

OPINION

By Prof. Miroslav Dachev

On the dissertation for acquiring the educational and scientific degree "Doctor"

To ANI VLADIMIROVA YANEVA

PERSONAL ARCHIVE FUNDS AND THEIR ROLE FOR THE CONSTRUCTION OF HISTORICAL ART KNOWLEDGE. (Based on materials from the archives of Lyubomir Tenev and Alexander Alexandrov)

For acquiring the educational and scientific degree DOCTOR

Academic area: 8.1 Theory and History of Culture

I cannot help remarking at the outset that from us is expected to evaluate a piece of work, which unfortunately is increasingly rare these days. It is not about the important topic of archives per se, but about their intersection with art, capable of giving birth to intriguing narratives and providing new perspectives on authors, phenomena, and processes in Bulgarian art. This fact deserves to be explicitly noted, even more so because it is in such a cultural context that the main messages of the work are presented to us.

We encounter a diligent author, with accumulated experience on the subject, who promises to be successful in the longer term (there is also a call for further work on the topic). The scientific metrics have been met: four papers have been published of the dissertation, one of them in a publication indexed and refereed in WoS. The structure of the work (234 pages, typical composition that includes an introduction, three chapters and a conclusion; the necessary in this case and very useful appendices, the rich literature used) is correctly reflected in the appended abstract, as well as the contributions. All of this suggests a focus on the substance of the work itself, as presented by Ani Yaneva.

The INTRODUCTORY PART successfully fulfills its mission in the text. The dissertation thesis has clearly stated its aim - to assemble a general picture of the construction of contemporary civic culture using personal archival funds as a sociocultural center for the study of arts. To achieve it, it is necessary to examine the place of archives as knowledge and culture for society and to overturn a well-established idea about archivists: they do not simply collect a vast amount of information but recreate and shape new knowledge to preserve our collective memory. The relevance of the research is also pointed out, which is determined by the fact that the topic is poorly studied in our country. The leading hypothesis of the author is that the personal archival funds contain valuable and unknown information about development of various arts in Bulgaria in the twentieth century. As a result, the research thesis is clearly defined; the methodology of the research is also indicated. A curious aspect is the alignment of the work with the postmodern trend of perception of the archivist as a key mediator and constructor of archival knowledge.

To this end, the work draws on the perspectives of a number of emblematic names familiar from the postmodern situation in Europe. This also reflects on the research methodology: it focuses on documents from personal archives that are recognized as discursive practices and, in a Foucauldian way, considers discourses not as documents but as monuments, where history is an event, a set of events.

In general, the topic is interdisciplinary and this requires the use of different methods as the sources are from different scientific fields: archival science, documentary studies, art history, cultural studies. Therefore, an integration of different approaches, among which I would highlight two - the interpretative (it is necessary to interpret the archives in order to derive knowledge about the nature of a given historical fact) and the culturalological (historical narrative is always a product of a certain point of view, which bears the reflection of certain cultural or political traditions; culture contains meanings as well as the ways of their transmission, and the archive has precisely this role - it contains meanings, stories, texts, that need to be passed on to future generations).

THE FIRST CHAPTER ("Nature and Functions of Archives") is entirely dedicated to cultural studies. It links the concepts of archive, text, trace, history in the postmodern reading of Ricoeur, Derrida, and Foucault, and I would say it is very well presented in terms of the aims of the work. It provides a thorough overview of the development of archives and archival institutions from their emergence to the present day, with an emphasis on the etymology of the concept and its origins; the development of archival work in Bulgaria and the distinction of the science of archives in Bulgaria, as well as the importance of personal archival collections; the functions of archives are articulated (the relationship of the archive to the memory, archives as discursive practices); a number of links are explored (between the historian and the archivist, between the archive and power). The promised postmodern reading of the archives as text does indeed occur through the optics of Ricoeur, Derrida and Foucault in particular. Working and interesting figures such as the "archival fever" (and Derrida's statements on the matter in general); the idea of "archive as the secret of a life", as well as the links between "archive and history", "document and trace" (after Ricoeur and Marc Bloch). Against this background, when considering the archival work in Bulgaria, the trace left by Prof. Ivan Duychev - it seems to me that he has not been sufficiently used in this work both as an archivist and as a cultural and interpretative strategy of using historical documents. In the same way - in pointing out the role of the monasteries, one can complement the huge role of the archival heritage of Mount Athos.

I was particularly attracted by the text in which the archive - thought of as a trace (a natural through Derrida) and as infinity (again Derrida, but with a rather Peirce's semiosis) outline, at least for me, a predominantly semiotic perspective. The question of whether the ideal archive should be complete reminds me very much of the question of whether interpretation should have limits, especially in Eco's resonant polylogue with Rorty, Kaler, and Brooke-Rose. These pages are contributory because they offer new optics for reading archives in the arts; they also suggest connections to

the appendices at the end of the work. They are also intertextually loaded: when Derrida expresses his fears that memory might be destroyed (the archive on fire; forgetfulness in Ricoeur; memory in Halbwachs), he seems to be writing on *The Name of the Rose* or on the later conversation with Eco and Jean-Claude Carrière about the end of books. As the saying goes, in such cases, every self-respecting archivist has a piece of William of Baskerville, or at least of Addison, slumbering inside. But beyond wordplay, it is here that the dissertation rightly reveals the functions of the archive and the relationship to memory (after Jan Asman). The thesis reaches a valuable observation that I would recommend to be further developed, especially since as a discourse it belongs to the generously used postmodern critical thought. "All the points of our memories are tied to one another. They form chains and links in our memory that ultimately keep the story of one's life," the PhD student writes. In fact, this is part of the rhizome mechanism outlined by Deleuze and Guattari and later used by Eco in his description of labyrinths. I think using it would make the postmodern basis of the work even more effective. To paraphrase the novelist Eco, the archive is the most complex and alluring type of labyrinth.

Another important idea introduced in the work is Lotman and Ouspensky's view of culture. Here it is not so much the postmodern situation as the foundations of structuralism in the burgeoning semiotics of the Tartu School that gives the work a new reading of archives in the context of the arts. Indeed, Lotman and Ouspensky recommend that semiotic analysis of the document should always precede historical analysis in order to limit the possibility of partial accounts of an event being recognized as a complete picture of what happened. But in their study of forgetfulness they make a point that is often overlooked: that the history of the destruction of texts runs parallel to the history of the creation of new texts, and that culture is inherently directed against forgetting. This simultaneous obliteration and creation introduces another beloved semiotic figure, particularly potent since Janet: the palimpsest.

The dissertation, most likely unconsciously, steps on an invisible but sure-as-support semiotic construction, or rather perspective: the archival edifice and the creative acts are situated in an indefinite and perhaps infinite number of hexagonal Borgesian galleries. By presumption, dealing with archives is a palimpsestic enterprise. The most visible evidence that the rhizome is woven of lines, not dots. The work of course uses another figure, that of Foucault on the archaeology of knowledge, but they grew up, as it were, with the same books. Actually, Foucault is needed much more for something else - the relationship of the archive (knowledge) and power, which seems unchanged from time immemorial to the infancy of AI. The PhD student also skilfully uses this view in her work.

THE SECOND CHAPTER ("The Role of Archives for Art Knowledge") is a bridge to the work with personal archival funds in the last third chapter. The focus in this short chapter is the highlighting of the specificities of performing arts archives, as well as the essence of work of the historian of the performing arts, compared - predictably - to the archeologist or detective (for this purpose, studies by Prof.

Spassova-Dikova in the field of theatre and of Prof. Martonova in the field of cinema). Skillfully is introduced the use of the interview or oral history. Thus, the step towards the archives and personal archival holdings of the Institute of Art Studies at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences has already been made.

The THIRD CHAPTER, as the title indicates, deals with the personal archive funds of Prof. Lyubomir Tenev and Alexander Alexandrov. It is also the largest part of the study. It not only summarizes a lot of empirical material and shows how the first two chapters were carried out, but also sets a curious interdisciplinary perspective. Here the archives really come alive as a re-creation of history. The analytically presented pages unfold for the reader a possible history of theatre and art cognition through Tenev's archive (pp. 68-109) and a possible historiography of history of cinema and art cognition through the archive of Alexandrov (pp. 110-160). It would be best to read these pages as a parallel biography with the two rich APPENDICES at the end of the work (pp. 176-234).

THE CONCLUSION reinforces the postmodern understanding of the archivist as a key mediator and constructor of the knowledge contained in the archive. On the other hand the work proves the importance of the study of archival holdings as a trace and memory of important processes in the arts that have emerged alongside personal histories. Personal archival collections contain a wealth of rhizomatic points that archival fever that can be transformed into lines of art cognition - that's how, in my own words, I would describe the message of the work. And I fully share one such view as working and much needed in times when cultural memory seems to be more erased, than preserved and built upon. Is the archivist as a profession, or rather a redefined learned archivist that slumbers in all of us, but someone has to recreate and shape that new knowledge to preserve the collective memory.

CONTRIBUTORY MOMENTS. The author notes seven, adding to them two contributions of scientific and applied nature. I accept them and will summarise them with my own words, preserving their spirit. The author attempts to pave the way in the study the art of theatre and film through the handwriting of the archive (in Barthes' sense) - something that has been hard at work in literary history and, in recent decades, in iconography. This work is inevitably interdisciplinary and implies a multiplicity of approaches at the boundary of the dialogue between word and image. It also presupposes adequate training for those dealing with archives in this very sense. I cannot but support such an approach and such an undertaking. I therefore vote convincingly FOR the author and the defense of her dissertation. Supporting both the meaning of such an undertaking and the belief in its usefulness for the understanding of art, I invite the other distinguished members of the scientific jury to vote "FOR" as well.

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