ARCHIVE FEVER:
Lost Words, Buried Voices

Wednesday, February 21, 2018, at 7 p.m.
Joyce J. Cammilleri Hall
University of Southern California

ABOUT THE PARTICIPANTS

º BLUNT RESEARCH GROUP is an anonymous collective of poets, artists, and scholars who engage in investigative poetics, drawing from the archives of institutions ranging from youth prisons to mental asylums.
º Miroslava Chávez-García is a professor of history, Chicana/o studies, and feminist studies at UC Santa Barbara. She is the author of Negotiating Conquest: Gender and Power in California, 1770s to 1880s; States of Delinquency: Race and Science in the Making of California’s Juvenile Justice System; and the forthcoming Migrant Longing: Letter Writing across the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands.
º Asher Hartman is an LA-based artist, author, and playwright whose visual theatre practice blends intuition and research.
º M. NourbeSe Philip is an award-winning poet and writer who started writing poetry while practicing law. She was born in Tobago and now lives in Canada.
º Caleb Smith is a professor of English and American studies at Yale University. His books include The Prison and the American Imagination and The Life and the Adventures of a Haunted Convict, the earliest known prison memoir by an African American writer (Austin Reed), which Smith edited for publication in 2016.
º Daniel Tiffany is an award-winning poet and literary critic and professor of English and comparative literature at USC.

ANON., COLLECTIVE

BLUNT RESEARCH GROUP is an anonymous “constellation” of poets, artists, and scholars from diverse backgrounds who believe that poetry is by nature collaborative and commonly relies on multiple sources. The group’s structure is meant to question the function of the “single author” in the poetic tradition, a paradigm BLUNT RESEARCH GROUP believes is essential to maintaining systems of racism, class domination, and gender bias in literary culture. BLUNT RESEARCH GROUP seeks instead to re-activate and re-purpose the oldest poetic signature: Anon.
RETHINKING “THE ARCHIVE”

An archive is a repository of historical or institutional records, or the place where such records are kept. It’s common to think of an archive as a collection of concrete, straightforward primary source materials. BLUNT RESEARCH GROUP thinks of archives as not fixed but mutable. From the records of institutions like juvenile detention facilities and German work camps, they take an archive that was once used for repression and turn it into an archive that gives voice to the silenced or oppressed.

The group sees the very fact that they can do this as evidence of the complexities of time and the multiple potentials of language and action—things that “have not achieved full expression in the past . . now point towards a still unrealized future: a utopian surplus.” In this way, what once reflected confinement or violence may now “harbor an intimation of justice or hope.”

VOCABULARY CORNER

Archive: A place in which public, institutional, or historical records are preserved.
Investigative poetics: An approach to poetry rooted in the methods of documentary sampling and assemblage.

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

- What do you think about BLUNT RESEARCH GROUP’s rationale for being anonymous and collaborative?
- What are the ethical responsibilities of resurfacing, translating, or otherwise making heard voices from archives who cannot give permission for this use of their words and stories?
- What do you think of the concept that “bare life” may be “the ground of collectivity”?
- Are there any archives at USC that you might want to explore or engage with?

TO LEARN MORE, CHECK OUT THESE RESOURCES:

- The Work-Shy by BLUNT RESEARCH GROUP
- ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archives at the USC Libraries one.usc.edu
- Southern California Library socallib.org
- Los Angeles Contemporary Archive lacarchive.com
- A Room of One’s Own by Virginia Woolf (for its exploration of “Anon.” and the role of women in literary history)
- The Life and the Adventures of a Haunted Convict by Austin Reed (ed. by Caleb Smith)
- Zong! and other books by M. NourbeSe Philip
- States of Delinquency: Race and Science in the Making of California’s Juvenile Justice System by Miroslava Chávez-García

DISCOVER MORE AT THE USC LIBRARIES

KATHERINE KAPSIDELIS and SUZANNE NORUSCHAT of the USC Libraries selected the following library resources to help you learn more about tonight’s event. They include materials on the archive as a socio-cultural construct and primary source collections that may enable new discoveries of vanished or forgotten voices.

BOOKS


“We might presume that a lost voice would welcome the chance to be heard, but this presumption ignores the need to ask for consent. It is always possible that the unknown voice may insist on remaining silent. It may refuse permission.”—from The Work-Shy by BLUNT RESEARCH GROUP

“What exactly do we hope to discover by listening to voices that have been lost or silenced? History, images, music? Unfamiliar ways of thinking and speaking? Perhaps we listen for emotional cues or triggers, which may cause one to turn away, or to act without thinking—to fulfill a pact to which one is inscrutably bound. Could we say that we sometimes listen for relic feelings? And in that moment of attention, could we be listening to direct traces of bare life, conceived as the ground of collectivity?”

A Room of One’s Own by Virginia Woolf

The Life and the Adventures of a Haunted Convict by Austin Reed

VISIONSANDVOICES.USC.EDU LIBRARIES.USC.EDU/USC-VISIONS-AND-VOICES
ARCHIVAL COLLECTIONS
View these materials online or in the Special Collections Reading Room on the second floor of Doheny Memorial Library. Advance notice is required for access to Special Collections materials; see the library’s website for further information:

libraries.usc.edu/locations/special-collections

- California Migrant, Transient, and Homeless Populations Collection, 1930–1992
  Collection no. 0449, California Social Welfare Archives
  Special Collections, USC Libraries
  archives.usc.edu/repositories/3/resources/447

- Japanese Internment Collection, 1942–1946
  Collection no. 0296, Regional History Collection
  Special Collections, USC Libraries
  archives.usc.edu/repositories/3/resources/299

- Poets Garden Records
  Collection no. 0110
  Special Collections, USC Libraries
  archives.usc.edu/repositories/3/resources/2230

- Rancho Los Amigos Hospital Records
  Collection no. 0407, California Social Welfare Archives
  Special Collections, USC Libraries
  archives.usc.edu/repositories/3/resources/405

- USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive
  vha.usc.edu

- ONE National Gay & Lesbian Archives at the USC Libraries
  one.usc.edu

DATABASES
The USC Libraries subscribes to databases that make digitized archival documents and other primary source resources available electronically. You can access them through the the USC Libraries homepage at libraries.usc.edu.