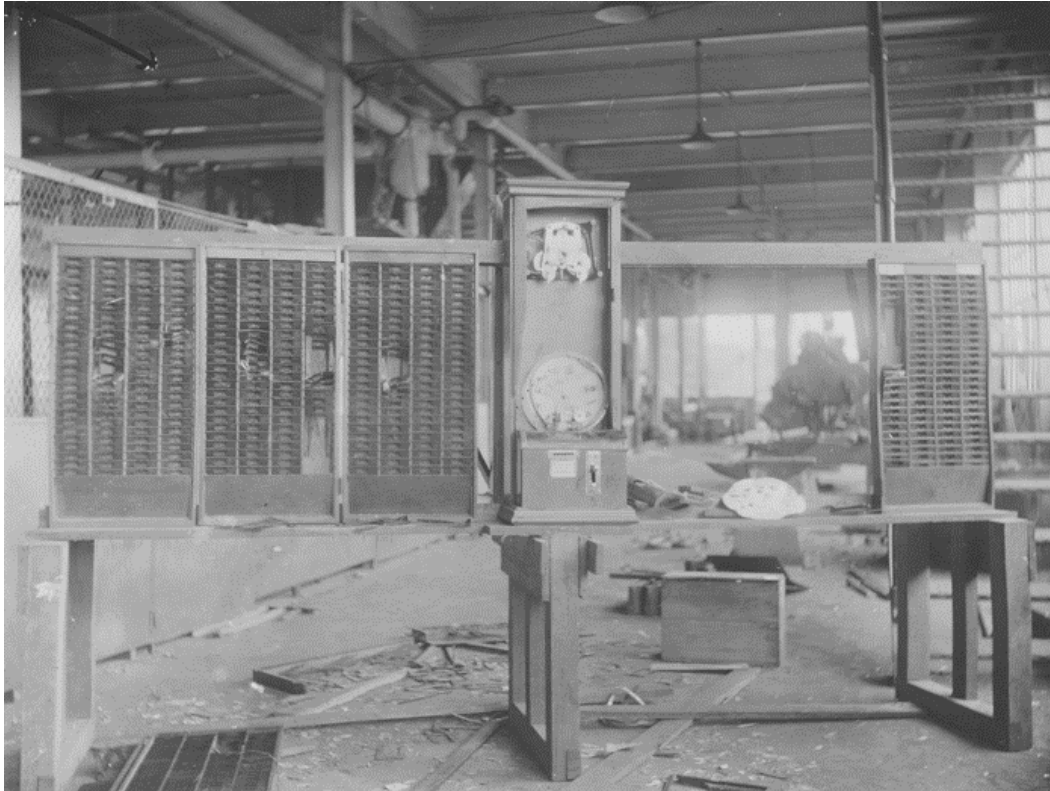


**Archaeologies of the present.**

**Recent anthropological approaches to temporality and materiality**

Finse 'Steinboligen', March 29<sup>th</sup> to. April 1<sup>st</sup> 2016



Teaching team (in alphabetical order):

Paul Wenzel Geissler, UiO ([p.w.geissler@sai.uio.no](mailto:p.w.geissler@sai.uio.no))

Ferdinand de Jong, UEA ([F.Jong@uea.ac.uk](mailto:F.Jong@uea.ac.uk))

Guillaume Lachenal, Paris 7 ([lachenal.univ.diderot@gmail.com](mailto:lachenal.univ.diderot@gmail.com))

Morten Nielsen, Århus University ([etnomn@cas.au.dk](mailto:etnomn@cas.au.dk))

Keir Martin, UiO ([k.j.c.martin@sai.uio.no](mailto:k.j.c.martin@sai.uio.no))

Knut Rio, UiB ([Knut.Rio@uib.no](mailto:Knut.Rio@uib.no))

Course Administrator: Katrine Blindheimsvik, UiO ([katrine.blindheimsvik@sai.uio.no](mailto:katrine.blindheimsvik@sai.uio.no))

***The course will take place at Steinboligen <http://steinboligen.no/> at Finse where we all will be sleeping and eating. The course will also partly take place at Finse 1222:***

***<http://www.finse1222.no/hotellet.html> 100 m from Steinboligen.***



Postadresse: Postboks 1091 Blindern, 0317 Oslo  
E-post: [henvendelser@sai.uio.no](mailto:henvendelser@sai.uio.no)  
[www.sv.uio.no/sai/](http://www.sv.uio.no/sai/)

*All meals are included, and you are allowed to bring your own alcoholic drinks.*

For questions please call Wenzel Geissler at + 47 22857579, or course administrator Katrine Blindheimsvik (+47 22 85 56 27)

## **Archaeologies of the present. Recent anthropological approaches to temporality and materiality**

This 3-day course is for all PhD students who grapple in their research with the relation between past, present and future, the challenges of 21<sup>st</sup> century time, and in particular with the concrete remains of the past that constitute the present, and upon which futures are imagined and built. Together we will explore the nexus between materiality and temporality, and develop a shared sensitivity to work the ethnographic present differently. We will try to make sense of the peculiarities of the contemporary moment and the remnants its modern precursors, delve into the history of the future, and ask new questions about how we, and the people we study, conceive of time, history and memory.

### **Anthropology in the aftertime.**

In the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, scholars and others experience (again) a 'crisis of time', the end of a familiar historical period (the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which once was claimed to be at the "end of history"), and the falling apart of the attendant progressive and linear sense of time (Thompson; Hartog). Modernity has turned into an object of the past and its past futures have become objects of affective attachments, reinterpretation and recycling. But even nostalgia is not what it used to be: the post-Fordist/post-imperial/post-socialist ruins disappear just as they become cherished aesthetical icons; from Detroit to Kinshasa, we witness a sequences of ruination, abandonment, repossession and renaissance that produce distinct landscapes of bust and boom –familiar by their very estranging quality.

Sharing this disconcerting experience of fragmentation of time and multiplication of temporalities with those they study, anthropologists require new ways of confronting the problem of time and history; a question, which has been at the heart of the discipline since its birth as a synchronic social science: how are different temporalities made and remade, contested and negotiated by and among our informants, by anthropologists, as well as emerging from the encounters between ourselves as anthropologists and those whom we study?

### **Temporality and materiality**

Building on the rich and diverse traditions of historical anthropology and ethnographic histories, and drawing on literary critics like Frederic Jameson, anthropologists and historians have focused their efforts on the intersections between materiality and temporality, what we may define as an archaeological (re)turn (Buchli, Stewart). In particular, as the legacies of utopian thinking have accumulated in palimpsests of modernisms, contemporary scholars have increasingly turned towards archaeological 'excavations' of material futures in the past.

Building its questionnaire around *the material presence of the past*, this new strand of scholarship moves beyond a conventional focus on “memory studies”. Where ethnographies of commemoration, heritage and “*lieux de mémoire*” attended to explicit, nation-state centered, top-down, political elaborations of various pasts from the present, the question is now to engage specifically with material-cum-temporal *traces*, understood as implicit, unexpected, autonomous, materializations of the past-in-the-present. Drawing from recent debates within archeology, this new research agenda attends to the temporal multiplicity of the present, as materially made up from a diversity of pasts, and to the poetics, aesthetics and politics of their manifestation as outcrops and remains, through excavation, re-enactment or unexpected encounters.

This archaeological turn draws on diverse theories, methods and motivations.

The development of ‘**science and technology studies**’ (STS) as well as the anthropology of material culture have shifted attention away from narratives and texts, to matter, and objects - things, ruins, buildings, landscapes – to the material manifestations of process in time – growth, decay, trace - to the agency of objects and materials themselves, and to human engagements with materials in and over time, affective attachments and responses, through which temporality and a sense of time is continuously made and remade by individuals, and between actors and groups - without necessarily congealing into any lasting, shared epochal ‘Zeitgeist’. STS’s attempts at characterizing the plurality and messiness of the world echoes archeologists’ passion for junk and crossed temporal horizons. By contrast, attempts at purifying “epochs”, at cutting slices of history and at pondering continuity and change from textual sources or personal experience may seem, following Achille Mbembe’s critique, naïve, vain, lazy or provincial: time, especially experienced from post-colonial situations, is not “a series but an interlocking of presents, pasts, and futures that retain their depths of other presents, pasts, and futures, each age bearing, altering, and maintaining the previous ones” (Mbembe). How such a complex understanding of temporality might inform research on the decaying materialities of modernity is one of the challenges that contemporary anthropologists are increasingly faced with.

Beyond their aesthetic celebration and even artistic commodification, **ruins of the modern** have been prominent themes and fields for anthropologists, who deployed the same innovative “commitment to intricately linking – or attending to a ‘breach’ between – pasts to presents” (Hunt) that they applied to archives (Stoler) or monuments (Pelkmanns). Post-welfarist ruins have been explored as sites of nostalgic attachments and persistent expectations (Schwenkel, Ferguson) and as witnesses of a fundamentally virulent and violent political process of ruination, manifesting itself in “rotting bodies” (Stoler, Navarro-Yashin), unattended pains (Livingston) and in the uneven geographies of nuclear and other toxic wastes (Hecht), or the ‘rubble’ of infrastructural remains (Gorrillo). Taken together, this body of work charts the contours of a new generations’ perspective on modern remains: anthropologists who came of age during the decline of modernity’s progressive temporality turn their attention towards (once taken-for-granted) universal structures of progress, stranded spaceships, traces of different ages. Others have moved beyond the ruin, by attending to the life and work within it, experimenting with ethnographies of maintenance,

repair and neglect (Tousignant) and exploring the historiographic potential of using “debris as method” (Hunt) and ‘recycling’ as epistemology (Navarro-Yashin).

Thirdly, the study of the remains and landscapes of late-modernity have become vibrant sites of excavation and of **theoretical discussion in the discipline of archeology** itself (Holtdorf, Buchli & Lukas, Harrison & Schofield). An “archeology of the contemporary past” has emerged as a legitimate sub-discipline, not only as the specific study of the traces of the proximal past but more radically as a theoretical proposition affirming the unique potential of archeological methods for “presencing absences”, i.e. for materializing subaltern, forgotten, silenced pasts, for experimenting multi-vocal and democratic exchanges on history, and for stimulating new, collective, explorations of landscape, affect and materiality, in conversation with non-representational geography, STS and anthropology (Ingold, Wylie). This perspective applies to vestiges of all epochs, so that “the present, made up as it is of a diversity of past temporalities, constitutes of itself, and in its entirety, archaeology’s field of study” (Olivier).

Partly intertwined with the recent affinity between archaeology and anthropology, **interactions between performance, conceptual art, and archaeological practice** - reconstituting the excavation as event and performance - have been fruitful both for art production and archaeological theory (Ssorin-Chaikow, Pearson). A different performative approach to temporality is involved in experiments by anthropologists, historians and filmmakers, as well as in popular culture, with the re-enactment of past events, on-site performances that engage ancient places and objects, or that take people back to the earlier selves (Agnew, Oppenheimer, de Jong),

### The course

We invite all PhD students who confront the riddles of time (in our time), wherever their field site or topic, working at the intersection of anthropology with history, archaeology, material culture studies, and science and technology studies. How are we to deal with the double prism of temporality that we face in the field – our informants’ diverse and shifting experiences of temporality and modes of expressing the same, and our own wondering about past and future, and the passage of time, sharing with the informants in a wider crisis of temporality?

Participants, including the teachers, on this Ph.D. course will discuss pre-circulated texts about questions of temporality and materiality: people’s way of living with buildings or objects, ethnographic accounts of archive work, archival readings of urban palimpsests, archaeologies of abandoned infrastructures, affective engagements o ruins and remains of a not so distant past, continuous effects of sedimented routines and traces of past organisation, performances of heritage and re-enactments and returns of the past...

## Selected readings

### By the convenors

de Jong, F. (2014) Archiving after Empire: Saint-Louis and its Sufi Counter-Memory. Francosphères 3: 1 25-41.

de Jong, F. (2009) Shining Lights: Self-fashioning in the Lantern Festival of Saint Louis, Senegal, African Arts 42: 4 38-53.

Geissler, P. W. (2014). What future remains? Remembering an African place of science. Para-states and medical science: making global health in Africa. P. W. Geissler. Durham, Duke UP: 142-178.

Geissler, P. W. (2011). Parasite Lost: Remembering Modern Times with Kenyan Government Medical Scientists. Evidence, Ethos and Ethnography: The Anthropology and History of Medical Research in Africa. P. W. Geissler and C. Molyneux. Oxford, Berghahn: 297-232.

Geissler, P. W. and A. Kelly (2015). Field Station as Stage: Re-enacting Mid-20th Century Scientific Work and Life in Amani, Tanzania. Social Studies of Science in press.

Lachenal, G. and A. Mbodj, Eds. (2014). Politiques de la nostalgie. Special issue 135 Politique Africaine. Paris, Karthala.

Lachenal, G. (2013) „Kin porn“. Somatosphere, 2014. <http://somatosphere.net/2013/01/kin-porn.html>

Lachenal, G. (2013), "The Dubai Stage of Public Health. Global Health in Africa between Past and Future". Tiers Monde, n°215, 53-71, [http://www.cairn.info/article.php?ID\\_ARTICLE=RTM\\_215\\_0053](http://www.cairn.info/article.php?ID_ARTICLE=RTM_215_0053).

Dalsgaard, S & Nielsen, M (2013), 'Introduction: Time and the Field' Social Analysis, vol 57, 1, pp 1-19.

Nielsen, M (2015), 'Into Architecture: House-building and Acentered Personhood in Maputo, Mozambique'. in T Flohr Sørensen & M Bille (eds), Assembling Architecture. Routledge, London.

### Other readings

Agnew, V. (2004). Introduction: What Is Reenactment? Criticism 46(3): 327-39.

Bissell, W. C. (2005). Engaging Colonial Nostalgia. Cultural Anthropology 20(2): 215-248.

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De Boeck, F. (1998). Beyond the grave: History, memory and death in postcolonial Congo/Zaire. Memory and the postcolony. African anthropology and the critique of power. R. Werbner. London, Zed Books: 21-57.

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- Gordillo, G. (2014) Rubble: The Afterlife of Destruction. Durham: Duke University Press
- Harrison Rodney & John Schofield (2010), After modernity. Archeological approaches to the contemporary past. Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- Hartog, Francois (2015) Regimes of Historicity: Presentism and Experiences of Time. New York: Columbia UP.
- Hecht, Gabrielle (2012). Being Nuclear: Africans and the Global Uranium Trade. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Holtorf, C. (2012). Search the past - find the present: qualities of archaeology and heritage in contemporary society. Oxford, Archaeopress.
- Hunt, Nancy (2014). "The affective, the intellectual, and gender history", *The Journal of African History*, vol 55, pp. 331 - 345
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- Stoler, Ann Laura (2008). Imperial Debris: Reflections on Ruins and Ruination. Cultural Anthropology 23, no. 2: 191–219.
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