

# On the Back of a Tiger: Deconstructive Possibilities in 'Evidence of Me'

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*This article offers a deconstructive reading of Sue McKemmish's 'Evidence of me...', published in 1996 in Archives and Manuscripts. McKemmish's essay is of seminal importance, being the first (and still the only) sustained application of a recordkeeping conceptual framework to the realm of personal recordkeeping. The reading shows McKemmish breaching the boundaries of an enchanted wilderness for too long neglected by the recordkeeping professions. McKemmish, it is argued, demonstrates that in this wilderness we are hanging on the back of a tiger. Using deconstructive techniques, Harris attempts to move into the many openings marked by McKemmish and to point out others missed by her. He suggests that the recordkeeping framework deployed by McKemmish needs to be reimagined in order to accommodate the realities of a realm fraught with complexity.<sup>1</sup>*

Nature threw away the keys and woe to the fateful curiosity which might be able for a moment to look out and down through a crevice in the chamber of consciousness, and discover that man [sic] indifferent to his own ignorance, is resting on the pitiless, the greedy, the insatiable, the murderous, and, as it were, hanging in dreams on the back of a tiger.

Friedrich Nietzsche<sup>2</sup>

...the passivity of genesis and of synthesis invites a sustained meditation on the ashes of evidence and the evidence of ash. Evidence is evidently to be mourned.

David Farrell Krell<sup>3</sup>

To locate the promising marginal text, to disclose the undecidable moment, to pry it loose with the positive lever of the signifier; to reverse the resident hierarchy, only to displace it; to dismantle in order to reconstitute what is always already inscribed. Deconstruction in a nutshell.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak<sup>4</sup>

I am very fond of everything that I deconstruct in my own manner; the texts I want to read from the deconstructive point of view are texts I like, with that impulse of identification which is indispensable for reading.

Jacques Derrida<sup>5</sup>

## A rationale

In 1996 *Archives and Manuscripts* published an important (and deservedly prize-winning) article by Sue McKemmish, entitled 'Evidence of me...'.<sup>6</sup> It is a seminal work, over four years later retaining both its freshness and the urgency of its challenge. It is elegantly written, evinces a close reading of numerous texts both 'fictional' and 'non-fictional' and, crucially, offers a sustained application of a recordkeeping conceptual framework to a records space (personal recordkeeping) usually avoided by the articulators of such frameworks. It marks, both in terms of McKemmish's own thinking and of recordkeeping discourse, a significant stretching (in some cases a reimagining) of core concepts. Indeed, one could go further and argue that McKemmish enters terrain which at the time was virgin in archival discourse; terrain which McKemmish's intervention has sadly not encouraged others in the discourse to enter. Of course, in broader discourses around 'archive' there have been and are intrepid explorers of personal recordkeeping – many writers of fiction, some read by McKemmish; philosophers such as Jacques Derrida; interrogators of the impact on writing (and communication, and human relationships) of email and other forms of electronic communication; and so on.

'Evidence of me...' is at once marginal and anything but marginal. In a sense McKemmish is beyond the margins (in archival discourse), from where she calls colleagues to join her in the task of extending margins. She is at pains to emphasise

the exploratory nature of her endeavour. At various points she flags issues requiring further research, and in the article's final paragraph suggests a possible 'research brief'. In this essay I attempt to heed her call, not by engaging the imperative for further research, but by unfolding the possibilities offered by deconstruction in this space beyond the margins.

The term 'deconstruction' is most commonly associated with Jacques Derrida, who coined it and remains its most prominent articulator and exponent.<sup>7</sup> It is difficult, arguably impossible, to say what deconstruction is. It is not a philosophy, nor an episteme, nor a paradigm. If anything, it is a mode of interrogation, a style of discourse, a way of reading. Let me attempt to suggest its contours by observing Derrida 'in the archive'. His most direct engagement with the archive as concept was in the celebrated (in some quarters, including many archival quarters, reviled) *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (1996). But in a sense all Derrida's work is about the archive. He converses with it, mines it, interrogates it, plays in it, extends it, creates it, imagines it, is imagined by it. It is impossible to speak of Derrida without also speaking of the archive. It is impossible to speak – now, at the beginning of the twenty-first century – of the archive without also speaking of Derrida. Of course, all these assertions assume a concept associated with this word, this noun, 'archive'. An assumption Derrida questions. Not only are there numerous competing concepts associated with the word, but from within the word itself – coming from behind linguistics or semantics or etymology, coming from the very processes of archiving – there is a troubling of meaning. But however we understand the word 'archive', it remains true to say that all Derrida's work, in a sense, is about the archive. And in sense and sensing, for his work – the sense of Derrida, the non-sense of Derrida – insistently, searingly, joyously, embraces the dimensions of reason, emotion and instinct contained in the word 'sense'.

Derrida's work can be typified as an extended reading, or rewriting, of what others have written. Always the canon of Western philosophy and literature, the tradition, the archive, is his point of departure.<sup>8</sup> In the archive he generates archive, opening the future in the past. He reads, and reads again, the canonical texts. Out of his reading comes new text, which is old in its newness. He discloses – for himself and for all readers of text, readers of archive – that we are always and already embedded in 'archi-text'.<sup>9</sup> There is nothing outside of the archive.<sup>10</sup>

And yet, at the same time, in what could be called an aporetic of being, or of becoming, everything is outside of the archive. In everything known is the unknown, the unknowable, the unarchivable, the other. And every other is wholly other. This is not so much – though it is this – a marking of reason's limits. It is more a disclosing of structural resistance to closure. Every circle of human knowing and experience is always already breached – breached by the unnameable, by an (un)certain divine particularity, by a coming which must always be coming. In

his more recent work, Derrida has opened (more fully) what could be called religious and autobiographical dimensions to his explorations.<sup>11</sup> These dimensions coalesce in an ever closer heeding to the call of the other, more precisely of otherness. In heeding closely, he has been drawn, in one movement, to the otherness outside and the otherness inside – the otherness of the self, or of the selves, an otherness marking and marked by, but never found, in the personal archive.

The personal archive. Personal recordkeeping. Evidence of me. This is the terrain in which I intend to move in this essay. A terrain broached in archival discourse (narrowly defined) by McKemmish. My movement will be informed (consciously) by three dimensions. Firstly, a deconstructive reading of McKemmish's 'Evidence of me...'. Secondly, a further opening (for I believe that McKemmish has begun the work of opening) into personal recordkeeping for the energies of deconstruction. And thirdly, an invitation to readers to engage in the deconstruction of my movement.

### Of scope

In the article's opening three paragraphs, McKemmish outlines the analytical framework she will deploy. For her, personal recordkeeping is a way of 'evidencing' and 'memorialising' a life. It is a 'kind of witnessing'. The 'capacity to witness' hinges on the 'functionality' of the archive generated by this witnessing – the degree to which a person 'systematically' goes about the 'business' of creating and capturing records, ordering them in relation to each other, placing them in the context of related activities, keeping and discarding them – in short, 'organising them to function as long-term memory of significant activities and relationships'. Within this framework McKemmish indicates that she will explore the factors that condition recordkeeping behaviour and seek to identify the range of 'personal recordkeeping cultures'.

Before she begins (and one could go further back, to other writings of hers which inform the moves she will make in 'Evidence of me...'), she establishes that she is outside the evidence–memory dichotomy which informs so much recordkeeping discourse. The record is at once evidence and memory, but not in any reductionist 'two sides of a coin' way. Both concepts are infused with fresh possibility by their configuration within the category 'witnessing'. This McKemmish has already marked in her choice of title, a quote from Graham Swift's *Ever After*. Later, as she engages Swift's text, it becomes clear that for Swift 'evidence' is hospitable to the dynamics of storytelling, which bring with them 'mysteries', 'fantasticalities', 'wonders' and 'grounds for astonishment'. Although she does not spell it out, McKemmish flags her distance from narrow 'record-as-evidence' formulations.

What might a spelling out, or better, a probing beyond the surface layers, reveal? That witnessing is a terrain without horizon, always stretching beyond evidencing and memorialising, embracing (without hard boundaries between them) interrogating, constructing, resisting, imagining, narrating, fabricating, hiding (from), forgetting, healing, and so on (and on). That witnessing, contrary to its conventional usage, cannot submit to an economy of proof, certainty and information. As Derrida has said of 'testimony', 'there is no testimony that does not structurally imply in itself the possibility of fiction, simulacra, dissimulation, lie, and perjury'.<sup>12</sup> That witnessing can only be squeezed into the claustrophobic space of recordkeeping functionality at a price.

Why should the capacity to witness through personal records depend on the degree of 'functionality'? What of the possibility that an 'anti-functionality' or a 'dysfunctionality' is as legitimate a mode of witnessing? Does not the total destruction of all documentary traces carry a fund of meanings? Or the deliberate 'decontextualising' of correspondence by preserving only fragments stuck in a scrapbook? In the final section of the article McKemmish addresses the question of archival intervention in the domain of personal recordkeeping. I think she makes many valid points, all of them informed by a commitment to promoting functionality. But she does not explore what is for me by far the most interesting dimension – the resistance to functionality in this domain. What underlies these resistances? Why do even archivists resist 'system' and 'order' and 'business' with their personal archives? What is this 'dysfunctionality' saying to us? And, to shift the focus somewhat, what of the possibility that a poem about a life can carry far more meanings than a whole archive of personal records? Does Leonard Cohen's song 'Suzanne' not do for his relationship with Suzanne Verdal what no volume of archival records can approximate? What does that say about the value of evidence in records? And about the collecting priorities of archivists?

Questions not posed. A narrowing of a scope of enquiry. The paying of a price. The notion of recordkeeping functionality works against McKemmish's broad understanding of witnessing in records. It pulls her towards a privileging of 'evidencing' over other dynamics, and towards a narrower representation of evidence as an authentic, reliable 'capturing' of process. Let me offer two examples here to illustrate this. On page 30, McKemmish suggests that 'archivists can analyse what is happening in personal recordkeeping in much the same way as they analyse corporate recordkeeping'. Specifically, archivists 'can analyse socially assigned roles and related activities and draw conclusions about what records individuals in their personal capacity capture as evidence of these roles and activities'. A second example is to be found on page 35. Having related how the writer Patrick White moved from being 'remembrancer' to 'recordkeeper' in relation to his own life, McKemmish asserts that 'for White too, there eventually came a time when "privacy was no longer the issue" and carrying forward evidence

of his life beyond his own lifetime was what “mattered most”. This strains against McKemmish’s own formulation of remembrancing working within all recordkeeping. And I have to wonder if White, in conceding to the preservation of records, was not more concerned about a different form of remembrancing, of witnessing, of carrying forward stories of his life.

The opening paragraphs of ‘Evidence of me...’ raise two other areas of concern for me. Firstly, the notion of a range of ‘personal recordkeeping cultures’. That McKemmish does not delimit the spaces in which she will seek this range of cultures sets off alarm bells for me. Will she be seeking it in the present, the now, or in past presents? Will she be seeking it across the globe? Or in the Western world? Or in Australia? In certain sectors of society? The questions are endless and, as I will attempt to point out, they haunt the whole article.

A final preliminary alarm bell is ringing. McKemmish’s stated intention is to explore the factors that condition the recordkeeping behaviour of individuals. But what about the equally valid and important question, ‘how does recordkeeping condition a life?’ Numerous scholars have studied the impact of writing (in the narrowest sense) on societies. As numerous are the scholars who have studied the impact of new technologies – from cameras to typewriters to the telegraph to computers – for recording and/or communicating ‘the event’. Arguably none has interrogated the recording process as profoundly as Jacques Derrida. He argues that the trace, the archive, is not simply a recording, a capturing, a reflection, of the event. Nor is it merely a construction of the event. It shapes the event. ‘The archivization produces as much as it records the event.’<sup>13</sup> So that the questions ‘what factors condition personal recordkeeping?’ and ‘how does recordkeeping condition a life?’ hang together, unfold out of one another. Any enquiry into recordkeeping which privileges one, or omits one, invites impoverishment.

## Finding fissures

Throughout ‘Evidence of me...’ McKemmish quotes records and people from a variety of contexts. The span and richness of the variety is impressive. This to illustrate a spectrum of ‘recordkeeping behaviour’, from ‘obsessive recordkeeper’ to ‘remembrancer’; from the one who diligently documents process, the event – with respect for functionality – to the one who relies entirely on ‘memory’. McKemmish’s account is seamless and compelling – a metanarrative inviting deconstruction. For if deconstruction has an obsession it is with the seams, the ruptures, the frayed ends which are always already there. McKemmish gives us a glimpse of some of them. For instance, the category ‘obsessive recordkeeper’ carries a pejorative meaning. The portrait of Ann-Clare – an archetypal recordkeeper – in the novel *The Grass Sister* is ‘disturbing’. Here is a strong

suggestion of dysfunction. A dysfunction nestling right in the heart of recordkeeping functionality. McKemmish opens for us a whole realm of possibility. And of course McKemmish has already placed the spectrum under erasure with her embrace of recordkeeping as 'a kind of witnessing' – so that memory is always teasing the most obsessive recordkeeping; and the most committed remembrancer is engaging, and engaged by, a kind of recordkeeping.

These are important glimpses. But hidden by the spectrum's appearance of seamlessness are a myriad layers and fractures. What are the differences – and they are without number – determined or informed by 'things' such as gender, class, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and so on? What are the differences between cultures (in the broadest sense)? And countries? And historical 'moments'? McKemmish, I am suggesting, is underplaying 'context'. Her numerous examples of records and recordkeepers tend to float free of space, time, and other contextual layerings. Let me mention just two in order to suggest the consequences. On page 38 she quotes a long extract from Edmund White's 'Esthetics and Loss' in which he places 'memorialisation' and 'bearing witness' in the context of gay experience. This to support a single sentence by McKemmish: 'In Edmund White's writings there is a fine sense of the role of personal recordkeeping linked to issues of cultural identity and memory, and to the instinct to witness.' A whole corridor of doors marked by White are left unopened by McKemmish. For instance, are there gay specificities in the realm of recordkeeping? How have these specificities changed over time? Do they differ from country to country? What are the obstacles to straight readings (especially of the most intimate) gay recordings? How do criminalisation and other forms of oppression impact on the personal recordkeeping of gay people? How do these recordkeeping dynamics impact on gay experiences?

The other example is McKemmish's passing reference to Australian Aboriginal experience on pages 38 and 39. Again, the extent and the specificities of what is a rich tapestry are not explored. The considerable Aboriginal challenge to Western notions of 'the record' are left unmarked. In fact, one could go further and argue that the brief passage offered by McKemmish suggests (though this is surely not her intention) that Aboriginal people need (white) institutional intervention in order to help them remember and evidence their pasts.

### **Of forms and power**

As I have already intimated, the 'recordkeeping cultures' of what we could call 'traditional' or 'indigenous' societies and communities are not featured in McKemmish's account. Nor does she address forms of the record – orality, tattoos, facial markings and so on – regarded as more or less 'informal' within recordkeeping discourse (in radical formulations they would be excluded altogether from the category 'record'). Her focus is intently on the 'formal' record

– positioned, in the main, in what we could call a societal (and Western, or global hub) mainstream. This focus, I want to suggest, is conditioned by McKemmish's utilisation of recordkeeping functionality as a framework.

Not that McKemmish does not provide an opening for a wider focus. She does so by including remembrancing as a form of recordkeeping. But clearly, further exploration of personal recordkeeping by archivists must take this opening boldly. Such exploration should avoid a functionality straightjacket. Equally, it should avoid narrow conceptualisations of 'recordness'. Here Jacques Derrida has much to offer. In numerous writings, but particularly in his seminal *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, Jacques Derrida unfolds the structure of recording, of archiving, as involving a trace (text, information) being consigned to a substrate, a place (and it can be a virtual place) of consignment. So that for Derrida the archive is a conjoining of trace and substrate – writing on paper, painting on rock, cut on skin, even a configuring of brain particles in the psychic apparatus. Does the latter mean that 'archive' and 'memory' are conflated? No. The need for exteriority (ultimately) separates 'archive' from 'memory':

...since the archive doesn't consist simply in remembering, in living memory, in anamnesis; but in consigning, in inscribing a trace in some external location – there is no archive without some location, that is, some space outside. Archive is not a living memory. It's a location – that's why the political power of the archons is so essential in the definition of the archive. So that you need the exteriority of the place in order to get something archived.<sup>14</sup>

For a story, a memory, to become archive, it must have exteriority. And consignment to the psychic apparatuses of others constitutes an exteriorisation. So that the stories and memories of collectivities are archive. As are the stories and memories transmitted by an individual to any other. They are, in recordkeeping terminology, evidence of transactions. (Thus, for instance, the legal status of 'verbal contracts' in many societies.) It could be argued, of course, that the 'unconscious' is an 'external space' within an individual's psychic apparatus – so that traces in the individual unconscious could be regarded as archive. But that is an argument for another day.<sup>15</sup>

Derridean thinking opens huge chasms under McKemmish's account of personal recordkeeping. At this point I mark just three vertiginous lines emerging from the passage quoted above. First, to reiterate what I've already said, McKemmish risks marginalising orality, that record, that archive, consigned to a dispersed substrate no one can 'see', which leads to a risk of marginalising whole layerings of personal recordkeeping, and of marginalising whole recordkeeping collectivities. Secondly, 'memory' – and 'remembrancing' – cannot be subsumed unproblematically under the category 'recordkeeping'. And thirdly, her account touches only briefly on the fundamental issue of power – a single direct engagement with the issue is recounted below. Derrida argues that consignment,



structurally, involves the exercise of power, what he calls 'archontic power'. Power in relation to both the process and the place of consignment. In all archiving then – the diarist making an entry, the rock painter at work, the person sending an email to a friend, the parent sharing a family tale with the children – archontic power is in play. The challenge for those who would follow McKemmish into this terrain fraught with complexity is to negotiate these chasms.

### The bounds of fiction

Arguably the boldest, most radical, move made by McKemmish is her suggestion that personal recordkeeping (amongst other things) is a playground of fictions. She quotes passages from Anthony Giddens and Graham Swift in which both writers stress the centrality of narrative, and thus of fictionalisation, to human identity. For Giddens, 'The individual's biography, if she is to maintain regular interaction with others in the day-to-day world, cannot be wholly fictive. It must continually integrate events which occur in the external world, and sort them into the ongoing "story" about the self.'<sup>16</sup> So that the individual's recordkeeping – in the writing of a journal, the writing and keeping of letters – is contaminated by the human instinct to tell story and to create identity. For McKemmish Swift's novel *Waterland* 'provides an insight into the way Giddens's "narrative of the self" might merge into the narrative of the tribe – and eventually contribute to the yarn that is history itself' (page 37).

Recordkeeping as a way of keeping the narrative going. History as yarn. Here McKemmish is challenging the dominant position in recordkeeping discourse – indeed, the dominant position in all archival discourse – which will concede only that recordkeepers might work with the residues of storytellers and might serve storytellers; but that who recordkeepers are and what they do is neatly partitioned from the realm of story. It is a pity that McKemmish does not elaborate her challenge; that she does not draw from a discourse far broader than Giddens and Swift; that she does not weave the challenge into her analytical framework, explore its explosive implications for the concept of 'witnessing'. But she has given us a crucial marker.

In all that recordkeepers do they are working with 'context', continually locating it, constructing it, figuring and refiguring it. And they do this work primarily through the medium of narrative. There is analysis and processing and labelling and listing and quantifying and so on, but essentially the recordkeeping intervention has to do with storytelling. Recordkeepers tell stories about stories, they tell stories with stories. And narrativity – as Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Hayden White and others have demonstrated – as much as it might strive to work with actual events, processes, structures and characters, in its form – structurally – brings a certain fictionalisation of what Paul Ricoeur calls these

immediate referents.<sup>17</sup> For the form of narrativity – like all forms – is not merely a neutral container. It shapes, even determines, the narrative content in significant ways. Every narrative construction of the past is by definition creative, a work of the imagination – it recalls referents which in all their particularity, their uniqueness, are irrecoverable, and which flow in a chaotic open-endedness. The construction gives to them a shape, a pattern, a closure. So that all ‘non-fictional’ discourse employing narrative inevitably invites ‘fiction’ in. A hard boundary between ‘non-fiction’ and ‘fiction’, then, is unsustainable. Narrators of ‘non-fiction’, including recordkeepers, no matter how dedicated they are to ‘facts’ and to empirical methods, are confronted by documentary records, collective memories and individual memories shaped by the dance of remembering, forgetting and imagining. And that dance whirls in their own heads as they construct their representations of the past. History slides into story, reality into fiction. So that Jacques Derrida can speak of ‘the meshes of the net formed by the limits *between* fiction and testimony, which are also *interior* each to the other. The net’s texture remains loose, unstable, permeable.’<sup>18</sup>

## The event and the trace

In a short section entitled ‘Killing the memory...’, McKemmish talks about a pattern of records destruction in human conflict. She concludes:

On one level such actions are aimed at ensuring the victors against future claims by the peoples they hope to dispossess. At a more profound level, destroy the memory – the evidence that those peoples ever lived in that place – and those peoples, those cultures *never existed at all* (pages 39 and 40).

Here she gives us an extreme example of archontic power being exercised. It is also an extreme instance of evidence to be mourned. Elsewhere (in footnote 2) McKemmish quotes Tolstoy saying of his diaries: ‘The diaries *are* me’. In both cases she is marking profound levels (or spaces) but declining to enter them. Specifically, she is declining to explore the implications of these statements for our conceptualisation of ‘the record’. And these implications – to my ears anyhow – are crying out to be heard. For most archival discourse assumes a structural separation between ‘the event’ and ‘the trace of event’. But these statements (by McKemmish and McKemmish-through-Tolstoy) – so fleeting it is almost as though they were not made – conflate ‘event’ and ‘trace’, which reveals a yawning conceptual chasm beneath us.

Let me just suggest here the scope of the chasm with the beginning of a vertiginous inventory. If ‘event’ and ‘trace’ are not ultimately separable, then ‘me’ separate from ‘my traces’ is not all of ‘me’. ‘My traces’ are not merely ‘evidence’ of ‘me’, they are part of who I am. As much as I create ‘my traces’, they create ‘me’ (as Derrida puts it, ‘the archivization produces as much as it records the event’). ‘My traces’

are constructions, always demanding deconstruction. 'Me' is a construction, always demanding deconstruction. There is nothing outside of text, of 'trace'; everything is always already outside of text.<sup>19</sup> 'Evidence' must always be mourned, for its preservation carries the very possibility of its reduction to ashes. 'Evidence' must always be mourned, for it *is* the ashes of the 'always already outside'. Perhaps 'provenance' does not 'lie' in any particular 'locus' (cf. pages 35–6 of 'Evidence of me...') – perhaps it is – and always was – shattered and shattering.

And so on, and on and on. I terminate the inventory here before vertigo becomes overwhelming. My point is simply that McKemmish opens a door on the unlimited fecund spaces carried by the concepts 'record' and 'archive'. She opens a door on whole streams of philosophical and broader discourse. For those who would follow her, the imperative is to walk through the door.

A brief observation before drawing this section to a close. On page 36 of 'Evidence of me...' McKemmish makes passing comment on 'the photograph' in the context of the documenting work done by professional photographers. Another door inviting entry. What of amateur photography? The importance to personal recordkeeping of the family snapshot? What of moving images? The home video? The impact of digital technologies? The questions are legion. But I would argue that the most significant questions draw us back to the connection between 'the event and the trace'. For McKemmish's comments are bounded by a notion of the photographic image as a 'catching' or 'freezing' of the moment. The trace as a reflection of the event. The trace structurally separated from the event. What fecund spaces are opened by the possibility of their conflation? To what extent is the trace a construction of the event? Can the trace not create the event? Is there not a sense in which the trace *is* the event; in which the photographic image *is* the moment?

### **More vertigo**

Everything I have said thus far assumes the boundaries of 'personal recordkeeping' to be self-evident; and, in particular, assumes the boundary between 'personal recordkeeping' and 'corporate recordkeeping' to be clear, stable and hard. In doing so I follow McKemmish. But of course the boundary between these two recordkeeping 'spaces' is far from untroubled. On the one hand, organisations struggle to prevent employees maintaining more or less informal records systems which run parallel to the formal records systems. They struggle to prevent employees using the former to conduct personal recordkeeping – here I need only flag, for example, the huge challenge posed by email. They struggle, particularly in the electronic realm, to define what constitutes an organisational record. On the other hand, individuals outside the workplace find it difficult to

wear a single hat when dealing with a record. So often the 'personal' slides into the 'professional', 'associational' or 'organisational'.

Shadowing the boundary – exceeding it but always implicated in it – is the separation between the 'personal' and the 'public'. This is a separation every individual makes, but it is determined by an indeterminable and shifting context of cultural and societal layerings. There is a huge literature on this phenomenon, which I merely flag here. Just three points to illustrate the implications for any attempt to place boundaries around personal recordkeeping. Firstly, we need to consider the impact of freedom of information and protection of privacy legislation on how individuals keep records and on what records they can bring into their (personal) recordkeeping spaces. Secondly, electronic recordkeeping is at once increasing concern about privacy and drawing the 'private' out of previously hidden spaces. And thirdly, more and more individuals are working out of their home environments – for themselves, for a single employer, or for a shifting configuration of employers. In this scenario even the most committed devotee of functionality is confronted by a considerable challenge.

So, the boundary between 'personal recordkeeping' and 'corporate recordkeeping' is troubled. It is unclear, shifting and soft. What brings us to this conclusion – to some extent – is deconstruction. But deconstruction would take us further. It invites us to consider the boundary between these recordkeeping domains which is *interior* each to the other. On the one hand, consider the degree to which every corporate record bears the imprint of the individual. The individual telling his or her own story. On the other, consider the degree to which every personal record bears the imprint of what Derrida calls *archi-text*. The individual telling his or her own story always within a multi-layered – including organisational layerings – conceptual framework. A meta-archive shaping all archive. As Foucault argues: 'the archive is first the law of what can be said'.<sup>20</sup> And *when* it can be said; *how* it can be said.

## The tiger

In 'Evidence of me...' McKemmish breaches the boundaries of an enchanted wilderness area for too long neglected by the recordkeeping professions. There she shows us that we are hanging in dreams on the back of a (very) wild tiger. The realm of personal recordkeeping, to use non-metaphoric language, is one fraught with complexity. More than this, she suggests – gently, indirectly – that all recordkeeping domains are equally complex. We might think – with our ready definitions, legislation, policies, standards, programs and systems – that we can bring the wilderness under control, that we can tame the tiger. In my reading, McKemmish is arguing that this would be to fool ourselves.

Some might point to the final section of 'Evidence of me...' as evidence of McKemmish advocating a strategy for 'taming'. In this section she explores the possibilities for archival intervention in personal recordkeeping and proposes a research brief. I read her differently. Certainly, there is evidence of a certain ambivalence in her thinking. Given the daring conceptual challenges she poses earlier in the piece, her proposals for further research are somewhat cautious. They tend to shy from danger. And, as I have already indicated, her vision is troubled by adherence to the notion of recordkeeping functionality. She quotes approvingly, for instance, Chris Hurley calling for a process 'to identify and articulate the functional requirements for personal recordkeeping and for socio-historical evidence' (page 41). However, her respect for wilderness is unswerving. While archivists must move beyond passivity, 'we may just have to accept that archivists cannot play much of a direct role in these process-based aspects of personal recordkeeping' (page 41). An appropriate role, she suggests, is more about promoting awareness, purveying concepts, crossing disciplinary boundaries, engaging creatively, expanding conceptual frameworks, breathing life into discourses grown weary:

What archivists can do is to further develop and share their understandings of the role of personal recordkeeping in our society and the 'place' of the personal archive in the collective archives. It may be that studying the personal archive in the way suggested in this article will provide us with insights that enable us to understand recordkeeping per se as a social system, a perspective that is often missing in studies of corporate recordkeeping (page 41).

I have attempted to take McKemmish's analysis a step further. Specifically I have endeavoured, using deconstructive techniques, to move into the many openings she has marked and to point out others which she missed. Or, to return to the metaphor of the tiger, I have attempted to disclose more fully the tiger in all its frightening splendour, with its imperilled, dreaming rider. Like McKemmish, I offer no blueprint for managing danger. No solution. But I am arguing that the instincts to tame, to destroy, or to flee promise impoverishment. And I am suggesting (merely suggesting, for establishing the basis for the assertion is an argument for another day) that the archival instinct (and it has to be an instinct bigger than the merely 'archival') is to re-spect (look again at) wildness, to look – with passion – for ways of conserving wilderness. In 'Evidence of me...' McKemmish allows this instinct space to play. Of course, it could be argued that wilderness areas are best (con)served by preventing breaches. Another argument for another day...

## ENDNOTES

1 I wish to acknowledge my indebtedness to Adrian Cunningham, Kerry Harris, Ethel Kriger and Sue McKemmish for their readings of the first draft of this essay. Their insights

and shared passion led to a comprehensive rewrite. Any flaws which remain are my own responsibility.

2 Oscar Levy (ed.), *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche*, New York, 1964, vol. 3 part 2, pp. 175-6.

3 David Farrell Krell, *The Purest of Bastards: Works of Mourning, Art and Affirmation in the Thought of Jacques Derrida*, Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000, p. 133.

4 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Translator's Preface', in Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997, p. xxvii.

5 Jacques Derrida, in Christie McDonald (ed.), *The Ear of the Other: Otobiography, Transference, Translation*, Schocken Books, 1985, p. 87.

6 Sue McKemmish, 'Evidence of me...', *Archives and Manuscripts*, vol. 24, no. 1, May 1996, pp. 28-45.

7 Other notable 'deconstructionists' include Emmanuel Levinas, Maurice Blanchot and Gayatri Spivak.

8 In *Edmund Husserl's Origin of Geometry* (1978), for instance, Derrida engages Husserl and Joyce. In *Glas* (1986) he engages Hegel and Genet. *The Gift of Death* (1995) is a conversation with Kierkegaard and Jan Patocka. In *Politics of Friendship* (1997) he tackles the Western canonical discourse on friendship.

9 John Caputo describes 'archi-text' as 'various networks - social, historical, linguistic, political, sexual networks (the list goes on nowadays to include electronic networks, worldwide webs) - various horizons or presuppositions...' Caputo, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida*, Fordham University Press, 1997, pp. 79-80.

10 This is a reading, a rewriting, of possibly Derrida's most misunderstood, most abused, statement: 'there is nothing outside of the text' (*Of Grammatology*, p. 158).

11 See, for instance, *Memoirs of the Blind* (1993), *Circumfession* (1993), *On the Name* (1995), *The Gift of Death* (1995), 'Faith and Knowledge: The Two Sources of 'Religion' at the Limits of Reason Alone' in J Derrida and G Vattimo (eds), *Religion* (1998), and *Monolingualism of the Other* (1998).

12 Jacques Derrida, *Demeure: Fiction and Testimony*, Stanford University Press, 2000, p. 29.

13 Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, University of Chicago Press, 1996, p. 17.

14 Jacques Derrida, Transcript of seminar 'Archive Fever', presented at University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, August 1998, to be published in *Refiguring the Archive*, David Philip Publishers, South Africa.

15 This is arguably the core argument of Derrida's *Archive Fever*.

16 Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1991, p. 54.

17 Quoted and analysed in Hayden White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation*, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987, pp. 169-84.

18 Jacques Derrida, *Demeure: Fiction and Testimony*, Stanford University Press, 2000, p. 56.

19 Acknowledgement to Derrida.

20 Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, Pantheon, New York, 1992, p. 129.