

The Sensorial Regime of “Second Slavery”: Landscape of Enslavement in the Paraíba Valley (Rio de Janeiro, Brazil)



Friday, February
28 (2:20 - 4 p.m.)

056 Hagerty Hall

A lecture by:

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Rui Gomes Coelho is an archaeologist interested in historical archaeology, archaeology of the contemporary, critical heritage and photography. His current interests are driven by a fascination with the sensorial constitution of alternative modernities, and for marginal communities who mobilize material culture against traditional, nationalist-oriented approaches to heritage. He has been collaborating with archaeological projects based in the U.S., Portugal, Brazil, Germany, Spain, and Croatia. Recent publications include the essay “The Garden of Refugees” in the volume *The New Nomadic Age: Archaeologies of Forced and Undocumented Migration*, edited by Yannis Hamilakis, 2018 and the article “An Archaeology of Decolonization: Imperial Intimacies in Contemporary Lisbon”, published by the *Journal of Social Archaeology*, 2019.

The institution of slavery was constitutive of the modern liberal society and was crucial to the development of the capitalist world-system in the 19th century. I argue that in order to persevere and be legitimized in the eyes of an increasingly liberal Western society, slavery gradually moved away from traditional practices of physical punishment and coercive surveillance and became a more holistic institution. In its new shape, the institution of slavery paralleled other institutions associated to the emergence of the liberal society, intended to create self-disciplined bodies. Because of its disciplinary power, the “Second Slavery” mirrors aspects of other modern institutions such as the factory, the prison, and the school. This new form of slavery became possible because it was materialized in a landscape, under a sensorial regime that combined production and experience. My question is: what role did landscape play in creation of the sensorial regime of “Second Slavery”, and how did coffee planters and enslaved workers negotiate their subjectivities? Based on archaeological fieldwork in the Paraíba Valley in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, I argue that the tensions emerging from the difficulties of adapting a slavery-based society to a disciplinary and liberal project led to the definition of a sensorial regime, in which coffee planters tried to model the perceptions and experiences of slaves and non-captive workers. The enslaved, on the other hand, tried to cope with those challenges and defined alternative sensorial engagements with the plantation landscape. These alternatives challenged the institution of slavery, and left a long-lasting legacy.

