

<http://somatosphere.net/2013/01/the-archaeology-of-past-futures-or-fieldwork-by-fragments-2.html>

## The archaeology of past futures, or fieldwork by fragments

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This series is an exercise in fieldwork through material fragments – of coming to grips with the present pasts of scientific institutions in the ‘tropics’. It is about what biomedicine leaves behind – rusted instruments, congealed and unlabeled bloods slides – and the losses, pleasures, failures, and desires these leftovers relay. It is about photographs, blueprints, monuments and archives – half-forgotten techniques and engrained bodily gestures, unacknowledged intimacies and interrupted peregrinations.

This series began as a meditation on the processes of memory and forgetting in medical research, from commemorative practices and archival maintenance (or destruction) to the splintered lab-benches and family photo-albums that we encountered during visits to the ruins and remains of scientific endeavors in Africa, to the retirement homes, houses and gardens of those who once partook in these, and to more or less well-maintained sites of purposive accumulations of past artefacts, be they museums or archives.

The fragments, and their collectors, were brought together by members of the British-Franco-Dutch research programme ‘Memories and Remains of Medical Research’ (funded by UK Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), the French Agence Nationale de la Recherche (ANR) and Dutch Netherlands organization for Scientific Research (NWO) respectively), hosted at the University of Paris Diderot, the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, the VIH-Sida et Maladies Associées at the Institute de Recherche pour le Développement in Senegal and the Free University of Amsterdam (<http://mereaf.hypotheses.org/the-mereaf-project>). This exhibition reflects both aspects of the history of medical science, and our shared infatuation with traces and the intimacies of excavation.

We believe that excavating the built, archived, inhabited and haptic manifestations of the pasts of health institutions will expose alternative stories of colonial and postcolonial biopolitics and privilege new understandings of the changing visions and possibilities of contemporary global health. At the same time, approaching the past in such a tactile and

affective manner opens our own renderings of past and present to critical reflection.

**Trace 1:** *Archivophagy* – John Manton

Our first trace was encountered in Ayos, a medical research station in South-East Cameroon. Created as a segregation camp for sleeping-sickness patients by German colonial doctors, Ayos was 're-created' by French colonial doctors after World War I. After years of underinvestment, a new hospital has been erected on site, resulting in the repurposing and partial destruction of the original structures and site-plan.



Trace 1 (J. Manton, 2012)

Here we see a fragment of archival material found in Ayos. The document's current state of ruination – its mildewed and torn pages – make it difficult to use and decipher. Whether a victim of recent development-led upheaval, or rescued by it, we found these sheets laid out on a floor to dry, presumably prior to re-filing. From the context of this encounter, we can discern the labours involved in preserving records; perhaps more significantly, we can infer important features of the performance of state power, and its limitations with regards to knowledge production/classificatory order/historical production, from the precarious and yet persistent afterlife of such documents. We would call this an example of *archivophagy* – the process by which institutions consume and are powered by the scaffolding upon which they and their legacies are

built.

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