"Theorizing Practices" is a dialogue, research, and project intensive seminar series that seeks to engage with emergent community-based & activist practices as a means to trouble academic approaches to archival, museum, urban, and other studies domains. Each seminar seeks to:

- decolonize Eurocentric knowledges and practices and
- build on the work and organizing experiences of engaged graduate students and develop working theories that help further advance such practices
- impact in social justice and equity issues especially related to subaltern communities.

These seminars, of which “Underground Archives” is the first of a series, are dialogue-driven working to better articulate and analyze various “post-positivist” and “reflexive” realities of contemporary U.S. in the world cultural/knowledge production work with the goal of promoting archives building and publishable critical essays, exhibits, maps, documentaries, and other intervening productions.

"Underground Archives" is, therefore, open for participants (actually cheering you on) to pursue your passionate ongoing projects. The course is designed to help graduate students to not take archives for granted and to understand it is part of their necessary critical knowledge production and activist work. We’ll be formulating basic questions of Eurocentrism, politics, and knowledge formations. How should we reframe and redefine archives and archival practices into what we’ll call an alternative, “counter-archive” to the master power/knowledge narrative and archive.

The New York City metro region and its rich range of community-based organizations, subcultures, countercultures, collectors, and natural resources provide an ideal place to explore what has been done and how to conceptualize what has been done that further refine practices, especially as we move into digital, augmented, and virtual realities. Most concretely, I want to explore how “underground archives” is necessarily part of the "hidden" organizing work of groups excluded and marginalized from dominating and normatizing political cultures. Collectors and their collections, keepers of such collections (they probably don’t call themselves archivists but should) and networks they create are a foundational yet largely unrecognized group of cultural activists. Or framed
differently, activists are also necessarily archivists but tend to undervalue that dimension of the labor performed.

On the macro-systemic level, governmental and formal and institutional archivalization processes and systems are about the politico-managerial control of everyday life, a bioarchival bureaucratic and hierarchic politics is you will, the ordering, cataloguing, and finite differentiating of “the normal.” This includes what Thomas Richards calls “The Imperial Archive” of the British Empire—the matrix of domestic and colonial “positive” knowledges including the India Survey, the British Museum, and institutions which order and organize a notion of time (Greenwich Mean Time) and spatiality (longitude 0’ also at Greenwich, cartographers, census takers, etc.). In retrospect it’s easier perhaps to view the British Empire as a systemic archive, but far more difficult to gain perspective on what might constitute to the archive of what media mogul Henry Luce dubbed the “American Century” (or what Giovanni Arrighi has called “the long American century,” pre and post 9/11. Again, we will use NYC as a locus of examination. We collaboratively describe the contours of the archival system of American empire-building by looking at relationships among the U.S.’s matrix of institutions, bureaus, and offices juxtaposed against the counter archives or underground work of various “others” contesting dominant knowledge/power.

Lots of questions must be asked. What is the range of underground archives in NYC metro? What are their interventional and survival strategies? What are their missions, stated and unstated? Is it useful to think in terms of a “master archive” comparable to Tony Morrison’s “master narrative”? Is a broad Foucaultian or Derridian perspective too grand a scale to be practicable? What are disciplinary and interdisciplinary possibilities and limits to get at these problematics? *Et cetera.*

Over the semester, we’ll talk to activists and visit collections and exhibits. We’ll engage with provocative archival theorists in person and in their work. Books, essays, exhibits, and films will serve as background resources to critically examining actual archives and the contexts in which they were formed.

A note on my teaching philosophy.
I welcome the amazing diversity and knowledge that each seminar participant brings to our gathering. You each embody a particular background and perspective contributing to the riches of our group as a whole. The trick is to be respectful and appreciative of our individual projects and backgrounds while coming together and building synergies as a working group. Collaboration is key.

I am a historian and cultural activist, but not technically an archivist. I help to build collections, organizations, and networks to make a tangible presence of disenfranchised peoples to gain greater recognition in the contested public sphere. My primary work has been in building community-based museums, archives, online dialogic sites, and Asian American/Pacific worlds and translocal people of color communities.
The flow of the sessions will build from different projects and people I’ve worked with and are learning from. This sequence will give you a sense of decades of sequential and overlapping projects. I do this not to privilege my work nor for you to think it is a template. Rather, this is a means to demonstrate a series of engagements and to locate your own work in your own ways.

I am committed to a dialogue driven-approach toward critical pedagogy modeled after Paulo Freire’s collaborative “naming” approach and feminists of color who insist on identifying one’s subject position and the intersectional positionality of one’s teaching, researching, production work, and politics.

Requirements & project.
In addition to attendance, posting and contributing to Blackboard, keeping up with readings and leading reading discussion, and the quality of your ongoing engagement, the main requirement will be an original research paper or project.

Semester Arc
- Weeks 1-5: key concepts, framings, projects underway
- Weeks 6-12: case studies, speakers, visits
- Weeks 13-15: presentations, one panel per session, reflexive summary

Field Notebook.
How can you keep the “flow” of your embodied understanding going in the face of the conventions of academic writing? Zizek says he doesn’t set out to write a manuscript. He takes notes and notes, reworks them, redrafts and then an essay and a book emerges. The notebook and your notes on those notes are the most important tools you’ll use.

Please keep all your notes and fieldnotes in one bound volume. Ideally, get a bound, hardcover 100 page or more composition-like notebook just for this project/class. Use a good pen so the ink won’t fade on you. If you have notes from somewhere else or a scribble on a piece of paper, just tape it into the notebook. When you read, write your notes into this. This will be the primary, low-tech research/field notebook.

Events.
Here we are at NYU in NYC with so much going on all the time. You’ll be required to attend and write short reviews of three activities related to your project. In the case of a more involved event like a film festival, you can pick one film and any discussion that related to it.

Blackboard.
If you don’t already know how, learn how to access the Blackboard site for the class right away. When I set it up for access, it will appear on your NYU Homepage.

Archive Documentation
You’ll each be required to critically document two “underground archives” in which you and a seminar mate will research, visit, and speak to a founder or “keeper of the
flame.” I'll offer options or you can find your own w/my quick approval. Ideally this will help you in your archival project. More details will come, but you’ll need to write up a journalistic piece that will both engage with the thematics of the seminar and be offered to the archive about its origins and significance for potential users and funders.

Archival Project
The project will be on an "underground archive" that certainly can be used to advance work towards your thesis. The form is open, but many of you might choose an essay form. Just make sure the form you decide on is commensurate with the nature of your archive. (For example, Can a dancer’s movement be captured by a written essay alone?) Your formulation will be subject to our meeting, tweaking, approval.

**IMPT - Your counter archive needs to be articulated relationally to an identifiable "master archive."**

Production schedule. (15 weeks, including exam session)

- **Week #1-2** brainstorming for project, meet w/ Jack & Andrew
- **Week #3** pick a project
  w/one other mate, locate 2-5 possible archives to describe and begin the process
- **Weeks #4-6** research like crazy, visit to Municipal Archives
- **Week #7** project draft deadline
- **Weeks #9-11** research more and reformulate
- **Weeks #12-15** panel presentations

Project due: Monday, Dec. 22 by noon.

Resources.
This seminar focuses on your work but we’ll also engage with a wide range of readings. We’ll draw from a number of books and additional essays/chapters/interviews (to be posted on Blackboard “Course Documents”). No books will be required.

Partial list below. Do consider your favorites to add to a working bibliography.


Pierre Bourdieu and Loic Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (University of Chicago, 1992)


Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969)


Thomas Richards, *The Imperial Archive: Knowledge and the Fantasy of Empire* (1993)


Key additional:
“Haunted Files: The Eugenics Record Office” exhibit, 8 Mews & Kimmel Windows, A/P/A Institute, NYU.

“Memory Prints: The Story World of Phillip Chen” exhibit, Museum of Chinese in America.


Selections from “Radical Archives” Conference, Spring 2014, A/P/A Institute, NYU, online.

Selections from The Hemispheric Project, NYU, online.

Selections from Densho, online.

Jonathan Safran Foer, Everything is Illuminated (2002)

“Everything is Illuminated” (2005)

“Ida” (2013)


Assignment #1: Triangulating your positionality

Double postings: post 1a by W noon, and 1b by F noon, respond to two postings each.

We are agents of our research projects, yet never “free” and disentangled. From the privileged vantage of private school, graduate studies how are our choices infused with assumptions and predispositions of what Foucault refers to as power/knowledge. How can we unpack our objects of study and also, necessarily, unpack/liberate our “selves”?

Foundational to this seminar is your locating your “self,” honestly, usefully, critically, within and in relation to the political culture of our “globalizing” translocal world. This is done both “rationally” and in your “gut” with the understanding it is a constant process of unfolding and discovering, revising and reinventing conscious, embodied, and unconscious layers, fragments, multiplicities.

I take what can be described as a cross-cultural, feminist analytical stance on this issue. Hence I insist, as your benevolent despot, we take both experience and structures of power/knowledge into account as we enact our progressive agency as searchers, as organizers, and as researchers/reorganizers. This engaged process begins to earn us the status of being activist/scholars, a necessary stance in an unjust, inequitable world in which we are local, national, and international creatures.

I need you to work rigorously at locating:
- your subject position, intersectionality, potential critical insights
- your epistemic privilege/insights
- your embodied knowledges
- your practice – theory passions
- your archival project

This is a process and we will work iteratively throughout the semester.

1a. Locating your “self” in its manifold dimensions.

Take notes in your composition book like crazy! I want you to post your additional thoughts from your “Big Sheet of Paper” (BSP) exercise in our first session, your responses/notes from Varda’s “Gleaners,” your responses to Linda Martin Alcoff’s essay on the continuing salience of experience, and to Michel Serres’ essays on embodied practices and knowledges. If you take your experience seriously in this way, spend some time with these ideas on a second BSP. From these meta-notes, write a first round posting responding to your subject position as bulleted above. No need to be definitive, but you must be honest! This is a continuous process and a marking of this moment at the beginning of this seminar -- to be referred back to in the middle and at the end.


Serres, “Upbringing” excerpt, 3-34.
Post on Blackboard, Wednesday at noon and comment on at least two classmates. Pls note. Writing longish passage directly on Discussion Board is not a good idea. It’s prone to logging out after a certain number of minutes of inactivity and wiping out what you wrote. Write your longer postings separate and then paste into the Discussion Board box. It’s definitely clunky!

We’ll have a discussion on your postings, responses, and additional thoughts in seminar.

1b. Read and post, part b.
Only after you’ve posted the above assignment, 1a, then read the Smith’s *Decolonizing Methodologies*, Intro-Chapter 3; and Trouillot. Think about your possible archival project in relation to what she is saying and post your metanotes Friday by noon. Then comment on at least two others’ postings.

    Linda Tuhiwai Smith, Intro + Chapters 1-3, *Decolonizing*, 1-77.

I’ll need two volunteers to lead a discussion on Smith, two for Trouillot. Do refer to each others postings as part of the community of learning we’re creating. I’ll insist on a spirit of “critical generosity.” (See link in Public, online journal of Imagining America on Blackboard)

2. Optional

Agnes Varda, “Two Years Later” (2002) Agnes Varda produced an even better sequel. I can be viewed at Avery, second floor Bobst.

Nancy Harstock first formulated the idea that feminism was a way of knowing the world from a critical epistemological framework in this first essay published in 1983. It has been a foundational and controversial essay establishing the philosophical basis for feminist studies as a distinctive field of academic study. The second essay is a response five years later to her critics and the debates. This is posted in Course Docs as an extra reading.