Actually it has been written twice... I determined to give it up; but it tormented me like an unlaid ghost.¹

Yes, I am teaching something positive here. Except that it is expressed by a negation. But why shouldn’t it be as positive as anything else?²

There is no meta-archive.³
Argument

This paper will follow the thread that may be traced in Derrida’s *Mal d’Archive* when the title is translated as “The Archive Bug.”

In so doing, it will attempt to describe the ways in which the death drive as it appears in *Mal d’Archive* may be related to the (non-)concept of *différance* as it has emerged in Derrida’s theoretical writings under various names. The argument will hinge on the thinking of *différance* as a virus, in the sense of an (anti-)information (non-)entity which propagates by entering a genetic structure and substituting elements of its code.

Entstellung [Re-Framing]

... and I always dream of a pen that would be a syringe, a suction point rather than that very hard weapon with which one must inscribe, incise, choose, calculate, take ink before filtering the inscribable, playing the keyboard on the screen, whereas here, once the right vein has been found, no more toil, no responsibility, no risk of bad taste nor of violence, the blood delivers itself alone, the inside gives itself up and you can do as you like with it ... Nevertheless, the needle must puncture the skin: a small violence. And it is strange that Derrida does not mention the other function of the syringe: to inject the *pharmakon*. One might wonder whether Derrida’s dream is a dream of death: “once the right vein has been found, no more toil, no responsibility...” Even a dream of sadism. The syringe accompanies other instruments of torture in “interrogation,” a means by which “the inside gives itself up and you can do as you like with it...” But who is the torturer and who is tortured? Of whose vein does Derrida dream? Who is the “you” opposed to the “I” of the dreamer? Between the “I” and the “you” is the “one” who writes (a certain article of the person suggests a middle voice), who must “inscribe, incise, calculate,” a place of indeterminacy between the “I” who dreams of gaining and the “you” who does indeed gain access to the inside, between the dreamer and operator: the writer, between outside and inside, just like the syringe itself. The writer, then, fulfils the other function of the syringe, to puncture, to penetrate, to inject the *pharmakon* (to prepare for the incision), and generally to serve as a means of passage between inside and outside, between “I” and “you.” The passage between the dreamer who wishes for a non-violent writing and the operator who non-violentlyextracts the blood is established only by the violent act of writing itself: “Once the right vein has been found, no more toil, no responsibility, no risk of bad taste nor of violence.” Finding the vein is another matter.
One might be tempted to read in this dream the texture of a kind of auto-affective sadism whereby the “I” of the dreamer is the “one” whose vein is pierced by the “you” of the operator, united but also separated by the interval of the syringe itself, the function of writing or of the writer. After all, for whom is there “no more toil, no responsibility, no risk of bad taste nor of violence”: the operator, or the “one” who lies back and lets “the inside give itself up,” who hands over the “responsibility,” “toil,” “bad taste” and “violence” of the inside with an abnegation: “do as you like with it” that also expresses permission: “you can do as you like with it”?

Therefore, the auto-sadistic tendency (which paves the way to the end of pain and violence, that is to death – one here faces the death drive in all its manifestations) only functions through the banishment of death to an exterior (a “you” exterior to the “I”) only through its own act of violence (the puncture, the incision, writing).

Freud: “The pleasure principle seems actually to serve the death instincts.”⁷ What we thus face in this dream of non-violence is actually an “economy of death.”⁸

There is another way in which this dream could be interpreted: as an expression of the operation of Derrida’s writing on the structure of metaphysics. Thus one also might wonder whether différance is not implicated in this economy of death.

How are we to think simultaneously, on the one hand, différance as the economic detour which, in the element of the same, always aims at coming back to the pleasure or presence that have been deferred by (conscious or unconscious) calculation, and, on the other hand, différance as the relation to an impossible presence, as expenditure without reserve, as the death instinct, and as the entirely other relationship that apparently interrupts every economy?⁹

Différance as death, différance as life: “How are they to be joined?”¹⁰

Restraint upon motor discharge (upon action), which then became necessary, was provided by means of the process of thinking, which was developed from the presentation of ideas. Thinking was endowed with characteristics which made it possible for the mental apparatus to tolerate an increased tension of stimulus while the process of discharge was postponed. It is essentially an experimental kind of acting, accompanied by displacement of relatively small quantities of cathexis together with less expenditure (discharge) of them. For this purpose the conversion of freely displaceable cathexes into “bound” cathexes was necessary, and this was brought about by raising the level of the whole cathectic process.¹¹
This “conversion” is the condition of any sublimation. But it is also the very phenomenon of sublimation, “raising the level of the whole cathectic process” in such a manner that it in effect negates the “discharge” or “expenditure.”

All that I insist upon is the idea that the activity of the first $\psi$-system is directed towards securing the free discharge of the quantities of excitation, while the second system, by means of the cathexes emanating from it, succeeds in inhibiting this discharge and in transforming the cathexis into a quiescent one, no doubt with a simultaneous raising of its potential.\(^\text{12}\)

Therefore the “economic detour,” différance as deferral, is always a form of sublimation, for example, from action to thinking, which always involves the “binding” of mobile energy in order to store a reserve.

Again it is easy to identify the primary psychical process with Breuer’s freely mobile cathexis and the secondary process with changes in his bound or tonic cathexis. If so, it would be the task of the higher strata of the mental apparatus to bind the instinctual excitation reaching the primary process. A failure to effect this binding would provoke a disturbance analogous to a traumatic neurosis; and only after the binding had been accomplished would it be possible for the dominance of the pleasure principle (and of its modification, the reality principle) to proceed unhindered. Till then the other task of the mental apparatus, the task of mastering or binding excitations, would have precedence – not, indeed, in opposition to the pleasure principle, but independently of it and to some extent in disregard of it.\(^\text{13}\)

But there is always a difference between the “instinctual excitation reaching the primary process” and that which is successfully “bound,” thanks to the activity of entropy. (“A measure of unavailable energy in a physical system. Since usable energy is lost in irreversible energy transfers, entropy increases in closed systems [the second law of thermodynamics]”\(^\text{14}\)). The trace of this difference in deferral will always “press towards discharge.”\(^\text{15}\) That is, its activity is always, by definition, “expenditure without reserve.”

Of interest is that entropy is “a measure of the disorder in a system.”\(^\text{16}\) In relation to economic investment, the difference that the sublimation fails to bind is by definition a disorder and a failure of the information memory system of the secondary process.

It is the (failed) attempt to “master” this “energy” that results in the repetition compulsion.
At the same time, the mobility of this energy, its unremitting play of condensation and displacement, disrupts repetition by substituting differing elements into the genetic constitution of its structure. This is the activity of the primary process, the Entstellung, which transforms the logic of the secondary process.

It is at work, but since it always operates in silence, it never leaves any archives of its own. It destroys in advance its own archive, as if that were in truth the very motivation of its most proper movement. It works to destroy the archive: on the condition of effacing but also with a view to effacing its own “proper” traces – which consequently cannot properly be called “proper.”

Therefore, différance at the same time constitutes the attempt to master, to repeat, to remember, and that which escapes mastery, repetition and memory. Différance operates as a virus, entering the structure and substituting elements of its genetic code (its origin, its “point of presence”) so that the structure is reconstituted.

Henceforth it became necessary to think that there was no centre, that the centre could not be thought of as a present-being, that the centre had no natural site, that it was not a fixed locus but a function, a sort of nonlocus in which an infinite number of sign substitutions came into play. This was the moment when language invaded the universal problematic, the moment when, in the absence of a centre or origin, everything became discourse – provided we can agree on that word – that is to say, a system in which the central signified, the original or transcendental signified, is never absolutely present outside a system of differences. The absence of the transcendental signified extends the domain and the play of signification infinitely.

The différance virus opens every closed system to infinity. This is why this paper translates Derrida’s Mal d’Archive as “The Archive Bug.”

Another economy is thus at work, the transaction between this death drive and the pleasure principle, between Thanatos and Eros, but also between the death drive and this apparent dual opposition of principles, of arkhai, for example the reality principle and the pleasure principle. The death drive is not a principle. It even threatens every principality, every archontic primacy, every archival desire. It is what we will call, later on, le mal d’archive.
1. Body

The task which was imposed on me in the dream of carrying out a dissection of my own body was thus my self-analysis which was linked up with my giving an account of my dreams. Old Brucke came in here appropriately: even in the first years of my scientific work it happened that I allowed a discovery of mine to lie fallow until an energetic remonstrance on his part drove me into publishing it. The further thoughts which were started up by my conversation with Louise N. went too deep to become conscious. They were diverted in the direction of the material that had been stirred up in me by the mention of Rider Haggard’s *She*. The judgement ‘strangely enough’ went back to that book and to another one, *Heart of the World*, by the same author; and numerous elements of the dream were derived from these two imaginative novels. The boggy ground over which people had to be carried, and the chasm which had to be crossed by means of boards brought along with them, were taken from *She*; the Red Indians, the girl and the wooden house were taken from *Heart of the World*. In both novels the guide is a woman; both are concerned with perilous journeys; while *She* describes an adventurous road that had scarcely ever been trod before, leading into an undiscovered region. The end of the adventure in *She* is that the guide, instead of finding immortality for herself and the others, perishes in the mysterious subterranean fire. A fear of that kind was unmistakably active in the dream-thoughts. The “wooden house” was also, no doubt, a coffin, that is to say, the grave. But the dream-work achieved a masterpiece in its representation of this most unwished-for of all thoughts by a wish-fulfillment. For I had already been in a grave once, but it was an excavated Etruscan grave near Orvieto, a narrow chamber with two stone benches along its walls, on which the skeletons of two grown-up men were lying. The inside of the wooden house in the dream looked exactly like it, except that the stone was replaced by wood. The dream seems to have been saying: “If you must rest in a grave, let it be the Etruscan one.” And by making this replacement, it transformed the gloomiest of expectations into one that was highly desirable. Unluckily, as we are soon to hear, a dream can turn into its opposite the idea accompanying an affect but not always the affect itself. Accordingly, I woke up in a “mental fright,” even after the successful emergence of the idea that children may perhaps achieve what their father has failed to – a fresh allusion to the strange novel in which a person’s identity is re-
tained through a series of generations for over two thousand years. 22

Freud dreams the myth of psychoanalysis, the journey into the body to discover death and the ancestral memory trace at the “heart of the world.” And he dreams it in 1898, decades before “Beyond the Pleasure Principle” or *Moses and Monotheism*. Note the intersecting chains: *She*, a female guide, a mysterious subterranean fire, *Heart of the World*, a *house*, and a *grave* intersect with the paternal chain of generations and the Oedipal dialectic with the father: two chains intersecting in death, the grave housing the patriarchal ancestor.

2. Memory

I asked myself what is the moment *proper* to the archive, if there is such a thing, the instant of archivisation strictly speaking, which is not, and I will come back to this, so-called live or spontaneous memory (*mneme* or *anamnesis*), but rather a certain hypomnesis and prosthetic experience of the technical substrate. Was it not at this very instant that, having written something or other on the screen, the letters remaining as if suspended and floating yet at the surface of a liquid element, I pushed a certain key to “save” a text undamaged, in a hard and lasting way, to protect marks from being erased, so as to ensure in this way salvation and *indemnity*, to stock, to accumulate, and, in what is at once the same thing and something else, to make the sentence available in this way for printing and reprinting, for reproduction. Does it change anything that Freud did not know about the computer? And where should the moment of suppression or of repression be situated in these new models of recording and impression, or printing? 23

The changes in temporality structure that Derrida ascribes to e-mail are embedded in a repeating (hyper-)space structure: the windows environment of spaces linked by icons to menus that connect to applications such as web browsers whose interfaces allow passage into the structure of the world wide web of hyperlinks, websites and e-mail addresses. But this only repeats the system of references, quotations and footnotes that connect books, articles, authors and all the other documents and exhibits in the library and in the general archive of *memory*, whether electronic or inscribed in stone.

Of course, such documents may be erased, or effaced.

The text, however, as we possess it to-day, will tell us enough about
its own vicissitudes. Two mutually opposed treatments have left their traces on it. On the one hand it has been subjected to revisions which have falsified it in the sense of their secret aims, have mutilated and amplified it and have even changed it into its reverse; on the other hand a solicitous piety has presided over it and has sought to preserve everything as it was, no matter whether it was consistent or contradicted itself. Thus almost everywhere noticeable gaps, disturbing repetitions and obvious contradictions have come about — indications which reveal things to us which it was not intended to communicate. In its implications the distortion of a text resembles a murder: the difficulty is not in perpetrating the deed, but in getting rid of the traces. We might lend the word “Entstellung [distortion]” the double meaning to which it has a claim but of which to-day it makes no use. It should mean not only to “change the appearance of something” but also “to put something in another place, to displace.”

3. Myth

If we may rely upon the evidence of language, it was the movement of the air that provided the prototype of intellectuality [Geistigkeit], for intellect [Geist] derives its name from a breath of wind — “animus,” “spiritus,” and the Hebrew “ruach (breath).” This too led to the discovery of the mind [Seele (soul)] as that of the intellectual [geistigen] principle in individual human beings. Observation found the movement of air once again in men’s breathing, which ceases when they die. To this day a dying man “breathes out his spirit [Seele].” Now, however, the world of spirits [Geisterreich] lay open to men.

The movement of this paragraph is profound. It demonstrates, at least, the impossibility of any reduction of Geist to “intellect.” Indeed, it suggests that “spirit,” and even “soul,” are at least as much a part of Freud’s thought on the subject as any “abstract idea.”

The geistigen principle is not Geist but Seele. This substitution haunts the whole investigation. Seele cannot be determined as an “abstract idea,” for it is the “archontic principle” of abstraction. Geist leads to the “discovery” of Seele, which supplements it as its arkhe. Thus at the same time Seele commenced the Geisterreich: the spirit-realm.

L’Un se garde de l’autre.
NOTES


4 Derrida, *Archive Fever*.


9 Derrida, “*Différance*” 19.

10 Ibid. 9.


15 Freud, “Beyond the Pleasure Principle” 306.


17 Freud, *Moses and Monotheism* 43.


20 Ibid. 353–54.


22 Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams* 491–92.
24 Freud, Moses and Monotheism 43.
25 Ibid. 114.
26 Ibid. 113.
27 Derrida, Archive Fever 95.
28 Ibid. 78.