

The House of Liberation: a Dark Room for Ernest Cole.

Wolff Architects, Cape Town

Spring 2023 Advanced Studio VI A4106_005

Columbia GSAPP, NYC

Professor: Ilze Wolff

Assistant Professor: TBC

Class time:

Monday + Thursday: 1:30 pm – 6:30 pm

Photograph is from the South African Unseen archive of Ernest Cole

Caption: Re-surfacing the earthen floor of an exile's rondavel

Keywords: apartheid,Banishment,Bedroom,Black,Culture,Exile,Forced Removal,Health,Housing,Isolation,Leisure,Religion,Rural,Rural Infrastructure,Tradition,Wilderness

Location: Frenchdale, North West Province [Cape Province],South Africa

Source: Ernest Cole Family Trust/Magnum

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Introduction

In this studio we will closely review the vast research archive and images of Ernest Cole, the photographer from South Africa who lived in exile in New York City from 1966 until his passing in 1990. Ernest Cole, who was given the name Ernest Levi Tsoloane Kole at birth, arrived in New York City at the age of 26 with the view of publishing a photographic exposé on the cruelty of racial capitalism and its consequences on black people's lives under apartheid. This exposé was published in 1968 by Random House with the title '*The House of Bondage*'. The book, banned in South Africa immediately upon its release, covers in 14 chapters, the various institutions and spaces built by the state, in other words, the very infrastructure of the apartheid regime: the mines, the police, public transportation, declared Black spots, female domestic service, sub-standard 'bantus' education, hospitals and shebeens. The book reads like an architectural monograph of apartheid, visuals supported by precise and cutting descriptions in the accompanying essays and captions by Cole.

The book had the desired impact of informing and causing outrage in the outside world, of the conditions in which black people in South Africa were subjected to. Cole subsequently received much acclaim for the book both as a form of potent activism as well as for its aesthetic achievements. In the US he was awarded grants to do similar documentations in Harlem and in the American rural south, yet these books never materialised. Although THoB was successful, Cole resented being typecast as a '*chronicler of misery and injustice*' and wrote to a friend that he wanted to focus his talents on '*other aspects of life, more hopeful, with some joy to it.*' In November 2022 Aperture re-published Cole's famous House of Bondage, this time including a 15th chapter called '*Black Ingenuity*' a series of photos that depict the joys of creative and cultural black life in South Africa, despite the dehumanising effects of colonial modernity, apartheid and racial capitalism. Cole chose not to include this chapter in the original book and thus we have access to them for the first time in the republication.

Keywords and phrases

Black Ingenuity, Renewing our Habits of assembly, prophetic organisation, Black Aesthetic Education, Black Cartographies, Black Social Imagination, Trans-disciplinary, Black ecologies, Black Photography, Cyanotypes.

Key writers

Fred Moten, Bessie Head, Chimurenga, Bell Hooks, Alice Walker, Ousmane Sembene, Dambudzo Marechera, Arundhati Roy, Gabeba Baderoon, Manolo Callahan, Anna Atkins.

Outcomes and methodologies

The work of Cole deserves careful attention. Therefore the desired outcome of the studio would be for students to practice 'hard looking', 'hard listening' and the careful construction of insights. We wish that the students will grasp and develop their own aesthetic and spatial education whilst working with difficult histories of the present, such as these. Students will work collectively yet each student will be asked to contribute individual insights to this collective project.

In this studio we ask:

How do we look seriously and understand the emotional charge of space through the work of someone like Cole? How do we engage in ethical ways and how do we intervene with wisdom and creativity knowing what we know of a place? How we do work collectively? How we do work convivially? How do we construct houses of liberation and practices of freedom? We will develop a space or a series of spaces in which to engage with this particular work of liberation: perhaps a garden where one can make cyanotypes or prints using plant based emulsions, or maybe its a space to develop and construct 'new habits of assembly'. These spaces could be tectonic or conceptual or simply an intervention or an act of repair. They may be a result of various outcomes, it could be in conversation with an existing space or spaces. The design is not the main character

in the story but the process of arrival at a clear and precise creative intervention is. The idea is that students are guided and encouraged to work both intuitively and intentionally. Analogue forms of expression should dominate the outcomes with digital tools used will merely to access information and as ways to capture and catalogue work.

Students may choose any of the following forms of material outcomes:

- A publication
- A film
- A public cultural intervention
- A design of a space of engagement and conviviality
- A map
- A sound piece
- All of the above

Sites

- Ernest Cole's New York City (Harlem in particular) as a site
- Ernest Cole's digital archive as a site
- House of Bondage I as a site
- House of Bondage II as a site
- The photographer's dark room (real or conceptual)
- The project could straddle the realms and scales of landscape, urban or domestic.

Schedule

Generally introduction/seminars/reviews on a Monday, working reviews with students on Thursdays.

Detailed schedule to follow including when students may expect my presence in the studio.

Kinne Travel to South Africa

Students will travel to South Africa, spending two days in Johannesburg and three days in Cape Town. In South Africa students will visit the places identified in the studio and produce work towards a collective publication to be assembled at Wolff Architects in Cape Town. Various walking seminars will be arranged during the visits. In Cape Town students will gather at the Wolff house in Observatory and discuss amongst themselves and invited guests over a dinner, dance and music. The students will be asked to prepare and cook a meal based on ingredients found during their visit and play music as selected from engagement with the archive.

Required reading/listening/viewing/discussion

Websites/ digital archives

University of the Witwatersrand Historical Papers digital archive of Ernest Cole

<http://historicalpapers-atom.wits.ac.za/a3440a>

Photography Legacy Project

<https://www.plparchive.com/explore/collection/wppaspec/oc1/lnen/cv0/abErnest-Cole>

Books

Cole, E. and Flaherty, T., 1968. *The House of Bondage*. Ardent Media.

Cole, E et.al. 2022. *The House of Bondage*, Aperture. **(All students signing up are required to purchase/acquire their own copy at \$65. This copy will be used as a notebook for students to capture their thoughts and then to share in collective discussion.)**

Cole, E., Robertson, S. and Powell, I., 2010. *Ernest Cole: Photographer*. Hasselblad Foundation.

Rhodes-Pitts, S., 2011. *Harlem is nowhere: a journey to the Mecca of Black America*. Hachette UK.

Gooden, M., 2016. *Dark space: Architecture, representation, black identity*. Columbia University Press.

https://nhm.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/view/BookReaderViewer/44NHM_INST/12190875980002081

Journal articles

Hayes, P., 2007. Power, secrecy, proximity: A short history of South African photography. *Kronos: Journal of Cape History*, 33(1), pp.139-162.

Chapters in books

Harney, S. and Moten, F. 2021. 1. Habits of Assembly. In: Hockenberry, M., Starosielski, N. and Zieger, S. ed. *Assembly Codes: The Logistics of Media*. New York, USA: Duke University Press, pp. 23-33. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781478013037-004>

Films

Select any of these independent black films listed in this article

<https://www.filmlinc.org/series/tell-it-like-it-is-black-independents-in-new-york-1968-1986/#films>

Ernest Cole (2006) Documentary Dir by Jürgen Schadeberg

<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt8018240/>

Black Girl (1966) Directed by Ousmane Sembene

Sound

<https://www.mixcloud.com/chimurenga/neo-muyanga-revolting-songs-1/>

<https://www.mixcloud.com/chimurenga/neo-muyanga-revolting-songs-2/>

LPs for listening

<https://www.discogs.com/release/7706206-Hugh-Masekela-Home>

<https://www.discogs.com/release/475844-Lee-Morgan-Search-For-The-New-Land>

<https://www.discogs.com/release/2513826-Philip-Tabane-And-Malombo-Malombo>

<https://nextstopsoweto.bandcamp.com/album/spirit-of-malombo-malombo-jabula-jazz-afrika-1966-1984>

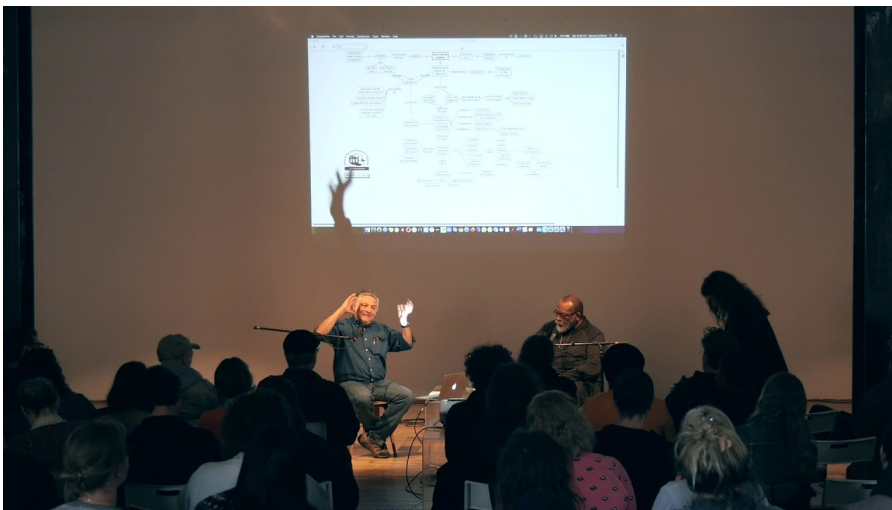
Online articles

<https://mg.co.za/friday/2022-12-26-brash-photographer-ernest-cole-revisited/>

<https://www.magnumphotos.com/arts-culture/society-arts-culture/ernest-cole-rediscovered-archive-apartheid-black-history/>

Online lectures

Fred Moten & Manolo Callahan



March 7, 2020

The Lab

Fred Moten is a student of the black radical tradition. He works collaboratively with Manolo Callahan, Stefano Harney, Laura Harris, Wu Tsang and many others. His latest book is all that beauty (Letter Machine Editions, 2019). He teaches in the department of Performance Studies at New York University.

Manuel Callahan is an insurgent learner and convivial researcher with the Center for Convivial Research and Autonomy. He also participates in the Universidad de la Tierra Califas and remains an active member of Acción Zapatista South Bay.

PASS presents: Revolting Songs (Neo Muyanga)



Stories about Music in Africa

This the second in a series of monthly Pan African Space Station (PASS) broadcasts, concert-lectures, recorded at the Chimurenga headquarters in Cape Town as well as satellite locations across the African world.

Tune in at <http://www.panafricanspacestation.org.za>

For more on Neo Muyanga visit:
<http://panafricanspacestation.org.za/...>

Produced with kind support from Goethe-Institut and Pro Helvetia. Thanks too to Brundyn+ Gallery and Johannesburg Workshop in Theory and Criticism.

End of syllabus.