

Aesthetics of Abandonment

Date : January 10, 2011

Call for Papers: From Decay to Deterioration: Questioning the Aesthetics of Abandonment

Proposed Panel: Annual Meeting of the American Studies Association, 20 - 23 October, 2011

The decay of the built environment has become a subject more of aesthetic fascination than of fear for many twenty-first-century Americans. Real communities such as Detroit, pictured in Time's 2010 photographs and Julian Temple's documentary "Requiem for Detroit?" (2010), and Gary, Indiana, seen in David Tribby's Gary Indiana: A City's Ruins (2009), have become fodder for photographers, bloggers, and artists. Meanwhile, fictional decayed landscapes are used as a spectacular backdrop to countless recent apocalyptic movies, from "I Am Legend" (2007) to "The Road" (2009), even undergoing transformation into animated form in the children's film "Wall-E" (2008).

But people who live, or once lived, in the real landscapes of decay often resent the intrusion of visitors following a podcast tour through Baltimore neighborhoods used as locations for "The Wire," or the presence of the urban explorer, wishing that such touristic interest might be followed by political action aimed at transformation of the material environment where their communities are based.

How can scholars interested in visual and material culture address the aesthetics and ethics of this fascination with deterioration? Possible topics to be addressed in this panel include the ethics of the representation and simulation of decayed environments; the role of the urban explorer as proto-archaeologist; historical perspectives on the visual and material cultural presence of the decayed landscape; decayed landscapes and their function in filmic narrative; and decay and its relationship to discourses of consumer culture.

If you are interested in being part of this panel, please submit abstracts of no more than 500 words to rebeccaonion@gmail.com, by 20 January, 2011