Declining Derrida: Integrity, Tensegrity, and the Preservation of Archives from Deconstruction*

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RÉSUMÉ Jacques Derrida est parmi les philosophes de la « déconstruction » qui a le plus démontré d'intérêt pour le concept d'archives. Jusqu'à présent, les archivistes ont ignoré ses travaux. Cet essai présente trois raisons justifiant cette négligence. Il soutien de plus que la relation entre « déconstruction » et pratique archivistique se décrit le mieux par un rapport simultané de tension et d'intimité.

ABSTRACT Among philosophers, none has shown more interest in the concept of archives than deconstructionist Jacques Derrida. Yet archivists have virtually ignored his work. This essay offers three reasons for this neglect, and then proposes that the relationship between deconstruction and archival practice is best described as one of simultaneous tension and intimacy.

There should be an implicit contract, a supposed affinity, as if a question should always be first authorized by a place, legitimated in advance by a determined space that makes it both rightful and meaningful, thus making it possible and by the same token necessary, both legitimate and inevitable.

<div style="text-align: right">Jacques Derrida</div>

Among modern philosophers, Jacques Derrida is one of the few to have shown a serious interest in questions concerning archives. Yet archivists have so far largely ignored the French philosopher's works. This article briefly probes the reasons behind this neglect, considers why archives figure so prominently in Derrida's philosophy, and discusses the relationship between archives and deconstruction – one, this article contends, of intimate tension. Though numerous reasons undoubtedly lie behind Derrida's unpopularity among archivists, we discuss three such explanations here: a traditional general lack of any sustained interest in philosophy in much of the archival community; the difficulty of reading Derrida's work; and the apparently irreconcilable differences between the postmodern concept of "textuality," which interests Derrida, and the qualities of "recordness," which concern archivists. An examination of the main features of the architectural

notion termed "tensegrity" provides concrete illustration of deconstructive action.

This article will attempt to show how Derrida's deconstructive practice weaves the phenomenon of archives into the fabric of human knowledge and existence. It is "archiving" that provides people with the power to generate and share meaning and to establish, amongst themselves, the identities of all things within the world. For Derrida, however, the exploitation of this possibility also begets numerous philosophical conundrums of an ethical, intellectual, and political nature, which we will be discussing shortly. This, briefly, is why the concept of archives occupies such a prominent place in his philosophy. Thus, the amount of attention that Derrida has devoted to the question of archives, as disturbing as it may sometimes seem and as unwelcome as it may be, effectively elevates archives to a position of significance it has seldom occupied in other scholarly writings beyond the archival community.

Reactions from outside the archival community to Derrida's philosophy have ranged from high praise to bitter denunciation. Some endorse it as a productive method for generating new perspectives on and critiques of various issues and matters. In fact, Derrida's philosophy can very effectively – some would say too effectively – open up alternative ways of reading that disturb conventional understandings of individual texts, institutions and social practices, and particular events and circumstances. Deconstruction has been useful, to cite some examples, in the fields of architecture, management science, legal studies, literary theory, organizational theory, public administration, social theory, and even religious and theological studies. Other observers, while acknowledging deconstruction's critical power, complain of its lack of intellectual resolution, positive conclusions, and practical recommendations. Still others have found Derrida's philosophy to be incomprehensible, ethically hollow, and lacking in moral traction.[1] Sometimes even sympathetic readers, attracted to its radical political possibilities, acknowledge deconstruction's political pliability and relativism, its suitability, for example, as a justification for nihilism and reactionary politics. More unscrupulous critics have even made crude and preposterous ad hominem remarks suggesting links with fascism based on Derrida's intense interest in the works of Nietzsche and Heidegger.[2]

Thus, the archival community aside, deconstruction has never won anything close to wide or unqualified acceptance within broader circles, and Derrida himself sometimes appears as something of an enigmatic figure, even among some of those who find profit in reading his work.[3] Certainly, deconstruction no longer enjoys the same popularity among academics that it did during its heyday in the 1970s and 1980s. Sometimes (with some sense of relief no doubt) its opponents have ridiculed deconstruction as nothing more than a passing academic fashion now fading from view, characterizing it as a designer philosophy fashioned by the self-consciously trend-setting French,

and, for a time, embraced by other academics, equally susceptible to trends, especially in North America.[4] Yet Derrida's philosophy continues to attract attention and praise from more than a few scholars. One can find ongoing evidence, sometimes under different names and other guises, of a subtle yet powerful deconstructive influence at work in many disparate regions of contemporary culture – reaching even into the language and ideas of some who have worked arduously for its demise. Indeed, its reach may now be in some respects greater and its presence better tolerated precisely because people believe that deconstruction – certainly as so identified – has now largely disappeared from the scene. As one sympathetic critic of deconstruction has observed, sometimes nothing succeeds better than failure.[5]

Before turning to explanations of deconstruction's failure in the archival community, a word of warning may be in order. This essay's primary concern is the relationship between archival practice and the concept of archives found in deconstruction. The claim of this essay is that the concept of archives is deeply imbedded throughout the entire corpus of Derrida's philosophy. Among archivists, however, Derrida's *Archive Fever*[6] is the only one of his works that has received more than passing notice, undoubtedly because of its title. Yet, in *Archive Fever* he pursues archival themes that he had already examined for many years under sometimes different names. The book's consideration of archival matters is only more obvious here than in his previous writing. Even though Derrida had not always explicitly named "archives" as a subject of discourse, he had constantly discussed and embroidered upon a cluster of crucial concepts – concepts that have deeply marked a phenomenon that most archivists take for granted in defining and pursuing their mission: the status of writing in human society.

More precisely, it is necessary to understand that Derrida simultaneously construes writing as one of several important metaphors for archiving, and archiving as one of numerous metaphors for writing. It will also help to keep in mind that the notions of both writing and archiving are metaphorically associated with concepts of memory and preservation, and vice versa, and even with the formation and operation of consciousness.[7] This should not come as a surprise, as Derrida seems to believe that language unavoidably carries metaphorical resonance – and thereby never quite yields the literal meanings its users intend to express.[8] Thus, when Derrida writes about archives, the discussion stretches beyond and beneath our profession's conception of archives. By the same token, when he dwells on the thematics of "writing," when he introduces seemingly recondite notions of "difference," "trace," and "origins," and when he deals with the issues of "presence" and "absence," being and meaning (all concepts we will touch on later), he is addressing concerns that ultimately carry consequences for the archival community's conception of what the preservation of records actually accomplishes, and what significance lies within and beyond the language archivists use to enunciate their purposes. To

claim that Derrida's treatment of archives distorts and trespasses upon the true, that is, archivists' meaning of archives, or to contend that his "archival" conceptualizations, preoccupations, and concerns are so different as to be virtually irrelevant to proper archival practice, is to sidestep the challenges in his questions and to miss an opportunity to deepen our appreciation of the keeping of archives.

Why, then, if the concept of archives figures so prominently in Derrida's work has the archival community failed to register much interest in his writings? First, and most obvious, only a very small minority of archivists have ever found that philosophy of any kind offers them much theoretical interest or practical utility. Apart from sporadic invocations of one philosophy or another, and an occasional foray into the philosophy of science in search of models and arguments relating to the value of theory for archival practice, archivists have seldom felt the urge to employ philosophy in accounting for what they do, for what they claim to know, and for what they believe to be justifiable in what they profess to do. This disregard may be partly due to a belief in certain tenets concerning the fundamental incompatibility between philosophical and historical approaches, that is, between understandings of the human experience that transcend time and those that are historically contingent and gain validity from historical context.

In addition, increasing numbers of archivists – sometimes overtly, sometimes less discernibly – have been recently promoting the image of a profession that is, not to put too fine a point on it, "business-like." The self-fashioning of a professional ethos of pragmatism – bolstered by the profession's concomitant discovery of the "authentic" archivist, the ancient, original archivist who occupied a place near the active center of public or corporate administration – seems almost to preclude any systematic forays into philosophy. Philosophy is generally regarded as being incompatible with pragmatic preoccupations – as too far removed from the world of practical archival concern. Moreover, the technologically-induced crisis of electronic records has encouraged increasing numbers in the community to dawn a corporate, "business" mantle.[9] All records are becoming characterized as "business" records, and all aspects of archival practice as "business processes."

If deconstruction philosophy represents only one of several postmodern intellectual fashions that have temporarily beguiled many academics, some archivists, especially those seeking to meet the challenges of electronic and other contemporary records, have themselves turned to writings from the equally trend-conscious worlds of management science and organizational theory. Record keepers at the forefront of theoretical and methodological developments have been drawing increasingly on the teachings and rhetoric of administrative science, public administration, information management, knowledge management, information engineering, business process reengineering, workflow studies, systems analysis, and enterprise reengineering, to

name just a few. These are fields in which the creation of new fashions in con-
cepts, theories, and terminology is no less evident than among some academic
proponents of postmodernism and poststructuralism.

This is not to say that the organizational and management science literature
is devoid of important insights to offer archivists facing new and daunting
institutional and technological challenges. Some of the work in these fields,
often itself interdisciplinary in approach, is providing record keepers with
fresh and important perspectives on organizations and institutions. Most
important, perhaps, record keepers have been anxious to exploit the growing
emphases on "information," "media," and "knowledge" as essential social and
organizational resources, and values. The frequent reduction of social and
organizational challenges to strategic problems involving information, infor-
mation technology, and information or knowledge management has an under-
standable appeal for record keepers – leaving aside the issue of the differences
between "information" and "records."

At the same time, it is also important to realize that the various disciplines
falling within the organizational and management sciences' discourse and tra-
ditions, as well as those of information management, are themselves heavily
beholden to borrowed concepts and methods, those of engineering, psychol-
ogy, and sociology. And what the organizational and management sciences
have appropriated from these disciplines in addressing information manage-
ment issues in turn comes, as a number of historians have shown, with its own
historical baggage. This consists of political, social, cultural, and institu-
tional perspectives and biases on the nature of individuals, institutions, organi-
zations, corporations, and society.[10] The archival appropriation of "informa-
tion," "knowledge," and "engineering" tools is, therefore, not entirely
innocent.[11]

Most important for our purposes, however, the preoccupation with these
perspectives has inclined archivists, including those drawing up archival edu-
cational curricula, to draw even farther away from critical philosophical
engagement with issues and questions related to knowledge. In particular,
archivists have shown little interest in questions concerning what makes it
possible for people to claim access to knowledge of what are habitually called
the "present" and the "past" – in what anchors our faith in the communication
of meaning over time. Nor have they inquired into how the information-han-
dling practices of societies and institutions in history have influenced the con-
struction of human, individual, and social identity, as well as narratives of
action created through acts of record-making and record-keeping. Moreover,
ever since Peter Drucker wrote of the rise of "knowledge workers" and pre-
dicted that knowledge would soon replace industrial and manufactured goods
as capitalism's primary commodity,[12] the determination of what "knowledge"
connotes no longer resides exclusively in the hands of academic philosophers.
Similarly, information engineers have been taking over the heavily philosoph-

ical notion of "ontology" to describe a methodology for systems software development.

In summary, the archival community has shown little interest in exploring possibilities for erecting any philosophical scaffolding for archival theory and practice, both of which in fact carry serious epistemological and ontological weight. A longstanding indifference, if not aversion, to philosophy – along with competition from powerful contemporary currents of thought and interest – help account for the persisting exclusion of philosophy from archivists' purview. We might mention again that archivists, often operating under severe resource restraints, deem philosophy unhelpful in the face of practical problems. Yet, the growing number of academic positions devoted to training professional archivists begins to make this intellectual neglect less understandable.

A second, more specific reason for Derrida's unpopularity among archivists (and others) concerns the difficulty of reading his works. Unfortunately, accounting for this difficulty virtually requires an explanation of Derrida's philosophy. Why he writes what he writes and the way he chooses to write, together form a single problem. His primary concerns are, after all, how – and how well – certain notions of language and writing have served philosophy's literary efforts to account for the conditions of human existence, knowledge, and reality.

There is no denying that reading deconstruction can be rough going. It does not repay casual browsing. Certainly, it does not easily accommodate a culture whose pace, some might argue, often predisposes individuals to intellectual fast food and against lengthy, time-consuming exposition. In a way, deconstruction positions itself athwart of a culture increasingly prone to speed reading, anxious to locate the bottom "line," and reach the intellectual pith – the core meaning presumed to await our discovery. Brief essays, snapshot reviews, visual aids done up in "slide show" or "PowerPoint" form, sound bytes, advertising spots, and system models and diagrams – Derrida's writing concedes nothing to and implicitly casts doubt upon the reductive pretensions of all such communicative efforts. Such methods – in truth, all methods of representation – foster inflated expectations about what language has the power to deliver, and be. When the thesis or message within a piece of writing appears clear, unequivocal, and insightful, this is merely an indication that it has more effectively obscured the repression that inevitably occurs when people use language to help others focus on the heart of the matter.[13] All processes resulting in the representation of meaning – all meaning – is necessarily repressive; its price of purchase is the perpetration – intentional or unintentional – of exclusionary "violence."[14]

Although it has been described as such, deconstruction is not simply a form of literary criticism, as some have claimed – even merely a method of criticism per se, as others have assumed.[15] The elliptical style of Derrida's writing,

shot through with punning, metaphorical allusion, and other tropes, reflects the operation of a serious philosophical purpose, as others have argued.[16] In short, the virtual inseparability of his style, method, and philosophy is what makes his writing difficult to follow. Indeed, each is almost indistinguishable from the others. This fusion of style, method, and philosophy reflects the virtually impossible philosophical task Derrida has set for himself. He is concerned with what he takes to be the problematical relationship between popular concepts of "writing" and the need humans have to communicate and to establish a relationship to a worldly reality through their various signs and means of symbolization. Derrida works his own language in order to demonstrate a fundamental difficulty: that it is virtually impossible even to say anything decisive or conclusive – meaningful – about writing itself. One cannot convey anything definitive about writing because language and writing themselves have no such expressive power – or perhaps, more accurately, too much power to impart to us. The power of language to generate meaning is more (or less) than what any single author can hope to cope with. The reason for this, as we will now show, is that the writing that humans do functions as much to obscure and *defer* meaning as to fix it permanently.

There are two issues here that, ultimately, hold implications for the concept of archives. First, what does the "deferral" of meaning mean? and second, how can someone who holds the above kinds of views justify recording them in his writing? First, then, what about the notion of writing as an act of "deferral?" For Derrida, the very premises upon which our commitment to writing rest themselves establish limits to communication that writing cannot breach. To write is already to concede the necessity of placing our fate in others' hands, so to speak. Writing, by its nature, suspends its own consummation of meaning. The certification of meaning as "the meaning" of a particular piece of writing inevitably requires the endorsement of a subsequent reading. It is other readers' interpretations that ratify the "original," "genuine" meaning of the work.

But the inevitability of deferral involves more than suspending the meaning of a document until others have read or misread it (a process which can include the author "himself"). For Derrida, deconstruction begins whenever writing begins. Instances of communication always already partially disable themselves from within, even before what most people recognize as "writing" begins. That is, writings somehow always deconstruct themselves. By its very nature, so to speak, language-in-use limits its own expressive power. To see what lies behind this assertion, it is necessary to turn to one of Derrida's key notions, *differance*.[17]

Like many of Derrida's concepts, differance is not easy to grasp. For his idea of differance, Derrida, like many poststructuralists, is heavily indebted to Ferdinand de Saussure, the late nineteenth, early twentieth-century French linguist and progenitor of the idea of structuralism. Saussure proposed that the

individual words that comprise the language systems that humans use to communicate possess no status in themselves. Words carry no self-contained sense or meaning, no intrinsic "linguistic value." Signs do not come naturally endowed with some power to help individuals refer to particular objects or phenomena in the world. That is, the correspondence among (1) the signs we compose, (2) what these signs mean (their content), and (3) actual objects in the world is not a self-evident one. Rather, meaning arises from the internal differentiations among a network of signs in a language system. For their meaning, words are beholden to a play of difference among terms forming part of an unending chain of references occurring within a language system.[18] Words possess no essence, only *difference*. Thus,

the signified concept is never present in and of itself, in sufficient presence that would refer only to itself. Essentially, (that is, of its being) and lawfully every concept is inscribed in a chain or in a system within which it refers to the other, to other concepts, by means of the systematic play of differences.

The implication of this play of difference is that meaning owes its existence to something that is absent – to what it lacks – as much as to what is present to it and within it. This being the case, all marks, all signs that populate our lives, are mere "traces" – another key Derridean term. The concept of trace suggests something present to us; however, it simultaneously strongly signifies that something is absent. It signifies incompleteness. That is (as archivists acknowledge from referring to artifacts and records as traces), traces always intimate that the thing itself, the "real thing," is not fully present, is not there. Language itself, according to Derrida, is made up of traces – and only traces. Thus, if words themselves are mere traces – artifacts – then something, some difference, is always left over, left behind. In each instance of word use, the very process of writing creates a blank space, a hollowing, awaiting fulfillment. Hence, the system is never a tidy structure of words, each of which peacefully co-exists with other words fully possessing their own meanings. There are no "complete" self-contained words, only traces – traces of difference. Derrida, understandably, discusses mostly what difference is not. ("*Differance* is neither a word nor concept.")[19] This is, of course, because differance is itself only another trace.

It is important to notice that the above notions of deferral and trace strongly resonate with intimations of temporality. Both involve the elusive problem of time's effects on writing's *retention* of persistent, integral structures of being and meaning – its archival capacity. In French, the verbal infinitive *différer* means both to differ and to defer. To defer harbours an ineluctable element of temporality, of temporal delay. To defer is to postpone or adjourn; it also implies to save for a later date, to preserve – to keep in reserve – for later expenditure or future completion. However, to defer also bears a second and

not unrelated connotation: it also entails a hierarchical relationship of author-
ity and deference, dominance and subordination, centrality and marginality,
superiority and inferiority between commonly paired terms: nature-culture,
appearance-reality, primary-secondary, presence-absence, sameness-differ-
ence, original-copy, inside-outside, form-content, context-content. Neverthe-
less, the binary structures and values that such pairs comprise always fall short
of achieving states of pure, absolute difference or opposition. That is, neither
member of any binary structure ever entirely succeeds in perfectly eradicating
the presence of the absent other, a trace of the other from its midst. Thus, the
ether of trace, differance, and deferral which permeates language preserves
disturbances, though not complete reversals of constructed linguistic hierar-
chies, indeed, of the latent biases and prejudices in the language we use.

Writing, then, is merely the most obvious form of temporal delay, for signs
in all their forms engender delay. No word, no sign, ever "takes time off"[20] to
remain fully present and self-identical. Signs unavoidably become swept up in
the movement of delay and difference, of traces leaving traces. Efforts to over-
come time's effects on meaning through writing are doomed to fail because
writing itself structures delay even as it sets down structures of ostensibly
fully present meaning free of any trace of differance and absence (a point we
will examine more closely later). As one literary theorist has written, it is in
the very nature of writing, and of language, not to be confined to specific
structures of meaning.[21] The force of this constant movement undermines De
Saussure's notion of a comprehensive, synchronic, and self-enclosed language
system (*langue*) enabling the possibility of frozen moments of fully meaning-
ful individual speech events (*parole*). Time's relentless motility disrupts and
delays the achievement of a perfectly coordinated and stable language system,
a population of peacefully co-existing meanings, an authoritative repository of
commonly shared terms. System – a condition outside of time – and the work-
ings of time exist together in unavoidable tension. Time, creator of difference,
inevitably defers or postpones arrival at stable structure – whether of lan-
guages, writing, societies, records, or record systems.[22]

Writing, then (including Derrida's), is a strategy without finality.[23] This is
because there is no supreme court of settlement outside of writing – and out-
side time – to which we can appeal to establish the full presence of meaning.
All such appeals must themselves necessarily pass through language. As such,
*the permanence of writing and the deferral of meaning actually invoke one
another.* Archiving depends on tracing, and tracing induces archiving. Each
one of this pair provides the conditions for the other's continual emergence
into and deferral of being.[24]

We come now to the second point. How can someone who holds the above
views about writing as the tracing of differance set out to write about and dem-
onstrate this? How does one begin to write about the limited capacity of lan-
guage to satisfy our bid to communicate meaningfully?[25] How can anyone

who holds this position do anything but remain silent, withdraw from writing? Yet how might one make one's silence understood other than by "breaking" silence? The need to cope with his seemingly self-refuting position and fundamentally paradoxical situation is partly what drives Derrida to write as he does. Derrida knows he has no choice but to speak, to break silence. By necessity, then, Derrida's deconstructive practice requires that he address this problem. And he does so in his writing by simultaneously engaging in analysis and performance. He must write, but he must also comment on writing's betrayal – all in the same stroke. It is what he might call a double gesture. All writing, the entire corpus of historical writing, he would say, is also the history of writing.

Two issues emerge from Derrida's apparent self-refutation: one concerns the status of Derrida as author – is he not, finally, an author attempting to convey meaning to readers of books? – and the second, the very complex relationship between deconstruction and the concept of metaphysics. In the interests of brevity, we only glimpse the second issue.

First, Derrida concedes the inevitability of humans engaging in moments of interpretation. Humans will always interpret. Derrida recognizes the obvious – that humans need to establish a reliable basis for access to stable, enduring knowledge and meaning – to name, define, explain, understand, and control "reality." Philosophers name this effort to develop an ultimate system that can account for the reality of phenomena in the world "metaphysics." (Indeed, according to Heidegger, philosophy simply *is* metaphysics.) Derrida acknowledges, indeed stresses, that it is impossible to overcome metaphysics. In other words, he knows that in order to conduct their lives as individuals and as communities, human societies – certainly Western society, at least – strive to impose pure meaning on the words they use and worldly objects they encounter. We need to name, that is, to share names of things and social entities in our world, to ascribe to all things identities and meanings that we can "all" agree fit, including things within ourselves. We assign "proper names," and "properties," to things just like we name people. The survival of communities depends on our capacity to stick labels on things. It is how we control – and make – our environment. (Those archivists who have climbed the heights in search of metadata will appreciate that this is what lies behind the preservation of names, and indeed, the possibility of naming.) According to Derrida, metaphysics itself is the name for the centuries-long project whose objective is to confirm and fully realize the possibility of building up an exhaustive repository of names that correspond with objects, events, and phenomena in the world.

It is this permanent metaphysical condition within and against which deconstruction works. All one can do is re-sign texts, as it were. For Derrida, it is important to examine putatively "successful" instances of naming, that is, writing, from a critical standpoint. Why does Derrida feel it necessary to

deconstruct metaphysics? Derrida's practice harbours a political interest, that of deconstructing the conditions that serve to determine description, that is, to govern the naming of what and how the world's reality is, or should be. He is interested in naming's power to impose as natural, truths about and true names for the realities of the world – which turn out always to be instances of the pretensions of particular individuals and groups to determine these realities. Therefore, metaphysics is as unending as is deconstruction. More to the point, deconstruction takes on the never ending ethical responsibility of naming what inevitably remains unnamed in our writing, of eliciting the silenced voicings and concealed meanings that simultaneously dwell within the world's writings, and yet beyond the limits of the "reality" upon which sovereign, proprietorial authors claim to bestow true names.

Necessarily working within the walls of metaphysics, then, and recognizing the impossibility of ever permanently escaping the need to name, Derrida resorts to a writing, that is, naming strategy that makes his work difficult to read. His seemingly impossible mission is to demonstrate the breaching forces of differance and trace within metaphysical structure, where we work out life's meanings, without succumbing to metaphysics. Derrida attempts to show the endemic limits of the very structures, or systems, within which he, and all of us, must work. He examines in minute detail instances of writing's imperious tendency to shape and reduce all things to stable meanings, pure identities, sovereign names, first principles, and essential truths. Like a ghost, deconstruction haunts the house of metaphysics, a philosophical questioning of philosophy's project of building permanent housing in which the writing of being and meaning can prosper. Our archives of knowledge and existence is inevitable, and also ineffable. This is why Derrida is regarded as a "poststructuralist." He works against, yet remains within the structure of metaphysics – that is, the metaphysics of structure, to which we turn next.

Here, then, it is worth pausing to examine more closely the notion of structure, undoubtedly one of the most important intellectual concepts to emerge from twentieth-century scholarly discourse. The intriguing architectural notion of "tensegrity" may enable us to better appreciate the implications and possibilities inherent within deconstruction's approach to structures – whether of buildings, organizations, language, or writing[26] – as systems that are inherently exposed to the stress of self-generated changes of state. Tensesgrity, a concatenation of "tensional integrity," is an architectural design principle that the renowned architect R. Buckminster Fuller first articulated in the 1920s. In the 1940s, the American sculptor Kenneth Snelson, a student of Fuller's, coined the term and then further developed and applied his mentor's principles to his own sculptural work. Today, one can see the principles of tensegrity at work in the "tensegritoys" carried by children's science toy stores.

Tensional integrity is the principal characteristic of an architectural design

system in which structures achieve stability through the countervailing forces of constant "compression" and "tension." Even in instances where tensegrity structures change their shape, both compression and tension are necessary to prevent structural failure. Thus, two complementary yet antagonistic types of forces come into play in the creation of stability in tensegrity structures. Forces that draw the elements of a structure closer together, "compression," and others that pull them farther apart, "tension," working against one another, somehow accomplish structural integrity. This seems almost counterintuitive.[27] Nevertheless, if this appears implausible Fuller went so far as to suggest that the two forces are not equal and that in fact the primary constituent of the world's structures is not compression, but tension:

Compression is that "realistic hard core" that men love to refer to, and its reality was universal, ergo comprehensive. Man must now break out of that habit and learn to play nature's game where tension is primary and where tension explains the coherence of the whole. Compression is convenient, very convenient, but always secondary and discontinuous.[28]

It is also important to notice that tensegrity structures transmit their tension across entire structures. Move one of its points and the entire structure changes its shape. Thus, "tension is continuously transmitted across all structural members. In other words, an increase in tension in one of the members results in increased tension in members throughout the structure – even on the opposite side."[29] Indeed, Hugh Kenner characterized tensegrity structures as "lifted outward by a hidden tensional system. It resembles a contained explosion."[30]

More pertinently, Fuller's "compression" and "tension" seem to approach deconstruction's view of instances of writing whose apparently pure self-contained transparencies of meaning actually harbour within themselves the constant stress between stability, on the one hand, and "difference" and "trace" on the other, and between structure (stability) and time (movement, anti-structure). In addition, tension and compression, like other binary terms, elude absolute definition because of their unstable nature; they contain traces of each other. According to Fuller, "No tension member is innocent of compression, and no compression member is innocent of tension. Tension and compression are inseparable and coordinate functions of structural systems."[31] Attempts to stabilize structures by applying greater compression induce forces of tension, and conversely, inducing tension to achieve structural stability will evoke the forces of compression.

Applied both in practical applications and for explanatory purposes, the principles of tensional integrity have spread far beyond the fields of architecture and building design to biology, organizational analysis,[32] and even object-oriented software design and development. Though not mentioning decon-

struction, one author has even suggested that tensegrity principles may find their most useful application in philosophy.[33]

And, indeed, deconstruction seems to converge in some measure with the notion of tensional integrity. In its implicit focus on the management of the potentially disruptive effects of the energy resident within structures, tensional integrity verges on Derrida's understanding of the destabilizing effects of energy residing within the various structures of writing. (Derrida draws on French intellectual George Bataille to develop his ideas about energy and language.)[34] Unlike Fuller, however, Derrida focuses on surplus energy. By definition it is that portion of the energy which our writing efforts fail to consume, which eludes our control, and which always escapes our best constructive attempts. It is language's overabundance of energy that undermines writing's best efforts to impose – to capture and fix once for all time – permanent structures of being and meaning.

This glimpse at tensional integrity and the workings of compression, tension, and surplus energy within structures brings us to the third reason for the archivist's aversion to the writings of deconstruction. Briefly, archivists have emphasized the forces of "compression" and virtually ignored the effects of the "tensional" aspects of surplus energy, something that will likely prove more difficult to do as the electronic age evolves. In a way, deconstruction calls to our attention the discomfiting constant play of tension and compression within writing and archiving.

How might the principles of tensional integrity bear on archival preservation? Is it possible that the linguistic phenomena archivists encounter – records, record series, information architectures, software designs, business process engineering, file forms and formats, as well as metadata structures and other contextual tools, to name a few – can never entirely contain or compress, that is, control the energy and tension they emit? Does supplementary meaning always strain control of the architecture, the system, the economy – the structure? Is it possible that archival designs to keep traces – artifacts, records, writings, bits, their various sources – never succeed in controlling or "capturing," meaning and being exhaustively? This would seem to be so in the case of documents viewed in their capacity as textual structure. Indeed, the third reason for the archival community's disregard of deconstruction concerns the apparent divergence of two perspectives on writing: the intimately connected notions of writing as *textuality or textual play*, which preoccupies Derrida, and writing as *record formation* or *archive*, which preoccupies archivists.

Archivists have commented sparingly on the notion of textuality (though they may sometimes casually refer to "texts"). However, among postmodernists and literary theorists the concept of text has emerged as a focal point of interest and debate. Moreover, the nature of textuality has found some interest in other disciplines, including the work of some anthropologists, philosophers, and historians. Indeed, in some of its more radical forms, literary theory

advances the view that the usual demarcation between "literature" and other kinds of documents is artificial. In these views, all writing in all its forms presents instances of text, whatever its provenance and whatever its authors' intentions. According to the late Roland Barthes, for example, "Text does not come to a stop with (good) literature; it cannot be apprehended as part of a hierarchy or even a simple division of genres. What constitutes the Text is, on the contrary (or precisely), its subversive force with regard to old classifications."[35]

As deeply immersed as they are in problems of description and documentation, archivists seldom talk about "texts," "textuality," or "writing." To most archivists, record-keeping and analysis of texts have little if anything to do with one another. Unlike several other professions, archivists have never passed through "the linguistic turn."[36] Few, if any archivists, would be willing to abide the characterization of records or archives as simply one order of text. How many archivists would embrace the idea that bureaucratic writings are texts that merely constitute one more genre of literature – or, for that matter, that works of literature are simply another form of documentation of the same order of being as, for example, institutional records.

Many archivists would probably object to the notion of records as texts. This is because those who are familiar with the notion of "textuality" believe that it lacks some of the essential characteristics of "recordness."[37] What texts inevitably contain is a measure of surplus energy: in the parlance of cyberculture, text is "hyper" and infinitely linkable to other texts. Indeed, a seamlessness oblivious of borders may exist among texts, constantly referring to each other: this represents a decisive break with the notion of record. Text is an undisciplined and undisciplinable object, "a structure of possible structures," a document formed of virtual documents.[38] All text, electronic or not, is hypertext. The information age, the age of hypermedia, is only making this more evident.

Most important, perhaps, textuality radically diminishes the need to posit the presence of an intentional author, the presence of a determinative "creator," or a creative context. In the domain of textuality the presence of an author or dominant creative force is incidental to the relationship among interactive texts – like evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins' notion of human beings as mere dispensable machines that genes use to reproduce, evolve, and survive the disappearance of our mortal bodies.[39] Indeed, the author's dominance in the author-text-reader triad evaporates. The persistence of authorial control over text even in absence or death is a chimera. Authorial lordship over documentary meaning diminishes significantly once, actually well before the work is released into the public domain of textuality. Because such notions vitiate the concepts of "author," "origins," and "uniqueness" they obviously complicate the belief that records possess a single definable provenance.

These factors – the repudiation of the author-context, the surplus energy

inherent in words, and the seamlessness – *seem* to make the concept of text antagonistic to the concept of a record, and to render the "discipline" of archives irrelevant.[40] What are we to make, then, of Derrida's claim that everything is text, including the archivist's stable, preserved record. In his widely quoted phrase, "there is nothing outside the text," or there is no out-side-text.[41] Derrida is not claiming that there is nothing real in the world. Rather, he is saying that the things that humans know and make in the world are themselves textual effects. Events, phenomena, natural and artificial objects, ideas, and concepts – all in one way or another owe their appearance and identity to textuality. Humans' only access to knowledge of, only connec-tions with anything is through their language. Indeed, even what emerges in consciousness, even our thoughts and ideas, ineluctably do so as a form of writing. Consciousness itself is something made in and through language; what takes shape in our consciousness does so as a form of "writing" that serves to structure our view of the world. The instantiation of the real, our con-struing of the world's objects and events inevitably takes place in and through writing – as textual phenomena. Writing – language – and consciousness of the world emerge in tandem, for one does not possess the privilege of lying at the origin of the other. There is no court of appeal beyond our textuality.[42]

The mission of archives is to prevent records, those writings that migrate from consciousness to public, durable external media, from unraveling into promiscuous textuality. This is the structural work that archivists expect prov-enance, original order, and physical media – with its "structure" and "context" – to accomplish. For Derrida, such archival preservation offers a prime instance of the imperious practice of metaphysics. Under conventional description, our descriptive principles form the reinforcing steel and concrete that presumably compress and contain public meaning and being together to form enduring structures of authentic creativity and complete integrity – records, record series, fonds, and so on. Metaphysics backs the pretension that language – the practice of naming – provides a reliable path to capturing a record of essences, identities, of meanings and being.

Derrida's claim, again, is not that humans can overcome this condition. Rather, his practice aims to show another inevitable process at work – the tex-tual slippages, the horizontal stressing and twisting, and the swaying that accompanies, and constantly threatens to topple all linguistic performance – whether that performance emerges in the form of a Madison Avenue ad, a sci-entific paper, a film, an architectural design, a government policy document, a professional conference presentation, "literature," or for that matter, all forms of transcription of information from our psyches to external media and back again. Ultimately, all of life's events are forms of inscription and communica-tion, and all form instances of textuality. Records function as "records," but for poststructuralists, also enter the seamless, subversive world of textuality and "intertextuality."[43] And intertextuality serves as "a strategic instrument,"

according to one commentator on deconstruction, "which can effectively combat the old law of context,"[44] and the legal wrapping of creative subjectivity.

Nevertheless, from the archival perspective all instances of writing (according to Derrida's view), fall under the terms of a law of contractuality. All writing sets out to achieve the status of a legal contract. What is involved in advancing such a claim? What is implied, that is, by saying that our traditional conception of writing has behind it aspirations of achieving the status of a contract?

Contract, here, refers to something beyond the traditional and frankly authoritarian idea from diplomatics that all social acts occur under legal sanction and are ultimately juridical in nature – although it certainly includes it. A legal contract is a species of writing that is only more obvious than other forms of writing in its claims to foresee any and all possibilities of divergent interpretation. More specifically, legal documents attempt to preempt the intrusion of any discordant elements from the past or present and foresee all future contingencies of interpretation or misinterpretation that might threaten or strain the binding conditions of textual meaning and challenge documentary truthfulness. The achievement of such conditions of containment and compression is meant to "capture" and subsequently impose and enforce the "original terms" of the text such that it can, in and by itself, perpetually represent itself in the absence of the original signatories. It is meant to impose what postmodernists call "closure." All instances of writing, like drawing up contracts, seek to establish terms of unassailable, sovereign authority. By their very nature, all acts of writing harbour this contractual pretension – to become a record essentially by closing the record on the record.

Deconstruction aims to demonstrate what is impossible about the notion of such sovereign presence, about contractual closure and infinitude, that is, about writing. Derrida's entire writing is a commentary on this preservative, archival ambition. For Derrida, the conventional notion of writing has it assuming the character of a last will and testament. Writing's intrinsic pretense is that it will withstand the winds of time in the absence of the author, whether that time arrives ten seconds after the text has been signed, or ten centuries after this hopeful moment. Writing simultaneously announces the absence – the death – and the presence of the author. As we have seen, this is the paradox of the structural delay inherent in writing, one that it is impossible to overcome. *Writing is expressly meant to be taken out of context*, and archivists are major contributors to this task.[45]

For philosophical, political, and ethical reasons, Derrida deconstructs the notion of intellectual control implicit in the idea of the contract. Yet, the archivist's main purpose is, again, to fix the hitherto undisciplined text – to fix it, and to fix it in place, to cut off any surplus energy within textuality,[46] whose "hyperness" (to coin a word) threatens always to disrupt the integrity of recordness. Acts of preservation, then, implicitly include efforts to set limits.

Archivists act as collaborators in the "contractual" process, in the preservation of writing, that is, in the enforcement of "last wills and testaments." This is the principle means by which a piece of writing achieves its status as a record – through the elaboration and preservation of conditions that compress the text into enduring meaning.

Infrequently expressed, the archivist's goal is to do everything possible to ensure that what the author, the putative creator of the text, meant remains fixed for so long as certain interests (individual, corporation, government, the "people") deem survival of the writing's meaning necessary. This interpretation of the purpose of archival practice is the only one that makes sense in light of our enormous efforts to preserve the exact image of the document (structure and content), and to identify the circumstances surrounding and constraining recorded expression (technological conditions and intellectual context). In accordance with certain rules or principles of the craft, archivists take measures to preserve both text and context.

These acts, acts which essentially impose limits on possibilities, are a form of exclusion or forgetting. This, too, is part of preserving the contract implicit in safeguarding evidential integrity. How is this "restricted economy," as Derrida would call it – the mode in which we normally operate – established? One of the principle instruments is one already mentioned several times, one which archivists know well. The answer is, of course, something archivists call, or name, *context*. Archival methodology's focus on context stems from a responsibility to exclude, or to at least minimize the tensional possibility of alternative readings and meanings. This is why archivists work to identify or select – to impose – a single context on content. Context conditions the evocation of meaning; it disciplines textual content. To context, archivists implicitly confide the task of taming text's "hyperness," eliminating textual ambivalence, halting the operation of difference, and stanching the multiplication of interpretations. Context is the instrument of archival and intellectual content "control." Archivists deploy provenance to defend the borders of context, to specify *for all time* the time when and place where the creation of meaning began and ended. This is the structure of a record.

Ultimately, context provides an envelope – though the information technology jargon of "containers" and "encapsulation" is more expressive – to which archivists entrust documents. With these moments of complete presence now protected for eternity, archivists rest secure knowing that the fate of the contents of the envelope is sealed – forever. Within this impenetrable time capsule, an envelope bearing a sender's name, a postmark, a specific address or destination (at least those initially apparent) seals the fate of the documents. Those who later receive the envelope will understand from whence the contents came, and in understanding that, accept its authenticity and recover its true meaning – that original meaning placed in the envelope by its sovereign author.

It is in breaking open the envelope's or container's seal, however, and allowing the contents to again escape into public view – whether immediately after completion or many years later – that the hope of recovering a text's meaning lies. Yet the text always threatens the writing's archival condition. Writing opens a scene of constant struggle between the archiving of records and the releasing of texts. To achieve meaning a document must achieve an archival state. Yet writing is fated to oscillate between its intrinsic structure of delay and differance, on the one hand, and its simultaneous transcendence of the debilitating effects of this very structure.[47]

Archiving is an attempt to preserve and to annul the effects of time. It is an attempt to both stretch and shrink time. Archival record keeping is an attempt to simultaneously keep records in and rescue records from their context. It is part of the structure of delay and difference, but enables the attempt to over-come the structure of delay and differance. It is an effort to mark "individual [authorial] expression" and to preserve "transcendental coherence."[48] Archival theory is an attempt to preserve recordness and to annul textuality, and to pre-serve textuality and to annul records. Archivists aim to let the records speak for themselves, from the purity of their singular origins. Yet they also *speak up* for records by avowing their silence as professionals.

This might be how Derrida would define archival work – not as an impossi-bility, but as an important, Sisyphean effort to make a difference in the world by constructing an elaborate structure to eradicate the appearance – the pres-ence – of archival intervention, both declaring and preserving its absence. Yet, as with Derrida's confinement within metaphysics, it is impossible for archi-vists to escape into silence before the record. Silence itself emerges, becomes evident, precisely as archivists make their vow of silence – in their speech, in their writing, in their works and texts.[49]

Deconstruction, finally, is a work of complementarity. It is an attempt to account for the limits and possibilities of the archiving of human identity and human expression, all the while acknowledging the limits of deconstruction. Indeed, Derrida's work represents an attempt to supplement the positive project of philosophy. The philosophers' dream is an archival one. It envisions the achievement of durable metaphysical conditions for absolute presence and total knowledge. Derrida enables us to catch a glimpse of the ethical, political, and philosophical underside – the other side – of this effort. It is plausible to argue that humans cannot do without, and, truly have never been able to do without either perspective. Archiving contains the seeds of its own decon-struction. Similarly, deconstructive practice, as Derrida has admitted, indeed emphasized, can never entirely escape the effects of the metaphysical, the archival – the *appearance*, through archives, of full being and meaning. Indeed, archiving is the default[50] condition of human communication.

The relation between archiving and deconstruction, then, is an intimate one. It resembles the "anti-epistemological" relationship of "complementarity"

between wave and particle that Danish physicist Niels Bohr described to account for atomic behaviour. Neither wave nor particle are by themselves sufficient to account for atomic phenomena. Nor, however, can one ever observe the trace of one without losing sight of the other. These are "two aspects of reality that are mutually exclusive yet both necessary for a full understanding of what is to be described."[51] To adapt Fuller's description of tensegrity, neither can archiving ever completely exclude the working presence of deconstruction, nor can deconstructive practice prevent its own emission of archival effects. The two exist in intimate tension.

Neither archives nor deconstruction contains sufficient resources to ever completely overcome the self-subversions inherent in their respective claims and practical concerns. Yet, there is no single time or place from which the two strategies can be pursued or observed simultaneously.[52] Neither archival theory nor deconstructive philosophy alone can account for writing's effects.

Understanding this much may enable archivists to better discern that Derrida's philosophy is hardly preoccupied with the annihilation of archives – an impossible mission by his own admission – but with the deconstruction of archives.[53] For one simple reason, it is important not to mistake deconstruction for destruction: Derrida believes that to call what he does criticism or destruction, to characterize deconstruction as the diametrical opposite or in fundamental contradiction with archival practices and metaphysics is wrong. Such a claim inevitably leads to the view that deconstruction aims to supersede metaphysics and archiving with a new ultimate synthesis, one that would again purport to offer a more reliable source of truth, a new foundation for naming and classifying acts, phenomena, and objects in the world, and one that might better capture the natural order of reality that had been hidden from us. This naming pretense, Derrida believes, harbours potentially dangerous consequences; it has been responsible for some of the worst acts in human history. This ethical concern explains why Derrida, in his writing, expends such enormous effort to avoid a position of pure opposition or criticism – of pure, overpowering presence. He wants to avoid falling back into metaphysics, into archiving.

By his writing, Derrida aims to show how the archival concept quite literally embodies the centuries-long project of closing in on the establishment of an absolute regime of metaphysical truth. His writing also demonstrates that the meticulous unpacking of the metaphysical principles immanent in writing (the breaking open of the seal) is absolutely and constantly necessary to the avoidance – even when intentions appear morally laudable and ethically sound – of the catastrophes and failures that throughout history have accompanied claims of the discovery of a natural order, of an independent reality, and of metaphysical truth. Deconstruction works in the realm of claims concerning the "nature" of "recordness" (or of anything else), assertions regarding the truth in records, and guarantees concerning an extra-textual reality that our

records, our writings, inevitably purport to name. This motivation informs his pursuit of the deconstruction of all claims to knowledge and truth.

Archivists may not agree with everything Derrida's philosophy sets out to do. However, the challenges it sets before us, the questions that Derrida's work relentlessly poses, compel all people and institutions to examine critically and ceaselessly justify the integrity of their naming practices, intellectual assumptions, technological beliefs, political goals, ethical intentions, and moral responsibilities. Indeed, Derrida's dissection of the concepts of decision-making, technology, accountability, and, especially, responsibility may provide a fourth reason for the apparent distance between archival practice and deconstruction. Consideration of these matters, however, will have to await another occasion.

Notes

* I would like to thank my colleague Richard Brown, National Archives of Canada, for generous advice on issues related to contemporary archival theory and methodology, and post-structuralism. My thanks also go to the two readers who persevered with the subject, and provided useful criticism of the manuscript. Finally, I wish to acknowledge editor Don Macleod's close reading and insightful, thought-provoking suggestions. All helped to improve the quality of the essay. Errors of fact and interpretation, however, remain mine.

1 See, for example, Mark Lilla, "The Politics of Jacques Derrida," *New York Times Review of Books* (25 June 1998), pp. 36–41; David Lehman, *Signs of the Times: Deconstruction and the Fall of Paul de Man* (New York, 1991).

2 Ibid. These characterizations stem from Derrida's interest in the philosophy of Nietzsche, which some have linked to the rise of Nazi ideology, and his philosophical filiation with Martin Heidegger, who had links to the Nazi party. In addition, Derrida's friendship with Paul De Man, a Yale literary theorist whom the press exposed as having been a Nazi collaborator in his native Belgium before the emigrating to the United States has been cited. Among many writings on Derrida and De Man, see the special issue of *Critical Inquiry* 15, no. 4 (Summer 1989).

3 On the political content of Derrida's work, see Nancy Fraser, "The French Derrideans: Politicizing Deconstruction or Deconstructing the Political?" and Robert Bernasconi, "Politics Beyond Humanism: Mandela and the Struggle Against Apartheid," in Gary B. Madison, ed., *Working Through Derrida* (Evanston, Ill., 1993), pp. 51–75; Christopher Norris, *Derrida* (Cambridge, Mass., 1987), pp. 155–71, and passim; Richard Beardsworth, *Derrida and the Political* (New York, 1996); Francoix Debrix, "Impassable Passages: Derrida, Aporia, and the Question of Politics," *Postmodern Culture* 7, no. 3 (May 1997). On the historical context of the politics of Derrida's writing, see Lee Morrissey, "Derrida, Algeria, and 'Structure, Sign, and Play'," *Postmodern Culture* 9, no. 2 (January 1999), and Stephen Helmling, "Historicizing Derrida," *Postmodern Culture* 4, no. 3 (May 1994).

4 George Cotkin's description of the American reception of the existentialism of Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir in the years following the Second World War bears some striking resemblances to the reception accorded deconstruction in North America forty years later. George Cotkin, "French Existentialism and American Popular Culture, 1945–1948," *The Historian* 61, no. 2 (Winter 1999). See also, Rebecca Comay, "Geopolitics of Translation: Deconstruction in America," *Stanford French Review* 15, nos. 1–2 (1991), pp. 47–79.

5 Barbara Johnson, *A World of Difference* (Baltimore, 1987), pp. 11–16. On the significance of

various versions of the story of deconstruction's demise, see Jeffery Williams, "The Death of Deconstruction, the End of Theory, and Other Ominous Rumours," *Narrative* 4, no. 1 (June 1996).

6 Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (Chicago, 1995).

7 Of course, many believe that memory and archives differ because archives concerns a written past and psychological memory concerns images stored in the mind rather than on a medium. However, in his survey of the history of western writing on memory – in Plato, Hobbes, Locke, Freud, and Merleau-Ponty, and recent writings in the neurosciences – philosopher David Farrell Crell explores the significance of the constant resort to metaphors of inscription on a material medium to explain the operations of memory. David Farrell, *Of Memory, Reminiscence, and Writing: On the Verge* (Bloomington, c. 1990). On the difficulty throughout history of discussing memory without resorting to metaphor, see also Daniel Dennett, *Consciousness Explained* (Boston, 1991), p. 455.

8 Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* Gayatri Chakravorty Spivack, trans. (Baltimore, 1976), p. 15.

9 This pragmatism is a more elaborate version of the notion that archives is a "craft," a code word meaning that archivists have successfully resisted the temptation to over intellectualize their work, while also avoiding the less savory aspects of modern professionalism. Accordingly, archivists have often insisted that archives is a practical, that is, no nonsense occupation, undeterred by fruitless abstraction.

10 See Stephen Waring, *Taylorism Transformed: Scientific Management Since 1945* (Chapel Hill, NC., 1998). Waring surveys the theories of such important figures as Alfred Chandler, Elton Mayo, Herbert Simon, Chester Barnard, and Peter Drucker. There are many studies attesting to the pervasive social influence of the engineering professions, particularly its dominance of the ranks of corporate management beginning back in the 1920s. See David E. Nye, *Electrifying America: Social Meanings of a New Technology, 1880–1940* (Cambridge, Mass., 1990), pp. 138–42; G. Pascal Zachary, *Endless Frontier: Engineer of the Century* (New York, 1997); David F. Noble, *America By Design. Science, Technology and Corporate Capitalism* (New York, 1977); Thomas Hughes, *Rescuing Prometheus* (New York, 1998).

11 Derrida, "Differance," p. 11. For a discussion on the values frequently accompanying use of the term "information," its "transferability," "nobility," and the "preservation of meaning," for example, see Geoffrey Nunberg, "Farewell to the Information Age," in Geoffrey Nunberg, ed., *The Future of the Book* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1996), pp. 106ff. Peter Drucker, Tom Peters, and James Gleick, all arguably neo-Taylorites,[55] all insightful, imaginative, and even prescient, have emerged as the most influential philosophers of knowledge for our time. On the persistence of the influence of Frederick Winslow Taylor in management thought, see Waring, *Scientific Management Since 1945*, passim.

12 Peter Drucker, *The Age of Discontinuity. Guidelines to Our Changing Society* (New York, 1968).

13 The structure of Derrida's own published works embodies this view. Take a look, for example, at *Archive Fever*. The book runs to 111 pages. An introductory "Note," "Exergue," "Preamble," and "Foreword" take us to page 83. The "Thesis" chapter consumes all of thirteen pages, and the "Postscript," "Translator's Notes," and "Works Cited" cover the remainder of the book. This may be one reason why readers find Derrida's writing so frustrating. It is difficult to tell the thesis, the heart of the matter, from the "externals" – the introductions, preambles, and so on. This is one of several tactics Derrida uses to elicit the fragile, tentative nature of our differentiation between what is "central" and what is "marginal" in texts, what is peripheral in life – and in archives, for that matter. Interestingly, there is an etymological relation between "heart" and "record."

14 See, for example, Jacques Derrida, "Violence and Metaphysics," in Jacques Derrida, *Writing*

and Difference (Chicago, 1978). This essay is an ethical meditation on the work of Emmanuel Levinas, whose philosophy centers around the status of "otherness," and the effects of human acts to impose what "is" and "is not" the case on the "other." This will have implications for Derrida's view that in writing's attempt to state the heart of the matter by resort to a language of transparent, settled meanings always fall short of the author's mark.

15 Irene Harvey, *Derrida and The Economy of Differance* (Bloomington, 1986), p. 3. Derrida himself explicitly repudiates the characterization of deconstruction as a form of criticism, and explains why. See "Lettre a un ami japonais," in Jacques Derrida, *Psyche. Inventions de l'autre* (Paris, 1987), pp. 387–93. In this same letter, Derrida also briefly and explicitly tries to explain the nature of deconstruction.

16 Rodolphe Gasche's widely admired *The Tain of the Mirror: Derrida and the Philosophy of Reflection* (Cambridge, Mass., 1986) remains unsurpassed as a treatment of deconstruction as a work of philosophy. In addition, Derrida's commitment to philosophy, problematic though it may be, is evident in his membership in GREPH (Groupe de recherche sur l'enseignement philosophique), a group dedicated to promoting the introduction of philosophy at the pre-college level. His status as a founding member of the International College of Philosophy also demonstrates his commitment to philosophy. See also Derrida's speech at UNESCO, "Of Humanities and the Philosophical Discipline," reproduced in *Surfaces* 4 (1994). It makes a claim for the importance of the autonomy of philosophy.

17 Most of the following discussion of differance draws on one of Derrida's most important and widely cited essays, "Differance," which, not surprisingly, largely concerns the meaning or non-meaning of the term, and its implications for the status of meaning and being in general. "Differance," in Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy,* trans. Alan Bass (Chicago, 1986).

18 Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics* (New York, 1966). This classic book in linguistics was pulled together from notes his former students gathered and published in 1915 as *Cours generale de linguistique*.

19 Derrida, "Differance," p. 3.

20 Jacques Derrida, "The Double Session," *Dissemination* (Chicago, 1981), p. 177.

21 Terence Hawkes, *Structuralism and Semiotics* (Los Angeles, 1977), p. 148.

22 Mark Taylor, "Introduction: System...Structure...Difference...Other," in Mark Taylor, ed., *Deconstruction in Context. Literature and Philosophy* (Chicago, 1986), pp. 13–14. For an in-depth study of the relationship between deconstruction, systems theory, and cybernetics, see Christopher Johnson, *System and Writing in the Philosophy of Jacques Derrida* (Cambridge, Eng., 1993), pp. 148–50 and passim.

23 Derrida, "Differance," p. 7.

24 Ibid.

25 Jacques Derrida, "How to Avoid Speaking: Denials," in Sanford Budick and Wolfgang Iser, eds., *Languages of the Unsayable. The Play of Negativity in Literature and Literary Theory* (New York, 1989), pp. 3–30.

26 "It is because it extends to solid structures, to "material" institutions, and not only to discourses or meaningful representations that deconstruction is always distinguishable from an analysis or a critique." Derrida cited in Harvey, *Deconstruction and the Economy of Differance*, p. 3.

27 Donald Ingber, "The Architecture of Life," *Scientific American* 278, no. 1 (January 1998). A life scientist, Ingber discusses how the principles of tensegrity might be used to characterize cell structures.

28 R. Buckminster Fuller, *Synergetics. Explorations in the Geometry of Thinking* (New, 1975), p. 356.

29 Ingber, "The Architecture of Life."

30 Hugh Kenner, *Geodesic Math and How to Use It* (Los Angeles, 1976).

31 Fuller, *Synergetics*, p. 357.

32 Anthony Judge, "Transcending Duality Through Tensional Integrity: Part I : A Lesson in Organization from Building Design," and "Part 2: From Systems-Versus-Networks to Tensegrity Organizations," *Transnational Association* 5 (1978), pp. 248–57, 258–65.

33 Anthony Pugh, *An Introduction to Tensegrity* (Berkeley, 1976), p. 56.

34 Bataille was a French essayist and theorist who in fact trained as an archivist at L'École des Chartes in Paris.

35 The literature on the notion of text and textuality is vast. One of the earliest to propose the authorless text, and to formulate the concept of cognomen of "literature" to apply to all forms of writing is the late Roland Barthes. See "From Work to Text," in Josue V. Harari, ed., *Textual Strategies: Perspectives in Post-Structuralist Criticism* (Ithaca, 1979), pp. 73–81.

36 The "linguistic turn" is a phrase first used to describe philosophy's identification of issues of language in the 1920s and 1930s as holding the key to solving philosophical problems. It then reappeared in the 1970s and 1980s in several other disciplines, including history.

37 With his primary concern to criticize what he construes as archivists' continuing delusional and obsessional relationship of dependence upon history, leading archival academic Richard Cox invokes as support for his case David Harlan's remarks (in *The Degradation of American History*) to fellow historians concerning the resilience of postmodernism and the influence of its idea of textuality on historical practice, which many historians hope and believe has disappeared from the scene. Harlan's central argument is that the abandonment of literary criticism for documentary criticism and the search for objectivity has lead to the moral degradation of American history. Unabashedly present-centered, Harlan is not warning other historians *against* the influence of literature on history. Rather he is urging them to embrace it.

   Curiously, Cox seems to side with Harlan. Indeed, in Harlan's criticism of the historical profession as in decline because of its neglect of literary approaches to documents, Cox purports to have found evidence that the profession to which archivists have slavishly turned for guidance is falling apart. Cox even seems to cite as support for his own point Harlan's complaint that historians have ignored the insights of literary criticism in teaching students how to analyze and interpret records.

   It is not clear what point Cox is trying to make. Is he citing Harlan's criticism as itself an example of historical practice gone terribly wrong? Or is he agreeing with Harlan's criticism of the historical profession as a correct diagnosis of an ailing profession? If the latter, he seems to miss the point entirely that Harlan's clear invocation of the methodology of literary criticism is incompatible with, if not inimical to the commonly accepted principles of archives, and current record theory. By my reading of the passages Cox cites, Harlan is actually critical of approaching sources as "documents." On the contrary, Harlan seems to be a proponent of approaching sources as "text." In fact, he endorses *decontextualized* textual criticism because he thinks it is supportive of an "ethics of reading," which, he claims, historians lack. What seems like a fundamental misreading prevents Cox from appreciating, and therefore stating fully and confronting productively the stakes that are involved in the differences between the contemporary concept of "textuality," which Harlan promotes, and the concept of "recordness" that archivists, including Cox himself, have been working hard to establish, or to reestablish. Either way, he seems determined to read Harlan in a way that accommodates his determination to diminish, if not to dismiss, the relevance of history for archival practice. (It is also unclear as to what Cox is referring to when he mentions "history.") Richard J. Cox, "American Archivists, Cyberculture, and Stasis," in *Cyber, Hyper, or Resolutely Jurassic? Proceeding of an International Symposium Marking Twenty-five Years of Professional Archival Training in Ireland, University College, Dublin, Oct. 2-3, 1998.* (Http://www.ucd.ie/~archives/sympos.html [as of 17 October 1999]). David Harlan, *The Degradation of American History* (Chicago, 1997), pp. 191–92.

   At the same conference, another leading academic archivist, Luciana Duranti, marshaling the weight of long European tradition, similarly attempted to convince her audience of archi-

vists' misplaced reliance on history, which, starting in the late nineteenth century, served to draw archivists away from the original, presumably authentic, juridical and diplomatic roots of their practice. Duranti, "The Future of Archival Scholarship," Ibid.

38 Jay David Bolter, *Writing Space. The Computer in the History of Literacy* (Hillsdale, N.J., 1990), p. 144.

39 Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene* (New York, 1976).

40 On the notion of text as an anti-disciplinary object, one whose nature is being contested among various disciplines, and which resists accommodation of the "ossifying" agendas and needs of the established disciplines, see John Mowatt, *Text: The Genealogy of an Anti-Disciplinary Object* (Durham, N.C., 1992), p. 103 and passim.

41 This famous, or infamous, phrase appears in "... That Dangerous Supplement ...." an essay on Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Confessions*. In a way, the supplement to which Derrida refers is media. There is always something mediating – standing between – us and our wish to make contact with the outside "real" or "natural" world, something (present) between full absence and full presence. That something is text, or writing. The writing to which Derrida refers, however, can occur on paper, in speech, or in thought. To be fair, it is worth quoting from this passage at length.

"There is nothing outside the text [there is no outside-text; il n'y a pas de hors-texte]. ... What we have tried to show by following the guiding line of the "dangerous supplement," is that in what one calls the real life of these existences, "of flesh and bone," beyond and behind what one believes can be circumscribed as Rousseau's text, there has never been anything but writing. There have never been anything but supplements, substitutive significations, ... the "real" supervening, and being added only while taking on meaning from a trace and from invocations of the supplement, etc. And thus to infinity, for we have read, in the text, that the absolute present, Nature, that which words like "real mother" name, have always already escaped, have never existed; that which opens meaning and language is writing as the disappearance of natural presence." Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, pp. 156–7.

42 For other interpretations of Derrida's phrase, see Nicholas Royle, "Yes, Yes, the University in Ruins," in *Critical Inquiry* 25, no. 1 (Autumn 1999), p. 147ff and note 3; Dominick LaCapra, *Rethinking Intellectual History: Texts, Contexts, Language* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1983,) p. 26, and LaCapra, *Soundings in Critical Theory* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1989), p. 19.

43 The term "intertextuality" was coined by French psychoanalyst and semiotician Julia Kristeva in *Semeiotike. Recherche pour une semanalyse* in the late 1960s. In 1974, Kristeva suggested that the word "transposition" better expressed her meaning and that "intertextuality" had mislead people into believing that it merely concerned the "study of sources" rather than the passage from one sign system to another. Margaret Waller, trans. *Revolution in Poetic Language,* (New York, 1984), pp. 59–60.

44 Vincent Leitch, *Deconstructive Criticism. An Advanced Introduction* (New York, 1983), p. 161.

45 On the relation between "contractualist discourse," the concept of signature, and the sovereignty of authorship, see Gilbert Larochelle, "From Kant to Foucault. What Remains of the Author in Postmodernism," in Lisa Buranen and Alice Roy, eds., *Perspectives on Plagiarism and Intellectual Property in a Postmodern World* (New York, 1999), p. 125. A cursory review of law journals will quickly reveal the concern about intellectual property issues that the emergence of cyberspace has occasioned among lawyers and legal scholars. Notions of "personal jurisdiction," "physical" versus electronic presence, copyright, originality, and "sequential innovation" all revolve around the enlightenment ontology of the person as a sovereign being and creator, and author versus reader rights. See, for example, David Nimmer, "Brains and Other Paraphernalia of the Digital Age, *"Harvard Journal of Law and Technology* 10, no. 1 (Fall 1996); Douglas Y'Barbo, "On Legal Protection for Electronic Texts: A Reply to Professor Patterson and Judge Birch," *Journal of Intellectual Property Law* 5, no. 1 (Fall 1997);

Alex Morrison, "Hijack on the road to Xanadu: The Infringement of Copyright in HTML Documents via Networked Competitors and the Legitimacy of Browsing Hypermedia Documents,"*Journal of Information, Law and Technology* 1 (February 1999).

On how separateness – "individuation," "isolation," "detachment," and "inner selfhood" – have been embedded in law, see Thomas Barton, "Troublesome Connections: Law and Post-Enlightenment Culture," *Emory Law Journal* 47, no. 1 (Winter 1998), passim. On the changing notion of the individual as an "agent" and "guarantor of meaning" in history, see Simon Baddeley, "Governmentality," in Brian D. Loader, ed., *The Governance of Cyberspace. Politics, Technology, and Global Restructuring* (London, Eng., 1997), pp. 90–91 and passim; James Boyle, *Shamans, Software, and Spleens: Law and the Construction of the Information Society* (Cambridge, Mass., 1996), ch. 10 and passim.

46 The Victorian Electronic Records Strategy Project final report, for examples, refers to locking a record, and various legal texts discussing the definition of records refer to "fixity" and "fixation" of meaning.

47 George Allan's elegant, wistful prose beautifully expresses this condition: "The problematic character of temporal achievement must be transcended without transcending its distinctive and unrepeatable quality, lest the very effort at salvaging what is most precious result in its perishing." *The Importances of the Past. A Meditation on the Authority of Tradition* (Albany, 1986), p. 154. On the kind of paradox involved in Allan's characterization, Derrida writes that writing both evokes and at the same time necessarily transcends the absent, dead intentional moment of writing. Otherwise, he insists, it would not be writing. Writing, by definition, survives and transcends its moment of subjectivity. This is what makes historicity possible: "The silence of prehistoric arcana and buried civilizations, the entombment of lost intentions and guarded secrets, and the illegibility of the lapidary inscription disclose the transcendental sense of death as what unites these things to the absolute privilege of intentionality in the very instance of its essential juridical failure ..." Thus, "the originality of the field of writing is its ability to dispense with, *due to its sense*, every present reading in general." *Edmund Husserl's Origin of Geometry. An Introduction* (Lincoln, 1989), p. 88.

48 Mowatt, *Text*, p. 7.

49 Pat Bigelow discusses the relationship between silence, writing, and existence. *Kierkegaard and the Problem of Writing* (Gainesville, Fl., 1987),

50   Interestingly, the French term for default is *défaut*. It translates as absence or lack, failure to meet obligations, as in defaulting on loans. Through its usage in the context of computer programs, however, we have come to think of default as a normal state.

51 Arkady Plotnitsky, *Complementarity. Anti-Epistemology After Bohr and Derrida* (Durham, N.C., 1994), p. 73.

52 On the applications of Bohr's notion of complementarity to the unpacking of philosophical and religious issues, see Thorleif Boman, *Hebrew Thought Compared with Greek* (London, 1960), pp. 207–8. For an exploration of the affinities between Bohr's physics theory and philosophy and Derridean deconstruction, see Plotnitsky, *Complementarity: Anti-Epistemology After Bohr and Derrida*, passim.

53 In "Lettre a un ami japonais," Derrida expresses surprise at how the term "deconstruction" arose to become so closely associated with his work. It is a term that Derrida first used almost in passing in the French version of *Of Grammatology* (*De la grammatologie*) back in 1967. There he wrote: "The 'rationality ... which governs a writing thus enlarged and radicalized, no longer issues from a logos. Further, it inaugurates the destruction, not the demolition, but the de-sedimentation, the de-construction, of all significations that have their source in that logos." *Of Grammatology*, p. 10.