

# ARCHIVE FEVER:

## Lost Words, Buried Voices

Wednesday, February 21, 2018, at 7 p.m.

Joyce J. Camilleri Hall

University of Southern California

### ABOUT THE PARTICIPANTS

- ◉ **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.
- ◉ **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*.
- ◉ **Asher Hartman** is an LA-based artist, author, and playwright whose visual theatre practice blends intuition and research.
- ◉ **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.
- ◉ **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.
- ◉ **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

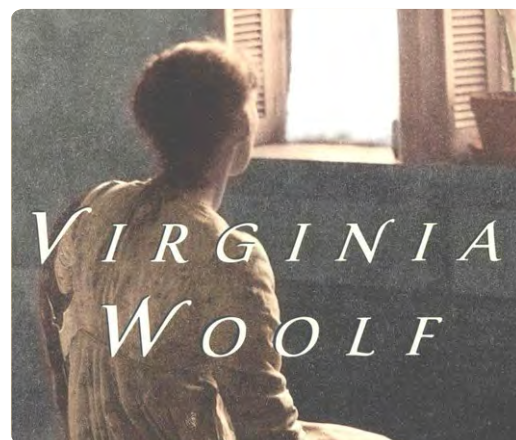
**KATHERINE KAPSIDELIS** and **SUZANNE NORUSCHAT** of the USC Libraries selected the following library resources to help you learn more about tonight’s event. They include materials on the archive as a socio-cultural construct and primary source collections that may enable new discoveries of vanished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

### BOOKS

- ◉ Blunt Research Group. *The Work-shy*. Wesleyan Poetry. 2016.  
Doheny Memorial Library: PS3602 .L885 2016

“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

- Cummins, Vesalius, Vesalius, Andreas, McLean Hospital, and McLean Asylum for the Insane. *Anatomy of Insanity*. High Falls, NY: M. Cummins, 2008.  
Special Collections: N7433.4.C86 A53 2008
- Davis, Natalie Zemon. *Fiction in the Archives: Pardon Tales and Their Tellers in Sixteenth-century France*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1987.  
Doheny Memorial Library: PQ613 .D38 1987
- Derrida, Jacques. *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*. Religion and Postmodernism Series. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.  
Leavey Library: BD181.7.D4713 1996
- Merewether, Charles. *The Archive*. Documents of Contemporary Art Series. London: Cambridge, Mass.: Whitechapel; MIT Press, 2006.  
Architecture and Fine Arts Library: CD971 .A715 2006
- Steedman, Carolyn., and Rutgers University Press. *Dust: The Archive and Cultural History*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2002.  
Doheny Memorial Library: CD947 .S73 2002

### 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](http://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](http://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](http://archives.usc.edu/repositories/3/resources/299)
- Poets Garden Records  
Collection no. 0110  
Special Collections, USC Libraries  
[archives.usc.edu/repositories/3/resources/2230](http://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](http://archives.usc.edu/repositories/3/resources/405)
- USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive  
[vha.usc.edu](http://vha.usc.edu)
- ONE National Gay & Lesbian Archives at the USC Libraries  
[one.usc.edu](http://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](http://libraries.usc.edu).

