

Genres of the trace: memory, archives and trouble¹

Verne Harris*

Verne Harris is Head of Memory Programming at the Nelson Mandela Foundation's Centre of Memory and has been Mandela's archivist since 2004. He is an honorary research fellow with the University of Cape Town and has participated in a range of structures which transformed South Africa's apartheid archival landscape, including the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and is a former Deputy Director of the National Archives. Widely published, he is probably best-known for leading the editorial team on the best-seller *Nelson Mandela: Conversations with Myself*. He is the recipient of archival publication awards from Australia, Canada and South Africa and both his novels were shortlisted for South Africa's M-Net Book Prize. He has served on the Boards of the Ahmed Kathrada Foundation, the Freedom of Expression Institute and the South African History Archive.

Harris offers a brief preliminary deconstructive reading of archives–memory nexuses. The reading is positioned in relation to what he sees as a paucity of engagement between archivy and the emerging memory industry. While, at one level, the essay is simply a reading of Jacques Derrida and Paul Ricoeur within archives–memory nexuses, at another, it is an attempt to demonstrate how troubled, and troubling, these nexuses are. Harris ranges from theoretical to anecdotal, conceptual to political, and argues that archives and memory are best understood as genres of the trace.

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Introduction²

In both popular and professional discourses, the concepts of 'archives' and 'memory' tend to be held in an uncomfortable relation of separation. The former is still commonly associated with notions of stability, durability and evidence, the latter with fluidity, transience and narrativity. The former has been appropriated by archival experts over centuries. The latter is developing as a field of specialist knowledge and is being appropriated by its own cohort of experts, linked most often to the processes and discourses of transitional justice, dialogue theory, psychotherapy, neuroscience, oral history and indigenous knowledge. Engagement between this emerging body of knowledge and practice (what Michael Piggott, reading Kerwin Lee Klein, calls 'the memory industry'),³ on the one hand, and archivy, on the other, has been limited.

This essay offers a brief preliminary deconstructive reading of archives–memory nexuses. At one level, it is simply a reading of Jacques Derrida and Paul Ricoeur within these nexuses – a reading which suggests that (in their readings) archives and memory are best understood as genres of the trace. Derrida and Ricoeur were two of the great thinkers of the late twentieth century. While neither can be said to have engaged with archivy, both undertook sustained engagements with both 'archives' and 'memory'. Both wrote seminal texts on archives–memory nexuses. Derrida, of course, gave the

*Email: Verne@nelsonmandela.org

world ‘deconstruction’. He resisted defining the term, and he discouraged those who looked to turn it into a theory or a methodology. For him, as I have argued elsewhere,⁴ deconstruction was something always already at work within texts – what he called an incessant movement of recontextualisation – as well as paying heed to that something, by means of what Christopher Norris calls ‘textual close-reading’.⁵

Anecdotes

I begin with two personal anecdotes.⁶ Both describe experiences which unfolded in the late 1990s and were concentrated within the years from 1996 to 1998. Together, they changed the way I thought about archives and memory and opened me to the perspectives articulated in this essay. One is a story of a truth commission; the other of a scrapbook.

South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission was established in 1995, and, the following year, I was appointed head of liaison between the Commission and the National Archives of South Africa. Then I was seconded to the Commission’s investigation into the destruction of records by the apartheid state and spent the best part of two years scouring security establishment offices and vaults. We worked in teams, comprising members of both the old and new orders. At one point, I was working closely with a former freedom fighter – let’s call him Ben – as the investigation moved from military intelligence to the security police. One day, I shared with him what a military team member had said to me, as we painstakingly listed surviving apartheid-era files, namely, ‘we should have destroyed more’.⁷ Ben was as outraged as I had been. Some months later, Ben was overseeing the securing and listing of surviving security police case files. We were both disturbed at what these files contained – a destructive mix of misinformation and horrible truth, evidence of personal flaws and compromises, deeds of courage and deeds of betrayal. One day, he turned to me and, shaking his head, said: ‘Maybe they should have destroyed them all’.

Here, I offer one reflection on this experience. The files we were dealing with had been conceptualised and used as instruments of oppression. They fell into the category of what Paul Ricoeur would call ‘bad memory’.⁸ The systematic destruction undertaken by the apartheid state in its last days had been an endeavour to cover its tracks – a systemic amnesia falling into the category of what Ricoeur would call ‘destructive forgetting’.⁹ The Truth Commission, clearly, was about ‘good memory’, about turning the surviving files into what Eric Ketelaar has called ‘instruments of empowerment and liberation’,¹⁰ about allowing for constructive forgetting. These were the certitudes I took into the Commission process – ‘good’ the binary opposite of ‘bad’; ‘constructive’ the binary opposite of ‘destructive’. By the end of the process, I was not certain about anything.

The second story is about a scrapbook. My life partner of 30 years – Kerry – and I first began corresponding in 1981, in the days before email, text messaging and Facebook. Handwritten letters, cards, notes – for years always deemed worthy of preservation – had all been stored safely. In 1997, after a change of residence and a clearing of boxes, we flirted briefly with the possibility of destroying what had grown into a substantial record, supplemented in its last year of accumulation by printouts of email communications. We decided instead, however, to embark on an epic journey together, re-reading each item, appraising it, then either destroying it or preserving it in part or in full. The journey took over a year, finally resulting in a scrapbook of fragments, ordered chronologically and contextualised with dates and occasional explanatory annotations.

I would like to offer two reflections on this second story. First, I remember feeling uncomfortable at the beginning of the scrapbook journey. I felt uncomfortable as an archivist; I felt as though we were *meddling* with the record and, clearly, we were. But we were doing what archivists do as part of their work – reading the record, appraising it, narrating it. We were deeming what is worthy to be archived and what is not. And no doubt somewhere in the future, Kerry and I will read the scrapbook again, possibly ‘redeem’ it and bequeath it to our son, possibly re-narrate it before bequeathing it or possibly simply destroy it.

Second, among the many extraordinary discoveries made during the making of the scrapbook, one stands out. At the outset, we shared a similar memory of the way in which we had decided to get married. In short, Kerry had been reluctant, but I had been keen, determined and persuasive enough to secure her agreement, eventually. Our individual memories of that time had coalesced into a collective memory, which was shared, more or less, by family and friends. And yet, the letters told a different story. There was no evidence of me pushing or of being enthused once the decision was taken. There was, on the other hand, much evidence of Kerry engaging with the idea of marriage, talking about its advantages and embracing the decision. So we were confronted by two different stories – one in the archives of our correspondence, another in the archives of many memories, including our own. We still have not resolved this conundrum. And, of course, the record does not speak for itself – we, or others, are going to have to find the narrative which will make sense of things.¹¹

Troubles

The experiences outlined above were troubling, precisely because the framing of my more or less conventional positivist archival thinking at the time was not hospitable to complexity and uncertainty. Instead, as with other discourses of modernity, it was characterised by ready categorisation, the hard boundary between categories (the ‘either/or’, rather than the ‘both/and’) and the binary opposition. These are my ‘targets’ in the reading of archives–memory nexuses. I explore, in turn, the pairs ‘perception’/‘recollection’, ‘memory’/‘recollecting’, ‘long-term memory’/‘short-term memory’, ‘individual memory’/‘collective memory’, ‘remembering’/‘forgetting’, ‘conscious’/‘unconscious’ and ‘memory’/‘imagination’.

The trouble with memory is that it is ubiquitous. It folds into every human discourse, transaction, record, conversation. Think, for example, of the argument with a partner or spouse which routinely loses track of the matter at hand, because it has turned into a disagreement over what was said and how it was said at the beginning of the argument. Memory is always at play. Indeed, no train of thought by an individual is possible without memory being at play. Whether that individual is simply ruminating on the lyrics of a song or drafting a communication or crafting a complex argument for a conference paper, he or she is drawing on memory of the rules – if not the content – of languages, idioms, conventions and genres. One must remember rules, in order to make sense of the simplest experience.

But beyond the imperative, individuals unavoidably engage experience with, and through, a rich layering of memory. Memory of previous experience is a filter and a feeler for present experience. In the formulation of Jacques Derrida: ‘[f]rom the outset, perception belongs to recollection’.¹² So that all experience – even *before* it is thought about, before it is made sense of, before it is communicated to another – is always

already mediated by memory. Think back for a moment to my Truth Commission story – the files and three people: the former apartheid security functionary, the former freedom fighter and me. *Before* we read any files, *before* we assessed anything, our different histories and our recollections of those different histories fundamentally shaped how each of us understood the task at hand, what each of us was looking for and why each of us would come to different conclusions.

The trouble with memory is that it folds into and out of itself continuously. What science calls ‘short-term memory’ is a space of dizzying dynamism – a container being filled and emptied simultaneously. Whatever it holds – and we are talking, in terms of duration, of seconds, in most cases – is read against the contents of what science calls ‘long-term memory’. This reading might involve what Paul Ricoeur calls ‘automatic, mechanical recall’ or ‘intelligent reconstruction’ – in fact, usually both, for, as Ricoeur points out, they are ‘intimately mingled in ordinary experience’.¹³ The former Ricoeur phrase matches the Greek concept of *mneme* – ‘the popping into mind of a memory’ – the latter with *anamnesis* – ‘memory as an object of a search’.¹⁴ So, long-term memory is always at play ‘in the short-term’, at once determinative of the patterns which emerge and subject to re-patterning in the process. To state it crudely – what is in long-term memory moves into short-term memory and back again. And what is in short-term memory either moves into long-term memory or is erased. *Most* of it is erased, forgotten. Whether moved or erased, remembered or forgotten, memory can also be recorded on an external surface. Memory can be recorded, either in the sense of inscription (the Greek *graphein*) or imprinting (*tupos*) onto a surface that is external to the individual’s psychic apparatus. In other words, memory can be *archived*.

The trouble with archives is that the word ‘archives’ – and the concept archived in the word – means different things to different people. Even people calling themselves archivists seem unable to agree on what archives are and are not. This is one of the reasons why discourses calling themselves archival find it so difficult to reckon with memory. In truth, most often – at levels that we can call ontological, epistemological, hermeneutical and psychological – they are paralysed by ‘memory’. Michael Piggott’s 2005 characterisation of archivists’ use of memory as carefree – that is, uncritical and undeveloped – remains valid.¹⁵ As Margaret Hedstrom concluded from her 2010 review of archival literature’s engagement with memory: ‘Although recent archival science literature is replete with allusions and references to social and collective memory, the appropriation of memory concepts in archival science suffers from simplification and over-generalization’.¹⁶

In my understanding, ‘archives’ is defined by three fundamental movements or attributes: one, a trace on, or in, a surface; two, a surface with the quality of exteriority, and; three, an act of deeming such a trace to be worthy of protection, preservation and the other interventions which we call archival. I am indebted to Professor Carolyn Hamilton for this use of the word ‘deem’ in relation to the word ‘archives’. This use is not unrelated to the ‘deeming’ which takes place in Schellenbergian and neo-Schellenbergian appraisal, but it posits an intervention almost without apparatus and certainly without professional or disciplinary authority. Anyone can *deem*. In this understanding,¹⁷ until there has been what Derrida would call ‘archivation’¹⁸ – until the traces constituting memory are on an external surface *and* have been ‘deemed’ – we cannot properly speak of ‘archives’. The three movements of archivation could be regarded as constituting the generic law of archives.¹⁹ I offer, here, three examples to illustrate these movements:

- (1) In the final phase of his imprisonment, Nelson Mandela was accommodated in a prison house under the watch of warder Jack Swart.²⁰ On many days, Mandela left notes for Swart at the entrance to the house, to be picked up by the latter on his arrival in the morning – fragments, ephemera, if you like. For instance: ‘please make me a light breakfast’ and ‘please don’t kill the mouse’. To Swart, however, they had great value, and he kept every one for a collection which he still holds, now over 20 years later. He deemed them worthy.
- (2) Someone does a bungee jump and has it recorded on video. She posts a story on her Facebook page, together with several extracts from the video. The rest of the footage is erased. What she has deemed worthy and has imprinted (‘imprint’ – *tupos* – in the Greek, inextricably linked to the metaphor of the stamp and the seal)²¹ on the external surface provided by Facebook constitutes archives.
- (3) In 1999, I had a vivid dream followed by an extraordinary (conscious) experience. Over the following days, I carried in memory an image representing both the dream and the subsequent experience. Then I had a version of that image tattooed on my arm. It had been moved from the interiority of my own psychic apparatus to the exteriority of my arm. It had been deemed, by me, to be worthy of archivation. It had been archived. Of course, I also carry in memory a complex story of that dream and what happened to me afterwards. I have never written it down, but I have told it to my closest friends. In other words, it is no longer confined by the interiority of my own psychic apparatus. It has the exteriority afforded by its imprint in the psychic apparatuses of my friends and those they have chosen to share it with. Moreover, it has been deemed worthy in, and by, the act of sharing. It has been archived, just as surely as the image on my arm.²² Some would disagree, arguing that, at most, my story has become part of a collective memory. However, it has all three of the fundamental attributes of archives. As did – to go back to my story of the scrapbook – the collective memory of family and friends, in relation to Kerry and I deciding to get married. As do the memories of communities in South Africa reclaiming land lost to the state during the apartheid era – these communities bring their memories to the Land Claims Court to do battle with the archives of the apartheid state. This is archives versus archives, in the view of these communities, not memory versus archives.

The trouble with collective memory is that, on the one hand, it is better understood as a form, or subgenre, of archives, and on the other, its binary partner, individual memory, is woven through with elements that are profoundly collective in nature. One never remembers alone.²³ As I alluded to at the outset, languages, idioms, conventions and genres – the rules, if not the content, of which determine how experience is converted into individual memory – belong to collectivities, so that there is an unavoidable public structure to any individual memory. In the formulation of John Caputo reading Jacques Derrida: ‘We [“we” as individuals and “we” as collectivities] are always and already ... embedded in various networks – social, historical, linguistic, political, sexual ... – various horizons or presuppositions’.²⁴ We are always and already embedded in what Derrida has termed *archi-writing*, or *archi-text*. We are embedded in *meta-archives*, if you like, behind all remembering. In other words, *before* all memory – whether individual or collective – are archives. Contrary, then, to the conventional (positivist) mnemonic (or mnesic) trajectory of memory becoming archives (or getting lost), deconstruction posits archives becoming memory becoming archives – memory folding into archives,

archives folding into memory. For deconstruction, then, memory and archives are best understood as genres of the trace,²⁵ subject to what Derrida calls ‘the law of the law of genre’, namely, ‘a principle of contamination, a law of impurity, a parasitical economy’. In this understanding, the boundary between memory and archives should be seen as a process and, more specifically, as a process of invagination.²⁶

Speaking of loss, the trouble with memory, in the memorable formulation of Heidegger, is that ‘remembering is possible only on the basis of forgetting’.²⁷ In other words, forgetfulness is the very *possibility* of memory. In the discourses of modernity, of course, forgetting is usually opposed to remembering in a binary relation – forget–remember – equivalent to any number of other binary opposites – dark–light, blindness–sight, loss–gain, bad–good and so on. In these discourses, memory is defined, fundamentally, as a struggle against forgetting. And yet:

- First, the notion of total recall – of a memory which absorbs and holds all – is monstrous. To be human is to have mnemonic limits of capacity and competence. To be human is to need to have the traces of violence, of violation, removed from living memory, from anamnesis. To be human is to have the capacity to forgive – a capacity which Ricoeur describes as an appeasement of memory, which ‘seems to constitute the final stage in the progress of forgetting’.²⁸ To be human is to have the right to forget.
- Second, all traces in human memory are narrativised, wrapped in a story, patterned by a narrative. Memory is narrativised over and over again, with each movement of recall and re-inscription. In the terminology of Ricoeur, narrative mediates memory. And ‘the idea of an exhaustive narrative is a performatively impossible idea. The narrative necessarily contains a selective dimension’.²⁹ In other words, with each narration, there is loss. Forgetting is imbricated in remembering.³⁰ In the formulation of Derrida: ‘in anamnesis itself, there is *amnesia*’.³¹
- Third, the logic of the trace is an enabling to forget. Every movement to record memory, to keep it safe, is a movement to forget, whether it is the movement from immediate memory to short-term memory, the movement from short-term to long-term memory, from consciousness to unconsciousness, from memory to archives. Every movement here is about putting something in a safe. Listen to Derrida again: ‘when you put something in a safe it’s just in order to be able to forget it ... When I handwrite something on a piece of paper, I put it in my pocket or in the safe, it’s just in order to forget it, to know that I can find it again while in the meantime having forgotten it’.³²

Forgetting, then, is not necessarily the enemy of memory. There is what Ricoeur calls ‘founding forgetting’³³ – a forgetting that is necessary, that is functional, that is healthy. On the other hand, there is what Ricoeur calls ‘destructive forgetting’ – a forgetting that is malevolent, dysfunctional and pathological. And the trouble is that ‘in human experience, there is no superior point of view from which one could apprehend the common source of destroying and constructing. In this great dramaturgy of being, there is, for us, no final assessment’.³⁴ What is constructive can become destructive and vice versa. More disturbing, the constructive and the destructive can fold out of one another. Returning to my scrapbook, for instance, I have no confidence that only constructive forgetting shaped its content. Another example: the fading memories of an ageing person. Is this about healthy forgetting – a means to enable the ageing one to clear away the clutter? To focus on what really matters? To do the soul work necessary in

the final stages of a personal journey? Or is it dysfunctional, a denizen of decay, disease and death? Is it healthy or is it dysfunctional? Is it both?³⁵

The trouble with individual memory is that what keeps its content safe is the condition of its vulnerability. Safety is provided by interiority. The content is kept within the individual's psychic apparatus – in other words, in a safe. No one else – no one outside – can meddle with it, use it inappropriately, betray confidences, alter it, recontextualise it, efface it, lose it, destroy it. But this safety, as oral historians keep telling us, is the source of great danger. Human mortality could result in all the content being erased in an instant, without a trace. Human faculty, if not frailty, will undoubtedly result in the individual herself meddling with content.

The trouble with archives, including collective memory, is that what keeps its content safe is the condition of its vulnerability. Safety is provided by exteriority. The traces on an external surface are safe from the faculty, the frailty and the mortality of the individual. However, because it is outside, the traces are exposed to meddling by the ones outside. At this point, I offer two observations, each tagging yet another layer of trouble which will be explored below: first, I am not suggesting a binary opposition between 'outside' and 'inside'; second, meddling – for memory, for archives – is unavoidable and not always undesirable.

What do we make of the unconscious, which psychoanalysis names as an 'outside' located deep inside the human psyche?³⁶ It is an outside, because its content resists what Ricoeur calls 'the vigilance of consciousness'³⁷ and because access to it from the inside is barred by repression. It is a world of dreams, of forgotten or repressed memories, narratives and images, of languages and idioms, which are difficult or impossible to grasp. The trouble with the unconscious is that it resists rational analysis and ultimately eludes both the concept of memory and the concept of archives. If, like Bergson and Ricoeur, we regard it as a category of memory, then the unconscious is an awkward domain of latency, of what Ricoeur calls a reserve of forgotten memories,³⁸ and its attributes of exteriority remain unaccounted for. If, on the other hand, like Derrida, we regard the unconscious as a category of archives, then the full richness of the Freudian and Jungian discourses is harnessed, with both individual and collective dimensions of the unconscious reckoned with, but the act of *deeming* – the third necessary attribute or movement of archives – remains unaccounted for, unless, that is, *deeming* can be carried out unconsciously.

The unconscious could be described as a domain of meddling – a domain in which memory is muddled with fantasy – in which comedy, farce and horror are muddled with documentary. Does not one feel meddled with by one's dreams, both those that feel benign and those we call nightmares? So, meddling appears to be the warp and woof of the unconscious. But meddling, as I have suggested, is also the warp and woof, more broadly, of the domain that we have named the trace.³⁹ For the trouble with the trace is that it never speaks for itself. What I have already discussed about traces in memory applies equally to traces in archives – they are narrativised, wrapped in a story, patterned by a narrative. Memory is narrativised over and over again, with each movement of recall and re-inscription. Like the correspondence that Kerry and I have narrated into scrapbook form and will continue to narrate in forms and contexts still to be determined. Always with the trace, there must be a reckoning with more than *evidence* of what is *past*. Always already, there is also *story*, there is *imagination* and there is *future*, which is why, in the Socratic tradition, the Greeks either viewed memory as a category of imagination or viewed imagination as a category of remembering.⁴⁰ Which is why, in deconstructive and other post-positivist accounts of archives, meaning and

significance *in* archives is unstable, imbricated in ever-shifting contexts, determined, in principle, by a future which is always coming.

Conclusion

The trouble is that I have only begun to name the troubles, and the troubling, in archives–memory nexuses, but I want, at least, to move towards a conclusion. Of course, the trouble with conclusions is that they carry with them an expectation of wrapping up, of tying up loose ends, of summation, of a final exhortation. I can offer none of these. Instead, I want to address one last dimension of trouble, before closing with a comment on troubledness.

I have alluded to the question of forgiveness, and, without being named, this question is woven through my anecdotes of the Truth Commission and the scrapbook. Forgiveness haunted South Africa's Truth Commission – a burden given it by both participants and observers and most often confused with conciliation; tales of forgiveness asked and given littered the correspondence from which the scrapbook emerged. Forgiveness, as a concept and as a process, is interwoven with memory. It is no accident that Ricoeur ends his monumental *Memory, History, Forgetting* with a long epilogue on forgiveness, which he introduces thus: 'Forgiveness – if it has a sense, and if it exists – constitutes the horizon common to memory, history and forgetting'.⁴¹ The trouble with it is that it demands both remembering and forgetting. I must remember the fault, the violation done to me. I must forget the pain of it as living memory, as anamnesis. I must forget my judgement (as an active passing of judgement) of the violator. I must remember that I have forgotten. The trouble with forgiveness is that human society – certainly intimate human connection – is unimaginable without it, but that as an act of mercy from one to another, it is impossible. As has been argued in different ways by Derrida, Hartmann and Ricoeur, forgiveness is directed precisely towards what is unforgivable.⁴² The violation cannot be erased. And while forgiving a violator is one thing, forgiving a violation is another. Who has the authority, finally, to say 'you are forgiven'? Also, no one can be certain that an act of forgiveness will not be followed by return of the pain, of the judgement. I can never be certain that I have forgiven, finally.

There *is* forgiveness. Not as an act of mercy from one to another. Not defined in any blueprint or by any institution. There is forgiveness in what Anne Michaels calls a rendezvous⁴³ – a sublime rendezvous between who I am now and who I was before the violation; a sublime rendezvous between remembering and forgetting.

When we speak about memory, nothing is certain. When we speak about archives, nothing is certain. As I have attempted to demonstrate, with memory and archives come trouble and an incessant troubling. To be troubled is not a bad thing. One of the etymological tributaries for the word 'trouble' comprises the grouping of the concepts 'crowd', 'throng' and 'disorder'. To be troubled is to be aware of crowdedness, of an overflowing of space. To address archives–memory nexuses, I would argue, is to be crowded. Derrida got it just right when he said, in 1994, that 'nothing is ... more troubled and more troubling today than the concept archived in this word "archive"'.⁴⁴ He said that just as 'memory' was taking off as a field of study in its own right. I have no doubt that if he were still alive today and had found it necessary to read the burgeoning literature of the memory industry, particularly the literature of transitional justice, he would have felt oppressed by the certainties and clarities informing it and would have been tempted to rehearse his words accordingly: nothing is more troubled, and more troubling, today than the concept archived in this word 'memory'.

Endnotes

1. This essay is based on a paper entitled 'Memory, Archive and Trouble', the keynote address at the Archives Society of Alberta conference, 'Memory in Archive, Archive of Memory', in Calgary, May 2012. I am grateful to the following friends and colleagues for their readings of early drafts of that paper – Terry Cook, Chandre Gould, Carolyn Hamilton, Kerry Harris and Emily Sommers, as I am to the *Archives and Manuscripts* referees for their readings of the later essay version. Elements of the piece were used for the paper 'Deconstructing "the Tat-too"', presented at the Society of American Archivists' 2012 Annual Conference, 'Beyond Borders', San Diego, August 2012. Feedback on the latter impacted on the final re-write of the essay. The views expressed in the essay are those of the author and do not represent those of the Nelson Mandela Centre of Memory.
2. This introduction is based on the text prepared by me in 2011 for the Archives Society of Alberta to use in its pre-publicity for the 2012 conference 'Memory in Archive, Archive of Memory'.
3. Michael Piggott, 'Archives and Memory', in Sue McKemmish, Michael Piggott, Barbara Reed and Frank Upward (eds), *Archives: Recordkeeping in Society*, Charles Sturt University, Wagga Wagga, 2005, p. 307.
4. See Verne Harris, "'Something is Happening Here and You Don't Know What It Is': Jacques Derrida Unplugged", *Journal of the Society of Archivists*, vol. 26, no. 1, 2005, p. 135; Verne Harris, 'Ethics and the Archive: "An Incessant Movement of Recontextualisation"', in Terry Cook (ed.), *Controlling the Past: Documenting Society and Institutions*, Society of American Archivists, Chicago, 2011, pp. 350–1.
5. Christopher Norris and Andrew Benjamin, *What is Deconstruction?*, St Martin's Press, London, 1988, p. 10.
6. These are offered, in the first instance, not as case studies, but as elements of autobiographical (re)contextualisation. Deconstruction insists that personal contexts are unavoidable, even in the most robust research environments. One need not go as far as Derrida – who argued that there is nothing outside context and who also argued that 'there are only contexts without any centre or absolute anchoring' – to concede that my thinking (of) archives and memory has been shaped by my contexts. I begin, then, by paying heed to this shaping. See Jacques Derrida, *Limited Inc*, Northwestern University Press, Evanston, 1988, pp. 12, 136.
7. I tell this part of the story – but, very deliberately, not the part that follows – in Verne Harris, "'They Should Have Destroyed More": The Destruction of Public Records by the South African State in the Final Years of Apartheid, 1990–1994', *Archives and Justice: A South African Perspective*, Society of American Archivists, Chicago, 2007, pp. 305–36.
8. Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2004, pp. 21, 494–7.
9. *ibid.*, p. 443.
10. Eric Ketelaar, 'Recordkeeping and Societal Power', in Sue McKemmish et al. (eds), *Archives: Recordkeeping in Society*, Charles Sturt University, Wagga Wagga, 2005, p. 287.
11. Today, Kerry and I lean towards an interpretation with three movements: first, in those early days, I conveyed to her my desire to get married in ways other than writing, and she affirmed me in writing; second, I was relatively secure and wielding power in the relationship and; third, we both had a long way to go in our struggle against patriarchy.
12. Jacques Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind: The Self-Portrait and Other Ruins*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1993, p. 51. Maurice Halbwachs made a similar argument: 'There are hence no perceptions without recollections'. See his argument in Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1992, pp. 168–9. This Halbwachs text, which is edited and translated by Lewis A Coser, is not to be confused with his 1950 book *The Collective Memory*.
13. Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, p. 29.
14. *ibid.*, p. 4.
15. Piggott, 'Archives and Memory', pp. 305–7.
16. Margaret Hedstrom, 'Archives and Collective Memory: More than a Metaphor, Less than an Analogy', in Terry Eastwood and Heather MacNeil (eds), *Currents of Archival Thinking*, Libraries Unlimited, Santa Barbara, 2010, p. 163.
17. This understanding of archives is shaped most directly by the work of Professor Carolyn Hamilton (in our collaborative work, Carolyn Hamilton, Verne Harris, Jane Taylor, Michele

- Pickover, Graeme Reid and Razia Saleh (eds), *Refiguring the Archive*, David Philip, Cape Town, 2001, by many subsequent discussions and by Jacques Derrida (his whole opus, but especially *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1996), indigenous ways of knowing archives in southern Africa and Paul Ricoeur (especially *Memory, History, Forgetting*, pp. 13–16).
18. See, for example, Jacques Derrida, *Parages*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 2011, p. 197. It should be noted, and here I am indebted to an *Archives and Manuscripts* referee for pointing it out to me, that Ricoeur uses the same French term translated as ‘archivation’ in Derrida for what is translated as ‘archiving’ in *Memory, History, Forgetting* – see pp. 166–7.
 19. Jacques Derrida, ‘Living on Border Lines’, in Harold Bloom, Paul de Man, Jacques Derrida, Geoffrey Hartman and J. Hillis Miller. *Deconstruction and Criticism*, Continuum, New York, 1979, p. 86.
 20. For an account of Nelson Mandela’s relationships with Swart and other warders, see Nelson Mandela Centre of Memory, ‘Nelson Mandela’s Warders’, available at <<http://www.nelson-mandela.org/content/page/nelson-mandelas-warders>>, accessed 18 October 2012.
 21. Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, p. 16.
 22. So, two versions represented in different genres or sub-genres of archives, implicated in one another, overlapping, folding into one another and contaminating each other. Each is at once ‘text’ to the other’s ‘context’ and ‘context’ to the other’s ‘text’. I am merely signalling complication, for, in truth, the complication of genre is endless. The tattoo must also be accounted for and counted as a genre of artistic endeavour, as a genre of craft, of decoration, of rite of passage and so on. The interfolding and contaminations are endless. They are endless, but subject to what Derrida calls ‘the law of the law of genre’, namely – and precisely – ‘a principle of contamination’ (see Endnote 26). This is a law which determines every boundary to be soft and porous – more precisely, to be being folded in processes of invagination. Processes of sheathing through unsheathing; processes of being folded inside out – invagination, of course, is the thrust of tattooing as a process. While the trace of the tattoo appears to be on the surface of the skin, it is, in fact, beneath the surface. The tattooist’s needle pricks through the surface layer – the epidermis – and takes the ink with it into the next layer – the dermis – so that the ink is folded into the skin. Being foreign material, the ink activates the body’s immune system, which enfolds the ink in sheaths called fibroblasts. This is invagination. The tattoo, then, is not a trace on the skin, but *in* the skin. The tattoo is a folding inside out. So that what is inside is outside, and what is private is – at least in principle – public.
 23. This is the central thesis of Maurice Halbwach’s seminal work *The Collective Memory*, Harper, New York, 1950.
 24. John Caputo, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida*, Fordham University Press, New York, 1997, pp. 79–80.
 25. Both ‘genre’ and ‘trace’ are used here, of course, in Derridean terms. In this essay, my use of the former relies especially on Derrida’s use of the term in ‘The Law of Genre’, *Parages*, pp. 217–49, and my use of the latter relies on his use of the term in *Archive Fever* (see note 17) – ‘the trace’ precisely as ‘archiving trace’. This use is not unrelated to Ricoeur’s use of the word in *Memory, History, Forgetting*. In this work, Ricoeur distinguishes between three categories of trace – documentary, cerebral and affective. For him, only the first of these three is an archiving trace – see, for instance, pp. 13–15, 166–8.
 26. Derrida, *Acts of Literature*, Routledge, London and New York, 1992, pp. 226–8.
 27. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, Harper and Row, New York, 1962, p. 312.
 28. Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, p. 412.
 29. *ibid.*, p. 448.
 30. *ibid.*, p. 426.
 31. Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind*, p. 51.
 32. Jacques Derrida, ‘Archive Fever in South Africa’, in Caroline Hamilton, *Refiguring the Archive*, David Philip, Cape Town, 2002, p. 54.
 33. Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, p. 443.
 34. *ibid.*
 35. For a sustained engagement with these questions, see psychologist James Hillman’s *The Force of Character and the Lasting Life*, Random House, Sydney, 1999, chapter 10, pp. 84–93.
 36. Derrida, ‘Archive Fever in South Africa’, p. 42.

37. Ricoeur, *Memory, History Forgetting*, p. 440.
38. *ibid.*, pp. 417–46. Also see Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, Allen & Unwin, London, 1950.
39. For examples of science naming this meddling, see Bob Holmes, ‘When Memory Plays Us False’, *New Scientist*, no. 1935, July 1994; Graham Lawton, ‘The Grand Delusion: Head Full of Half-Truths’, *New Scientist*, no. 2812, May 2011.
40. Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, pp. 7–21.
41. *ibid.*, p. 457.
42. Jacques Derrida, *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*, Routledge, London, 2001; Nicolai Hartmann, *Ethics*, Allen & Unwin, London, 1932; Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, pp. 457–506.
43. This idea is explored by Anne Michaels in her novel *The Winter Vault*, McClelland and Stewart, Toronto, 2009. See, especially, pp. 93–4, 331–2.
44. Derrida, *Archive Fever*, p. 90. The lecture on which the book is based was delivered in 1994.