

Archive
Fever

A FREUDIAN IMPRESSION

RELIGION AND POSTMODERNISM
A Series Edited by Mark C. Taylor

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Lecture given on 5 June 1994 in London during an international colloquium entitled "Memory: The Question of Archives." Organized at the initiative of René Major and Elisabeth Roudinesco, the colloquium was held under the auspices of the Société Internationale d'Histoire de la Psychiatrie et de la Psychanalyse, of the Freud Museum, and of the Courtauld Institute of Art.

The original title of this lecture, "The Concept of the Archive: A Freudian Impression," was modified afterward. (The French title is *Mal d'Archive: une impression freudienne.*)

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* of the *arkhē*?

We have *there* two orders of order: *sequential* and *justive*. 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*, *tekhne*, *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 original, 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 speak the law: they recall the law and call on or impose the law. To be guarded thus, in the jurisdiction of this *speaking the law*, they needed at once a guardian and a localization. Even in their guardianship or their hermeneutic tradition, the archives could do neither 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,

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which does not always mean from the secret to the nonsecret. (It is what is happening, right here, when a house, the Freud's 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 uncommon 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 archic, 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

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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 institutionalization, that is to say, the theory both 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 deconstructible 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 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

4 | 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 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 papiers Funçaises 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].

correspondence, for example? What comes under system? under biography or autobiography? under personal or intellectual anatomy? 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 classificational 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.