

Punctum Exercise 8
(Telepathies of the Archive)

“This week, after reading Susan Howe, perform a ‘telepathy of the archive’ with your punctum; medium open...”

“Poetry has no proof nor plan nor evidence by decree or in any other way. From somewhere in the twilight realm of sound a spirit of belief flares up at the point where meaning stops and the unreality of what seems most real floods over us. The inward ardor I feel while working in research libraries is intuitive. It’s a sense of self-identification and trust, or the granting of grace in an ordinary room, in a secular time.”

Susan Howe, Spontaneous Particulars, p. 63.

“Mediation of a world’s vast Memory

*Predominance pitched across history
Collision or collusion with history”*

Susan Howe, Singularities, p. 33



In the archive are some *things not meant to be read*.

And other things, not meant to be read *by you*.

In the archive there are also some *things meant to be looked at*.

And other things. And not.

* * *

At one point the eighteenth-century philosopher Étienne Bonnot de Condillac writes that a boy raised by bears had no memory of the bears. I cannot remember what explanation Condillac had for this strange fact, but I recall that it all made perfect sense to him.



One puts everything into a small locker. Press C. Press four digits. (Small beeps; tiny flashing LED, red like an angry eye). Reflexively, I punch in the date of the most significant event in my life. It is also the PIN code for my ATM card.

Press the little icon of an antique key.

With a little hum and a click, I am separated from all my personal effects. I go to wash my hands at the little sink. Only then am I invited through the heavy glass door, which the archivist unseals with the click of an invisible solenoid.

* * *

The rituals of the manuscript reading room are precise and polite — the high barrel vault of glass brightly cups a gentle airlessness. Because I have requested my boxes in advance, I am addressed by name, by strangers who bring me bright orange sheets of paper, each sheet of which is perforated at the center with a large oculus. This is the only paper that is permitted in the reading room, and it has been made to look *like nothing in history*.

Kingston October 22nd 1810-
Dear Friend, It is recorded in sacred writ, as an instance
of criminal neglect, & the height of ingratitude
in the chief Butler of Pharaoh, that he "remembered
not Joseph but forgot him" — I feel myself justly
chargeable with a similar neglect to you; & all the
reasons, probably, that I could assign would be insuffi-
cient to atone for this criminal dereliction of

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FOR: HEARST NEWSPAPERS,

FROM: JAMES R. YOUNG

11TH FLOOR 235E 45TH NEWYORKCITY
SHEET2 OF 2

WILEY SMITH YOUNG SECOND TAKE EYEWITNESS ACCOUNT TODSYS BLAST HAD
APPEARANCE OF GIANT MONSTER MOVING THROUGH MASTS AND HULLS OF EIGHTY
SEVEN SHIPS USING GARGANTUAN BLOWTORCH SPREADING AN ATOMIC FLAME OVER
SEVERAL MILES OF HORIZON PARAGRAPH ALTHOUGH MANY SHIPS REMAIN ALFOAT
AS AN UNDERWATER ANTIPERSONNEL BLAST THIS ONE APPEARED ME TO HAVE
SUFFICIENT POWER CERTAINLY ENOUGH DEADLY RADIATION TO KILL OR
BUTN EVERYLIVING BEING ABOARD EYE CLEARLY SAW SOME OBJECTS THROWN
THOUSANDS FEET INTO AIR PROBABLY AIRPLANES FROM DECKS OF SARATOGA
OR MAYBE SMALL TARGET CRAFT PARAGRAPH IN FORMATION TODAYS FANTASTIC
SPECTACLE WAS TOTALLY UNLIKE NAGASAKI HIROSHIMA OR INITIAL TEST
HERE JULY FIRST PARAGRAPH EYEM CONVINCED THAT THUNDERING MIGHT
OF SMORNING "BIG BOOM" WILL DISPROVE CHARGES MADE BY
GROUP AMERICAN SCIENTISTS "WE CAN EXPECT NOTHING OF SCIENTIFIC
VALUE AND LITTLE OF TECHNICAL VALUE IN THESE TESTS" THE
MILITARY AND SCIENTIFIC PURPOSES AND RESULTS OF THIS SECOND PEACETIME
ATOMIC OPERATION SHOULD BE VERY SATISFACTORY END

TOT 0325/WS/25 JULY

I pull every box in the archive that comes up in the finding aide when I search for “August 6th 1945” — along with “6 August 1945,” and “August 6, 1945.” I look at what I find in these boxes as they are brought to me one by one.

I pay particular attention to the objects I find in the specific indexed folder in each box, since these are where I find the date. But I am no less concerned with the objects in the folders *immediately before and after* the relevant folders.

* * *

Archives *file* the stuff of the past. They file the stuff of the past *away*. Filing systems bring into conjunction physical and conceptual topologies. They are so ostentatious about their conceptual architectures, that they almost succeed, much of the time, in placing their physical topology just beyond the threshold of consciousness. Only fingers inside boxes — fingers walking across the tops of folders — can feel the surface of the *things* straining against the confines of the *concepts*.

* * *

There are two concepts that have been used to organize this archive: the concept “person,” and the concept “alphabet.” One can render a person concisely in alphabetic form. This is called a “name.”

It is much more difficult to render an alphabet concisely by means of a persons. But certain poems try to do this.

*for valuable services rendered to the Nation on work
essential to the production of the Atomic Bomb, thereby
contributing materially to the successful conclusion of
World War II*

Robert P. Patterson
Under Secretary of War



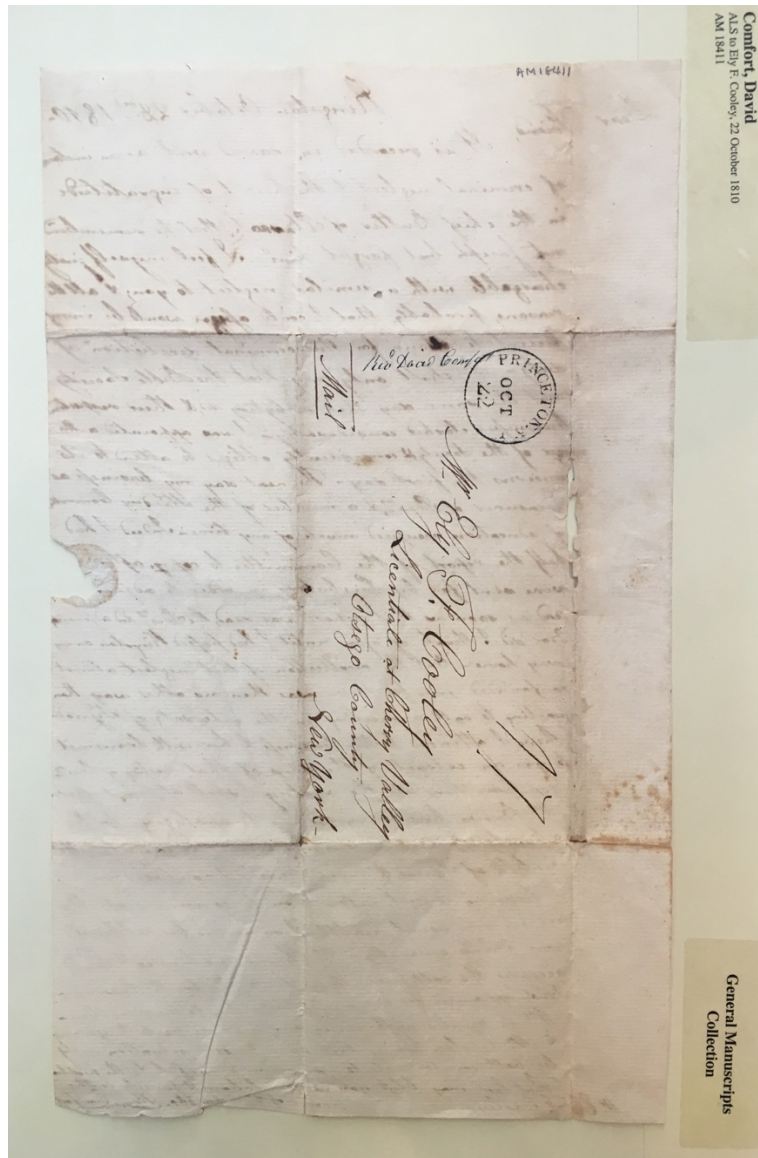
Henry L. Stimson
Secretary of War

Washington, D. C., 6 August 1945

& all the
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ficient to atone for this criminal dereliction of

TODSYS BLAST

EXPET NOTHING



AN ATOMIC FLAME OVER SEVERAL MILES OF
HORIZON PARAGRAPH

WILL

BIG BOOM

DOSPROVE

