RUIN MEMORIES

The Ruin Memories project is drawing to a close.

Here is the introduction to the final portfolio:

Modernity is rarely associated with ruins. In our everyday comprehension ruins rather bring to mind ancient and enchanted monumental structures; an archaeological dream world featuring celebrities such as Machu Picchu, Pompeii and Angkor Wat. Yet never have so many ruins been produced; so many things been victimized and made redundant, so many sites been abandoned. Closed shopping malls, abandoned military

sites, industrial wastelands, derelict mining towns, empty apartment houses, withering capitalist and communist monuments. A ghostly word of decaying modern debris mostly left out of academic concerns and conventional histories – and also considered too recent, too grim and repulsive to be embraced as heritage. Though the situation of neglect may be claimed to have changed, as reflected in the growing field of the archaeology of the contemporary past, in the broader popular, artistic and scholarly interest in decay and ruination, and lately even in heritage discourses, modern ruins still play a very marginal role in the political economy of both the past and the present.

This marginalization and othering of the derelict materiality of the modern was one concern grounding the Ruin Memories project, an international research project funded by the Norwegian Research Council. Through theoretical studies and a number of case studies in Spain, Iceland, Estonia, Sweden, Norway, USA and Russia, we have since 2010 explored how the ruins of modernity are conceived and assigned cultural value by focusing primarily on three themes: The aesthetics

of waste and heritage, the materiality of memory, and the significance of things. While one ambition has been to critically scrutinize the normative categorization of modern ruins and the discourses and practices that may have led to their academic and historical marginalization, another has been to reassess the cultural and historical value of this modern debris and to explore how abandoned and ruined things may contribute to different memories, or a different archaeology, of the recent past.

I will present a review soon.