

OPINION

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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.)

We are all aware that "archives are alive", but taking it for granted, we rarely reflect on the essence and meaning of this short sentence. For they are 'alive' if there is someone to collect, arrange, describe, preserve, and offer them for use. In recent years, the ever-expanding and easier access that their digitization offers has greatly supported, stimulated, and expanded scholarship and knowledge in various fields. It is also inevitable and necessary to find the relevant theoretical approaches and rationalizations that also provide the key to the practical instrumentalization of archival support.

Such a difficult task was undertaken by the PhD student Ani Yaneva in her dissertation. The first part of her thesis "Nature and Function of Archives" is general, theoretical, and introductory. It is extremely detailed and saturated with rich scientific apparatus. It begins with the etymology of the word and the different directions of its meanings and interpretations. With a broad cultural perspective and a very rich factual background provided by Yaneva, we start tracing the history of archival work from antiquity to the present day, in different eras and in different countries. It is somewhat surprising that the first piece of legislation in this country on archives and the establishment of a centralized archival system dates back only to 1951. The basic building block of the archive is the document, and anything can become a document if a trace of the past can be found in it, Yaneva agrees with Mark Bloch. She has indeed attracted a very large number of researchers to the subject of archives and archival studies, from the most famous names such as Foucault, Derrida, and Paul Ricœur, who have often been tempted by this topic, to lesser-known researchers, philosophers, literary scholars, and others. As Jacques Derrida said, "The archive begins by selection, and this selection is a violence". Michel Foucault also deals with the question of the archive and power. Ani Yaneva also defines the important figure of the archivist not only as a custodian and describer of documents, but also as a collaborator of the researcher, because archives are themselves passive, disinterested and immobile objects. They become a valuable tool and instrument of insight into history only through the archivist and the researcher, and of course the element of subjectivism in the researcher's selection of archival materials remains unavoidable. It also comes down to the question of collective and individual memory, in which the

processes of erasure and preservation always interact, and not necessarily only the suppression by power mechanisms.

Chapter two of the thesis examines the role of archives specifically for art studies. The author rightly notes that archiving the processes and events of theatre, since their actual texture constantly expires in time, stands closer to archiving historical events than the artworks that remain in existence. On the whole, Yaneva shows a good grasp of what is essential and basic to the arts of theatre and cinema, striving to transcend the mere descriptive, which the very subject matter of her study generally pushes her towards.

In fact, the personal archival collection - and this is what will be discussed later in the dissertation - seems to be able to reveal the personality of the founder like nothing else. Yaneva examines the archival materials of two such funders - the theatre historian, Prof. L. Tenev and the film scholar, prof. Al. Alexandrov: different in their volume, primary arrangement, and systematization. Here the characters of the two art historians really have their say. L. Tenev: artistic, thorough, but also with his inherent unexpected turns of thought; Al. Alexandrov: precise and systematic, with a marked inclination towards cumulating and even collecting. They are also quite different in their ideological preferences. In fact, I am also one of the people who had the pleasure, albeit briefly, of being their student, and this dissertation has also managed to awaken many memories from the inner archive of my mind. But it is necessary to note a somewhat disappointing circumstance that, at least in my opinion, accompanies most personal archives from the communist era: not much unexpected material and evidence of the past could ever come out of them. Since both professors also practiced serious critical work, we can today regretfully summarize that since the end of the 20th century, both in theatre and cinema, "the clamor of the mass media has silenced the voice of serious criticism.

Ani Yaneva's dissertation is a serious attempt at a thorough analysis of the importance of archives and their function in revealing and preserving art knowledge, particularly in theatre and cinema, through the examples of two of their most prominent figures - critics, theorists and educators - from the second half of the last century. The work is accompanied by extensive appendices of photographs and written material. In places, greater discipline and better structuring within, and across, the chapters is needed. I agree with the contributions outlined by Yaneva, and her abstract covers the main points and highlights of the thesis.

In view of what has been said so far, I believe that Ani Vladimirova Yaneva's dissertation should receive the approval of the members of the Scientific Jury and be awarded the educational and scientific degree of Doctor, for which I vote a resounding 'Yes'.

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