

Articles

On (Archival) Odyssey(s)*

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RÉSUMÉ Cet article est basé sur la conférence d'ouverture présentée par l'auteur au congrès de 2001 de l'Association of Canadian Archivists dont le thème était "The Archival Odyssey". À un premier niveau, il s'agit d'une méditation étendue sur la résonance des différents sens suggérés par la conjonction des trois mots du thème de la conférence. À un autre niveau, c'est une déconstruction très focalisée de ce thème. L'auteur dévoile les postulats sous-tendant le thème comme exercice de construction de sens et montre comment ces postulats masquent ou excluent certaines dimensions sig-

* This article was first presented as the keynote address to the ACA conference in Winnipeg in June 2001. The other plenary papers, by Terry Cook and Heather MacNeil, also appear in this issue of *Archivaria*. Early drafts of the conference paper were read by Terry Cook, Wendy Duff, Kerry Harris, Ether Kriger, Vicki Lemieux, and Sheila Powell. I am grateful to all of them for their patience and insight.

Meaningful introduction to Canada occurred for me a long time ago through the work of Margaret Atwood and Leonard Cohen. "Introduction to Canada" was, then, a "revealing" through the "circling of absence." Much later came exposure to Canadian archival discourse – revelatory for me at the time, and still today for me the richest, most diverse national discourse in archives. Through that exposure came connection with Terry Cook, who visited South Africa in 1994 and 1997 and who enabled me to visit Canada for the first time in 1995. Intense professional collaboration and friendship transformed my thinking on archives, societal memory construction, and a host of other things. Terry pre-eminently, but Canadian archival discourse generally, taught me that archives is a terrain for philosophy and poetry, as well as one for political struggle, community endeavour, and hard professional work. So many major voices made this call to me – Hugh Taylor, Brien Brothman, Tom Nesmith, Richard Brown, Joan Schwartz. Their impact on me personally and on South African archival discourse generally came at an historically significant moment. As in all South Africa's societal spaces, we were busy reimagining the country's national archival system in a context of fierce debate and political manoeuvring. It is no accident that the 1996 *National Archives of South Africa Act* demonstrates a patterning rooted in the drafters' decision to use the Canadian federal legislation as their point of departure; no accident that our new national system implicitly embraces the concept of "total archives"; and no accident that, in 1996, the National Archives adopted a macro-appraisal approach for its appraisal programme. (Almost a hundred years after the *South African War of 1899–1902*, Canada was again having a significant impact on South African nation-building....)

nificatives de cette construction. Son but est d'inviter ces « spectres » à apparaître au grand jour. S'il y a une conclusion, c'est que le terme d'odyssée est une métaphore ou un archétype malheureux pour désigner l'entreprise archivistique. L'auteur propose plutôt le mot « aventure » – un destin sans destination – comme une métaphore potentiellement plus enrichissante.

ABSTRACT This article closely resembles the author's keynote address to the Association of Canadian Archivists conference (2001), which had as its theme "The Archival Odyssey." At one level, it is an extended meditation on the resonances of meaning suggested by the conjunction of the three words in the conference theme. At another, it is a highly focused deconstruction of the theme. Harris lays bare the assumptions informing the theme as an exercise in meaning construction, and shows how these assumptions hold at bay, or exclude, significant dimensions of meaning construction. His concern is to invite these "spectres" in. If he has a conclusion, it is that "odyssey" is an unfortunate metaphor, or archetype, for archival endeavour. He proposes "adventure" – destiny without destination – as a potentially more enriching metaphor.

The truth likes to hide
out in the open ...
– Anne Michaels

The truth is why words fail
We can only reveal by outline,
by circling absence.
– Anne Michaels

Raise a tent of shelter though every thread be torn.
– Leonard Cohen

To tell story, to make story, is arguably one of the most fundamental human instincts. We take the chaotic jumble of experience, the clutter of elusive meanings, and we weave them into the healing shape of story. There *is* a beginning, a middle, and an ending. There *is* a plot and a coherent patterning of characters. There *is*, in Leonard Cohen's words, "a tent of shelter." Shape, then, as Hayden White has argued, determining content in fundamental ways; shape becoming content. Invariably, we cast story in terms of "odyssey" – a heroic engagement with the vicissitudes and trials of life, a meeting of challenges, a suffering emblazoned by a final tying of the last loose thread. In the end we come home; we come to the home which has been waiting for us; we find the "tent of shelter."

The organizers of the 2001 Association of Canadian Archivists annual conference chose as its theme "The Archival Odyssey." Whatever their intentions might have been in doing so, it is my contention that they invited in the resonances of story outlined above. In particular, they invited a conjuring with the

many resonances set at play by the articulation of “archives” and “odyssey.” My intention is to respond to this invitation, in determinedly deconstructive mode. I have selected as my markers deconstructive movements offered by two great Canadian poets. On the one hand, Leonard Cohen, who posits a necessary constructing of shelter, even though shelter’s fabric is tearing. On the other, Anne Michaels, who delineates a hiding out in the open and a revealing through absence. The conclusion I come to is that “odyssey” is an unfortunate metaphor, or archetype, for archival endeavour. Using the conceptual spaces opened up by Cohen, Michaels, and others, I propose “adventure” – a concept, admittedly, not entirely foreign to notions of “odyssey” – as a potentially more enriching metaphor. My call, in the end, and in the beginning, is for an embrace of destiny without destination.

“The Archival Odyssey.” When this conference title arrived formally on my desk, chance or the gods found me listening to Leonard Cohen with two texts before me – Jacques Derrida’s “Ulysses Gramophone”¹ and James Joyce’s *Ulysses*. (“Ulysses” is the Roman version of the Greek “Odysseus.”) Joyce’s, of course, is one of a myriad interpretations, readings, reworkings, and reimaginings of Homer’s “original” story, *The Odyssey*. Most recently, we’ve been offered the movie, *Oh Brother, Where Art Thou?* Thirty-three years ago, Stanley Kubrick and Arthur C. Clarke gave us their seminal *2001: A Space Odyssey*. Reading further back we find works by W.S. Merwin, Wallace Stevens, Tennyson, Shakespeare, Chaucer, Dante, and Virgil, among others. From Homer to George Clooney, then, there is a rich vein of image and metaphor in the Western tradition. Scholarship, we must note, tells us that the “beginning” marked by the proper name Homer is resonant with uncertainty. John Wheatcroft, for instance, says the following: “We know that the poet for whom we use the name Homer ... inherited stories, from an oral tradition almost surely, about an event from centuries before....”² Here we are firmly in archival territory, addressing “the archival ‘Odyssey’,” or “‘The Odyssey’ as archive.” Before us is a text which we cannot read without reading “through” all these and numerous other contextual layerings. And, in time to come, readers will have to negotiate many more layerings. Homer’s *The Odyssey*, as with every text, as with all archive, can never close. It opens to both its antecedents and its descendents, which in turn are always opening to expanding contexts. The Odyssey is positioned within what Chris Hurley calls “ambience,”³ an ambience that is ever changing because it has no determinable beginning and no determinable ending. Hurley’s ambience explodes narrow definitions of

1 Derek Attridge, ed., *Acts of Literature* (New York and London, 1992).

2 John Wheatcroft in Robert Metzger, ed., *Transforming Texts: Classical Images in New Contexts* (London and Toronto, 1993), p. 93.

3 Chris Hurley, “Ambient Functions – Abandoned Children to Zoos,” *Archivaria* 40 (Fall 1995), pp. 21–39.

provenance; it releases “the record” from the confines of “life cycle” or “odyssey” into the wide-open spaces of “journeying.”

Over a period of months after receiving the invitation to speak, I posed to archival colleagues the question: “What does the word ‘odyssey’ say to you?” The core ideas, or movements, which I outlined above emerged from these discussions: a journey, multiple challenges, heroic endeavour, a final coming home. My South African colleagues, with few exceptions, perceived no etymological or mythological significance in the word. Most made no connection with Homer’s text, nor to Homer’s hero Odysseus. In contrast, international colleagues – predominantly from Canada and the United States – without exception moved straight to Homer. And of all the many voices I listened to in that period, only one proffered a literary reference other than Homer, namely the movie *2001: A Space Odyssey*. An extraordinary thought. All these archivists for whom millennia of imprints on Homer’s epic have left no conscious trace. So much for my claim about intertextuality! In pondering this extraordinary thought, I found it connecting to another equally extraordinary one – the degree to which the users of archives at worst ignore, at best pay cursory attention to, the contextual documentation prepared painstakingly by archivists. At the heart of archival theory is the assumption that the meanings and significances of a record are located in the contextual circumstances of its creation and subsequent custody and use. In Chris Hurley’s terms, there is no understanding of the record without an understanding of its ambience. Yet, how many users, even renowned scholars, interrogate the record through an interrogation of the documentation of that ambience – the guides and inventories, the records system in which the record was created, surviving related records, relevant appraisals, documentation of previous research use, and so on? In my experience, there are very few. This poses profound questions to archival endeavour, and to archivists. Without buying into pragmatism, utilitarianism, or user-driven delivery, I find myself asking: What is the purpose of all this rich contextualization which we attempt to provide? Do we do it in hope of one day educating users to respect it? Do we believe in a future generation free of information junkies searching for their next information hit? Or do we do it as a noble end in itself, as some kind of badge of professional identity? Something, perhaps, for which the gods will reward us? These questions haunt me. As does that giant spectre looming behind every claim to archives being the memory of a nation, a society, or a community. Truth be told, (narrowly defined) archives, these “memory institutions” holding the treasure of records with archival value, these archives contribute relatively little to social memory. In my country, the vast majority of citizens have not even heard of such archives. Their rights to citizenship, property, and so on might be protected by archives; their access to public services might be supported by the use of archives; some of their knowledges might be shaped by popular work drawing on archival research. But the tapestry of their memories, their stories, their

myths, and their traditions – this tapestry is woven from other societal resources. The anti-apartheid rallying call of “take archives to the people!” has been quelled in the face of huge systemic barriers to its meaningful implementation. Is this just another uniquely post-apartheid South African problem? I think not. *All* archivists must engage this spectre.

But enough on this tangent. To return to odyssey: my research suggests that semantically the word, connected or not to Homer by its users, still carries a powerful classical frame for archivists. What I want to do now is hold that frame to a deconstructive reading of the title, “The Archival Odyssey.” In other words, I will attempt to lay bare the assumptions informing the title as construction and invite in the spectres, the ghosts, either held at bay or excluded by these assumptions. To invite these spectres in will require me to name them, an extremely tricky business. For there are always more than any naming exercise can accommodate. I extend the invitation only to those I can see, or rather, sense, now. And every spectre, once named, seems to reveal a doppelganger, so that this naming becomes a process with infinite reach. Now, you might be muttering under your breath, “What is he going on about?” Let me quickly conclude this ground preparation by quoting three others who have marked the spectral space better than I can. First, Anne Michaels, whose words I quoted at the outset and which provide just such a marking: a hiding out in the open; a circling of absence. But consider also this line from her novel *Fugitive Pieces*: “What is the true value of knowledge? That it makes our ignorance more precise.”⁴ Second, Jacques Derrida, who wrote a book titled *Specters of Marx* in which, among other things, he traced the degree to which our post-Marxist, post-socialist world is still haunted by Marx.⁵ Jacques Derrida also wrote a book on archive in which he disclosed the spectral structure of the archive and concluded that “nothing is less clear today than the word ‘archive’.”⁶ Jacques Derrida, whose writings on literature are numerous but who confesses that “nothing to this day remains as new and incomprehensible to me, at once very near and very alien, as the thing called literature.”⁷ And third, 1960s student activist Jerry Rubin, who confessed in 1976 that “as I grow older I am learning how much I do not know about life ... I will still be growing (up) on my death bed. The moment I think I know all about life, I find out I know nothing.”⁸ The more Anne Michaels, Jacques Derrida, and Jerry Rubin throw light on their world, the more shadow they cast. Every spectre named reveals a spectre yet to be named.

4 Anne Michaels, *Fugitive Pieces* (Toronto, 1996), p. 210.

5 Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International* (New York and London, 1994).

6 Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (Chicago, 1996), p. 90.

7 Jacques Derrida, *Demeure: Fiction and Testimony* (Stanford, CA, 2000), p. 20.

8 Jerry Rubin, *Growing (Up) at 37* (New York, 1976), p. 189.

So, let us turn to the spectres I discern moving through the title “The Archival Odyssey.” Notice first the use of the definite article “The” and the word “Odyssey” in the singular: “*The* Archival Odyssey.” What is posited is a single archival odyssey. Not one among many, but the only one. The *one* archival odyssey. Let us assume for the moment that the words are denotative. Then we are considering a categorization of archival endeavour: however diverse our ideas and our interests, our nationalities and our professional positioning, we are all embarked on this single odyssey, many journeys becoming collectively one. And, to bring in the dimension of time, through the ages all the diverse archival thinkers and practitioners, however unorthodox or extraordinary, have been similarly embarked. An inspiring thought, an epic tent of shelter. But what of the spectres? I sense at least two. One is pointing at the tent’s threads, inviting us to feel the many tears. The other is mumbling about numbering exercises. Can we ever be sure of “one”? One odyssey, one goal, one meaning, one truth. Can we ever be sure of “two”? Two values in archives (primary and secondary), two disposition options (retain or destroy), two sexes, two genders. Can we be sure of any finite number? The possibility of “the other,” the shadow of otherness, brings to all numbering the possibility of another, of one more. So that, beyond any consideration of whether there is indeed an archival unity in diversity, in what we might call an epistemological beyond, there is a question mark behind the very notion of such unity.

But what if the title is not denotative? Perhaps it carries an implicit verb, a verb in the subjunctive mood. So that, rather than describing a single odyssey, it is enjoining us to strive for the realization of such an odyssey. Would this not be a noble objective? For me, the question mark behind the notion of unity remains troubling. And this mark is joined by other spectral question markings: is the aspiration to odyssey, whether in the singular or the plural, a noble one? Is the desire for “one” not a totalizing one, a gesture carrying within it the marginalization of certain voices? Can we assume an essence, some pure archival essence, which clearly is preconditional to any striving for a single odyssey? What do we mean by “archival?”

To address this last spectre first (although one is being addressed as much as one is addressing): the concept of “archive” today is a site of wide-ranging and sometimes fierce contestation. Eric Ketelaar’s finely nuanced and increasingly postmodernist (his own label) formulations on archive, for instance, are a world apart from those to be found in formal documents of the International Council on Archives. The notion of archive driving activists in South Africa intent on documenting the experiences of the marginalized is a world apart from that driving the definers of standards for corporate record-keeping in a number of countries. A final example: in 1998, David Bearman visited the National Archives of South Africa and horrified us by responding to our painstakingly secured snapshot of a government-wide human resources management database with the words: “But it isn’t a record. It shouldn’t even be here.”

In recent years, numerous disciplines have been taking an “archival turn” – from philosophy to anthropology, from psychology to sociology; increasingly we hear voices exploring the meanings and significances of this thing we call “archive.” Whether we ignore these voices – as most archivists and record-keepers do – or dismiss them, or engage them, a reality is that they are stretching traditional discipline- and profession-bound understandings of the concept. Derrida is right, I would argue, in claiming that “nothing is less clear today than the word ‘archive’.” When Sir Hilary Jenkinson addressed a gathering of archivists in the 1930s and spoke of the archival mission, his audience could legitimately assume that they knew exactly what he meant by “archival” and that everyone present more or less shared his understanding. Today a similar gathering listening to a Tom Nesmith or a Terry Cook, or, more scary, to a Jacques Derrida or a Gerda Lerner, would be foolish to make such assumptions.

The archival odyssey. Implied here is the assumption that there is *archival* odyssey; and there are other forms of odyssey. The form of odyssey that is archival is separable from these other forms. Do you hear a spectre behind this assumption, whispering questions? For instance, even if we adopt the narrowest traditional definition of archives, does not every odyssey have an archival dimension? (*Odyssey as archive*; *odyssey in archives*.) Does this assumption of separability not at best downplay commonalities with other disciplines in, or approaches to, knowledge and memory construction? Is the assumption not expressing a process of identity formation which is exclusive rather than inclusive, which is about defensiveness and insecurity rather than about hospitality, which is about defending turf rather than tending turf? And does the assumption not resist broader understandings of “archive”? I want to avoid providing an inventory of these understandings, so let me mention but one, that of Jacques Derrida. Woven through many of his works is a depiction of archive as a kind of hyperwriting back of all human activity. This writing before writing, what he calls *archi-text*, mediates all experience. So that odyssey, if there be such a thing, before being recorded, or archived, is an expression of archive. The archive is its very possibility. And thus the qualification of odyssey by the adjective “archival” becomes tautological. Every odyssey must be archival.

I want now to shift focus back to the word “odyssey” before stepping away one final time to view the conference title as a whole.

“Odyssey” describes journey. But not any journey. In its shape and its modalities, it carries very particular attributes. This is not an open-ended journey, one from “A” to wherever whim or vicissitude will take the traveller. It is a journey with determinable beginning and ending. There is an itinerary, an “A” to “B.” Yet this is no linear journey, and the “B” is not “B,” but “A.” For odyssey, in its classical form, is circular. Odysseus journeys *from* home and returns *to* home. He closes a circle. He represents, or initiates, notions of reap-

propriation and totalization. Is this the archetype, or the model, we envisage for archival endeavour? I want to suggest that this was precisely the archetype informing the work of our predecessors who sought to close a circle using the blueprint provided by the notions of provenance and original order. A finite and knowable provenance. An arrangement and presentation of the archive in its “original” order. The archetype is also embodied, ironically, in the work of James Joyce scholars. I say ironically, for in his *Ulysses*, Joyce holds open the circle that he institutes after Homer. Listen to Jacques Derrida on Joycean scholarship:

Joyce experts are the representatives as well as the effects of the most powerful project for programming over the centuries the totality of research in the onto-logico-encyclopedic field ... A Joyce scholar has the right to dispose of the totality of competence in the encyclopedic field ... He [*sic*] has at his command the computer of all memory, he plays with the entire archive of culture – at least of what is called Western culture, and, in it, of that which returns to itself according to the Ulyssean circle of the encyclopedia....”⁹

Within the conference title, then, we can discern the movement of the Ulyssean circle, which draws us to dream at once of a determinable ending and a gathering in, a corralling, of knowledge. But there is another movement, a spectral movement, which invites us to consider otherness, the eccentric (the outside of circle), the breach that is always already in every circle, and the circling of absence (a corralling of ignorance). Do we have the courage to allow deconstructive energies into our construction of odyssey?

Let me illustrate what I mean by this question, through the naming of at least three spectres. I invite the first one in by returning to Derrida on Joyce. He said of the Joycean scholar that “he plays with the entire archive of culture – at least of what is called Western culture, and, in it, of that which returns to itself according to the Ulyssean circle of the encyclopedia.” Now, listen to how Derrida continues: “and this is why one can always at least dream of writing *on* Joyce and not *in* Joyce from the fantasy of some far Eastern capital, without, in my case, having too many illusions about it.”¹⁰

In conventional Western wisdom, Homer marks the beginning of the literary canon, the beginning of Western civilization. From him our odyssey has proceeded and continuously returns for succour. Kept outside the circle are non-Western ways of knowing, ways emanating from outside the West and from indigenous peoples within the West. Our metanarratives either appropriate or exclude the stories of the marginalized, a phenomenon from which

⁹ Jacques Derrida, “Ulysses Gramophone,” in Derek Attridge, ed., *Acts of Literature* (New York and London, 1992), p. 281.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

archival discourse (narrowly defined) is not immune. Does not the dominant discourse in archives internationally evince a powerful Western frame of reference? Do non-Western and indigenous voices participate only to the extent that they adopt this frame? In South Africa, despite dramatic processes of transformation, we agonize over the continued dominance in archival discourse of white voices and Western modes of knowledge construction.¹¹ Entrenched patterns of power are not easily dislodged. The question remains: how committed are we to the venture of dislodging? Or, to phrase it differently, do we have the courage to allow deconstructive energies into our construction of odyssey? To risk stating the obvious, the question rang in my head as I gazed around the conference floor on the first morning of the ACA 2001 conference. My gaze, unlike that of Anne Michaels', was a literal circling of absence, more precisely of absentees – First Nations people and visible minorities – in this most diverse of nations.

But the marginalized are, of course, legion. Naming them all is an impossible task. I restrict myself now to the possible by naming but two other spectres at play in the word "odyssey." The first moves behind the heroic register of Homer's tale, in particular, behind Odysseus's triumphal return home. This spectre invites us to consider the journeys and the stories of those who do not return home, who fail, who fall short, and of those who are devastated by the return home. Consider, for instance, the unhappy suitors of Odysseus's wife Penelope, brutally murdered, literally torn apart, by the returned Odysseus. Do we have place – meaningful place – in our storytelling for these unhappy souls? Does our Sunday school storytelling give space to the unhappy, ravaged Philistines? Do we have the courage to interrogate our heroes? Or do we retreat before the danger of our metanarratives unravelling? What, says another spectre, of the configuration of hero and heroine within the pattern of odyssey? Does this pattern not speak the terms of patriarchy? The man out venturing and conquering, the woman at home, bound by taboo and tending hearth. Is this the archetype, I ask again, we wish for archival endeavour? Few, I suspect, would venture "yes" to this question. But many might be tempted to point to the powerful presence of women in the archival profession and conclude that patriarchy (more accurately, patriarchies) is hardly a "problem." It is a conclusion that invites spectral questions. Does "presence" equate with "power?" Does *a* woman in charge translate necessarily into a challenge to patriarchal modalities? Does the empowerment of women in itself release us from gender entrapment – the trap of moving only within the binary opposition man-woman? (Again, a numbering exercise halting determinedly at "two"....)

11 See, for instance, Verne Harris and Sello Hatang, "Archives, Identity and Place: A Dialogue on What it (Might) Mean(s) to be an African Archivist," *ESARBICA Journal* 19 (2000), pp. 45–58.

For me this path is extremely inviting, a path splitting exponentially into tributaries up ahead. But I want to retreat now, not into safety, for there is no safety in deconstruction, but back to a broader viewpoint: “The Archival Odyssey.” Let us view all the title’s elements in one movement, or at least attempt to. In all its possible forms, moods, and tenses, it seems to hold this big question: What is “the archival odyssey?” Is this a legitimate question, or a useful question? Possibly so, but do we discern the looming assumption behind it, namely, that there is a thing-itself, an essence, named “archival odyssey,” transcending time and place? The impossible dream. Listen to Derek Attridge on this dream in philosophy:

what philosophy attempts, in its most fundamental mission, is a writing without a date, a writing that transcends the here-and-now of its coming-into-existence, and the heres-and-nows of the acts which confirm, extend, and renew that existence ... But all writing is a dating ..., every text has a provenance, and the date, like the signature, exhibits the counter-logic of iterability....¹²

Thus, from the outset I have carefully avoided the question “what is ‘the archival odyssey’?” Instead, I have been probing a more modest question: What meanings do we attach, here and now, to the words “the archival odyssey?”¹³

By now, I imagine, you are growing weary with my questions. Allow me just one more before moving to a conclusion. The question “what is the archival odyssey?” has a companion question – “who decides?” I want to suggest that I have been addressing this question implicitly from the outset. As with all questions on archives, answers are determined by those who hold power in the discourse: the macro-actors, the ones who have resources, the ones who set agendas – they receive the research and publication grants and enjoy access to the data necessary for the sustenance of intellectual endeavour; they are the ones, in short, who control record-keeping. Listen to Bruno Latour on this:

[The] role of the bureaucrat qua scientist qua writer and reader, is always misunderstood because we take for granted that there exist, somewhere in society, macro-actors that naturally dominate the scene ... Once accepted, these large entities are then used to

¹² Derek Attridge, *Acts of Literature*, p. 371.

¹³ I wish to pick up on a word used by Attridge – “provenance.” I have not come across an archivist who does not claim the “principle of provenance” as the cornerstone of archival theory. At the same time, I have not come across a conceptualization of the principle in the mainstream of current discourse which does not diverge fundamentally from its earliest formulations in the 1800s. And yet we continue to use the term, as if we mean the same thing as those archivists and bureaucrats in nineteenth-century Europe. Could this be an expression of our dreaming transcendence? Though everything is shifting, here is a thing-in-itself, a tent of shelter, a home. But it is a dating. It is dated.

explain (or to not explain) “cognitive” aspects of science and technology. The problem is that these entities could not exist at all without the construction of long networks in which numerous faithful records circulate in both directions, records which are, in turn, summarized and displayed to convince.¹⁴

Latour is worth listening to closely. I want to quote him again, this time applying his argument to a specific case:

The “rationalization” granted to bureaucracy since Hegel and Weber has been attributed by mistake to the “mind” of (Prussian) bureaucrats. It is all in the files themselves ... Economics, politics, sociology, hard sciences, do not come into contact through the grandiose entrance of “interdisciplinarity” but through the back door of the *file*. The “cracy” of bureaucracy is mysterious and hard to study, but the “bureau” is something that can be empirically studied, and which explains, because of its structure, why some power is given to an average mind just by looking at files: domains which are far apart become literally inches apart; domains which are convoluted and hidden, become flat; thousands of occurrences can be looked at synoptically ... In our cultures “paper shuffling” is the source of an essential power, that constantly escapes attention since its materiality is ignored.¹⁵

So, we are directed to “the mind” and “the files.” I wouldn’t go as far as Latour – “it is all in the files.” Nevertheless, he poses serious questions to those of us who emphasize the constructedness of the record. He does so by foregrounding the capacity of the record to structure cognition. The domination of any scene by macro-actors is never natural; it is constructed. And a key role in that construction – *the* key role according to Latour – is played by records. A question worth considering is: what is the impact on the minds of macro-actors in the archival scene of the record-keeping environment under their control – the neat rows of carefully arranged and labelled files, photographs, maps, sound recordings, and other records categories; the pristine, closely managed stackrooms; the ordered and interlinked contextual documentation; the rational and heavily documented configuration of archival spaces; and so on.

A frequent criticism of deconstruction is that it deconstructs only to lay waste. It never builds; it never says “yes!” Always it says “no!” I would want to question the binary opposition within this view – “yes!” opposed to “no!” In my view there is no “yes!” without an implied “no!” and vice versa. But I let that rest. I want to conclude now by unfolding the “yes!” in all that I’ve been saying.

Yes, telling story is an unavoidable dimension of the human condition. Indi-

14 Bruno Latour, “Visualization and Cognition: Thinking with Eyes and Hands,” *Knowledge and Society* 6 (1986), pp. 28–29.

15 *Ibid.*, p. 28.

viduals and collectivities make sense of experience through narrative. Instinctively we raise tents of shelter. Yes, this is “good.” But let us know the reality of torn threads. And let us know the tendency of narrative to slip into metanarrative, the slippage a totalizing movement stealing from us the pain and complexity we need to engage if we are to find healings and integrations.

Yes, in negotiating the darkened landscapes of life, we must deploy every light source life gives us. Reason, research, analysis, and so on, the gifts we usually associate with light in the Western world, are spurned at our peril. But let us know that all shining of light casts shadow. Or, to mix metaphors, let us recognize the spectral spaces within every circle of knowledge. And, let us find the courage to offer the spectres hospitality, though they trouble us horribly. This recognizing and this courage draw on gifts usually associated with the shadow realms – imagination, poetry, intuition, emotion, passion, faith.

Yes, we need archetypes. Arguably, we function as human beings archetypally. But should we choose or allow Odysseus? What about Tiresias, the blind seer finding light in darkness? Or Margaret Atwood’s Marian, determinedly ordinary but embarked on a noble struggle against patriarchies?¹⁶ Or Bowman, the only human survivor of *2001: A Space Odyssey*, for whom survival is an impenetrable mystery? Whomever we choose, or allow, let it not be a case of one, or two, or three. The demand of hospitality is that we remain open to the advent of “another,” even if this other is a shadowy Odysseus.

To the notion of “odyssey” I say “no!” I have argued that we must embrace adventuring, but not with the false comfort of an itinerary and a determinable end. (Is not “adventure” a mysterious word? Beyond the limitations of etymology, it suggests a going forth, an openness to what is outside. And yet, within it, nestling in its heart, is the word “advent” – the coming in, the arrival, beyond our control, of something or someone important.) “Adventure,” then, as going out in response to what is coming in, a going out which brings comings in, a state of becoming in which coming and going are not binary opposites. (In the language of beatitude, blessed is the one who does not know whether she is coming or going, but who lives a coming which is always already a going.) So, for archival endeavour, I am advocating a “yes!” to adventuring, but one informed by the unpredictability of “advent.” I am advocating a receiving of every advent with respect for otherness and passion for justice. “Otherness” and “justice” – each assuming the other, requiring the other; each equally beyond our understanding, and beyond assurance of a final coming. I respect, I yearn for, what I (precisely) do not know. The true value of knowledge, in Anne Michaels’s terms, is that it makes our ignorance more precise. I am advocating, in other words, a destiny without destination. It is for the gods, not human beings, to write odyssey into adventure.

16 See Margaret Atwood, *The Edible Woman* (London, 1990).