In Spring 2016, I received a Faculty Development Grant that allowed me to travel to Berlin in March 2016 to document the current state of construction of the Humboldt Forum as part of my video project ‘Untitled’ to be completed later this year. (I will shoot additional footage in Berlin in July/August 2016). I have been documenting the transformation of the former site of the Baroque Berlin City Palace along the river Spree in Berlin, Germany since 2007. This urban site in Berlin’s city center is emblematic of a state-orchestrated writing and re-writing of history. My March trip also enabled me to conduct an interview with a captain of one of the Spree river tourist boats that have served as a tracking shot device for my work.

The Baroque palace was partly damaged during World War II and demolished by the Communist East German government in 1950 as a despised emblem of Prussian militarism and imperial power. The German Democratic Republic replaced it in the mid-’70s with the Palace of the Republic to host the seat of the East German parliament. About a decade after the German re-unification, the German government decided to demolish the Palace of the Republic in order to build a replica of the former Berlin City Palace with a design faithfully reproducing three of the four original Baroque facades, and one façade modern and unadorned.

Over the years, I have captured footage that includes the demolition of the Palace of the Republic, the transformation of the site into a public green space, as well as the continuous construction of the Humboldt Forum. The reconstruction of adjacent bridges extends the focus of the project beyond a particular iconic building towards broader urban redevelopment strategies. Graffiti that appears and disappears on construction fences over the years functions as document of the relation of a site to its public.

I utilize the tour boats as readymade dolly or tracking shots. The dolly shot is a common trope in filmmaking that is employed for its dynamic activation of the experience of time and space while simultaneously encouraging the viewer’s gaze. To achieve the effect of a tracking shot, I record the Berlin palace site from one of the many tourist boats that run along the river Spree. This repetitive cinematic representation of the site mimics the repetitive nature of the writing and re-writing of history through urban and architectural development.

The completed work will include a soundtrack. The interview I recorded on my Spring trip to Berlin will contribute to the audio source material. The soundtrack will set different forms of text, speech, music and other diverse sounds against the moving image.

Below are several video stills from the footage shot in Berlin in Spring 2016.
Kathrin Burmester 'Untitled' (2016), video still

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