Let us not begin at the beginning, nor even at the archive.

But rather at the word “archive”—and with the archive of so familiar a word. Arkhē we recall, names at once the commencement and the commandment. This name apparently coordinates two principles in one: the principle according to nature or history, there where things commence—physical, historical, or ontological principle—but also the principle according to the law, there where men and gods command, there where authority, social order are exercised, in this place from which order is given—nomological principle.

There, we said, and in this place. How are we to think of there? And this taking place or this having a place, this taking the place one has of the arkhē?

We have there two orders of order: sequential and jussive. From this point on, a series of cleavages will incessantly divide every atom of our lexicon. Already in the arkhē of the commencement, I alluded to the commencement according to nature or according to history, introducing surreptitiously a chain of belated and problematic oppositions between physis and its others, thesis, tekhnē, nomos, etc., which are found to be at work in the other principle, the nomological principle of the arkhē, the principle of the commandment. All would be simple if there were one principle or two principles. All would be simple if the physis and each one of its others were one or two. As we have suspected for a long time, it is nothing of the sort, yet we are forever forgetting this. There is always more than one—and more or less than two. In the order of the commencement as well as in the order of the commandment.

The concept of the archive shelters in itself, of course, this memory of the name arkhē. But it also shelters itself from this memory which it shelters: which comes down to saying also that it forgets it. There is nothing accidental or surprising about this. Contrary to the impression one often has, such a concept is not easy to archive. One has trouble, and for essential reasons, establishing it and interpreting it in the document it delivers to us, here in the word which names it, that is the “archive.” In a way, the term indeed refers, as one would correctly believe, to the arkhē in the physical, historical, or ontological sense, which is to say to the originary, the first, the principal, the primitive, in short to the commencement. But even more, and even earlier, “archive” refers to the arkhē in the nomological sense, to the arkhē of the commandment. As is the case for the Latin archivum or archium (a word that is used in the singular, as was the French “archive,” formerly employed as a masculine singular: “un archive”), the meaning of “archive,” its only meaning, comes to it from the Greek arkheion: initially a house, a domicile, an address, the residence of the superior magistrates, the archons, those who commanded. The citizens who thus held and signified political power were considered to...
possess the right to make or to represent the law. On account of their publicly recognized
authority, it is at their home, in that place which is their house (private house, family
house, or employee's house), that official documents are filed. The archons are first of all
the documents' guardians. They do not only ensure the physical security of what is
deposited and of the substrate. They are also accorded the hermeneutic right and
competence. They have the power to interpret the archives. Entrusted to such archons,
these documents in effect state the law: they recall the law and call on or impose the law.
To be guarded thus, in the jurisdiction of this stating the law, they needed at once a
guardian and a localization. Even in their guardianship or their hermeneutic tradition, the
archives could neither do without substrate nor without residence.

It is thus, in this domiciliation, in this house arrest, that archives take place. The
dwelling, this place where they dwell permanently, marks this institutional passage from
the private to the public, which does not always mean from the secret to the nonsecret. (It
is what is happening, right here, when a house, the Freuds' last house, becomes a museum:
the passage from one institution to another.) With such a status, the documents, which are
not always discursive writings, are only kept and classified under the title of the archive
by virtue of a privileged topology. They inhabit this unusual place, this place of election
where law and singularity intersect in privilege. At the intersection of the topological and
the nomological, of the place and the law, of the substrate and the authority, a scene of
domiciliation becomes at once visible and invisible. I stress this point for reasons which
will, I hope, appear more clearly later. They all have to do with this topo-nomology, with
this archontic dimension of domiciliation, with this archie, in truth patriarchic, function,
without which no archive would ever come into play or appear as such. To shelter itself
and sheltered, to conceal itself. This archontic function is not solely topo-nomological. It
does not only require that the archive be deposited somewhere, on a stable substrate, and
at the disposition of a legitimate hermeneutic authority. The archontic power, which also
gathers the functions of unification, of identification, of classification, must be paired with
what we will call the power of consignation. By consignation, we do not only mean, in
the ordinary sense of the word, the act of assigning residence or of entrusting so as to put
into reserve (to consign, to deposit), in a place and on a substrate, but here the act of
consigning through gathering together signs. It is not only the traditional consignatio, that
is, the written proof, but what all consignatio begins by presupposing. Consignation aims
to coordinate a single corpus, in a system or a synchrony in which all the elements
articulate the unity of an ideal configuration. In an archive, there should not be any
absolute dissociation, any heterogeneity or secret which could separate (secernere), or
partition, in an absolute manner. The archontic principle of the archive is also a principle
of consignation, that is, of gathering together.

It goes without saying from now on that wherever one could attempt, and in particular
in Freudian psychoanalysis, to rethink the place and the law according to which the
archontic becomes instituted, wherever one could interrogate or contest, directly or
indirectly, this archontic principle, its authority, its titles, and its genealogy, the right that
it commands, the legality or the legitimacy that depends on it, wherever secrets and
heterogeneity would seem to menace even the possibility of consignation, this can only
have grave consequences for a theory of the archive, as well as for its institutional
implementation. A science of the archive must include the theory of this institutionaliza-
tion, that is to say, at once of the law which begins by inscribing itself there and of the right
which authorizes it. This right imposes or supposes a bundle of limits which have a
history, a deconstructable history, and to the deconstruction of which psychoanalysis has
not been foreign, to say the least. This deconstruction in progress concerns, as always, the
institution of limits declared to be insurmountable,1 whether they involve family or state

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1. Of course, the question of a politics of the archive is our permanent orientation here, even
if the time of a lecture does not permit us to treat this directly and with examples. This question will
law, the relations between the secret and the nonsecret, or, and this is not the same thing, between the private and the public, whether they involve property or access rights, publication or reproduction rights, whether they involve classification and putting into order: What comes under theory or under private correspondence, for example? What comes under system? under biography or autobiography? under personal or intellectual anamnesis? In works said to be theoretical, what is worthy of this name and what is not? Should one rely on what Freud says about this to classify his works? Should one for example take him at his word when he presents his Moses as a “historical novel”? In each of these cases, the limits, the borders, and the distinctions have been shaken by an earthquake from which no classification concept and no implementation of the archive can be sheltered. Order is no longer assured.

I dream now of having the time to submit for your discussion more than one thesis, three at least. This time will never be given to me. Above all, I will never have the right to take your time so as to impose upon you, rapid-fire, these three + n essays. Submitted to the test of your discussion, these theses thus remain, for the time being, hypotheses. Incapable of supporting their demonstration, constrained to posit them along the way in a mode which will appear at times dogmatic, I will recall them in a more critical and formal manner in conclusion.

The hypotheses have a common trait. They all concern the impression left, in my opinion, by the Freudian signature on its own archive, on the concept of the archive and of archivization, that is to say also, inversely and as an indirect consequence, on historiography. Not only on historiography in general, not only on the history of the concept of the archive, but perhaps also on the history of the formation of a concept in general. We are saying for the time being Freudian signature so as not to have to decide yet between Sigmund Freud, the proper name, on the one hand, and, on the other, the invention of psychoanalysis: project of knowledge, of practice and of institution, community, family, domiciliation, consignation, “house” or “museum,” in the present state of its archivization. What is in question is situated precisely between the two.

Having thus announced my intentions, and promised to collect them so as to conclude in a more organized fashion, I ask your permission to take the time and the liberty to enter upon several lengthy preliminary excursions.

never be determined as one political question among others. It runs through the whole of the field and in truth determines politics from top to bottom as res publica. There is no political power without control of the archive, if not of memory. Effective democratization can always be measured by this essential criterion: the participation in and the access to the archive, its constitution, and its interpretation. A contrario, the breaches of democracy can be measured by what a recent and in so many ways remarkable work entitles Forbidden Archives (Archives interdites: Les peurs françaises face à l’histoire contemporaine). Under this title, which we cite as the metonymy of all that is important here, Sonia Combe does not only gather a considerable collection of material, to illuminate and interpret it; she asks numerous essential questions about the writing of history, about the “repression” of the archive [318], about the “repressed’ archive” as “power... of the state over the historian” [321]. Among all of these questions, and in referring the reader to this book, let us isolate here the one that is consonant, in a way, with the low tone of our hypothesis, even if this fundamental note, the patriarchive, never covers all the others. As if in passing, Sonia Combe asks in effect: “I hope to be pardoned for granting some credit to the following observation, but it does not seem to me to be due to pure chance that the corporation of well-known historians of contemporary France is essentially, apart from a few exceptions, masculine. . . . But I hope to be understood also...” [315].