



# On Haunting and the Living Archive: How MOBA is Redefining Gaps through Storytelling

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**MOBA**

Canadian Research Knowledge Network (CRKN) Virtual  
Conference: Creative Collaborations, Collective Momentum

May 12 | 2026

# AGENDA

MAY 12, 2026

11:30AM TO 12:30AM

VIRTUAL

WHAT IS A HAUNTING?

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DEFINING THE LIVING ARCHIVE

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MOBA AS A DIGITAL HAUNTING  
AND LIVING ARCHIVE

# What is a Haunting?

In ***Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International***, trans. Peggy Kamuf (1994), French theorist Jacques Derrida opined:

“Haunting is historical but it is **not dated**, it is never docilely given a date in the chain of presents, day after day, according to the instituted order of a calendar” (p. 4).

# What is a Haunting?

In their 1997 book, ***Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*** University of California, Santa Barbara Sociologist Avery F. Gordon writes:

“Haunting is a constituent element of modern social life ... it makes its mark by **being there and not there at the same time**” (p. 6–7).

# What is a Haunting?

In 2011, Gordon revisited her ideas in an article, titled **“Some Thoughts on Haunting and Futurity”** where she explained:

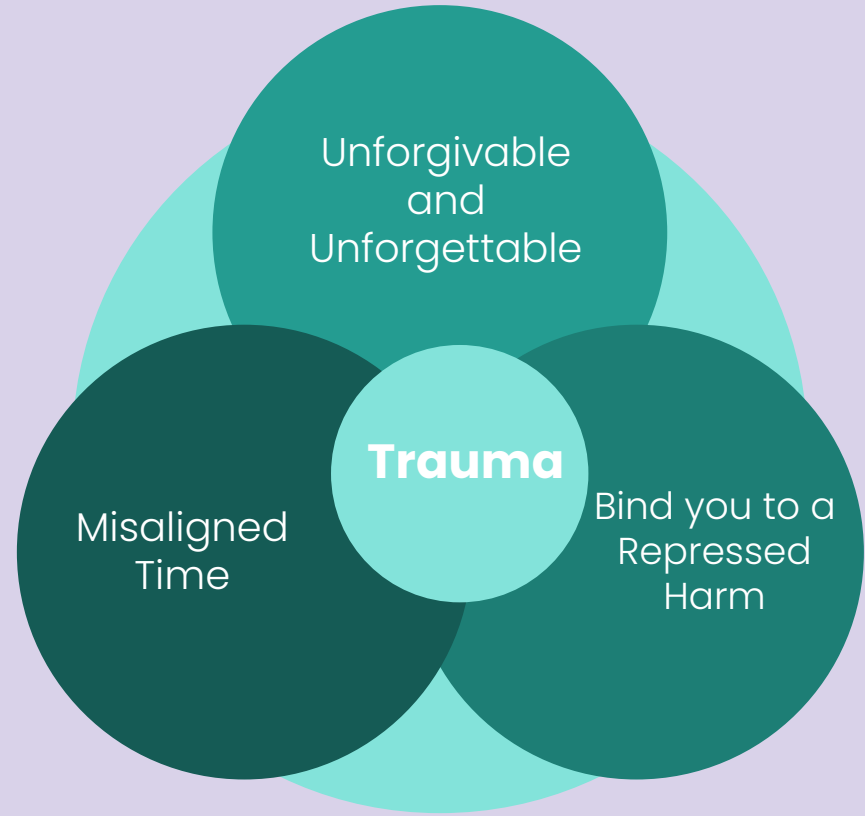
**“Haunting always registers the harm inflicted or the loss sustained** by a social violence done in the past or being done in the present and is for this reason quite frightening ... haunting is not about invisibility or unknowability per se, it refers us to **what’s living and breathing in the place hidden from view**: people, places, histories, knowledge, memories, ways of life, ideas.... ” (p. 2; 3).

# Trauma is Different

“Haunting is often treated as more or less identical to trauma. But trauma and the time of trauma are, in my view, quite different ... **trauma not only misaligned our perception of time**, it is, one could say, itself a misalignment of the temporality of experience since trauma is characteristically experienced belatedly... Trauma thus **binds you to what can't be forgotten or forgiven**. It binds you not to the repetition of a memory of a terrible, horrible, shocking event ... but **binds you to the *repression* of it**” (Gordon, 2011, p. 4).

# When Black histories are framed as traumatic histories...

They become linked to past events that **bind the future – what comes next – to the trauma**, which is never ending, and has no end point. As Gordon observes, “trauma is a deeply regressive and repressive state—an awful predicament for both individuals and societies—a fatalistic and aberrant condition because [it is] seemingly interminable” (p. 4).



**Difference between Haunting and Trauma**

# The Difference Between Black Histories as Traumas versus Hauntings

## *Black Traumas*

- Transatlantic slave trade
- Middle Passage
- Forced labour
- Sexual violation
- Family separation
- Racial profiling

## *Black Hauntings*

- Freedom seekers
- Jubilee singers
- Creolization of food, hair care practices, dance practices
- Call-and-response
- Anti-Black racism and systemic discrimination

# Defining the Living Archive

# Constituting a Living Archive

In **“Constituting an Archive”** (2001), British cultural theorist Stuart Hall explains that:

“In the idea of a ‘living archive of the diaspora’ all three terms needs to be considered for the hidden implications they carry ... [the construction of] **a ‘living archive’ ... must be seen as an on-going, never-completed project**” (p. 89).

# 2 Terms in Living Archive (Hall, 2001, p. 89–90)

## Living

Present, on-going, continuing, unfinished, open-ended.

Notion is strongly counter-posed to the common meaning accorded to “tradition” which functions like the prison-house of the past.

## Archive

A discursive formation.

Does have something specific in terms of its boundaries – that are not a natural “given” but remain to be critically specified.

# The Question of Technology & Access

"...new technological developments ... are transforming the practice of archival collection, in ways which have an impact, not only on **what and how much can be preserved, but on how widely it can be disseminated and circulated** – on how a wider access to an archive can be instituted ... An archive ... is a continuous production ... [it] is a practice which **both has its limits and its disciplines yet has no definitive sense of origin, boundary or termination** (Hall, 2001, p. 91).

# MOBA as a Digital Haunting and Living Archive

# MOBA

MAPPING  
ONTARIO'S  
**BLACK**  
**ARCHIVES**

Building an Inventory Through Storytelling and Community  
Engagement



2021-22



DIGITAL



ARCHIVES



COMMUNITY

2023

**Topics**

Historical Achievements, Figures, and Biography [5]	Culture, Heritage and Arts [3]	Freedom Seekers and Migration History [3]	
Military Service and War Efforts [2]	Children and Youth [2]	Education [2]	Family and Domestic Life [1]
Oppression, Activism, and Resistance [1]	Community and Social Life [1]	Media and Representation [1]	Educational Resources [1]

[Reset](#)



# MOBA'S Findings

PHASE I: INVENTORY

PHASE II: SURVEY

PHASE III: INTERVIEWS

# Research Results

## PHASE I: INVENTORY

- Family Histories Binders
- E-Books
- Educational Resources
- Reference materials
- Photographs and images
- Online Presentations
- Exhibits and Buildings
- Maps
- Artifacts
- Press releases and articles
- Newspapers, magazines and books
- Census
- Dissertations, theses, articles, and essays
- letters, correspondence and ephemera
- Minstrel files
- Oral histories / Interviews



96 Archives  
5,500 Item Records and  
counting

# Research Methods

## PHASE II: SURVEY

- Conducted online using SurveyMonkey
- 17 questions
- Combination of quantitative and qualitative data collection
- 46 respondents

## PHASE III: INTERVIEWS

- Recruited via self-selection from survey
- Semi-structured interviews
- Building qualitatively on data from the survey
- 8 participants

# Community Memory & Digital Curation

## *Archives*

- Creative outreach
- Open digital resources
- Linked descriptive data
- Curate exhibitions
- Digitize collections
- Update descriptive metadata in digital collections

## *MOBA*

- Open access to Black collections (hypertext links)
- Metadata tagging
- Geospatial mapping of archival locations
- Digital content creation
- Storytelling as cultural epistemology

# Institutional Archives...

Describe and  
arrange assets

Reference  
collections, and do  
outreach

Digitize assets

Preserve born-  
digital assets

Curate born-digital  
assets with  
metadata

Archivists or  
collection specialists  
steward collections



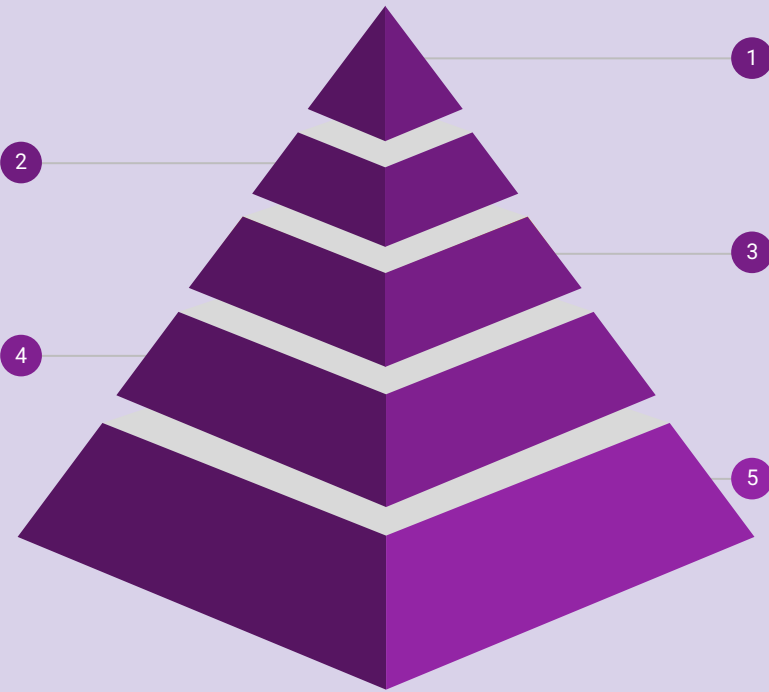
**Visual Representation of Haunting**

# Core Concepts of a "Living Archive"

(Hall, 2001, p. 92)

An archive is committed to inclusiveness

An archive always stand in an active, dialogic relation to the questions which the present puts to the past



1 An archive can be about the past but is always re-read in the light of the present

3 An archive has to exist on *heterodoxy* – beliefs, opinions, or doctrines offering different or opposing views

5 An archive has to be rich, varied and "eclectic" enough to bear the weight of different contested interpretations and to allow them to battle out their differences



Are you interested in researching Ontario's Black Archives?

Interested in researching Ontario's Black history?

**mobaprojects\_** ...  
 Mapping Ontario's Black Archives  
 41 posts 314 followers 172 following

Mapping Ontario's Black Archives (MOBA) ✨  
 @theblackcreativelab lead project  
 Building an inventory through... more  
[linktr.ee/mobaprojects\\_](https://linktr.ee/mobaprojects_)

Followed by a\_real\_life\_person, chiefmisfit + 36 more

Following Message

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**PLEASE JOIN THE AMHERSTBURG FREEDOM MUSEUM FOR A VIRTUAL BLACK HISTORY PRESENTATION AND BOOK LAUNCH FEATURING CHERYL THOMPSON**  
 TUESDAY, APRIL 21<sup>ST</sup>, 2026 5 PM EASTERN

**AGING BLACKFACE CANADA**  
 PUBLIC AMUSEMENT VARIETY SHOW AND RACIAL ANTI-IMMIGRATION IN AN AGE OF HATE 1880-1919  
 CHERYL THOMPSON

**'Why I created Vintage Black Canada seven years ago.'**  
 by Aaron Francis

**MOBA Pages**

**MOBA Pages:**  
 Carter Family's Etobicoke Story, and Judge George E. Carter's Life as an Archive

Megan Marsh O'Brien the granddaughter of George E. Carter

# MOBA as a Digital Haunting and Living Archive

Committed to  
Inclusion and  
Heterodoxy

We platform stories about the archive that are *about* archival objects, but also stories that are ephemeral, non-physical, and not yet identifiable as an “archival” asset.

Validating the  
Absence of Time,  
Registering the Harm

Rather than focus solely on provenance or archival hierarchy, we remain open to sequences that are out of order, not linear, and for missing or unknown descriptive metadata, we name the unknown and ask questions about it.

Present Questioning  
of the Past, Contested  
Interpretations

We platform voices and perspectives on historical events via the archival record, and we encourage new understandings about what constitutes an archival asset, what is archivable, and what is knowable.

# Follow

# MOBA

MAPPING  
ONTARIO'S  
**BLACK**  
**ARCHIVES**

Building an Inventory Through Storytelling and Community Engagement



Website: <https://mobaprojects.ca/>

Instagram: @mobaprojects\_

Linkedin: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/mobaprojects/>

# THANK YOU.



Images: Program for Puggsley Bros.' Famous, Tennessee Warblers, [ca. 1900]  
Children in front of the Marble Village Coloured School, [ca. 1900]  
Alvin D. McCurdy fonds, Archives of Ontario