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## Bowline on a Bight

Doing Right by the Records of Lilian Bland

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# Bowline on a Bight

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**ABSTRACT** Focusing on a case study that has at its axis myself and the records of Lilian Bland, I explore person-centred archival theory by engaging primarily with what Sara Ahmed conceptualizes as queer use. I draw on recent archival literature on love and grief, queer theory, feminist theory, anti-colonial methods, and new materialism to propose a radical somatics of critical archival love. I situate my knowledge and power within discourses of social justice, healing, liberatory memory work, and gender and sexuality to reflect on what it means to “do right”: to act ethically and with care toward ourselves and the myriad others we encounter in archival practice, and to be of use to one another.

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**RÉSUMÉ** En me concentrant sur une étude de cas ayant comme trame moi-même et les archives de Lilian Bland, j'explore la théorie archivistique centrée sur les personnes en engageant principalement avec ce que Sara Ahmed conceptualise comme le queer use. Je puise dans la littérature archivistique récente de l'amour et du deuil, des théories queers et féministes, des méthodes anticoloniales, et du nouveau matérialisme afin de proposer une somatique radicale de l'archivistique critique basée sur l'amour. Je situe mes connaissances et mon pouvoir à travers des discours de justice sociale, de la guérison, du travail mémoriel de libération, et du genre et de la sexualité pour réfléchir à ce que signifie « bien faire » : agir de manière éthique et avec care envers soi-même et la myriade d'autres personnes rencontrées dans le cadre de la pratique archivistique, en plus de se rendre utiles les unes les autres.

## Relationships at the Centre: Myself

It is August 1999, and I am nine years old, walking through the hills of unceded Southern Pomo, Wappo, and Graton Rancheria territory toward what is now known as Calistoga, California. I live between Calistoga and Santa Rosa in an intentional community called Monan's Rill. Formed by a group of Quaker Friends in the 1970s and nestled in the countryside northeast of Santa Rosa, Monan's Rill comprises 440 acres of unceded lands that I think of as home – that I love. I am a colonizer here, a child of colonizers who were children of colonizers for many generations. I am white, and I am a child who thinks of myself as *she* and *her* in my mind. It is hot, 100 degrees Fahrenheit; there is ice cream, shade, a creek.

It is October 2017, a rainy day. I am working at the Rare Books and Special Collections (RBSC) Library at the University of British Columbia (UBC) as an archives and reference assistant while completing my graduate degree in Library and Archival Studies. I am in Musqueam, Tsleil-Waututh, and Squamish territory now, living and working in what is also known as Vancouver, British Columbia.<sup>1</sup> While it rains in Vancouver, a wildfire burns near the place I once called home. On a break from work, I check an online fire map showing the extent of the flames. This year, in the Tubbs fire, Calistoga will burn, and Monan's Rill will not; three years later, the reverse will be true. Today, I am numbly thinking of all my family in California, hoping they evacuate to safety. Some of the evacuees head to the county fairgrounds – those same fairgrounds I remember reading about in the novel *Watermelon Nights*, by Greg Sarris – a place of forced dispersal for Pomo peoples in the past (and ongoing) colonial occupation of Santa Rosa.<sup>2</sup> I think of the land I call home, which I love and care for and which I left, under transformation by a natural disaster. I think of the ongoing climate crisis, whose structural origins, settler colonialism, and capitalism also predicated my

1 I am grateful to my teachers, including Dr. Dory Nason, Sarah Dupont, and Amy Perreault, who have challenged me to think critically about land acknowledgements. I offer this acknowledgement to position myself as a non-Indigenous person on Indigenous lands, as someone who has historically benefited and currently benefits from structures of settler colonialism. Here, I also position myself as someone interested in imagining anti-colonial futures and being in relationship with Indigenous lands and Indigenous peoples.

2 Greg Sarris, *Watermelon Nights* (New York: Penguin Books, 1999). I read this novel in a course taught by author and illustrator Julie Flett entitled "Indigenous Children's Literature." I am grateful to her for creating space for students to choose readings relevant to our lived experiences.



presence in California and Vancouver – and of the direct impact of those structures on land and the Indigenous Peoples on whose land they take form.

The place remains while time moves, back and forth and around itself.<sup>3</sup>

It is May 2018, and I am still a student worker, still living and working on unceded, traditional, and ancestral lands of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh peoples. As a student archivist with new theory under my belt, I return to my practice, eager to arrange and describe in a liberatory way.<sup>4</sup> I am also managing pain in my right shoulder and left foot. I am in somatic therapy and am beginning to learn how I have held trauma in my body and how it remains embodied today and manifests as pain. I am learning how this trauma relates to my gendered upbringing as a woman and my reflex to appease, appease, appease. I put these learnings aside when I am at work as best I can. I manage the pain as well as I am able.

My supervisor<sup>5</sup> tells me my next project will be to arrange and describe three large boxes worth of photographs, primarily negatives, belonging to one Lilian Bland. In addition to the negatives, Lilian Bland's relatives have donated digital images of the glass plate negatives, an unpublished memoir, and an inventory. In the past year, my peers, professors, and course readings have enriched my actions and thoughts around archival methodology. I hold such ideas as liberatory description and radical empathy in my mind while attempting to take a More Product, Less Process (MPLP) approach.<sup>6</sup> Without knowing who Lilian Bland is or what her records contain, my goal, then, is twofold: to arrange and describe the records utilizing a feminist ethics of care, which requires me to act

- 3 Michelle Caswell, *Urgent Archives: Enacting Liberatory Memory Work* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2021). I utilize multiple present tenses to indicate a resistance to dominant linear temporalities and the chronoviolence they inflict, as discussed by Michelle Caswell in *Urgent Archives*. This feeling, of multiple presences of temporality within myself, also aligns with my own experiences of embodied personal memory. To interrogate chrononormativity, I also draw on the work of Jamie A. Lee, who states, "Here, I am most interested in the ways that chronological progression and the related concepts of past, present, and future cannot adequately attend to the complex narrative strands about the (un)becoming body as it exists in states of ongoing life, of living, and of transformation/s." Jamie A. Lee, "Time" in *Producing the Archival Body* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2020), 63.
- 4 Wendy Duff and Verne Harris, "Stories and Names: Archival Description as Narrating Records and Constructing Meanings," *Archival Science* 2, no. 3 (2002): 263–85, <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02435625>.
- 5 I am indebted to RBSC Archivist Krisztina Laszlo and RBSC Archives Assistant Jacky Lai for mentoring me in archival arrangement, description, and processing. I remain grateful for their knowledge, patience, and willingness to question archival scripts and collaborate on creative and practical solutions.
- 6 Mark A. Greene and Dennis Meissner, "More Product, Less Process: Revamping Traditional Archival Processing," *American Archivist* 68, no. 2 (2005): 208–63, <https://doi.org/10.17723/aarc.68.2.c741823776k65863>.

with radical empathy and be responsible to various affective relationships,<sup>7</sup> and to do so promptly, with as little process as possible. The dialectic is generative.

It is August 2021, and I am putting words to feelings I have long held within my body, feelings that Michelle Caswell's work assures me are indeed epistemologically valuable.<sup>8</sup> I now work in a full-time contract position at RBSC as a forestry archivist. Still, I live on occupied and unceded Indigenous lands and ask how to live my life in a feminist<sup>9</sup> and anti-colonial way.<sup>10</sup> One of the current graduate library and archival students is creating a research guide on 2SLGBTQIA+<sup>11</sup> peoples and archives in our collections. I wonder aloud to this student if the Lilian Bland Fonds, which I worked on as a student archivist, belongs in this research guide. We agree that public knowledge about her life would not necessitate the inclusion of her records in this guide, but I say that there is more in her records – in the photographs and the unpublished memoirs – than what is publicly available online.<sup>12</sup> I find the words come spilling out of me, desperate to hold myself accountable for what I have seen and touched – the records I have

7 Michelle Caswell and Marika Cifor, "From Human Rights to Feminist Ethics: Radical Empathy in the Archives," *Archivaria* 81 (Spring 2016): 23–43, <https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/human-rights-feminist-ethics-radical-empathy/docview/2518886250/se-2?accountid=14656>.

8 Michelle Caswell, "Feeling Liberatory Memory Work: On the Archival Uses of Joy and Anger," *Archivaria* 90 (Fall 2020): 148–64, <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/775285>.

9 Ahmed reminds me, "Living a feminist life does not mean adopting a set of ideals or norms of conduct, although it might mean asking ethical questions about how to live better in an unjust and unequal world (in a notfeminist and antifeminist world)." Sara Ahmed, "Introduction. Bringing Feminist Theory Home," in *Living a Feminist Life* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020), 1–18.

10 I am learning how my role in anti-colonial efforts, while enacted from the periphery, does not mean silence but rather humility and acknowledgement that I, too, have a role to play in the destruction of colonialism. "With Indigenous resurgence at the centre of anti-colonialism, the roles of white settler academics are at the periphery, making space, and pushing back against colonial institutions, structures, practices, mentalities, and land theft." Elizabeth Carlson, "Anti-Colonial Methodologies and Practices for Settler Colonial Studies," *Settler Colonial Studies* 7, no. 4 (2017): 496–517, <https://doi.org/10.1080/2201473X.2016.1241213>.

11 I refer readers to a definition from the University of British Columbia's Equity and Inclusion Office: "Two Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer (or Questioning), Intersex, Asexual. The placement of Two Spirit (2S) first is to recognize that Indigenous people are the first peoples of this land and their understanding of gender and sexuality precedes colonization. The '+' is for all the new and growing ways we become aware of sexual orientations and gender diversity." Equity and Inclusion Office, "Glossary of Terms," University of British Columbia, accessed January 24, 2022, <https://equity.ubc.ca/resources/equity-inclusion-glossary-of-terms/>.

12 "Gallery," Lilian Bland, last modified October 15, 2014, <http://www.lilianbland.ie/gallery/>. In addition to photographs, correspondence, and articles written by Lilian Bland, the website also contains the plans of her airplane design. Colm O'Rourke, who maintains this website, can be reached at [info@lilianbland.ie](mailto:info@lilianbland.ie).

activated and inscribed<sup>13</sup> – and to share the queer uses<sup>14</sup> I saw for and in her records. Here, I find myself working through sweaty concepts<sup>15</sup> and attempting to tie a knot between my practices, Lilian Bland’s records, and person-centred archival theory.

## Lilian Bland and the Lilian Bland Fonds

The Lilian Bland Fonds consists of more than 1,300 images stored on analog media such as glass plate negatives, lantern slides, and rolled negatives and prints. The fonds also includes the original enclosures these photographs came in; an electronic version of Lilian’s unpublished memoir; digital images of the negatives, resting on a lightbox; and a donor-created, item-level inventory of the photographs. Together, these records tell the story of many lives, primarily those in the Bland/Madden family<sup>16</sup> and explicitly, partially through my input as a shaper of the archive, the story of Lilian Emily Bland.<sup>17</sup>

The photographs document Lilian Bland’s many notable achievements, including designing, constructing, and flying a biplane in Ireland in 1909, becoming the first known woman to design and fly an aircraft. In addition to this feat, Lilian Bland

13 Eric Ketelaar, “Tacit Narratives: The Meanings of Archives,” *Archival Science* 1, no. 2 (2001): 131–41, <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02435644>.

14 I use the word *queer* throughout this article. Historically, this term has been weaponized as an insult. I do not mean to use it this way but, rather, to partake in a reclamation of the term, embraced by the discipline of queer studies and the resultant queer theory. As I draw on Sara Ahmed’s conceptualization of *queer use*, the reader will also encounter this term with frequency. Ahmed uses *queer* as an adjective that challenges or rejects the normative and prescriptive and applies it to *use*. So, a queer use would be different from the normative, prescribed use. Use, and queer use, could perhaps, be considered in relation to T.R. Schellenberg’s conceptualization of primary and secondary value. However, this comparison would need to be further explored beyond the scope of this article. I mention this to acknowledge the echo archivists might hear when reading these definitions of *queer use* and *use*. Sara Ahmed, “Conclusion. Queer Use,” in *What’s the Use?: On the Uses of Use* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019), 197–229.

15 Ahmed, “Introduction. Bringing Feminist Theory Home,” 1–18.

16 Lilian Bland’s mother was Emily Charlotte Madden, and her father was John Humphrey Bland.

17 Jennifer Douglas, “Toward More Honest Description,” *American Archivist* 79, no. 1 (2016): 26–55, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26356699>. I utilize Douglas’s term *shaping* to indicate how, through my description, I shaped the archives to centre on Lilian Bland. While I mention the presence of photographs taken by Lilian’s father, John Humphrey Bland, and husband, Charles Loftus Bland, in the finding aid, by titling the fonds the Lilian Bland Fonds, I centre her amid these other records creators as the main or central creator.

drove motorcars, rode horses, contributed articles to sports magazines, and lived in British Columbia as a settler-colonist for more than 20 years. Her memoir is protected by international copyright law. However, correspondence with both the copyright holders and the donors resulted in permission to access the memoir for research and scholarly purposes.

### A Bowline on a Bight

Unless you are a mountaineer or sailor, or have enjoyed knots as a hobby, you – like me, before I encountered the Bland photographs<sup>18</sup> – have probably never heard the phrase *bowline on a bight*. A bight is a bit of rope – a pinch, a loop – distinct from the rope’s ends.<sup>19</sup> A bowline is a type of knot that forms a loop that neither slips nor jams.<sup>20</sup>

In my opinion, it is an elegant knot, as far as knots go (figure 1). But I have been influenced by looking with love.<sup>21</sup> I looked with love at the images of how to tie a bowline on a bight from the Lilian Bland Fonds – not at first, when I thought, “What good is a box of photographs of knots?” but after, when I had read Lilian Bland’s unpublished memoirs about her father’s love for knots and her daughter’s aptitude and enjoyment of the same hobby. I looked with love at the heavy glass plate negatives, stored over time, as records that may have helped with grief – that may have brought forward the presence of John Humphrey Bland and Patricia Bland in a healing way – once Lilian had outlived them both.<sup>22</sup>

I chose *bowline on a bight* as a title because I saw it as a metaphor for the kind of person-centring in which I am interested, a centring that does not privilege one person over another but, instead, centres the relationships between them. In turn, the kinds of relationships I am interested in building are those based on mutual respect, enabling collective struggle toward shared goals (figure 2). I see these as relationships that allow people, even those who exist in different

18 See, for example, University of British Columbia Library, Rare Books and Special Collections, Lilian Bland Fonds, RBSC-ARC-1792-PH-147 to RBSC-ARC-1792-PH-169, box K. Knots, glass negatives, 1908.

19 Merriam-Webster, s.v. “bight (n.),” accessed April 17, 2022, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/bight>.

20 Merriam-Webster, s.v. “bowline (n.),” accessed April 17, 2022, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/bowline>.

21 Jennifer Douglas and Alexandra Alisaukas, “‘It Feels Like a Life’s Work’: Recordkeeping as an Act of Love,” *Archivaria* 91 (Spring/Summer 2021): 6–37, <https://archivaria.ca/index.php/archivaria/article/view/13785>.

22 Douglas and Alisaukas, 6–37.

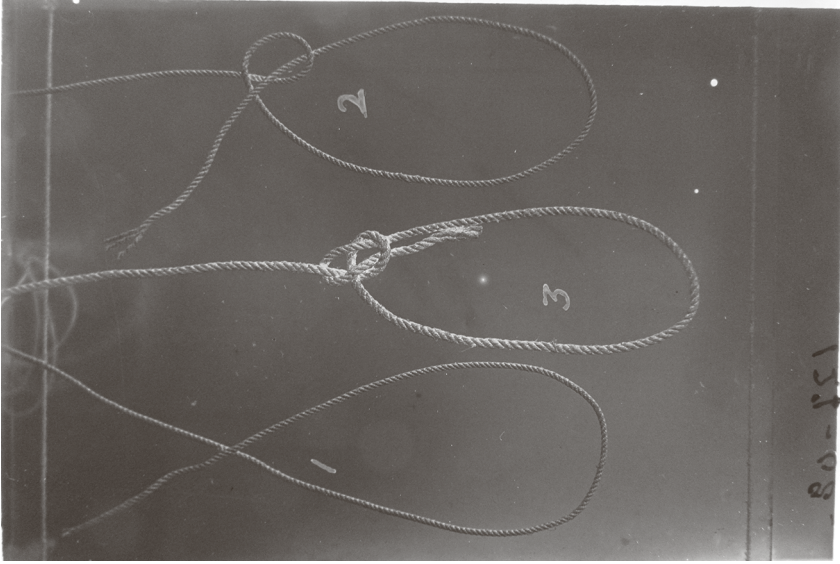


FIGURE 1 *How to tie a bowline knot, glass plate negative, Lilian Bland Fonds (RBSC-ARC-1792-PH-413). Source: University of British Columbia Library Rare Books and Special Collections, Vancouver, Canada.*

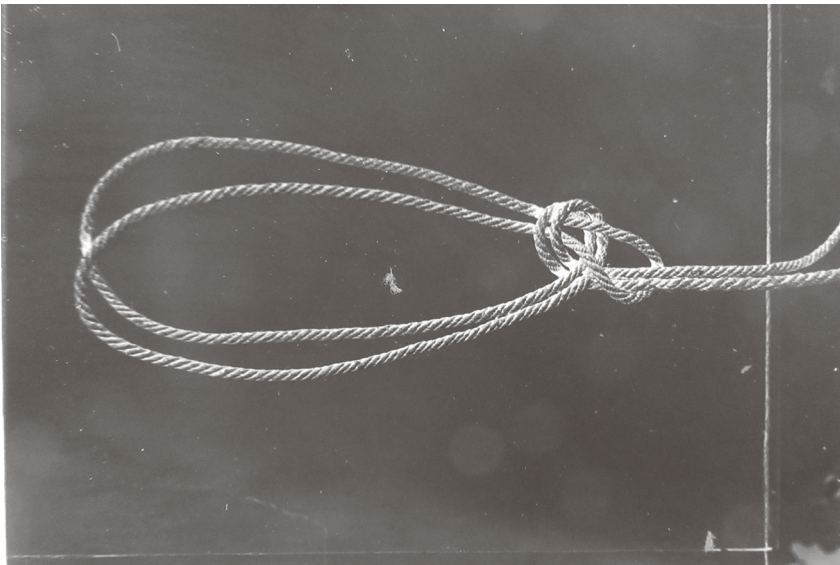


FIGURE 2 *Bowline on a bight, glass plate negative, Lilian Bland Fonds (RBSC-ARC-1792-PH-414). Source: University of British Columbia Library Rare Books and Special Collections, Vancouver, Canada.*

decades or centuries, the potential to hold something new, something they could not have held alone.

### A Letting In

Upon accepting my current position at UBC Library in May 2019, I volunteered to join the Positive Space campaign.<sup>23</sup> Created through a collaboration between UBC Library staff and faculty and the UBC Equity and Inclusion Office, the initiative trains library employees to offer workshops on making the library a space where people of all sexualities and genders are welcomed and valued. When I signed up for this, I was not thinking of the people connected through the records I worked with every day, but they, too, were impacted by my learnings in this workshop, as we shall see.

I grew up in a homophobic and transphobic environment. At times, I felt these phobias directed toward myself, and in turn, I directed them inward. As such, I welcomed the Positive Space curriculum and often wished it had been available far earlier in my life. Nevertheless, I was grateful to have the workshop available at any age, for, as I became more adept at leading my colleagues through the curriculum, I also began to grow my understanding of sexual and romantic desire, gender expression and identity, and the vast array of terms folks might use to best describe these separate but related aspects of themselves.

Throughout my work with this campaign, I was reminded of the importance of queer studies and of the infinitive verb *to queer*: “to consider or interpret (something) from a perspective that rejects traditional categories of gender and sexuality: to apply ideas from queer theory to (something).”<sup>24</sup> I learned or remembered concepts that allowed me to reconsider myself from a perspective that rejected a prescriptive normativity of gender and sexuality. I similarly began to reconsider the people I had interacted with through their records during my short career processing archives. I also learned about such concepts as *letting in*,<sup>25</sup> which appealed to me greatly; the harmful effects of misgendering or outing

23 I am particularly grateful to Eirian Vining, for co-facilitating my first Positive Space workshop with me and teaching me many things along the way, as well as to Rachael Sullivan, an education expert from the Equity and Inclusion Office, for sharing her expertise and patience with the UBC Library Positive Space facilitator group.

24 Merriam-Webster, s.v. “queer (v.),” accessed April 17, 2022, <https://www.merriamwebster.com/dictionary/queer>.

25 See, for example, Robert Espinoza, “‘Coming Out’ or ‘Letting In’? Recasting the LGBT Narrative,” *The Blog, Huffpost*, February 2, 2016, [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/coming-out-or-letting-in\\_b\\_4070273](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/coming-out-or-letting-in_b_4070273).

someone; and how important it is to let people describe themselves using the words they want – and, if in doubt about what those words are, to ask them. But what to do for those deceased people who could not be asked, whom I had only met through their records, whose eyes stared out at me from still photographs, and whose tongues spoke through recorded words?

### Processing Records, Processing Bodies

As someone who actively chooses to let in rather than come out in terms of my own sexuality and gender identity, I was hesitant to connect Lilian Bland to a label that she did not use herself.<sup>26</sup> Yet, as I spent more time with the records, I began to feel a need to express how Lilian rejected prescriptive gender norms. How could I do this in a way that did right by<sup>27</sup> myself, users of the archives, subjects of the records, and their creator, Lilian Bland?

I do not wish to imply that I am reading Lilian as definitively queer and assigning that label to her based on the examples I encountered in her records. Instead, I hope to do what is recommended by others who have reflected on the challenge of describing materials whose creators and subjects *may have* existed outside of, or in different relationships with, cisgender heteronormativity. The challenge requires cultural humility and involves explicit engagement with considerations of consent, the impact of terminology, and the minimization of harm.<sup>28</sup>

Travis L. Wagner undertakes these challenges in their 2021 article titled “‘She Started Wearing Men’s Clothing and Acting More Masculine’: Queering Historical Knowledge, Gendered Identity Making, and Trans Potentialities in Visual Information.”<sup>29</sup> Wagner reminds readers of Judith Butler’s decentralization of gender as a rigid identity, stating, “Gender, even if it is a deeply ritualized experience,

26 K.J. Rawson, “Accessing Transgender // Desiring Queer(er?) Archival Logics,” *Archivaria* 68 (Fall 2009): 123–40, <https://archivaria.ca/index.php/archivaria/article/view/13234>.

27 I refer here to Catherine Hobbs’s question of what it means to do right by the archives of writers. Catherine Hobbs, “Personal Ethics: Being an Archivist of Writers,” in *Basements and Attics, Closets and Cyberspace: Explorations in Canadian Women’s Archives*, ed. Linda Morra and Jessica Schagerl (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2012), 181–92.

28 Travis Wagner, “‘She Started Wearing Men’s Clothing and Acting More Masculine’: Queering Historical Knowledge, Gendered Identity Making, and Trans Potentialities in Visual Information,” *International Journal of Information, Diversity, and Inclusion* 5, no. 4 (2021): 21–42, <https://doi.org/10.33137/ijidi.v5i4.36492>.

29 Wagner, 21–42.

remains better understood as deeply individualized phenomena.”<sup>30</sup> Along with Erin Baucom,<sup>31</sup> they suggest a few solutions, which I adopt: to embrace ambiguity and potentiality; to assign access points whose purpose is *not* to identify members of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community retroactively but to allow researchers to find these collections; and to adopt a research guide for the same purpose, which also seeks to welcome 2SLGBTQIA+ community members to the Rare Books and Special Collections Library.<sup>32</sup>

I will now share a few photographs from the Lilian Bland Fonds, lingering on their uses,<sup>33</sup> queer and otherwise. Along the way, I will offer a transparent narrative of processing these photographs, as one body touching a body of records containing other bodies within.<sup>34</sup>

The process is this: I open one of the large moving boxes and pull a smaller wooden box from it. One or many hands have scrawled descriptions and numbers on the exterior of these boxes. I use the box number or letter to identify the corresponding digital file folder to open. I compare the image on the glass plate resting on the lightbox with the one on the computer screen, transcribe the donor-created file number, and assign the photograph an RBSC-specific unique identifier in a spreadsheet. I then write this RBSC identifier on a special four-flap envelope and take the glass plate negative off the lightbox, carefully creasing the bottom flap around its centimetre-thick bottom edge. I tuck the left, right, and then top flaps over the plate and smooth them down gently over the image. I place the rehoused glass plate in its new archival box and transcribe a donor-created description of the photograph’s subject, from a list the donors have written out by hand for each image in the donation.<sup>35</sup>

30 Wagner, 21–42.

31 Erin Baucom, “An Exploration into Archival Descriptions of LGBTQ Materials,” *American Archivist* 81, no. 1 (2018): 65–83.

32 Baucom, 65–83.

33 Ahmed, “Conclusion. Queer Use,” 226.

34 I must again acknowledge the work on bodies in archives of Jamie A. Lee, who writes, “The embodied archives is in the state of (un)becoming, with unsettled and unsettling naming practices and procedures that make room for multidimensional histories.” Lee, “Bodies Producing Archives Producing Bodies,” in *Producing the Archival Body*, 151.

35 The resulting inventory from this process is available at the Lilian Bland finding aid. Claire Williams, “Lilian Bland Fonds” (finding aid, University of British Columbia Library, Rare Books and Special Collections, March 2019), <https://rbscarchives.library.ubc.ca/lilian-bland-fonds>.



While I am doing this, my shoulder or foot sometimes aches. I turn the screen to high contrast, large font, when my eyes get tired. I get up and take breaks every so often to roll my shoulders back, to twist my spine this way and that. While I am doing this, the photographs seem to grow and shift in affective quality. For I also keep another window open on the computer screen – that of the unpublished memoir and, later, correspondence from the Lilian Bland website. I initially plan to skim these materials for biographical details, but I soon become engrossed in them. I begin to develop a personal connection to the characters evoked through these records; I am influenced.<sup>36</sup>

I read while I process the photographs, especially while folding the envelopes. I begin putting more images on the lightbox and then folding several envelopes at once, which allows me to take more time to read uninterrupted. I never pause to wonder what sort of burden I might be placing on myself, reading a copyright-protected text whose contents are under murkily defined access restrictions.<sup>37</sup> The publicly available online content exists in a strange parallel universe now, where some facts are made known and others are not, and some things that are portrayed as facts in the memoir are thrown into question by the perspectives of other Bland family members whose correspondence is also included on the Lilian Bland website.<sup>38</sup>

I was a new archivist, only in my second year of processing, and I did not expect then, as I do now, that the level of trauma woven into the lives of others would inevitably surface in their records for the archivist to hold. I did not expect what I would find.

I found loss, and it echoed my loss; I found grief, and it echoed my grief. I found a wilful subject<sup>39</sup> in Lilian Bland, who was willing to disobey, to be considered “bad,” to challenge normativity. And I found encouragement for all the times I wished I could be so brave. I found pictures of a land I miss greatly, which is

36 Hobbs, “Personal Ethics,” 181–92.

37 These murky restrictions have since been clarified to provide access for scholarly and research use, with enthusiastic consent given by the donors. Lilian does not herself mention access to the memoirs, or restrictions on access, but writes, in the introduction, “I wrote my memoirs to amuse myself in the long winter days.” University of British Columbia Library Rare Books and Special Collections Library, Lilian Bland Fonds, box 11, file 1, Lilian Bland, copy of memoir, 2016.

38 See, for example, this letter from Lilian’s relative, Kathleen. “Kathleen Francis Bland to Unknown,” Lilian Bland, posted April 16, 2016, <http://www.lilianbland.ie/letters/kathleen-frances-bland-to-unknown/>.

39 Sara Ahmed, *Willful Subjects* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), 21.

under threat from fire and drought – a drought brought on by a history, of which Lilian Bland was a part, that continues into the same present I am a part of now. I realize now, though I did not at the time, how important it is that a feminist ethics of care includes caring for our own bodies and our feelings as archivists.

In my body, I felt various aspects of the Lilian Bland Fonds as a weight – something heavy to keep quiet about – and a fluttering of wings – something to share, spread, and open. The records were lively, to use Marika Cifor's terminology; they had a liveliness.<sup>40</sup>

### Loving What Does Not Last: Refusal, Grief, and Return

I open an envelope containing a broken glass negative and carefully move the pieces to an archival envelope. I open the donor's digital images files and find a carefully laid out digital image of a fractured portrait of Lilian Bland (figure 3).

I cannot say what label and identity from our current and growing lexicon of terminology to describe gender and sexuality Lilian might have connected herself with, or if she would have chosen any such label or identity at all. However, as Molly Ostertag recently wrote in an article on queering fantasy fiction, "All we can do is . . . be open to the possibility."<sup>41</sup>

Of course, describing real and not fantastical people is a different matter. Still, the quote remained apt and remained in my mind, even as the Positive Space workshop had recently alerted me to the myriad ways people express gender and describe sexuality. I know that Lilian did not conform to the gendered norms of her or our time. The perception of her nonconformity is clear from the donor descriptions, which at times put question marks next to her name or describe her as wearing men's clothing, and at times mistake her for someone else altogether. Her commentary on her gender identity in the memoirs reveals a similar nonconformity. However, is this enough to include her in our new research

40 Marika Cifor, "Stains and Remains: Liveliness, Materiality, and the Archival Lives of Queer Bodies," *Australian Feminist Studies* 32, no. 91–92 (2017): 5–21, <https://doi.org/10.1080/08164649.2017.1357014>.

41 Molly Ostertag, "Queer Readings of The Lord of the Rings Are Not Accidents," *Year of the Ring* (blog), June 30, 2021, <https://www.polygon.com/lord-of-the-rings/22550950/sam-frodo-queer-romance-lord-of-the-rings-tolkien-quotes>.



FIGURE 3 *Lilian, emulsion separated, glass plate negative, Lilian Bland Fonds (RBSC-ARC-1792-PH-515). Source: University of British Columbia Library Rare Books and Special Collections, Vancouver, Canada.*



FIGURE 4 Lilian leaping (off or on) horse in barnyard, [Frankfort?], glass plate negative, Lilian Bland Fonds (RBSC-ARC-1792-PH-226). Source: University of British Columbia Library Rare Books and Special Collections, Vancouver, Canada.

guide – perhaps to add an access point to her fonds for gender and sexuality?<sup>42</sup>

I wish to pause here and recognize how person-centred theory leads me to a place of decision. After writing this article, I will add the *sexuality and gender*

42 During a remote-work project undertaken by Jacky Lai and supervised by Krisztina Laszlo, we collaborated on a subject term to “use for records about human sexuality and gender identity/expression, including materials created by or about lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning, queer, intersex, pansexual, two-spirit, androgynous and asexual individuals and groups. Also use for interpersonal romantic content created by or about all sexual orientations and gender identities.” The subject access points assigned to the Lilian Bland Fonds include *arts and culture; exploration, discovery and travel; family and personal life; sports, recreation and leisure; transportation and utilities; and women*. Rare Books and Special Collections, University Archives, Okanagan Special Collections, “Sexuality and Gender,” UBC AtoM, accessed January 8, 2022, <https://rbscarchives.library.ubc.ca/sexuality-and-gender>.

access point to the Lilian Bland Fonds. Without the experience of writing this article, I would not have been able to share my relationship with the knowledge I encountered in the Positive Space campaign or reflect on how the campaign changed my perception of the people I met in archival records, especially Lilian Bland. In writing this article, I have thus felt a liberatory joy, a relief in having a place to share these learnings, to linger and loiter on the queer uses of archives for queer theory – for a discipline much younger and with a much more tenuous relationship to archives than history or literature.

The cracked glass negative, the fractured representation of Lilian Bland in “men’s” clothing, as the description of another photograph in proximity to this one labels this particular outfit, is useful in a queer way. Ahmed employs the term *queer use* to refer to “how things can be used in ways other than for which they were intended or by those other than for whom they were intended.”<sup>43</sup> In its cracked state, the photograph is at the end of its use in terms of maintaining a material, functional, whole portrait of Lilian Bland. In resigning from this use, it takes up another: the capacity to reveal how time destructs static identities and the static materials that hold them. As Ahmed proposes, “Queer use can be offered as an ethics of finitude, an appreciation of the wrinkle or the scratch, expressions of time on the surfaces of bodies and things, loving what does not, and will not, last.”<sup>44</sup> I loved this image of Lilian for its inability to last – for its expression of what did not fit, the parts of her that broke with convention, that ultimately resigned from compulsory functions.

One of the first things I learned about Lilian Bland from the website created about her in 2014<sup>45</sup> was her daring preference for riding horses astride, partially due to an injury she suffered while riding sidesaddle (figure 4). I lingered over this fact, eventually including it in the biographical sketch I created for her finding aid. Her refusal to conform to the prescribed use of saddles for women and her reclamation of a “men’s” saddle, with legs astride, as a response to pain and danger stayed with me.

43 Ahmed, “Conclusion. Queer Use,” 197–229.

44 Ahmed, 197–229.

45 “The Art of Riding,” Lilian Bland, posted August 26, 2014, <http://www.lilianbland.ie/articles/the-art-of-riding-2/>.

Ahmed states, “To queer use is to live in proximity to violence.”<sup>46</sup> Lilian shares an anecdote of a woman being stoned for riding astride in the memoirs and in one of the letters available online.<sup>47</sup> But this proximity to violence did not stop her. In recounting her act of queering the use of the saddle, as men had instructed women to use it, she shares triumphantly that, instead of facing physical violence, she was applauded by those watching her. Ahmed writes, “The demand to use something properly is a demand to revere what has been given by the colonizer. Empire-as-gift comes with use instructions.”<sup>48</sup> Lilian repeatedly failed to follow these instructions, as we shall see, even when she participated in empire-making as a settler-colonist on Quatsino Island, the unceded and traditional territories of the Quatsino and Kwakwaka’wakw First Nations.

In 1911, Lilian Bland married her first cousin, Charles Loftus Bland, and in 1913, they had one daughter, Patrick, or Patricia, Bland.<sup>49</sup> In her memoir, Lilian clearly states the desire to give her daughter a “boy’s” name in case the daughter should prefer it. I read this while I pick up a glass negative and fold another tan, creamy envelope – bottom, left, top, right. I feel a tension in my body. As I become more affected by Lilian and her resistance to gender normativity in the early 20th century, I also feel a mounting pressure to break from the performative scripts<sup>50</sup> of archival finding aids and biographical sketches. To describe Lilian Bland’s records honestly,<sup>51</sup> I will have to break from these scripts and acknowledge, however I can, what I am finding in the records, and how it affects me.

Maybe this affect can be best summed up as an unsettling of fact and fiction. Wagner states,

46 Ahmed, “Conclusion. Queer Use,” 197–229.

47 In a letter to a Mr. Mees, Lilian writes, “Here I started to ride and became a good rough rider, training horses, often riding in a man’s saddle as I found it easier, having ricked my back in a side-saddle when a horse bolted with me. Riding cross-legged was then considered a terrible thing for a lady to do. A fanatical priest in Tipperary told the people to stone me, but they cheered me on.” “Lilian in Quatsino to Mr. Mees – April 1930,” Lilian Bland, posted January 17, 2016, <http://www.lilianbland.ie/letters/lilian-in-quatsino-to-mr-mees-april-1930/>.

48 Ahmed, “Conclusion. Queer Use,” 197–229.

49 Patricia, or Patrick, also went by Pat and Peggy; I use Patricia or Pat in this article, and in this case, Patrick, which – aside from the mention in Lilian’s memoir – is not used by Patricia or Pat again.

50 Terry Cook and Joan Schwartz, “Archives, Records, and Power: From (Postmodern) Theory to (Archival) Performance,” *Archival Science* 2, no. 3 (2002): 171–85, <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02435620>.

51 Jennifer Douglas, “Toward More Honest Description,” 26–55.



Perhaps most integral to queer theory and its informing of cultural heritage institutions' work is the unsettling of a rigid notion of fact and fiction. Such a destabilization responds to the historical erasure of queer history. . . . the idea of fact or even truth remains limited by the language of a moment. In response to such limits, queerness asks questions of to whom a person is normal and how such normalcy becomes contingent on the space and time of the person in question and who is viewing them.<sup>52</sup>

I was aware that being honest meant telling another story,<sup>53</sup> and I feared the danger and harm that might come from incorrectly embracing possibility, improperly blurring the line between fact and fiction. I feared doing wrong by Lilian Bland. I feared an article like this one might contain more about me than it did about her. But the more I worked with her records, and the more time passed after I finished arranging and describing them, the more time went by where the negatives I had touched and protected and changed now went quiet, still, and unilluminated – the more I heard a hum and buzz<sup>54</sup> urging me to feel my way through a different kind of doing right, a risk. I cannot centre Lilian Bland honestly as a person by herself; the Lilian Bland I describe will always be the version of her I behold in my mind – through whatever means I have to know her, including the fragmented sliver of her mirror of records.<sup>55</sup> What I can centre honestly, then, is the relationship between archivist and archival subject. I posit that this is what it means to do right, and I offer the following summary of some aspects of my relationship with the Lilian Bland I encountered and beheld.

52 Wagner, "She Started Wearing," 23.

53 Lee notes, "Archivists themselves are also storytellers. The posthuman approach to archives, then, makes space and time for the multiple stories and POVs that tell nonlinear and unsettling narratives of lived and living history." Lee, "Bodies Producing Archives Producing Bodies," in *Producing the Archival Body*, 151.

54 Rachel Buchanan, "The Iran Album (1974): Some Sleeve Notes," *Archivaria* 85 (Spring 2018): 124–54, <https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/iran-album-1974-some-sleeve-notes/docview/2518875238/se-2?accountid=14656>. I am particularly indebted to Rachel Buchanan's article, which allowed me to conceptualize and envision writing an article such as this one.

55 Verne Harris, "The Archival Sliver: Power, Memory, and Archives in South Africa," *Archival Science* 2, no. 1–2 (2002): 63–86, <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02435631>.

In 1917, after four years of living in Quatsino together, Lilian and Charles were joined at the settler homestead by another cousin, Mary Madden. In 1921, Lilian, Mary, and Charles travelled to Calistoga, California, for two years.

Calistoga! I have been in that place! I want to tell someone, tell the records, tell Lilian. I want to tell her about the recent destruction by fire and how it relates to climate change, capitalism, and settler colonialism. I want to say that it is near where I grew up, that I, too, was a child there in the land that has now burned, that the homes are gone. I see an image of Lilian's daughter on the homestead and think of myself at Monan's Rill and feel great grief. With a mix of homesickness and loss, I take the image off the light table and look for its description on the donor's list. I want to connect Lilian's past to my present and ask many questions. But there is no one to tell, save my supervisor when she comes by to check on me and my progress in processing the records. When I say it aloud, the connection loses some of its import; I do not have words to say what I mean, to give my feelings to the terrain of logic.

I fold envelopes. I write identifiers. I keep being in relation with the fonds. I do not know that Pat dies at the early age of 16 from a tetanus infection until I read it in the memoirs and tears come to my eyes. I must not spill them on the photographs, and I tip my head back. The records change before me. Their affective qualities grow as the contexts and circumstances under which Lilian Bland kept the records shift. When I read Jennifer Douglas and Alexandra Alisaukas's recent publication on trauma, grief work, and "looking with love," they shift again.<sup>56</sup> They transform into evidence of loss but also of Pat's presence and of her mother's continued relationship with that presence. I see the photographs of Patricia as potential acts of Lilian's grief work and journey toward healing.<sup>57</sup> I look now at the images of Pat – Pat and animals, Pat and her family, Pat in nature – with love. I become attuned to the records in a new way, and my bond with them deepens.

How did the grief of Pat's passing change Lilian? I wonder, looking at the glass negatives and thinking of a timeline marked by loss: before Pat's death and after it. A few letters from the Lilian Bland website relate both the sorrow

56 Jennifer Douglas and Alexandra Alisaukas, "It Feels Like a Life's Work": Recordkeeping as an Act of Love," *Archivaria* 91 (Spring/Summer 2021): 6–37, <https://archivaria.ca/index.php/archivaria/article/view/13785>.

57 Douglas and Alisaukas, 6–37.



and the hope Lilian held about continuing to live in Quatsino Sound<sup>58</sup> following Pat's death; however, four years after Lilian wrote these letters, she left Canada, returning to stay with family in Britain.<sup>59</sup> Lilian Bland's reasons to leave are ultimately her own, and I do not claim my reading of the reasons behind this departure as fact, as certainty. Acknowledging that, I speculate on her departure from British Columbia as a resignation from the settler-colonial project and the nuclear family. As Ahmed so aptly writes, resignation

is another way of saying *no* to the system; you withdraw your labor, your body, yourself. The word *resignation* can seem to suggest giving up, reconciling yourself to your fate, to resign yourself to something. I hear the word *resignation* and I hear a long, drawn-out sigh rather like saying, perhaps, *what's the use?* But resignation can also be how you refuse to resign yourself to a situation.<sup>60</sup>

Lilian often refused to resign herself to situations, and I have expanded on some of these refusals above, including her refusal to dress solely in women's attire and to ride sidesaddle. Now, there is a new refusal to stay in British Columbia and continue the project she had started so many years ago. What is the use of leaving? It is this use that I queer, tying it to a disruption of the intended functionality of white settlers in Canada, a place where Lilian's path deviated from those of so many other settler-colonizers, and to disobedience against the grand will of colonialism. I see this deviation as connected, in some way, to the grief surrounding Pat's death, the pain of loving that which cannot last, and the realization of the finitude of Lilian's own time and role in British Columbia – the ending of it.

58 A few months after Patricia's death, Lilian writes the following letter, which describes the difficulty of continuing life on the homestead since Patricia's death: "Lilian in Quatsino to Unknown – 7th March 1930," Lilian Bland, posted December 27, 2015, <http://www.lilianbland.ie/letters/lilian-in-quatsino-to-7th-march-1930/>. The following month, she pens a lengthy account that offers many details of her and Charles's lives: "Lilian Bland to Mr Mees – April 1930," Lilian Bland, posted January 17, 2016, <http://www.lilianbland.ie/letters/lilian-in-quatsino-to-mr-mees-april-1930/>.

59 "Kathleen Frances Bland to Unknown," Lilian Bland, posted April 16, 2016, <http://www.lilianbland.ie/letters/kathleen-frances-bland-to-unknown/>.

60 Ahmed, "Conclusion. Queer Use," 197–229.



FIGURE 5 *Rabbit in window, glass plate negative, Lilian Bland Fonds (RBSC-ARC-1792-PH-129). Source: University of British Columbia Library Rare Books and Special Collections, Vancouver, Canada.*

I do not wish to propose leaving as a solution to the oppressive structures of settler colonialism. Doing so would suggest that settler-colonizers could be absolved of their responsibility toward changing the power structures they are mutually engaged and invested in simply because of their geographical location. Doing so would also deny the reality that settler-colonizers, mainly white colonizers, have inherited responsibility for both the creation and maintenance of these structures and, therefore, have also inherited responsibility for playing a role in their destruction.

I am learning – with humility, for I make many mistakes – the necessity of acting in good faith and showing up where I desire to be, in the places that allow me to leverage what privilege I have, to assist in dismantling systemic injustice. I am learning the need to do right and take risks. In lingering on the queer uses of Lilian Bland’s records, writing this article, adding the access point to her finding aid, and adding her records to our research guide on 2SLGBTQIA+ materials, I feel an opening – a spreading of the joy of Lilian’s wilful and unique character rather than a weight of silence. As Wagner reminds us, “A record for a piece of information is only as good as its engagement with users, and those users are only able to do so if they are seen and seeing themselves within those records.”<sup>61</sup> Throughout this section, I have attempted to centre both myself and the people represented in these records and the uses of these records as sites of potentiality for how to do and be in different ways. I hope that doing so might enable this article to act as a colophon<sup>62</sup> for the finding aid to the Lilian Bland Fonds to encourage engagement with other wilful users who may see themselves in these records.

I open a paper box of photographs, wondering what I will find next, and then click and double-click to navigate to the corresponding donor-created descriptions. The last line describing this box reads, “List inside box lid not helpful – all rabbits! Enough rabbits!”<sup>63</sup> I pull out one glass negative after another of a rabbit in various poses. I pause, for I know this hare from Lilian’s memoir and the Lilian Bland website, where an article Lilian wrote on the hare is published. Of the rabbit, Lilian writes, “Mr. Bunt is a very methodical person, and frequently gets annoyed with me for not being the same.”<sup>64</sup> Mr. Bunt is a hare Lilian raised from near infancy until he broke his leg and had to be put down. Mr. Bunt is one of many animals featured throughout Lilian’s memoirs and the photographs in her fonds. Though I have never cared for or loved a rabbit myself, I now look at the photographs of Mr. Bunt with love (figure 5).

61 Wagner, “‘She Started Wearing,’” 21–42. Wagner writes from a library context, wherein a record refers to the descriptive information attached to a work as a finding aid is attached to an archival fonds.

62 Michelle Light and Tom Hyry, “Colophons and Annotations: New Directions for the Finding Aid,” *American Archivist* 65, no. 2 (2002): 216–30.

63 Williams, “Lilian Bland Fonds,” 4.

64 “Mr. Bunt the Hare,” Lilian Bland, posted August 26, 2014, <http://www.lilianbland.ie/articles/mr-bunt-the-hare/>.

As I write this article years later, I think about how Lilian viewed these animals as kin and how I might as well, drawing on perspectives shared by Daniel Heath Justice,<sup>65</sup> Rosi Braidotti,<sup>66</sup> and Donna Haraway.<sup>67</sup> The presence of animals gives me pause, as does Lilian's clear assertion that they are persons, deserving of rights and of lives free from abuse.<sup>68</sup> I wonder how person-centred archival theory might accommodate what it means to do right by these persons in their non-human forms.

I reflect similarly on the lands and waters present in the fonds. Lilian does not treat these as people, as she does the animals, but I do. When I moved away from Monan's Rill at the age of 16, I felt the loss of that land, as if losing a dear family member to a faraway country. When Monan's Rill burned due to years of drought, I felt a different sense of mourning, of grief for the land as I had known it, now gone.

As a settler on stolen and occupied land, I am thinking about this. As someone who works now, as a forestry archivist, with records that document the transformation by natural resource extraction industries of lands, waters, and the ecosystems dependent on them for homes, I am thinking about this. I am thinking about what it means to treat the records of a forest, a river, or an underground space as the records of persons. It is something I think about as, around me, Indigenous Peoples are actively leading struggles to halt the further mistreatment of land and waters, to recognize their personhood and their rights.

Again, I take up a queer use – of a photograph of a fallen tree or a landscape that I read like an image of a lost beloved's face (figure 6). How might we think about expanding person-centred archival theory to make room for these people, too?

65 While approaching the concept of animals as people from a Western and settler perspective, I am wary of citing a related and yet entirely different concept from an Indigenous point of view brought to me by Daniel Heath Justice, and yet I hope future work will negotiate and attend to the differences between animal theory, new materialism, and Indigenous theory in this regard. Daniel Heath Justice, "How Do We Learn to Be Human?," in *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2018).

66 See, for example, Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2013).

67 See, for example, Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016).

68 Throughout the memoirs, Lilian communicates the importance of animals in her life and her actions taken in defence of them. A deeper and more thorough analysis of her relationship to animals and the literature on animal studies is outside the scope of this article. Still, I hope this mention of it acts as another example of a queer use for her records while it identifies work I hope to take up in the future.



FIGURE 6 *Mountain and sea or lake shore, glass plate negative, Lilian Bland Fonds (RBSC-ARC-1792-PH-740). Source: University of British Columbia Library Rare Books and Special Collections, Vancouver, Canada.*

In writing this article, I linger on the use of Lilian Bland's records and on what it means to do right by them. I have turned to Sara Ahmed and her rhetoric of queer use to expand person-centred archival theory to hold what I need it to hold, to tie a knot around something new, namely, myself and my work in relationship with the people I meet through records. The work makes me responsible for their trauma, grief, joy, love, and their identities. At the same time, I am responsible for myself, and it is here that I return to the idea of embodying a radical somatics of critical archival love.<sup>69</sup>

<sup>69</sup> I have many people to thank when it comes to my arrival at this phrase; indeed, I do not arrive alone. I thank Toni Morrison and Ursula K. LeGuin for rupturing my early understanding of what it means to love. I thank bell hooks

Person-centred archival theory necessitates the centring of bodies. It acknowledges that theory lives in the body, in multiple bodies, perhaps, as we work together to expand, define, and enact theory together through this special issue. Through the therapy work I mentioned in the introduction of this article, I have begun to learn how the body holds and releases trauma. When I bring my body to work on and with archival records and the bodies contained and connected through them, each with its histories of trauma, I hope to embody a radical somatics of critical archival love. I mean by this to first fundamentally re-root myself in the body while doing archival labour. Labour of all kinds – processing, arranging, describing, interacting with donors, doing outreach and advocacy – benefits from this, and each kind of labour poses a danger if we do not listen to the body.

The body can tell us when we hold too much, literally and metaphorically, and when the spaces or shapes we are in are too confining. It can tell us when to say no and when to say yes, when to make a choice, apply a subject heading, accession or deaccession records, take time away from traumatic records, process what we encounter there, and imagine uses for records, queer or otherwise.

By listening to the body, we might approach our work with what I term critical archival love. Critical because of the moment we are in and the great need we have to be of use to one another in the face of disasters, pandemics, structural systems of oppression, and inequity. Critical also because of the need to approach the bodies and persons we encounter in our work with a critical eye – to know when to clarify boundaries, distance ourselves, and draw near. And love? Love because of its potential to transform archives and to allow us to heal with and through archives. With critical archival love, we can envision new ways of being in ongoing relationships with records and the bodies and peoples connected in and through them. We can embody ways of caring and supporting one another, showing up for each other, leveraging our heterogenous privilege and power and our vulnerability, and doing right by our profession – being of use.

for her conceptualization of love as practice. I thank Dr. Dory Nason for assigning the reading of the epilogue of *Native Speakers*, by María Eugenia Cotera, and Cotera for introducing me to the essay by June Jordan, "Where Is the Love?" Most recently, I thank Jennifer Douglas and Alexandra Alisaukas for asking us to consider to what extent love should or could be part of our concept of recordkeeping, in their article "It Feels Like a Life's Work."

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