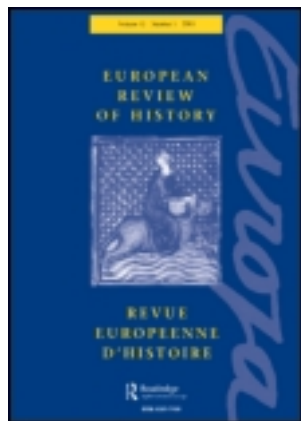


This article was downloaded by: [Royal Holloway, University of London], [Ahuvia Kahane]

On: 16 January 2012, At: 06:56

Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



European Review of History: Revue européenne d'histoire

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/cerh20>

Image, word and the antiquity of ruins

Ahuvia Kahane^a

^a Department of Classics and Philosophy and the Humanities and Arts Research Centre, Royal Holloway, University of London, UK

Available online: 04 Jan 2012

To cite this article: Ahuvia Kahane (2011): Image, word and the antiquity of ruins, *European Review of History: Revue européenne d'histoire*, 18:5-6, 829-850

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13507486.2011.618333>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Full terms and conditions of use: <http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions>

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The accuracy of any instructions, formulae, and drug doses should be independently verified with primary sources. The publisher shall not be liable for any loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand, or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.

Image, word and the antiquity of ruins

Ahuvia Kahane*

*Department of Classics and Philosophy and the Humanities and Arts Research Centre,
Royal Holloway, University of London, UK*

This paper considers the ruin as a special genre of representation involving special objects. The paper examines the temporality of the ruin, the mediality of the ruin – especially the relation between image and word – and the historical positioning of the idea of the ruin in relation to antiquity and the modern era. The author analyzes aspects of the basic visual and phenomenological “grammar” of the ruin and comments on some of the implications for our understanding of the representation of history and historical change. The ruin’s “deep sense of voicefulness” (as Ruskin calls it) is conveyed precisely through the silence of the material remains (and hence also their quality as images). The ruin, the paper argues, is as much an ancient idea as it is a product of modernity, but it allows us, paradoxically, both to understand times other than our own and to maintain historical difference and to keep a distance from the past.

Keywords: antiquity; Aristotle; Babel; Benjamin, Walter; Bracciolini, Poggio; Deleuze, Gilles; Foucault, Michel; Gibbon, Edward; Homer; Kiefer, Anselm; Ovid; Rome; ruins; San Gimignano; Strabo; Suda; Troy; Twin Towers

Language has unmistakably made plain that memory is not an instrument for exploring the past, but rather a medium. It is a medium of that which is experienced, just as the earth is the medium in which ancient cities lie buried.

Walter Benjamin¹

The ruin is a material thing and a visible object – the remains, for instance, of a building that has suffered damage or decay. But the ruin is also a narrative of sorts.² Objects always have stories to tell: What are they? How were they made? Why are they here? Often we ignore such questions and the histories they hide. Life would come to a halt if we interrogated every object in our sight. Yet ruins seem to be very special objects, and their history, especially if we do not know it, seems to persist in its explicitness.³ It demands, as it were, a telling, even as almost every ruin tells the same ‘generic’ story: a narrative of change ‘from better to worse’.

There are many ways of characterising this story. In Aristotelian terms, for example, we could describe the change of fortunes as a *peripeteia*. If we allow that such a change can inspire ‘pity and fear’, we may perhaps also view their effect as a ‘catharsis of such emotions’, and as a source of ‘tragic pleasure’. Thus – even as we take our very first glance – it would appear that the ruin partakes of complex narrative forms, here, in a formal sense, of the ‘tragic’.⁴ From this perspective, the ruin seems to be a kind of *muthos* in material form, a narrative without words, a special kind of ‘imitation of an action’

*Email: Ahuvia.kahane@rhul.ac.uk

(*mimesis praxeôs*) with – as Aristotle would have it – a ‘beginning’ (for example, the assumed construction of a building), a ‘middle’ (perhaps conflict or neglect), and an ‘end’, (the phase of decay).⁵

There are various obstacles to a ‘generic’ reading of this sort. Ruins may eventually inspire pleasure, but they are not normally made as imitations for pleasure. As a matter of principle, and with the exception, for example, of some architectural follies, ruins do not have a ‘poet’, a maker or an ‘author’.⁶ They are the result of contingent contradictory forces and intentions, personal, social, natural and perhaps divine.⁷ They are not quite tragedies in stone.

Space will not permit us to consider an ‘Aristotelian’ reading of the ruin in detail, and it is not our purpose to do so in this essay. Some points relating to Aristotle will re-surface further below, but the main purpose of this brief opening discussion is to underscore the basic terms of our enquiry: the ruin as visual object is also a form of discourse. It is a special genre of representation in which we must allow for tangled elective affinities between image and word. In this essay I wish to explore some aspects of this difficult point as well as its implications for our understanding of the representation of history, historical change and – what is particularly important in the context of the ruin – the interface between ‘ancient’ and ‘modern’.

The ruin’s formal associations with discourse are not always stated up front, but they are ubiquitous. For example, Ovid, in his canonical, eponymous narrative of change says (*Metamorphoses* 15. 420–30):

... we see times change,
and these nations acquiring power
and those declining. So Troy, that was so great in men and riches,
and for ten years of war could give so freely of her blood,
is humbled [*humilis*], and only reveals ancient ruins [*ruinas*] now,
and, for wealth, ancestral tombs.

Sparta was famous [*clara*], great Mycenae flourished,
and Cecrops’s citadel of Athens, and Amphion’s Thebes.
Sparta is worthless soil [*vile solum*], proud Mycenae is fallen [*cecidere*],
and what is the Thebes of Oedipus but a name [*nisi nomina*],
what is left of the Athens of Pandion, but a name [*nisi nomen*]?⁸

Past glory and present decay here mark two distinct points on an axis of narrative time.⁹ Change is highlighted in several ways: in economic terms and through a form of ‘visual’ transition, as a move from visible object to discourse and word. Great cities have become ‘worthless soil’. What was once famous, or rather *clarus*, ‘visible and prominent’, is now only a ‘name’. Tall citadels of the past now lie ‘low’.

It would seem, then, that underlying this narrative of metamorphosis from object to word is an almost geometrical move from the vertical to the horizontal. From tall buildings, to low ground. This move, or image, seems to capture graphically a distinct view of the ruin as the mark of ‘downfall’, as a representation of the ravages of time and fortune. This view is commonly associated with antiquity and is also often expressed by antiquarians, for example. Edward Gibbon, a great exponent of the narrative of decline and fall, speaks of it when he cites Poggio Bracciolini’s *de Varietate Fortunae* (The Vicissitudes of Fate). Speaking of Rome, Poggius says:

This *spectacle of the world* how is it *fallen!* How *chanced!* How *defaced!* The path of victory is *obliterated by vines*, and the benches of the senators are *concealed by a dunghill*. ... the *vacant space* is interrupted only by ruins and gardens [my emphasis].¹⁰

Here again, then, is an 'ancient' view of the ruin as that which marks a 'fall' from heights. The ruin is the decomposed ('dunghill') remains of things which no longer exist and which in this sense are 'obliterated' and 'concealed', and thus invisible.

But, can we really attach the historical tag 'ancient' to this view? If nothing else, Gibbon and Poggio are, in fact, modern figures. To be an antiquarian and to be ancient are two different things. Is their view of the ruin 'ancient' or 'modern'? Are Gibbon and Poggio anachronistic figures living in the past? This is hardly likely. What, then, does modernity bring to their perception of the ruin?

It is often argued that, in direct contrast to the 'ancient' view and to the 'invisibility' of the ruin in antiquity, modernity has placed the ruin at the centre of vision. One needs only look to such modern monuments as the ruins of the Frauenkirche in Dresden or the Gedächtniskirche in Berlin (discussed elsewhere in this volume) to see that modernity elevates the ruin to a position of extreme visibility.¹¹ Poggio's own text, when read carefully, seems to suggest exactly this. 'The vacant space', he says, 'is interrupted only by ruins and gardens.' Both ruins and gardens are highly *visible*, living elements of the landscape of the present. Such visibility may nevertheless indicate that both the nature of the ruin and its historical position are rather complex. To see why, let us consider a further example.

At a show in Paris in 2007, artist Anselm Kiefer exhibited a piece entitled 'Chute d'étoiles' comprising twin falling concrete towers.¹² The core of the piece seems to need little explanation, or even an image. We all know the story. The piece was, nevertheless, accompanied by an audio guide, something that at first might seem like a surfeit of words. 'We all know,' says Kiefer, 'that one day everything will collapse.' He adds: 'I already see the grass growing over New York.'¹³

Surfeit and excess are, of course, important modern critical principles.¹⁴ Kiefer's excess of words points, obliquely, to an underlying truth: his ruin is, in fact, not in the past, as one might expect, but (interestingly, using a perfective present tense, 'I *already see*') partly in the future. Furthermore, green grass, normally an iconic image of regeneration and growth, is here, strangely, a great city's sign of decay.¹⁵

Kiefer's work is focused on the question of history and the past, on the memory of destruction (the World Trade Center) and the process of decay and disappearance. But his words suggest that the ruin appears exposed before our eyes, at home, where we live, at a place and a moment *in the present*, a moment in which both the past and its tall, grey fallen towers, and the low-lying green grass of the future are 'visible'. 'I already see ...' he says. This conception of extreme, perhaps total visibility is simple, yet bewildering. Kiefer sees the ruin as something other than matter. He sees vision as something other than optics. He sees time as something other than a linear progression. These are views often associated with modernity in general. They are also views often regarded as largely foreign to antiquity.

To exclude these views from antiquity is not entirely unreasonable. Consider for example the idea of time as a linear sequence. Aristotle, speaks, in the fourth book of the *Physics*, of time as the number (*arithmos*) of change (*kinêsis*), and thus of time as a linear movement ($T^1 \dots T^2 \dots T^3 \dots T^n$).¹⁶ We can link this view directly, for example, to his prescriptive formulation in the *Poetics* of narrative (*muthos*) as an 'organic' (*kata physin*) structure and as a linear sequence that is characterised by a beginning (' T^1 '), a middle (' T^2 ') and an end (' T^3 ').¹⁷ Unlike modernity, Aristotle, and antiquity, could only grasp time as a linear progression. At the same time, as we have already seen, the phenomenology of the ruin suggests a distinctly 'Aristotelian' tragic narrative, the ruin as a silent narrative with a beginning, middle, and end, a narrative which has no words, but

which can nevertheless be seen.¹⁸ Not only the nature of the ruin, then, but also its position in history and its historical characterisation require further explanation.

The view expressed by Kiefer wherein time breaks free, as it were, of its linear order, and where the ruin is visible beyond what lies before our eyes, is, as we have already noted, closely associated with historical conceptions of the present day. As, for example, the editors of a recent collection of essays entitled *Ruins of Modernity* note:

... catastrophe [i.e., the ruin], *real and imagined*, underpins modernity's *multilayered sense of history* [my emphasis].¹⁹

The catalogue to an important exhibition on ruins at the Getty Museum puts this even more explicitly, 'ruins are the product of modernity':

In ancient times, the past was freely used as the foundation for subsequent building or, if too sacred to be discarded, was often buried. At least since the Renaissance, however, ruins have occupied a central position in our collective imagination, provoking reactions ranging from nostalgia to foreboding, from dreams of grandeur to fears of mortality.²⁰

The point in these and many similar views, of course, is not to preclude the existence of decaying buildings, 'ruins', from antiquity. Ovid's passage from the *Metamorphoses* is well known. References to ruins abound elsewhere in ancient poetry, prose, travel-guides and other works.²¹ Yet in antiquity the ruin – so the story goes – is often little more than an emptiness that marks downfall and the ravages of time. It is the invisible mark of a well-ordered 'end' which, as we noted, follows a prominent beginning and the 'reversal of fortune' (*peripeteia*) affected by the middle. Not only in Ovid, but in many other ancient sources, ruins *per se* seem to be swiftly glossed over as the narrative moves on to recount the 'visible' glory of their pasts. The great travel writer Pausanias, for examples, says: 'The sanctuary of Asclepius I found in ruins, but it was originally built by a private person ...' and so on (Paus. 10.38.13). When Strabo the Geographer visits the site of Ilium, he cites Homer and other sources and describes the past glory of Troy at length. The place itself, as he says plainly, is empty. There is nothing to see (*Geog.* 13.1.38.1–5):

No trace [ichnos] of the ancient city has survived [sôzetai]. This might be expected, for the cities around were devastated, but not entirely destroyed, whereas *when Troy was overthrown from its foundation all the stones were removed for the reparation of the other cities* [my emphasis].²²

A clear-cut characterisation of 'ancient' and 'modern' offers the tempting prospect of historical order. We must allow, however – I will not argue this point in detail here – that such periodisation and a sharp differentiation of historical mindsets bear something of modernity's authoritarian rhetoric of progress, its narrative self-fashioning as a breaking-free from the tyranny of the past, as well as the more sinister overtones which such ideas sometimes carried.²³ Neat taxonomy also belies the irrepressible historical resonance and complexity of the ruin and, I submit, obscures the advantages that such resonance can bring to an understanding of history.

Consider, for example, that when Ovid, or Pausanias, or Strabo, see nothing but 'empty space' in front of their eyes, they also 'see' the glory of the past in words. In its most straightforward sense, this is what the ancients meant by the rhetorical figure of *ekphrasis*;²⁴ it is also close to what Horace in the *Ars Poetica* (361) famously speaks of when he says *ut pictura poiesis*. Such 'ancient' vision is not entirely different from the 'modern' vision that allows Anselm Kiefer to see grass growing in the future over New York.

The implication of the above is that clear-cut historical differentiation is at best questionable. Not surprisingly, the editors of the volume *Ruins of Modernity*, for example,

having pointed to the link between modernity's 'multilayered sense of history' and the ruin, add that

... ruins can bear witness to, but can also idealize or undermine, modernity's asynchronous temporalities.²⁵

In other words, to localise such temporalities in modernity is an idealising gesture (which can undermine modernity's temporalities). This summary caveat merely restates seminal formulations of the problem of history in modernity, none perhaps better known than Walter Benjamin's description of the angel of history, the *angelus novus* (after Paul Klee):

His [the angel's] face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage ... But a storm is blowing from Paradise ... This storm propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward.²⁶

We need only point out that the 'catastrophe' which from this perspective underlies the perception of an ordered 'chain of events' ($T^1, T^2, T^3 \dots T^n$), must also displace – among everything else – the 'ordered' historical position of modernity itself. Where time, or the chain of events is 'a pile of debris' (in other words, 'a ruin') the historical divide between modernity and its pasts may itself be reduced to rubble. This pronounced late-modern view seems to admit a new image of the ruin into the realm of antiquity. Furthermore, if this 'new' image of the ruin exists in antiquity, then perhaps it is not as 'new' as we might otherwise imagine, but, to the contrary, quite 'old'. In other words, new ruins may be found in the past, and the past may be found in new ruins.

Can we really read such modern views, such implied anachronism, into the ancient past? Let us look at another example. Its source is the Byzantine encyclopaedia known as the *Suda*.

Note first that, like all encyclopaedias and perhaps unlike both the *Metamorphoses*' poetic text and Anselm Kiefer's artistic production (but more like Pausanias and Strabo), the *Suda* is not a high-flown meditation on change. It is a more practical attempt to preserve the past in the form of a fixed 'archive'. Also, unlike Ovid, whose personal history is famous (not least from his own poems), or Kiefer, who is a celebrity, the author of the *Suda* is unknown except by the name of Suidas, which most scholars now agree is a misreading of the title of his book. 'Suidas', we might say, is the personified image of a general ancient position. It is not a private perspective.²⁷ Finally, the ruins we are about to see are not the remains of glorious citadels. They do not carry with them the dramatic Gibborean narrative of downfall. Their story is and seems to have always been unknown – one of those we never interrogate in ordinary life. In this sense, they are perhaps 'invisible'. Yet it is precisely this veneer – as we shall see, it is a veneer – of the ordinary that lends the *Suda*'s example its strength.

In the *Suda*, then, under the letter *nu*, we find a short entry for *nuktikorax*, the long-eared owl, which, as our encyclopedia explains, is 'is a kind of solitary [*erêmikos*] bird':

It shuns places of habitation and instead seeks ruined [*erêmois*] and abandoned [*katalelumenais*] dwellings. For 'ruins' [*ereipia*] is what they call the sites on which houses once stood [*oikopeda*]. Likewise the sparrow [*strouthion*], a sad [*deilon*] bird ...²⁸

At first glance, this example seems to embody the same 'ancient' conception of the ruin and especially its visual attributes. The Greek word *ereipia*, 'ruins' is derived from the verb *ereipô*: 'throw or dash down, tear down'. As in Ovid, the ruin seems to be a sad, worthless, and thus desert space. Great or small, this landscape is a horizontal,

featureless, and in this sense ‘invisible’ emptiness. It marks – as before – downfall and the ravages of well-ordered time. It marks the place ‘on which houses once stood’.

Yet a seemingly small puzzle emerges from the text. The *Suda* says that the *nuktikorax* is a ‘solitary’ bird. The Greek adjective used here, *erêmikos*, means ‘of or for solitude, living in a desert’, a cognate of *erêmia*, ‘desert’, ‘wilderness’. If this solitary creature seeks a desert, what need, we may ask, does it have of ‘ruined’ or ‘abandoned’ dwellings or, indeed, of any kind of formerly lived-in abode? Why does this bird seek ‘sites on which houses once stood’? And why does this animal seek distinctly *human* remnants?

A little like Anselm Kiefer, the *Suda* too seems to say too much. Yet let me suggest that this surplus points, as before, to larger and more complex truths. Why does the owl care for ruins? In fact, it does not (science tells us that the long-eared owl prefers to nest in coniferous trees and thickets). The passage has little or nothing to do with ornithology. As has been long recognised, it belongs to a totally different tradition of discourse and thought.²⁹ Verbal echoes and a strong proximity of tone suggest that we must read the passage in relation to one of the strongest generic expressions of lament, in relation, almost bewilderingly, to Biblical ruins, and with specific attention to the book of *Psalms* (101 [102 Masoretic text].7–8):³⁰

I am like a desert [*erêmikôs*] owl, like an owl [*nuktikorax*] among the ruins [*en oikôpedôi*].
I lie awake; I have become like a bird [*strouthion*] alone [*monazôn*] on a roof.³¹

We are dealing it would seem not with animals or empirical facts, but with distinctly *human* emotions, with discursive genres and poetic intertexts. The object underlying the Psalmist’s lament is unspecified and invisible. Yet in its ‘original’ Judaic form at least, in the Hebrew version of the text which lies ‘underneath’ the Septuagint’s Greek version, it is impossible that any song of lament (no matter when it was originally composed) which speaks of ‘ruins’ should invoke, of course, anything but the City of Jerusalem, the ruin of ruins and ‘the city of eternal exile’, which is one of the most resonant ruins in the tradition of the West. This unspecified Jerusalem is a ‘pile of debris’ to match Mycenae, Rome, Troy or perhaps even New York.³² The *Suda*’s humble entry thus lies atop an intractable stratigraphy of oblique receptions and a virtual Babel of cultural, linguistic, social, religious values and historical layers – from the Biblical Hebrew source and the Septuagint, to a Byzantine reworking, from the Psalmist’s lament and the Hebraic tradition, through its Alexandrian permutations, through Christianity to the lexicon’s archive and thus back to the ancient, Pagan world – a ‘multilayered sense of history’ in the most immediate sense. Although the *Suda*’s use of the Bible as a source is known, we could not, and probably would not ever want to reduce the relations between these texts to a linear historical sequence of direct allusions and citations.³³ It is impossible to tell this story as an ‘organic’ (Aristotelian) narrative with a ‘beginning’, ‘middle’ and ‘end’.

Amidst such far-flung intertextuality and multilayered traditions, what is clear is that the *Suda*’s *non-human* subject in a short, practical entry which is part of a well-ordered, *alphabetical* compendium of facts, has become the vicarious bearer of a distinctly *human* sentiment, a being that lives in a time that is not a straight line, an embodiment of the idea of exile, diaspora, and of loss as a way of life. All these sentiments are focused, of course, on the material image of the ruin. Our example hints, clearly, but from an unknown distance, at what we might call an essential solitude or ‘homelessness’ or indeed simply ‘a sense of ruins’.³⁴

This is hardly a sense of ruin as plain downfall which, as we have noted, is associated with antiquity and with a representation of the ravages of time. It is, in fact, somewhat

closer to the sense of homelessness which is at the core of the experience of modernity.³⁵ Such homelessness and the *Suda's* ruins are not an emptiness. They are not 'worthless' empty space. We have already seen that there is nothing essential about the substance of the ruin. Green grass can be the mark of destruction. If we recall Poggio's description of Rome, he too invokes, paradoxically, image of exuberant growth and life in the form of vines and gardens as marks of decay. We can perhaps turn this around now: the *Suda's* ancient ruins too, whatever their material substance, are, paradoxically, not a 'desert'. They are not flat, empty 'invisible' space, even as they are destroyed. These ruins are the *nuktikorax's* ordinary 'home', the site of its everyday life. The owl has not lost its abode.³⁶ Its home has not been destroyed. Quite the opposite: it is *seeking* a home. Indeed, this home can never be 'destroyed', because it *is* by its nature a site of destruction (in this sense, one cannot ruin the ruin).

And yet, as we have already noted, the *nyktikorax* seeks a home in specifically *human* dwellings. Such dwellings, whether ruined or not, can never be the proper home of a bird or an animal, and are thus not a 'true home'. Owls and other birds do not really feel 'sadness' or the existential melancholia of loss. Owls are not songbirds, and they do not sing psalms of lament for Jerusalem. Unless, of course, they are the creation of human consciousness and the symbol of larger things.³⁷

Let us recapitulate: the *Suda's* passage brings to light a multilayered stratigraphy and a sentiment of essential displacement, diaspora, or 'homelessness', embodied in the material form of the ruin and its 'archaeology'. This perception of the ruin seems entirely different from the perception we have described earlier in our passage from Ovid. It is, I submit, closer to the condition of modernity and to characterisations of modern historical consciousness, its 'melancholia', the subject sundered from the world and from itself, the subject's 'homelessness', and so on.³⁸

We need, however, to understand this idea of diaspora, and its relation to the ruin, to the process of decay and to our examples a little better. As we have seen, the *nuktikorax's* 'homelessness' is anchored in its quest for alien, human habitation. The *Suda's* owl is not so much an animal as an animal figuration of human sentiment, a creature at odds with its own nature. If this is true, then perhaps the habitation it seeks, although a fallen ruin (*ereipia*), is likewise at odds with its own nature, not simply a visible pile of debris, but a much more elaborate construction that is an essential sentiment of ruins, like the Psalmist's thoughts and words. The *Suda's* ruins then are much closer to discourse. Yet in this, they seem to realign with the ruins in Ovid, the poet par excellence of the life of exile, which are 'only a name'. This realignment may suggest that the transmission in Ovid from material, or world, or visible image, to word or name, to something invisible, is not – melancholy as it is – the destructive act that a *prima facie* reading of the *Metamorphoses* might suggest. A second glance will show how obvious, indeed conventional this idea is.

As is widely recognised, Ovid's own life in exile is a life of ruin.³⁹ But it is a life, indeed a life of words, highly visible, transferrable, almost imperishable. Also, more specifically to our passage, when Ovid speaks of the past glory of Troy as 'mere names', especially when he is doing so in hexameter verse, the eponymous medium of epic poetry (the technical term in Greek is *epos*), he means more than he says. In epic poetry, the fall of a visible city or the death of a hero and their decay into 'invisible' words is no decay at all. To the contrary, it is precisely the Homeric idea of *kleos aphthiton*, 'imperishable fame'.⁴⁰ This is the general poetic principle of epic song: Troy's eternal visibility and the immortality of heroes are acquired in the conversion of the visible world into words of fame.⁴¹

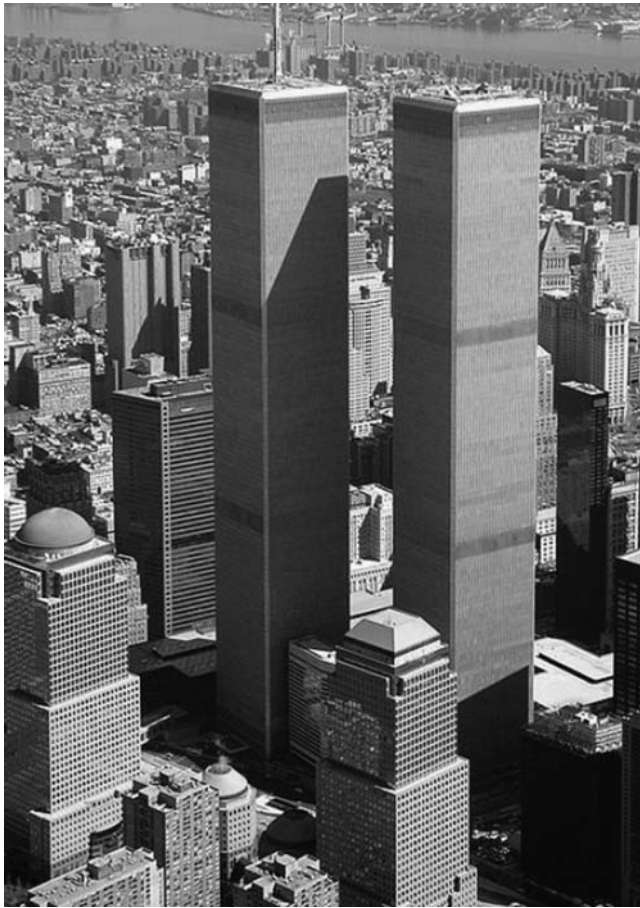


Figure 1. The Twin Towers (World Trade Center, New York).

Amidst such visibility, we realise again that the sequence of ‘beginning-middle-end’ which Aristotelian *muthos* traces in words is not a suitable image of time or of the transitions from great city or citadel to ruin. The transition from ‘visible reality’ to ‘invisible word’ or the geometric transition from an upright vertical position to a prostrate horizontal one is likewise not a simple act of change from ‘a’ to ‘b.’ It is not simply an act of disappearance, decay, or downfall.⁴² The changes are an essential interaction between inextricable elements, without which, we might almost say, history, and time itself would end, or disappear. To see flat landscape and to hear no words, not to know the names or the narratives of its indistinguishable parts, is to not know that, for example, the high citadel of Troy ever existed. Without the element of discourse, narrative and time, there is, paradoxically, nothing out there but a pile of debris or ‘the desert of the real’.⁴³

This point is highly abstract. But it is also something we can see, literally, in a picture (Figure 1). Not one stone is overturned. No puff of smoke is in sight. It is a perfect image, in which the Manhattan skyline stands upright and intact. Yet, to repeat my point about Troy, this time turned around and applied to the most iconic vertical landscape of modernity, unless we live outside of history and time, it is clear that this image also shows other, ‘invisible’ things and tells a narrative. It is, as Anselm Kiefer might say, a picture of

a ruin. Furthermore, unless we imagine ourselves in some form of time without change (an *imperium sine fine*, 'a thousand years' Reich', Benjamin's 'homogenous, empty time'), we know, with Kiefer, that *every* building must aspire to its own collapse.⁴⁴ This verbal and visual oxymoron is by no means exclusive to modernity. It is also part and parcel of the ancient world, and part of the vocabulary of antiquity. For example, in Homer, the canonical text par excellence of antiquity, one of the most prominent formulaic (and hence traditional) expressions for destruction, an expression applied to both individuals and cities, is *aipus olethros*, 'sheer destruction'. Here too, is an oxymoron. The idea of collapse and downfall is inseparable from the image of dizzying vertical heights.⁴⁵ This idea also embodies the temporality and historicity of the ruin: if destruction is always already inscribed in the building itself, then, to the degree that history, time, and change exist (in other words, if all things decay and collapse), the ruin is both fragile and contingent, and, curiously 'timeless'.⁴⁶ Nowhere is this idea more vividly attested – as we might perhaps already realise – than in the specific form of the tower and some of its contingent historical examples, both modern and ancient, to which, in this final part of our discussion we must now turn.

Let us begin with what is arguably 'the mother of all towers' and one of its most prominent examples (strangely situated in what is today Iraq, the centre of the modern conflict that brought down the Twin Towers) the Tower of Babel (Figure 2):⁴⁷

To grasp the force of the Tower of Babel as ruin we must take a look at the words of Genesis 11, where the story is told, and in particular at three of its key attributes: the visual contrast of vertical and horizontal elements; the amalgamation of image and word; and finally, the conflation of tower and city or tower and world at-large.

Consider first the visual image. Earlier in the narrative of Genesis, the Flood reduced the world to a featureless horizon (water seeks flatness by nature!) The survivors of the



Figure 2. Peter Breugel the Elder, "The Tower of Babel," 1563.

flood now dwell in a low, flat plain (Heb. *bika*, 'valley', 'rift'), but they all speak the same language and strive as one upwards, building a tall tower (Heb. *migdal*, something that 'grows big/tall'; root, *g-d-l*) that will 'reach the heavens'.⁴⁸ The tower will prevent the people from being 'scattered (Heb. *nafutz*) abroad upon the face of the whole earth', in other words, from being reduced yet again to a state of horizontal 'flatness'.⁴⁹ God descends (Heb. *vayered*) from above. Fearing the excess of man's united will and humanity's common language, he resolves to go down (Heb. *nerda*), to confute (*navla*) this language and to stop the tower's rise. The builders scatter, construction stops and the narrative ends.

The text of Genesis nevertheless offers – like Kiefer's or the *Suda*'s – a supplement, here in the form an *action* which seals the visual image of something scattered and flat, but likewise transforms it into a word (11.9):

Therefore is the *name* of it is called Babel, because the Lord did there confound [*balal*] the language of all the earth, and from thence did the Lord *scatter them* abroad upon the face of all the earth [my emphasis].

The name Babel and the verb *balal*, 'confound' are cognate (Semitic root *b-l-l*). The *action* binds the scattering of the Tower's builders and the confuting of their language by means of and within the Tower's name. Further emphasis of the analogy between confuting language and physical scattering is given by the anaphora '... the language of *all of the earth* ... scatter them upon the face of *all the earth*' (... *kol haaretz* ... *kol haaretz*).⁵⁰ This double 'horizontal' fragmentation counters the vertical aspiration of the Tower as an act of man's will. Yet the same fragmentation also preserves the tower for eternity in the name of Babel. This also seems to be exactly what the builders of the Tower had wanted. One might expect that the purpose of a tower whose top 'reaches the heavens' is to save the sons of Noah from another Flood. In fact, the builders' stated objective is to 'make ourselves a name' (*naaseh lanu shem*).

At the beginning of this essay we spoke of the ruin as 'a *muthos* in material form'. We saw this echoed in Ovid's idea of ruin as name and elsewhere. Here, it seems to me, we find a similar argument. The Tower is the material form of its name.⁵¹

This brief analysis suggests something of the visage and of the integrated 'mediality' of the Tower of Babel as image and word. There is, however, one more pointed rhetorical twist to the narrative which is important for our understanding of the ruin. The story of the *Tower* of Babel is, in fact, the story of the *City* of Babel. Genesis' carefully crafted narrative says (11. 4):

And they [the sons of Noah] said, Go to, let us build us a *city and a tower* [my emphasis] ...

At no point does the Biblical text speak of the Tower on its own. Rather, using the rhetorical trope of *hendiadys*, the 'one idea by means of two words', it marks the overlap of City and Tower. The figure is repeated two verses later when we are told that God descends to see '*the city and the tower*' (11.6). In fact, the text never describes the destruction of the Tower *per se*. Its final words (before the *action*) are 'and they [mankind] left off to build the *city*' (11. 8). What begins, then, as pointed *hendiadys* develops in the course of the narrative into a full blown *synekdoche* and a relation of metonymy which is of crucial importance for the inherent ambition embedded in the Tower and for the Tower's function as representation.

It is not hard to see that these elements, the geometrical visage, the special relation of image and word and the relation of metonymy between tower and city are also attested, with important and meaningful contingent variations, in almost every other tower, and in the tower-as-ruin. The Leaning Tower of Pisa, for example, always at the point of collapse,

clearly ‘overlaps’ its city, as does the Pharos of Alexandria, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world of which only underwater traces now exist. Yet it seems to me that one of the best examples of a tower displaying these elements, each inextricably wound up with the others, is one that accompanies this essay from the start, the World Trade Center. Let us briefly consider it again.⁵²

This large complex was a ‘city within a city’ and thus a metonymy of the city. Yet the Twin Towers’ metonymy resides even more distinctly, I submit, in their basic form, and in the very image which (somewhat like the tower of Babel), of course, is also their name, the Twin Towers.

A single tower is a long, vertical element. Georg Simmel is right to interpret this as a representation of the upwards thrust of human will.⁵³ But can one aspire to more? The World Trade Center’s architect Minoru Yamasaki wanted his design to reflect ‘man’s ability to find greatness’. His clients were corporate masters, of course, not the masses. He feared that a group of several towers may ‘look too much like a housing project (sic!)’ and would thus project an insufficiently imperious image.⁵⁴ His solution was to build two towers.

Two towers, let me suggest, like two vertical lines, mark not only an upwards thrust, but a horizontal axis, too (Figure 3). They thus mark, with perfect ‘geometric’ economy, the whole of the horizon: up, down and sideways. More than the will of man, two towers mark, let me suggest, modern man’s will to possess all that he surveys, and perhaps even all that lies beyond (unsurveyable heights) and which cannot be seen.

We could thus describe this as ‘an image of excess’, a modern image of *hybris* and also of *catastrophe*, the point of ‘a turning downwards’.⁵⁵ Furthermore, this is not just a matter of geometry and abstraction, but of material architecture and contingent images (Figure 4).

We can now also see that the Twin Towers, in the essence of their form, stand metonymically for the one City as a whole. They are, let me suggest, a geometric trope, a visual analogue to the Biblical *hendiadys*, the rhetorical figure which expresses ‘one idea by two words’ and which conflates ‘the City’ (and in this sense ‘all the earth’) and ‘the Tower’.⁵⁶

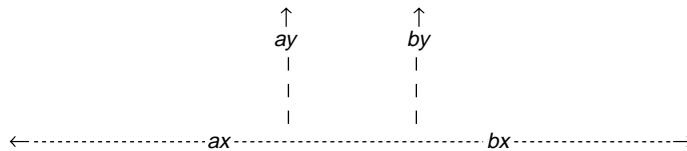


Figure 3.



Figure 4.

We all know that New York and its towers are symbols of modernity's excess. One needs only to consider, for example, how many futuristic disaster movies, *The Day After Tomorrow*, (2012), *2012* (2009), *Deep Impact* (1998), *Armageddon* (1998) and more, rely on precisely this cityscape and its destruction for their plot and often also for the metaphor/image of their opening or closing scenes.⁵⁷ But, as we have already pointed out, the association of the ruin with modernity and its exclusion from the ancient world is mistaken. This holds true, I submit, in precise contingent detail, in the case of the tower-as-ruin too.

Consider the following images circa 1929 in postcards from the archives of Walter Benjamin, who, as we have seen, is one of the 'authors' of modernity's conception of both the ruin and of modernity 'itself' (Figure 5).⁵⁸

Here, then, is another image of the 'City'. The caption reads *San Gimignano: Panorama dal Poggio*, 'a view from the hill'.⁵⁹ The ancient town of San Gimignano, is, of course, best known for, indeed almost synonymous with its thirteenth-century towers, many times destroyed, but now restored to their full height (Figure 6).

This second postcard clearly shows three towers. But the essence of the image, beyond doubt, is the number *two*. The caption, the *name of the image*, reads, 'Le due Torre Salvucci', 'the *two* towers of the Salvucci family'.

We have already seen, in the words of Poggio and Kiefer, that the same object, 'grass', 'a garden', 'vines', can be both the sign of life and a mark of decay. We have likewise seen that the movement of historical time, 'real' time, cannot be restricted to a linear, numerical progression. These two sets of images of New York and San Gimignano, combined into one (a visual *hendiadys*) are, I submit, a literal 'picture' of these arguments. They tell us that images and names that are 'exactly the same' – the old and the new, can still, 'at the same time', be vastly different in terms of history, geography, language, ethics, and politics. They teach us that every building, no matter how complete, is a manifestation of *excess* and is thus, also, inherently, a ruin. The Ruin is present in a building, even when a building is intact, even when the destruction is *not* to be seen, even when a building is described or remembered in words.



Figure 5. San Gimignano-Panorama dal Poggio. *Walter Benjamin's Archive: Images, Texts, Signs*, 177.



Figure 6. San Gimignano - Palazzo Pesciolini e le due Torri Salvucci. *Walter Benjamin's Archive: Images, Texts, Signs*, 177.

Michael Roth, Clare Lyons and Charles Merewether, the editors of *Irresistible Decay: Ruins Reclaimed*, are thus mistaken to suggest that 'ruins are the product of modernity'. They likewise misconceive the historicity of the ruin and its invisibility in antiquity when they suggest that 'in ancient times, the past was freely used as the foundation for subsequent building or, if too sacred to be discarded, was often buried'.⁶⁰ In modernity ruins do, of course, occupy 'a central position in our collective imagination'.⁶¹ There is no question that some of antiquity's famous ruins are the subject of modernity's intensive gaze. The Parthenon, for example, having survived ancient wars and more-recent Venetian cannonballs, is now being restored to its perfect glory, yet it will, of course always remain 'a ruin'. What is mistaken is to exclude the ruin from antiquity. As I have tried to argue, the 'antiquity' of ruins denotes, not merely the 'visibility' of the past in the present, but, paradoxically, its 'visibility' within that very past. The stones of the past may be 'recycled' for other uses or buried in the ground away from sight, but the ruin in antiquity is a medium (recycled stones are literally, a 'medium') used, like memory, for its own sake: it is 'that

which is experienced', like the 'earth', as Walter Benjamin in the epigraph to our essay suggests, 'in which ancient cities lie buried'.

Nowhere, it seems to me, is this more evident than in the most prominent ruin in antiquity which, already by Strabo's time was not to be seen because, as Strabo says (*Geog.* 13.1.38.1–5),

When Troy was overthrown from its foundation all the stones were removed for the reparation of the other cities.⁶²

It took the modern efforts of Schliemann, Dorpfeld and others, in the nineteenth century, to recover these stones.⁶³ But it is not stones we look at. As John Ruskin, for example stressed:

The greatest glory of a building is not in its stones, nor in its gold. Its glory is in its Age, and in that deep sense of voicefulness, of stern watching, of mysterious sympathy, nay even of approval or condemnation, which we feel in walls that have long been washed by the passing waves of humanity.⁶⁴

This 'deep sense of voicefulness' of a building is precisely the *silence* of ruin, but it is also, for example, the voice given to the ruins of Troy by the single most famous monument of the ancient world, the poetry of Homer.⁶⁵ Here we find the walls of Troy and its many tall towers or indeed, metonymically, 'the holy citadel of Troy' (*Troiês hieron ptoliethron; pyrgos . . . megas Iliou*) in full view.⁶⁶

The fate of the holy tower and the city of Troy is sealed. It is as certain as the fate of the proud Oedipus in Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*. 'We all know,' as Anselm Kiefer says, 'that one day everything will collapse'. Yet Homer's poetry represents a fundamentally *different* narrative choice from the one made by Sophocles. Tragedy gives words to the downfall. Oedipus is blinded, Agamemnon, Clytemnestra and Antigone all die in the course of tragic narrative action. In contrast, the destruction of Troy and its walls, its 'ruin' – the common noun denotes here both the event and the material remains – are *not* described in Homer's *Iliad*. Even the *Odyssey*, although that poem postdates the 'sheer destruction' (*aipys olethros*), leaves that act and those visions largely beyond the boundaries of its narrative. Strangely, it is precisely the epic occlusion of destruction that preserves the 'perfect visibility' we might say, of the ruin of Troy within the *Iliad* and *Odyssey's* 'voicefulness'.⁶⁷ Herein within unsaid words lies 'the antiquity of the ruin'. It is, it seems to me, an important strand of historical consciousness in antiquity.

We must offer one brief final comment. Our conclusion depends, perhaps optimistically, on the possibility of 'translation', 'transmission', or 'free movement' between the visible and the articulable. But can we really preserve the visual order of things in words? As one of the most influential thinkers on the topic, Michel Foucault, says in *Les mots et les choses*, 'it is vain that we say what we see':⁶⁸

What we see never resides in what we say. And it is in vain that we attempt to show, by the use of images, metaphors, or similes, what we are saying; the space where they achieve their splendour is not that deployed by our eyes but that defined by the sequential elements or syntax.

Yet in the same breath Foucault adds what might seem like a contradictory statement:

Between the figure and the text we must admit a whole series of crisscrossings, or rather between the one and the other attacks are launched and arrows fly against the enemy target, campaigns designed to undermine and destroy, wounds and blows from the lance, a battle . . . images falling into the midst of words, verbal flashes crisscrossing drawings . . . discourse cutting into the form of things.

There is, of course, no contradiction here. Gilles Deleuze, one of Foucault's most influential exponents, explains:

The two sorts of text do not in the least contradict each other. The first says that there is no isomorphism or homology, nor any common form to seeing and speaking, to the visible and the articulable. The second says that the two forms spill over into one another, as in a battle. The image of a battle signifies precisely that there is no isomorphism. The two heterogeneous forms comprise a condition and a conditioned element, light and visibilities, language and statements; however, the condition does not 'contain' the conditioned element but offers it in a space of dissemination, and offers up itself as a form of exteriority.⁶⁹

What we possess, then, are precisely the 'criscrossings' and 'battles', 'discourse cutting into the form of things'. Where can we find these battles? In Homer, but also in the work of Anselm Kiefer, at Ground Zero in New York, and in other 'piles of debris' that are, it seems to me, the ruin.⁷⁰

Notes

1. Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, 2: 576.
2. A narrative that is also an un-conscious of place, in the sense provided, for example, by Freud, when he considers Rome in his *Civilization and its Discontents* (SE 21 [1927–1931]: 64–148, or, indeed, in his early notions of archaeology, for example in "Delusions and dreams in Jensen's 'Gradiva.'" (SE 9 [1907]: 1–95).
3. See, for example, Schönle, "Ruins and History: Observations on Russian Approaches to Destruction and Decay," 651: "The disintegration wrought on their roughened surface or grotesque forms sometimes points to a specific history of decay, whether incremental or catastrophic, and hence offers visible traces of historical derivation."
4. *Peripeteia: Poet.* 1452a.2–23; *katharsis: Poet.* 1449b.24. For the pleasure of ruins see, for example, Macauley, *Pleasure of Ruins*; Zucker, "Ruins, An Aesthetic Hybrid."
5. Cf. *Poet.* 1450b.25–30.
6. For architectural follies see, for example, the monument to Rousseau at Ermenonville or other follies which became popular from the eighteenth century and Harries, *The Unfinished Manner: Essays on the Fragment in the Later Eighteenth Century*, 92; further bibliography in Roth, "Irresistible Decay: Ruins Reclaimed," 22 n. 6. From a different perspective, see partially restored commemorative ruins like the Frauenkirche in Dresden. Discussion, for example by Zill, "A True Witness of Transience," 811–27 in this volume.
7. Cf. Simmel's classic formulation in "The Ruin," 261–2.
8. . . . *sic tempora verti*
cernimus atque illas adsumere robora gentes,
concidere has; sic magna fuit censuque virisque
perque decem potuit tantum dare sanguinis annos,
nunc humilis veteres tantummodo Troia ruinas
et pro divitiis tumulos ostendit avorum.
clara fuit Sparte, magnae viguere Mycenae,
nec non et Cecropis, nec non Amphionis arces.
vile solum Sparte est, altae cecidere Mycenae,
Oedipodioniae quid sunt, nisi nomina, Thebae?
quid Pandioniae restant, nisi nomen, Athenae?

For a discussion see Azzara, "Osservazioni sul sens delle rovine neall cultura antica," 2–3, with further references in n. 9, p.10. The passage and its context contain many difficulties. See Hardie, "The Speech of Pythagoras in Ovid *Metamorphoses* 15: Empedoclean Epos."

9. On ruin time see Hetzler, "Causality: Ruin Time and Ruins," 51: "Ruin time is immanent in a ruin and this time includes the time when it was first built, that is, the time when it was not a ruin; the time of its maturation as a ruin."
10. Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, 8: 267. Bracciolini, *Historia de Varietate Fortunae*; Gibbon, p. 58, note 51. For a facsimile see http://www.uni-mannheim.de/mateo/itali/autoren/poggio_itali.html
11. Cf., for example, Rüdiger Zill, "A True Witness of Transience," 811–27, Jean-Pierre Vallat, "Héritage, mémoire, identités. La liste UNESCO du Patrimoine mondial," 759–81, Salvatore

- Settis, “Nécessité des ruines: les enjeux du classiques” 717–40 and other contributions in this volume.
12. Anselm Kiefer, “Chute d’Etoiles”, *Monumenta* 2007 (8 July 2007), Grand Palais. This exhibition took place next door to the conference from which the present volume evolved (“Antiquity and the Ruin”, University of London Institute in Paris, 8–10 June 2008). See Dagen, *Sternenfall – Chute d’étoiles: Anselm Kiefer au Grand Palais – Monumenta 2007*; Hell, “Briefly Noted: The Twin Towers of Anselm Kiefer and the Trope of Imperial Decline.” For a discussion of other works by Kiefer in this volume see Andreas Wittenburg’s “Les ruines comme mémoire des crimes du passé,” in this volume, 799–810.
 13. See Hell and Schönle, “Introduction,” 3.
 14. See, for example, Davis, *Critical Excess: Overreading in Derrida, Deleuze, Levinas, Žižek, and Cavell*.
 15. The association is also prominent in earlier modernity. See, for example, Robert Browning’s “Love Among the Ruins”: “To distinguish slopes of verdure, certain rills / from the hills / intersect and give a name to, else they run / into one” and, on its possible material sources, Parr, “The Site and Ancient City of Browning’s Love among the Ruins.”
 16. *Physics* IV 220a.24–26: ὁ χρόνος ἀριθμὸς ἐστὶν κινήσεως κατὰ τὸ πρότερον καὶ ὕστερον, καὶ συνεχῆς (συνεχοῦς γάρ), φανερόν. For Aristotle on time see Coope, *Time for Aristotle: Physics* IV 10–14.
 17. *Poet.* 1450b.26–30: ὄλον δέ ἐστιν τὸ ἔχον ἀρχὴν καὶ μέσον καὶ τελευτήν. ἀρχὴ δέ ἐστιν ὃ αὐτὸ μὲν μὴ ἐξ ἀνάγκης μετ’ ἄλλο ἐστὶν, μετ’ ἐκείνο δ’ ἕτερον πέφυκεν εἶναι ἢ γίνεσθαι· τελευτὴ δέ τοῦναντίον ὃ αὐτὸ μὲν μετ’ ἄλλο πέφυκεν εἶναι ἢ ἐξ ἀνάγκης ἢ ὡς ἐπὶ τὸ πολὺ, μετὰ δὲ τοῦτο ἄλλο οὐδέν.
Beginnings, middles and ends are, of course, causally linked in Aristotle. Such causality requires separate, extended discussion, but, apart from anything else, it is a way of indicating fixed linear sequence.
 18. The contradiction may have been more pronounced in antiquity. In modern times, “no words” can imply a silent reading of the (graphic) letters on a page. Evidence suggests that silent reading was uncommon in antiquity (see Knox, “Silent Reading in Antiquity”; also, for example, Nietzsche’s general view in *Beyond Good and Evil*, section 247). The “silence” of ruins would thus mark the idea of “no words” much more strongly.
 19. Hell and Schönle, “Introduction,” 9.
 20. See Roth, Lyons and Merewether, *Irresistible Decay*, inner cover.
 21. See the articles in this volume and especially the essay by Catharine Edwards “Imagining Ruins in Ancient Rome”, 645–61.
 22. Οὐδὲν δ’ ἴχνος σώζεται τῆς ἀρχαίας πόλεως. εἰ κότεως ἄτε γὰρ ἐκπεπορημένων τῶν κύκλων πόλεων, οὐ τελέως δὲ κατεσπασμένων, ταύτης δ’ ἐκ βάρθρων ἀνατετραμμένης, οἱ λίθοι πάντες εἰς τὴν ἐκείνων ἀνάληψιν μετηνέχθησαν.
“Pausanias periodically informs his readers that a city or a village is defunct, ‘in ruins’, yet then goes on to describe an apparently still functioning sanctuary (or sanctuaries) within it” (Alcock, *Graecia Capta: The Landscapes of Roman Greece*, 207, w. table). This apparent paradox slots comfortably into the conventional argument about the “invisibility” of the past (and a visibility of the present) among ancient writers.
 23. Against modern progressionism in the context of antiquity, see, for example, Williams, *Shame and Necessity*.
 24. See Lausberg, Orton and Anderson, *Handbook of Literary Rhetoric: A Foundation for Literary Study*, 496, section 1133; Laird, “Sounding out Ecphrasis: Art and Text in Catullus 64”; Elsner, “The Verbal and the Visual: Cultures of Ekphrasis in Antiquity” (and elsewhere in Elsner’s work). For the modern use of the term see Heffernan, “Ekphrasis and Representation.”
 25. Julia Hell and Andreas Schönle, *Ruins of Modernity*, 9.
 26. Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” in *Illuminations*, 257. Also cited by Richard Alston, in this volume 697–716. For Benjamin and ruins see Caygill, *Walter Benjamin: The Colour of Experience*, 59 (on the *Trauerspiel*), 146 (on the *Arcades* project and on Paris); Rosen, “Walter Benjamin and His Ruins”; Wohlin, *Walter Benjamin: An Aesthetic of redemption*; Schönle, “Ruins and History,” 650–1 rightly notes the opposition between Benjamin’s view of the ruin as an emblem of essential fragmentation, and Simmel’s view of the ruin as “psychic wholeness.”

27. See Franz Dölger, “Zur ΣΟΥΔΑ-Frage”, but recently Hemmerdinger, “‘Suidas,’ et non la ‘Souda,’” 31.
28. *Suda*, 583.1–4 (Adler): Νυκτικώραξ: εἶδος ὄρνέου ἐρημικοῦ, ὃ τὰς οἰκουμένας φεύγων τῶν οἰκιῶν ταῖς ἐρήμοις καὶ καταλελυμέναις προστρέχει· τὰ γὰρ οἰκόπεδα ἐρείπια φασιν. οὕτω καὶ τὸ στρουθίον δειλὸν ὄρνεον ὄν ὑπὸ ἀγωνίας ἐλαυεῖ τὸν ὕπνον. For the purposes of this text I prefer to translate a little differently from, for example, Catharine Roth (*Suda on Line*, http://www.stoa.org/sol-bin//search.pl?search_method=QUERY&login=&enlogin=&searchstr=nu,583&field=adlerhw_gr&db=REAL). I am grateful to William Hutton, Catharine Roth and the *Suda on Line* project for their help.
29. See Adler, *Suidae Lexicon* vol. 3, Nu 538, and Theodoret of Cyrus’ commentary (PG 80.1677c) on Psalm 101.7 LXX.
30. “A Prayer for one afflicted, when he is faint and pours out his complaint before the face of Yahweh”: ὁμοιώθην πελεκᾶνι ἐρημικῷ, ἐγενήθην ὡσεὶ νυκτικώραξ ἐν οἰκοπέδῳ, ἠγρύπνησα καὶ ἐγενήθη ὡσεὶ στρουθίον μονάζον ἐπὶ δώματι. “I am like a desert owl [*pelican*], like an owl [*nuktikorax*] among the ruins. I lie awake; I have become like a bird [*strouthion*] alone on a roof.” It is clear from the presentation and the mention of the *strouthion*, which appears in the following sentence (583.4) in the *Suda*, that the Septuagint text is here the source of the *Suda*’s tradition, as it is in various other instances (*strouthion* = “bird,” “sparrow.” The original Hebrew *tsippor* denotes any small bird, 102.8: מִיְתִי לְקָצָה :מִדְּבַר הַיְיָ כְּכֹס הַרְבּוֹת :שְׂקֵתִי וְאַהֲרִי בְּצַפּוֹר בּוֹדֵד עַל-גָּן :). The exact route by which this text arrives in the *Suda* is impossible to trace. As Catharine Roth of the *Suda Online* informs me (pers. comm. 29 July 2010) “in the notes we often say something like ‘presumably quoted from somewhere’”).
31. Compare Aeschrus, *Agamemnon*, 2–3: κοιμώμενος / στέγαις Ἀτρειδῶν ἄγκαθεν, κυνὸς δίκην, “lying on the roof like a dog”. Transfer of human sentiment onto an animal embodies the sense of dislocation and in this case the impending ruin of the “house” of Atreus.
32. The emblem of this Jerusalem is, of course, the Wailing Wall, the ruined remains of the western wall of the Temple of Solomon which are meticulously preserved in (Jewish) cultural memory as well as in material form.
33. The *Suda* contains much material by way, for example, of biblical proper names (*Galaaditis* = Gilead, *Gabao* = Gideon), lexical items and more. The reference to Psalms is well recognised (Adler, *Suidae Lexicon*, Nu 583).
34. See Huysen, “Nostalgia for Ruins,” 6–21.
35. Cf. for example, Lukács in the opening sentences of *Theory of the Novel*, 29–30: “Happy are those ages [in antiquity] when the starry sky is the map of all possible paths . . . Everything in such ages is new and yet familiar, full of adventure and yet their own. The world is wide and yet it is like a home . . . the world and the self, the light and the fire, are sharply distinct, yet they never become permanent strangers to one another . . . ‘Philosophy is really homesickness,’ says Novalis: ‘it is the urge to be at home everywhere.’ That is why philosophy, as a form of life or as that which determines the form and supplies the content of literary creation, is always a symptom of the rift between ‘inside’ and ‘outside’, a sign of the essential difference between the self and the world, the incongruence of soul and deed. That is why happy ages [of antiquity, for example] have no philosophy, or why . . . all men in such ages are philosophers . . . When this is so, passion is the way, predetermined by reason, towards complete self-being and from madness come enigmatic yet decipherable messages of a transcendental power, otherwise condemned to silence. There is not yet any interiority, for there is not yet any exterior, any ‘otherness’ for the soul. The soul goes out to seek adventure; it lives through adventure, but it does not know the real torment of seeking and the real danger of finding; such a soul never stakes itself; it does not yet know that it can lose itself, it never thinks of having to look for itself.”
36. Unlike even the underlying “narrative” of its source, Psalm 101.
37. Cf. the owl’s function as a symbol of Athena and later of the city of Athens (see Shapiro, “From Athena’s Owl to the Owl of Athens,” 213–24).
38. See above, n. 31.
39. See, for example, Williams and Walker, “Ovid in Exile”; Williams, “Ovid’s Exile Poetry: *Tristia*, *Epistulae ex Ponto* and *Ibis*,” 233–48; more recently, McGowan, *Ovid in Exile: Power and Poetic Redress in the Tristia and Epistulae ex Ponto*.
40. See, for example, Nagy, *The Best of the Achaians: Concepts of the Hero in Archaic Greek Poetry*, Ch. 10, “Poetic Visions of Immortality for the Hero,” 175–210.

41. Cf. *Iliad* 2.485: ὑμεῖς γὰρ θεαὶ ἐστε πάρεστε τε ἴστε τε πάντα, “you [Muses] are goddesses, you are present [everywhere] and know everything”. The omnipresence, (implied) infinite power of vision and (stated) omniscience of the Muses is transferred onto mortal words in the form of poetry. Comments on image and word in the passage in Kahane, *Diachronic Dialogues: Continuity and Authority in Homer and the Homeric Tradition*, 16–17, 26 n. 49. Catharine Edwards, in this volume, 645–66 says: “In a sense Troy’s fame lies in its ruin – as Lucan would memorably observe (9.964).”
42. “Ruins signal simultaneously an absence and a presence; they show, they are, an intersection of the visible and the invisible . . . But their visible presence also points to durability, even if that which is, is no longer what it once was.” Settis, “Foreword,” in Roth, Lyons and Merewether, *Irresistible Decay*, vii.
43. See Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real: Five Essays on September 11 and Related Dates*, 15: “The Wachowski brothers’ hit *Matrix* (1999) brought this logic to its climax: the material reality we all experience and see around us is a virtual one, generated and co-ordinated by a gigantic mega-computer to which we are all attached; when the hero (played by Keanu Reeves) awakens into ‘real reality’, he sees a desolate landscape littered with burnt-out ruins – what remains of Chicago [another great city, AK] after global war. . . . Was it not something of a similar order that took place in New York on September 11? Its citizens were introduced to the ‘desert of the real’.”
44. See also James Porter’s contribution to this volume, “Sublime Monument and Sublime Ruins in Ancient Aesthetics,” 685–96. For “empty time” see Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” in *Illuminations*, (XVIII B), 264.
45. For example, *Iliad* 11.174, 441; 12.345, etc. *Odyssey* 1.11, 37; 5.30. The expression *aipus olethros* is used a total of 25 times in Homer. Heubeck in *Homer’s Odyssey: A Commentary*, 1: 73 *ad loc.*, while getting the basic sense right, fails to understand the logic of the phrase: “ἀἰπύς is similarly used metaphorically with φόνος, πόνος and χόλος; though it is not quite clear what metaphor is presupposed, the general sense seems to be ‘merciless, hard to overcome’.” See Verdenius, “The Metaphorical Use of”; *Lfgre* s.v. *aipys*.
46. As Merewether, for example says, “ruins collapse temporalities (“Traces of Loss,” in *Irresistible Decay*, 25).
47. Commentaries on the Tower are too numerous to list, but see, for example, responses by Primo Levi (HaKarmi, “Hubris, Language, and Oppression”) and Franz Kafka (comments in Steiner, *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation*, 69–70).
48. See Ben-Yehuda, *Thesaurus Totius Hebraeitis et Veteris et Recentioris*, 2: 2778. This dictionary, now over 100 years old, and problematic at many points, is still an unmatched source of historical references and perspectives.
49. The verb *nafutz*, root *p-waw-ts* (פּוּץ), “be scattered”, “broken”, also denotes the sense of “exile”, “diaspora” in later usage. See Ben-Yehuda, *Thesaurus Totius Hebraeitis*, 16: 7849 s.v. *tefutza*.
50. See a discussion and comments (esp. on Wagner’s views of such scattering) in Andreas Huyssen, *Present Pasts*, 44.
51. Kafka “saw in the Tower and its ruin a dramatic shorthand through which to convey certain exact, though not quite wholly articulate, intimation about man’s linguistic condition and the relation of that condition to God . . . Rebellion and worship are inextricably mixed [in the Tower]. . . .” (Steiner, *After Babel*, 69).
52. Almost every major living thinker has contributed to the discussion on the Twin Towers, of course, including, for example, Fredric Jameson, Noam Chomsky, Slavoj Žižek, Paul Virilio and countless others. I am unaware of “formal” analyses which follow the lines suggested below.
53. “What has led the building upward is human will; what gives it its present appearance is the brute, downward-dragging, corroding crumbling power of nature . . . Nature has transformed the work of art into material for her own expression, as she had previously served as material for art” (Simmel, “The Ruin,” 261–2).
54. Yamasaki’s views, in fact, combine technical instrumentality, banal aspiration, and ethical crassness: “After studying more than one hundred schemes in model form, Yamasaki decided on a two-tower development to contain the nine million square feet of office space. One tower became unreasonable in size and unwieldy structurally, yet several towers became too approximate for their size and ‘looked too much like a housing project’ [sic], whereas two towers gave a reasonable office area on each floor, took advantage of the magnificent views, and allowed a manageable structural system. . . . ‘The World Trade Center should,’ Yamasaki

said, 'because of its importance, become a living representation of man's belief in humanity, his need for individual dignity, his belief in the cooperation of men, and through this cooperation his ability to find greatness.'" Heyer, *Architects on Architecture*, 194–5. See also Yamasaki, *A Life in Architecture*.

55. Cf. HaKarmi, "Hubris, Language, and Oppression." Franz Kafka referred to the tower as "the pit of Babel" (See Steiner, *After Babel*, 70).
56. Note that "the one tower of Babel" = "the two towers of the WTC" = "the City". The "arithmetic" of metonymy resists numeric quantification.
57. *The Day After Tomorrow* (Roland Emmerich, 2004); *Asteroid* (Bradford May, 1997); *Deep Impact* (Mimi Leder, 1998); *2012* (Roland Emmerich, 2009); the *Matrix* franchise, especially *Matrix Revolutions* (Wachowski brothers, 2003) and its closing visage of a post-holocaust cityscape. For the tower as an enhanced presence in film see, for example, Jameson on the Westin Bonaventure in LA in *The Cultural Turn: Selected Writings on the Postmodern 1983–1998*, 1–20. Further brief comments by Kahane, ("Introduction," in artist Jaspar Lester-Joseph's project, *Revisiting the Bonaventure Hotel*, 9–10).
58. See Marx, et al., *Walter Benjamin's Archive: Images, Texts, Signs*, 177.
59. The pun is almost irresistible: Poggio Bracciolini is the man who stands on the "hill" (*poggio*) watching the past . . .
60. Roth, *Irresistible Decay*, inside front cover.
61. Roth, *Irresistible Decay*, inside front cover.
62. See above, n. 19.
63. See Latacz, *Troy and Homer: Towards a Solution of an Old Mystery*.
64. Ruskin, *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, 172.
65. Cf., for example, Nagy, *Greek Myth and Poetics*, 222: "The entire *Iliad* is a *sêma* reinforcing the will of Zeus." Also, Grethlein, "Memory and Material Objects in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*," *Journal of Hellenic Studies*": "there is a juxtaposition here of epic poetry and the 'archaeology of the past' as two different media of memory."
66. Cf. e.g. *Odyssey* 1.2: Τροίης ἱερὸν πτολίεθρον. Grethlein ("Memory and Material Remains," 35) cites Andrew Ford who sees the wall as "a figure for a written-down *Iliad*" (Ford, *Homer: Poetry of the Past*, 150).
67. See Bakker and Kahane, *Written Voices, Spoken Signs*.
68. Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 9, cited in Deleuze, *Foucault*, 56.
69. Deleuze, *Foucault*, 56.
70. I am grateful to William Hutton, James Porter, Pietro Pucci, Catharine Roth, Andreas Wittenburg, James Bradburne for helpful comments.

Notes on contributor

Ahuvia Kahane is Professor of Greek and Head of the Department of Classics and Philosophy and was formerly Director of the Humanities and Arts Research Centre at Royal Holloway, University of London. He works on ancient literature, especially Homer, on the classical tradition, literary history, visual arts, psychoanalysis and more. His forthcoming books include *Epic, Novel, and the Progress of Antiquity* (Bloomsbury, 2012), *Homer: A Guide to the Perplexed* (Continuum, 2012) and *Social Order and Informal Codes* (ed., in Hebrew [Resling, 2011]). Ahuvia Kahane is also Senior Associate of the *Oxford Centre for Hebrew and Jewish Studies* and is planning a new Hebrew verse translation of Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*.

Bibliography

- Adler, Ada. *Suidae Lexicon*. Stuttgart: Teubner, 1928–38.
- Alcock, Sue. *Graecia Capta: The Landscapes of Roman Greece*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.
- Alston, Richard. "Seeing Caesor in Ruins: Towards a Radical Aesthetic of Ruins," *European Review of History* 18 (2011): 697–716.
- Azzara, Silvia. "Osservazioni sul sens delle rovine neall cultura antica." In *Senso delle rovine e riuso dell'antico*, edited by Walter Cupperi, 1–12. Annali della Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa Ser. 4, n. 14. Pisa: Scuola Normale Superiore, 2002.
- Bakker, Egbert and Ahuvia Kahane, eds. *Written Voices, Spoken Signs: Tradition, Performance, and the Epic Text*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997.

- Ben-Yehuda, Eliezer. *Thesaurus Totius Hebraicitatis et Veteris et Recentioris*. Jerusalem: Makor Publishers, 1980.
- Benjamin, Walter. *Illuminations*, edited by Hanna Arendt. New York: Schocken Books, 1968.
- . *Selected Writings*, vol. 2.1 and 2.2: 1927–1934, edited by Michael W. Jennings. Cambridge, MA: Belknap, Harvard University Press, 1999.
- Bracciolini, Poggio. *Historia de Varietate Fortunae*. Paris: Antonius Urbanus Coustellier, 1723.
- Caygill, Howard. *Walter Benjamin: The Colour of Experience*. London and New York: Routledge, 1997.
- Coope, Ursula. *Time for Aristotle: Physics IV 10–14*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.
- Dagen, Philippe. *Sternenfall – Chute d'étoiles: Anselm Kiefer au Grand Palais – Monumenta 2007*. Paris: Editions du Regard, 2007.
- Davis, Colin. *Critical Excess: Overreading in Derrida, Deleuze, Levinas, Žižek, and Cavell*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010.
- Deleuze, Gilles. *Foucault*. London: Continuum, 2006 [1986].
- Dölger, Franz. "Zur ΣΟΥΔΑ-Frage." *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 38, no. 1 (1938): 36–57.
- Edwards, Catharine. "Imagining Ruins in Ancient Rome," *European Review of History* 18 (2011): 645–66.
- Elsner, Jas, ed. "The Verbal and the Visual: Cultures of Ekphrasis in Antiquity." Special issue of *Ramus* 31–32 (2002).
- Ford, Andrew. *Homer: Poetry of the Past*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992.
- Foucault, Michel. *The Order of Things*. Trans. Antony Sheridan. London and New York: Pantheon, 1970 [orig. *Les mots et les choses*. Paris: Gallimard, 1966].
- Freud, Sigmund. "Delusions and dreams in Jensen's 'Gradiva'." *SE* 9 (1907): 1–95.
- . *Civilization and its Discontents*, *SE* 21 (1927–1931): 64–148.
- Gibbon, Edward. *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. Boston: Little and Brown and Co., 1855.
- Grethlein, Johannes. "Memory and Material Objects in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*." *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 128 (2008): 27–51.
- HaKarmi, Batnativ. "Hubris, Language, and Oppression: Recreating Babel in Primo Levi's *If this Is a Man* and the Midrash." *Partial Answers: Journal of Literature and the History of Ideas* 7 (2009): 31–43.
- Hardie, Philip. "The Speech of Pythagoras in Ovid *Metamorphoses* 15: Empedoclean Epos." *Classical Quarterly* NS 45 (1995): 204–14.
- Harries, Elizabeth W. *The Unfinished Manner: Essays on the Fragment in the Later Eighteenth Century*. Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 1994.
- Heffernan, James. "Ekphrasis and Representation." *New Literary History* 22, no. 2 (1991): 297–316.
- Hell, Julia. "Briefly Noted: The Twin Towers of Anselm Kiefer and the Trope of Imperial Decline." *The Germanic Review* 84 (2009): 84–93.
- and Andreas Schönle. "Introduction." In *Ruins of Modernity*, edited by *idem*, 1–14. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010.
- and Andreas Schönle, eds. *Ruins of Modernity*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010.
- Hemmerdinger, Bertrand. "'Suidas,' et non la 'Souda'." *Bollettino dei classici*. 3rd ser. 19 (1998): 31–2.
- Hetzler, Florence M. "Causality: Ruin Time and Ruins." *Leonardo* 21 (1988): 51–5.
- Heubeck, Alfred. *Homer's Odyssey: A Commentary*, vol. I. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990.
- Heyer, Paul. *Architects on Architecture: New Directions in America*. New York: Walker & Co., 1966.
- Huyssen, Andreas. *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003.
- . "Nostalgia for Ruins." *Grey Room* 23 (2006): 6–21.
- Jameson, Fredric. *The Cultural Turn: Selected Writings on the Postmodern 1983–1998*. London: Verso, 1998.
- Kahane, Ahuvia. *Diachronic Dialogues: Continuity and Authority in Homer and the Homeric Tradition*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005.
- . "Introduction." In *Revisiting the Bonaventure Hotel*, edited by Jaspas Lester-Joseph, 1–3. London: Copy Press, 2008.
- Knox, Bernard M.V. "Silent Reading in Antiquity." *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 9 (1968): 421–35.

- Laird, Andrew. "Sounding out Ecphrasis: Art and Text in Catullus 64." *The Journal of Roman Studies* 83 (1993): 18–30.
- Latacz, Joachim. *Troy and Homer: Towards a Solution of an Old Mystery*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004 [Orig. *Troia und Homer: Der Weg zur Lösung eines alten Rätsels*. Munich/Berlin: Koehler & Amelang, 2001].
- Lausberg, Heinrich, David E. Orton, and R. Dean Anderson. *Handbook of Literary Rhetoric: A Foundation for Literary Study*. Leiden: Brill, 2002.
- Lukács, Georg. *Theory of the Novel*. Trans. Anna Bostock. Boston: MIT Press, 1971.
- Macauley, Rose. *Pleasure of Ruins*. New York: Thames and Hudson, 1983 [1953].
- McGowan, Matthew M. *Ovid in Exile: Power and Poetic Redress in the Tristia and Epistulae ex Ponto*. Leiden: Brill, 2009.
- Marx, Ursula, Gudrun Schwartz, Michael Schwartz, and Erdmut Wizisl. *Walter Benjamin's Archive: Images, Texts, Signs*. London: Verso, 2008.
- Nagy, Gregory. *Greek Myth and Poetics*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990.
- . *The Best of the Achaians: Concepts of the Hero in Archaic Greek Poetry*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Beyond Good and Evil*. Trans. Reginald J. Hollingdale. London: Penguin Classics, 2003.
- Parr, Johnston. "The Site and Ancient City of Browning's Love among the Ruins." *PMLA* 68.1 (1953): 128–37.
- Porter, James I. "Sublime Monuments and Sublime Ruins in Ancient Aesthetics." *European Review of History* 18 (2011): 685–96.
- Rosen, Charles. "Walter Benjamin and His Ruins." *The New York Review of Books* 24, no. 17 (27 October 1977): 31–40; 24 (18): 17 November 1977, 30–8.
- Roth, Michael S. "Irresistible Decay: Ruins Reclaimed." In *Irresistible Decay: Ruins Reclaimed*, edited by Michael S. Roth, Claire Lyons and Charles Merewether, 1–23. Los Angeles, CA: The Getty Research Institute, 1997.
- , Claire Lyons, and Charles Merewether, eds. *Irresistible Decay: Ruins Reclaimed*. Los Angeles, CA: The Getty Research Institute, 1997.
- Ruskin, John. *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*. London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1848.
- Schönle, Andreas. "Ruins and History: Observations on Russian Approaches to Destruction and Decay." *Slavic Review* 65 (2006): 649–69.
- Settis, Salvatore. "Foreword." In *Irresistible Decay: Ruins Reclaimed*, edited by Michael S. Roth, Claire Lyons and Charles Merewether. Los Angeles, CA: The Getty Research Institute, 1997.
- . "Nécessité des Ruines: Les Enjeux du Classique." *European Review of History* 18 (2011): 717–40.
- Shapiro, Harvey A. "From Athena's Owl to the Owl of Athens." In *Studies in honor of Martin Ostwald*, edited by Ralph Rosen and Joseph Farrell, 213–24. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1993.
- Simmel, Georg. "The Ruin." In *Georg Simmel et al., Essays on Sociology, Philosophy and Aesthetics*, edited by Kurt K. Wolff, 259–66. New York: Harper, 1965 (orig. in *Der Tag*, 22. Februar 1907= Simmel, Georg. *Die Ruine. Ein ästhetischer Versuch*, in idem, *Philosophische Kultur*. [Leipzig: Alfred Kröner Verlag, 1919], 125–33. Text online at <http://www.salmoxisbote.de/Bote12/Simmel.htm>. Many thanks to Andreas Wittenburg for pointing me to the online version).
- Steiner, George. *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.
- Vallat, J.-P. "Héritage, Mémoire, Identités: La Liste UNESCO du patrimoine mondial." *European Review of History* 18 (2011): 759–81.
- Verdenius, W.J. "The Metaphorical Use of ΑΙΙΙΥΣ." *Mnemosyne* (Ser. 4) 6 (1953): 115.
- Williams, Bernard. *Shame and Necessity*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994.
- Williams, Gareth D. "Ovid's Exile Poetry: *Tristia*, *Epistulae ex Ponto* and *Ibis*." In *The Cambridge Companion to Ovid*, edited by Philip Hardie, 233–48. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.
- and Andrew D. Walker, eds. "Ovid in Exile." Special issue of *Ramus* 26 (1997).
- Wittenburg, Andreas. "Les Ruines comme mémoire des crimes du passé." *European Review of History* 18 (2011): 799–810.

- Wohlin, Richard. *Walter Benjamin: An Aesthetic of Redemption*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994.
- Yamasaki, Minoru. *A Life in Architecture*. New York & Tokyo: Weatherhill, 1979.
- Zill, Rüdiger. "'A True Witness of Transience': Berlin's Kaiser-Wilhelm-Gedächtniskirche and the Symbolic use of Architectural Fragments in Modernity," *European Review of History* 18 (2011): 811–27.
- Žižek, Slavoj. *Welcome to the Desert of the Real: Five Essays on September 11 and Related Dates*. London and New York: Verso, 2002.
- Zucker, Paul. "Ruins, An Aesthetic Hybrid." *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 20 (1961): 119–30.

Websites

- Suda. http://www.stoa.org/sol-bin//search.pl?search_method=QUERY&login=&enlogin=&searchstr=nu,583&field=adlerhw_gr&db=REAL