Cities of Contested Memory
MIT DUSP 11.S939
Fall 2018 | Tuesdays 2-5pm
Class location: 3-329

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for other times email for an appointment

Course Description
This seminar explores relationships between built environments and memory. Memory is both a faculty for dealing with previous experiences and a social, economic, and political force that shapes the legacy of the past. Within the vast field of memory studies, this course will highlight the study of spaces and spatial practices in which the future of the past is imagined, negotiated, and contested. In particular, it will emphasize three areas of critical importance to understanding the nature of memory in cities today: 1) the threats that rapid urban development pose to the remembrance of urban pasts; 2) the politics of representation evident in debates over authorized and marginalized historical narratives; and 3) the art and ethics of sensitively addressing the afterlives of violence and tragedy.

Classes will draw intensively from readings in theory and about places and people. Theoretical texts will include those by Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela, Maurice Halbwachs, Alison Landsberg, Viet Thanh Nguyen, and Pierre Nora, among others. We will consider these authors’ conceptual frameworks in relation to contexts close to home, including the controversies surrounding civil war monuments in places like Charlottesville; the commemoration of 9/11 at the World Trade Center site in New York City; and the production of Holocaust memorials in cities at a distance from sites of violence (e.g. Boston). Our concerns will also take us to Latin America, where we will learn about the relationships between erasure, materiality, and justice evident in “truth museums”; to Rwanda to explore the emotional, organizational, and physical labor involved in producing memorials to the genocide; and to Chernobyl, where we will consider the afterlives (and half-lives) of catastrophic accidents that have produced long-term bodily and environmental effects that challenge us to reconsider the nature of memory.

Course Expectations and Grading
This is a course that will require the active participation of every individual—in completing all readings, preparing questions and comments for each class, and debating issues with respect and openness. In addition, each participant will be required to develop a final project—using primary sources—that will take the form of either a research paper or design proposal. Through our group discussions and individual projects, it will be our collective task to critically probe the ways that communities choose to remember (and spatialize) the past.
Class Discussion: ______ 20%

This course is a reading, writing, and discussion seminar. It requires the active and sustained participation of every individual. Each week, a small group of students will lead a discussion of the assigned texts. Every seminar participant will be asked to lead one class discussion.

For student discussion leaders: your job is to identify what you think are the 2 most interesting issues raised in the texts studied that week. You do not need to discuss every detail of every text. Rather, you might: reflect on the session’s topic and identify issues or concepts that you can trace across two or more texts. OR: describe an author’s theoretical contribution(s), explore what you find helpful about her theoretical framework, and consider some of its limitations. OR: focus on a single passage in a text—summarize what you think the passage contributes to the session topic, focusing on what you think the author is trying to say, what we know about her, and how that might shape our understanding of her text. In all cases: you will be responsible for posing open-ended discussion questions for your colleagues to facilitate our collective exploration of the 2 issues that you identify.

For those not leading the discussion: your job is to do the assigned readings and be willing to talk. You may find some of the material challenging to understand—there will be others who feel similarly! Please ask questions of concepts, passages, chapters, or theories to aid our comprehension. You may not fully understand or agree with a concept or theory, but you are obliged to try to make sense of them.

Weekly Response Papers: ______ 30%

Every week, participants are required to write and submit a short essay of between 1-2 pages that are exercises in reflection on the subject and reading material assigned for the week. The purpose of the Response Papers is to develop your own archive of weekly reflections and to help prepare your contributions to class discussions. Response Papers should elaborate, in concise and critical prose, at least two questions or analytic comments that you have in relationship to the assigned readings. Provide evidence from the texts (using consistent citation practices—author last name, year, and page number will suffice) to support your views and interpretations.

Response Papers are due by the start of each class (to be submitted via the course website). Length and format: 1-2 pages single-spaced, 12 pt Times Roman, PDF. Bring copies to class to help you formulate questions and comments in our class discussions.

Students who are leading discussion do not need to submit a response paper that week.

Final Project: ______ 50%

The Final Project may either be a research paper or a design proposal on a topic related to memory and the built environment. One way to orient your projects: choose to research
or design for a counter or collective memory. You may draw inspiration from or extend one of the topics we cover in class (see Course Summary, next page) or develop one of your own obsessions. In both research paper and design proposal format the Final Project must draw from primary sources in addition to secondary literature.

Primary sources of information are those that provide first-hand accounts of the events, practices, places, or conditions that you are researching. They can be historical or contemporary. Some examples of primary sources include: interviews with Boston residents last week, photographs of Cambridge from the 19th century, creative works, financial records, diaries, letters, newspaper articles, and oral histories (to name a few). Note that spatial data can be considered a primary source—the key here is that whether you collect it or someone else does, that it be available to you in some pre-analysis form. Please do not consider primary sources as unassailable truths by default. Like all sources, they must be contextualized, verified, and taken to be representative of some (but not a full) window on experience.

If you are developing a design proposal for a place of memory, you must include a 1,500 word project rationale that elaborates on the theoretical and contextual basis for your design. The design proposal must also include a series of visual representations to adequately describe your project.

If you are developing a research paper, plan to write around 5,000 words. Choose a topic that can be framed as a problematic—as an inquiry that can be followed through both a selection of the theoretical literature and primary sources. You may choose to develop a topic that is historical or contemporary.

In preparation for your Final Project, plan to meet with Dr. Wendel to discuss research ideas in the first weeks of class and develop a research prospectus that you will share with peers for constructive feedback.

You may absolutely work in teams. If you choose to do so, it is imperative that you meet with Dr. Wendel both on your own and as a group and that you have discrete contributions to the final project.

Final Project Deadlines:
- **Oct 15**: Plan to meet with Dr. Wendel during office hours before this date to discuss your final project ideas
- **Oct 26, 5pm**: Upload a research prospectus to the course website. The prospectus should include 500 words to identify your research question(s) and describe the context that you will explore. In addition, list the primary source material you will draw from and at least 5 key secondary sources (e.g. literature on your topic). You will exchange your prospectus with a colleague in class to refine your ideas.
- **Dec 12 (TBC)**: Final project due date (upload to course website)
General class guidelines:

No one is required to agree with one another, but everyone should try to understand others’ points of view. Please consider this class an opportunity to be open and empathetic, to disagree with respect, and to think constructively about difficult topics.

Late assignments will not be accepted. These and missed classes will result in the reduction of your grade. Excused absences will be considered with advance notice.

Course Summary of Session Topics and Assignment Deadlines

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<th>Session</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Session Topic</th>
<th>Assignment Due</th>
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<tr>
<td>Sep 04</td>
<td>No Class—Registration Day</td>
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<td>01</td>
<td>Sep 11</td>
<td>Cities, Memory, and History</td>
<td>RP 01</td>
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<td>02</td>
<td>Sep 18</td>
<td>The Invention of Tradition</td>
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<td>Oct 02</td>
<td>Power, Representation, and Counter Memory</td>
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<td>05</td>
<td>Oct 09</td>
<td>No Class—Columbus Day</td>
<td>By Oct 15: Research Ideas mtg. w/ DW</td>
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<td>06</td>
<td>Oct 16</td>
<td>Places of Memory</td>
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<td>07</td>
<td>Oct 23</td>
<td>Race and Monuments in American Cities</td>
<td>RP 06</td>
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<td>08</td>
<td>Oct 30</td>
<td>Proposal Peer Review + Library Visit</td>
<td>Oct 26, 5pm: Research Prospectus due</td>
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<td>09</td>
<td>Nov 06</td>
<td>The Holocaust Memory Paradigm</td>
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*RP: Response Paper; all response papers are due before class; upload a PDF to the course website.

* : Indicates a deadline related to the Final Project

NOTE: syllabus is subject to change. Changes will be announced in advance.
**Readings and Discussion Topics by Session**

**Sep 11 | Cities, Memory, and History**

Many view our present situation as a crisis of memory: where the material trace of the past (the memory-space of a community) is threatened by rapid, generic, urban development. We will discuss the various historical permutations of this claim along with scholarly distinctions between memory and history. Singapore and New York City will provide context for our discussions (note: we will be meeting on the anniversary of 9/11).

**Required reading:**

**CHOOSE ONE TO SKIM and ONE TO READ CAREFULLY:**

**Additional resources:**

**Sep 18 | The Invention of Tradition**

Memory is not merely a faculty for registering prior experiences; it is also a source of national and political identity and a force for marketing the past (whether for cultural means or economic gains). We will read the introduction to the canonic Hobsbawm and Ranger book, The Invention of Tradition, to explore theses on the instrumentalization of history. We consider this text along with the urban heritage industry and the legacies of invented traditions (their ruins and transformations) in Monrovia, Liberia.
Required reading:

Additional resources:

**Sep 25 | Collective and Prosthetic Memory**

What is collective memory and its relationship to place? What communities are formed from collective memories and vice versa? How might a concept like “prosthetic memory” extend our understanding of the ways in which collective memories form and operate today?

Required reading:

Additional resources:

**Oct 02 | Power, Representation, and Counter Memory**

In *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, writer Milan Kundera posits that “the struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting.” In this session we will explore Foucault’s concept of “counter memory” and the forms and practices of representation that aim to make such marginalized or oppositional experiences visible in a public sphere. We will also consider the processes and power structures that authenticate and govern collective memory. Los Angeles and Dolores Hayden’s landmark text, *The Power of Place*, will help focus our discussions.

**Required reading:**

**Additional resources:**

**Oct 09 | Columbus Day—NO CLASS**

There are no assigned readings for this week. But to keep the momentum going, you might consider reading the short fiction essay by Milan Kundera, “The Angels,” in *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* (see course website for PDF).

Strongly recommend: that you use this week to develop your Research Proposals, due in two weeks.
Oct 16 | Places of Memory

How do places register and activate memory? Furthermore, how do we understand the city as a medium of memory? Are cities historical texts to be read, interpreted, and translated? Are urban environments palimpsests, haunted sites, or merely temporary materializations of global flows? What, moreover, is the status of the city as a historical source in relationship to archives, natural environments, or landfills for that matter? We will ground our discussions in Berlin and Cape Town.

Required Reading:

Additional resources:

Oct 23 | Race and Monuments in American Cities

Public spaces in the United States are sites of contestation. This has been ever more apparent in recent years’ debates regarding memorials to slavery and monuments to the confederate and civil rights eras. Historically, these discussions have been proxies for those on race, citizenship, and civic values. In this session, we begin to untangle the power structures, myths, erasures, and representation of race in American cities by studying historical contexts and current debates around urban monuments. Part of our class conversation will center on Charlottesville.

Required reading:


Additional resources:

Oct 30 | Proposal Peer Review & Library Visit

This session will be structured in two parts: a visit to the MIT Libraries for an introduction to some of the Institute’s primary source holdings and special collections. The second part of the session will be devoted to group work: peer review and consultation around your Research Proposals.

Note: Research Proposals are due online by Oct 26th at 5pm to give your colleagues time to read.

Required reading:
• Environmental historian Bill Cronon has compiled an excellent primer on “doing” historical research with primary sources: http://www.williamcroron.net/researching/documents.htm

Additional resources:
**Nov 06 | The Holocaust Memory Paradigm**

In this session, we examine the influence of Holocaust memory organizations and memorialization practices on our understanding and representation of other difficult pasts. Doing so allows us to engage in debates regarding the exceptionality of Holocaust memory curation and its simultaneously paradigmatic status as a global form of commemoration.

**Required reading:**

**Additional resources:**


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**Nov 13 | The Art of Just Memory**

Viet Thanh Nguyen sagely remarks that “all wars are fought twice, the first time on the battlefield, the second time in memory.” On his view, the nature and representation of memories are intimately entangled with the afterlives of violent conflict. Nguyen’s recent book provides a foundation for our discussion on global conflict heritage—on the material and psychosocial legacies of violence and war—and the ethics of inclusive representation. We will return to different aspects of conflict heritage during the next few sessions.

**Required reading:**

Nov 20 | Museums of Truth

In the aftermath of violent dictatorships in Latin America, civil society groups and national
governments embraced museological practices in pursuit of truth and justice. Such institutional
and material forms of memory were considered to be central to making visible (state) violence
that was previously hidden. In this session, we look at the relationship between visibility and
truth-telling in the form of forensic and museological practices—along with strategies of silence
and invisibility.

Required reading:
  Museum for Chile’s Memory’,” Exhibiting Atrocity: Memorial Museums and the Politics of

Additional resources:
- Annie E. Coombes, History after Apartheid: Visual Culture and Public Memory in a Democratic
- Zoe Crossland, “Violent Spaces: Conflict over the Reappearance of Argentina’s Disappeared,”
  Materiel Culture: The Archaeology of 20th Century Conflict, C. M. Beck et al. eds., (New
- Andreas Huyssen, “Memory Sites in an Expanded Field: Memory Sites in Buenos Aires,”
- Adrian Parr, Deleuze and Memorial Culture: Desire, Singular Memory, and the Politics of
- Francisco Ferramondez and Antonius C.G.M. Robben, eds. Necropolitics: Mass Graves and
Nov 27 | An Era of Heritage

In Rwanda after the 1994 genocide, there are stark distinctions between collective and counter memory—or, national and lived memory—with the former rendered overwhelmingly visible and the latter barely articulated in public. This session will explore the memory work that transformed counter memory to collective memory and other experiences marginalized by the dominance of the national narrative. These various forms of memory work are comprised of fundamentally spatial practices, constituting what I call an “era of heritage”.

Required reading:
- Delia Wendel, chapters from Rwanda’s Genocide Heritage: Between Memory and Sovereignty (forthcoming).

Additional resources:

Dec 04 | The Ruins of War

This session explores the buildings and cities that become targets of armed conflict and wars of attrition or objects of forfeiture and reparations. We will consider the legacies of such ruptures and follow their afterlives as ruins that are preserved or rebuilt, as highly symbolic places that carry traumatic memory across generations, and as sites of imaginative social creation.

Required reading:
Additional resources:

Dec 11 | Environmental Afterlives

This session will explore the nature and temporalities of memories of tragic events that are mediated through ecological environments. Who is most affected by these “ecologies of the aftermath,” to use Rob Nixon’s term? How does the ecological maintenance of memory affect our understanding of the relationships between memory and place?

Required reading:

Additional resources: