

MIT Architecture  
4.s12 Special Subjects in Architecture  
Units: 3-0-6  
Instructor: Rosalyne Shieh  
Mondays 1:30-4:30  
Room 1-136

## Like a descendant: haunting, archives, and diasporic senses of place

Place is location, but it's also people, relationships, and memories, the site of things forgotten, suppressed or unrecorded, terrible and ordinary ways of being. The experience of people and peoples who have migrated, been displaced or exiled add further complexity to place: perhaps, an unshakeable orientation to elsewhere or a sense of in-betweenness; or a simultaneous yet imperfect belonging to both here and there, to neither here nor there; an intermittent or constant feeling of being entirely out of place. What is a diasporic sense of place, how do we image or describe it, and how might it reimage space and place to define a territory for spatial practice?

Together, we will study work by authors and artists whose lives and works are profoundly influenced by their own relation to place. Some forms that give direction to the semester project are: memoir, cartography, annotation, oral history.

### Collection

Within the notions of place, migration, and memory, the semester project will be: first, to foreground your instincts and curiosity and accrue a collection; and secondarily, to give it shape and form. This process may begin naturally from a personal place, but it doesn't have to, and as we workshop through the semester, we will be asking ourselves how the work can be shared, who it might be shared with, and what forms it may take to those ends.

Each participant is to keep a journal in which to record, collect, reflect, responding to weekly readings/works/prompts/discussion in class, and each person's practice of becoming ever more sensitive to the ordinary and extant parts of their existence and memory as they relate to the themes of this class. A recommendation: 1/3 writing, 1/3 drawing, 1/3 photography. Consider this class as dedicated time to develop this practice using the notebook as primary tool.

### Outcome

Archives, altars, catalogs, atlases. These are some examples of forms that collections can take. Forms that are sharable with an audience or participants, they may even be disseminated and inflect the economy of knowledge. The final project will be for each collection to be developed into such a format that we will share in the last class.

### Structure

Each week, we will use class time in two parts: a short lecture or screening with discussion and time to workshop individual projects and process. Readings/screenings for the next class will be assigned at the end of each session.

## Part 1 the haunting, the collection (Weeks 1-6)

Prompt for week 1: Acquire a journal. Collect objects, words, images, around something or someone lost or now gone without explanation.

Prompt for week 2: Continue your collection from week 1, but include recollection, remembrance, mourning, sorrow, grief, and joy.

For consideration:

John Akomfrah on archives, history, non-fiction as counter-ballast; affective proximity.

- Why History Matters, Tate Shots (2025)  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jDJYyG7jKV0>
- Handsworth Song (1981), montage  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FrR5Byjmf9I>

Avery Gordon on haunting and complex personhood

- Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination (1997)
  - Introduction to new edition (2007), xv-xx
  - Chapter 1: her shape and his hand, 3-28

Trinh T. Minh-ha on speaking nearby

- “Speaking Nearby:” A Conversation with Trinh T. Minh-ha,” w/Nancy Chen (1992)
- Surname Viêt, given name Name (1989), 1 hour 48 min  
Available through MIT Libraries on Kanopy

Sky Hopinka on dislocation

- Dislocation Blues (2017), 16:57  
<http://www.skyhopinka.com/dislocation-blues/>
- A Disclocated Wild  
<https://mubi.com/en/notebook/posts/sky-hopinka-introduces-his-film-dislocation-blues>

Lara Oldfield Ford on a lost London

- Savage Messiah (2011)

Mark Fisher on Lara Oldfield Ford

- ‘Always Yearning for the Time That Just Eluded Us,’ Introduction to Savage Messiah (2011)

Walter Benjamin on unpacking his library

- Unpacking My Library: A Talk about Book Collecting (1931)

Homi Bhabha on the right to narrate

- The right to narrate (2014)

bell hooks on the margins

- Marginality as Site of Resistance (1989)