Reclaiming Ruins
The New York State Inebriate Asylum and Other “Abandonscapes” by A.D. Wheaeler

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infused aluminum 2013

The Reclaiming Consistent with the solemn mission of these new public institutions. These structures, born of the fanaticism of the Enlightenment to identify and humanely eradicate the problems of human life, social or moral disease. The building was the product of a zeal for reform that also proliferated asylums, poor houses, penitentiaries, and sanitoria. These were the institutions that had been founded in the eighteenth century to treat the mentally ill, and that had been expanded in the nineteenth century to treat a wide range of other diseases. The New York State Inebriate Asylum, for example, was built to treat alcoholism, and the Castle on the Hill, or the New York State Lunatic Asylum, was built to treat mental illness.

Commonly known as the Castle on the Hill, or simply the Castle, the New York State Inebriate Asylum seems to afford just such an escape from the troubles of the newly trendy pursuit of urban exploration (or “urbex”) seek out abandoned or crumbling structures as curiosities containing some interesting stories, and newly crafted “vintage” furniture, and studies show that the leisure activity of antiquing has recently enjoyed a boom among twenty-somethings. As the taste for all things sublime and picturesque grew voracious, the act of looking backwards gained particular significance in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, moving contrapuntally with the rapid modernization of the built environment. As the taste for all things sublime and picturesque grew voracious, the act of looking backwards gained particular significance in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, moving contrapuntally with the rapid modernization of the built environment. 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