

# SHELF-LIFE: BIOPOLITICS, THE NEW MEDIA ARCHIVE, AND 'PAPERLESS' PERSONS

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**Abstract** *Through the writings of Adorno, Benjamin, and Derrida, and the films of Alain Resnais, this essay considers the construction of the subject through state-sanctioned forms of inscription - passports, for example. Such forms, traditionally speaking, are aspects of the technologies of the book - the biblion - and they indicate that 'biopolitics' merges with bibliopolitics. Indeed, the subject is a matter of 'shelf-life': it is constructed through archival forms of collection; by the bibliotekhe - the 'slot' or shelf where documents are placed. Yet peoples and texts may not fit normative taxonomies, in traditional and digital media contexts. In the context of historical diasporas, for example, we might recall Derrida's argument that, like the peoples referred to as the sans-papiers, those without state-sanctioned documents, we are all becoming 'paperless', as external memory becomes virtual. The essay is concerned, then, with what happens when the subject is no longer substantiated by traditional legal papers, but by digital files and memory chips; while it argues also that the distinction between traditional and digital media cannot be reduced to a linear history.*

**Keywords** biopolitics, media, archive, paper, passport, Derrida, Resnais, Adorno, Benjamin, Agamben, Nazi concentration camp, library

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1. Sigmund Freud, 'Note upon the "Mystic Writing Pad"', in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, William Strachey (ed and trans), London, Hogarth Press, 1961, Vol. 6, pp226-32; Jacques Derrida, 'Freud and the Scene of Writing', *Yale French Studies* 48 (1972): 74-117, republished in Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, Alan Bass (trans), Chicago, Chicago University Press, 1978, pp196-231; Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, Eric Prenowitz (trans), Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1998, pp13-19, henceforth *AF* in the text; and Jacques Derrida, *Paper Machine*, Rachel Bowlby (trans), Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2005, pp48-50, henceforth

It is possible that I now know something that he did fear. Let me say how I arrived at this assumption. Well inside his wallet was a sheet of paper, folded long since, brittle and broken along the creases. I read it before I burned it. It was written in his finest hand, firmly and evenly; but I perceived right away that it was only a copy. 'Three hours before his death', it began. It was about Christian IV. I read it several times before I burned it ... I now understand very well, by the way, that a man will carry, for many a year, deep inside his wallet, the account of a dying hour ... Can we not imagine someone copying out, let us say, the manner of Felix Arver's death? ... He became perfectly lucid, and explained to her that the word was 'corridor' not 'collidor'. Then he died.

Rainer Maria Rilke, *Notebooks of Malte Laurids Briggs*

In his text, the writer sets up house. Just as he trundles papers, books, pencils, documents untidily from room to room, he creates the same disorder in his thoughts. They become pieces of furniture that he sinks



into, content or irritable. He strokes them affectionately, wears them out, mixes them up, re-arranges, ruins them. For a man who no longer has a homeland, writing becomes a place to live. In it he inevitably produces, as his family once did, refuse and lumber. But now he lacks a storeroom, and it is hard in any case to part from leftovers. So he pushes them along in front of him, in danger of filling his pages with them. The demand that one harden oneself against self-pity implies the technical necessity to counter any slackening of the intellectual tension with the utmost alertness, and to eliminate anything that has begun to encrust the work or to drift along idly, which may at an earlier state have served, as gossip, to generate the warm atmosphere conducive to growth, but is now left behind, flat and stale. In the end, the writer is not even allowed to live in his writing.

Theodor Adorno, 'Memento' in *Minima Moralia*

In Jacques Derrida's later work one frequently encounters notable semantic shifts in terminology with regard to writing, storage devices, the archive, and paper, as he addressed the effects of the shift from the era of paper to multimedia technologies of writing. In *Archive Fever*, Derrida returned to his essay on Sigmund Freud's 'Note upon the "Note Upon Mystic Writing Pad"' in 'Freud and the Scene of Writing' to ask what difference it would make to psychoanalysis had Freud sent faxes and email rather than postal letters, and in *Paper Machine*, Derrida returns to his rereading of Freud in *Archive Fever* to ask what difference the shift from paper as a material support to virtual 'paper' might make.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, in 'Typewriter Ribbon: Limited Ink (2)', Derrida returned to the account of archive fever he had formulated 'elsewhere' in *Archive Fever*.<sup>2</sup> The writing machine and typewriter ribbons, the answering machine, word processor, tape recorder, and other storage devices, such as the photograph, and the 'subjectile', the material support or 'technical substrate', all came to matter increasingly to Derrida in ways they did not in his earlier accounts of non-phenomenal arche-writing, the trace, and the supplement to which he contrasted phenomenal 'writing in the general sense' (hieroglyphs, ideograms, alphabets, and so on).<sup>3</sup>

While rethinking the archive in relation to new media, Derrida was also rethinking, on a different channel, a biopolitical and ontological question about paper documents that put deconstructive pressure on seemingly unquestionable oppositions between materiality and virtuality (or spectrality), the human and the machine, the human and the animal, the document and the work of art (*PM*). In a chapter of *Paper Machine* entitled 'Paper or Me, You Know... (New Speculations on a Luxury of the Poor)' Derrida deconstructed a distinction between persons with papers and persons without them, 'undocumented' or *sans-papiers* in French:

The 'paperless' person is an outlaw, a nonsubject legally, a noncitizen or

*PM* in the text. See also Derrida's parallel comments on bank notes, checks, and credit cards in 'Priceless', *Negotiations: Interventions and Interviews 1971-2001*, Elizabeth Rottenberg (ed and trans), Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2002, pp326-328. Derrida earlier returned to 'Freud and the Scene of Writing' in *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond*, Alan Bass (trans), Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1987, pp262; 346; 407.

2. Jacques Derrida, 'Typewriter Ribbon: Limited Ink (2)' ("within such limits") in Tom Cohen et al (eds), *Material Events: Paul de Man and the Afterlife of Theory*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2001, pp302-03, p359, n11. This essay was published in *Papier machine*, Paris, Galilée, 2001, 35-150 but was not included in the English *Paper Machine*, op. cit.

3. On the 'technical substrate' or subjectile as a material support, see Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever*, op cit., p25; on arche-writing and writing in the general sense, see Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology: Corrected Edition*, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (trans), Baltimore, John Hopkins University Press, 1997, pp6-26.



4. Jacques Derrida, 'Paper or Me, You Know... (New Speculations on a Luxury of the Poor)', henceforth PorM in the text, in *Paper Machine*, op. cit., pp60-1. See also Derrida, 'Machines and the Undocumented Person', *ibid*, pp1-3; Derrida, 'Derelictions of the Right to Justice (But What Are the "Sans Papier" Lacking?)' in *Negotiations: Interventions and Interviews 1971-2001*, op. cit., pp133-46; and Jacques Derrida *H.C for Life, That Is to Say...* Laurent Milesi and Stefan Herbrechter (trans), Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2002, p137 and p171, n123.

5. *Ibid.*, p16. The Postscript is written on 'the rim of Mount Vesuvius, right near Pompeii', *ibid*, p98.

6. Derrida presumably puts 'paper' in scare quotes in order to indicate that the literal referent is materialized differently in various kinds of identification documents.

7. See also Richard Burt, 'Read After Burning: Derrida Destroyed ... Derrida Published', *Glossator*, special issue entitled 'Going Postcard: The Letter(s) of Jacques Derrida' Michael O'Rourke (ed), Volume 7, Fall 2012; and Richard Burt, 'Putting Your Papers in

the citizen of a foreign country refused the right conferred, *on paper*, by a temporary or permanent visa, a rubber stamp. The literal reference to the word *papers*, in the sense of legal justification certainly depends on the language and uses of particular national cultures (in France and Germany, for instance). But when in the United States, for example, the word *undocumented* is used to designate analogous cases, or *undesireables*, with similar problems involved, it is the same axioms that carry authority; the law is guaranteed by the holding of a 'paper' or document, an identity card (ID), by the bearing or carrying [*port*] of a driving permit or a passport that you keep on your person, that can be shown and that guarantees the self, the juridical personality of 'here I am'. We shouldn't be dealing with these problems without asking what is happening today under international law, with the subject of 'human rights and the citizen's rights', with the future or decline of nation-states.<sup>4</sup>

At the end of this long passage, Derrida concludes 'we are all, already, "paperless" people' (PorM, p61)). After having insisted that he and other supporters of the 'paperless' people are not 'calling for the disqualification of identity papers or of the link between documentation and legality' and having pointed out that 'when we support them [paperless people] today in their struggle, we *still* demand that they be issued papers', Derrida adds that what he metaphorically calls 'the earthquake' of virtual, paperless media 'touches nothing less than the essence of politics and its link with the culture of paper. The history of politics is a history of paper, if not a paper history' (PorM, pp60-1). (Derrida uses the analogy of the 'earthquake and ... the après-coups of its aftershocks' in *Archive Fever* as well).<sup>5</sup> Clarifying the force of the final subordinate clause qualifying the meaning of a 'history of paper' (not the same thing as 'a paper history'), Derrida restates his earlier point that 'although the authentication and identification of selves and others increasingly escapes the culture of paper ... the ultimate juridical resource still remains the signature done with the person's "own hand" on an irreplaceable paper support' (PorM, p57).

In this essay, I will ask what it means for people to default to the condition of being paperless inside of the 'earthquake' of new media, when the archive is no longer founded on paper supports, when files go virtual, when the state and paper, the reading of a text and its storage, are decoupled yet inseparable: the distinction between paperless and paper media cannot rightly be reduced to a linear history in which an age of a material medium is replaced by the age of a virtual, or digital one.<sup>6</sup> As Derrida acutely observes, 'the unlimited upheaval under way in archival technology ... should above all remind us that ... archival technology no longer determines, will never have determined, merely the moment of the conservational recording, but rather the very institution of the archivable event. It conditions not only the form or the structure that prints but also the printed content of the printing: the *pressure* of the *printing*,



the *impression*, before the division between the printed and the printer. This archival technique has commanded that which in the past even instituted and constituted whatever there was as anticipation of the future' (AF, p18). The archive is a structuring structure that both preserves and destroys what it stores, not a particular building site with a particular collection of papers, say the Bibliothèque Nationale. Thus, in this article, I read 'paperless' people in light of the impact Derrida thought that new media had on the archive with regard to its 'archive fever', or 'anarchivity', a word he coins in his book, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, to mean 'the violence of the archive itself, as archive, as archival violence', the radical destruction of the archive and the remains of what can never be archived, the ash of the archive (AF, p6, p10, 19, p7).<sup>7</sup> I will then be in a position to elaborate and examine various ways in which what Foucault and Agamben call *biopolitics* merges with *bibliopolitics*, or what I will come to define as 'shelf-life'. This relation will be discussed through the passport's dual function as identification papers and as a kind of book; through Alain Resnais's parallel film documentaries *Nuit et brouillard* (*Night and Fog*, 1955), devoted to the Holocaust, and *Toute la mémoire du monde* (*All the Memory of the World*, 1956), devoted to the Bibliothèque nationale de France (National Library of France); and through autobiographical essays by Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno about shelving and shipping their books.<sup>8</sup>

## I

How is a 'paperless' person, someone whose support takes the form of identification papers, caught up in new kinds of virtual biometrics and bioprocessing? What kind of virtual life supports might international law offer to replace paper supports? How are these supports a problem of storage, and of writing as self-storage, or what I will call shelf-life? I want to address these questions by turning to Derrida's account of the thing that holds papers together, namely, the *portefeuille*, or wallet. Taking this turn means that we begin to grasp what I call the 'hold' of reading, or in this case the holdover of readings to be continued. Derrida's account of the wallet is textually deferred and placed in the storage unit of an endnote (PM, pp188-9, n29). However, this endnote does not follow Derrida's first mention of the wallet at the end of a very long parenthetical comment regarding paper: '(Indeed a reflection on paper ought in the first place to be a reflection on the sheet or leaf [*feuille*] ... We should also, if we don't forget to later, speak about the semantics of the *portefeuille*, at least in French)' (PM, p14). Derrida's endnote begins as if taking up where his parentecheical remarks left off: 'I had forgotten to come back to the French word *portefeuille* [wallet]'. A note does follow the parenthesis that defines the meaning of *Portefeuille* (PM, p186, n14). But this note has been added by the translator, who seems to forget that Derrida remembers he forgot

Order: The Matter of Kierkegaard's Writing Desk, Goethe's Files, and Derrida's Paper Machine, or the Philology and Philosophy of Publishing After Death', *Rhizomes* 20 (Summer 2010).

8. Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, Daniel Heller-Roazen (trans), Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1994. In a way that superficially resembles Derrida's conclusion that we are all already paperless people but does not theorize virtual media, Agamben writes 'If today there is no longer any one clear figure of the sacred man, it is perhaps because we are all virtually *homines sacri*', p115. Agamben's account of biopolitics derives from Michel Foucault's chapter, 'Right of Death and Power Over Life', in *The History of Sexuality Vol. 1: An Introduction*, Robert Hurley (trans), New York, Pantheon, 1980, 135-59. For Derrida's critique of *Homo Sacer*, see *The Beast and Sovereign 2*, Geoffrey Bennington (trans), Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2011, 315-17; 324-34. Derrida coins the phrase 'biblioontological essence' in *Geneses, Genealogies, Genres, & Genius: the Secrets of the Archive*, Beverly Bie Brahic (trans), New York, Columbia University Press, 2006, p16.



9. Derrida,  
 'Typewriter Ribbon',  
 op cit., pp331, 333.

in endnote 29. (Dear reader: please hold on while I hold up my essay by attending to the hold ups in Derrida's interview.) The translator's arguably unnecessary note is not merely an uncaught error; rather, it echoes and perhaps even mimics Derrida's own textual repetitions. For example, the phrase 'we are all, already, undocumented, paperless' occurs in the first chapter of *Paper Machine* and Derrida rewrites it almost verbatim, dropping 'undocumented' in 'Paper or Me, You Know' (PM, p61). Similarly, Derrida has an endnote on 'biblion' in 'Paper or Me, You Know', that similarly repeats much of a passage in the body of 'The Book to Come' (PM, pp6-8, pp187-8, n27). Endnoting allows for Derrida to put certain issues into storage or take them out, often marking his discussion in the body of the text as a lapse: for example, in 'Typewriter Ribbon, Limited Ink', he says 'I don't know why I am telling you this' in the middle of a rhetorically unmarked digression on the amber vampire insects and then ends the three page digression by apparently recalling his purpose: 'I didn't know, a moment ago, why I was telling you these stories of an archive: archives of a vampire insect'.<sup>9</sup> Yet a clear distinction between an unmarked lapse and a lapse rhetorically marked as a 'hold on' moment of interruption is very difficult, probably impossible, to draw in Derrida's work. Moreover, these 'hold on' and 'hold up' moments may mean both delay or stopping and support, as in holding a place. Derrida's many returns to Freud's 'Notes on the Mystic Writing Pad' mentioned above may be construed as placeholders that enabled him to hold up reading by folding it up, unfolding it, and refolding. In *Archive Fever*, Derrida writes: 'an exergue serves to stock in anticipation and to prearchive a lexicon which . . . ought to lay down the law and *give the order*. ... In this way, the exergue has at once an institutive and conservative function. ... It is thus the first figure of an archive' (AF, p7). The 'exergue', 'preamble', 'foreword', and 'postscript' of *Archive Fever* paratextually mark a series of hold ups that auto-immunize the already auto-infected archive fever Derrida has already caught. Derrida's thought remains unfinished not just because he died but because no reading can ever be finished or complete: reading is always an operation of re-shelving, of unfolding, of living-on as shelf-life.

Let me now cite Derrida's endnote on the wallet so we may understand how variously virtual and material forms relate to shelf-life more concretely:

I had forgotten to come back to the French word *portefeuille* [wallet]. Which says just about everything on what is invested in paper, in the leaf or the *feuille* of paper. Current usage: when its 'figure' does not designate a set of documents authenticating an official power, a force of law (the ministerial portfolio), *portefeuille* names this pocket within a pocket, the invisible pocket you *carry* [*porte*] as close as possible to yourself, carry on your person, almost against the body itself. Clothing under clothing, an effect among other effects. This pocket is often made of leather, like



the skin of a parchment or the binding of a book. More masculine than feminine, a wallet gathers together all the 'papers,' the most precious papers, keeping them safe, hidden as close as possible to oneself. They attest to our goods and our property. We protect them because they protect us (the closest possible protection: 'This is my body, my papers, it's me...') (PM, p188, n29).

Derrida proceeds to account for the partially paperless contents of wallets.

They take the place, they are the place, of that on which everything else, law and force, force of law, seems to depend: our 'papers,' in cards or notebooks: the identity card, the driving permit, the business or address book; then paper money - banknotes - if one has any. Nowadays, those who can also put credit or debit cards in there. These do fulfil a function analogous to that of other papers, maintaining the comparable dimensions of a card - something that can be handled, stored away, and carried on the person - but they also signal the end of paper or the sheet of paper, its withdrawal or reduction, in a wallet whose future is metaphorical ... One effect among others: the majority of the 'rich' often have less cash, less paper money, in their wallets, than some of the poor.

Wallets traverse both papered and paperless, or 'pauperized' people (PM, p187, n25).<sup>10</sup> Is the wallet an archive, then, regardless of the materiality of the papers it holds? Is it a 'biological archive' (AF, p34)? To be sure, Derrida lays out, in the first pages of *Archive Fever*, certain conditions on which he says any archive depends: there can be no archive 'without substrate nor without residence', no archive without archons as guardians and interpreters of the law, 'no archive without outside', no archive without psychoanalysis (AF, pp3-4; p11). Yet as Derrida engages questions of the difference new media make to the archive, he begins questioning the limits of the archive: 'is not the copy of an impression already a kind of archive? ... Can one imagine an archive without foundation, without substrate, without subjectile?' and begins to talk of 'virtual archives' and 'an archive of the virtual' (AF, p28; pp26-7; p64; p66). In several essays including in the French edition of *Paper Machine*, Derrida refers to storage devices as different as two editions of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Confessions* and a piece of amber containing fossils of vampire insects, and he refers elsewhere in *Paper Machine* to 'computer archives' having been 'locked up'.<sup>11</sup>

If we grant that the wallet too is a kind of archive, even an archive that may contain other archives in the form of copies, it follows that the archive may be portable, even transportable. Near the end of his endnote on the wallet, Derrida relates an autobiographical anecdote about his home having been burgled twice over the previous two years; the thieves took his laptop the first time and his '*portefeuille* the second time' (PM, p189,

10. There are now digital wallets as well. See, for example, 'Google wallet' <http://www.google.com/wallet/>. It offers the following options: 'Your wallet in the cloud; Make your phone your wallet; Carry your wallet on the web; A wallet you can lock'.

11. Derrida, 'Typewriter Ribbon', op cit., p286, p289; p331; 'Machines and the "Undocumented Person"', in *Paper Machine*, op cit., p2 and 'The Word Processor', op. cit., p29.



n29). 'So what was taken away', Derrida writes, "was what was included or condensed - virtually, *more in less* - less time, space, and weight. What was *carried away* [*emporté*] was what could most easily be *carried* [*porté*] on the person and with the person: oneself as an other, the *portefeuille* and the 'portable' (PM, p189, n29). If the wallet is an archive, the archive itself becomes potentially portable, both nomological and virtualized. 'We are all, already "paperless" people' may be read broadly as follows: the biological and virtual archive offers various kinds of life support even when material supports are lacking. Portable, virtualized archives may become virtual life support systems in the form of trans/portable reading materials, materials that go unnoticed and unread, or in Rilke's case, copied, found on a corpse, read, and finally burned.

## II

By saying that we are all 'paperless' persons, Derrida means, I take it, that the substitution of a material paper support by a paperless electronic support has entailed a global network in which even those with papers are effectively reduced to those without them. It might be tempting to appeal to Michel Foucault for the explanation of what Derrida is looking at the epiphenomena of, namely, paperlessness as a technology of surveillance. Derrida describes a "'paperless" setup' that that both covers the entire earth and extends beyond it:

new powers delete or blur the frontier in unprecedented conditions, and at an unprecedented pace ... These new threats on the frontiers are ... *phenomenal*; they border on phenomenality itself, tending to phenomenalyze, to render perceptible visible, or audible; to expose everything on the outside. They do not only affect the limit between the public and the private - between the political or cultural life of its citizens and their innermost secrets and indeed, secrets in general; they touch on actual frontiers - on frontiers in the narrow sense of the word: between the national and the global, and even between the earth and the extraterrestrial, the world and the universe - since satellites are part of this 'paperless' setup (PorM, p57).

To explore how this paperless setup differs from new kinds of biometrics and dataveillance, I turn now to a Youtube video on the US passport, as it effectively raises borderline questions about borders and border crossing. As Derrida writes,

the crossing of borders always announces itself according to the movement of a certain step [*pas*] - and of the step that crosses a line. An indivisible line. And one always assumes the institution of such an indivisibility. Customs,



police, visa or passport, passenger identification - all of that is established upon this institution of the indivisible, the institution therefore of the step that is related to it, whether the step crosses it or not.<sup>12</sup>

12. Jacques Derrida, *Aporias*, Thomas Dutoit (trans), Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1993, p11.

The passport figures a problem of form related to materiality, a problem of determining the form of the object / thing. The passport as 'book' offers resistance to a narrative, especially a genetic narrative of its construction and assemblage; the passport is a hybrid, both a printed book and yet also a kind of e-book, a Kindle that doesn't function (you can't read the digital data or subtract from it, add to it / alter it). It is first a 'thing', then a 'book' with fine print and microprint, first made of a foreign, imported cover (thing) with three blank but formatted memory chips, then becomes American (book) when assembled (the paper covering over the foreign chips, which are loaded and locked), and finally a 'personalized' book (sort of like on demand publishing). Only machines 'read' the passports (officers 'skim' them). This narrative of passport production reveals and hides its own double Un/American construction (the side of the inside (chip) being covered by the paper laminated onto the plastic cover): the 'made in America for Americans' notion of book assemblage beginning and ending in America (printing, stitching, lamination) competes with a global industrial model of assemblage in which non-American digital parts and cover get imported and data then gets 'loaded on' to the imports and covered up without Americans even knowing (unless they watch this video from 2009).<sup>13</sup> Like any (transnational) commodity, American passports alienate American citizens from their own identity papers, covering up the foreign, protective cover, literally secreting the chips that fully functionalize the identity papers from their 'owners' (PorM). The printed pages of the passport as book become a cover, literally and metaphorically, for the storage of citizens as data, their reduction to microchips. And the question of 'reading' and 'skimming' the book is all the more bizarre since there is no narrative to read, just a profile reduced to one's life span and home.

13. See [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2009/06/13/how-a-us-passport-is-made\\_n\\_215287.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2009/06/13/how-a-us-passport-is-made_n_215287.html)

The YouTube video does not say what is stored on the chips (the word 'information' is not used), whether it is the same as the information on the passport or in excess of it. It is information about us, however. That much is clear. But we are alienated through our data processing; we are booked by the State into persons through personalization. But we are only informed by changes in how US passports are made. Their making would usually seem to fall under state secrets, so the effect of the ideas that we are learning is like seeing something that we are not supposed to see. The video is itself a threat because it gives forgers information they could use to forge. But the issue is that persons are stored as data when they are turned from persons into citizens. Citizenship passes through the person in enabling him or her to pass through customs, instituting distinctions between guest and host, alien and host, and the inhuman outside citizenship (equated with aliens as



animals, vermin, threats, viruses, flus, and so on), hostage and hostage-taker. Citizenship not as securing of human rights but as Host-age taking.

### III

It is beyond the scope of this essay to show how what I take to be the dead-end of biopolitics - how to recognize a camp since even a hospital room may become a detention centre? - is a consequence of its failure to theorize the impact of new media on the archive. We may take a tentative step, however, by showing that the archive is the *nomos* of the earth, the paradigm of the political space opened up in modernity when the state of exception becomes the norm and all life becomes virtually *homines sacri*, not the camp. Even if all life is bare life and hence may be caged, bare life is still minimally 'free' to range (with papers or without them; with genuine papers or forged papers) within the planetary space of the political as the archive, even when phenomenalized as camp or cage. The political space of the archive includes the camp within it. The camp is always already an event of archivalization. Biopolitics is therefore not about confinement (only, or even primarily) but about various kinds of mediatized transmission, translation, transit, or bio-biblio-processing. To grasp this point more fully, we may move from the question of passerlessness to that of shelf-life as played in two reciprocally haunting films about the camp and the archive. Like so many of Alain Renais's films, *Nuit et brouillard* (*Night and Fog*, 1955) and *Toute la mémoire du monde* (*All the Memory of the World*, 1957) are concerned with memory, media, biopolitics, and the archive. Whereas *Night and Fog* shows archival material about bioprocessing - passports stripped of prisoners or records kept by prisoners with the names of the recently dead crossed out - *All the Memory of the World* addresses an almost inverse kind of biblioprocessing of books as prisoners: the camp is haunted by the library, just as the library is haunted by the camp.

Much as the Nazis tattooed numbers on the arms to be used to identify the victim's corpse, sewed symbols of different colours and shapes on their prison clothing (figure 1) and stripped prisoners of their passports and identification cards (figure 2) in *Night and Fog*, so books enter the national library as prisoners and are immediately issued identification cards, then subject to inspection, labelling, 'inoculation', classification, card catalogued, and shelving in *All the Memory of the World* (figures 3, 4 and 8). In an extended high angle tracking shot, we see an inspector walking up and down between the reading tables. One of the first overheads shows a man who pushes a cart with book requests stop at a desk and then give them to a woman librarian who gets up to check them out. After she sits back down, the film cuts to a second overhead shot of the man pushing the cart as the narrator refers to the books passing into circulation as crossing the 'last border', a 'boundary' more profound than Alice going through the looking glass. A kind



Figure 1, Alain Resnais (director), *Night and Fog*, 1955. The concentration camp as archive, library archive as fortress

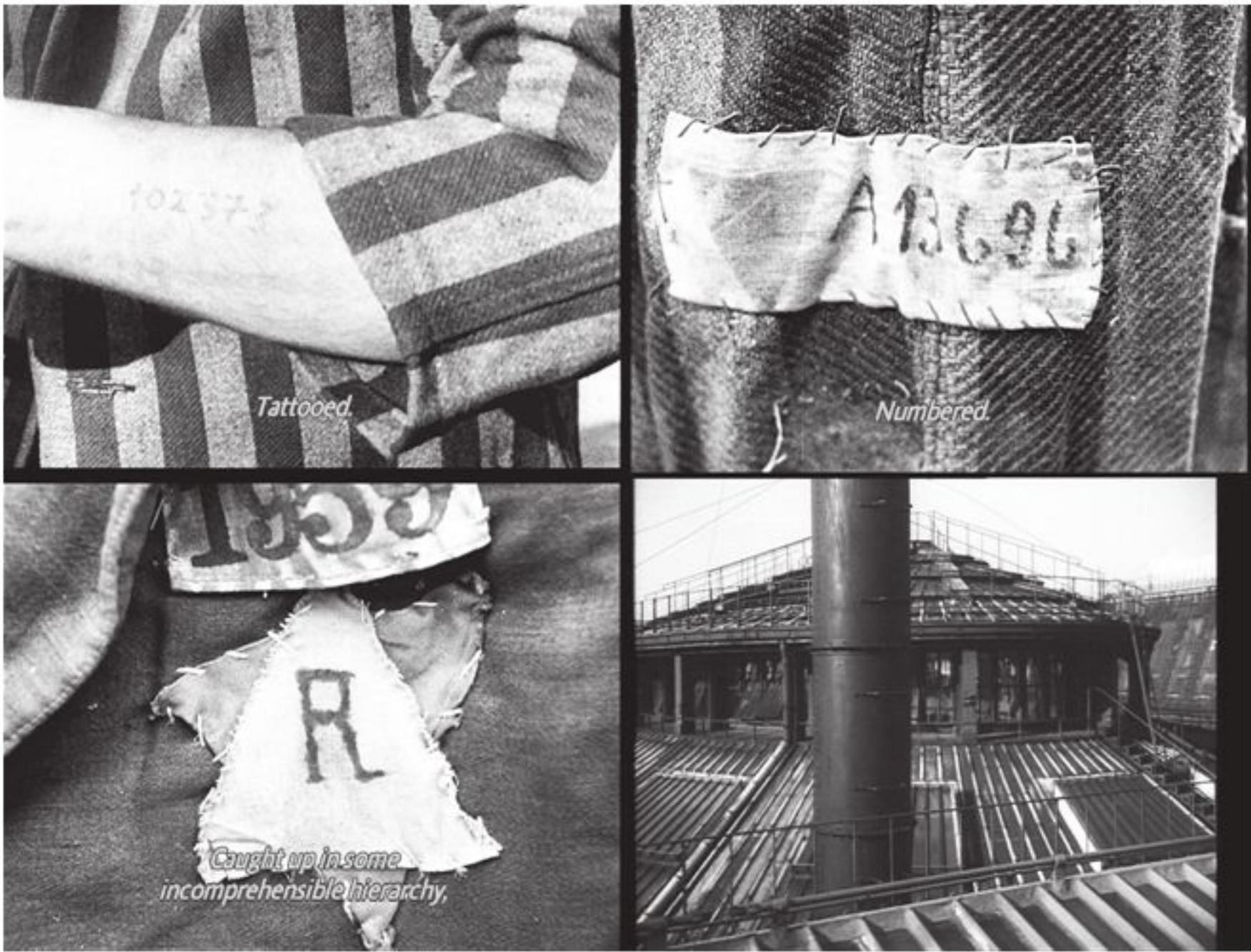


Figure 2, Alain Resnais (director), *Night and Fog*, 1955. People decoupled from their papers







Figure 3, Alain Resnais (director), *All the Memory of the World*, 1956.  
*Books as prisoners*

of biblio-border control operates here, paper check for the books, which are given identification cards and those shelved on a cart readied for the reading room to have their request slips in them (figures 5 and 6).

Both films highlight the social construction of the paper world that auto-archives people: the desertion, abandonment, and partial destruction of the Nazi concentration camps poses a threat to the survival of yet to be archived materials in *Night and Fog*, much as the destruction of books by readers who ‘crunch them like insects’ in *All the Memory of the World* (figure 6) poses a threat to the national library’s already archived materials.<sup>14</sup> *All the Memory of the World* is arguably haunted by *Night and Fog*, particularly by the way it eventalizes the archive as an unreadable place. What were then contemporary shots of the ruins of Nazi concentration camps are haunted by the absence of archivists in particular and of humans in general. The camps are always shot totally lacking in humans. There are no guides, no tourists, no schoolchildren: only the camera visits the blocks now (figure 7).

14. Since *All the Memory of the World* has received almost no critical attention, I will focus primarily on it. None of the essays in a recent, quite comprehensive discussion of *Night and Fog* mentions *All the Memories of the World*. See Griselda Pollock and Max Silverman (eds), *Concentrationary Cinema: Aesthetics As Political Resistance in Alain Resnais’s Night and Fog*, Oxford, Berghahn Books, 2012





Figure 4,  
Alain Resnais  
(director), All  
the Memory  
of the World,  
1956

Figure 5,  
Alain Resnais  
(director), All  
the Memory  
of the World,  
1956





Figure 6,  
Alain Resnais  
(director), *All  
the Memory  
of the World*,  
1956



Figure 7, Alain Resnais (director), *Night and Fog*, 1955. *The lifeless after-life of the concentration camp*





Figure 8, Alain Resnais (director), *All the Memory of the World*, 1956, and Chris Marker, *La Jetée*, 1962. The Paris Cinematheque archive haunting the underground camp of the post-apocalyptic future



The camp has erased itself as a potential archive, so to speak, and this erasure is in turn being ‘archived’ in Resnais’s film as a resistance to reading. Resnais advances this erasure of the archive and its recording on film: in *All the Memory of the World*, by drawing a series of provocative parallels between the ‘fortress’ and ‘silent stronghold’ of the national library in in *All the Memory of the World* (figure 1) and the wide variety of camp architectural styles in *Night and Fog*. Just as there are no people in the camps in *Night and Fog*, so there are next to no readers in *All the Memory of the World*. We see one person in a reading room at one point, but he is still. Otherwise, all the reading rooms are empty, as are the storage rooms. Those few people we do see work in the library, and readers seen in a long, overhead tracking shot in the cathedral-like space of the reading room near the end of the film resemble the sequence alternating the close up shots of the faces of statues with close up shots of people, seen in looking up at various objects or books in the library but never taking them down from the shelf (figure 5). For example, one shot begins with a close up of a book shelf, and then dollies in and dollies right before cutting



15. See the extra 'On *Vertigo*' in the Criterion edition of Chris Marker, *La Jetée* (1962) for an analysis of how the archive of the Paris Cinemathèque haunts the underground camp of the post-apocalyptic future in Marker's film. See figure 8. On the architecture of the Bibliothèque nationale and underground areas of Paris occupied by the Nazis during World War II, see W.G. Sebald, *Austerlitz*, Anthea Bell (trans), New York, Random House, 2001.

abruptly to a stationary shot of a Bibliothèque nationale inspector standing motionless in the shadow behind a large sculptural ornament attached to a column (figure 5). The inspector wearing a cap with the initials 'BN' (for Bibliothèque nationale) discloses the archon, guardian function of the archive. That function is increasingly spectral and yet also increasingly graphic, as we see a book literally injected with a shot containing, one assumes, some kind preservative, as if metaphorically inoculating against its future reader, before it may pass through the 'looking glass' from the stacks into the reading room.<sup>15</sup>

Archiving is inseparable in *All the Memory of the World* from personified technical supports. The film begins in the basement, with a microphone dropping down into the centre of the shot. Like the camera that is the only visitor to the concentration camp in *Night and Fog* (figure 1), the microphone is the only visitor in the library, as if the microphone itself were delivering voice-over narration. The erasure of the archive suspends the decision about the value of its contents, unlike the Nazi officer shown in *Night and Fog* deciding which prisoners go in the forced labour line and which go in the line for the gas chambers. The value of the catalogued materials shown in the BN's basement have an unclear status. Are they waiting to be catalogued or unworthy of being catalogued? Like a box in one room of the library that cannot be opened until 1974, the value of the library's various materials is subject to a future consisting of non-reading, a future that deprives the archivist of sovereignty. The film's final high overhead shot, lasting more than ten seconds, makes the check out desk and the people using it resemble a portrait painted by Giuseppe Arcimboldo (figure 6). The work of reading as abstraction returns as a pattern to be recognized, a happy face of memory which is not a human face yet can be recognized only by humans capable of reading it, translating into a metaphor, a figure, face, personification of memory. The best hope for an imprisoned book is to remain unread, perhaps misfiled, mis-shelved, even lost in the archive.

#### IV

We may understand further how biopolitics is better understood as bibliobibliopolitics, or shelf-life, if we turn to Walter Benjamin's essay, 'Books by the Mentally Ill: From My Library'. The essay concludes with a cryptic reference to an un-named manuscript whose difficulties of publication Benjamin links with obtaining a passport:

The mere existence of such works has something disconcerting about it. So long as we habitually regard writing as - despite everything - part of a higher, safer realm, the appearance of insanity, especially when it enters less noisily from elsewhere, is all the more terrifying. How could this happen? How did it manage to slip past the passport control of the city of books, this Thebes with a hundred doors? The publishing history



of such works must often be as bizarre as their contents. Nowadays, one would like to think, the situation is different. Interest in the manifestations of madness is as universal as ever, but it has become more fruitful and legitimate. The writings of the insane, so we might suppose, would have no trouble obtaining a valid passport today. Yet I know of a manuscript that is finding it as difficult as ever to obtain the approval of a respected publishing house, even though it is the equal of Schreber's in both human and literary form, and far superior in intelligibility.<sup>16</sup>

Some books get left behind in manuscript, even if passports become less restrictive. Benjamin records the loss by failing to give the author or title of the unpublished manuscript that is not yet a book, instead tabling its contents as if he were hoping it and others like it might thereby slip by the passport controls of the biblio-polis.<sup>17</sup>

Obviously, Benjamin's semi-serious, semi-jocular reach for the passport ('your papers please!') in order to make apparent the ideological underpinnings of the biblio-polis anticipates, desperately, heart-wrenchingly, the fate of so many Europeans, himself included, who found themselves, stateless, niche-less, slot-less, without papers, literally 'fatherless', or '*apatrides*', as they fled the Nazis in 1940. While the passport analogy might play differently now than it did in the today of Benjamin's essay, it indicates that Benjamin's neurotic 'motley order' of re-shelving recovers what, in 'The Book to Come', Derrida elaborates as the status of the book or *biblion* as backing, the material support or guarantee which, in purely physical terms permits portability, linearity, and enables a manuscript or a person to travel into the hands of readers, find a slot or niche in the physical and ideological or semiotic world of its today, having passed muster at border control (*PM*, p27). For *biblion* we may also read person, the 'book' now the backing of a particular way of configuring an identity, a mode of citizenship, belonging, and the privileges it affords.

As Derrida observes, 'the Greek word *biblion* ... has not always meant "book" or even "work"'; instead *biblion* could designate a support for 'writing' (so derived from *biblios*, which in Greek names the internal bark of the papyrus and thus of paper, like the Latin word *liber*, which first designated the living part of the bark before it meant 'book'). *Biblion*, then, would only mean 'writing paper', and not book, nor oeuvre or opus, only the substance of a particular support - bark. But *biblion* can also, by metonymy, mean any writing support, tablets for instance or even letters: post (*PM*, pp5-6). The extension of *biblion* as book, then, represents the development of one particular metonymy, that equates the backing of writing, the underpinning of writing by a physical substance with the figure of the 'book', collating, if you like, writing and book, text and material support and linearizing the *biblion* as book. For Derrida, the 'book to come' signals not something new, so much as something held in abeyance by the repetition and so adoption of one particular metonymy. That repetition made a world. Likewise, as Benjamin's re-shelving discovers,

16. Walter Benjamin, 'Books by the Mentally Ill: From My Library', *Selected Writings Volume 2 part 1, 1927-1930*, Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith (ed), Harvard, Harvard University Press, p130.

17. This loss of the mss in order to make it possible to find it later in published form would, in any case, only be a temporary solution since Benjamin sees the collector as an endangered species about to go extinct. See Walter Benjamin, 'Unpacking My Library', *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, Hannah Arendt (ed), New York, Schocken Books, 1968.



other infra-worlds, other forms of writing, a whole 'library of pathology', for example, inhere within the order provided by the book.

As Derrida turns to the figure of the library - he is giving this lecture at the Bibliothèque nationale de France - he arrives at the question of the slot or niche, the shelf, as it were, 'already in Greek, *bibliothèque* means the slot for a book, book's place of *deposit*, the place where books are put (*poser*), *deposited*, laid down (*reposer*), the *entrepôt*, where they are stored' (PM, p6). And such places of deposit constitute for Derrida a '[s]etting down, laying down, depositing, storing, warehousing - this is also receiving, collecting together, gathering together, consigning (like baggage), binding together, collecting, totalizing, electing, and reading by binding' (PM, p7). 'So the idea of *gathering together*, as much as that of the immobility of the statutory and even state deposit', he writes, 'seems as essential to the idea of the book as to that of the library'. Within this question of gathering, depositing, and so of sorting by gathering, of generating the *polis* via or in relation to the *biblio-polis*, he arrives at the 'question of the *title*'. 'Can we imagine a book', asks Derrida, 'without a title?' 'We can' he answers, 'but only up to the point when we will have to name it and thus also to classify it, deposit it in an order, put it into a catalogue, or a series, or a taxonomy'. He ends this thinking of the title with the contention that 'it is difficult to imagine, or at any rate to deal with, with a book that is neither placed nor collected together under a title bearing its name, an identity, the condition of its legitimacy and of its copyright'. 'Sure', we may say, 'yes it is' - for such books, which exist, and which are not properly speaking books at all, or not books quite yet, sit uneasily on their shelves, as Benjamin might tell him, until, of course, the day when those books without titles, such as the manuscript whose title Benjamin withholds from us, reveal their own encrypted infra-titles to us.

## V

In 'Bibliographical Musings', Theodor Adorno offers his own instance of shelf-life, in this case, of damaged books. He tells an anecdote in which he correlates a distinction between real and fake books with a distinction between damaged and undamaged books: damaged books are the real books, and fakery extends not only to reproductions of books but even to the presentation of new books as old:

[The] Potemkinian library I found in the house of an old American family on the grounds of a hotel in Maine ... displayed every conceivable title to me; when I succumbed to the temptation and reached for one, the whole splendid mass fell apart with a slight clatter - it was all fake. Damaged books, books that have been knocked about and have had to suffer, are the real books. Hopefully vandals will not discover this and treat their brand new stocks the way crafty restaurateurs do, putting an artificial layer



of dust on bottles of adulterated red wine from Algeria. Books that have been lifelong companions resist the order imposed by assigned places and insist on finding their own; the person who grants them disorder is not being unloving to them but rather obeying their whims. He is often punished for it, for these are the books that are most likely to run off.<sup>18</sup>

Against the degraded collection he finds in Maine, that nevertheless ‘tempts’ him, because of the verisimilitude or efficacy of the ‘backing’ and the replete order of titles seemingly on offer, Adorno pitches the authentically damaged book. Not a stunt book that falls apart on contact - there only to advertise the importance of books which are in fact not there - the damaged book acquires a life all its own, a life, or liveliness. The damaged book, the used or mangled book, is the book that resists its owner’s impulse to order it.

Adorno goes on to describe his own damaged books, their ruination and repair, his description taking on a theological cast that makes Providence sound like a life and death selector or military officer deciding which books will be preserved and which will be disappeared:

Emigration, the damaged life, disfigured my books, which had accompanied me, or, if you like, been dragged, to London, New York, Los Angeles, and back to Germany, beyond measure. Routed out of other peaceful bookcases, shaken up, locked up in crates, put into temporary housing, many of them fell apart. The bindings came loose, often taking chunks of text with them. They had been badly manufactured in the first place; high quality German workmanship has long been as questionable as the world market began to think it was in the era of posterity. The disintegration of German liberalism lurked in it emblematically; one push and it fell to pieces. But I can’t get rid of the ruined books; they keep getting repaired. Many of these tattered volumes are finding their second childhood as paperbacks. Less threatens them: they are not real property in the same sense. Now the fragile ones are documents of the unity of life that clings to them and of its discontinuities as well, with all the fortuitousness of its rescue as well as the marks of an intangible Providence embodied in the fact that one was preserved while another was never seen again. None of the Kafka published during his lifetime returned with me to Germany in good condition (BM, p24).

It is as impossible as it would be undesirable to separate the story of these damaged books, books broken in and by transit, from the damage inflicted on their owner in and by his own eviction or emigration. Indeed, it is tempting to say that here Adorno embarks on a rhetorical inflection of the pathetic fallacy, to construct the ‘bare life’ of books which follow in the wake of their human reader. And so it is perhaps that despite their damage, despite the damage they reflect back at him, Adorno cannot bear to throw out these books

18. Theodor W. Adorno, ‘Bibliographical Musings’ in *Notes to Literature Volume 2*, Shierry Weber Nicholsen (trans), Rolf Tiedemann (ed), New York, Columbia University Press (1992), pp20-31; p24, henceforth BM in the text.



and they remain, in stark relation to the reduction of books to mass culture delivery mechanisms for 'stimuli'.

Beyond the folding of books into a biographical regime as backing or prop for the self, Adorno goes on to write that 'the life of a book is not coterminous with the person who imagines it to be at his command'. 'What gets lost in a book that is loaned out', he continues,

and what settles into a book that is sheltered are drastic proof of that. But the life of a book also stands in oblique relation to what the possessor imagines he possesses in his knowledge of the book's *dispositio* or so-called train of thought. Time and again the life of books mocks him in his errors. Quotations that are not checked in the text are seldom accurate. Hence the proper relationship to books would be one of spontaneity, acquiescing in what the second and apocryphal life of books wants, instead of insisting on that first life, which is usually only an arbitrary construction on the reader's part (BM, pp24-5).

Forget immobility. Forget the established or satisfactory order (*dispositio*) of 'first lives'. Give yourself over to the order that books produce by and in their juxtapositions, use, misuse, and damage. The trick is how to do it without doing violence to the relation that develops between *biblion* and *bios* - how we might accede to or allow ourselves to be the beneficiaries of this form of life support without installing that aid as another order or system. Best to keep everything - however damaged. Best not to know why exactly and trust to luck, to what seems like chance, a pure exposure to the aleatory figure that cohabits with fictions of order.

One might as well attempt to herd cats - which is of course the Derridean *animôt* or anti-metaphor, a neologism and pun Derrida makes on the French word for animals ("animaux" and the French word for words [mots] meant to call into question the distinction between mute animals and man as speaking animal,)<sup>19</sup> to which Adorno turns:

The private life of books can be compared to the life that a widespread and emotionally charged belief, common among women, ascribes to cats. These undomesticated domesticated animals. Exhibited as property, visible and at one's disposal, they like to withdraw. If their master refuses to organize his books into a library - and anyone who has proper contact with books is unlikely to feel comfortable in libraries, even his own - those he most needs will repudiate his sovereignty time and time again, will hide and return only by chance. Some will vanish like spirits, usually at moments when they have special meaning. Still worse is the resistance books put up to the moment one looks for something in them: as though they were seeking revenge for the lexical gaze that paws through them looking for individual passages and thereby doing violence to their own

19. Jacques Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, Marie-Louis Mallet (ed.), David Wills (trans), New York, Fordham University Press, 2008.



autonomous course, which does not wish to adjust to anyone's wishes. An aloofness toward anyone who wants to quote from them is in fact a defining characteristic of certain authors, especially Marx, in whom one need only rummage around for a passage that has made a special impression to be reminded of the proverbial needle in the haystack (BM, p25).

Moody, aloof, resistant, apt to punish, the book is a strange animal, an animal dressed in an anthropomorphic 'coat', for to itself it lacks no skin. It likes to punish the 'pawing' of the 'lexical' gaze of the reading animal that seeks after particular passages rather than accepting what is given freely if capriciously, and subject to loss. It is worth noting further that properly speaking the book is not an animal at all, so much as a form of life that unfolds in the circuit that unfolds between women and cats - the book, *this* book, like *this* cat, is always a thoroughly historical, singular being which resists attempts to confine it to this or that species, this or that slot on the shelf. It wanders.

For Adorno, then, life, life worth living, might be said to consist in a bio/biblio life support project that we might call 'living together with or through books', that is by attending to the second-ness of books, to the apocryphal, tacked on life, that books make possible, to the backing and bucking of writing, to recall Derrida's modeling of the *biblion*, that they effect (PM, p6). Reading the book's paratext is for Adorno a matter of attending to the book's graphic design:

The book has figured among the emblems of melancholy for centuries ... there is something emblematic in the imago of all books, waiting for the profound gaze into their external aspect that will awaken its language, a language other than the internal, printed one. Only in the eccentric features of what is to be read does that resemblance survive, as in Proust's stubborn and abyssal passion for writing without paragraphs. The eye, following the path of the lines of print, looks for such resemblances everywhere. While no one of them is conclusive, every graphic element, every characteristic of binding, paper, and print - anything, in other words, in which the reader stimulates the mimetic impulses in the book itself - can become the bearer of resemblance (BM, p27).

By reading mimetically, Adorno becomes revelatory, finds a way into reading the history of the book and of historicizing the book: 'What is revealed in this history' is a totality, the implosive dialectical tensions of which may be detected in Adorno's adoption of metaphors or literal book damage to route the book's 'material components' through the formal 'irregularities, rips, holes, and footholds that history has made in the smooth walls of the graphic design system ... and its peripheral features' (BM, p30).

Adorno's essay ends with a series of breakdowns in mimetic reading until reading itself becomes impossible. First, a distinction between inside and



outside gets collapsed as a consequence of Adorno having made 'anything' in a book an occasion for mimetic reading:

The power history wields both over the appearance of the binding and its fate and over what has been written is much greater than any difference between what is inside and what is outside, between spirit and material, that it threatens to outstrip the work's spirituality. This is the ultimate secret of the sadness of older books, and it follows how one should relate to them and, following their model, to books in general (BM, p31).

Reading a book through its graphic design and paratext, the vertical printing on the spine, the removal of the place and date of publication of the title page, the book's cover is to encounter the book's resistance to reading. Adorno's metaphors for reading a book focus on the paratext of the book. This focus on the book's 'most eccentric features' transmutes from print to the book as image, '*imago*', 'graphic image' (BM, p30).

Although Adorno refers throughout the essay to the book's external and internal form, his account of the true book as the damaged book does not yield an analysis based on resemblance: he defines damage both as external and literal (what happens to books when they are shipped around the globe, when they are read and reread over time, when they are produced more cheaply); and also as external and metaphorical (the way external coercion and pressure gets interiorized - 'The book[s] ... own form ... is attacked within the book itself') (BM, p21). The resistance to reading may penetrate the writing of the book so far as to verge on altering its form. As Adorno writes of Karl Marx's writings:

At many points Marx' [sic] texts read as though they had been written hastily on the margins of the texts he was studying and in his theories of surplus value this becomes almost a literary form. Clearly his highly spontaneous mode of production resisted putting ideas where they belong in neat and tidy fashion - an expression of the anti-systematic tendency in an author whose system is a critique of the existing one; ultimately, Marx was thereby practicing a conspiratorial technique unrecognized as such even by itself. The fact that for all the canonization of Marx there is no Marx lexicon available is fitting; the author, a number of whose statements are spouted like quotations from the Bible, defends himself against what is done to him by hiding anything that does not fall into that stock of quotations . . . The relief the lexica afford is invaluable, but often the most important formulations fall through the cracks because they do not fit under any keyword or because the appropriate word occurs so infrequently that lexical logic would not consider it worth including: 'Progress' does not appear in the Hegel lexicon (BM, p26).



In Adorno's account, the process of writing and printing involves a secret that is hidden even from the author himself, already described by Adorno earlier as estrangement of the author from his text and even of the text from itself when he reads the page proofs ('the authors look at them with a stranger's eyes' 'unrecognized as such even by itself') (BM, p23). Yet what is hidden by the violence of reading for the pullable quotation is not reducible either to a secular Marxist account (book as commodity, reified by the means of production), nor to an actual agency (the book continues to be personified), nor to a particular theology, but is detected through a series of metaphors, the last of which is to 'fall through the cracks' (BM, p42).

Adorno finishes his essay off by calling up an 'ideal reader' rather than an existing one. In speaking of 'the work's spirituality' and "'the ultimate" secret', Adorno ends by (re)tuning into a theological wavelength, a call from beyond the grave of the book's life, as it were, but there is no religious identification. Karl Marx's marginal notes are analogous to musical notes, which may be heard by a reader:

Someone in whom the mimetic and the musical senses have become deeply enough interpenetrated will ... be capable of judging a piece of music by the image formed by its notes, even before he completely transposed it into an auditory idea. Books resist this. But the ideal reader, whom the books do not tolerate, would know something of what is inside when he felt the cover in his hand and saw the layout of the title page and the overall quality of the pages, and would sense the book's value without needing to read it first (BM, p31).

What kind of life support do damaged books, resistant to reading, offer Adorno? On the one hand, a kind of Jewish mysticism may be heard in Adorno's metaphors of hiding (even the act of hiding is hidden from the one who hides), a mysticism that stops short of messianism as a book becomes a work of art through suffering: 'Damaged books, books that have been made to suffer, are the real books'; 'The bibliophile expects from books beauty without suffering ... Suffering is the true beauty in books; without it, beauty is corrupt, a mere performance' (BM, p24, p29). The books' suffering is redeemed in aesthetic terms, as the books' true beauty. And yet, on the other hand, Adorno's account of suffering is clearly not messianic nor eschatological in that he is not using Christian images of the 'wound' or 'stigmata' for suffering or narrating an apocalyptic history (of more and more degradation of books due to changes in the book publishing industry). Nor does Adorno single out one book in particular. His concern with damaged books is rather with the conditions of book publication and how those conditions make books both more accessible and more resistant. Adorno speaks at the end of 'Bibliographical Musings' both of a singular type of books (older books) and of books in the plural, putting more pressure on his personification of



books by highlighting even more clearly the differences between the non 'coterminus' if analogous lives and deaths of books and the lives and deaths of writers and readers (BM, p24). Books preserve and defend their value by becoming inhuman. Reading a book whose value you cannot determine without reading it effectively reduces reading to information processing. Opening up the possibility of life supports in the form of suffering bio-books without equating suffering with sacrifice, Adorno redeems the archive as a hidden refuge or holding area for refugees of reading and personified book. Adorno does not hold out, that is, for an undamaged life support, repaired and rendered readable by a visible 'Passion of the Book' to be detained in a camp for inspection and inoculation.

## VI

What is there to be gained by displacing biopolitics with biobibliopolitics and by arriving, through a deconstructive examination of the new media archive, at the notion of shelf-life? At least one thing becomes clear: the question of paperlessness, the questioning of digital and material supports, arises from the fantasmatics of media, the dematerialization of paper, its virtualization or spectralization.<sup>20</sup> As Derrida writes in 'Paper or Me, You Know':

20. Derrida also links the 'book' and 'bios' through the phantasm in *The Beast and Sovereign 2*, op. cit., p129-133, p148-49.

It is not in itself a novelty or a mutation that the modes of appropriation are becoming spectral, are 'dematerializing' (a very deceptive word, meaning that in truth they are moving from one kind of matter to another and actually becoming all the more material, in the sense that they are gaining in potential *dynamis*): that they are virtualizing or 'fantasmaticizing' ... Once they have been identified with the form and material of 'paper', these incorporated schemata are also privileged ghost-members, supplements of structuring prostheses (PorM, p56).

Furthermore, the spectrality of the 'material' support takes the book's future from the opposition of life and death that orients biopolitics to the way a text lives on, or 'survives', to use Derrida's word: 'Survivance in the sense of survival that is neither life nor death pure and simple, a sense that is not thinkable on the basis of the opposition between life and death'.<sup>21</sup>

21. Derrida, *The Beast and the Sovereign 2*, op. cit., pp130-31.

With this reorientation of the new media archive toward a fantasmatics of biobibliopolitics and hence '(im)materialities of text', we may close by noting that Derrida's notion of haunted, spectral media is itself haunted by dreams about shelf-life, about storage and retrieval, as moments of passage, of border-crossing. Consider, in closing, Adorno's record of a dream he had in Frankfurt on 12 November 1955, a dream involving a question about an obsolete passport, the answer to which will have determined whether Adorno passed an exam:



I dreamt I had to take an exam for a diploma in sociology. It went badly in empirical sociology. I was asked how many columns there are in a punch card, and, as a pure guess, I said twenty. Of course, that was wrong . . . Taking pity on my ignorance, the examiner then announced that he would question me on cultural history. He showed me a German passport of 1879. It ended with the farewell greeting: 'Now out into the world, my little wolf!' This motto appeared in gold leaf. I was asked to explain this. I took a deep breath and explained that the use of gold for such purposes went back to Russian or Byzantine icons. The idea of the prohibition on images had been taken very seriously in those parts; only gold was exempted. Because it was the purest metal, an exception was made for it. Its use in illustrations was followed by baroque ceilings. And the gold lettering in the passport was to be the last vestige of a great tradition. The examiners were delighted by the profundity of my knowledge and I passed the exam.<sup>22</sup>

Shelf-life passes on.

*This essay is deeply indebted to Julian Yates, whose fingerprints, handprints, footprints, voice-prints, and answering machine may be traced everywhere in this essay. I would like also to thank John Archer for his many conversations, his trenchant comments on many drafts of the introductory section, and 'John Archer's answering machine' too.*

22. Theodor W. Adorno, *Dream Notes*, Rodney Livingston (trans), London, Polity, 2007, pp57-58. See also Derrida's waking 'dreams' of paper: 'First, when I dream of an absolute memory ... my imagination continues to protect this archive of paper. ... On paperless paper. Paper is in the world that is not a book'; and I *also* dream of living paperless – and sometimes that sounds to me like a definition of 'real life', of the living part of life. The walls of the house grow thicker; not with wallpaper but *with shelving* [my emphasis] Soon we won't be able to put our feet on the ground: paper on paper', 'Paper or Me, You Know', op. cit., p65.