

WIRING: The Sounds of Falling in Love and in Death with the Archive

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To begin is, in a word, to archive. Jacques Derrida, in *Archive Fever* begins “not [...] at the beginning, nor even at the archive. But rather at the word “archive”—and with the archive of so familiar a word. *Arkhe*, we recall, names at once the *commencement* and the *commandment*.”¹ *Arkho*, from *Arkhe*, commands and commences as “I begin”. But this particular instance of beginning doesn’t need the *Arkho*, doesn’t need the arrival of the beginning. It’s in the schedule and the beginning has a determined space and time. It’s commanded to commence before I am to say, “I begin”. It’s archived, determined, written and now commanded to commence. Upon beginning, the stakes are raised as a creation of a location of time, a space, and a memory to be forgotten. “Remember to remember the future”². Memory as, remembering to come today, remembering the future, as an “obligation of *memory*, or better, with the *obligation of the archive*.”³ The script of the audio piece for my honours project precedes the per-

1 Jacques Derrida. *Archive Fever* (Chicago: Publisher, 1996), 1

2 Ibid 76

3 Ibid 75

formance of itself. The script becomes the memory, to be remembered, interpreted, determined. It is archived in the sense that it exists in email, saved documents, dated, time stamped, determined and filed away to be retrieved. But the performance fails this archive, distances, spins away from the drawn lines, the straight lines that attempt to determine a future performance, determining what becomes of the performance. In that sense, then, the performance is failure. Failure fails as well, since it's a kind of programmed, expected failure. The process of which is expected, not accidental, even though the form that this failure determines itself, is undetermined. This break from the archive, while not an entire split, not a rupture or a breaking, but a desire of moving away from, directionally. Not as suddenly placed in alternate space by unforeseen accidents, but still calculated movement *away from*, keeping in a relationship to the memory. As remembering to *forget* to remember.

The archive is a structure that is determined and maintained. - Derrida writes that, “[t]here is no political power without control of the archive, if not of memory. [...] the participation in and access to the archive, its constitution, and its interpretation.”⁴ The participation in the archive, then, contributes to memory, to the determination of what is remembered. By determining and interpreting the archive, memory is determined, what we remember is interpreted for the future. Maintaining, sustaining access and entrance pulls the past into the future, preserved *for* future interpretation, remembrance, and entrance since, “It is a question of the future, the question of the future itself, the question of a response, of a promise and of a responsibility for tomorrow.”⁵

4 Ibid 4

5 Ibid 36

This participation in the future of the archive, in the future itself, causes desire, causes a fever towards and for the archive. The Fever induced by the Archive, as Derrida writes, “is to have a compulsive, repetitive, and nostalgic desire for the archive, an irrepressible desire to return to the origin, a homesickness, a nostalgia for the return to the most archaic place of absolute commencement.”⁶ It is the drive, the desire to always be entering into the memory, and the promise of the memory. To the extent, Derrida writes, of death. To desire unto death. Since, “[t] here would indeed be no archive desire without the radical finitude, without the possibility of a forgetfulness, [...] there is no archive fever without the threat of this death drive, this aggression and destruction drive.”⁷ The desire for the archive forms from the threat of death, and, as I will argue, the threat of failure. The archive is also a promise of the future of memory, a promise to remember to remember, since it can be forgotten, can fail. It becomes an interpreted memory to be interpreted in the future, to be maintained and accessed.

Questions of Haunting

The act of archiving creates secrets, unknown and unheard voices. These secrets, remaining hidden, disrupt the distribution, the sharing of the archive, its passing on permanently as a permanent body as it spills between the cracks of the holder’s fingers. All that is, can never be archived and has never. While the archive works as forgotten memory, remembering to remember the future, much has escaped memory yet also has been excluded from memory, and these are not neutral differences. To escape

6 Ibid 91

7 Ibid 19

the archive is to exit from a position already inhabited, to be lost from memory, to be forgotten. While exclusion, those not remembered, have never been remembered in the historical context, lost ghosts, lost secrets. An unmarked grave hidden away in a lost wood. But what happens when a wanderer, perhaps someone lost themselves, stumbles upon something lost, does the grave become marked and identified, allowing it to be categorized, named, shaped back into the mould of memory? Does the secret become known? How can we remember something that was never forgotten, was never present to be forgotten? Kicking up old dirt might reveal and locate bones, physical objects, but we must turn, as Anjali Arondekar writes, “away from the notion that discovering an object will somehow lead to a formulation of subjectivity—from the presumption that if one finds a body, one can recover a person.”⁸ So what happens when these lost moments of space are recovered, or can it even be possible? Can there be a space for the desire of what is lost, perhaps what is dead, what has failed memory, has failed the archive, to erupt between the spaces of the grave and its mark, the body and the person, the lost and the archive? My project is opened up by this promise of the failure of memory.

Sexuality and the Archive

“Archive Fever expresses the craving for this archive, the desire to enter it and to procure it, even unto death.”⁹ The archive becomes something to be entered, even to the point of death. Desire and death become entwined, since, “what is at work in the construction of the historical re-

8 Anjali Arondekar, “Without a Trace: Sexuality and the Colonial Archive.” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 14, no. ½ (2005): 21, accessed September 30, 2014, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3704707>

9 Ibid 10

cord is a negotiation between the death drive and the pleasure principle, between Thanatos and Eros.”¹⁰ An archive as the location of death and desire. The audio piece struggles between this negotiation between Thanatos and Eros, death and desire. Charlie Kemp, the protagonist of the audio piece desires her failing, and therefore dying laptop. The laptop fails to document properly, as every saved document changes each time Charlie opens it. Each saved document, upon opening it, returning to it, remembering to remember it, is changed, altered against the laptop’s hardwired intent, to retain the document proper. To maintain history, to move the document into both the past and the future by maintaining, holding, securing its passage. The laptop is failing its commands, and as such, to Charlie, is dying. It is unclear what caused the sudden change in the laptop’s ability. Whatever brought this on for the laptop, the deathly accident of ontology, as the laptop, to quote Catherine Malabou, “finds [it]self at the end, as if emerging from [its] accidents, from [its] own destruction, which has no meaning and comes out of nowhere”¹¹ becomes the conditions for Charlie’s desire both of the laptop, and its failure, its death as form. Charlie forms a strange, unfamiliar, perhaps even *lost* desire for this laptop, a desire which fails itself and fails the prompts of what makes desire possible. Yet this error becomes the method for uncovering the desired bones, the dead.

10 Marlene Manoff, “Theories of the Archive from Across the Disciplines.” *portal: Libraries and the Academy* 4, no. 1 (2004): 11, accessed October 3, 2014, <https://muse.jhu.edu/>

11 Catherine Malabou, *Ontology of the Accident*, trans. Carolyn Shread (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012), 63.

“Error is one of my inevitable ways of working”¹² writes Clarice Lispector in her novel, *The Passion According to G.H.*, inviting new ways of working through failure to be considered. In the book, the character, G.H. accidentally nearly kills a cockroach. Ultimately, her decision is to consume the dying cockroach. This result, G.H.’s desire to consume, for the cockroach to enter into her, becomes error, failure, death. The accident with the cockroach begins the desire for the cockroach, for death. Of my script, the written words on the page, act as the arkhe, the beginning. By beginning, Arkho, I begin. It is commanded and commenced. It begins. Instead of determining the outcome of the recording, where the written words become spoken, become “alive” only to be recorded, documented in another form, the recording fails as often as it possibly can, things change, are removed, are forgotten, are forgotten to be remembered, and error becomes the inevitable way that it works. Just as the desire between Charlie and the laptop is formed by the error, the dying creating the possibility for the desire to be expressed. The error in the script and in the laptop is embraced as the unanticipated. To abandon the beginning and not begin again, but to begin against. I desire to abandon the script, to kill it, to mark its grave with a location of time. “This is where I killed you,” I tell the script. “This is how I desire to kill you”.

Charlie desires death, desiring failure and the failure of desire. If Charlie were not to prompt the laptop to save a document, it would not be dying. Charlie’s desire for memory causes the accidental failure and causes the accidental desire. They cause each other, rather than become

¹² Clarice Lispector, *The Passion According to G.H.* (New York: New Directions, 2012), 115.

each other. The desire between them remains unfamiliar, distanced and failing, as the queering of desire and queering the archive.

Queering the Archive

Arondekar writes, “The intellectual challenge [...] is to juxtapose productively the archive’s fiction-effects (the archive as a system of representation) alongside its truth-effects (the archive as material with ‘real’ consequences), as both agonistic and co-constitutive. These (new) reading practices, I suggest, must emerge not against the grain of archival work but from within it, except the imperative here is not about founding presence but more about *confounding* our understanding.”¹³ To confound the archive, our understanding of it might also invite the opening up of new lines, of queering the archive. In Sara Ahmed’s work, *Queer Phenomenology*, she writes of the placement of objects on a table, that which is within reach, as being constructed, such as the archiving, the placement of history, creates the archive, “[w]hat puts objects near depends on histories, on how ‘things’ arrive, and on how they gather in their very availability to ‘do things’ with.”¹⁴ It is no accident that the relationship between Charlie and the laptop could not form before this failure, this accidental failure. The accident necessarily comes in a form of death, or at the very least dying (but for these two characters, the difference is slim). The laptop, in its dying death, becomes the messenger of Thanatos and Eros. It heats up as it’s used, as it continues to die, to fail

13 Anjali Arondekar, “Without a Trace: Sexuality and the Colonial Archive.” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 14, no. ½ (2005): 12, accessed September 30, 2014, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3704707>

14 Sara Ahmed. *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 8.

her prompts both mechanically and, eventually, sexually. Confoundedly, dying and oriented, suddenly, to desire as desired and desirous, desire confounded.

Ahmed takes up the idea of “sexual orientation” as being determined. She explains bodies as oriented both *to* and *from* possibilities. Yet, orientation is not merely a direction, but also “a matter of being”¹⁵ so then sexual orientation is a spatial and embodied experience in the world, but not always in a self-regulating and self-determining way. Since there are historically determined orientations (lines, modes, directions, not just sexual), to queer the orientation is to move toward what one is not already moving toward, and to simultaneously move *away* from what one was previously moving *toward*. Ahmed discusses how bodies are able to follow actions that are historically determined as well as exist in spaces that have been historically determined. The spaces of the archive. These lines that are historically determined and followed, are where Ahmed finds the possibility of *disorientation*, or straying from the lines or actions that are *to be followed*. Not, however, to exist as entirely, eternally disoriented, but to use moments of disorientation to allow for failures to happen and shape themselves. Queer, then, would be the failing of bodies to be determined by these lines. Queering the lines means queering or distancing from what has been determined to be the direction or the orientation as historically produced. By altering this positioning to the lines, and by moving away from what has been outlined by the archive, queering possibilities can both be added *to* the archive and *away*.

15 Ibid 69

“The threat of queer is a ‘death threat’”¹⁶ insofar as it “threatens to discontinue the [familial] line.”¹⁷ The familial line, while something my project does not touch on, can also be understood as a history that fails, that dies. Every time a save occurs on Charlie’s laptop, the history fails, changing in new, unintended ways. The save fails, killing the intended document, the intended familial line and the intended history. The lines, the direction, the orientation of the determined files changes, while also changing the relationship between the laptop and Charlie. The determined words and progressions of the script are killed, determined against, created in new ways every time they are opened up with the help of Mariel Layson, whose contribution to the project cannot be overlooked. The script becomes, by denying its lineage, denying its history, queer. “The task is to trace the lines for a different genealogy, one that would embrace the failure to inherit the family line as the condition of possibility for another way of dwelling in the world.”¹⁸ The script becomes queered or queering, by changing its orientation, changing the direction, changing the memory of the script and inviting the ghosts back into the page, the lost, buried words and events just as the desire between Charlie and her laptop was lost and uncovered in still unfamiliar, unrecognizable and therefore mostly disturbing ways.

My attempt in this audio piece is to explore disturbing and moving away from memory, as desiring death. By exploring the archive as the mechanism of documentation, the laptop, the recording itself, as well as Charlie’s conception of desire, the memory, I have attempted to display, reveal maybe, a desire for failure, a desire for death

16 Ibid 77

17 Ibid 77

18 Ibid 178

that is not to be remembered, to remain bones buried in an unmarked grave. Not towards the destruction of all that is known, but in a hope for the unknown, unheard, unpronounced voices to arrive.

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