

AR-620

Unearthing traces - Part 1

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Cursus	Sem.	Type
Architecture and Sciences of the City		Opt.

Language of teaching	English
Credits	2
Session	
Exam	Written & Oral
Workload	60h
Hours	45
Courses	11
Exercises	6
Project	28
Number of positions	30

Frequency

Only this year

Remark

May 27th-28th 2021

Summary

«Unearthing Traces» proposes to explore memory processes, power structures in archival practices in relation to built environments and material traces, providing an interdisciplinary frame allowing for a critical reading of one's own archival research and its relation to a physical reality.

Content**SWISS UNIVERSITIES COURSE****Unearthing Traces -Dismantling imperialist entanglement of archives and the built environment****Invited lecturers:**

- **Françoise Vergès**
- **Samia Henni (Cornell)**
- **Léopold Lambert (Funambulist Magazine)**
- **Michelle Caswell (UCLA)**
- **Shouride C. Molavi (Critical Urbanism, Uni Basel)**
- **Izabel Barros (cfd Bern)**
- **and others**

"History pledges to be faithful to the limits of fact, evidence, and archive, even as those dead certainties are produced by terror. I wanted to write a romance that exceeded the fictions of history- the rumors, scandals, lies, invented evidence, fabricated confessions, volatile facts, impossible metaphors, chance events, and fantasies that constitutes the archive and determine what can be said about the past. I longed to write a new story, one unfettered by the constraints of the legal documents and exceeding the restatement and transpositions, which comprised my strategy for disordering and transgressing the protocols of the archive and the authority of its statements and which enabled me to augment and intensify its fictions.#

Saidiya, Hartman. « Venus in Two Acts ». Small Axe 12, no 2 (2008): 9."

With the "**Swiss Universities**" doctoral course "Unearthing Traces - Dismantling imperialist entanglement of archives and the built environment" we propose to explore and learn about memory processes, power structures in archival practices in relation to the built environment and material architectural traces. With the participation of a wide array of thinkers and practitioners in archival and artistic practices, historians and researcher in architecture and social sciences, the course explores how imagined records and traces can be composed and grounded in the context of academic

research in order to implement them into an historical argumentation. A particular emphasis will be made on architectural and spatial traces and records both through the methodologies of urban critical and postcolonial studies and through questioning the imperialist dimensions of the architecture of archives and built environments.

The spreading of archival practices responds to one of the major issues faced by communities in decolonization processes; the monopoly of knowledge and the destruction of other forms of knowledge circulation by imperial powers, enacting barriers to other histories than the dominant ones (Stoler 2008). The rejection of other records still constitutes a major obstacle to the legitimation of cultures and alternative narratives, and sometimes, to the achievement of justice (Caswell 2014). This phenomenon is emphasized by intersectionality, the appartenance to several minority group - based on race, gender, sexuality, economic class...

Beyond the intentional segregation of archival documents, the "absence" in archives is grounded on the limits of the sayable (Hartmann 2008), issued from the episteme and tekhné of a time (Foucault 1966). Thus, western archives, by standardizing the ontology of their documents hid, erased, obstructed and de-valuated certain (organic) forms of knowledge (Povinelli 2011), amplifying the biases of misrepresentations. The European urban environment still supports and perpetuates the economies of symbols of colonialism (Mbembe 2002), both in their physical materiality and virtual one, from the origins of materials to the toponymy of their places. As such, there is an urge to deconstruct and re-ground our understanding and reading of both our archives and our environments in relation to one-another, to unearth 'hidden' traces, exhume obstructed narratives and give ground to « potential histories » (Azoulay 2019).

Since the Archival turn (Simon 2002) in artistic and academic practices, more and more archival practitioners developed methodologies to deal with imagined records (Gilliand and Caswell 2015), untaken photographs (Azoulay 2012), missing pictures (Pahn 2013), ghostly matters (F. Gordon 1997), or haunting legacies (Schwab 2010). The multiplicity of textures and materialities of these documents and records, from the hidden or forgotten spatial traces to embodied traumas and imaginary photographs, shed light on the growing prominence of imagination, critical /speculative fabulation (Hartmann, 2008, Haraway 2016) and affect (Dever 2010) in archival and historical practices to recover buried histories. In doing so, the aim is not to give voice to the deads, but "rather to imagine what cannot be verified [...]. It is a history of an unrecoverable past; it is a narrative of what might have been or could have been; it is a history written with and against archive (Hartmann 2008: 12), in order to consider at once the positive objects and methods of history and social science and the matter absent, entangled and unavailable by its method (Lowe, 2006, 208).

We reflect on how to decolonise public space, and how to mediate multi-layered histories of architectural sites while problematising their economic and cultural entanglements through perceiving the "spirit of place".

Current public debates and practices around erasing statues of colonists and men involved in slavery in the wake of the #blacklivesmatter has also begun to shake the swiss society and reflections around the built environment. What is the legitimation of maintaining of such names, monuments, buildings without awareness what racializing practices they stand for? How the narrate, analyze and write revisited historiographies and how to move on from here?

Problematics:

How can we deal with ontologies of archival documents and epistemic frames while working in historical fields?

Which methodologies and epistemologies have been and can be used to work with these imagined records and traces?

What is the role of imagination in the archives, notably in relation to what might have been, misrepresentations and intersectionality?

How these documents have been already been used by various fields, as artists, historians, humanities and also, for justice? In other words, what is the nature of their agency?

What is the effect of the Digital Turn in the archival practices? How it maintains or not, modify or not the traditional archival biases (Putnam 2016)?

How to unearth hidden traces or exhume obstructed narratives through the lens of material witnesses (Schuppli 2020)?

And then, how to act on the basis of revealed multi-layered histories and traces in the built environment?

Pedagogical outcome, assignment:

Estimated workload:

-Readings and preparation: 10 hours

-Project: 26 hours

Each participant to the course is asked to read a series of publications and articles suggested by each lecturer. Each lecturer will provide one text, and the organizers of the course will add some more precise input, notably on the Swiss context and methodologies. Each student will provide a series of questions issued from these readings before the round table, in order to get ready for the interactions with the invited lecturers.

Project:

Each participant contributes to a multi-media publication of the course, which can be visual, textual (minimum 3 pages) or in any other due format. The contribution aims at applying the methodologies learned during the course.

Thanks to the reading of the series of text, the students will propose a project to investigate one place, object, archival documents, or any other material witness in their close environment. The proposal will be discussed in the diverse workshop and common sessions during the two days of the course.

In the aftermath of the doctoral course, they will then develop a multi-media work on how to document or tell the story of a specific site with a specific relevance to our set of questions. Methods that were inspired by the two-day zoom conference of [Unearthing Traces](https://unearthingtraces.ch/) build the basis of this task. This multimedia work of each doctoral student will be published on the website of [Unearthing Traces](https://unearthingtraces.ch/) as a growing archive. It will be developed as well in a printed publication.

In investigating their relations to this object, and relying on sources they will have to find according to the methodologies the course introduced, the doctoral students will try to unearth the traces of colonial entanglements in the built/physical environment. This process of unearthing can be represented through all the medium relevant for the object.

The Course aims at providing a theoretical, methodological and interdisciplinary frame to the PhD Students allowing for a critical understanding of their own archival research, and its relation their terrain of investigations; how certain realities are misrepresented by the archives, and how certain spaces demand for the unearthing of traces in the archives to decolonize them.

Invited Lecturer

The choice of the (potential) lecturers is made in order to respect a gender balance, with both young and advanced researchers, coming from a diverse academic field (architecture, critical urbanism, contemporary history, gender studies, postcolonial studies, cultural studies, curatorial practices, memory studies, anthropology, archival studies, philosophy), as well as extra-academic practitioners (from architecture, artistic practices, association members and activists, film directors). Furthermore, a particular attention has been drawn in order to invite people of non-western backgrounds.

Keywords

Memory processes, revisiting historiographies, power structures in archival practices, architectural traces, decolonizing public space, Swiss colonialism, Material History

Learning Outcomes

By the end of the course, the student must be able to:

- **Zine/Publication:** As a learning outcome, the doctoral course aims to make a small publication with visual and textual material created by the participants after engaging with the material history of Neuchâtel. This will be co-published with the CAN "Centre d'Art in Neuchâtel" and EPFL in a small format. Each participant contributes one-three pages of content, which can be visual or/and textual. The material will be assigned by the maître d'enseignement of UNIL and EPFL. The organisers of the course, Denise Bertschi and Julien Lafontaine Carboni will edit and layout the contributions into a small publication in the format of a Zine. **Archival documents:** This course brings together a diversity of research methods by the presence of each participant around questions of power structures of archives. The first day serves to collect and learn from each other by an 8 min. presentation of each doctoral student of one specific archival artefact from his/her PhD research (oral, written, image, or material), which problematizes the question of power structures of archives and memory. A feedback from advanced researcher will be provided to each student, in order to maximise and individualize the impact of the learning outcomes on the individual research. The Course aims at providing a theoretical, methodological and interdisciplinary frame to the PhD Students allowing for a critical understanding of their own archival research, and its relation their terrain of investigations; how certain realities are misrepresented by the archives, and how certain spaces demand for the unearthing of traces in the archives to decolonize them.

Resources

Websites

- <https://unearthingtraces.ch/>