

Sophie Seita  
Fictional Collectives and Archives

This course will deal with fictional collectives and fictional archives, quizzing what makes them not so fictional after all or seeing the underlying fictional desire at the heart of any scholarly endeavour. We will research and experiment with the para-fictional, the para-academic, and speculative forms of research and writing alongside rigorous forms of enquiry into how we read or 'use' the past. We will study some examples of speculative historical research and fictional collectives for which traditional historical evidence is lacking. For example, we will look at poet and performer Karenjit Sandhu's *Poetic Fragments from the Irritating Archive*, an object-based collection of poetry that imagines and navigates through a fictional archive of irritating materials. Another case study will be Jennifer Walshe's *Aisteach: the Avant-garde Archive of Ireland*, about which the project website adds this disclaimer: 'I have a confession to make – all of the composers and artists on this website are fictional. The Aisteach Foundation is a communal thought experiment, a revisionist exercise in "what if?", a huge effort by many people to create an alternative history of avant-garde music in Ireland, to write our ancestors into being and shape their stories with care. We played fast and loose with history and the truth and we like to think Flann O'Brien would have approved.'

We will welcome such confessions, alternative histories, and communal thought experiments, and will build our own fictional archives together through critical essays, performance, video, lecture performances, digital archives, magazines, and other formats.

'When the archive and history books don't yield the desired stories you have to look elsewhere.' Often the evidence is provisional or lacking. But, as José Esteban Muñoz notes, perhaps 'evidence' is not a helpful intellectual category for those who've been left out of the historical record: 'Instead of being clearly available as visible evidence, queerness has instead existed as innuendo, gossip, fleeting moments'. In this class, we will follow the promise of these other forms of doing art and scholarship.

We will draw on methodologies from autoethnography, auto-theory, ficto-criticism, performance studies, and learn from scholars like Muñoz, Saidiya Hartman ('critical fabulation'), and Julietta Singh ('body archives'), who have merged the personal and scholarly in different ways.

Through these real and ficto-historical accounts, we will ask broader questions about attempts to queer and decolonise botany, knowledge, archives, and history.