying and acquisitive logic that has led to their production as they temporarily reappropriate them. These works are not meant to last, just like the decomposing structures that support them, only to momentarily comment on our own times.

- 20 Such practices, eventually, point to the necessity to assess the status of the ruins of our times. Are they, as Bégout suggests, “post-ruins” (35), “incapable of telling anything” and bound to oblivion (82-83)? Should they be appreciated for their value as heritage, or viewed as “abject vestiges of consumerism” (Manolescu), or even as ironic vestiges of utopian dreams turned sour (Orvell)? In this volume, Maud Hagelstein raises the question of how contemporary debris, industrial decay in particular, can acquire the necessary poetic surplus that transforms them into “ruins”. Hagelstein, Manolescu, Parisi, Tremblin and Jauréguiberry point to the important role of artists, who play a part in the “artialisation” of ruins, and who develop new strategies through which decayed and abandoned settings, which could be viewed as uninteresting debris, become objects of aesthetic appreciation or rehabilitation. Ultimately, however, the volume as a whole reminds us that it is impossible to view contemporary ruins as divorced from their economic, social and ecological contexts. “Ruins lust”, as a purely aesthetic experience, is no longer possible.

* * *

- 21 The present volume opens with Miles Orvell’s discussion of an emblematic ruin of our times, Chernobyl, more specifically the contained remains of the nuclear plant – the Sarcophagus – and the remains of the adjacent company town of Pripyat, as a “hieroglyph of the dystopian 21st century”. In this multi-semantic analysis, Orvell reflects on the way a utopian Soviet conception – with Pripyat as a model workers’ city, and the nuclear plant a demonstration of technological progress –, gave way to a dystopian ruin, focusing on how the catastrophe brought to the fore the dysfunctions of authoritarian epistemology in the Soviet hierarchy and foreshadowed its breakdown, but also on the eerie spectacle that contemporary photographers like Robert Polidori or David McMillan capture when they visit the Exclusion Zone around the plant: a total ruin, from which even human life has withdrawn. The analysis especially highlights the paradox of a zone that is both reclaimed by nature, and yet contains the long-term, invisible contamination of nuclear power, by contrasting the organic disintegration of Pripyat with the dangerous hidden ruin of reactor n° 4, hidden first under the Sarcophagus, and now under the New Arch.
- 22 While the example of Chernobyl mostly foregrounds processes of estrangement, through long-term contamination, Damien Darcis and Monica Manolescu suggest that ruined sites may still be places where new harmonies, new connections between the human and the non-human may be found. Darcis reflects about the renegotiation of human/non-human interactions in abandoned rural spaces (rural “Third landscapes”, to use Gilles Clément’s notion), arguing that conservation policies should take into account not only biodiversity objectives, but also the needs of agricultural populations, together with a recognition of the role their know-how can play in the rehabilitation of natural areas. After suggesting some precedents for the contemporary notion of “Tiers paysage”, for instance in 19th-century artistic representations of the countryside,

Darcis examines various conceptions of rewilding, and explains what justifies new forms of human intervention, inspired by former rural practices, but in which utility is replaced by ecological value. The essay concludes with a reflection about the necessity to acknowledge that natural environments are necessarily altered by agricultural activity, in order to shape new, hybrid territories where humans and non-human beings may coexist in a relationship of co-construction.

- 23 Monica Manolescu's article, which examines land artist Nancy Holt's practice since the 1960s, and the role played by ruins in her evolution, similarly emphasizes a quest for connections rather than the acknowledgement of a separation between man and the natural world. Manolescu emphasizes the specificity of Holt's approach – especially when compared to that of her husband Robert Smithson – as “animated by an ecological impetus” which leads her to establish connections between ancient ruins and more recent ones, but also between human temporalities and cosmic ones. She shows that from her photographs of Neolithic and Maya monuments, to her “ruino-morphic” *Sun Tunnels* and *Stone Enclosures*, and her reclamation projects, Holt has repeatedly demonstrated a desire to join “the earthly and the celestial”, but also a hope to redeem the most abject remains of our consumer societies by integrating them into broader temporal cycles in which may be found the promise of ecological recovery.
- 24 In Holt's case, artistic intervention in ruins is seen as intrinsically connected with ecological action. For other artists, ruins imagery is used as a commentary on the current environmental crisis, especially when it addresses and questions processes of aestheticization. Jonathan Tichit surveys the work of photographers who document recent ruins (such as industrial ruins or unfinished buildings), arguing that the new temporalities they explore provide a conceptual framework to reflect on the evolution of societies in the context of the Anthropocene, and more generally in connection with what is perceived as an “acceleration of history” (Nora). Tichit first examines late 20th-century photography that has transposed the retrospective and aestheticizing outlook of earlier approaches (like that of the picturesque) to industrial ruins, thus suggesting that they could be used as “sites of memory” (Nora). He then shows how photographers like Amélie Labourdette, who focus on abandoned construction projects, reveal the ecological consequences of temporalities that are specific to contemporary economic models, and eventually suggests that these images assess and question the value of our own ruins in future times, in response to catastrophic conceptions of our future (nuclear or ecological extermination), but also to call for ecological action.
- 25 Starting from Alain Roger's argument that landscapes cannot exist without cultural mediations (more specifically the visual and representational conventions that were developed in European art of the early modern period), Maud Hagelstein examines industrial environments that resist aestheticization (Roger's notion of “artialisation”). She argues that this resistance is necessary in order to prevent an easy resolution of the damage done by industrialization, and to take stock of the scars left by human activity. She then suggests a non-aesthetic approach, which may be provided by Gilles Clément's notion of “involuntary art”, an art that is produced by unregulated encounters between raw nature and man-made artefacts, and may be found in interstitial spaces, in which the waste products of industrial production contingently cohabit with natural milieus, that resist aesthetic sublimation. Gilles Clément, as well as the artist Josef Koudelka, document environments that are characterized by the

unavoidable and painful cohabitation of nature and the waste products of industrial production.

- 26 In street art, subversion of and resistance to the contemporary logic of consumption and appropriation takes place within ruined sites themselves. Vittorio Parisi's article examines the work of Italian street artists in the light of Mark Fisher's recent definition of the weird and the eerie as aesthetic experiences which compel us to look at the contemporary world in a critical manner, and to question the categories through which we previously made sense of it. According to Parisi, Italian street art can be viewed through the category of the weird in the sense that it brings together apparently incompatible things: unsanctioned muralism and architecture. By investing abandoned or unfinished buildings, or more generally urban interstices, in a dynamic or poietic way, these artists show that what may appear as uninteresting debris actually have an aesthetic value. They confer a new identity and meaning onto abandoned buildings, while finding in them a dynamic context for a type of artistic creation that makes the most of the disorder and formlessness provided by architectural decomposition. Nevertheless, these artworks remain incomprehensible and weird, haunting appearances, precisely because of their marginal location outside of the spaces conventionally devoted to art, and because of the ruined nature of their settings.
- 27 Mathieu Tremblin and Anne Jauréguiberry investigate similarly playful and challenging appropriations, by focusing on the subtle wear and tear that results from everyday uses of urban spaces, more specifically artistic practices that invest urban interstices to undermine normative conceptions of the city. Their creative exploration leads from a workshop about the renovation of disused urban spaces, "Réparer la ville", which took place in Marseille in May 2021, to a personal tour of the city highlighting its subversive uses and subtle signs of degradation, which in turn results in a theoretical elaboration of the notion of "micro-ruin". Tremblin and Jauréguiberry describe micro-ruins as traces of use and of life, subtle processes of erosion that elude the control of city authorities and testify to the symbiotic interaction of urban spaces and their inhabitants.
- 28 To conclude this reflection, Marine Aubry-Morici explores the connection between ruins representations and the contemporary anticipation of the irreversible consequences of the Anthropocene. Her essay revolves around the way non-fiction (documentary writing and film) uses contemporary ruins as a motif through which the Anthropocene, understood as a post-apocalyptic world from which humans have disappeared as a consequence of self-inflicted ecological collapse, may be imagined and given a concrete representation. Aubry-Morici asks the fundamental question of whether aestheticizing the Anthropocene, through the motif of the contemporary ruin or by imagining a future without men as the natural result of a historical cycle is not a form of denial, minimizing the origins and consequences of ecological catastrophe. She concludes that instead of passively contemplating ruins, in an a-political manner, it is essential to confront the reality of radically transformed environments and to develop strategies to adapt to a damaged world.

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NOTES

1. Among these publications, one should mention Michel Makarius's *Ruines. Représentations dans l'art de la Renaissance à nos jours* (2004), which covers six centuries of ruins paintings, *Ruins*, an anthology edited by Brian Dillon (2011), Tim Edensor's *Industrial Ruins: Space, Aesthetics and Materiality* (2005), Nick Yablon's *Untimely Ruins: An Archaeology of Urban Modernity, 1819-1919* (2009), *Ruins of Modernity*, a volume edited by Julia Hell and Andreas Schönle (2010), and most recently Susan Stewart's *The Ruins Lesson* (2020), Miles Orvell's *Empire of Ruins* (2021), Bruce Bégout's *Obsolescence des ruines: Essai philosophique sur les gravats* (2022), and Diane Scott's *Ruine. Invention d'un objet critique* (2019). The list is of course far from exhaustive.
2. On the history of the significance of ruins in Western culture, see especially Stewart and Macaulay.
3. As Nick Yablon suggests in *Untimely Ruins: An Archaeology of American Urban Modernity, 1819-1919*, this shift was already perceptible in 19th-century perceptions of American ruins.
4. Susan Stewart's recent *The Ruins Lesson* (2020) is a remarkable demonstration of this assumption and of its long-lasting success, from antiquity to Romanticism.

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