

Omelettes in the Stack

Archival Fragility and the Aforeafter

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*My life, my life, now I speak of it as something over, now of it as a joke
which still goes on, and it is neither, for at the same time it is over and it
goes on, and is there any tense for that?*

– Samuel Beckett, Molloy

ABSTRACT In Beckett’s novel, the eponymous Molloy suffers in equal measure an inability to remember and a failure to forget. He is a cipher for the archive and all its discontents. As a way of thinking through archival discontent, this article introduces two new expressions into archival discourse: *aforeafter*, to describe the condition of archival temporality and the archival tense (that which is over and goes on), and *archival fragility*, to name the discomfort of archivists confronted with proximate damages of their professional practice. As part of the conversations about and ongoing reassessments of archival power and function, I offer the *aforeafter* as an instrument in resituating the archive as sociocultural form and *archival fragility* as a means to help identify catalyzing moments where archivists can choose between hubris or humility in their working approaches to codified archival practices. The article proposes that disruption to archival language is necessary to support both progressive shifts in archival practice and theoretical moves to deterritorialize normative-destructive archives.

RÉSUMÉ Dans le roman de Beckett, le héros éponyme Molloy souffre à la fois de l'inaptitude de se rappeler et de l'incapacité d'oublier, offrant une clé pour comprendre les archives et tous ses malaises. Pour penser cette insatisfaction archivistique, cet article introduit deux nouvelles expressions dans le discours des archives : le « susaprès » (« *aforeafter* »), pour décrire la condition de temporalité archivistique et le temps archivistique (ce qui est terminé et qui se poursuit), et la « fragilité archivistique » (« *archival fragility* »), pour nommer le malaise des archivistes qui sont confrontés aux dommages immédiats de leur pratique professionnelle. Pour contribuer aux discussions portant sur la constante réévaluation des pouvoirs et des fonctions archivistiques, et à cette réévaluation même, j'offre le « susaprès » comme instrument pour resituer les archives dans leur forme socioculturelle, et la « fragilité archivistique » comme moyen pour aider à identifier les moments catalyseurs où les archivistes peuvent choisir entre l'hubris et l'humilité par leurs approches aux pratiques archivistiques codifiées dans leur travail. Cet article propose que la perturbation du langage archivistique est nécessaire pour appuyer à la fois les changements progressifs dans la pratique archivistique et les mouvements théoriques vers la déterritorialisation des archives normatives-destructives.

Introduction

In Beckett's novel, the eponymous Molloy suffers in equal measure an inability to remember and a failure to forget. He is a cipher for the archive and all its discontents. As a way of thinking through archival discontent, this article introduces two new expressions into archival discourse. I propose *aforeafter*¹ to describe the condition of archival temporality and the archival tense (that which is over and goes on) and *archival fragility*² to name the discomfort (manifesting as refusal to acknowledge or accommodate ongoing lived effects of codified archival practices) of archivists confronted with proximate damages of their own work. Adding to professional and interdisciplinary conversations about and ongoing reassessments of archival power and function, I offer the *aforeafter* as an instrument in resituating the archive as a wider sociocultural form and *archival fragility* as a means to identify catalyzing moments, where opportunities arise to choose between humility and hubris in professional practice. These new terms are part of an ongoing attempt to find fluent archival vocabulary for a world where the formation and use of archives has irrevocably altered and the assumed authority of archivists is rightly contested.³

Distributed and displaced communities (and records), networked technologies, postmodern philosophy, and post-truth politics shape the contexts archives

- 1 This concept of the *aforeafter* had its first public outing at the Association of Canadian Archivists' 2017 conference, "Archives Disrupted" (Ottawa, June 2017); this article derives in part from a paper I presented at that event. The conference theme emboldened me to take a performative approach to the text, and I have tried to retain some of that flavour in this reworking.
- 2 Loosely analogous to the concept of *white fragility* as set out by Robin DiAngelo, in "White Fragility," *International Journal of Critical Pedagogy* 3, no. 3 (2011): 54–70. I owe a great debt to DiAngelo's incisive articulation of white fragility, which has helped me to frame the concept of archival fragility. Proposing this term should not dilute or downplay the phenomenon of white fragility or take credit for the insights of DiAngelo and others. White fragility is frequently present in archival fragility; archival fragility also extends to cases where whiteness is a shared cultural marker.
- 3 For some useful overviews, see Joan M. Schwartz and Terry Cook, "Archives, Records, and Power: The Making of Modern Memory," *Archival Science* 2, no. 1–2 (2002): 1–19; Terry Cook and Joan M. Schwartz, "Archives, Records, and Power: From (Postmodern) Theory to (Archival) Performance," *Archival Science* 2, no. 3–4 (2002): 171–85; Eric Ketelaar, "Archival Temples, Archival Prisons: Modes of Power and Protection," *Archival Science* 2, no. 3–4 (2002): 221–38; Rodney Carter, "Of Things Said and Unsaid: Power, Archival Silences, and Power in Silence," *Archivaria* 61 (Spring 2006): 215–33; and Michelle Caswell and Marika Cifor, "From Human Rights to Feminist Ethics: Radical Empathy in the Archives," *Archivaria* 81 (Spring 2016): 23–43. For a longer historical treatment of the subject of archives and power, see Randall C. Jimerson, *Archives Power: Memory, Accountability, and Social Justice* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2009).

now inhabit. In situating the aforefter (and its possibilities) across physical, digital, and affective archival contexts, this article sometimes proceeds by way of non-sequitur, but is cumulatively working to perform the deconstruction of its title. To gloss the text: “You can’t make an omelette without breaking some eggs” is an idiom historically used to excuse human cost in service of a larger goal;⁴ eggs are bodies without organs⁵ – as “the archive” is an archive without record – and the stack is a memory buffer to store call requests. When a program demands more call memory than the stack has available, the outcome is stack overflow: a crash, in some instances resulting in system failure. The omelette in the stack is a metaphor for paradigm shifts born of “failure” and a parallel reference to the complex relation of recall to memory.⁶ As fairy tales abound with curses that cannot be undone but can be modified, archives are similarly stocked.

Aforefter and archival fragility might be a joke, if the need for such words were not serious. In adhering to the existing professional glossary, it is a struggle to find language that can speak about archives in a space that is both narrative and schematic, recognizing archives as dynamic repositories charged with both affect and effect while also acknowledging the structural biases they uphold by default. It is necessary to surface, in language and action, “affective counterbalances and sometimes resistance to dominant legal, bureaucratic, historical and forensic notions of evidence that so often fall short in explaining the capacity of records and archives to motivate, inspire, anger and traumatize.”⁷

- 4 Mike Vuolo, “Let’s Resolve in the New Year to Stop Using That Expression About Breaking Eggs and Making Omelets,” *Lexicon Valley* (blog), *Slate*, 30 December 2013, accessed 9 February 2018, http://www.slate.com/blogs/lexicon_valley/2013/12/30/english_idioms_it_may_be_true_that_you_can_t_make_an_omelet_without_breaking.html.
- 5 Take this as a prompt to instigate counter-readings of Deleuze and Guattari – because their work runs a gorgeous poetry engine fuelled by some very dodgy tactics of appropriation – and also as foreshadowing of the folk tale employed later in this article.
- 6 Neuroscience confirms that the anatomy of memory is distributed, rather than localized to a single site in the brain. For an overview of some of the relevant literature here, see Larry R. Squire and John T. Wixted, “The Cognitive Neuroscience of Human Memory since H.M.,” *Annual Review of Neuroscience* 34 (July 2011): 259–88. Memory’s malleability is similarly well established, with recent research in the field exploring the hypothesis that the mechanism for flexible memory updating also supports both stability and change. Donna J. Bridge and Joel L. Voss, “Hippocampal Binding of Novel Information with Dominant Memory Traces Can Support Both Memory Stability and Change,” *Journal of Neuroscience* 34, no. 6 (2014): 2203–13.
- 7 Anne Gilliland and Michelle Caswell, “Records and Their Imaginaries: Imagining the Impossible, Making Possible the Imagined,” *Archival Science* 16, no. 1 (2016): 53–75.

Archives play an evidentiary role for acts of both remembering and forgetting,⁸ but in admitting this we should further acknowledge that evidence serves many purposes: not simply as proof, but also as decoy, protest, threat, bond, and many other things besides.⁹ Archives have a long tradition of regulation, of sitting with the law, and the professional language of archival institutions betrays these roots as apparatus of legal and regulatory effects: custody, sentencing, evidence, authority, and control. However, the aggregation and interpretation of records is, as Gilliland and Caswell emphasize, not simply (or even primarily) a matter of legal provenance: the dominion of archives extends beyond law and into lore.

Ghost Writing the Archive

Ascribing my faith in fictitious etymology, I trust the aforeafter carries with it a sniff of legalese and a swell of folk story. It is a word freshly minted to describe the temporal context of archives: being neither before nor after – not past, present, or future, but all of these at once. More concretely, aforeafter describes the archival tense, which Penelope Curtis has identified as the “often peculiar position between past and future tense.”¹⁰ Outside archival address, this is the phenomenon captured by William Faulkner with the words “The past is never dead. It’s not even past”¹¹

8 Verne Harris follows Derrida in tagging the desire to forget, or forget safely, as an originary impetus for archives; see Verne Harris, “Antonyms of Our Remembering,” *Archival Science* 14, no. 3–4 (2014): 215–29.

9 On the “tissue of counter-truths” present in legal evidence across different historical and social contexts, see Natalie Zemon Davis, *Fiction in the Archives: Pardon Tales and Their Tellers in Sixteenth-Century France* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1987); and Jarrett Drake, “Off the Record: The Production of Evidence in 19th Century New Jersey,” *New Jersey Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 1, no. 1 (2015): 104–25. Davis explores fictive aspects in letters of remission (requests for pardon) produced in 16th-century France, whereas Drake exposes the deliberate and coordinated production of falsified consent records to enable the illegal transport and trafficking of enslaved and indentured adults and children in 19th-century America. Drake observes: “A careful look at the consent examinations suggests judges in New Jersey counties rarely – if at all – concerned themselves with recording what actually occurred, but instead focused on recording what could be entered as evidence in the face of litigation.” In highlighting the question of what constitutes authenticity (or, how evidence purports to be authentic), both authors draw attention to how the protocol of the record functions in these instances to make visible the tension between an ethics of justice (which is blind) and an ethics of care (which, in acknowledging difference, is relational).

10 Penelope Curtis, “From Out of the Shadows,” in *All This Stuff: Archiving the Artist*, ed. Judy Vakim, Karyn Stuckey, and Victoria Lane (Faringdon, UK: Libri Publishing, 2013), 7–15.

11 William Faulkner, *Requiem for a Nun* (1951; repr., New York: Vintage, 2012).

and which Samuel Beckett uncovers in Molloy's lament (epigraph to this paper).¹²

Similarly, Jane Birkin reveals archival objects and descriptions as being "all at once temporal, atemporal, and supertemporal in nature."¹³ I agree with Birkin that this characteristic – being simultaneously of time, against time, and beyond time – is an intrinsic part of archival constitution. Birkin describes this as the quality of "being time-critical and timeless."¹⁴ Archives are temporal: described and interpreted as time-bound constructs through their relational standing to specific markers of time. Archives are atemporal: affectively experienced in ways that transcend relation to time and work against time's divisional effect. Archives are supertemporal: the archive *endures* beyond specific measures of time. Alongside, or as an extension of, the archival tense, this paradox of temporality constitutes the aftereffect. By including archival description in her assessment, Birkin also neatly reminds us of the Derridean truism that the labour of describing the archive insinuates itself as part of that archive.¹⁵

Within the choreography of the archival turn, characterized as the movement "from archive as source to archive as subject,"¹⁶ actors and observers from outside the archival profession have increasingly highlighted the fluid temporalities of archival production in which "archives are conceptualized as inherently processual operations that define a politics of knowledge."¹⁷ Along a similar vein, a number of recent archival writings have deployed metaphors of the haunt,

12 Samuel Beckett, *Molloy in Three Novels: Molloy, Malone Dies, The Unnameable* (1947; repr., New York: Grove Press, 2009).

13 Jane Birkin, "Art, Work and Archives: Performativity and the Techniques of Production," *Archive Journal* 5 (2015): n.p..

14 Ibid. Shannon Faulkhead and Kirsten Thorpe also point to the "metaphysical existence of multiple dimensions of time," in their wise and wonderful "Dedication: Archives and Indigenous Communities," which opens the recent collection *Research in the Archival Multiverse*. Anne J. Gilliland, Sue McKemmish, and Andrew J. Lau, eds., *Research in the Archival Multiverse* (Clayton, VIC: Monash University Publishing, 2017).

15 I am thinking here not of the comparatively measured *Archive Fever*, but of the vaguely hallucinatory opening address of Derrida's earlier work *The Postcard*, which obsessively reinscribes a series of posts through a one-sided and insistently incomplete correspondence played out in verso on a pictorial reversal of Plato and Socrates (Plato before/behind Socrates). The methodology of deconstruction – iterative destabilization – continually exposes the effects of acts of comprehension on containers of knowledge.

16 Ann Laura Stoler, "Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance," *Archival Science* 2 (2002): 87–109.

17 "Makeshift. On Temporality and Temporariness in Artistic Production: November 15–17, 2012," Freie Universität Berlin, accessed 29 June 2017, <http://www.geisteswissenschaften.fu-berlin.de/v/interart/veranstaltungen/intern/jointsymposium/12makeshift.html>. These are not, of course, new insights for archivy, but it is worth recognizing similar engagement taking place beyond the profession.

ghost, or spectre as shorthand to encompass the temporal flux of the archive as well as the physical and psychological dislocations and repercussions it has come to symbolize:¹⁸ “haunting is symptomatic of a division, a multiplication, a return.”¹⁹ The ghost, like the archive, is a construct as deeply invested in the future as in the past, and continually reconstituted in the present. Verne Harris tells us that the primary agency of ghosts in the archive is one of transitional justice; they possess a warrant that charges us with responsibility for change before them. By calling out the work of archive²⁰ as being both *spectral* and *justice*, Harris highlights the “risk of speaking for the ghost rather than listening to it,”²¹ and challenges archival scholars to engage in an ethics of deconstruction²² rather than simply to participate in a disassembly of forms.

Archival description does not begin or end with formal inscription according to professional standards, and arrangement takes many guises. Claims that an archive is both, well understood and a feral mess are not mutually exclusive.²³ Nor is the acknowledgement or enactment of forward uses or interpretations of an archive dependent on entry into institutional remit. Lived ledgers of accountability and response-ability form by way of complex negotiations – appraisals – of

18 See, for example, Harris, “Antonyms of Our Remembering”; Verne Harris, “Hauntology, Archivy and Banditry: An Engagement with Derrida and Zapiro,” *Critical Arts* 29, no. 51 (2015): 13–27; Zeb Tortorici, “Archival Seduction: Indexical Absences and Historiographical Ghosts,” *Archive Journal* 5 (November 2015); J.J. Ghaddar, “The Spectre in the Archive: Truth, Reconciliation, and Indigenous Archival Memory,” *Archivaria* 82 (Fall 2016): 3–26; Nadine Siegert, “The Archives as Construction Site: Collective Memory and Trauma in Contemporary Art from Angola,” *World Art* 6, no. 1 (2016): 103–23; and Antonina Lewis and Kirsten Wright, “Torch Songs to Modernity: Ghost Signs as Emblems of the Urban Soul,” in *Advertising and Public Memory: Social, Cultural and Historical Perspectives on Ghost Signs*, ed. Stefan Schutt, Sam Roberts, and Leanne White (New York: Routledge, 2017).

19 Lewis and Wright, “Torch Songs to Modernity,” 46.

20 “By ‘the work of archive’ I mean: archival genesis as process; professional archival practice; engagement with archive by readers, mediators and users; and impact (both actual and potential) in society of such genesis, practice and engagement.” Harris, “Hauntology, Archivy and Banditry,” 13 n2.

21 *Ibid.*, 24.

22 On the ethics of deconstruction, see E. Jeffrey Popke, “The Face of the Other: Zapatismo, Responsibility and the Ethics of Deconstruction,” *Social and Cultural Geography* 5, no. 2 (2004): 301–17; Simon Critchley, *The Ethics of Deconstruction: Derrida and Levinas*, 3rd ed. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014).

23 To say that catalogues produced by archival organizations are (at best) elegant summations to archivists and notoriously incomprehensible to everyone else would be an exaggeration, but not a particularly large one. Similarly, an entity may be entirely competent at understanding and navigating the entity’s own records, while the same aggregation of materials is utterly opaque to the encountering archivist.

what the resonances of a record may be.²⁴ Within existing archival frameworks, the thereafter is complementary with the records continuum,²⁵ insofar as continuum approaches suggest possible patterns for applied postmodernism in the archival sphere. However, while continuum thinking may be common in archival circles, continuum practice remains uncommon. Gilliland and Caswell observe:

. . . dominant strands of archival theory and practice [. . .] maintain an unreflexive preoccupation with the actual, the instantiated, the accessible and the deployable [. . .] 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 content, record or archive as these might be imagined.²⁶

The thereafter will, I hope, go some way towards bridging this gap, further opening up an archival paradigm that recognizes, acknowledges, and actively validates reflexivity, performativity, and imagination in the archives.

Archival Fragility

The concept of the thereafter stands, in part, as a provocation in response to what I will frame here as archival fragility. The term *archival fragility* does not describe instability of archival records, but refers instead to psychosocial brittleness demonstrated in the professional behaviour of archivists or amplified in the official stance of archival institutions. Archival fragility is a blinkered perspective

24 For example, see Gilliland and Caswell, "Records and Their Imaginaries," 68 (on refugee documents and narratives). On the concept of response-ability, see Donna J. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016). I also wish to acknowledge my debt to Monash University colleague Cath Nicholls for inspiring me to think more deeply about the notion of appraisal as a complex negotiation within and between overlapping zones of recordkeeping literacies.

25 For a summary overview of the records continuum, see Frank Upward, "The Records Continuum," in *Archives: Recordkeeping in Society*, ed. Sue McKemmish, Michael Piggot, Barbara Reed, and Frank Upward (Wagga Wagga, NSW: Centre for Information Studies, Charles Sturt University, 2005): 197–222; and Frank Upward, Sue McKemmish, and Barbara Reed, "Archivists and Changing Social and Information Spaces: A Continuum Approach to Recordkeeping and Archiving in Online Cultures," *Archivaria* 72 (Fall 2011): 197–237.

26 Gilliland and Caswell, "Records and Their Imaginaries," 53.

with regard to the capacity of archives to be divisible yet remain integrated as part of holistic cultural reckonings and individual narratives. It symptomizes unwillingness or inability on the part of professional archivists to fully recognize and compensate for their complicity in the historicity of the archive, and it is characterized by reticence to cede intellectual or physical control over archives.

Like dynamics of white fragility,²⁷ archival fragility plays out as a defensive mode that serves to reinstate (archival) equilibrium by processes of misdirection and concealed oppression. By positioning as threats all challenges to archival language or authority, archivists shift attention away from how people are actually experiencing the archive and centre the form as legitimizing itself: archival authority remains normalized and the “threats” to destabilization remain marginalized. In claiming, for example, that repatriation of original archival materials – or even their handling outside the reading room – threatens the long-term “survival” of those archives, archivists are able to dismiss the moral rights of persons disadvantaged, damaged, or imperilled by lack of free access to the archive in question. Archivists cast those “users,” “clients,” or “subjects” (actually, people) wishing to gain access to documentation on their own terms, or simply in an environment in which they feel physically and psychologically safe, as threats both to the records and to the archivists’ professional identity. In equating *survival* with *archival preservation*, archivists implicitly disparage and depreciate the capabilities of people outside the profession to preserve records in meaningful ways.

The unspoken logic of archival fragility is that the sanctity of the formal archive, premised on deferred access and exemplified by the archival principle of respect des fonds, outweighs violations to living beings. Archival fragility subsumes the realities of people who experience records as barbs, barriers, and weapons under a professionally normalized construct of the greater historical good of the archival mission. In conforming to such patterns of behaviour, archivists are assimilating to and providing protection for an inequitable status quo, fortifying the structural forms that continue to enforce the custom of archives (as repository and as process) as authoritarian generators of normative exemplar. Archival fragility makes archivists complicit in supporting the formal archive as a tool to marginalize and deny. At one extreme, fragility manifests as complete denial

27 DiAngelo, “White Fragility,” 54–70. DiAngelo’s article as a whole explicates the dynamics of white fragility; readers may find pages 57–58 particularly relevant for this analogy.

of this complicity, most visibly in claims to Jenkinsonian archival neutrality. Elsewhere on the spectrum, it is in evidence when projects described as being “participatory” or “with community” encourage people to create and/or maintain archives by producing (or reproducing) content that readily conforms to institutional standards. It would be a rare – in the sense of mythical – community that naturally constrains either their identity or their archives within the fixed parameters of professional archival description. However, as Jarrett Drake has noted, professional organizations of librarians and archivists continue to “see new documentation efforts in the context of incomplete, neoliberal notions of diversity.”²⁸

Drake is not alone in emphasizing that the maintenance of archives reinforces ideological acts within structural forms. The original design goal of archives, codified in ways that still endure in the present, was to perpetuate systems and structures of power: archives as arsenal for economic, legal, religious, and governmental control. The archive as a sociocultural form functioned for a long time to pass on *social order*, not memory or affect – and this purpose is what has shaped the formalized standards we know today. Michelle Caswell, in a chapter elaborating the liberatory possibilities of the archival imaginary²⁹ asserts the necessity for archivists to be inventive, willing to shed some of their professional authority, and able to interrogate assumptions of mainstream Western archival practices.³⁰ In other words, to confront and challenge archival fragility. As Caswell and Drake direct us to recognize, declaring change in the functional effects of the archive as a form (in order to include, for example, obligations to imagination and affect) also calls for modifying the formal structures by which it perpetuates those effects.

28 Jarrett M. Drake, “Archivists without Archives: A Labor Day Reflection,” *On Archivy* (blog) *Medium*, 2 September 2016, accessed 21 February 2018, <https://medium.com/on-archivy/archivists-without-archives-a-labor-day-reflection-e120038848e>.

29 Michelle Caswell, “Inventing New Archival Imaginaries: Theoretical Foundations for Identity-Based Community Archives,” in *Identity Palimpsests: Archiving Ethnicity in the U.S. and Canada*, ed. Dominique Daniel and Amalia S. Levi (Sacramento, CA: Litwin Books, 2014), 35–55. Caswell summarizes the archival imaginary as “the dynamic way in which communities creatively and collectively re-envision the future through archival interventions,” the significance of which “is not just about documenting a more diverse version of the past based on the identities of the present, but rather, by uncovering previously untold, ignored, or misrepresented histories, communities can imagine and reimagine different trajectories for the future.” Caswell, “Inventing New Archival Imaginaries,” 49.

30 *Ibid.*, 51.

Endurance

Beckett wrote *Molloy*, like many of his works, in French before taking on the translation of his own text into his primary language, English. What motivated Beckett to write in this way? We can choose to surmise something of his motives from a later letter – itself written in German – sent by Beckett to his friend, translator Axel Kaun:

More and more my own language appears to me like a veil that must be torn apart in order to get at the things (or the Nothingness) behind it. Grammar and Style. To me they seem to have become as irrelevant as a Victorian bathing suit or the imperturbability of a true Gentleman. A mask.³¹

In attempting to unmask formal structure in favour of the porosity of language,³² Beckett grapples with something like a Lacanian register (or, reaching further, with Odin over the abyss). The imaginary – a socket of alienation achieved through the fantasy of a discrete, uncontextualized self; the symbolic – whereby the formation of the subject (as a coherent entity) is codified through language; and the real – which exists in spite of language, resisting, as Beckett tragically demonstrates, all efforts to systematize or synthesize it in expression. In performing Lacan's famous theorem "the unconscious is structured like a language,"³³ Beckett's wilful subversions of text bypass the usual controls of language and channel the reader directly into a current of meaning. In pushing the rules of language beyond endurance, Beckett makes space for the possibility of other modes of representation (what language does rather than what it says). In pushing the rules of the archive

31 This letter (sent in response to Kaun's request that Beckett might translate poems by Joachim Ringelnautz from German to English) is reprinted in Samuel Beckett, *Disjecta: Miscellaneous Writings and a Dramatic Fragment* (London: John Calder, 1983), 171–72.

32 "At least the texture of language has become porous." *Ibid.*, 172.

33 "When I say that the unconscious is structured like a language I say like so as not to say – and I come back to this all the time – that the unconscious is structured by a language. The unconscious is structured like the assemblages in question in set theory, which are like letters." Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XX, Encore: On Feminine Sexuality, the Limits of Love and Knowledge*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: Norton, 1998), 48.

beyond authority, we can similarly amplify the possibility and resonance of what archives do.

Archives are not homogenous; they can and should function differently from each other, and they are constructed (through languages and schema) as symbolic domains of diverse, divergent intent. As repositories of record, archives hold materials that their depositors hope to forget, or to remember. As depositories of evidence, archives hold means to oppress, appease, or liberate. Nonetheless, and despite radical differences in purpose and function, each archive shares a common characteristic: that of being filled or fleshed through repeated process. Repeatability underpins archival design, maintenance (labour),³⁴ and use. In these acts of repetition and repletion, the archive transposes the act of administering memory from a bodily enterprise to a systematic one. This process is not seamless: it creates ghosts, phantoms, echoes, and ebbs.

Imagining a paradigm where archives depend on dynamic performance to survive is nothing new. Correspondences can be located among many of the preservation questions that trouble digital archives. (This is not to detract from their interest or import as materially valid technical questions, rather to extend their utility.) Take for example a video game from the 1980s and the question of a faithful access rendition: should the load time for graphics be set to render at the same speed as at the date of release? User tolerance for delay has diminished in inverse proportion to increases in processing power, so there is little doubt contemporary players would experience the duration differently than their 1980s counterparts. What responsibility does the archive bear to preserve experiential affect or conceptual intent alongside mechanical rendition?³⁵

34 Although space does not permit pursuing it here, the relationship between maintenance and endurance is important to discussions of both archival fragility and the *afterlife*. Hillel Arnold, Sam Winn, and Jarrett Drake are among those who have interrogated the archive as a site of maintenance – drawing attention to the invisibility of much archival labour and making explicit the elitism and inequity that often thrives behind such hidden labour practices. Importantly, critical examination of maintenance labour also admits the reality of failure and decay within archives.

35 For an introductory overview to questions of preserving the authenticity and accessibility of electronic works over time, see Howard Besser, who notes that archival digital preservation requires critical consideration of larger problems “than fixity, dynamic, boundary, and formal issues . . . and includes the interplay between these, as well as other problems. This question has been raised by other forms of contemporary art as well. . . . The actual ‘work’ may not be embedded within the object itself, but rather may lie in the signs and information used to construct it.” Howard Besser, “Longevity of Electronic Art” (presented at the International Cultural Heritage Informatics Meeting, Milan, Italy, 2001), accessed 5 August 2017, <http://www.eai.org/resourceguide/collection/singlechannel/pdf/besser.pdf>.

In its focus on the benefits of preservation, archival theology glosses over the correspondence that exists between endurance and trauma. Running a marathon, for example, inflicts damage at various sites of the body: kidneys, muscles, and joints all experience acute trauma effects. What bodies, both biological and social, do with trauma-in-endurance is part of the ongoing project of contradiction (speaking against) explored by Kathy Acker throughout her literary works. This is more concisely glossed in the title essay to Acker's collection *Bodies of Work*, which takes an auto-ethnographic reading of bodybuilding as an example of the intentionality of failure³⁶ – a theme that is also heavily explored by Beckett (without the bodybuilding). Literature is not the only creative sphere to interrogate generative iterations of failure and archival effects of trauma. The capacity of art to activate the complex relationships among endurance, imagination, bodies, memory, and trauma is a significant effect in the work of artist Kader Attia:

Attia has developed a unique continuum of inquiry between political, aesthetic, and architectural expressions of repair. . . . He inverts the term [repair] to articulate the chaos that lies behind the internalised rendering of that which has been harmed or forcibly removed. Whether this wound is located [bodily], or embedded within the socio-political tissue . . . the process of repair generates ambivalence. For while it may succeed in eradicating signs of a damaged past, it also reconstitutes trauma through artificial means creating multiple somatic remainders and prosthetic monuments to that which is no longer there. Repair, in Attia's artistic vocabulary, denotes the endless agency of a . . . process of regeneration in contrast to a rationalist affirmation of progress.³⁷

Attia's recent video *Reflecting Memory*³⁸ shares with his installation works an exploration of how damage, repair, and (re)percussive trauma manifest in corporeal, psychological, and social spaces. *Reflecting Memory* pieces together interviews with academics, surgeons, psychologists, psychiatrists, and trauma

³⁶ Kathy Acker, "Bodies of Work," in *Bodies of Work: Essays* (London: Serpents Tail, 1997).

³⁷ Clémantine Deliss, "Kader Attia: The Phantom Limb in Art," in *Kadia Attia: Reflecting Memory* (Prato: Gli Ori, 2016), exhibition catalogue.

³⁸ Kader Attia, *Reflecting Memory* (2016), HD Video, colour, sound, 45 min.

survivors. These conversations address the phenomenon of phantom limbs experienced by amputees and reflect on how trauma experienced at the scale of a community or society might similarly produce ghosts and “narrative scars.” The interviews interrupt footage of individuals posed in still, almost meditative, placements within a variety of interior and exterior environments. Late in the work comes the visual disclosure that these quiet figures in the landscape are straddling mirrors (a therapeutic practice dislocated from clinical to cultural settings), creating an illusion of limbs where absence exists. Reviewing the work, Lauren DeLand notes, “Attia’s film deftly exposes how the desire to perceive a choate subject can itself operate as an act of erasure.”³⁹

As sites of endurance, archives cannot escape a direct relationship to the production of trauma, however much they might wish to do so. In considering this, archival practitioners have much to learn from Indigenous knowledge practices. Joan Vickery, Shannon Faulkhead, Karen Adams, and Angela Clarke⁴⁰ make a distinction between oral history research – which is methodologically inclined through question and response to interrupt, shape, and reinterpret the flow of Indigenous story through another culture’s worldview – and oral tradition and oral records (defined by Vickery et al. as Indigenous-controlled recordings) – which are cognizant of complex responsibilities that come with receiving oral knowledge. They present the voice of Albert Mullett, who explains,

When the stories were told to me by the old people, when I was learning from my Elders, in those days you didn’t ask them for information, they would call you and tell you. They wouldn’t tell you everything at once, just some of the things and you would have to keep coming back to them to get the full story. This was because you had to understand respect and the meaning of the word. The old people would know that you were seeking information but they had to see if they could entrust that information

39 Lauren DeLand, “Kader Attia,” exhibition review of “Kader Attia: Reflecting Memory,” at Mary & Leigh Block Museum of Art, Evanston, ILL, *Art in America*, 25 April 2017.

40 Joan Vickery, Shannon Faulkhead, Karen Adams, and Angela Clarke, “Indigenous Insights into Oral History, Social Determinants and Decolonisation,” in *Beyond Band-aids: Exploring the Underlying Social Determinants of Aboriginal Health – Papers from the Social Determinants of Aboriginal Health Workshop, Adelaide, July 2004*, ed. Ian Anderson, Frances Baum, and Michael Bentley (Darwin, NT: Cooperative Research Centre for Aboriginal Health, 2007), 19–36.

within you. Over a period of time that trust was built up between you and them along with mutual respect and understanding.⁴¹

Archival Instincts and Extinctions

In her recent monograph *Staying with the Trouble*, Donna Haraway emphasizes the need to bear with complexity (even when it might be discomfoting), to think in ways of “becoming-with” rather than “becoming,” and to enter into a less species-centric culture of global relations rather than attempting to determine grand solutions (or being overwhelmed by wicked problems) of human design:

Each time I trace a tangle and add a few threads that at first seemed whimsical but turned out to be essential to the fabric, I get a bit straighter that staying with the trouble of complex worlding is the name of the game of living and dying well together.⁴²

In Australia, not so long ago – more than two decades, but barely a blink for archival duration – we had an aspiring prime minister who felt quite differently. Interviewed during the 1996 federal election campaign, he described his vision for the country: “I would like to see an Australian nation that feels [. . .] comfortable and relaxed about their history; I would like to see them comfortable and relaxed about the present and I’d also like to see them comfortable and relaxed about the future.” Prompted as to whether this was a dynamic enough leadership vision, he expanded: “You can’t possibly hope

41 Ibid., 20.

42 Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 116. It is important to acknowledge, too, the trouble in Haraway’s own work, as called out by Sophie Lewis. For example, Haraway’s failure, in calling for a radical reversal of population growth, to adequately account for the sexual, racial, and economic politics of reproduction in the lives of many women. Critiquing Haraway’s argument as being anti-human (rather than multi-species, as Haraway frames it), Sophie Lewis writes, “*Make kin not babies* happens to be a motto I have – personally – been more than willing to render operative . . . but as a white Anglo-European whose biogenetic self-reproduction has only ever been structurally encouraged. I am, truth be told, ashamed to see it deployed in this way against the principles of reproductive justice.” Sophie Lewis, “Cthulhu Plays No Role for Me,” *Viewpoint Magazine*, 8 May 2017, accessed 30 June 2017, <https://www.viewpointmag.com/2017/05/08/cthulhu-plays-no-role-for-me/>. For Haraway’s public response to this critique, see Donna Haraway, “Cyborgs for Earthly Survival!” letter to the editor, *London Review of Books*, 29 June 2017.

to feel excited about something unless you feel comfortable and familiar with it. If you really want to drive Australians away from interest in something . . . disturb their sense of . . . comfort about it and you will succeed in driving them away from it.”⁴³

It is easy to laugh, cringe, or rail against statements like these – and many in Australia did at the time, with the “relaxed and comfortable” statement widely satirized across media and cultural forms.⁴⁴ Yet, his party won that election, and the man proceeded to become Australia’s second-longest-serving prime minister, holding office for more than 11 years. Something in what he was saying resonated with the majority. I suggest the expressed societal wish for a state that is *relaxed and comfortable*, in contrast to *staying with the trouble*, speaks to a desire to remain unwitting of underlying fragility. This is a mode of preservation whose affordances are self-limiting. In denying the possibility to engage with enduring effects of damage (and the damaging effects of endurance) we forgo the practice of reparation as Attia demonstrates it: reparation not as fixing but as flux – accepting of ambivalence in processes of regeneration, acknowledging irreversible losses, and admitting inharmonious relations.

Archivists, like politicians, regularly blunder into the self-limiting trap of papering over their own fragility in order to maintain a relaxed and comfortable atmosphere for a known cohort, at the expense of the more difficult task of making reparation for those who are experiencing exclusion. This phenomenon has not gone unrecognized; calls to disrupt the archive are many and varied.⁴⁵ Whether or not the disruption of archival models is actually widespread and to

43 “An Average Australian Bloke – 1996,” John Howard, interview by Liz Jackson, *Four Corners*, ABC, 19 February 1996, accessed 23 May 2017, <http://www.abc.net.au/4corners/content/2004/s1212701.htm>.

44 See, for example, Julie Shiels, “The Day After,” stencilled hard rubbish, *Writing in Public Space* (blog), 25 November 2007, accessed 29 June 2017, <http://julieshiels.com.au/writinginpublic/the-day-after/>.

45 In particular, recent literature around community archiving offers a multitude of perspectives on how archives are, and might continue to be, disrupted. Among many examples are Jeannette Bastian and Ben Alexander, eds., *Community Archives: The Shaping of Memory* (London: Facet Publishing, 2009); and the forthcoming companion volume, Jeannette Bastian and Andrew Flinn, eds., *Community Archives: Sustaining Memory* (London: Facet Publishing, 2018). As a focus for professional discourse, “Archives Disrupted” was the central theme for the 2017 annual conference of the Association of Canadian Archivists, held in Ottawa, 7–10 June 2017. Further examples of the foregrounding of this theme in discussion include “Disrupting the Archive,” a panel presentation at a digital humanities symposium at George Washington University in 2015; Rick Prelinger’s keynote address, “The Future of Memory: Disrupting the Archives to Save It,” at the 2015 symposium of the International Federation of Film Archives in Sydney; and Michelle Caswell’s talk, “Now More Than Ever: Community Archives, Activism, and Disrupting Time,” for the University of British Columbia iSchool 2017–2018 Colloquia Series, 5 April 2018.

what degree it remains a plausible fiction spread by optimistic, antagonistic, or self-congratulatory archivists are pertinent questions. Many individual projects exist that look to respectful post-custodial practices and possibilities for alternative archival inscription;⁴⁶ yet, overall, archives (as institutions) are arguably less willing to divest their status as treasure holders and gatekeepers than are individual archivists. The economic rationalist reasons for this scarcely need repeating. In any case, I contend that the contemporary reinvention of the “open archive” as a site of cultural production is largely a normative practice, premised on assumptions over entitlement to knowledge that too often elide questions of cultural specificity, appropriation, and freely given consent.⁴⁷ For many institutions, activities to open the archive and engage audiences (often by making digitized documents or metadata records available online) are building on social and economic paradigms that quantify success of approach and implementation in terms of asset conversion and unit uptake (pages described, digitized, or downloaded), without looking too closely at whether the metrics themselves are just or equitable. An obvious example here is counting visitor numbers for state and national institutions: a disingenuous statistic if it masks an increase that is occurring only within the same cohort. An archival institution that plays such numbers as demonstrating success in a mandate to serve its jurisdictional populations is either naïve or lying.

Disruption within a closed system – disruption that improves things for one group of people at the expense of others – is little more than misdirection. If visitor numbers to a reading room are increasing but the demographics are not changing, if whole cohorts of people continue to feel intimidated or unwelcome

46 See the Circus Oz Living Archive community annotation model, an example of which is visible at “This Story is about 1983 – Independent Montage Film – Melbourne, Australia – Big Top, Princes Park,” accessed 30 June 2017, <http://archive.circusoz.com/clips/view/3335>; and recent changes to titling practice in the Find & Connect web resource, described in Kirsten Wright, “Language and the Words We Use,” Find & Connect (blog), 8 September 2017, accessed 21 February 2018, <http://www.findandconnectwblog.info/2017/09/language-and-the-words-we-use/>. For additional examples and perspective from the Canadian context, as well as a lucidly argued demand for critical examination of motives and effects, see Ghaddar, “The Spectre in the Archive.”

47 By *open archive*, I am not referring to the Open Archives Initiative (OAI) but am using the term less granularly, in the sense of *open market* – denoting an unrestricted system with unfettered access, in which any investor or consumer is nominally free to participate. Just as the open market is characterized by the absence of tariffs, taxes, subsidies, licensing requirements, or any other regulations that might interfere with the “natural” functioning of the free market (and in consequence maintains obstacles to entry and participation through asymmetries in powers of engagement – financial or otherwise), I contend the “open” archival model is one that continues to raise barriers to participation and reinforce structural inequalities.

in a civic archival space (physical or digital), there remains a failure of archives to perform justice – or, perhaps, there continues an aptitude for performing it in a way that resists deep systemic disruption. Conversely, Caswell and Cifor note that a shift to an archival ethics of care would “transform the reading room space from a cold, elitist, institutional environment to an affective, user-oriented, community-centred service space.”⁴⁸ Despite such observations, the appetite to address this type of inequity remains underserved by the leadership and vision of most flagship archival institutions, which are constrained by ‘efficiency’ demands and seemingly unable to effectively challenge existing performance metrics. The notion of community-centred space for repositories of public record thereby remains largely tied to established modes of practice, and the popular idiom of “memory institutions” is further entrenched. Yet what do archivists imagine institutionalized memory looks like? Or, to ask a different question, What kind of cognitive dissonance are we employing as a profession that can simultaneously imagine the possibility of decolonized archives and living archives while embracing the types of structure that produced the need for these concepts?

That self-described memory institutions hold records of institutionalized memory is not in dispute, but nor is it much contested at this point that those documents are all too frequently records of repression, injury, trauma, and abuses of human rights. Writing from the context of Canadian realities, Jamila Ghaddar points out that “incorporation of records by or about Indigenous people into the national settler archival repository has been crucial for the constitution of a settler historical *archival memory* (at the expense of an Indigenous one).”⁴⁹ The public and political palatability of the term *memory institutions* is undoubtedly part of its appeal for professional use, but left unquestioned, this taste is in itself highly problematic.

48 Caswell and Cifor, “From Human Rights to Feminist Ethics,” 24.

49 Ghaddar, “The Spectre in the Archive,” 5. Ghaddar’s essay grounds itself in Canadian case study but speaks in terms that are broadly transferable to the relationship of any marginalized subject of official record to the social order that has legitimized the marginalization. For an Australian perspective, aimed at a general audience, see Nathan Sentance, “My Ancestors Are in Our Memory Institutions, But Their Voices Are Missing,” *Guardian*, 6 March 2018.

Interlude

Let me indulge in a story.⁵⁰

Once upon a time, there was a king who had seven sons, and he outfitted six of them with fine clothes and set them on magnificent horses and sent them out into the world to find princesses to bring home as brides. And not one of them returned. So the seventh son, against his father's desire, determines to find his brothers. The only horse left in the stable is broken down and can barely carry his weight, but he sets off nonetheless. As he travels, the young prince encounters a raven and a salmon and a wolf, and he helps each of them in turn. Then he arrives at a castle, where he finds his six brothers and their six princesses standing as stone statues in the courtyard. He enters the castle and meets a beautiful princess, who agrees to help him rescue his brothers, although she cautions him that it will be difficult, for the castle is the domain of a Giant Who Has No Heart in His Body.

The princess hides the prince, and the giant returns home, greatly excited to scent a human stranger in the air; but the princess makes up a lie, and the giant accepts it. Then she asks him where he keeps his heart, and the giant tells her, "Oh, it's buried outside, just there under the window sill." The next day, the giant goes out to do giant things, and the prince comes out of hiding, and he and the princess dig and dig and dig under the window, but they don't find anything. Now it's getting towards dusk, the prince hides again, and the princess fills in the hole and plants an array of flowers to cover up the disturbed earth. Then the giant arrives home and, again, he smells human flesh; but the princess makes up another lie, and the giant accepts it. And he asks about the new flower bed, and she says, "It's to mark your heart with beauty," and he laughs and says, "Oh, but my heart isn't buried there at all!" So the princess asks again where he keeps his heart, and the giant tells her, "It's hidden in the closet in the hallway."

The next day, the giant goes out to do giant things, and the prince comes out of hiding, and he and the princess hunt through every drawer and box and coat pocket in the hallway closet, but still they don't find the giant's heart. As it is getting

50 "The Giant Who Had No Heart in His Body" is a Norwegian folk tale collected by Asbjørnsen and Moe (1841). I am indebted to Ruth Manning Sanders, whose version of the tale I first encountered in childhood. My retelling here is loosely based on the 1859 translation of Asbjørnsen and Moe's text by George Dasent. Asbjørnsen and Moe, "The Giant Who Had No Heart in His Body," trans. George Dasent, Multilingual Folk Tale Database, accessed 10 May 2017, <http://www.mftd.org/index.php?action=story&id=3251>.

towards dusk, the prince hides, and the princess decks the closet with garlands of flowers. And the giant comes home and, again, he is excited because he smells human flesh; but the princess makes up another lie, and the giant accepts it – or he pretends to. And then he asks about the garlands on the closet, and she says, “It’s to mark your heart with beauty,” and he laughs and says, “Oh, but my heart isn’t in there at all!” So the princess asks again where he keeps his heart, and the giant sighs and tells her, “Where my heart is, you will never go.” And the princess smiles up at the giant and says, “All the same, I should like to know.”

The giant relents. He says, “Far, far away in the middle of a lake lies an island; on that island stands a locked temple; in that temple is a well; in that well swims a duck; in that duck there is an egg; and in that egg – there lies my heart.”

You may know how the story ends: assisted in turn by the wolf, the raven, and the salmon, the prince succeeds in retrieving the egg. He holds the precious object in his hand, and he squeezes it experimentally. . . . The giant cries out in pain and promises to do anything if the prince will only leave the egg alone. The prince thinks for a moment and then asks the giant to release all of his brother-princes and their princess-brides in exchange for the egg, and the giant agrees. But no sooner are the stone figures restored to flesh than the young prince clenches his fist and breaks the giant’s heart.

Preservation

I tell this tale not (or not only) because the giant’s layered stronghold to his heart strikes me as an analogy for the hurdles to access that I have heard people describe time and again when speaking of quests to obtain archival records relating to childhoods spent in out-of-home care.⁵¹ I tell it because it is a story that regularly drifts away from my conscious mind yet has stayed with me since

51 Specifically, I am drawing on conversations and other documents that people have shared in the context of the Find & Connect and Imagined Archives of Out of Home Care projects. For published accounts regarding the ongoing experience of exclusion from the formalized “community of records” and the difficulties of care leavers in gaining access to information about their own lives within the Australian context, see, for example, Jacqueline Z. Wilson and Frank Golding, “Latent Scrutiny: Personal Archives as Perpetual Mementos of the Official Gaze,” *Archival Science* 16, no. 1 (2016): 93–109; Frank Golding, Cate O’Neill, and Natasha Story, “Improving Access to Victoria’s Historical Child Welfare Records,” *Provenance: The Journal of Public Record Office Victoria* 12 (2013); Cate O’Neill, Vlad Selakovic, and Rachel Tropea, “Access to Records for People Who Were in Out-of-Home Care: Moving Beyond ‘Third Dimension’ Archival Practice,” *Archives and Manuscripts* 40, no. 1 (2012): 29–41.

I was little (the other to a giant); it is evocative, elusive, eliding moral certainty. Reading Haraway's urge to engage with complex worlding,⁵² I think of this tale. I find myself asking a question to which I never quite find a satisfactory answer: does the young prince act well when he shatters the giant's core?

I place this story here as an indicator of the manifold meanings that preservation takes, and of the value of the after in allowing us to hold them all together at once. If we accept the after as a temporal reality that is confluent with continuous use and reuse of archives, records are not pinned as historical markers⁵³ but are more loosely understood as testifying to mutability. In thinking about the evaluation of archives as matter (or matters) that are in a state of becoming, with before, during, and after ingestion or attribution as archives, we move away from the question, What do we wish to preserve? Questioning the sustainability of appraisal, we are faced with a different enquiry: What does it mean to preserve? What do we – archivists, individuals, society, and community – imagine happening in consequence to acts of material and intangible preservation, and what effects does relational power have on such imaginings?

In the tale of *The Giant Who Has No Heart in His Body*, we see preservation from many aspects, differently embodied in its implications for the various actors in the story, but always associated to dynamics of power and vulnerability:

- a king, attempting to preserve his dynasty, for whom preservation is distribution
- a father, having lost six sons and now attempting to preserve a last remaining filial bond, for whom preservation is about relinquishing control
- a raven, a salmon, and a wolf, for whom preservation is a matter of reciprocal exchange

52 Touched on earlier in this article, Haraway's figuring of "worlding" proposes that caring for the world now renders human exceptionalism and bounded individualism unthinkable. In caring, we must conceive ourselves as part of a global schema, operating within multi-species configurations of complex, tangled, and dissenting copresence: "We become with or not at all. That kind of material semiotics is always situated, someplace and noplacement, entangled and worldly." Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 4.

53 Here I wish to thank one of the anonymous reviewers of this article for sharing their interpretation of the after as "a temporal state that acknowledges a continuous use and reuse of archives in which documents never become historical markers."

- a giant who wishes – and fails – to preserve his heart, his relationship, and his life, for whom preservation is about maintaining secrecy and concealment
- a princess who preserves a fiction of compliance, for whom preservation is in deceit
- six princes and six princesses, set in stone in the giant’s garden, for whom preservation is a fixed material representation of a past-present moment
- a prince who wishes these frozen figures unpreserved, for whom preservation is – what? Reinstatement? Luck? Proving his worth?

How can we possibly understand this thing called preservation, which is simultaneously about sharing, concealing, promising, falsifying, fixing, and transforming? I think we begin by understanding it from the standpoint of the eponymous giant: as failure. Insofar as failure is stress and breakpoint, rupture, a catalyst for change. Insofar as we will always fail to preserve, if by preserve we mean “keep static and unchanging.” Because decay feeds growth, because things change, values change, interpretations change, and infinite histories of power and ideology exist to remind us that there is always going to be someone prepared to burn the library, bomb the archive, loot the museum, or mine the sacred site. Yet I do not think failure, even at the extremes of destruction, equates to obliteration. It might be a tragedy, a farce, a keen of despair – but not an endpoint.

This is the measure of hope (and terror) afforded by the afterlife: there are no endpoints. I suggest we need to understand preservation as being about keeping: *keeping* in the sense of holding and passing on, not in the sense of keeping things the same or keeping things forever. And, from there, I would make the case that appraisal is about valuing, not about judging worth. Because, if folk tales teach anything, it is that all things have value, including (or especially) those things that appear not to. Where does this leave the archive? What models exist for honouring value without assigning worth? If there is no principle of hierarchy behind valuation, how should archivists recognize what to collect? Will a disrupted appraisal paradigm that is about care rather than judgment make the archive, or the archivist, obsolete? Far from it. Where archives are no longer concerned with selection or accrual but rather with exchange, including sharing

– or ceding – authority to make decisions, they are not obsolete; they are simply displaced from seats of wisdom to sites of learning.

Conclusion

Deep in the final season of the television series *Hannibal*, a fantastic moment of archival transgression and transmutation occurs.⁵⁴ The emergent character of the Red Dragon, having followed appropriate protocol to gain access, within a secure and sterile reading room, unwraps from its acid-free trappings the original of a William Blake drawing, the image of which he has previously had tattooed on his skin, and proceeds, rapturously, to eat it.

The archival stack must overflow. Whether it is in seeking technological systems capable of applying pluralizing models such as the records continuum, or in deploying the performativity of language in calls to liberatory archives, archival imaginaries, and the after, the challenge is to surface the responsibility of archives in calls to memory and connection. By fitting new language into the discourse of archival practice – language for enabling attention to archival lore rather than remaining only in the province of archival law – we begin to dissolve the symbolic and structural boundaries that conspire to keep archives (as cultural forms and as caches of records) from shared ownership. In the broadest sense, archives – no less than folklore – are of, and for, everyone.

Ultimately, it is not archives that must be disrupted. Archives, despite claims to order, are always already in a state of disruption. The disruptions we need are to archival industry: the systems and technology, the labour paradigms, the ethical frameworks, and the business models that continue to underpin how, to paraphrase William Gibson, the archive is unevenly distributed.⁵⁵ Destabilizing the fulcrum upon which the purported “balance” of archival power claims its premise cannot be fully realized through redress to the constitution of individual archival repositories. Effective change must also address, at a structural

54 “. . . And the Woman Clothed with the Sun,” *Hannibal*, season 3, episode 10, directed by Guillermo Navarro (2015, NBC), first aired 8 August 2015.

55 “The future is already here; it’s just not very evenly distributed.” By some accounts, William Gibson first stated this in an interview on the NPR radio program *Fresh Air*, broadcast 31 August 1993. Verifiably, he repeats the phrase, prefaced with, “As I’ve said many times . . .” in the segment “The Science in Science Fiction” on another NPR program, *Talk of the Nation*, broadcast 30 November 1999.

scale, how the archive (conceptual) functions as information technology – how it guides and scaffolds society’s reproduction of modes of thought and action.

In its most complex – that is to say, its simplest – form, the archive is atomization.

In its simplest – that is to say, its most complex – form, the archive is a bringing together.

The aforeafer is, more or less, a game of language, but one with serious intent to name a phenomenon that is familiar both inside and beyond repository walls: *that which is over still goes on*. In calling it thus, we can playfully – and powerfully, because play is transformation – challenge the claims to executive control and exclusive knowledge keeping that are too regularly exercised by archival authority and too loudly amplified by archival fragility. In this way, the aforeafer becomes a useful instrument in movements to resituate the archive as a socio-cultural form uncontained by institutional limitation, celebrating the displacement of mechanisms of custody and control by new guiding standards of agency and affect.

BIOGRAPHY Antonina Lewis lives in Melbourne, Australia. She holds a bachelor’s degree in creative arts and a doctorate in cultural theory and has over ten years of experience as a practicing archivist (including roles at the Public Record Office Victoria, the National Archives of Australia, and as University Archivist at Victoria University in Melbourne). Most recently, she was employed as a research fellow on the Imagined Archives of Out of Home Care project in the Centre for Organisational and Social Informatics (COSI) at Monash University, working on a participatory research program that considers intersections between creative practice and living archives and co-creating public exhibitions with care-experienced collaborators. Prior to joining the research team at COSI, Antonina was program manager for the Find & Connect web resource, a data portal and archival outreach site that aims to better the standard of information justice available to survivors of the Forgotten Australians generations, the estimated 500,000 children who were placed into institutional “care” in Australia during the 20th century. If you’d like to say hello, she tweets sporadically as @aylewis.