Troubles in archives:
Misleading assemblages, awkward activisms and trickster traces

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Preface...
Regarding the narrative turn

- People matter
- No god’s eye view, no epistemological privilege
- Researchers too are subject
- Situated knowledges, reflexivity & non-referentiality
- Lives are stories, & stories are accounts
- Neither ‘the past/then’ nor ‘the present/now’ are sui generis
Misleading assemblages: artfulness and artefects

The feminist and socialist writer and social theorist Olive Schreiner (1855-1920) was one of the most important - and radical - social commentators of her day.

Schreiner's published writings include novels, allegories and influential works of social theory, among them *The Story of An African Farm*, *Undine*, *From Man to Man*, *Dreams, Dream Life and Real Life*, *Trooper Peter Holkebt of Mashonaland*, *The Political Situation*, *Closer Union*, and *Woman and Labour*.

Around 5000 of Schreiner's letters, written between 1871 and 1920, survive. They appear in *The Olive Schreiner Letters Online* just as she wrote them - including omissions, spelling mistakes, deletions and insertions.

Schreiner's letters have these strong 'bird in flight' characteristics, and as a consequence they provide a unique source for exploring the unfolding thinking of one of the great feminist theorists and New Woman writers. Her letters are an unparalleled resource for investigating colonialism under transition, feminism and socialism, prostitution, marriage, changing understandings of 'race' and capital, imperialism in southern Africa, the South African War, women's franchise campaigns, 'race' and labour issues, international feminist networks, pacifism and war economies, political and economic change in South Africa post WWI, and much more.

In addition, Schreiner's letters enable her writing practices to be explored over a time-period in which many technological and related social changes greatly impacted on epistolary exchanges, including the invention

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*Stunned Carpenter supports war, hate & war beget hate & war, will never talk of again* Read the full letter
Awkward activisms
my lovely,

I could only write a short letter to you but I want to let you know that you are always on my mind. I hope you are well.

I don't know how to say goodbye, but I hope you have taken good care of yourself and are healthy. I miss you very much.

I hope you are happy and that life is good for you. I wish you all the best.

With all my love,

[Signature]

[Letter from another person]

[Letter from another person]
Trickster traces: what remains
...My friend Lady Constance Lytton has just cabled me she has made satisfactory arrangements for bringing out my little article on Closer Union in Book form. Tell Jan I am going to send him a copy that he can carry about in his pocket, as I know how much he likes it & agrees with all the views!!!!!!

Really, I would come up to Pretoria just to have a long talk with him; but I know a politician never talks; he fences! ...

Good bye, dear thanks for all you your love to me.

Olive Schreiner.

Tell Neef Jan, he’s I say, he’s not to go on dancing on the head of my Indians like he does; & that when I die, he must take care of all my black people for me!!! I shall leave them to him in my will.

[OS to Isie Smuts, Jan-Feb 1909, NAD Smuts / OSLO]
Grannie Wt. with Elberton on lap. Effie standing, Georgie & Mannie sitting on left of photo.
Troubles in archives –
some brief conclusions
Whites Writing Whiteness

Letters, Domestic Figurations & Representations of Whiteness in South Africa 1770s–1970s

Please reference as Whites Writing Whiteness (2014) 'About the Whites Writing Whiteness project' http://www.whiteswritingwhiteness.ed.ac.uk/Whites-Writing-Whiteness and provide the paragraph number as appropriate when quoting.

1. The 'Whites Writing Whiteness' project (ESRC ES/J022977/1), based at the University of Edinburgh, is concerned with how social change happens and the best ways for social science research to get to grips with this. In particular, it is investigating how change happened in South Africa over the two hundred year period from the 1770s to the 1970s, especially concerning the representation and re/configurations of whiteness and its various 'Others'. Whiteness is the focus because of the powerful and almost definitional association between South Africa and what was for a lengthy time its highly structured racial order, a racial order which was emergent at the start of this period, and in its transitional or even terminal stages at its end.

www.whiteswritingwhiteness.ed.ac.uk