Breaking the Archive

Graduate Conference hosted by the Graduate Students of English Collective (GSEC)

Humanities Centre, University of Alberta

May 3rd - 5th, 2019

The Graduate Students of English Collective respectfully acknowledges that we live, work and research on the traditional territory of the Treaty 6 and Métis Nations. The University of Alberta is located on the traditional territory of many Indigenous peoples, particularly Laurent Garneau's river lot and the traditional territory of the Papaschase Cree. These rich histories, languages and cultures continue to shape our vibrant community.

“The archive … is a death sentence, a tomb, a display of the violated body.”

— Saidiya Hartman, “Venus in Two Acts”

In Jacques Derrida’s formulation, the archive is both a place and an action of power or, more accurately, legislation. The archive always implies both inclusion and exclusion—the preservation of something to remember, and the omission of something to forget. This paradoxical nature of the archive is a crucial aspect of both its function and its structure. As researchers we are bound to the contents of the archive, but we also have the power to both responsibly narrate and compose that which is held within it. Indeed, as Marlene Manoff posits, “the archive affirms the past, present, and future; it preserves the records of the past and it embodies the promise of the present to the future.” In many ways, the state, corporate entities, and the media have narrated these temporalities of the archive. The work of researchers has been to break away from these narratives and envision radically different historiographies.

Considering the politicization of archives in our contemporary moment, urgent questions arise:

- What are the opportunities and the threats presented by the archive’s power to shape what is known?
- How do we negotiate the presence or absence of archives in our research?
- Does breaking the archive mean leaving it all together? Is that possible?
- What are the ethical responsibilities we have to consider when working with archives, creating those of our own, and publicizing the contents of said archives?
- In addition to being, in Hartman’s words, “a death sentence,” can the archive also be a place of life and strategic action, and, if so, how do we hold these potentialities in suspension?
- If the archive "affirms the past, present, and future," how does breaking the archive impact our relationship to the past, present and future?
- How might the curation, preservation, and alteration of archives impact political and social life in the future?

This conference aims to examine the archive and the act of breaking the archive through interdisciplinary conversations where we may consider its impact in various fields, comprising narrative, ecology, economics, culture, politics, pedagogy and beyond. We invite work across all disciplines including methodologies within the humanities, social sciences, and fine arts. We encourage submissions in any
genre, from scholarly writing to creative work, academic papers to performances. We welcome individual presentations or collaborations in panels, round tables, etc.

**Suggestions for Topics:**
- Archives of Memory and Mourning
- Archival Politics, Theories, and Methods
- Engendering the Archive
- Governance, Influence, and the Framing of the Archive
- Literary Archives and Publishing
- Cultural Institutions and the Archive
- Archives, Libraries, Exhibitions, Festivals
- Visual Archives
- Embodied Archives
- Digital Archiving
- Culture, Memory, and the Archive
- Narrating the Archive
- Sound Archives
- Archiving the Self / Autobiography
- Living Archives
- Hidden Archives
- Inclusions and Omissions

As stated above, this is an interdisciplinary conference and presentations in any genre and field are welcome. Please submit abstracts by **Friday, February 1, 2019** to: gsecconference2019@gmail.com. Abstracts should be no more than 300 words and accompanied by a bio no more than 100 words. If you are proposing a group panel, please include abstracts and bios of each presenter involved. Individual presentations should be 18-20 minutes long, but time limits may be flexible to accommodate proposed panels which may follow a nontraditional structure. Space requirements and audio/visual equipment needs may be included in your submission. We look forward to receiving your proposals.