



A Study within the Ruins

By Crystal Muns

Abstract:

By immersing myself within a month long field study that was set to explore a passion that I had, I was able to connect to the subject of ruins using Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's methodology of delicate empiricism. This paper takes a look at the study of ruins in a whole new light, abstracted from the common perceptions of a ruin only being that of a structure. What if instead, you and I are the ruin of all our life experiences, the last archive to that which shaped you and who you are today. In this paper you will find both views on ruins; ruins of structure and the ruins of the intangible (the internet, technology, memory,...etc.).

By the utilization of delicate empiricism a whole new understanding of ruins was possible to me within ruined structures. That coupled with meditation, writing, crafting, research, jewelry of ruins were integrated so that I could "lick the ruins" and become more intimately involved and interpret what these often times ostracized and underappreciated structures-or ruins- within our lives have to teach.

A Study within the Ruins



By Crystal Muns "Upward Bound"

First off: Delicate Empiricism, and My Method

"The realization that the phenomena we confront are always richer than the abstractions we use to explain them is central to a Goethean approach. This realization is the expression of a two-fold awareness or sensitivity that Goethe points to with his expression "delicate empiricism".

~Craig Holdridge (from his article "Doing Goethean Science")

Delicate empiricism, It rolls off my tongue as if it were some strange new language. Delicate empiricism, the form in which science and poetics can merge and become one. Such an abstract though in today's age but most certainly a breath of fresh air in comparison to the rigidity that has consumed the scientific world.

I started my journey into ruins with a past knowledge of anthropology and the limitations that such a fields perspective can have upon one truly becoming intimate with ones work. You could "like" the subject of ruins within these confines, but to "love" them was an entirely different realm all together. They were to be found, looked at, analyzed, documented, and the history behind them exposed. A very cut and dry approach, you could be fascinated by them but you would forever be one step removed from your subject. With delicate empiricism, those unnatural forms of interaction can

be stripped away. I began to experience the ruins in a new light, they become a part of me and I found a connection with all aspects of my subject on a much more personal and emotional level.

The steps I followed in order to conduct this project were

1. To go and sit within the ruined structures of Aberdeen and Hoquiam as often and for as long as I could.
2. While in these structures I spent time writing and reflecting upon how I and the ruin could be one and the same. What aspects of myself and my past did I see within their confines (or lack of confines)? Why was I drawn to these structures?
3. I also documented my outings through photography. To bring light to that which is normally overlooked. Often finding myself in areas devoid of anything other than small woodland creatures and a peaceful silence.
4. When at home I would conduct research, more writing, reading and recycle crafts. All just another way for me to reaffirm my connection with ruins.

My main goal was total immersion and to find a new way of getting closer to the ruins. I once had a teacher who professed that we must “Lick the Ruins” an amusing statement to say the least but at the heart of it is the message that we shouldn’t be afraid to be close to these testaments to our past and our own mortality. Be they [ruins] memories or something as intangible as the internet and technology’s ever changing structure and our link to that change.

The Harbor Towns



By Crystal Muns “The Bone Masher”

Again I have found myself alone in Hoquiam, despite its obvious state of ruin it is in a much better shape than that of Aberdeen. Both towns are located within the state of

Washington in the County of Grays Harbor. The area is steeped in the history of a rich logging industry, outlandish tails of wild men, and even our own Ghoul¹. Within more recent years, however, the timber industry has been waning and the land that produced such lawlessness and fathered intrigue is now a maid well past her prime.

*Your shores are broken
your backbone crooked
your once proud posture
now stooped, your
nothing like you use
to be, yet everything's
still gray as its always
been.*

Right now, I am seated in what use to be the old rundown portion of the La Vogue's department store. It was a place I'd frequented a lot during my child hood, since my father was good friends with the owner. It wasn't in the best condition then, but the prices were great if you didn't mind vintage when vintage wasn't fashionable yet, and the hissing roaches that were kept in the backroom certainly were an interesting little known fact about the place. In recent years it has become the home of a Tully's Coffee shop. It isn't what I remember and the old well-worn wood scent is gone, which makes it all the more alien. It is, however, a nice comfy place none the less. I look to my left, and there on the table is this silly little map that proclaims that it is the:

"Li'l Hip Pocket Guide:
All the Hidden Gems of Grays Harbor"

As I flip through it I laugh to myself. Advertisers will proclaim that anything is a secret or being made privy exclusively to you in an attempt to bring in an air of mystery and intrigue. I take my pencil and write on the back:

*"None of which are really secret,
I know the secrets."*



By Crystal Muns "Dark Light"

¹ The Ghoul that I allude to here is that of Billy Ghoul, a local agent for the Sailors Union of the Pacific. The man is infamous for murdering 40 or so people and leaving them to float in the harbor. The Wild man is a reference to John Tornow, who allegedly killed two boys and then fled into the thick forests of the Wynoochee. Tornow was shot and killed a year and a half after the murders. Grays Harbor has a colorful past to say the least.

I've lived here long enough to know that the real secrets are to be had in the ruination of the Harbor; it's economic decline has made it interesting to say the least. The flux of people, the rollercoaster of blind optimism and sheer pessimism, everything is just subject to change at a moment's notice. When the gray clouds roll in you can see it in the faces of the people, it affects them profoundly and the melancholy that sits on their shoulders at times can be a debilitating and difficult ordeal². But when the sun finally comes out, the change is drastic. It just seem like everyone is living the best life possible, everyone wears a smile, and can be friendly. I suppose that one has to go through hell to really appreciate heaven, and that's just how it is here. Grays Harbor is just one of those places that can feel barren yet at the same time be full of life.

The Structures of both Aberdeen and Hoquiam are frail and decaying, cracked with faded paint, some windows busted out, ceilings caved in, and many stairs to nowhere. The towns feel and appear as though they have hit bottom. Many businesses have closed up shop, become desolate, or have been burnt down to nothing more than ash and a few scraps of lingering wall.

*I've walked your halls
A thousand times, or maybe
it was only ten, seems
I've lost track of
Everything especially
in this "modern" age.*

*Bare as bone, but
nowhere near as
neat. Shattered glass
glistens like cut stones
upon your floors,
leaving only hollow
shells where your
eyes use to be.*



By Crystal Muns "Gothica"

The pictures of this desolation that begin to form, in my mind they become something more like scenes from a gothic horror film. Their twisting and contorting from that which is benign into something less safe, is all a part of its appeal to me. It is a shade which others would rather ignore or fear because they do not understand it. They don't

² I feel it in my own facial expressions at times. As though the lack of sun has turned me into a stone, unfeeling, cold, emotionless, with a very heavy want to get away from everyone. It is no fun, that and the lack of vitamin D that is processed is minimal in such conditions and can affect ones overall health adversely.

understand me either, so it's only natural that these ruins and I should become friends. I feel secure and safe there where as others find fear of mortality in the burnt or wrecked walls of a derelict structure. No one can tell me what is wrong or right there, nor can they judge me, call me weird, or say anything! for there is no one else there. Just me and the ruins cohabitate this limbo that exists between nature and urban structure. The chaos that is at the core of these structures does not intimidate me, or ward me of. Instead, it as if the runes speak to me. They tell me that here; I can do what it is that I want to do. I can build or destroy anything. I am the ruler supreme. It is a lot of power, and a lot of room for growth that people in today's society do not often get to experience.

Looking Inwards



*Guilty by design
she's nothing more than fiction.
she dreams in digital,
cause it's better than nothing.
now that control is gone,
it seems unreal,
she's dreaming in digital.
she dreams in digital.*

~Orgy. Fiction (She Dreams in Digital). 2007

I was born amongst those few children who grew up alongside the development of the internet and it's mass integration into society, as well as technologies rapid acceleration.

I remember it was back in 1997 that my elementary school first got a computer lab with internet. It was fascinating and awe inspiring. Later on in High school I started to take web development classes where I learned HTML coding and how to construct thing like buttons and widgets for websites.

*I have become a ruin of the dawn of the net,
one of the digital seeds that paved the way for
the digital dream world that now thrives.*

Nowadays, what I learned back then is no longer cutting edge. The technology behind my education is old and a lot of it outdated or non-existent for modern operating systems. At best, a good beginning education in web development has become a train wreck of outdated methods that have been replaced by more complex interfaces that can do almost a million things at once. Well maybe not that many things, but the newer programing and development tools out there are much more advanced and capable than yesteryears tech and in some ways it has become easier. You can pick and pull pre-formed pieces off of the net, no real skill needed. The days of self-development are waning; we are in the mod era where all that was created is just recycled and repurposed for someone else's benefit. But my memories, they don't die easily. Although the era that cultivated those memories, and helped to shape me is drastically transforming, my memories cannot be taken from me.

*My memory is a ruin,
an archive and testament
to how things once were.*

The past knowledge that I acquired is still at my disposal. A series of old outdated methodologies and practices but for as long as I live, those old ways will live on as well. We may be rough round the edges at times but it is my knowledge and my way of doing things. I can still craft a webpage from scrap in html code. . It is something that I can feel comfortable doing and it can be quite relaxing. From time to time I like to hop on an old desktop computer and play my old games that I grew up with³, even if it means that I have to fix it on my own, debug and all the required maintenance on the machine. There is no tech support for its operating system⁴, but I don't care all that much since by keeping this old technology around I have direct access to at least a small portion of my past that would have otherwise been lifeless and reserved to memory alone.

³ Games such as; *Mysts, Riven, Borrow's Hill, Morpheus*. Old puzzle games developed in the latter 90's and are not compatible with the newer O.S's.

⁴ Windows XP

I at times feel as though I might be stupid or foolish to cling on to old things, but I am human and I seek comfort in things that I know; things that I grew up with, things that remind me of where it is I have come from. Maybe that's why I feel a closeness to the ruined and outdated things of this world. I seek a place for myself in this world, and it must be familiar, and it must move me. What is more moving than something that can stir up the warmth and joy that came with fond memories. In the end however, all things return to dust, but like a phoenix rising out of the ashes, I will always have my memories and they will always come through for me and shine a light in the darkest of times. They will lift me up and propel me forward throughout my life.

Appendix

Poetry

To ashes

To ashes we all are dust
covered and yet bare in the wind.
The effervescent spectacle before
our my eyes, is no more than
the modern ruins from
which my bones were raised.

To Dawn the dark is but a dream
and to the dream the dark is home.

Momentary enlightenment of the

Flash-forward sort is limited to the
backroom stalkers, alone in their ways.

A Trip to Think of Me Not

So far I've got nothing but two quarters
and a liter of soul.

The backpack float on,
over hills and muddy pits,
lead by flesh and an oversized hoodie.

Two rubber cups cling to
the wanderer, clings to me,
as upwards I climb,
and upwards I climb,
till sometime soon
I'll touch the sky.

Quotes

1. "I see buildings falling in Glasgow. I see rubble. I ask myself where that rubble goes. I discover that it's crushed and then used to build new pedestrian streets – so people are walking on the ghosts of tower blocks." ~Cyprien Gaillard (Ruins pg. 20)
2. "The failure to recapture the presence of the gaze outside of the abyss into which it is sinking is not an accident or weakness; it illustrates or rather figures the very chance of the work, the

specter of the invisible that the work lets be seen without ever presenting. Just as memory does not here restore a past (once) present, so the ruin of the face....does not indicate ageing, wearing away, anticipated decomposition, or this being eaten away by time.” ~Jacques Derrida (Ruins pg.42)

3. "Exploring is delightful to look forward to, and back upon, but it is not comfortable at the time, unless it be of such an easy nature as not to deserve the name."
~ Samuel Butler in *Erewhon*
4. "Life is either a daring adventure or nothing at all. Security does not exist in nature, nor do the children of men as a whole experience it. Avoiding danger is no safer in the long run than exposure." ~ Helen Keller
5. "Do not follow where the path may lead. Go instead where there is no path and leave a trail."
~Muriel Strode
6. "It seems, in fact, that the more advanced a society is, the greater will be its interest in ruined things, for it will see in them a redemptively sobering reminder of the fragility of its own achievements. Ruins pose a direct challenge to our concern with power and rank, with bustle and fame. They puncture the inflated folly of our exhaustive and frenetic pursuit of wealth."
~ Alain de Botton, *The Pleasures and Sorrows of Work*

Photography

Aberdeen

Aberdeen is located at the confluence of the Chehalis and Wishkah rivers at the head of Grays Harbor, at the southern end of the Olympic Peninsula. The region's rich fisheries and abundant timber supported a number of Native American communities and served

to attract white American settlement in the mid-nineteenth century. During the latter half of the nineteenth century a number of small communities were established on Grays Harbor, but Aberdeen quickly grew to dominate as the commercial and cultural hub. Lumber, fisheries, and shipbuilding have fueled the local economy for much of the region's history. More recently extractive industries have declined and tourism and commercial retail have increased. ⁵



By Crystal Muns “Off the Wishkah”

⁵ brief history of Aberdeen, WA as found on Historylink.org
http://www.historylink.org/index.cfm?DisplayPage=output.cfm&file_id=7390



By Crystal Muns "No Bums. Thank you"



By Crystal Muns "Watching the Tide Roll In"



By Crystal Muns "A Hazy View"



By Crystal Muns "Stairs to Nowhere in Particular.....it's the Harbor!"

Hoquiam

The City of Hoquiam was first settled by James Karr, who moved to the Grays Harbor area from Oregon in 1859. He was joined shortly thereafter by Ed Campbell, who later on in 1867, applied for and received a post office at the mouth of the Hoquiam River. While applying for the post office Campbell was forced to choose a name for the settlement that was already almost a decade old. After some time Campbell settled on Hoquiam which was a native word meaning “hungry for wood”.

This name was an ample fit for a town that was to make most of its living off of the timber industry. With numerous different lumber barons staking a claim in the woods that surrounded Hoquiam the town predominantly was and still is a logging town. The entirety of the area is steeped in logging culture and every year in September a festival called Loggers Play Day occurs to celebrate that particular niche of history. ⁶



By Crystal Muns “Deer Me! Life in the Ruins”

⁶ Piece on Hoquiam by Crystal Muns.



By Crystal Muns "Littlest Tugboat"



By Crystal Muns "Ravaged and Lost"



By Crystal Muns "Sometimes, You Just Have to be Creative..."

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