

## Course Description/Invitation



Inspired by the autoethnographic method, I'm reaching out personally to invite you to join ***Intimate Excavations: Emotional Archaeology as Research Method***, my second course at CILAS.

This course stands independently, but grows organically from my earlier offering, *Performing Stories with Neo-Dastangoi*. Where that course used storytelling and performance to animate political memory in urban space, this one turns inward – toward a more intimate, research-driven engagement with place, emotion, and the archive.

*Emotional Archaeology* is a methodology I've been developing since my postgraduate work. It weaves together phenomenology, aesthetic

analysis, digital culture, and autoethnography to explore overlooked or everyday spaces as repositories of lived memory. The aim is not only to study archives— whether physical, oral, spatial, or digital— but to ask how they feel upon encounter, and what they ask of us in return. This 8-week seminar-practicum introduces Emotional Archaeology as a way of thinking and researching that centres emotional literacy, ethical presence, and Practice-as-Research. Participants will learn to approach archives— from community libraries and personal collections to online blogs and cultural maps— as dynamic sites where memory, identity, and meaning accumulate and shift.

We'll be asking:

- How do objects and spaces hold emotion?
- How do we document what is felt, not just what is found?
- What kinds of knowledge lie outside institutional archives?
- Can a researcher be both implicated and rigorous?

Drawing inspiration from grassroots initiatives like the Hazrat Shah Wali Ullah Library in Delhi, and parallel efforts in Cairo, we'll explore how archives rooted in community often tell deeper, more plural stories than those housed in institutions.

Sessions will combine theory, fieldwork (on- and offline), and creative documentation. Our digital classroom— bridging India and Egypt— will serve as both a site of learning and a space of shared excavation. Each participant will develop a Practice-as-Research project draft that reflects their own methodology, potentially culminating in a multimedia piece that captures the relationship between artefact, space, and emotion.

Whether you're a researcher, artist, or simply curious about how we remember and record meaning, this course invites you to slow down, feel deeply, and rethink what counts as knowledge.

I look forward to the possibility of thinking, feeling, and researching together.

### **Tentative Course Flow**

Each week includes conceptual grounding, experiential engagement, and creative reflection. The course builds progressively toward independent fieldwork and the development of original Practice-as-Research outputs.

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#### **Week 1: Foundations of Emotional Archaeology**

**Key Themes:** Emotional knowledge, sensory archives, personal memory

**Focus Questions:** Why study archives emotionally? What makes an object or space archival?

- Introduction to the course and methodology
- Emotional Archaeology as a research lens
- Digital archives and cultural memory in a post-globalised world
- Workshop: *Personal Object as Archive*— a hands-on exercise in emotional memory and narrative layering

#### **Core Readings:**

Ellis, Benjamin, Stewart

## **Week 2: Phenomenology of Space & Memory**

**Key Themes:** Embodied experience, orientation, spatial memory

**Focus Questions:** How do we experience space emotionally? What does it mean to "be oriented" toward an archive?

- Phenomenology of perception and place
- The politics of orientation and lived geography
- Mapping memory: space as a sensory container
- Workshop: *Cartographies of Feeling* – participants create personal memory maps

### **Core Readings:**

Tuan, Ahmed

**Film (excerpts):** *La Chimera* (2023)

## **Week 3: The Archive as Intimate Landscape**

**Key Themes:** Autoethnography, voice, vulnerability in research

**Focus Questions:** How does the researcher's self shape the archive? Can intimacy be methodologically valid?

- Autoethnography as a critical and creative mode
- Archive as a queer/feminist and embodied practice
- Full screening + discussion: *Al Mummia* (1969)
- Guest conversation: Archive and Queer/Feminist Practice
- Workshop: *Writing the Archive from Within*

### **Core Readings:**

Reed-Danahay, Ellis

## **Week 4: Intercultural Archives – Case Study: Delhi**

**Key Themes:** Syncretism, grassroots heritage, memory politics

**Focus Questions:** What stories live in non-institutional archives? How do multilingual/multi-religious histories cohabit?

- Exploration of the Hazrat Shah Waliullah Library and similar community archives
- Visual presentation of selected manuscripts
- Intercultural memory and plural urban pasts
- Workshop: *Sensory Writing Exercise*— recording archival atmospheres
- Preparation for independent fieldwork

### **Core Materials:**

Archival selections from Delhi; discussion prompts

## **Week 5: Cairo Fieldwork Orientation**

**Key Themes:** Ethics of witnessing, methodological design, positionality

**Focus Questions:** What does it mean to “excavate” cultural memory? How do we balance access and care?

- Orientation to field research: approaches, challenges, permissions
- Field Visit Protocols shared and discussed
- Methodology Clinic: building your research toolkit
- Reflection activity: *The Ethics of Looking Closely*

## **Week 6: Fieldwork Week**

**Key Themes:** Embodied research, situated documentation, community dialogue

- Independent or small-group visits to local archival or cultural spaces (suggested list provided; students may propose others)
- Documentation through visual, audio, written, and sensory methods
- Midweek peer check-in (virtual or in-person) to share early impressions and troubleshoot

## **Week 7: Translating Fieldwork – Studio Sessions**

**Key Themes:** Curation, creative synthesis, affective storytelling

**Focus Questions:** How do we tell what we felt? What does a "living" archive look/sound/feel like?

- Practice-as-Research studio workshop: curating your materials (sound, images, text, sketches, maps)
- Peer feedback and collaborative problem-solving
- Writing the Affective Archive: guided exercises in creative-critical synthesis

## **Week 8: Shared Excavations – Final Presentations**

**Key Themes:** Knowledge sharing, reflection, methodological legacies

**Focus Questions:** What do we do with what we found? How do we honour the process?

- Public or semi-public presentation of final Practice-as-Research projects
- Reflecting on process, ethics, and embodied knowledge
- Closing circle: collective reflections and possible afterlives of your research

## Learning Objectives

By the end of this course, participants will be able to:

- Apply **phenomenological and emotional archaeology frameworks** to the study of cultural memory, spatial experience, and archival research.
- Employ **autoethnographic and aesthetic strategies** to engage with archival spaces in ways that are inclusive, reflective, and grounded in lived experience.
- Critically examine **intercultural and syncretic narratives** within grassroots and community-driven archives, especially those underrepresented in institutional memory.
- Conduct fieldwork using a **hybrid methodology** that integrates community knowledge, creative inquiry, and academic rigour.
- Produce original **Practice-as-Research outputs** that combine textual, visual, and performative modes to document the affective life of archives and spaces.
- Contribute to **experimental, decolonial forms of knowledge-making** that centre sensory experience, emotional literacy, and ethical engagement.

## Learning Outcomes

By the end of the course, participants will be able to:

1. **Apply phenomenological and emotional archaeology frameworks** to the analysis of cultural memory, space, and archival practice using tools such as Experience Logs, e.tc.
2. **Engage in autoethnographic research** by drawing on personal experience, affect, and embodied memory to inform scholarly and creative inquiry using tools like Specimen Folders, e.t.c.
3. **Critically interpret grassroots and community-based archives**, with attention to their intercultural, syncretic, and political dimensions, using tools like Observation Sketchbooks, e.t.c.

4. **Design and conduct field-based research** using hybrid methodologies that integrate academic rigour with community knowledge and creative modes of documentation, using tools like Analytical Classification Tables, e.t.c.
5. **Produce Practice-as-Research outputs** that synthesise theory, fieldwork, and artistic expression across textual, visual, and performative forms using methodological praxis frameworks such as Neo-Dastangoi, e.t.c.
6. **Demonstrate emotional and ethical literacy** in research encounters, especially in contexts involving intimate, marginal, or overlooked cultural spaces.
7. **Contribute to decolonial and community-rooted modes of knowledge-making**, challenging dominant narratives through sensory, inclusive, and situated methodologies.

## Core Readings & Viewings

These readings and films will anchor our weekly discussions and introduce key conceptual, aesthetic, and methodological frameworks in Emotional Archaeology. Supplementary materials will be shared during the course.

### I. Theory & Methodology

*Emotional Archaeology, Autoethnography, and Phenomenology*

- **Deborah E. Reed-Danahay**, *Autoethnography: Rewriting the Self and the Social* (selected chapters)
- **Carolyn Ellis**, “The Autoethnographic I,” in *The Ethnographic I: A Methodological Novel about Autoethnography*
- **Sara Ahmed**, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (selections)
- **Yi-Fu Tuan**, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Introduction)
- **Walter Benjamin**, “Unpacking My Library”

- **Susan Stewart**, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*
- **Mircea Eliade**, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* (selections)
- **Ananda K. Coomaraswamy**, *The Transformation of Nature in Art* (selections)
- **Michael Baxandall**, *Patterns of Intention: On the Historical Explanation of Pictures*

## II. Literature & Lived Histories

*Urban Memory, Intimacy, and Intercultural Aesthetics*

- **Naguib Mahfouz**, *The Harafish*
- **Ahmed Ali**, *Twilight in Delhi*
- **Attia Hosain**, *Sunlight on a Broken Column*
- Excerpts from **Naguib Mahfouz**, *On Art, Literature & History*
- **Keri Smith**, *How To Be An Explorer of The World: Portable Art/Life Museum*
- Selected Urdu and Persian manuscripts from the Hazrat Shah Waliullah Library (Delhi) and parallel archives in Cairo (to be shared during the course)

## III. Films & Visual Poetics

*Archive, Absence, and Embodied Storytelling*

- **Al Mummia** (1969, dir. Shadi Abdel Salam)
- **La Chimera** (2023, dir. Alice Rohrwacher) – selected scenes
- *Optional viewing*: Clips from **Kaili Blues** (2015, dir. Bi Gan) and **Stalker** (1979), **The Mirror** (1975, dir. Andrei Tarkovsky)

## IV. Supplementary & Optional Readings

These texts offer additional lenses for participants seeking deeper theoretical grounding or comparative frameworks.

- **Rustom Bharucha**, *The Politics of Cultural Practice: Thinking Through Theatre in an Age of Globalization*
- **Rashmi Varma**, *The Postcolonial City and its Subjects: London, Nairobi, Bombay* (selected chapters)
- **Edward Casey**, *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History* (excerpts)
- **Kaveh Safa**, selected articles on Transmedia Storytelling
- **Paula Serafini**, *Performing the City* (optional excerpts)

### **Discussion-Based Learning Approach**

In *Intimate Excavations*, discussion-based learning will be woven into every stage of the course as a method of both intellectual inquiry and emotional reflection. Drawing on the principles of relational autoethnography and feminist/queer pedagogy, each session will begin with a facilitated round of reflective dialogue— drawing from the week's readings, viewings, or field notes. Rather than treat discussion as commentary, we will treat it as co-authorship: a collaborative process where lived experience, emotional resonance, and theoretical insight are given equal weight. Participants will be invited to share not only what they have understood, but what they have felt, questioned, or remembered— foregrounding the affective labour of research. These dialogues will directly inform creative exercises and methodological workshops, allowing students to iteratively test and refine their Practice-as-Research approaches. The classroom will function as a porous space— part seminar, part studio— where conversations evolve into documentation strategies, memory maps, or experimental texts. Weekly peer exchange and feedback will further support the development of participants' projects, nurturing a collective environment of ethical witnessing, vulnerability, and mutual respect. Through this approach, DBL becomes not just a pedagogical tool but a core practice of emotional archaeology itself.