

Becoming an Imagined Record: Archival Intervention in Autofiction

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ABSTRACT

Human rights are intricately tied to the practice of archivists, and the imperative to address the silence of the archive has been discussed in archival scholarship. After examining the evolution of archival intervention in arts (films, novels, plays, etc.), this article analyses the narrative components of two novels—W. G. Sebald’s *Austerlitz* (2001) and Valeria Luiselli’s *Lost Children Archive* (2019)—and demonstrates that certain works of autofiction are uniquely fit to become “imagined records.” Through the lens of “archival reading,” the article reveals these novels’ narrative traits, such as their tendency to rely heavily on photographs, maps, and other iconography; their use of a specific type of narrator; and their intention to supplement the silence of the archive, the characteristics that facilitate the construction of imagined records. By delineating the ways in which these traits were implemented in the creation of an imagined record, the article paves a way for more imagined records to come in the future. Rooted in real sociohistorical traumas, these two novels expand the notions of evidence and the forces that shape archival theory and practice.

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KEY WORDS

Advocacy, Archival records, Imagined records,
Photographs, Writings about archives

Can novels emerge as a new medium for an imagined record, filling in the silence of the archive, promulgating awareness, and inciting action for human rights issues? Two prominent scholars in the field of archival studies, Anne Gilliland and Michelle Caswell, define imagined records as “records that, while not actually existing, meet pressing social needs in the present.”¹ They propose this new term along with another, “impossible archival imaginaries,” which they define as imaginaries “archivally impossible in the sense that they will never result in actualized records in any traditional sense,” but “they can provide a trajectory to the future out of a particular perspective on the past and may build upon either actual or imagined documentation and narratives.”² Can novels serve this purpose? Novels engage and enrapture readers by telling fictional stories, but many great stories are based on factual events. In most fiction, however, real events serve mainly as a mere backdrop to the characters’ drama, thence the novel’s limit to function as a record. The case may be different for another genre, autofiction.

In 1977, Serge Doubrovsky coined the term “autofiction” to “denote the combination of two narrative forms: autobiography and fiction.”³ Two prerequisites for autofiction further explain the term. It must be

1. nominal. (Autofiction requires homonymy among its author, narrator, and character; this clause distinguishes autofiction from the autobiographical novel, in which the author bestows a borrowed name upon a character).
2. generic. (Autofiction plays on its generic ambiguity, on its “contradictory pact,” on presenting itself as both absolutely referential, since it is subject to a principle of factual exactitude, and nonreferential, since by claiming to be a novel it attends to [indicates, announces] its entrance into fiction).⁴

The phrase “generic ambiguity, on its contradictory pact” can also be applied to the concept of *imagined record*, as it is a record, albeit imagined, vying to have the power to authenticate the past as a legitimate record can. Discarding the artifice of plot, literary autofiction highlights the tensions and hybridizations between real-life materials and literary treatment of them. In recent years, the literary world has witnessed the surge of popularity in autofiction, as testified by works such as Norwegian author Karl Ove Knausgaard’s *My Struggle* series and Rachel Cusk’s *The Outline Trilogy*.⁵ In this article, I discuss two autofictional works, *Austerlitz*⁶ by W. G. Sebald and *Lost Children Archive*⁷ by Valeria Luiselli, for they incorporate within their narratives a particular set of traits that aptly qualify them as imagined records.

Not all autofiction can be considered imagined records. One significant common factor that unites *Austerlitz* and *Lost Children Archive* is their endeavor to trace, excavate, mark, preserve, and pass on to posterity the records of enduring sociohistorical traumas—the Holocaust during World War II and the heightened

immigration crisis in the United States under President Trump since 2016, respectively. Archives and archivists feature prominently in both storylines. In *Austerlitz*, a narrator (a stand-in for Sebald) relays the story of the eponymous character, who was separated from his parents via *Kindertransport* at a young age during the Second World War. Austerlitz visits the state archives in Prague to dig up his forgotten past, which is the central enigma of the book. In *Lost Children Archive*, two main characters, a mother and father, are sound archivists gathering artifacts and audio recordings. The mother (again, a stand-in for Luiselli herself) compiles the evidences of the state-sanctioned cruelty hurled toward the downtrodden migrant children currently detained in decrepit shelters near the southwestern US border. Extraordinary about these novels is not their portrayal of archives and archivists in their contents but the archival traits reflected in their narrative fabric that expands and supersedes the narrative's traditional function, reconstructing them as imagined records.

The two novels' ultimate aim is to record and keep within reach the silent remnants of the past (or the present, in the case of the immigrant crisis in the United States), hoping to engender advocates for human rights issues. To achieve this feat, they are replete with photographs, maps, meticulous lists, and architectural details. Luiselli's novel, *Lost Children Archive*, even incorporates several finding aids for the materials in the boxes the main characters bring on their road trip.⁸ Furthermore, the two stories are told through a narrative voice that, at times, seems to merely function as a conduit for others' stories, accentuating victims' voices while the narrator recedes into the background.⁹ Readers get to experience the story directly from those who have experienced the trauma rather than through the narrator, analogous to how a researcher directly encounters firsthand accounts via artifacts in archives rather than through secondary sources. In these ways, the novels acquire the characteristics pertinent to an imagined record. According to Anne Gilliland and Michelle Caswell:

Dominant strands of archival theory and practice both maintain an unreflexive preoccupation with the actual, the instantiated, the accessible and the deployable—that is, with records that have presence, established evidentiary capacity, and identifiable users and uses. Archivists currently offer little conceptual space for acknowledging, or practical guidance for addressing, the existence of or roles played by the content, record or archive as these might be imagined.¹⁰

Archivists can think more critically about nonexistent records and archives by investigating the characteristics and the impact of imagined records as revealed in certain autofictional novels.

These two novels have some traits in common that may help to explain why the autofictional form aptly suits imagined records. A number of reasons may have propelled the authors to implement the aforementioned narrative traits.

For one, both novels deal with momentous sociohistorical traumas caused by systemic racism and human rights abuses, and they strive to deliver something more than a mere commentary or fictional account based on the tragic events. Hence, imbuing the quality of the “real” is imperative.¹¹ The meticulous details in both novels, along with photos, maps, reports, and street names, invoke such quality in the narration. By incorporating into the narrative what can be interpreted as primary sources, the authors focus not only on verisimilitude but also on the very act of authenticating the “real,” evoking historical events as they happened. It should be noted again that the purpose of these two novels is not merely to entertain, but to record, to preserve, to educate posterity, and, hopefully, to increase awareness of social justice.

The authors’ keen focus on human rights issues must be considered for their works. Imagined records can appear in many forms as scholarly, juridical, fictional, and artistic representations, but I argue that autofiction, especially as manifested in the two works of literature being considered here, is uniquely suited to serve as an imagined archival record because of the genre’s smooth amalgamation of actual events and imaginary supplements. The autobiographical aspects focus on what has indeed happened, while the fictional aspects speak for the silence in the archives. They can inspire “the collective will to read them as evidence in support of just causes,” which is one aspiration for archivists when it comes to social justice.¹² Citizens should neither experience collective amnesia nor suffer from a lack of moral imagination when it comes to hideous acts of discrimination, lest we perpetuate the mistakes. I posit that *Austerlitz* and *Lost Children Archive* contain sufficient archival characteristics and aspirations to serve as imagined records to supplement the absent or unattainable, hence silent, archive.

This article argues that the two novels are indeed imagined records that can address the silence of the archive. An in-depth literary analysis of these two texts delineates two formal techniques the novels employ to embody the characteristics germane to those of imagined records as suggested by Caswell and Gilliland.¹³ Considering affect theory and the social justice aspect in archives, I seek to expand the boundaries of records and archives in archival practice and theory. In addition, I address how archival scholarship is influencing the creation of literature in a new way. The article also provides room for archivists to critically think about how to construct an imagined record if they are so inclined.

Literature Review

The concept and image of archives and archivists have seeped into and permeated popular culture and literature in various ways in recent decades. Yet academic journals have only sporadically investigated the role of archives and

records in such media. Several articles focus on the depiction of archivists and archives in movies and novels, examining how certain stereotypes have formed. However, recent years have witnessed scholarly engagement with the narrative structure that shapes those cultural products, emphasizing manifold purposes for incorporating the concept of *archives*. This section chronicles the evolution of the discourse on archives in literature. Eventually, the studies reveal the imbrication of the narrative and the archives, culminating in the creation of an imagined record by fluently fusing the two.

Peter Gillis analyzed spy fiction for settings and conditions commensurate with the use of archivist as character.¹⁴ He writes that two particular ideas have pervaded fictional espionage writing since the 1930s: 1) the concept of information as power, and 2) the past haunting the present.¹⁵ These two themes have produced within spy fiction a commentary on the nature of archives and the role of archivists. Gillis compares the imagination of the novelists to the actual archival profession, a topic addressed in articles in the following decades.

Several articles focus predominantly on the contexts within which archivists and librarians appear in the plotline. Archival scholars and practitioners have expressed concerns about the image of archivists in mainstream media, as these portrayals can shape popular views of archival work. Arlene Schmuland explored, within the spectrum of 128 novels, how contemporary fiction depicts the role of records, archives, and archivists.¹⁶ She concludes that, although those depictions have some basis in reality, a handful of misguided stereotypes plagues their image in these novels. One solution to combat the negative images, she suggests, is “to create a large body of users in order to expand the number of people who know what archivists are and what they do.”¹⁷ A decade later, Karen Buckley observed the representations of archives in popular novels and movies, summarizing that they typically present four tropes in the plot trajectory: 1) protection of the record as protection of the truth; 2) the archival experience as an interior one for the characters, 3) records in an archives as “lost” and “buried,” which characters must spend much time and effort “digging” to unearth, and 4) most important for this article, the archival record as invariably centering around the search for self or truth, as is the case in Sebald’s novel *Austerlitz*.¹⁸ Buckley also mentions that “another positive aspect of the representation of archives in popular culture—and an indication of the pervasiveness of the ‘archival sign’—is that archive is being mentioned with more frequency in the ‘mainstream’ entertainment media.”¹⁹ Tania Aldred, Gordon Burr, and Eun Park delved exclusively into films in search of the portrayal of archivists and conclude that “the majority of reel archivists followed stereotypical patterns,” which can be summed up as “covered in dust, aging, and unhappy.”²⁰ Amanda Oliver and Anne Daniel addressed their concern about how the media depiction of archivists influences the popular perception of the profession.²¹ Oliver and

Daniel compiled an exhaustive literature review on the topic, concluding that most films portray archivists ambiguously.

Suzanne Keen investigated the frequent appearance of archives in British fictions since World War II.²² Her research stands out from the aforementioned articles in that her interest primarily lay in “why” rather than “how.” She concludes that postmodern theory’s distrust of master narratives and its preoccupation with the indeterminacy, instability, and unknowability of the past may have prompted what she terms “the romances of the archive.” The preponderance of archives in these novels affirms the relevance and accessibility of the past.

Alexandrina Buchanan discusses the opportunity for exploring the creative possibilities of the archive as a narrative and/or fictional device.²³ Archives cry out for human interpretations, she speculates, which can represent creative starting points rather than the closed records of completed actions. She concludes, “We might, however, consider the potential of using these and other techniques to add other layers, other voices, other possibilities to traditional archives, thus providing opportunities for different meanings to be communicated or created.”²⁴

Caryn Radick investigated with an archival lens one specific, well-known work of classic literature, Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*.²⁵ This article employs structural analysis: what comprises the main body of the narrative? The story of *Dracula* is presented as a series of documents. These include: “two journals kept in shorthand, a diary originally recorded on phonograph cylinders, letters, telegrams, memoranda, a ship’s log, and newspaper clippings. Stoker used a variety of records to form the narrative of *Dracula*.”²⁶ Radick’s analysis is more formal than the previously mentioned authors as she looks at the shape (the form) of the narrative—not the content of the story—pointing out that it is entirely composed of documents and records, a narrative created solely by juxtaposing artifacts. Katherine S. Madison viewed the hugely popular, award-winning musical *Hamilton* from an archival perspective.²⁷ Madison examines the presence of records both onstage as props and in the narrative of *Hamilton*, where they provide both authenticity and authority for the historically inspired story. In addition, Madison emphasizes the “right to tell a story” when the documentary record in the archive is silent, hence giving authority to the subjective nature of memory-making and historical narrative.

Rebekah Xanthe Taylor and Craig Jordan-Baker from the University for the Creative Arts detail their experience of immersing creative writing students in archives for their fiction writing.²⁸ They argue that archival functions inherently involve elements of narrative creation. Also, as in Madison’s article on *Hamilton*, Taylor and Jordan-Baker discuss the silence in the archive by stating: “Creative writers can use this silence to provide a voice for the person who is not there.”²⁹

Anne Gilliland and Michelle Caswell set out to legitimize and popularize two archival concepts—impossible archival imaginaries and imagined records. Impossible archival imaginaries have a “co-constitutive relationship with actualized records” but exist only as imaginary because they can never result in actualized records in any traditional sense. The authors add, “If instantiated, they may take various media forms, including fiction, film and performance.”³⁰ Imagined records are records borne out of impossible archival imaginaries that “meet pressing social needs in the present.”³¹ Gilliland and Caswell provide two examples of imagined records: 1) the video footage of Michael Brown’s murder, and 2) records invented by refugees to secure their status as legal aliens.³² Ultimately, Gilliland and Caswell are calling for serious consideration of the legitimacy of the imagined record in current archival theory and practice, where it can supplement the absent archives and engender broader awareness and collective action to address human rights issues.³³ By presenting these two novels as imagined records, this article intends to expand the notion and possibility of the concept by exploring the constituents of their narratives.

Inspiration, Background, Form, and Content

In the first decade of the twenty-first century, W. G. Sebald was arguably the most critically acclaimed German writer, and *Austerlitz* is his last prose work, published in the same year as his untimely death in a car accident. According to Professor J. J. Long, who has written a monograph discussing Sebald’s entire oeuvre:

Since his death in a road accident in December 2001, W. G. Sebald has become one of the most written-about contemporary German authors. Conferences devoted to his work have been held in Davidson (North Carolina), Munich, Paris, Sydney, Marbach am Neckar and elsewhere, and the secondary literature devoted to his work is now extensive—to say nothing of interviews, reviews, obituaries and further publications in press.³⁴

Austerlitz is often labeled a “novel,” but the author refused to designate it as such, calling it “a prose book of indefinite form.”³⁵ A combination of travel writing, history, fiction, and autobiography, it is meditative, digressive, and undramatic. The pages are replete with grainy black-and-white photographic images. Although he hardly reveals anything about himself, Sebald seems to be the anonymous narrator of the book, rescuing the last remnants of memories before they are swept away by the whirlwind of time. He is respectfully devoted to recording “the real,” meticulously authenticating his narrative with photography, repurposed from both archival and personal collections, and other

historical iconography. This very aim might be the reason he incorporated traits of an archives into his work. According to Long:

W. G. Sebald's last completed prose text, *Austerlitz*, contains the author's most extensive exploration of the archive. We have seen in previous chapters how zoos, entomological collections, libraries, maps and various forms of photography are extensively thematised in the text. We have also seen that Sebald is interested in the "archival consciousness" of the modern subject, and he pursues this investigation to its probable extreme in *Austerlitz*.³⁶

Although all four of Sebald's prose works have similar formal structure, in *Austerlitz* he deals most thoroughly with many themes of the archive in the book's content and form.

In the novel, the narrator encounters a mysterious figure named Jacques Austerlitz, an architectural historian. Their friendship lasts for more than twenty years. The narrator is merely a conduit for the story of Austerlitz,³⁷ who only finds out his birth name in his teens because he was transported at a young age from Czechoslovakia to Wales via *Kindertransport* on the cusp of World War II, and his foster parents gave him a new name. He grows up with a Calvinist preacher and his wife, and his memory before this time does not survive. Austerlitz, in his middle age, finally learns about his buried past by visiting the state archives in Prague. There, he finds the address of an apartment building where he had lived until he was four, and, upon revisiting the place after almost half a century, he meets Vera, who was a friend of his parents and who had moonlighted as his babysitter. Vera tells Austerlitz the story she remembers, the story we the readers in turn hear via the narrator, the story that had been stored only in one individual's tattered memory.

Vera remembers the coming of Nazi sentiments to their city and shares what she knows about Austerlitz's parents: his mother was taken to Theresienstadt, one of the most infamous concentration camps, and his father to the Gurs internment camp in France. Austerlitz visits these sites, tracing the steps of his parents, seeking vestiges of their existence in videos, archives, and libraries.

The inspiration for Austerlitz came from Susi Bechhöfer, who recounted her forced immigration via *Kindertransport* during the World War II in her autobiography. Martin Modlinger compared excerpts from the two works side by side to track the direct influence of Bechhöfer's history on Sebald's novel.³⁸ He discovered that Sebald adhered to Bechhöfer's biography for nearly every important moment in the protagonist's life. The article also proves the inclusion of Sebald's own archival research in his book.

In letters sent to the Goethe Institute in Prague in February and June 1999, Sebald requested access to the state archives in Prague, specifically to consult the address register to find actual residents with the name "Austerlitz" living in Prague between 1900 and the 1940s. Sebald included the results of this historical

research in his novel. Adéla and Max Austerlitz, who, as the Goethe Institute informed the writer, lived in Prague according to the censuses of 1908 and 1938, became the model for Jacques Austerlitz's biological parents in the novel, Agáta and Maximilian.³⁹

Sebald created one (wo)man's experience of *Kindertransport* because no record exists to verify that one particular person's (Susi Bechhofer's) past and, in doing so, complements truth with fictional inventions. The novel also enacts a number of lesser-known histories and memories of the genocide such as the inconspicuous abodes where Jewish prisoners were kept. *Austerlitz* is re-imagining engendered by history, both global and personal.

Published nearly two decades after *Austerlitz*, Luiselli's novel *Lost Children Archive* bears an eerie resemblance to Sebald's work and is glaringly self-conscious about its archival nature. According to Gaiutra Bahadur in the *New York Times Book Review*:

Lost Children Archive takes the highly complex shape of an archive. It contains three recognizable narratives: 1) the wife's eddying first-person musings subdivided into recurring headings . . . 2) transcriptions of recordings the boy has made for his little sister . . . , and 3) the third-person "Elegies"—a fictional book within Luiselli's own fiction—threaded throughout as either the wife or the boy reads them into the recorder.⁴⁰

The pages contain an image of Apache prisoners being transported by train in 1886, a 1910 poster seeking guardians out West for homeless children in New York City, a photograph of these orphans sent west by rail, and a migrant mortality report. Luiselli said during her interview in *Poets & Writers*: "It (disparate set of narrative voices) threads so tightly into the reality of the novel that the reader comes to see it as an artifact. I don't have to believe that it's a book; it's an artifact. I think fiction should not be scared to reveal itself as artifact."⁴¹ Similar to Sebald's *Austerlitz*, Luiselli's novel embodies a striking number of archival traits.

The book Luiselli published right before *Lost Children Archive* is *Tell Me How It Ends: An Essay in Forty Questions*, a nonfiction account of her volunteer experience as an interpreter in US courts assisting migrant families.⁴² Her novel, with its focus on the new way to document political violence, is a fictional twin to her nonfiction work; their contents share a significant number of names, events, and situations. One may wonder why Luiselli wrote a fictional account of the same story that she had addressed in her previous book. Luiselli hints at this answer: "Numbers and maps tell horror stories, but the stories of deepest horror are perhaps those for which there are no numbers, no maps, no possible accountability, no words ever written or spoken."⁴³ Luiselli understands the limits of records in conveying the full story, and she wants her fiction to rescue the stories left unrecorded, the stories the bureaucratic and historical notions of evidence have always delimited.

The plot follows a family on a road trip. It is clear from the beginning that the family will disintegrate upon reaching its destination; the wife is constantly on alert for her husband's cynical remarks and indifference lethal to their marriage. They are traveling from New York to Apacheria in Arizona, so that the father, who works as a sound documentarian, can record the "echoes" of the last Indians. The mother, along the way, looks for the traces left by the "lost children," a euphemism for illegal immigrant children. She says, "I collected loose notes, scraps, cutouts, quotes copied down on cards, letters, maps, photographs, lists of words, clippings, tape-recorded testimonies."⁴⁴ She is self-conscious about her ambivalent motive to archive; she often speculates what it means to document events, what documenting entails, and how useful it is once something is documented for a general audience. She reflects:

I'm not sure that I'd ever be able to—or should—get as close to my sources as possible. Although a valuable archive of the lost children would need to be composed, fundamentally, of a series of testimonies or oral histories that register their own voices telling their stories, it doesn't seem right to turn those children, their lives, into material for media consumption.⁴⁵

After the mother's narration ends midway through the novel, a transcription by her son begins. He has his own recording device: a Polaroid camera. The pictures he has taken during the road trip are exhibited at the end of the book. These photos imbue the feeling of the "real" to Luiselli's novel.

In a video interview for the independent global news outlet *Democracy Now*, Luiselli confirmed the autobiographical elements in the book.⁴⁶ The configuration of the family mirrors Luiselli's. Her family indeed took the road trip across the country as it is recounted in the novel. For the past few years, she remarked, she has been deeply concerned with the country's treatment of migrant children after immigration policies got stricter and more inhumane.⁴⁷ The novel re-enacts this social situation in an archival form to tell the story of "the lost children." Without being didactic, it stimulates the conscience of citizens in regard to the current social/national issue.

Specificity in Photos and Prose

The prevalence of an archive in literature parallels the modern obsession with collection, preservation, and classification. Mary Ann Doane claimed that modernity is characterized by a generalized "archival desire," to which a large range of institutions and recording technologies responded by developing easy-to-use recording devices.⁴⁸ Recording using mobile devices has become an obsession in the twenty-first century. Most people seem to feel the need to juxtapose the ephemeral with the "permanence" of a photo. Before the current digital

era of instantaneous recording and sharing, photography itself was considered another byproduct of modernism. J. J. Long points out that, “Of the various media of memory, photography is the one most obviously present in Sebald’s work. Photography is in many ways the emblematic medium of modernity.”⁴⁹ In their books, Sebald and Luiselli embed photographs that correspond directly to and supplement their prose. Although it would be impossible to determine the precise provenance of these photographic images, they seem to be either 1) pictures taken by the authors themselves to replicate their novels’ events (photos of landscapes and buildings would belong in this category); or 2) pictures from archives repurposed for the novel at hand (architectural blueprints and the Xerox copy of a stamp depicting the town of Theresienstadt Ghetto in Sebald’s novel, and the aforementioned image of Apache prisoners in 1886 in Luiselli’s novel would belong in this latter category).⁵⁰

Unlike a body of text that can be elaborated by employing metaphors and intricate syntax, photos record people and landscapes at a point in time. Roland Barthes, a scholar deeply engaged with the philosophy of photography, claims, “Perhaps we have an invincible resistance to believing in the past, in History, except in the form of myth. The photograph . . . puts an end to this resistance: henceforth the past is as certain as the present, what we see on paper is as certain as what we touch.”⁵¹ The majority of people tend to put more trust in images. They seem to facilitate, even reinforce, the truthfulness of an account. Thus, what Sebald and Luiselli achieve by embedding photos in the pages of their books is more than just embellishment and enhancement on their narration; it is in fact the very act of authenticating their texts.

However, it might be the other way around: photos can effect evidentiary quality to texts, but texts can also serve as captions to these photos. To further ascertain the impetus behind Sebald’s and Luiselli’s penchant for photographs in their narratives, it is worthwhile to involve Sontag’s argument in her book on photography,⁵² where she writes that every picture is seen in some setting, and where one sees certain photographs determines the impression and the interpretation of them. In the twenty-first century, photos appear ubiquitously and are shared promiscuously on mobile phones. This flood of images has desensitized viewers. Autofiction is another setting for photos, and, in it, the narrative functions as a caption. The caption of a photograph typically gives information such as a date, a place, and some names. Any attached story is usually brief and insufficiently summative. Photographs in autofiction engage the audience in a more overarching, permeating, and pervasive way. The words on the page allow more holistic contextualization of photos. Sontag adds that a proper caption (or narrative) “allows photographs to be both objective record and personal testimony, both a faithful copy or transcription of an actual moment of reality and an interpretation of that reality—a feat literature has long aspired to, but could

never attain in this literal sense.”⁵³ *Austerlitz* and *Lost Children Archive* provide grounds for an ideal, symbiotic relationship between photos and texts.

In *Austerlitz*, many photos of modern and premodern architecture stand out. Having specialized in architectural design, Jacques Austerlitz is a retired art historian who used to teach at a “London Institute of Art History,” a stand-in for the Courtauld Institute, part of the University of London. The narrator and Austerlitz explore a number of historical buildings, such as the Liverpool Street Station, the Great Eastern Hotel, the Royal Observatory in Greenwich, and the Palace Hotel at Marienbad. The prose describes the buildings they visit—the design of the facade, the topography, its utility—all accompanied by the photos. “Not unlike a palimpsest,” Rumiko Handa says of Sebald’s use of architectural details in his novel, “a building may call back a once-forgotten past event by way of physical traces it carries.”⁵⁴ To underscore the effect the photos bring to his text, Sebald selected those specific photos of architecture. Complementing these photos of buildings is a compendious description of the buildings themselves, as can be seen here from the passage that describes the state archives in Prague:

I took a taxi to the Karmelitska in the Lesser Quarter, where the state archives are housed in a very peculiar building going far back in time if not even, like so much in the city of Prague, standing outside time altogether. You go in through a narrow doorway let into the main portal, and find yourself first in a dim barrel-vaulted entrance through which coaches and carriages used to drive into the inner courtyard. This courtyard measures some twenty by fifty meters, is roofed by a glazed dome, and on three stories has galleries running around it, giving access to the rooms containing the archives, where the windows look out on the street.⁵⁵

This vivid narration interweaves the photo of the architecture into its prose, as if the words are leading readers, holding their hands, into the place.

This argument applies to Luiselli’s novel as well, although the photos in her novel consist of different kinds of Polaroid shots, mostly in color, including some that are spontaneous. These photos showcase an eclectic mix of landscapes, buildings, and people in different regions of the United States. Similar to Sebald’s pictures, those Polaroid pictures correspond to the content of the novel. The narration recounts one instance when the mother as narrator mentions a restaurant in a seemingly abandoned neighborhood where the family has stopped for breakfast; she encounters an enigmatic figure in a cowboy outfit, and there is a photo of such a figure in such an environment in the book.

These two authors’ decisions to include photographs in their novels is a carefully calibrated literary maneuver to testify to the “real” elements of the prose, to convince the readers of the archival quality of their texts in its effort to retain the memory. The texts, in turn, allow the photos to be interpreted in a new way, setting them in a proper context. Unlike the majority of autofiction,

which focuses mainly on the sense of self in a particular milieu, *Austerlitz* and *Lost Children Archive* both deal with momentous historical issues. These two works of autofiction refrain from focusing on the authors themselves; rather, their attention turns outward. In documenting grand-scale tragic history, non-fiction may seem too arrogant (how can you know with absolute certainty?) and fiction may appear too frivolous (do you dare imagine “what ifs” against the backdrop of such tragic history? as when Theodor Adorno famously stated that poetry was not possible after the Holocaust).⁵⁶ Hence, autofiction is an apt choice not only for documenting and filling in the silence of the archive but also for creating an imagined record. One can hope to spread the awareness of important sociohistorical issues and bring about a positive change in a way to which no other single genre—whether fiction or nonfiction—can aspire.

Who Speaks? The Disappearing Narrator

Compared with Gilliland and Caswell’s examples of imagined records—hitherto nonexistent video footage of Michael Brown’s murder and records invented by refugees—the two novels this article advocates as imagined records have a stronger component of textual narration. Though not evident at first, what will eventually dawn on readers of these two novels is that the narrator often disappears into the background, sometimes completely. Understanding this narrative approach can guide archivists who hope to invoke or create a textual-heavy imagined record.

In *Austerlitz*, the story is seamlessly told through a first-person point of view with casual insertions of “who said” within text without any quotation marks. Influenced heavily by the renowned Austrian writer Thomas Bernhard, Sebald applies his narrative technique of incessant repetition of attribution that indicates who is thinking and saying the words on the page conspicuously throughout his narration.⁵⁷ In the introduction to *Austerlitz*, James Wood, an American literary critic, writes that the technique of repetitive attribution succeeds in “blurring the distinction between biography and autobiography and allows the memento to recall the past, to leave its confines and to enter the spheres of the narrator and, furthermore, that of the reader.”⁵⁸ According to Wood, this type of narrative further dulls the dichotomy between fiction and real (what is needed in imagined records), and it allows the (hi)story to come alive directly and swiftly to the reader. Like researchers handling the artifacts firsthand in the archives to formulate their own interpretations of the event that produced such artifacts, the narration in *Austerlitz* seems to flow directly to the reader without intervention from the narrator (or, for that matter, from the writer). All the anecdotes Jacques Austerlitz recounts are told through the nameless narrator; yet, due to the repetitive attribution seamlessly embedded

into the narration, they seem to come effortlessly from Austerlitz himself. Here is one example:

And I remember, Vera told me, said Austerlitz, that it was Aunt Otylie who taught you to count at the age of three and a half, using a row of small, shiny black malachite buttons sewn to an elbow-length velvet glove which you particularly liked—jedna, dva, trii, counted Vera, and I, said Austerlitz, went on counting—ctyrii, pet, sest, sedm—feeling like someone taking uncertain steps out on to the ice.⁵⁹

Although the narrator relays Austerlitz's story using "I," many sentences are interjected with the phrase "said Austerlitz," even when the narrator is speaking, or, in the cases of double, or even triple attribution, with a phrase like "Vera told me, said Austerlitz," or a slight variation thereof. The effect of this kind of distancing in narration is profound. The narrator is self-effaced, buried under the ceaseless appearance of other names. The repetitive attribution allows the events (or victims) to speak for themselves. Carol Jacobs commented about this narrative method:

Over eighty pages Vera retells Austerlitz's past. It comes to us in a rhythm of said-said, said Vera, said Austerlitz. And during this parroting, at once marked by the distancing of a triple narration: said Vera, said Austerlitz (said the narrator), and the apparently unproblematic path of verbal repetition, almost all at once, miraculously, not only memory returns but also the mother tongue.⁶⁰

The effect this kind of prose has on readers is similar to the feeling of the return of memory, how archival materials recall moments from the past.

In Luiselli's novel, the narrator disappears into the background in different and more subtle ways. Unlike Sebald, she does not incorporate the rhythm of said-said in *Lost Children Archive*; instead, she uses an imagined literary allusion (to a fictional record of Latin American children coming to the United States on top of a train) that overtakes the main narration at various points in the book. She lists many other bodies of literature of the twentieth century throughout her novel, but one among them stands out, a book titled *Elegies for Lost Children* by the writer Ella Camposanto. By placing this imagined record among an extant body of literature, she imbues more credibility to it:

At the very top of the box, I placed a few books I'd read and thought could help me think about the whole project from a certain narrative distance: *The Gates of Paradise*, by Jerzy Andrzejewski; *The Children's Crusade*, by Marcel Schwob; *Belladonna*, by Dasa Drndic; *Le gout de l'archive*, by Arlette Farge; and a little red book I hadn't yet read, called *Elegies for Lost Children*, by Ella Camposanto.⁶¹

Elegies for Lost Children is about tens of thousands of unaccompanied Central American children who climb aboard a northbound freight train called the *Bestia*. The passages from this imaginary book follow headings titled "First

Elegy,” “Second Elegy,” and so on, attributed to Ella Camposanto, and are told directly to the reader without intervention from the narrator. The name of the writer, Camposanto, furtively alludes to Sebald; his collection of nonfiction essays published posthumously is also titled *Campo Santo*.⁶²

Another reason for deferring the agency of narrative to another author—albeit imaginary—in Luiselli’s case is that she is fully aware of the weight of the subject matter, the current immigration and child separation crisis in the country, a pressing social issue seemingly in limbo. She admits that it is not her story to tell (this statement is especially conversant with the recent controversy surrounding another novel with a similar theme, *American Dirt*, an Oprah Book Club selection);⁶³ the only proper and ethical way to relay the story is to give direct voice to those suffering from the crisis, the firsthand account. In the book, the nameless mother lists her qualms about documenting the sources:

Political concern: How can a radio documentary be useful in helping more undocumented children find asylum? . . . Ethical concern: And why would I even think that I can or should make art with someone else’s suffering? . . . constant concern: Cultural appropriation, pissing all over someone else’s toilet seat, who am I to tell this story, micromanaging identity politics, heavy-handedness, am I too angry, am I mentally colonized by Western-Saxon-white categories. . . .⁶⁴

To give more poignancy to the stories of others rather than to those of the narrator, Luiselli withholds the names of her main characters throughout the narration. Just as Sebald’s narrator gets self-effaced without so much as a name given to him, all the main characters of Luiselli’s novel—the husband, wife, son, and daughter—are nameless as well; instead, they give each other Apache names such as Cochise, Lucky Arrow, Swift Feather, and Memphis.

Sebald and Luiselli both use several literary techniques, among them a disappearing narrator via repetitive attribution, allusion to an imagined record, and metafictional elements, to allow a direct conduit between the victims’ experience of sociohistorical traumas and the reader. The resulting effect clearly resembles the encounter between researchers and archival materials. These two authors strive to deliver evidence, proofs, and stories stemming from tragic historical events to readers without much intervention from a third party. Archivists interested in creating a textual imagined record in the future can use such narrative techniques as these two novels employ.

Addressing the Silence in the Archives

Another impetus for constructing imagined records is the surge of interest in human rights within archival studies in recent years.⁶⁵ Gilliland and Caswell mention “The urge to invoke an imagined document or record where none exists

has been well articulated by feminist scholars, particularly those whose work focuses on subaltern subjects whose voices are absent from archival records.”⁶⁶ Although they specifically mention feminist scholars, the instigator can just as well be other marginalized groups, such as refugees and war victims. Already, an imagined record has played a role in spreading awareness of social justice: in the case of a police shooting that resulted in the murder of Michael Brown, an imagined record of Officer Darren Wilson’s hitherto nonexistent body camera has been created.⁶⁷ Imagined records predominately exist to advocate human rights issues and to save vanishing historical memories, and they can be indispensable and even necessary for addressing inevitable gaps in records. Gilliland and Caswell urge us to “contemplate how they can function societally in ways similar to actual records because of the weight of their absence or because of their aspirational nature.”⁶⁸ An imagined record is created to effect a positive change with its ability to address the absence.

One affinity imagined records share with fiction is their affective nature, which can stimulate citizens to feel and contemplate certain social issues from a new perspective. Although I argue that both *Austerlitz* and *Lost Children Archive* should be considered imagined records, these two works are, indeed, novels. They contain more fictional elements than historical ones. The juxtaposition of events in the narration, a handful of peripheral characters, and many dialogues are fictionally constructed to convey a persuasive and affecting story. Strictly speaking, these two works of autofiction are literary construction, two instances of literary imagining. However, such characteristics of fiction should not discredit them from attaining their status as imagined records. In fact, it is crucial to treat them as such due to their potential to speak for the silence in the archive and to affect positive changes.

The impact of an imagined record can be glimpsed in what the novel *Austerlitz* has exhumed: the buried history that involves the national library in Paris. In the novel, the narrator relates the story told by Austerlitz, which had been told in turn to Austerlitz by a librarian by the name of Henri Lemoine—another case of repetitive attribution—about the Bibliothèque nationale de France in Paris that was built on the site of an internment camp during the German occupation of France. The narrator recounts, “Thus, on the waste land between the marshalling yard of the Gare d’Austerlitz and the Pont Tolbiac where this Babylonian library now rises, there stood until the end of the war an extensive warehousing complex to which the Germans brought all the loot they had taken from the homes of the Jews of Paris.”⁶⁹ It is a great irony that a national library, a cultural repository, stands on the site of a historical crime against humanity. At this internment camp, the novel claims, Jewish prisoners sorted the looted goods from Jewish apartments. James L. Cowan reveal that “A year after the French translation of *Austerlitz* appeared, a full historical

account of the camps was published, in which Sebald was acknowledged as having played an important role in bringing to light this hidden episode of the Holocaust.⁷⁰ Sebald, by writing this novel, excavated one aspect of the Holocaust buried under the rubble of other myriad accounts of this tragic event. Only a small number of incomplete records documenting this episode of history existed before *Austerlitz*, but a year after its publication, precisely in October 2003, a new book documenting the principal history of the event was published titled *Des camps dans Paris: Austerlitz, Lévitán, Bassano, juillet 1943—août 1944* by Jean-Marc Dreyfus and Sarah Gensburger.⁷¹ The book includes two passages from *Austerlitz* as a way of honoring its contribution. Sebald rescued, so to speak, this historical knowledge from the smoldering ashes of memory. This consequence showcases that the imagined record can help to build “. . . new relationships between archival evidence and the construction of knowledge, and how to locate and uncover them.”⁷² While Sebald’s *Austerlitz* was published in the early 2000s, Luiselli’s novel was published far more recently. It will be interesting to see if *Lost Children Archive* can effect a certain change in our knowledge, our communal understanding of an event, or even our nation’s policies.

As such, an imagined record has the potential to act as a key player in promulgating awareness of human rights issues, social justice, and even forgotten history. Gilliland and Caswell assert that, for many refugees who do not possess any concrete records to provide documentary evidence of their horrible past, imagined records can complement their oral testimony.⁷³ Imagined records’ capacity to motivate, inspire, anger, and educate should be acknowledged widely among the scholars of archival theory and practice.

Conclusion

This article investigates three characteristics that make two novels uniquely strong contenders to become imagined records: 1) the particular use of photographic images and meticulously detailed prose, 2) the narrator as a conduit rather than as a storyteller him/herself, and 3) the novels’ keen interest in supplementing the silence in the archive, especially in regard to a sociohistorical trauma.

Austerlitz and *Lost Children Archive* effortlessly blend historical records and fiction, and this quality is suited to address sociohistorical traumas, to incite action, and to generate affect in readers and allow them to encounter what has not yet been recorded. Gaiutra Bahadur says, “While stories soothe with their imposed semblance of order, archives exhaust with the often incomprehensible chaos of what’s been left behind.”⁷⁴ By interweaving autobiographical narrative, history, and fiction, these two novels impose a semblance of order on the incomprehensible chaos that is historical memory. Creating imagined records in the

guise of autofiction just might be a new, effective way to document traumatic historical events and, furthermore, to address the silence in the archive. Factual records alone tend to leave gaps in the archive. These two novels thus become records that can be “. . . pregnant with the possibility of establishing a proof, a perspective, justice that heretofore has remained unattainable.”⁷⁵

The archival community should advocate for the theoretical openness to accept imagined records as a legitimate source of reference if they can address and assist with humanitarian issues. The example of the Bibliothèque nationale de France proves that these novels can effect a change. Sebald’s work can remind those arguing against the validity and legitimacy of imagined records that the wider definition and criteria of either the archive or the record should be acknowledged. It is time to usher in a new paradigm by which the archival community considers novels like Sebald’s and Luiselli’s as imagined records of sociohistorical events.

Most important, *Austerlitz* and *Lost Children Archive* achieve what institutional archives alone cannot achieve: humanizing the story. These novels are exemplary in how to use (or imagine) archives for telling affecting stories that can engender positive changes in our society. Hua Hsu, when writing about a recent trend in literary theory, argues that “In the past couple of decades, however, a different approach has emerged, claiming the rubric ‘affect theory.’ Under its influence, critics attended to affective charge. They saw our world as shaped not simply by narratives and arguments but also by nonlinguistic effects—by mood, by atmosphere, by feelings.”⁷⁶ Novels are often credited with their potential to influence not only what we think about but also how we feel about certain events. Taking all these aspects into consideration, it is crucial to acknowledge these two novels as records that can bring forth a better future in which justice is championed.

NOTES

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- ¹ Anne J. Gilliland and Michelle Caswell, “Records and Their Imaginaries: Imagining the Impossible, Making Possible the Imagined,” *Archival Science* 16, no. 1 (2016): 65, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10502-015-9259-z>.
- ² Gilliland and Caswell, “Records and Their Imaginaries,” 61.
- ³ Inge van de Ven, “The Monumental Knausgaard: Big Data, Quantified Self, and Proust for the Facebook Generation,” *Narrative* 26, no. 3 (2018): 322, <https://doi.org/10.1353/nar.2018.0016>.
- ⁴ Philippe Vilain, “Autofiction,” in *The Novelist’s Lexicon*, ed. Villa Gillet (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 5–7. Emphasis added.
- ⁵ Gavin Tomson, “More Life: On Contemporary Autofiction and the Scourge of Relatability,” *Michigan Quarterly Review*, August 8, 2018, <https://sites.lsa.umich.edu/mqr/2018/08/more-life-on-contemporary-autofiction-and-the-scourge-of-relatability/>, captured at <https://perma.cc/LQS5-YJXS>.
- ⁶ W. G. Sebald, *Austerlitz*, trans. Anthea Bell (New York: Modern Library, 2001).

- ⁷ Valeria Luiselli, *Lost Children Archive* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2019).
- ⁸ Luiselli, *Lost Children Archive*, 34, 70, 110, 148–49.
- ⁹ In Sebald's case, this "conduit" effect is brought forth by repeatedly inserting all the speakers' attributions in a single sentence (example appears under the section heading "Who Speaks? The Disappearing Narrator," and in Luiselli's case, it is done by embedding a fictional document within a book that is presented for readers to read directly (and not relayed through the main narrator).
- ¹⁰ Gilliland and Caswell, "Records and Their Imaginaries," 55.
- ¹¹ Literature's relationship with "reality" or "the real world" has long been a topic of major interest in the theory of literature. The term "the real" used repeatedly throughout this article emphasizes the constituents of a novel that are rooted in strong historical facts within a medium known as a fictional construct.
- ¹² Gilliland and Caswell, "Records and Their Imaginaries," 65.
- ¹³ Gilliland and Caswell, "Records and Their Imaginaries," 65. Gilliland and Caswell particularly emphasize the "pressing social needs" of these imagined records.
- ¹⁴ Peter Gillis, "Of Plots, Secrets, Burrowers and Moles: Archives in Espionage Fiction," *Archivaria*, no. 9 (1979), <https://archivaria.ca/index.php/archivaria/article/view/12561>.
- ¹⁵ Gillis, "Of Plots, Secrets, Burrowers and Moles: Archives in Espionage Fiction," 3.
- ¹⁶ Arlene Schmuland, "The Archival Image in Fiction: An Analysis and Annotated Bibliography," *American Archivist* 62, no. 1 (1999): 24–73, <https://doi.org/10.17723/aarc.62.1.v767822474626637>.
- ¹⁷ Schmuland, "The Archival Image in Fiction," 53.
- ¹⁸ Karen Buckley, "The Truth Is in the Red Files: An Overview of Archives in Popular Culture," *Archivaria* 66 (Fall 2008): 95–123, <https://archivaria.ca/index.php/archivaria/article/view/13187>.
- ¹⁹ Buckley, "The Truth Is in the Red Files," 122.
- ²⁰ Tania Aldred, Gordon Burr, and Eun Park, "Crossing a Librarian with a Historian: The Image of Reel Archivists," *Archivaria* 66 (Fall 2008): 85, <https://archivaria.ca/index.php/archivaria/article/view/13189>.
- ²¹ Amanda Oliver and Anne Daniel, "The Identity Complex: The Portrayal of Archivists in Film," *Archival Issues* 37, no. 1 (2015): 48–70, <https://doi.org/archivalissues.10928>.
- ²² Suzanne Keen, *Romances of the Archive in Contemporary British Fiction* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001).
- ²³ Alexandrina Buchanan, "Cardiff and Miller's *Road Trip* (2004): Between Archive and Fiction," *Archivaria* 73 (Spring 2012): 19–41, <https://archivaria.ca/index.php/archivaria/article/view/13383>.
- ²⁴ Buchanan, "Cardiff and Miller's *Road Trip*," 39.
- ²⁵ Caryn Radick, "Complete and in Order: Bram Stoker's *Dracula* and the Archival Profession," *American Archivist* 76, no. 2 (2013): 502–20, <https://doi.org/10.17723/aarc.76.2.wn3964n4r01h7034>.
- ²⁶ Radick, "Complete and in Order," 507.
- ²⁷ Katherine S. Madison, "Who Lives, Who Dies, Who Tells Your Story: The Use and Representation of Records in *Hamilton: An American Musical*," *American Archivist* 80, no. 1 (2017): 53–81, <https://doi.org/10.17723/0360-9081.80.1.53>.
- ²⁸ Rebekah X. Taylor and Craig Jordan-Baker, "Fictional Biographies: Creative Writing and the Archive," *Archives and Records* 40, no. 2 (2019): 198–212, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23257962.2017.1419944>.
- ²⁹ Taylor and Jordan-Baker, "Fictional Biographies," 202.
- ³⁰ Gilliland and Caswell, "Records and Their Imaginaries," 61.
- ³¹ Gilliland and Caswell, "Records and Their Imaginaries," 65.
- ³² Gilliland and Caswell, "Records and Their Imaginaries," 65.
- ³³ Gilliland and Caswell, "Records and Their Imaginaries," 53.
- ³⁴ J. J. Long, *W. G. Sebald—Image, Archive, Modernity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 1.
- ³⁵ Ruth Franklin, "Rings of Smoke," in *The Emergence of Memory*, ed. Lynne Sharon Schwartz (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2007), 123.

- ³⁶ J. J. Long, *Image, Archive, Modernity*, 149.
- ³⁷ The unnamed narrator is the sole speaker in this novel; yet by repetitively attributing the sources to others, it feels as if the stories are coming directly from those sources.
- ³⁸ Martin Modlinger, "You Can't Change Names and Feel the Same: The Kindertransport Experience of Susi Bechhöfer in W. G. Sebald's *Austerlitz*," in *The Kindertransport to Britain 1938/39: New Perspective*, ed. Andrea Hammel and Bea Lewkowicz (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2012), 219–32.
- ³⁹ Modlinger, "You Can't Change Names and Feel the Same," 225.
- ⁴⁰ Gaiutra Bahadur, "Missing Children," *The New York Times Book Review*, March 10, 2019.
- ⁴¹ Lauren Leblanc, "Angles of Experience," in *Poets & Writers* 47, no. 2, March–April 2019.
- ⁴² Valeria Luiselli, *Tell Me How It Ends: An Essay in Forty Questions* (Minneapolis: Coffee House Press, 2017).
- ⁴³ Luiselli, *Tell Me How It Ends*, 30.
- ⁴⁴ Luiselli, *Lost Children Archive*, 23.
- ⁴⁵ Luiselli, *Lost Children Archive*, 96.
- ⁴⁶ Valeria Luiselli, "Valeria Luiselli on Trump's Border Crisis, Ethical Storytelling & Her Book *Lost Children Archive*," March 8, 2019, in *Democracy Now!*, produced by Amy Goodman, Video Interview, 27:17, https://www.democracynow.org/2019/3/8/valeria_luiselli_on_trumps_border_crisis, captured at <https://perma.cc/6Z57-QDCP>. Luiselli speaks about how the novel borrows directly from her real life in this interview.
- ⁴⁷ New immigrant policies under President Trump can be found here: "Executive Order: Enhancing Public Safety in the Interior of the United States" (<https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/executive-order-enhancing-public-safety-interior-united-states/>), captured at <https://perma.cc/YHN5-7Z4Q> and "Executive Order: Border Security and Immigration Enforcement Improvements" (<https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/executive-order-border-security-immigration-enforcement-improvements/>), captured at <https://perma.cc/KZ8F-764Q>.
- ⁴⁸ Mary Ann Doane, *The Emergence of Cinematic Time: Modernity, Contingency, the Archive* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).
- ⁴⁹ J. J. Long, *Image, Archive, Modernity*, 4.
- ⁵⁰ In Sebald's novel, the architectural blueprints, including one from three centuries ago, appear on pages 15, 21, 234–35, and the image of the Theresienstadt stamp appears on page 240. A total of eighty-seven photographic images are interspersed throughout the pages in Sebald's book, whereas Luiselli's book has two designated places for photos: archival photographs appear on pages 242–55 and Polaroid photographs appear on pages 353–75.
- ⁵¹ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1981), 87–88.
- ⁵² Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Picador, 2004).
- ⁵³ Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, 26.
- ⁵⁴ Rumiko Handa, "W. G. Sebald's *Austerlitz*: Architecture as a Bridge between the Lost Past and the Present," in *Reading Architecture*, ed. Angeliki Sioli and Yoonchun Jung (New York: Routledge, 2018), 72.
- ⁵⁵ Sebald, *Austerlitz*, 144.
- ⁵⁶ Theodor Adorno, "Cultural Criticism and Society," in *Prisms* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1983), 19–34.
- ⁵⁷ Michael Silverblatt, "A Poem of an Invisible Subject," in *The Emergence of Memory*, ed. Lynne Sharon Schwartz (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2007), 82. Sebald said in 2001, only a few months before he was killed in a car accident, "Yes, I was always, as it were, tempted to declare openly from quite early on my great debt of gratitude to Thomas Bernhard. But I was also conscious of the fact that one oughtn't to do that too openly, because then immediately one gets put in a drawer which says Thomas Bernhard, a follower of Thomas Bernhard, etc., and these labels never go away. Once one has them, they stay with one. But nevertheless, it was necessary for me eventually to acknowledge his constant presence, as it were, by my side," <https://biblioklept.org/2016/01/06/one-gets-put-in-a-drawer-which-says-thomas-bernhard-a-follower-of-thomas-bernhard-etc-w-g-sebald/>, captured at <https://perma.cc/M9QB-HRGP>.

- ⁵⁸ James Wood, Introduction, *Austerlitz*, by W. G. Sebald (New York: Modern Library, 2001), v–xix.
- ⁵⁹ Sebald, *Austerlitz*, 160. Emphasis added.
- ⁶⁰ Carol Jacobs, *Sebald's Vision* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), 105.
- ⁶¹ Luiselli, *Lost Children Archive*, 24.
- ⁶² W. G. Sebald, *Campo Santo*, trans. Anthea Bell (New York: Modern Library, 2006).
- ⁶³ Laura Miller, "Will the *American Dirt* Fiasco Change American Publishing?," *Slate*, January 31, 2020. <https://slate.com/culture/2020/01/american-dirt-controversy-will-publishers-change.html>, captured at <https://perma.cc/4ABS-WP37>. Among the main issues with the novel *American Dirt* are the inaccuracies or stereotypes that resulted from the author's lack of knowledge about her subject matter, as she was a white woman writing a Mexican experience, producing a book palatable only to a certain readership. The author of *Lost Children Archive*, Luiselli, is a Mexican author, yet she is still concerned about her authority as a storyteller of such a complex and weighty subject matter.
- ⁶⁴ Luiselli, *Lost Children Archive*, 79.
- ⁶⁵ Michelle Caswell, "Defining Human Rights Archives: Introduction to the Special Double Issue on Archives and Human Rights," *Archival Science* 14, nos. 3–4 (2014): 207–13, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10502-014-9226-0>.
- ⁶⁶ Gilliland and Caswell, "Records and Their Imaginaries," 68.
- ⁶⁷ Gilliland and Caswell, "Records and Their Imaginaries," 66.
- ⁶⁸ Gilliland and Caswell, "Records and Their Imaginaries," 56.
- ⁶⁹ Sebald, *Austerlitz*, 278.
- ⁷⁰ James L. Cowan, "Sebald's *Austerlitz* and the Great Library: A Documentary Study," in *W. G. Sebald: Schreiben ex patria/Expatriate Writing* (New York: Rodopi B.V., 2009), 193.
- ⁷¹ Cowan, "Sebald's *Austerlitz* and the Great Library," 211.
- ⁷² Caswell, "Defining Human Rights Archives," 69.
- ⁷³ Gilliland and Caswell, "Records and Their Imaginaries," 67–68.
- ⁷⁴ Bahadur, "Missing Children," 13.
- ⁷⁵ Gilliland and Caswell, "Records and Their Imaginaries," 72.
- ⁷⁶ Hua Hsu, "That Feeling When," *The New Yorker*, March 25, 2019, 61.

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