Let us not begin at the beginning, nor even at the archive.

But rather at the word "archive"—and with the archive of so familiar a word. Ἀρχή, we recall, names at once the commencement and the commandment. This name apparently coordinates two principles in one: the principle according to nature or history, there where things commence—physical, historical, or ontological principle—but also the principle according to the law, there where men and gods command, there where authority, social order are exercised, in this place from which order is given—nomological principle.

There, we said, and in this place. How are we to think of there? And this taking place or this having a place of the Ἀρχή?

We have there two orders of order: sequential and jussive. From this point on, a series of cleavages will incessantly divide every atom of our lexicon. Already in the Ἀρχή of the commencement, I alluded to the commencement according to nature or according to history, introducing surreptitiously a chain of belated and problematic oppositions between ἡ φύσις and its others, thesis, σκέψη, νόμος, etc., which are found to be at work in the other principle, the nomological principle of the Ἀρχή, the principle of the commandment. All would be simple if there were one principle or two principles. All would be simple if the ἡ φύσις and each one of its others were one or two. As we have suspected for a long time, it is nothing of the sort, yet we are forever forgetting this. There is always more
than one—and more or less than two. In the order of the commencement as well as in the order of the commandment.

The concept of the archive shelters in itself, of course, this memory of the name archē. But it also shelters itself from this memory which it shelters: which comes down to saying also that it forgets it. There is nothing accidental or surprising about this. Contrary to the impression one often has, such a concept is not easy to archive. One has trouble, and for essential reasons, establishing it and interpreting it in the document it delivers to us, here in the word which names it, that is the “archive.” In a way, the term indeed refers, as one would correctly believe, to the archē in the physical, historical, or ontological sense, which is to say to the originary, the first, the principal, the primitive, in short to the commencement. But even more, and even earlier, “archive” refers to the archē in the nomological sense, to the archē of the commandment. As is the case for the Latin archivum or archium (a word that is used in the singular, as was the French archive, formerly employed as a masculine singular: un archive), the meaning of “archive,” its only meaning, comes to it from the Greek archēion: initially a house, a domicile, an address, the residence of the superior magistrates, the archons, those who commanded. The citizens who thus held and signified political power were considered to possess the right to make or to represent the law. On account of their publicly recognized authority, it is at their home, in that place which is their house (private house, family house, or employee’s house), that official documents are filed. The archons are first of all the documents’ guardians. They do not only ensure the physical security of what is deposited and of the substrate. They are also accorded the hermeneutic right and competence. They have the power to interpret the archives. Entrusted to such archons, these documents in effect speak the law: they recall the law and call on or impose the law. To be guarded thus, in the jurisdiction of this speaking the law, they needed at once a guardian and a localization. Even in their guardianship or their hermeneutic tradition, the archives could do neither without substrate nor without residence.

It is thus, in this domiciliation, in this house arrest, that archives take place. The dwelling, this place where they dwell permanently, marks this institutional passage from the private to the public, which does not always mean from the secret to the nonsecret. (It is what is happening, right here, when a house, the Freuds’ last house, becomes a museum: the passage from one institution to another.) With such a status, the documents, which are not always discursive writings, are only kept and classified under the title of the archive by virtue of a privileged topology. They inhabit this uncommon place, this place of election where law and singularity intersect in privilege. At the intersection of the topological and the nomological, of the place and the law, of the substrate and the authority, a scene of domiciliation becomes at once visible and invisible. I stress this point for reasons which will, I hope, appear more clearly later. They all have to do with this topo-nomology, with this archontic dimension of domiciliation, with this archic, in truth patriarchic, function, without which no archive would ever come into play or appear as such. To shelter itself and, sheltered, to conceal itself. This archontic function is not solely topo-nomological. It does not only require that the archive be deposited somewhere, on a stable substrate, and at the disposition of a legitimate hermeneutic authority. The archontic power, which also gathers the functions of unification, of identification, of classification, must be paired with what we will call the power of consignation. By consignation, we do not only mean, in the ordinary sense of the word, the act of assigning residence or of entrusting so as to put into reserve (to consign, to deposit), in a place and on a substrate, but here the act of consigning through gathering together signs. It is not only the traditional consignatio, that is, the written proof, but what all consignatio begins by presupposing. Consignation aims to coordinate a single corpus, in a system or a synchrony in which all the elements articulate the unity of an ideal configuration. In an archive, there should not be any absolute dissociation, any heterogeneity or secret which could separate (secernere), or partition, in an absolute manner. The archontic principle of the archive is also a principle of consignation, that is, of gathering together.

It goes without saying from now on that wherever one could attempt, and in particular in Freudian psychoanalysis, to rethink the place and the law according to which the archontic becomes instituted, wherever one could interrogate or contest, directly or indirectly, this archontic principle, its authority, its titles, and its
genealogy, the right that it commands, the legality or the legitimacy that depends on it, where secrets and heterogeneity would seem to menace even the possibility of consignation, this can only have grave consequences for a theory of the archive, as well as for its institutional implementation. A science of the archive must include the theory of this institutionalization, that is to say, the theory both of the law which begins by inscribing itself there and of the right which authorizes it. This right imposes or supposes a bundle of limits which have a history, a deconstructible history, and to the deconstruction of which psychoanalysis has not been foreign, to say the least. This deconstruction in progress concerns, as always, the institution of limits declared to be insurmountable, whether they involve family or state law, the relations between the secret and the nonsecret, or, and this is not the same thing, between the private and the public, whether they involve property or access rights, publication or reproduction rights, whether they involve classification and putting into order. What comes under theory or under private correspondence, for example? What comes under system? under biography or autobiography? under personal or intellectual amnesia? In works said to be *theoretical*, what is worthy of this name and what is not? Should one rely on what Freud says about this to classify his works? Should one for example take him at his word when he presents his *Moses* as a “historical novel”? In each of these cases, the limits, the borders, and the distinctions have been shaken by an earthquake from which no classificational concept and no implementation of the archive can be sheltered. Order is no longer assured.

I dream now of having the time to submit for your discussion more than one thesis, three at least. This time will never be given to me. Above all, I will never have the right to take your time so as to impose upon you, rapid-fire, these three + n essays. Submitted to the text of your discussion, these theses thus remain, for the time being, hypotheses. Incapable of supporting their demonstration, constrained to posit them along the way in a mode which will appear at times dogmatic, I will recall them in a more critical and formal manner in conclusion.

The hypotheses have a common trait. They all concern the *impression* left, in my opinion, by the *Freudian signature* on its own archive, on the concept of the archive and of archivization, that is to say also, inversely and as an indirect consequence, on historiography. Not only on historiography in general, not only on the history of the concept of the archive, but perhaps also on the history of the formation of a *concept in general*. We are saying for the time being *Freudian signature* so as not to have to decide yet between Sigmund Freud, the proper name, on the one hand, and, on the other, the invention of psychoanalysis: project of knowledge, of practice and of institution, community, family, domiciliation, consignation, “house” or “museum,” in the present state of its archivization. What is in question is situated precisely between the two.

Having thus announced my intentions, and promised to collect them so as to conclude in a more organized fashion, I ask your permission to take the time and the liberty to enter upon several lengthy preliminary excursions.