Addressing Absence in the Archives: Comparing Shola von Reinhold's Lote and Valeria Luiselli's Lost Children Archive

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Past, present, and future are the interflowing, ever-shifting sites where happiness, joy, shame, loss, mourning, disgust, despair, hope, pride, and victory are experienced and processed. It is in the boundary-eroding current of time that longing and love, identification and connection, pleasure and desire collect, coalesce, and circulate.

- Stephen D. Moore, Kent L. Brintnall, and Joseph A. Marchall, *Sexual Disorientations*

Introduction

When I worked in the New York State governor's office as an intern at the hopeful age of sixteen, my only meaningful writing, besides a litany of internal emails, was a proposal to change the framing of Columbus Day to remember Native Americans as official policy. The proposal was lost in a sea of others, and the only response I received was that the holiday was too important to the Italian American constituency. The remembrance, I was implicitly told, did not matter to any group which was still around and voting. Seven years later, the immigration crisis is denounced as a new political failing, addressed in the past month by President Biden blocking all asylum claims made on US soil (Aleaziz). The news is filled with the threat of oncoming hordes of immigrants descending. While not often connected, the treatment of queer or transgender people in the news cycle similarly espouses the threat of recent political failings, as though queer identity labels are a completely modern fabrication. These two issues are not connected often, though around the world immigration and transgender politics are making headlines. The answer I received in the governor's office reveals how marginalized people struggle to justify themselves when they are unable to pull from a history they have been absent from.

Valeria Luiselli's *Lost Children Archive* and Shola von Reinhold's *Lote* deal with absence within archival documentation and history writing for these different groups. *Lote* unravels the mystery of a hidden poet and a secret, decadent society while addressing the absence of Black and queer figures in artistic and historical memory. *Lost Children Archive* uses a maximalist approach to telling the stories of the undocumented children who cross the US-Mexico border. These two books speak to very different parts of history and use different tonal approaches and narrative structures, but they both end up writing against the aforementioned assertion of queerness or immigration as a modern threat. They overlap in their investigations of the construction of archives and the inclusion of meta-fictional texts;

the novels include books encapsulated within the main text, as chapters interspersed throughout the other narratives. While *Lote* is characterized by a personal and detailed approach, *Lost Children Archive* is aloof and overtly intertextual. However, the comparison of their strategies toward the archive can elucidate the way in which gaps in the archives can be addressed for present communities through fiction.

Shola von Reinhold's debut novel *Lote* follows Mathilda, a fabulous Black woman with a mysterious past. She volunteers at a new archive site researching her deep and embodied fascination with figures from the Bright Young Things (BYT), a loose group of socialites, and the Bloomsbury group in 1920s London. Mathilda's fascinations, or "Transfixions," become focused on a fictional, scarcely documented female Black poet called Hermia Druitt. While Hermia is an invention of Von Reinhold, Mathilda's other 'Transfixions' from the London artistic scene are almost all historical people. Mathilda also discovers a meta-fictional academic text called *Black Modernisms* which also researches the scarce fragments of Hermia's life. *Black Modernisms'* chapters and a few sections from Hermia's perspective interject into Mathilda's narrative. Mathilda becomes more invested, enamored, and intertwined with Hermia as she spontaneously goes to an artist residency in a small European town. The place and people turn out to be deeply connected to Hermia and a secret society called the Lote-Os which all of Mathilda's 'Transfixions' throughout history have been part of. The book has segments from these three distinct narrations: Mathilda, Hermia, and *Black Modernisms* and links Mathilda, eventually also called Hermia right at the end, to a strong and partly fictionalized line of ideas and people.

In the second novel, *Lost Children Archive* (referred to here after as *Lost Children*), Valeria Luiselli also includes a collage of fragments from historical material and fictional books. The novel contains chapters divided into small subsections with headings that often repeat. Seven of the chapters list the contents of boxes the family carries with them on a road trip, creating personal archives for the characters and a vast array of snippets or titles of literary and historical documents. The novel begins with a woman's perspective on her blended family — "the girl is my daughter and the boy is my husband's son" — as her marriage falls apart on a road trip from New York to Arizona. None of the main family members are named, except with nicknames they give each other briefly, so I will refer to them as the Woman, the Man, the Boy, and the Girl. The Man is working on a sound documenting project in Apacheria, and the Woman is attempting to document the migration crisis at the border while the Boy feels his family slowly tearing apart. After hearing stories of children illegally crossing into the US and the Apaches, the Boy decides to run away with

the Girl to find these ‘lost children’ at a place called Echo Canyon. The book switches from primarily the Woman’s perspective to the Boy’s, though it is also intercut with passages from *Elegies for Lost Children*: a meta-fictional, vaguely historical text which slowly comes to be the perspective of seven children making a dangerous border crossing. In a surrealist scene, the Boy and Girl meet migrant children in a desert before finally reuniting with their parents. *Elegies for Lost Children* (here after referred to as *Elegies*) is stylistically different from the rest of the book; Luiselli states in the “Works Cited” that it is meant to contain “thin ‘threads’ of literary allusion” to other works (Luiselli 357).

Both books choose to address currently marginalized groups through the lens of historical fiction in their meta-fictional texts and narratives. The interaction of history and imagination becomes an important bridge of finding understanding. The following section dives into the discussion around history writing and the role that fiction can play in discovering the truth of the past and present.

Theoretical Framework

History and Fiction

The mixing of 'real' archival history and fiction has been heavily debated by historians. Historians, such as Michel de Certeau in his seminal work *The Writing of History*, often acknowledge their role as separating life from death, and therefore creating what is the 'past' and the 'future' (De Certeau ix). History writing is concerned with submitting proof and with telling events as truthfully as possible, devoid of imagination or construction. However, choices must be made about what is included and how. While not implying that all historians purposely fabricate or falsify, history itself is, due to every scholar's implicit bias or agenda, necessarily made up of a fiction of facts arranged and formalized: "thus the past is the fiction of the present" (De Certeau 10). Historians can never be completely authentic to the past because there are so many perspectives, artifacts, documents and so on that can never be analyzed perfectly into a singular narrative. This is also complicated by an absence of documentation for some and an abundance for others. The creation of historical narratives and 'truths' is therefore influenced by the time, place, and power structures that books and archives spring from.

An archive creates power hierarchies in both its selection procedures and through the building which houses it. Achille Mbembe's 2002 essay "The Power of the Archive" argues the importance of the materiality and imaginary of an archive. The archive building and rooms confer status upon the documents housed within, so one cannot define the archive without the space that creates it (Mbembe 19). De Certeau also states that archives presuppose the group, places, and practices that establish and formalize the sources into history (73). The documents' shuffling and selection procedures give status as well by creating in and out groups reinforced by the space they inhabit in the present:

> The archive, therefore, is fundamentally a matter of discrimination and of selection, which (…) results in the granting of a privileged status to certain written documents, and the refusal of that same status to others, thereby judged 'unarchivable'. The archive is, therefore, not a piece of data, but a status. What status? First of all materiality status, the status of proof, and lastly status of the imaginary. It is part of the fragments that make up our memory (Mbembe 20).

Mbembe makes clear that the fragments gain status through their materiality and stand as proof of historical and cultural narratives. By giving them a place, a building and a "burial," one "makes it possible to establish an unquestionable authority over them" (Mbembe 22). The notion of owning history through physical control of its remains is not new in post-

colonial thinking.[1] Museums, particularly in the UK, have long kept the cultural artifacts of colonized countries, but also literal human remains of colonized peoples (Richardson 7). While some colonized peoples' histories are displayed for the public, publicly owning and controlling those remains, other objects and artifacts not selected are sealed off and inaccessible in archives and backrooms. The selection process allows for history to be shaped by those in power; the materiality of archives controls cultural remains and memory.

The separation between history and the present is essentially death, as De Certeau and Mbembe have commented (De Certeau 11, Mbembe 21). Mbembe states that while power claims "the dead should be formally prohibited from stirring up disorder in the present," even the most sparsely documented lives and deaths are not silent (22). Another conception of death is presented in Matt Richardson's *The Queer Limit of Black Memory.* Richardson explains how a formal archive often fails specifically Black subjects and creates a grave for their violated lives and remains. He wrote *The Queer Limit* to attempt to remember 'figuratively dead,' often Black and queer, people: "those who have never been recognized as fully human to begin with, the dispossessed and disremembered" (Richardson 9). While death implies a complete lack of agency in the present, as we will see farther in the essay the existence or absence of an archive can both haunt and teach us.

The seeking of 'truth' in history can be argued to extend naturally to fiction, which may illustrate reality through artistry better than available facts (White 149). To understand the figurative death Richardson theorizes, take for example the enslaved people of the Middle Passage of whom there are few records. Saidiya Hartman's essay *Venus in Two Acts* tackles how to represent and remember the oft eluded-to figure of Venus from the Middle Passage:

> I could say after a famous philosopher that what we know of Venus in her many guises amounts to 'little more than a register of her encounter with power' and that it provides 'a meager sketch of her existence' (Hartman 2).[2]

Hartman discusses the difficulty of piecing together the lives of those who are only remembered in court documents and property records. Ultimately, she describes the mixed use in literature of contacts with power, archival materials, and fictionalized narrative creations as "critical fabulation:"

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[1] See, for example, the recent work done by Lisa O'Sullivan and Ross Jones about the connection between the treatment of indigenous bodies during the colonial period and the continuing collection of human specimens in museums: "Two Australian Fetuses: Frederic Wood Jones and the Work of an Anatomical Specimen." *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, vol. 89, no. 2, 2015, pp. 243–66.

[2] Hartman is referring to Michel Foucault's "Lives of Infamous Men," page 284.

> This double gesture can be described as straining against the limits of the archive to write a cultural history of the captive, and (…) enacting the impossibility of representing the lives of the captives precisely through the process of narration (Hartman 11).

Critical fabulation is the construction of something which both pulls from history and chooses to imagine what might have been, while reflecting on the impossibility of knowing what we do not have records of. Authors dare to construct narratives to remember people with fully formed lives, while calling attention to the fact they can never know those lives with certainty. Hartman acknowledges the tricky line historical fiction writers face when they attempt to do justice to both truth and silence. They have taken up their pens to help create histories which are missing by stretching archival materials into the imaginary.

For example, Toni Morrison's famous novel *Beloved* (1987) fleshes out the story of Margaret Garner, an escaped slave who killed her own baby to prevent her from being enslaved too. Morrison chose to rename her to Sethe, and largely avoids relying on historical documents. However, she laments in her essay, "The Site of Memory," the loss of the voices, experiences, and thoughts of slaves in the US who were sparsely recorded. Even the slave narratives which were remembered are deeply focused on appealing to the sensibilities of white people in service of abolition (Morrison, "The Site of Memory" 88). The images and documents which are available to Morrison allow her to reconstruct a world beyond brushes with power. Truth, for her, is something beyond the available facts:

> Therefore the crucial distinction for me is not the difference between fact and fiction, but the distinction between fact and truth. Because facts can exist without human intelligence, but truth cannot. So if I'm looking to find and expose a truth about the interior life of people who didn't write it (which doesn't mean that they didn't have it) (...) (Morrison, "The Site of Memory" 93).

Beloved is a story of haunting, of the past affecting the future in un-factual ways. Morrison's approach to human truths and the way memories haunt the present is relevant to *Lote* and *Lost Children*. Both novels explore the lack of access to the interiority of people in the past and haunting spaces. Both novels also use imagination to bridge the factual and attempt to reconstruct the past.

On the other side of the historical fiction debate, many criticize the use of fiction to fill gaps because it could do a disservice to the truth and the people who can no longer speak. Arlette Farge in *The Allure of the Archive* acknowledges that even the most "brutally" archived materials are arranged by someone, that choices were made to include, exclude, and

order documents (Farge 3). Farge also argues that anonymity in history denies people form and agency: illustrating this with the growing representation of past women in history writing (Farge 36). Women, when absent from analyzed records as they no longer are, were not considered as movers or definers of history. However, she is firm that the necessity to make choices while creating archives does not equate to accepting creative leaps. Farge claims, firstly, identification with archival documents "saps" the understanding that can be drawn from them (Farge 72). Identification creates the narratives and fictionalized aspects of historical figures through our urge to connect to them, sometimes fitting facts into familiar, yet incorrect, stories. Secondly, she claims historical fiction has nothing in common with the truth of history and is only for entertainment value: writers of historical fiction "make marionettes out of eighteenth-century men and women" (Farge 76). This disagreement about historical fiction's relationship to truth and justice lies at the heart of *Lote* and *Lost Children.*

Another difficulty with fictionalizing history is the use of literary devices and style for representational writing. Both *Lote* and *Lost Children* creatively portray real historical figures and events, potentially making historical representations of meaningful topics less direct. To illustrate the problem with this, let us take a look at the extremes of literary theory. Theorists and writers have debated whether there should be artistic work on the Holocaust. Theodor Adorno famously argued that poetry and any stylized work would "make the unthinkable appear to have some meaning" and remove some of the necessary horror of the Holocaust (Van Alphen 18). Cynthia Ozick's 1997 essay "Who Owns Anne Frank" lambasts any and all probable editing of Anne Frank's diary as a distortion of the truth. She goes on to criticize the identification fostered in the diary for fostering too much optimism around the Holocaust, concluding it would have been better if Anne Frank's diary was never found (Ozick 15). Some of the key features of critique for any changes made to history are laid bare here: distortion through identification and the removal of 'truth'. The comparison of 'mere' historical fiction and holocaust testimony is not made lightly, because it highlights the difficulty of speaking for those who are gone. While there are always choices made in the creation of history, it is not a completely subjective art.

However, others have argued 'flat' or historical words are not enough to properly convey the 'truth' of the past. Therefore, "Figurative expressions are more *precise*; they are able to represent situations and experiences that cannot be conveyed by literal expressions" (Van Alphen 29). Art, in visual or literary styles, can evoke feelings through indirect representations that 'proof' and testimony styles could lack. Stylized representations can distort the truth of the past or offer emotions and feelings that words alone cannot.

The push for accuracy and 'truth' in history frequently runs into another problem: the absence of proof, especially for marginalized people. As alluded to by Mbembe, the access and framing of documents in archives is subject to power, leading to figurative deaths for those unremembered. This is not to mention where documentation was never collected or destroyed. The clash in viewpoints over the role of fiction in history gets to the heart of the questions leading both *Lote* and *Lost Children*: how to tell the stories fairly of those who are absent from history?

Archive Fiction

Literature and archival history have intersected for centuries. The above discussion mentions the layers of inaccessibility from public access, to the problems about who is included in archival projects, and the status of 'proof' which historical documents confer. These issues culminate in archive fiction as mysteries and truth to be uncovered in the archives. The argument raised of artistic representation as a mimetic fallacy, distorting the truth, originates as far back as Plato (Pasco 373). However, creative works have been accepted and utilized by historians to gain a fuller grasp of the 'truth' of the past while writing history. Art of the time can be carefully used to better understand the opinions, minds, and attitudes of people, especially the lower classes which are not well documented (Pasco 378). Due to many eras of history and population groups being scarcely documented by 'formal' records, some historians argue that studies of literature are therefore essential (Pasco 389). Given that past artistic works can be a key addition to archival history writing, it follows that contemporary writers might flip this and use the truth found in fiction to interpret the archives and narratives from our present-day perspective.

Fictional novels have utilized historical sources within their works for a long time, as *Lote* and *Lost Children* do by mixing narrative and documents. The genre of "archive fiction" comes from an older genre of works from the late-eighteenth century called 'autobiografiction,' which tells the perceived author's life story through letters, events, and narration which all may be edited or fictionalized after the fact (Saunders 177). Autobiografiction is important for this paper as both Luiselli and Von Reinhold similarly blur their own voices with that of the narrator, though *Lote* and *Lost Children* do not claim to be autobiographies. They use techniques of history writing and realism to question the writing of truth itself.

Archive fictions from the twentieth century onward are often stories of mystery and uncovering where archives hold answers and even murder mysteries. Academic Max

Saunders wrote how archive fiction often leans into optimism and empiricism, creating the fantasy that every life is discoverable in the archive (171). Novels like these find surveillance redemptive and truthful, as though documentation can never be harmful or misconstrue the truth. He states that this approach to archives in fiction can create 'Holocaust Kitsch', and traumatic histories can "offer a fantasy that every traumatic memory can be retrieved and preserved; (...) not as terror or tragedy but as incontrovertible historical evidence" (171). An approach which narrates the archival sources as objective facts and stories, without understanding of nuance in historical preservation and historiography, may in fact warp history as Adorno and Ozick fear.

This approach to archive fiction is not, however, representative of everything out there. Saunders makes clear that many writers, such as Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose* (1980) and A. S. Byatt's *Possession* (1990) use the archive to change the present and meaning itself. Like many other works of archive fiction, Byatt and Eco write about investigating a mystery. However, the archive does not only contain answers but also changes the lives of the narrators and poses new questions:

> So if the archive leads to secrets in these literary works, it is the literature that lets one understand what the archive means. This is to propose a more dynamic, dialectical relationship between archive and truth: a relationship mediated by the imagination, by art, by fictions (Saunders 173).

These archive fictions suggest the same questions as autobiografiction, about the relationship between the author and their writing, the detective and the archive. The autobiografiction writer leaves uncertain truths about their life, or even name, yet writes in the style of an autobiography. Eco, Byatt, and others create their fiction like archives, and suggest that the archive spits back an imagination (Saunders 180). Writers like Eco and Byatt are often literary theorists by training, already predisposed to considering how meaning was created and changed through relationships (Saunders 174). Archive fiction in this vein poses questions and critiques about the relationship between historical records and our present, similar to *Lote* and *Lost Children*.

As both novels wrestle with the question of fairly telling the stories of those who are absent, the meaning of their historical fiction reflects on the characters and our own present lives. This paper will answer: How do *Lote* and *Lost Children* address and imagine absences in archives for present communities? And under this umbrella, how do the novels bridge the separation between the unknowable past to our present? As we will see in the following

chapters, *Lote* and *Lost Children's* texts become non-traditional archives themselves, as the multiple narratives and metafictional texts bring history into conversation with the present.

The paper first introduces itself and outlines a literature review and theoretical framework of the academic discussion around historical fiction and archive building. The research unfolds through the theoretical framework above which poses three main areas of interest: analyzing the narrative structures and style, time and space within the novels, and the physicality of documents and artefacts within the books. Chapter 1 will analyze *Lote* first, and Chapter 2 will consider *Lost Children* while beginning to compare the two. These two main chapters focus on comparing how each book represents the separation between the past and present, the living and the dead, through the temporal structures of the books and the spaces the characters inhabit. Because the connection between past and present is through archives, traditional or not, the analysis also therefore focuses on the desires and physical connection of the characters using the medium. These chapters also analyze and compare the literary techniques that the authors employ to create their own fictive archives, how they do or do not connect or effect present communities. Lastly, the compression of space and time through various techniques will also be compared. The final chapter is a conclusion summarizing the comparison between and takeaways from the *Lote* and *Lost Children*, and how their individual methods of writing historical fiction are instrumental to present communities.

Chapter 1: *Lote*

This chapter will analyze how *Lote* creates Hermia, an archive within the plot, and in itself becomes archive. It will first look at the character of Hermia Druitt and what she answers both for Mathilda, *Lote*'s protagonist, and for readers. Then, using the archive of Hermia's life, the following section considers how *Lote* approaches the intentionality of absence within history. The third section analyzes how space in the novel connects the past and present, introducing other voices to illustrate how space can be haunted. Finally, the last two sections will utilize conceptions of queer time and analyze the effect of the temporal confusion created in the narrative.

Lote addresses immediately both its connection to archives and the absences therein: Mathilda struggles to find herself represented in records of history as she is simultaneously an outsider to the archive buildings and artist residency's town. The book opens on a scene of "bizarre little role-play" where an acting-concierge to the museum assumes both that Mathilda is in the wrong place and would not have her own name because she is Black (Von Reinhold 14). The presumption by white people that Mathilda is in the wrong place repeats throughout in different spaces; museums, a small European town, and an artist residency each have layers of inaccessibility.

During the artist residency, Mathilda's entirely white colleagues are surprised by her tastes and interests in fashion and art. She attends an art exhibition by a Black painter who reimagined portraits for Black sitters that had been denied the interaction with the medium throughout history. Mathilda's white friend Griselda disapproves of the art and the 'positioning' it stands for. Griselda is referring to identity positioning, and argues "that the artist is upholding the white western traditions he's supposedly challenging" (Von Reinhold 185). This interaction encapsulates how Mathilda is told over and over in the novel that she does not fit into the expectations of her spaces, but is met with surprise that she would be interested in the art, history, and people of the past. The assumption by Griselda and others in the book is that because this artistic medium has excluded Black people from the traditional canon, that Mathilda is participating in her own oppression when she enjoys the medium. Mathilda finds respite in diving into the past, eventually stumbling upon a figure in the archives who both experienced similar things and represents what Mathilda has been told she ought not to enjoy.

Creating Hermia

The reports of Hermia in *Black Modernisms* and her own narrative chapters frequently address her difficulties fitting in to similar spaces as Mathilda. Hermia reportedly was able to attend the Slade, a school of fine arts in London, but still had difficulties finding places to eat or facing racism in the artistic society she joined. Along with her associates, Hermia was a "Low Bloomsbury", therefore amongst the likes of Virginia Woolf, E.M. Forster and other extremely influential people in British history (Von Reinhold 168). As Mathilda navigates her way into the Dun Residency, Hermia was figuring out acceptance by association: she would return to extravagant establishments that previously excluded her after being brought by her wealthy white male friend Stephen (Von Reinhold 169). The settings throughout *Lote* of old European towns and library rooms with colonial aesthetics' also create a connection between Mathilda's present alienation and historical oppression. When Mathilda finds the inciting photograph of Hermia she is taken aback:

> Beyond photographs taken for colonial documentation, I wasn't sure if I'd ever seen a photograph of a Black Woman, or man, from this era, with this hair texture, that hadn't been ironed or lye-straightened (Von Reinhold 28).

Mathilda stumbles upon a few photographs in the archive and is immediately 'transfixed,' struck by Hermia's appearance and her inclusion in the London social scene. The BYTs and Bloomsbury group were famously both socialites of imaginative excess and artistic ambition. While both groups were queer in sexual performance, and, to many in lifestyle and taste, they scarcely contained any non-white members (Detloff 5). Hermia's representation as part of the widely revered and discussed group becomes more important as Mathilda uncovers her interior thoughts, motivations, and personal belongings. Hermia offers a connection to the past, as someone who looked like Mathilda and was interested in the same aesthetics and artistic mediums.

Richardson in *The Queer Limit of Black Memory* writes about the difficulty of incorporating queerness into the cultural memory of an already deeply disempowered group in history:

> The Black queer ancestor is an unimaginable figure in mainstream diasporic memory. That she does not exist is a fiction of domination, an effect of trauma that has made her illegible even in alternative archives. To speak of her, one has to be creative and seize the means of archival production while pointing to her absence in written history and in memory (Richardson 14).

Black cultural memory, Richardson posits, already struggles to authenticate the suffering and domination sparsely documented figures endured in history without also transgressing heterosexual norms. The call to "seize the means of archival production" is answered to some extent by Von Reinhold in the creation of Hermia, who also is careful to point to "her absence in written history" (Richardson 14). *Lote* makes it explicit that Black queer ancestors, in both the interwar period or earlier eras of British portrait painting, are not usually found in the history books or museums. The official archives only have a few photos of Hermia, and her letters and works are not uncovered until later in the book, as will be discussed in the following section. The method of fictionalizing history in *Lote* reflects the duality of wanting to create an ancestor while remaining cognizant of what led to their absence, and respectful of those circumstances. Hermia's absence in the historical records becomes a key part of her meaning; her story speaks to both the exclusion she faced and parallels the problems with the narratives of history and art written during Mathilda's time.

Silence as an Action

The absence of Black and queer figures in art and history are approached with an emphasis on intentionality in *Lote.* Agnes is an older Black woman Mathilda meets at the archive who has a similar interest in historical documentation. Agnes has a long experience in museums and archives witnessing Black art be forgotten or intentionally lost. Her apartment is full of art, lost or forged, which she calls "evidence" and "recovered cultural artefacts;" if these works were included in broader historical memory they would indicate broader Black contributions to various artistic and political areas, such as paintings of Kings' courts and obscure Dutch-Caribbean modernist books (Von Reinhold 81, 83). Later in the book Agnes is arrested for attempting to steal works of forgotten Black art, as she has been doing successfully for years, but the ending of the novel is optimistic (Von Reinhold 450). Agnes' thefts lead to an investigation after which "two directors were suspended after Agnes was able to highlight, incidentally, their racist behavior, and also flag up numerous works in archives that were of cultural merit" (Von Reinhold 451). The works which she recovers mirror Mathilda's successful foray into finding Hermia's traces, and the obvious intentionality of the absences in historical records because the museum directors were found to be at fault.

The intentional, yet simple burial of Black art lost in museum and archival backrooms is taken to the extreme through *Lote*'s philosopher and 'thought-artist' Garreaux. He is the founder and seminal theorist of the artist residence Mathilda attends in Dun. Mathilda later

discovers that the artist residency's building and original submissions are built off the room which Hermia previously lived in:

> 'It's all the same,' Erskine-Lily said. 'Preserved exactly as it was.'
>
> It was Hermia Druitt's room.
>
> … I ran my finger along their spines, desperately feeling the need to touch them. To touch everything… The bed was curtained; a presentiment had come over me that Hermia's skeleton, or incorruptible corpse would be there (Von Reinhold 343).

Although Hermia's body is not preserved in the room, her belongings and writing are all present, things which had been lost for almost a century. The room is like a private archive, designed to hide and repress Hermia. Her lost artistic work had been sought after by Mathilda the writer of *Black Modernisms*, the meta-fictional academic book which studied the little that was known about Hermia. *Black Modernisms* writes that Hermia was "passionate about Sappho" and her great work was "*The Fainting Youth* (...) a long, formally innovative work concerned with androgyny and was much influenced by what it would not be too anachronistic to describe as 'queer femme society'" (Von Reinhold 92-3). By sealing away all the traces of her life, Garreaux buries and hides the memory of Hermia which could influence in the present historical narrative around Black, queer art in the canon of the Bloomsbury group and beyond.

Framing himself as a 'thought-artist', Garreaux claims he does not want to suppress Hermia but to "synthesize" her life and "more generally LOTE and everything it stood for" (Von Reinhold 429). Garreaux uses his money and property to buy off Hermia's memory in her old age because he loathes what she stands for. He exclaims: "She still lives through the yellow book, through the project. Lives gloriously—by pure antithesis" (Von Reinhold 429). Her life is sealed away for over 50 years in service of an ideology Hermia would have despised. Throughout Mathilda's time at the Dun Residency, Garreaux's philosophy becomes evidently meaningless jargon completely divorced from art. The thought-artists dress and eat plainly and severely, making the choice to seal away Hermia's flamboyant life and art feel like incineration. Hermia's room is a burial, purposefully erased and inaccessible to an even greater extent than paintings hidden in storage rooms. Garreaux is able to wield his power and completely renarrate history, though Hermia's room is carefully left intact so that the plot can find archival answers to redress this.

Lote emphasizes absence as intentional in both Garreaux's suppression of Hermia and the art world's lost Black art. Mathilda states that Agnes makes it appear as though "there's a

shadowy cabal specifically suppressing Black art in Europe," and Agnes responds that "there doesn't need to be… there's enough in place to keep it out" (Von Reinhold 420). Michel-Rolph Trouillot theorized that silence in history, while often construed as an absence, is an *action:* "Mentions and silences are thus active, dialectical counterparts of which history is the synthesis" (48). The lack of historical documentation and narratives can be understood not only as the fiction and impossibility of history writing, but also with recognition of the processes and power that enacted the absence:

> Silences enter the process of historical production at four crucial moments: the moment of fact creation (the making of *sources*); the moment of fact assembly (the making of *archives*); the moment of fact retrieval (the making of *narratives*); and the moment of retrospective significance (the making of *history* in the final instance) (Trouillot 26).

Lote tackles the moments in which power enacts absence, whether by directors in museum archives or Garreaux 'synthesizing' Hermia's life, in addressing the creation of archives. The loss of Hermia's work and life remnants silences the facts which may have changed narratives and eventually history. These archives created in *Lote* argue there was more out there than recorded, and that deliberate moments and people led to facts being destroyed and assembled into different philosophies. That museums which assembled and retrieved these facts, intentionally or not, contributed to the silence of Black and queer art throughout history. It remains unaddressed what the museum director's intentions were in their selections and erasures, but the effect is clear. Garreaux saw Hermia's memory as a threat, or simply contradiction, to his own philosophy and had the power to remove it from the history books.

Garreaux's synthesis of Hermia's life work into a philosophy antithetical to her being is an example of the processes of power in history creation. Of course, the production of history is incredibly more complex, and does not only occur in museums and academic books like *Black Modernisms*, but *Lote* gives these nebulous processes a concrete villain and motive which helps to understand the intentionality of absence. Trouillot contends that the Haitian Revolution has been silenced in history because of the three themes it encapsulates, "racism, slavery and colonialism," challenging the power of the state too much (98). Where the Haitian Revolution was incompatible with the history writing of the United States because of these themes, Hermia's existence is much smaller yet personally challenging to Garreaux who held money and space over her. Trouillot's example of the Haitian Revolution shows how different actors over a much longer period interact with a cycle of intentional silencing at each step of historical production. This complex process still emphasizes the intentionality

at each step, akin to the cultural institutions in *Lote* leaving out Black art perhaps not as a consciously racist action but as a continuation of the cycle of power which has long marginalized queer and Black voices.

History in *Lote* is not simply a fantastical, it is created through processes and people who made active choices in legitimating their power. The power structures which left Mathilda excluded from artistic and aesthetic narratives, *Lote* posits with proof, intentionally silenced documents from and within archives that may have connected to her. This is compounded through Garreaux, who's influence and power is stated, even if Mathilda only meets him for a few pages. His work is influential, visible in Dun's new buildings and artist residency. Hermia's personal archive is concealed for decades in Garreaux's foundation of the residency, yet her life appears to haunt the space of Dun even when not clearly visible.

Haunting Spaces

Returning to Achille Mbembe's "The Power of the Archive," privileging and memory creation are acts where an archive can both give power to and challenge the state's control. Documents from the past now 'live' and effect change in the present time. The archive of Hermia's room fundamentally entombs and attempts complete control over her life and story. However, the physical remnants of her life, once found, offer up new interpretations and narratives that fundamentally challenge Garreaux's philosophy and story. For Mathilda, and the reader, the remains connect to a positive and relatable queer experience which has not been visible. There is now proof for Mathilda that allows her to imagine fuller identities for people in history who have not been afforded this. The exploration of silences through historical fiction can lead to imaginative identities and communities outside of the mainstream norms. However, even before the discovery of proof and facts of Hermia's life, the absence seems to haunt the spaces she inhabited and the present time Mathilda navigates.

The dual nature of an archive regarding power extends to the accessibility and presence of the archive: even without proof of past lives an imagination, and therefore resistance, can remain. As previously discussed, the synthesis of information into narratives to support states and nation building comes from the selection and ordering of facts into archives. However, if the state has an archive, it also must contend with the proof that pushes back over its uncontested control of time and narratives. Proof in the physical present affords an opportunity to reinterpretation and the basis for conflicting narratives. Yet, if a state or entity destroys an archive, it is haunted by a specter and an imagination: "because [the archive] is touched by death, is transformed into a demon, the receptacle of all utopian ideals

and of all anger, the authority of a future judgement…" (Mbembe 24). The space left by the silencing of an archive leaves room for imaginary thoughts, such as fictionalizations of archives. While Garreaux is not part of the state, his power attempts to silence the dead and yet Mathilda remains connected and enchanted with the ideas of Hermia even before she finds proof.

Mbembe argues that power attempts complete control over time both by the death of documents and the metaphorical death through archival narrative control, but in both instances, there is respite (23). The erasure of proof of Hermia attempts control over her fragments of time, but even in the complete denial of access to her, Mathilda and others like the writer of *Black Modernisms* attempt to piece together what might have been. Garreaux's synthesis of Hermia is an attempt to control and redirect the entirety of Hermia's meaning, to turn the truth of her life into the opposite. The failed attempt at incinerating Hermia's life does not make her disappear completely, she seems to haunt the edges of the town in clues and fragments, as well as feelings. The archival narrative control is seen in the many museums both Agnes and Mathilda visit which leave objects languishing in the dark. However, once found they can be rearranged for new meanings as they exist to contest narratives in the present.

In Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, traumatic memories are spatial and felt by characters who did not experience the original moments. Morrison calls this reliving of memories 'rememory', which can be described as:

> The possibility of a collectively animated worldly memory is articulated here in that extraordinary moment in which you—who never was there in that real place—can bump into a rememory that belongs to somebody else… you have encountered haunting and the picture of it the ghost imprints (Gordon, 166).

The literary form allows the imaginative spaces left in archives to create figures for cultural memory. In *Lote,* Mathilda encounters glimpses of Hermia and other 'Transfixions' in objects and spaces throughout London and Dunn. The scenes of Hermia grow from memories Mathilda understands mystically: "All my Transfixions would visit me in fluttering apparitions" (Von Reinhold 103). The past haunts a space which has been denied justice in the history books. In *Beloved*, it is those who experienced the horrors of slavery and could not speak. In *Lote,* Hermia's existence is 'synthesized' but the town of Dun and Mathilda hold memories or connections. Mathilda has an almost magical intuition, the photograph of Hermia contains only a first name written on the back: "But on reading the name Hermia, another rose up in response: 'Druitt'. I was absolutely sure of it. Hermia Druitt. My mouth

ached to say the name aloud" (Von Reinhold 29). Mathilda has a memory or magic connection through history to intuit Hermia's last name, and also her other many 'Transfixions.'

Lote plays creatively on historical memory and ghostly haunting of the past. The secret society of the Lote-Os supposedly believed in an old text about the "Luxuries," which the Lotus Eaters descended from in Homerian times, and worshipped the holy act of adornment (Von Reinhold 311). This angelic, folkloric belief is not strongly fleshed out in *Lote*, remaining on the edges of the mystery about Mathilda's 'Transfixions:' "Even now it was hard to say what *it* was, but it had something to do with our relation to Life: Black, fantasists, worshippers of Beauty" (Von Reinhold 375). However, the story of the 'Luxuries,' which Hermia believed in as part of the Lote-Os, imbues intergenerational value to certain landmarks within Dun. The obelisk at the town center is fabled to contain two 'Luxuries' who reappeared in Dun one day but were instead mistaken for evil spirits and sealed within (Von Reinhold 313). The spaces Hermia inhabited as a Lote-O magically speak to Mathilda even before she uncovers the 'Luxururies', and her 'Transfixions' are all potentially devoted to this belief. This use of magical realism, much like vilifying Garreaux, makes the ghostly absence of Hermia's traces more concrete. It connects things like obelisks, town squares, and cafe ceilings to a mystic tradition both Hermia and now Mathilda can have knowledge of.

The story of the Lote-Os makes tangible both the intergenerational knowledge of the past and the suppression of those ideas at many levels of history creation. Despite the obstacles, like the 'Luxuries' trapped in the obelisk and Hermia's sealed archive, "the idea survives even after the ransacking and incineration of our libraries and palaces" (Von Reinhold 313). Distinctly Black and artistically ornamented historical proof have all been destroyed in *Lote*, from documents to buildings to people. The characters also insinuate the purpose of the residency is to keep Hermia and the Lote-O's hidden, like Hermia's sealed room, they claim it is the foundation: "A hex; against us, and Hermia. That's what the Residency is… to keep them chanting the curse" (Von Reinhold 368). While the Lote-Os and the 'Luxuries' are only a small thread in the story, it points again to the tactic of representing more tangibly the specter or haunting of absence in the present. This religious belief or mystical connection between Mathilda and past figures imaginatively renders the silence in the archives for the people of the present.

While Mathilda rescues Hermia and the Lote-Os from a figurative death, *Lote* reflects the double gesture of critical fabulation. The novel always leaves lingering doubt whether Hermia's life is all imagined, even when Mathilda has proof after finding Hermia's room.

The pages of *Black Modernisms* after the discovery, while ultimately disagreeing, entertain the possibility that Hermia was entirely made up: "In need of addressing is the possibility that Hermia Druitt did not exist at all" (Von Reinhold 355). This reflects Hartman's call to both produce new archival memory and point to the impossibility of doing so. Despite being a novel with no claims to historical authenticity, *Lote* constantly reminds the reader that Hermia and the Lote-Os could be only of mystic and ghostly importance. But, through the erasure of the past a stronger phantom haunts the present. The found personal archive of Hermia's room is the materialization in *Lote* of the foundations which Garreaux's philosophy and residency is built on, and it is an incarnation of a ghostly presence. Here, like Garreaux's cartoon villainy, the secret is answered by the materialization of a perfect representation of the past in Hermia's preserved room, like a ghost returning in physical form.

A Queer Time

Queer identity of the past is structured by current cultural discourse around gender and sexuality. Historians acknowledge that every social identity, mainstream or marginalized, is shaped by the discourses concurrent with the writing of history. Social identities in our present are made explicit and held in place by historical discourse and narratives (De Certeau 45). As will be discussed further, the exclusion of groups of people from historical narratives and normal life milestones and rhythms can make them more likely to look backward and to perceive time differently (Halberstam 152). This trend reflects on the shrinking of time to create communities and identities, but also the scarcity and shortage of time in queer communities which, as Jose Muñoz said, need archive of the "ephemeral" (Ephemera as Evidence 6).

Mathilda craves for a connection to the past and Hermia. When sorting through photographs she steals the one of Hermia to hold onto, acknowledging it would probably have been deemed 'unarchivable' anyway (Von Reinhold 30). Her fixations on real people like Richard Bruce Nugent and made-up ones like Hermia allows Mathilda to 'dream' and quite literally fall into stupors of weeks on end in pleasure. The physicality and emotions of Mathilda's experience with history is reflected in the discussion on time in queer theory. The queer impulse for connection over time has received much attention from scholars over the past few decades, leading to many innovations in how pleasure, time, and communities can be understood in literature.

> This timely body of work *on* time seeks to replace reliance on logics of repetition, linearity, periodicity, and teleology with counterlogics of hauntological

> historiography, erotohistoriography, and queer temporal drag; anachronisms and proximities; contaminations and caresses across temporal gulfs (Brintnall 2).

Alongside 'hauntologic' analyses of space, *Lote* can also be considered in terms of the affective turn in queer theory. The impulse to rethink or reimagine connections to the past is particularly strong for marginalized groups, those who have not historically been able to shape their own narratives. Heather Love writes *Feeling Backward* about how exclusion from the dominant narrative forces leads queer people to imaginatively look outside of normal avenues for history, sometimes positively and sometimes painfully negotiating one's identity, constituting an "archive of feeling" (4). Matt Richardson also writes in the introduction to *The Queer Limit*: "Black people have a fever for the archive" (5). Mathilda's 'Transfixions' are not defined or perfectly described by Von Reinhold. They are obsessions and deeply emotional, and it is up to interpretation whether Mathilda feels romantic desire or representation in Hermia. She identifies with white queer people, and the few visible Black queer men, from the past. Queer, fabulous, and joyous representations of Black women in history are near impossible to find, they may only be remembered by their "encounter with power" (Hartman 2).

The intersection of Mathilda's identities creates problems for representation, but also creative impulses to look backward. Elizabeth Freeman's *Time Binds* holds in its thesis that queer time, a lack of presumed longevity for queer people, and grief within the queer community pushes people to seek out historical connections. Freeman says there is comfort and pleasure by placing "the past into meaningful and transformative relation with the present" (xvi). The comfort and pleasure of Mathilda's connection to Hermia, *Lote* constantly reminds us, is directly related to the physicality of the past in the present. Hermia's photographs, writings, and belongings all have a visceral effect on Mathilda. She spends days pouring over the same photographs and documents for the moment of connection, some feeling: "These sleeps, Transfixion-sleeps, were quite frankly the equivalent of sunlit opiate-baths" (von Reinhold 102).

Connections to the past are understood in queer temporalities as physical, but also in discussions of archival theory. Arlette Farge describes the physical pleasure of "touching the real" in the archives (11). Mathilda has cards with descriptions of those throughout history she is 'Transfixed' by, including their names, important moments from their lives and the sensory experience she feels when thinking about them. On the card about Stephen Tennant: "Sensations: Silver wafer into lead-white paste, soundless string instruments involving beeswax in their production" (Von Reinhold 33). Other 'Tranfixions' include members of the

BYTs, Bloomsbury group and even ancient figures: "(…) Josephine Baker, Nancy Cunard, Richard Bruce Nugent, Ludwig II Bavaria and Bel-Shalti Nannar, Babylonian High Priestess of the moon god, Sin" (Von Reinhold 33). These descriptions she carries are reminiscent of the catalog cards in archives for the inventory in certain shelves or rooms.

Her 'Transfixions' are fueled by tangible remnants of their lives she finds, such as photos or art, and the physical pleasure is still present when she imagines these people and items. This is particularly true when she can connect with their lifestyle or disposition. For example, during the Lote-O ceremony when Mathilda and her friends wear decadent clothes, drink the same elixir, and take on the same airs as Hermia, the two narratives of Mathilda and Hermia blend together (Von Reinhold 445). In the opposite vein, when Mathilda internalizes Garreaux's philosophy, the antithesis of Hermia and the Lote-Os, she feels guilt and shame thinking about her 'Transfixions' and their lifestyles instead of the ecstatic joy, even "getting dressed was mortifying" (Von Reinhold 232). Mathilda is losing a part of herself, a denial of the aesthetics and beliefs she loves when she reads too much into the negation of self, as followed by the other thought-artists. In the archive, a "reader experiences beauty, amazement, and a certain affective tremor" which supplements the analytical creation of history (Farge 31). History, according to Farge, cannot be completely dispassionately created, and for those on the margins a "fever for the archive" is even stronger (Richardson 5). This emotional part of history is intensified, longer lasting, and magically related, and Mathilda has an adverse emotional reaction when she begins to deny Hermia in the acceptance of Garreaux's philosophy.

Mathilda's fevers of 'Transfixions' in *Lote* reflect on the way scholars describe queer time and historical connection as unique from the dominant heterosexual time (Wiegman 5). Queer people are often outside of the usual societal markers of biological, sexual, and familial milestones. They are also left out of many communities, institutions, and access to healthcare. J. Halberstam argues, "...queer temporality disrupts the normative narratives of time that form the base of nearly every definition of the human in almost all of our modes of understanding" (Halberstam 152). The consistent marginalization from normal temporal modes of institutional, familial, and biological time have left queer communities with a different understanding. Mathilda's past is buried by implied gender discomfort which she and her childhood friend Malachi, a sex worker, have been 'escaping' for years, yet remain on the margins of society in precarious financial and social positions (Von Reinhold 56-60). Mathilda's identity, housing, and relationships have been transient and uncertain. Her creative urge to feel backwards could be due to being restricted from normal modes of

understanding time. *Lote*'s approach to connection with the past justifies and intensifies the joy and pleasure derived from reaching backward across time. In particular, the intersection of Mathilda's gender and sexual identity with her Blackness makes her more passionate for the archive.

Temporal Confusion

The book's multiple narratives and confused perspectives contributes to the non-linear or normative approach to time and history, creating more connection across space and physicality than might otherwise be afforded. The story time and narrative time of *Lote* is complicated by the addition of *Black Modernisms* and Hermia's narration, as well as Mathilda's lack of temporal awareness. Mathilda skips weeks in a trance and refers to old sections of her life as farther away than Hermia in the 1920s. This makes the reading experience occasionally confusing, but overall serves the purpose of shrinking time between the past and present.

Sections of *Black Modernisms* and Hermia's perspective are included in full without context or preamble that might center them as an analepsis, or flashback, in the story time. *Black Modernisms* has chapter titles and is dated to the 1980s, but the sections interject as responses and predictors to Mathilda's life. It is not made clear whether Mathilda is reading these passages, or they are simply placed in conjunction for the reader. On page 345, an 'Appendix' chapter from *Black Modernisms* interrupts Mathilda discovering Hermia's bedroom. It is entirely implausible for Mathilda to have read the book at this moment, potentially pushing the reader to imagine it outside the context of the scene, or as though Mathilda is considering her memory of the chapter. The Appendix discusses the possibility that Hermia was never a real literary figure, introducing doubt about the presentation of events and facts about her life into the reader's mind right as Mathilda finds proof of her life in the archive. While *Black Modernisms*' chapters may appear as anachronies between the diegetic and discourse time, I would argue *Lote's* permutation of these chapters with Mathilda's story places them in dialogue with one another.[3] This means the past, especially Hermia's narrative, serves as a living document in the present, instead of as an analepsis in the story.

To illustrate this, Hermia's perspective is interspersed with no context at all, eventually leading to a blending of Hermia and Mathilda's narrative styles. Hermia's chapters

[3] Anachronies as defined by Gérard Genette in *Narrative Discourse. An Essay on Method* as a deviation between story time and discourse time.

have no page numbers and no headings, where they might have read is heavily blacked out at the top. Her sections change font and formatting, but there is no introduction: the reader must make sense of their surroundings. The events from Hermia's perspective anticipate Mathilda's story. In one scene from Hermia's narration, Hermia's white friend Nancy defends her at a party against racist aggression. Directly after, Mathilda's white friend Griselda sticks up for a presumed act of racism or homophobia against Erskine-Lily (Von Reinhold 389). Mathilda's knowledge of Hermia's perspective within the story is not clear either. After falling into the Garreauvian philosophy she says, "My Transfixions deserted me," and is unable to fall into dream states of connection to Hermia (Von Reinhold 230). However, the section on the page before was from Hermia's perspective, indicating perhaps Hermia's chapter was included for the reader's benefit rather than from Mathilda's cognition.

Queer temporalities disrupt modern heteronormative time, and affect a sense of future, or lack thereof, and create a compression of time (Martin 8). This shortening of time is thick in *Lote*, as in the scenes which move Mathilda and Hermia closer in language, style, and experiences. Mathilda's delirious states also compresses time, as weeks go by without the plot progressing in only a few sentences. On page 44, without warning, the Mathilda and Hermia's perspectives and styles blend. The typeface, decorative first character, and the point of view becomes the same as Hermia's sections. The story remains focused on Mathilda, but the wording becomes more ornamental and harkens back to Hermia's 1920s vernacular. Mathilda and her friend become 'Transfixions' themselves and take part in a ceremony of the Lote-Os. The blending of the writing styles feels as though Hermia and Mathilda have met despite the century separating them. In this way, Hermia and the Lote-Os could be an apparition, imagination, or historically accurate in the context of the novel, but regardless Mathilda becomes one of them.

The mixing of their styles and perspectives happens very briefly earlier in the book, when Mathilda steals a piece of an archive necessary for the Lote-O ceremony. Again, reinforcing the silencing of archives, the stolen piece will not be noticed for years because it has already been languishing in a drawer (Von Reinhold 417). It is at the moment of connection to this old artifact, potentially from the time of the Lotus Eaters, that Mathilda's narration stretches over time. She looks backwards and can touch something from the past and tradition she values, changing her narration to be grander and more ornamental. This scene and the final Lote-O ceremony both represent the compression of time that affords Mathilda an emotional and spiritual ancestor which she lacked. This is the value in historical

fiction for *Lote*, offering community and pleasure across time through imagination. This approach to the narration also challenges the idea of queerness as a modern invention.

To elaborate, the identity of queer or gay is often portrayed as a modern label which is now being forced upon the past. Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley's "Black Atlantic, Queer Atlantic" is an attempt to map the fluidity of queer Black people of the Middle Passage who are incredibly sparsely documented. However, she discusses the difficulty of attempting this for racialized and sexualized bodies which have traditionally been given 'authenticity' when they ascribe to historical narratives of the period. While some treat "discourses of resistant black queerness as a new fashion (…) borrowed and adapted from Euro-American queer theory," the Middle Passage and slave experience are contrasted as the authentic places of identity and history (Tinsley 193). In *Lote,* Mathilda's interest in the past is surprising to many; someone like her, visibly Black and queer, is not represented in the writing of history. However, *Lote's* creation of a long line of 'Luxuries' worshippers who look like her creatively pushes back against the periodization of queerness as modern. While the story is made up, *Lote* consistently points to real figures and intentional silences in archives and history-making. Its assertions about the possibility of the Lote-Os are grounded in both remembering the absence in history, the few clues and fragments which could imaginatively construct a Black, queer line of ancestors in that silence.

"Rich, Riotous Time"

Despite the criticism of pushing modern identity labels upon people from different eras, especially Black people already struggling for space in historical narratives, Hermia is a decidedly queer figure in *Lote*. Gaps, disjointedness, and exclusion in archives and history-making can offer "creative potential for community" (Dinshaw 172). There is also pleasure to be found in allowing characters to fulfill a life outside of heteronormative society. Looking and feeling into history, like Heather Love does in *Feeling Backward*, "can offer affective resources for queer survival in the political present where forgetting has become the keynote of a progressivist historical consciousness" (Wiegman 14). There is a tension between the narrative of progress for queer people in the 20th and 21st century which focuses on damage in and the exclusion of affirming queer existence in the past (Love 3). The factors which lead to queer people's alienation modern time and communities have not disappeared, as can be seen in fleeting communities, shorter lives and futures, and general marginalization from normative institutions and life milestones. The different approaches to community and

"something to do with our relation to Life: Black, fantasists, worshippers of Beauty", in the Lote-Os is transformative for Mathilda (Von Reinhold 375).

Other works have tried to use historical fiction for positive representation of queer history; Michael Cunningham's *The Hours* (1998) reimagines Clarissa Dalloway from Mrs. Dalloway to have a queer, "rich, riotous" future which may have been denied to Virginia Woolf (Halberstam 3). *The Hours* is a rewrite of an already fictional story, but Cunningham's characters are three women across different decades each with situations and experiences mirroring and responding to Mrs. Dalloway. This turn "comforts by renarrating abjection as resistance" (Wiegman 6). *The Hours* focuses, in its uplifting and expressive imagination of queer lives, on the existence of queer experiences across time responding to one another. It is not a revolutionary move to center queer pleasure throughout history, but it creates space through resistance to erasure for the community. Queerness throughout history is therefore not defined exclusively as an identity label but a multitude of activities, organizations, and behaviors which are not essential yet clearly related to queer people (Halberstam 6). *Lote* focuses not on the sexual exploits and desires of Hermia and Mathilda, but their shared experiences, aesthetics and inclinations while noting they are indeed queer.

Many of the queer theorists discussed have taken up academic Eve Sedgwick's call, to varying effects, for *reparative* reading to build "small worlds of sustenance that cultivate a different present and future for the losses that one has suffered" (Wiegman 11). The backwards feeling in people and literature is not entirely one of defeat, instead it pushes back at the idea that progress has been completed and provides re-narration of history into resistance. Sedgwick's call is to turn away from the paranoid critical reading which has dominated queer theory and instead to use hope and the desire to build something new from the problems facing the community (Sedgwick 126, 146). The reparative impulse is one of love for books, artifacts, aspects of culture and above all people.

Mathilda's intense love for historical art, fashion, and ornamentation is not in spite of her Blackness or queerness but part of it. Her rediscovery and later performance of Hermia's life and the Lote-Os ceremony is joyous, cultivating a future which can learn from past lives' contributions. Mathilda and Hermia's parallels deepen a link that Von Reinhold implies will connect people not only to the past but the future. On the very last page, Mathilda introduces herself as "Hermia" to a new set of luxurious, extravagant, and Black people who move to Dun. One of the new arrivals even appears familiar to Mathilda: "as they turned around I thought, just for a moment, just like the year before, that I was looking at Hermia's apparition" (Von Reinhold 460). This continuation of Hermia's life in Mathilda and beyond

is powerful and it defies the intentionally silencing of Hermia within historical archives and writing.

Queer subcultures can disappear entirely due to their lack of documentation and the speed at which they morph and die (Halberstam 154). However, there is a backwards leaning and referential respect in queer art to what came before them; for example the butch rock genre, including the Riot grrrl movement and others, which threw out old norms of mainstream music yet remained referential to the previous decade of women's music (Halberstam 174). Queer/ LGBTQ+ archives, too, suffer from early deaths, fleetingness, and absence (Marshall 1). Certain "queer knowledges" are documented better than others, some peoples' lives and expression of queerness are preserved while others are "buried, and forgotten" (Marshall 3). Despite documentation problems in the second half of the 20th century, some knowledge passes on in new yet referential forms through communities. Many writers mourn these absences in knowledge, especially as rarely have queer theorists been "wholly apart from the subculture" and have usually participated in some ways to the archive they create or analyze (Halberstam 169).

Lote explores this problem through the fleetingness and mysteriousness of the Lote-Os, which carry on in architecture, artwork, and ghosts in spaces. Hermia's absence is reminiscent of many of the subcultures which have not been documented properly yet still live on in the queer scene. In the paper "Emphemeral as Evidence," José Esteban Muñoz posits that something about queerness is a possibility, a mode, or a fleetingness (Muñoz 6). The process of documentation and academic rigor when applied, particularly to queer art, makes the space "legible" and therefore robs it of its counterculture-ness, of purpose, and incorporates what it was originally writing against (Muñoz 5). Queer archives therefore can be an act of negation if not also acknowledging the impossibility of capturing queerness in institutions (Muñoz 6). The mysteriousness and consistent gestures to the impossibility of knowing in Hermia and Mathilda's creation allow for a certain covertness to be retained in *Lote*. The need to archive Hermia, was after all, an intense desire to negate and synthesize what she represented. Mathilda's interest in the proof of Hermia is not to control, but rather to embody and learn from her, and Hermia's life is not recorded in any traditional archive by the end of the book. The novel needs to acknowledge the absence in the past and the impossibility of conveying through proof alone the life of Hermia, while still allowing the characters and reader to rejoice in the imaginative possibilities presented.

This way of connecting to Hermia through the archives and in their absence offers both Mathilda and the reader a queer, Black figure with not only a fun and artistic life usually

only afforded only to wealthy white people, but also the interior thoughts which are so inaccessible from the dead. The shrinking of time through spatial, experiential, and narrative strategies allows for a broadening of what queer Blackness can look like. In lieu of having subjectivity and citizenship for people in the past, or when the formal archive fails and there is no "grievable life" to be found, it is necessary to imagine one's own history (Richardson 11). The imagination is not only for the memory of those absent in history, but also for the present reimagination of community, time, and ways of living. *Lote* answers the call of absence while not forgetting what draws it to the archives, the dual necessity of renarrating silence and respecting the impossibility of knowing.

The importance of the archival dive in *Lote* is twofold, it allows for Mathilda to establish herself and other Black queer people in relation to the dead and interrogates the production of history, finding the moments where silence was created.

Chapter 2: *Lost Children Archive*

Like *Lote*, *Lost Children* attempts to deal with the silences in historical archives, documentation, and cultural memory. The novel follows a family's road trip through the US from the Woman and later the Boy's perspective, who runs away as his parents' marriage is falling apart. The family's story is intercut with descriptions of their boxes of personal materials and chapters from the meta-fictional text *Elegies*. *Lost Children* justifies the novel's writing when the Woman says: "The story I need to document is not that of the children in immigration courts, as I once thought. The media is doing that already…" (Luiselli 146). Luiselli herself already wrote a book, *Tell Me How It Ends: An Essay in 40 Questions*, about the frustrating paperwork and confusing requirements customary to the immigration courts' process. The customary approach to writing about illegal immigration is not how this novel covers the subject. Instead, *Lost Children* is about people who cannot speak and the silence their deaths signify in history:

> I am still not sure how I'll do it, but the story I need to tell is the one of the children who are missing, those whose voices can no longer be heard because they are, possibly forever, lost (Luiselli, 146).

The difficult reality both Luiselli and the Woman grapple with is understanding the lives of dead and voiceless undocumented children. In the book, absence refers not only to the migrant children, but also the Apache people from the same area. Luiselli's characters are therefore creating projects of and connections to the people who cannot speak.

The way *Lost Children* approaches this challenge is dizzying in its variety; there are perspectives and styles which blend and merge probing questions about how and who we document. The novel becomes a collection of archives which reframe and recontextualize both the historical photographs next to family members' personal items. The various methods also explore what silence and absence can feel like in echoes and remnants of spaces which have been turned into graveyards and sites of trauma.

This chapter first analyzes how *Lost Children* reframes who is part of an archive by changing how we traditionally identify with perspectives and addressing methods of documentation. Then, it argues the haunting of the landscapes and spaces of the road trip comments upon American myths of mobility and freedom, while also beginning the compression of time between the past and present. The third section analyzes how the children's perspectives continue the rearranging of history and meaning, again challenging the understanding of migration as a modern problem. This section will also discuss myths about Native Americans which are implicated in the questions of modernity and how Luisellli uses the Man's project

to reinforce myths in comparison to the rest of the book. Lastly, this chapter argues that *Lost Children* becomes an archive itself by rearranging documents and time periods into living conversation to comment on the present.

Who is part of the archive?

Lost Children uses multiple techniques to challenge who is included in an archival project and who the focalizers can be. The American family is never named and only referred to by their relation to one another, making their identities less individual. The choice makes 'woman' or 'girl' feel both inaccessible and universal, imitating how the nameless in history might be perceived. Although the nested meta-fictional book *Elegies* begins in a similar manner, with numbered and unnamed children making the journey into the US, the children eventually shout out their names, symbolically pulling them out of anonymity. *Elegies* is described by the Woman as an amalgamation of different stories of migration throughout history. The style of the text gives the impression of a folktale. However, *Elegies* grows to be more specific in character identities and setting as the chapters inject and intertwine with the American children. *Lost Children'*s choice to keep the typical protagonists nameless, instead slowly introducing and connecting the migrant children, challenges who is anonymous and who is identified with in the story.

Once the Boy and Girl run away, the Boy's perspective becomes more intertwined with the passages from *Elegies*, trading off pages, as the migrant children's lives and identities become more fully formed. One of the required questions for undocumented children, also often asked by the American public, Luiselli addresses in *Tell Me How it Ends:* why minors immigrate. In *Elegies* the children imagine the big city they are heading toward, talking about vague and fantastical images of "great buildings made of glass rising up to meet [them]" (Luiselli 268). However, Luiselli cuts these visions short with reality: "And then he tried to imagine further, but he could only think back to the putrid jungle… his thoughts like an ocean receding, accumulating destruction and fear in a great wave" (Luiselli 268). The children come from different backstories which flesh out the motivations and imaginations they carry, but they are still fleeing from harrowing experiences, some of them are under ten years old, and they cannot fully comprehend the socio-political situation they were born in or are entering. Above all, Luiselli makes it clear they are young children going through a harrowing experience.

The perspectives of illegal migrants and American children bridge into one another; the Boy says he "felt that we were getting closer and closer to the lost children" as he reads

passages from the *Elegies* (Luiselli 268). On page 269, the migrant children are dangerously urinating off the side of a train car hurtling through the desert, in the next section the Boy realizes he also must urinate outside. They share similar experiences with one another and then are treated similarly by their legal documents. The Boy and Girl's descriptions given to the police after they run away are recorded in a same manner to the migrant mortality reports earlier in the book:

> Child one. Age: 5. Sex: Female. Eye color: Dark brown. Hair color: Brown
> Child two. Age: 10. Sex: Male. Eye color: Hazel brown. Hair color: Brown (Luiselli 300).

The description is flat and unemotional, despite the fear and sadness the parents are feeling in the story. It connects the struggle of how little the reports of dead migrant children can convey to the weight of meaning for families and the children. The Boy and Girl are alone now too, and their experiences mirror the children in *Elegies* as they walk through a desert with little direction. The choice not to use names for the American children and briefly merge their experiences switches the roles and draws attention to how little knowledge we often have of migrant children. However, Luiselli keeps the Boy's narration in first person and the migrant children in third person the whole book, as if understanding the limits of how much she can write from the perspective of those who are gone.

The American family's collections of things, photographs, and literature is turned into a personal archive. In one of the sections called 'Archive', the Woman says, "I almost never take pictures of my own children. They hate being in pictures and always boycott the family's photographic moments" (Luiselli 66). She says the photos the Boy takes of her daughter are more indicative of his own journey than the setting they are in. She goes through his backpack, listing the things inside: "Why is it that looking through someone's things is always somehow so sad and also endearing, as if the deep fragility of the person becomes exposed in their absence, through their belongings" (Luiselli 67). A small, personal collection of the Boy is created on the road trip, as though his life can be understood through the first photo he takes and the Swiss Army knife in his bag. This emphasis on documentation and personal belongings, organized and listed like reports, reframes the American family as the fragile, absent ones. It points out what is lacking in the documentation of migrant children and even in a small personal archive of the Boy.

Lost Children also reflects on critical fabulation, similar to *Lote,* by pulling documents, photos, and people from history and creating a fiction which cautiously approaches the absences. Critical fabulation is the dual gesture of wanting to expand the

cultural and interior history of unrepresented people while acknowledging the impossibility of doing so (Hartman 1). When creating this term, Hartman is specifically referred to the immense lack of knowledge left behind in "brushes with power" like court documents and police reports, such as those depicted above. *Lost Children* points to this absence in history not through fictionalizing the story directly around these documents, but by paralleling the experience with American children in a larger family road trip narrative that builds up the reader's empathy and awareness. The absence of the names of the American family and the constant focus in both parents' work on telling the stories of those who cannot speak pushes the reader toward understanding both the necessity and impossibility of the migrant children's histories.

Luiselli directly references this absence as the Woman's main story to tell, as Von Reinhold does with the cover-up of Black art that Agnes reveals. Both *Lote* and *Lost Children* contain heavily stylized meta-fictions mixed in with the primary narration about their absent subjects: *Elegies* and Hermia's chapters. These meta-fictions are never confirmed nor presented as historical writing in the main narrative of each book. *Elegies* is even more distant and unrealistic in the world of *Lost Children* than Hermia and the Lote-O's stories, however both play with the possibilities contained in these representations. *Lost Children* is very careful in its fictional perspectives, clearly drawing connections between the American and migrant children's perspectives while keeping a certain distance from claiming to be able to write their story. As will be touched upon later, the mystical confusion of these storylines becomes important in both novels for showing space is haunted by memory and temporal confusion, but the mixing of perspectives is brief and temporary in *Lost Children*.

Both *Lote* and *Lost Children* have narrators who are inserts for the writers in this task of critical fabulation. As Mathilda and the writer of *Black Modernisms* question their findings, the Woman's children ask what she is doing and why someone would want to document the world (Luiselli 103). *Lote* tackles the intentionality behind absence in a more clear-cut manifestation than *Lost Children:* through Hermia and the villainous Garreaux. *Lost Children* instead seeks to point out the historical injustices which she highlights as responsible for absence.

Haunting Spaces

The space the family traverses is haunted by the memories of the past which they bump into. This haunting is reminiscent of Hermia in Dun, always at the edge of Mathilda's awareness. The children's perspective collapses time periods, but the parents are also reminded

consistently of ghosts. The Man searches out echoes, graves, and sounds of the Apaches' land. The Woman alludes to other literary works and historical moments throughout time. She brings up landscape photographers, other migrations, and writers. These allusions are placed within the narrative and rearranged out of their normal fields and historicity in the novel and therefore comment on the present issue of children who died in the border crossing.

Luiselli is using the space traveled in the road trip to comment on the myth of American mobility and freedom. The US is considered to be born out of immigration, when in fact its beginnings were colonial, built on the restriction of not only Native American but African freedom of mobility. Importantly, the 'Great American Road Trip' is an iconic part of the cultural mythos of the US. Luiselli chose to juxtapose a family road trip with the harrowing journey undertaken in *Elegies* and news stories, drawing the Boy and Girl into their own migration journey at the end to parallel the migrant children.

The landscapes are captured bleakly in photographs at the end of the book, challenging a myth of freedom on the road (Šimunović 15). The photographs are an intertextual reference to Juan Rulfo, a writer and photographer who created imagery of the Mexican border as wastelands and hell (Šimunović 13). The emptiness and blurriness of the photographs combines with the reference of Rulfo to portray the landscape as a grave.[4] The Man even brings his children to the grave of Geronimo, attempting to capture something for his documentation of the past, in the clearest reminder of the division between life and death. In sharp contrast to the pleasure and aesthetic decadence the spatial connection of Hermia and the Lote-Os brings to Dun and historical documentation, the landscape here is transformed through its archival organization into a depressing graveyard.

Lost Children also connects these areas of the US to the borderlands through the intertextual references. Luiselli references not only Rulfo and his wastelands, but also to the Chicana scholar Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera,* which maps onto the complicated border space stories of personal identity, migration, and colonialism. Reshuffling the current migration discussion next to Anzaldúa's seminal writing about Latinx people living on the dual border of culture, gender, and countries once again implores the remembrance of the US's complex history with migration. Under the header 'Missing' and above another epitaph about forced migration for Native Americans on reservations, Luiselli quotes Anzaldúa:

[4] *Elegies* is also 'authored' in *Lost Children* by someone named Camposanto, which translates from Spanish to graveyard.

A borderland is a vague and undetermined place
Created by the emotional residue of an unnatural
boundary.
It is in a constant state of transition.
The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants -Gloria Anzaldúa (Luiselli 111).

This powerful quote mentions the emotional residue, the memory and emotion left behind by the restriction of movement in the US. Anzaldúa mentions the residue of history and calls this space "vague" and "undetermined" as though it cannot be defined. The road trip in *Lost Children* does not take place primarily in the typical borderlands of the US and Mexico, but it consistently references it. The migrant children may cross borders and make it far into the US, but they remain illegal and in a state of unknown. The photos included of the family road trip portray the landscape not only as a grave but with the blurry vagueness of the borderlands, as history remains present haunting this space.

The haunting is particularly acute in the Man's sound project documenting the ghosts and echoes of the last Apache people. He says his project is "linked to specific locations" and interested in the "last Apache leaders -- moral, political, military -- of the last free peoples on the American continent, the last to surrender" (Luiselli 21, 20). The Man is interested in documenting a very romantic and noble story, which he relays to his children frequently:

> This whole country, Papa said, is an enormous cemetery, but only some people get proper graves, because most lives don't matter. Most lives get erased, lost in the whirlpool of trash we call history, he said (Luiselli 215).

Notably, the Man is planning to document the sounds of the last Apaches' historical spaces. He does not elaborate much throughout the book on his project, but is pictured recording nature, wind, and his children. This project suggests different meanings for work on historical absence. The Man draws away from his family for this project, losing his marriage in the process. By attempting to capture something which no longer exists, it could be argued that he is lost in a romanticized or completely futile experiment. It also could be argued that he, an American, reads Jack Kerouac and other great road trip fiction, therefore might be missing the consequences behind the absence in history. His focus on the last stand of Geronimo and the extremely fleeting noise of the past suggests his approach romanticizes the death of Native Americans and forgets the present lingering issues. The state and power which forced the Apache people out of this very land still affects their descendants and others to this day.

On the other hand, the Man may be pursuing the echoes of the last Apaches and finding the remnants through historical attentiveness to the setting. The Woman ruminates on

his project, “Maybe everything will remain unnarrated, a collage of environments and voices telling the story on their own (...)” (Luiselli 95). His project is historical, yet lacks the contextual arrangement of documents in *Lost Children.* The soundscape approaches absence from a new direction, but lacks *Lost Children*’s multiple perspectives, types of media, intertextual references, and stylizations. Where the Woman struggles with telling the absence of the present from the children’s perspectives, the Man takes an approach which is more distant from the people and yet still attached to the land.

The juxtaposition of Chicano, Native American, and migrant children in different documentation reframes the American space into a graveyard and challenges dominant narratives about the space. The strong intertextual references challenge the view of migration, borders, and mobility in the US and push the reader to consider the constructed-ness of history. The Man’s sound documentary of Apacheria also forces us to consider the method and silence of documentation, particularly for such a fleeting sense as sound.

Perspectives on Time

Lost Children follows children for a large part of the story, showing their perspective both during harrowing unaccompanied migrations and their interpretation of history. As Luiselli deconstructs who and how we build archives for, she also considers the children’s understanding of politics and history as a tool for reimagination. The snippets of the radio and stories the Man tells the Boy and Girl are placed without as much narrative context into their brains, much like flipping to a random page in a book. The American children “have been listening more attentively than we thought… but they combine stories, confuse them”, as is evident when they clamor that if Geronimo had won his war the “lost children would be the rulers of Apacheria” (Luiselli 75). The American children conflate the news stories of children crossing the border with the last stand of Geronimo. Even though these stories are separated by a century of time, the space they inhabit is the same, and there would have been a different reality for these migrant children had the US not constructed the borders which made them illegal.

As previously mentioned, the American and migrant children’s perspective is utilized to rearrange who is part of the archives and to what extent, through juxtaposing and later combining the children’s narration and documentation. The children’s perspective is also integral to understanding how confusing and traumatic the border crossing can be, and *Lost Children* flips this confusion to time periods and politics. The previous chapter discussed how queer identity and sexuality is sometimes considered to be a creation of modernity and

therefore excluded from the past, and a similar assumption of the modernity of the US migration crisis is frequently made. The children's lack of experience in history and politics indirectly combats this myth. *Lost Children* uses the space the family travels through as a juxtaposition for the space of the current migration crisis and Native American forced migration. The novel also juxtaposes the present time of the migration crisis against Apache history, historical migrations, children's crusades, and other allusions in *Elegies* and the Boxes.

The current migration crisis is frequently portrayed in the news as a modern crisis of border security and domestic weakness, divorced from the actions of the United States for the past few centuries and deeply affecting the way immigrants are treated by the public and state (Farris 814). However, the very ideals of freedom and expansion from the birth of the US leaves out the other half of its founding: the forced migration of Native Americans. *Lost Children* integrates the story of Geronimo, a Ndendahe Apache who died in the 20th century. The lack of agency which narratives about Native Americans ascribe leads to myths about the 'vanishing' Native Americans, or the pristine environment of the Americas before Europeans arrived (Denevan). These ideas contribute to relegating away Native Americans in the US consciousness to the 18th century. Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz and Dina Gilio-Whitaker's *'All the Real Indians Died Off': And 20 Other Myths about Native Americans*, discusses the title's myth first given its prevalence in the American public conscious. Throughout the book, the authors point out the contradictions in how the settler state celebrates and remember the Native Americans of the past while continuously inflicting harm upon the present Native Communities.

In some ways, the myth of Native Americans dying off is challenged in *Lost Children* through the inhabiting of spaces and the focus on Geronimo, one of the most recent examples of forced Native American migration. However, if we reflect on how the myths around Native Americans were produced in history from Trouillot's analysis, the silences in the archives and documents are not addressed in the Man's process of documentation. In fact, by recording the sounds of graveyards and empty landscapes, he is indirectly reinforcing the falsehood that the Apache tribes no longer exist. This is perhaps in purposeful contrast to the Woman's focus on history as a repetition into the current time. The perspectives, framed in the story as documentarian versus documentarist, from the Man and Woman highlight how historical narratives can either be challenged or reinforced by our arrangement in the present.

These stories of forced migration, alongside snippets of other histories, link eras which have previously been temporally separated in many peoples' minds. Seeing through

the lens of children also helps to reorient how we view historical 'truths' with fresh eyes. Both *Lote* and *Lost Children* attempt to write against the periodization of their respective silences.

Archival Time

Lost Children itself is a non-traditional archive of family, history, and migration across time and space. The boxes, passages, and allusions in the novel operate as a reshuffling of past into present. The boxes represent the references of the Man and the Woman, and the items the Boy and Girl pick up along the way. The materials change how and when information is contextualized. The contents are mentioned by characters at different moments both as they put the boxes together in the beginning and pull from them throughout the road trip, using different perspectives to reframe the material between children and adults. The reading experience is also disrupted when this multi-media comes into play. The polaroids mentioned throughout the story are at the back of the book, encouraging the reader to search for the correlated photo. These small archives of books lists, photographs, and excerpts come at different points, but force reading to be broken up and slowed down, mimicking the experience of searching that the characters are also undertaking.

The boxes in *Lost Children* change the experience for the reader. The use of documentation, such as photographs of objects found on migrant trails or of the Orphan Train, create living proof. Their original time and signification have been changed once these objects are placed within the story. An "archival document is a tear in the fabric of time, an unplanned glimpse into an unexpected event" (Farge 6). The document takes on new meaning, when the Orphan Train from the 1800s is compared by being in the same box to the maps of the deaths of unaccompanied migrant children traveling in the desert (Luiselli 253). This box, number 5, compares the mortality reports and maps of migrant children to the orphan trains and homeless epidemic of the 19th century and to reports about children in the slave trade of the 18th century. A picture of the cycle of abandoned and traumatized children in American history being forced to or out of necessity migrating to survive is painted through this box.

The collaged and fragmented reading experience is unusual, mimicking the experience of sifting through archival material to find the story. Traditionally, the discourse time or reading experience of a novel is smoother, but characters also usually have names in books. *Lost Children* leaves many historical and intertextual references as fragments with

their meaning up for interpretation. The Woman has a habit of opening books to random pages and reading a section that is sometimes included in the story (Luiselli 85). This irregular way of reading mirrors the composition of the book and framing of materials. Interestingly, Luiselli places the photographs taken by the family all at the end of the book, as opposed to scattered throughout like the boxes or books she reads. By leaving the polaroids to the end, they represent moments from the story but also are divorced from them, allowing the photos to bring to mind other photographers and graveyards from the novel's references. The disruption of chronology through archival material leads to history feeling closer and less alien, in the same way the space carries memories of forced migration that the family runs into.

The focus in the novel on the projects of the Man and Woman self-reflexively mirror the difficulties Luiselli had in writing the migrant children's stories. As discussed in the beginning of this chapter, the Woman realizes as the novel goes on that she must try to tell the story of the migrant children who are absent, reflecting Luiselli's own mission. The scraps, books, and photographs which the Woman and Man keep in their boxes represent their attempts. Box I shows the process of the Man documenting:

Four Notebooks (7 ¾" x 5)

"On Soundscaping"

"On Acoustemology"

"On Documenting"

"On Field Recording"

Seven Books

Sound and Sentiment, Steven Feld

The Americans, Robert Frank (introduction by Jack Kerouac)

Immediate Family, Sally Man

Ilf and Petrov's American Roadtrip, Ilya Ilf and Evgeny Petrov

The Soundscape, R Murray Schafer

A Field Guide to Getting Lost, Rebecca Solnit

In the Field: the Art of Field Recording, Cathy Lane and Angus Carlyle, eds. (Luiselli 34).

This list wedges an American era at the height of highway culture, through road trips and landscape photography books, between the snippets of books about documentation. The Man takes sound bites from the landscape to capture the Apache people, while ironically reading

classics about the great American outdoors, calling into question the possibility of recording the noises of people whose absence he is vacationing through.

The perspectives used in *Lost Children* mirror the contraction of time through the style of *Elegies* and the Boy's narration. Using the perspective of children already changes the audience's entry into the time of the story, as children perceive both time and history differently. For example, the migrant children pretend to call their parents and the youngest heartfeltly says to his mother: "Mama I haven't been sucking my thumb at all, Mama, you'd be so proud, and proud to know we've rode on the back of many beasts for many days and weeks now, I'm not sure how long" (Luiselli 307). His speech is childish and sweet, reminding the reader of the mother who he is separated from and the bonds he formed with the other children; it also displays the confusion of a child going through a deeply traumatic journey. The young boy's speech also references a confusion for how long it has been since he's seen her. In the time he has been gone he says he became a man, even though he is still sucking his thumb (Luiselli 307). His wording is long and full of run-on sentences, similar to the final segments of *Elegies* which are placed at the end of the book without separation or perspective changes, building dramatic tension.

When the American boy runs away, his narration increases in chaos, culminating in a thirteen-page long, oddly punctuated sentence. As the separation between the styles and perspectives begins to blur between the Boy and *Elegies*, so do the sentences. The Boy seems to feel these days longer than any other, and as his confusion grows the story finally intersects with that of the *Elegies*:

> (...) no, the eagles won't eat us, no way, I said, they're taking care of us, don't you remember the Eagle Warriors Pa always told us about, I asked, and you said yes, you remembered, and then said let's follow them, let's pretend the eagles are kites and we have to follow them like when we follow a kite, which was a brilliant idea, so we started following them, clutching invisible holders (...) (Luiselli, 328).

This overwhelmingly long sentence is both the dialogue, internal monologue, and poetic description of the Boy with his sister in the desert. The breakdown of the writing form signals the inclusion of migrant children into the story, either the children from *Elegies* or the news reports, or both. The sudden arrival and departure of the migrant children into the main characters' story is similarly mystical to Hermia or the 'Luxuries' inclusion into Mathilda's narrative. However, where Hermia and Mathilda's narration melds together until the characters share the same name at the end of the book, the lourst children depart and are not heard from again. The style and language return in *Lost Children* to how it was before. Where

Hermia is a queer ancestor for Mathilda, who shares similar knowledge, tastes and experiences, the American boy and girl do not have the memory or knowledge from the lost children. Their backgrounds are not shared but based in attempts to understand one another.

Elegies is described originally as "loosely based on the historical Children's Crusade" although reimagined in a future unnamed continent.[5] The past and future inspiration for the book fits for a while until it becomes very clearly based on the contemporary children migrating across the Americas. The first elegy begins poetically: "Mouths open to the sky, they sleep. Boys, girls: lips chapped, cheeks cracked, for the wind whips up day and night" (Luiselli 142). The second elegy follows suit, describing distant places the children come from and old grandmother's warnings (Luiselli 143). This tone shifts as the main narrators become more intertwined with the migrant children. However, the poetic and vague beginning makes *Elegies* feel like folklore, showing again through style the many ways to tell these children's story. The migrants once again become linked closer to history through the allusions and style of the meta-fictional book.

Lost Children utilizes space and time to show the repetition of history and challenge dominant narratives about the US, playing with the absence and silence of landscapes in recordings and photographs. The landscapes link strongly to the past and other writers on Mexican border towns and border lands who deal with the complicated US colonial legacy. The intertextual and intermedial elements of *Lost Children* also rearrange one's normal chronology of history, creating bonds and arguing for empathy. *Lost Children* changes the reader's temporal perception through the style of *Elegies* and choice to see through children's eyes. It also simulates to some degree the experience of being in an archive and sorting through documentation in the fragmented and collaged style of compilation, forcing the reader to consider the difficulties of arranging history and the new meaning in this ordering.

[5] An interesting, though not useful, note on the intertextuality of *Elegies:* Luiselli cites some of the same sources as influences for the meta-fictional text that are referenced in *Lote,* though Luiselli's allusions are difficult to spot. The Von Reinhold mentions the Lotus Eaters from Homer's Odyssey as the original worshippers of the "Luxuries" (311). Luiselli cites Ezra Pound's *Cantos* as an influence, which you can see supplying the wording of 'gondolas' instead of trains and relating to migration by retelling Odysseus' travels (359). "Canto XX" by Pound also mentions the lotophagoi within the first stanza: "And from the floating bodies, the incense – blue-pale, purple above them. - Shelf of the lotophagoi, - Aerial, cut in the aether." Both Luiselli and Von Reinhold are expressly influenced by the modernist writers of the interwar period, visible in their references to Virginia Woolf, Joseph Conrad, or others and their use of stream of consciousness.

Conclusion

As was discussed in the theoretical framework, history writing's main task is the separation of the living and the dead. An archive can, however, bring some of the proof of the past into dialogue with the present. The question was posed at the beginning: how do *Lote* and *Lost Children* address and imagine absences in archives for present communities? And within this, how do the novels bridge the separation between the unknowable past to our present? Both *Lote* and *Lost Children* touch the past and the dead across time and space, effectively passing that separation in their stories. The novels utilize different perspectives and documentation from the past, whether real or fictional, alongside and in juxtaposition and dialogue with the present. Therefore, the main argument of this paper is *Lote* and *Lost Children* show that historical fiction can create imagination, emotions, community, and dispel myths for the present and future. The comparison of the novels elucidates the methods of addressing absence and bridging the separation with the past can leads to different results: while both challenge the assumptions of modernity in migration and queer history, *Lote* focuses on creating community, future and hope while *Lost Children* aims to address the patterns and explanations of history.

Space becomes haunted in the absence of a "grievable" life in both *Lote's* Dun and *Lost Children*'s Apacheria. *Lote* chooses to make these connections visible through the mysterious religion of the 'Luxuries' and Garreaux's villainous hiding of Hermia's room. The tangibleness of the haunting serves two purposes: to give the connection for Mathilda, and the reader, to Hermia more substance and meaning, and to point to the intentionality of the silences in the production of history. The haunting of spaces in *Lost Children* are documented differently from *Lote* through the impossible remnants of sound and the demonstration of historical similarities in juxtapositions and intertextual references. The separation between life and death is not clear cut in the mystical towns and blurry wastelands, and the sites of *Lost Children's* road trip therefore become deserts and graveyards. This, like *Lote,* points to the closeness and absence in historical memory but to different effects. Instead of providing a historical ancestor, the spaces provide a mourning and recognition of history repeating itself. While both novels comment on the connections through time in space, *Lote* makes silence visible and tangible whereas *Lost Children* points to silence in the efforts to document something so fleeting yet repeated.

The compression of space and time in both novels is created through the multiple perspectives, style, and fragmentation and rearranging of sources. *Lote* and *Lost Children* both have narrators who understand time differently, not separating history normatively,

Mathilda's transfixed perspective and both American and migrant children's understanding. The frequent insertion of other documents, like photographs or Mathilda's 'Transfixion' cards, reorientates their meaning and makes history closer. In both *Lote* and *Lost Children,* the main narrative and the historical fiction perspectives blend stylistically and literally, Mathilda meets a 'Luxury' through Hermia's perspective and the two groups of children meet in the desert. This leads to the compression of the time and space the characters inhabit in the story, but because of how each author achieves the compression the resulting effect is different. *Lote* writes Hermia from her perspective and ultimately Mathilda takes on her mannerisms and even name. The 'Transfixion' cards are also personal to Mathilda and offer her more connections, as she slowly uncovers that most if not all of her 'Transfixions' were in the Lote-Os. In comparison, *Lost Children* carefully approaches the silences in documentation and its characters experience a little bit of the inaccessible truth, while *Lote* fully takes on the silences and writes joyously within them. In *Lost Children*, the Boy and Girl meet the migrant children in the desert, however they still don't know where the migrant children came from, if they are the children from *Elegies* or the news, or what will happen to them after. *Lost Children* address the absences in history with some bridging of the past and present but keeps the silences unknowable.

As the novels' approaches to the archive differ, both for the authors and characters, they leave the story with different takeaways. The Woman, Man, and Mathilda all become obsessed with the archive, impacting parts of their lives. The motivation for the Woman in reaching into the archive is stated clearly in the opening chapters of the book: she wants to try and find a voice for those who cannot speak and have endured the hardship she sees in New York and the media constantly. Her respect for the dead and the unknowable-ness of their interiority is deep in her approach to telling their stories, but the book must use techniques to make these stories personal throughout. *Lost Children* challenges us with who is part of the archive, it places mini archives to help us consider how documents are arranged and perceived. The Woman does cry briefly when she sees a plane deporting migrant children, but these feelings are reaching towards children who are so far away she cannot see their faces (Luiselli 182). It is the narrative switching to *Elegies* and the experience her children go through which can finally make this story personal and relatable for the Woman and the reader. There is no *Black Modernisms* in *Lost Children* to affirm the existence of these ancestors' stories, and *Elegies* only offers a few snippets towards the last few chapters of the interior lives of the characters. However, the family is deeply affected: the parents and children are split at the end of the book. In both parents' attempts to understand the missing

and dead children, they ended up experiencing something similar firsthand. There is not a happy conclusion here like in *Lote*.

Mathilda ends *Lote* with the answers found in hidden archives and something to connect her identity to. The possibility of the imagination in history for *Lote* is hopeful, keeping a lineage of information and beliefs between people. The inclusion of fictional archives which have been covered up, but still exist, offers answers for Mathilda. The focus is on the possibilities instead of the tragedy which created that silence. The traditional archive, as Mathilda sees through Agnes and other experiences, often is a figurative form of death for those housed within. Instead, the stolen documents and fragments of the 'Luxuries' she finds is enough to completely transform her, much like how queer subcultures may be fleeting and die quickly yet live on referentially in the present. The archive's importance, like *Lost Children*, is pointing to the silence and not wishing to repeat it. However, for *Lote*, the historical imagination and small documentation left is enough to build queer community and knowledge in the future, and leaves the reader with a hopeful message.

The arrangements of fragments and stories makes *Lote* and *Lost Children* archival constructions themselves, forcing the reader to consider different time periods and spaces in the present and having to search for context themselves. The characters' experiences in the archive are mirrored in our own reading. However, the effect is different for each book. The connection through time for *Lost Children* points out the problems with the US's history and the myths of mobility and borders. It serves to both intellectually and emotionally validate the difficult choices of children crossing illegally into being prohibited and unknown, because this has been a product and pattern of history. *Lote* focuses on drawing community and connection between Black queer people throughout time, fueled by pleasure and luxury, and in doing so creates more space outside of narrowly defined Black and queer historical figures. This drive for full lives in queer ancestors helps envision rich lives for those now, and in the future. *Lote* offers an archive as a sensory experience, showing how history can connect through pleasure and physicality, while *Lost Children* focuses on the types and methods of documentation in sound, news, photography, and items. *Lost Children* is imagining in the absence of the present time, for people who are dying on the difficult journey into the US and there is nothing the Woman can do for them. Because the border crisis and the causes that led to it still persist, the approach to absence is helplessness to cross the boundary of death, and to know those past lives. Both these books therefore use history to try and create new narrative complexities and counter mainstream narratives about marginalized peoples by affording them an imaginative voice that reflects on the absence it inhabits.

While both novels' main focalizers draw readers into understanding connection with others who are absent, they have different aims and audiences. *Lote* finds identification in a queer, Black ancestor that can comfort and give liberatory power to a backwards feeling person who has been excluded from mainstream history. This is different from *Lost Children*, where the story will not reach those currently immigrating. Instead, the book writes from an outside perspective, remaining distant from the thoughts and context of the migrant children during *Elegies*. *Lost Children* does not find ancestors for pleasure or joy, but instead reconstructs the processes of power in American history that repeat patterns of drawing borders, forcing migration, and erasing the memories of those victim. Instead of writing the first-person narrative perspective of Native Americans or the migrant children, *Lost Children* challenges who is archived and how they are documented by using the American family.

The comparison of these two books has elucidated the complexities and methods of engaging with historical fiction, and even when they employed similar methods it was to different ends. This analysis goes past the constructivist and empiricist approach to history making by attempting to show the methods and effects of archival fictions in very different genres and areas of interest. Both *Lote* and *Lost Children* approach silence in the archives from multiple angles, materializing the often nebulous processes and actions which enact it, and tracing the echoes and ghosts of the past. Both books touch on the importance of space and physicality of memory and documentation. *Lost Children* focused on the repetition of forced migration in the area, rewriting the landscape and myth of modernity; *Lote* focuses on the physical connection through time in spaces of memory and touch, and the emotion instrumental to communities now. The techniques of temporal confusion in both Mathilda's and children's different conception of time emphasize the shortening of space between historical periods. The attempt to capture lost sound or something ephemeral suggests the fleetingness and impossibility of really knowing history. In their multifaceted attempts, each author clearly pointed to the uncertainty and impossibility of ever capturing 'truth' of the past while still attempting through imagination.

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