Call for Participation

Conference at the University of Dresden, February 11-13, 2021

(Counter-)Archive: Memorial Practices of the Soviet Underground

The 'archival turn' has changed the landscape of philosophy, cultural studies and arts of the last thirty years. Poststructuralism, and most of all Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida, updated the notion of the archive, turning it into an episteme of historical memory and also control over it. Archiving was conceptualized as one of the central memorial practices which not (only) reconstructs the narrative of the past, but produces and legitimises it. The increasing interest in the 'management apparatus' of collective memory in humanities and arts is symptomatic in the last decades, following the fall of authoritarian and colonial regimes and, moreover, as a reaction to the mass extermination of human life. The research focused on such topics as unequal distribution of memorial resources; conditions and practices of archiving tabooed or (temporarily) unclaimed layers of culture and history; the destruction and concealment of documents; and patterns of collective remembering that were often contingent on power and politics.

Soviet unofficial culture was not only the object of repression itself, but also a platform, or rather a whole range of platforms for the maintenance, systematisation and study of neglected or forbidden memory. This level of cultural and philological (self)reflection and its aesthetics are still little known. The practices of collecting, distributing and archiving were the result of isolation: the absence of institutions, traditionally taking on the work of organising and therefore effectuating the canonisation of cultural heritage. The fact that the delegation of the preservation, selection and analysis of artefacts and ideas was hardly possible, led to a culture of amateurish archives and private memorial practices. Vadim Zakharov, one of founders of the MANI archive, wrote about an obsession that a considerable number of underground artists had with the haphazard, unstoppable collecting of artefacts.

The topic "Archive and Underground" includes various aspects that should form the basis for discussions.

These are, *firstly*, the routine of transfer of ownership, storage and cataloguing of artefacts and texts, common in the underground environment: from acts of donation to private collections in Russia and abroad. Significant was the fact that the roles of artist, spectator and curator/cultural agent often merged within the network structure of a single action, and the art object was opened up to the adjacent space, discovering its artistic and economic value depending on the communicative situation and the circle of those present.

Linked to the privacy of unofficial archives is, *secondly*, the fact that the authorities (the militia and the KGB) – who were a kind of guide for unofficial culture into public sphere – have often preserved its heritage much better, more thoroughly and more accurately than the underground culture could do itself. For example, undercover agents, who became members and actors of informal circles, delivered detailed reports and descriptions. Recent research

focused not only on the techniques and content, but also on the aesthetics of police and security archives.

Thirdly, it is the topic of the performative archive. Since the 1960s, international art has used the phenomena of catalogues, museums and documentation to analyse historical and memorial processes. Until the late 1980s, perhaps the most significant was the birth of the conceptual and, more broadly, of the postmodern archive. It was exactly this kind of archive that was most closely associated with the synchronous and the subsequent paradigm of poststructuralism. The understanding of the archive as an event that foments historical discourses and statements about the past, continues to cultural studies of the 2000s, represented among others by Sven Speaker and Boris Groys, who problematized the congruity between the copy and the original as well as the homology between the archival space and the extra-archival reality. The emphasis, here, is on the model of counter-archive, where the special contiguity of documents and artefacts does not lead to a reconstruction of the true chronology, but refers to the signifier of archiving process, denying the teleology and reliability of memory. Postmodern archives question the indexical nexus of archival traces to the past as well as the very ability of narrating history. A special version of such an anti-archive was the Soviet underground, which (often ironically) explored, semanticised and turned into a device the process of selection and canonisation of culture. In the early 1990s, Georg Witte and Sabine Hänsgen analysed the artistic group of Lianozovo as a multi-media and highly auto-reflexive community with its own aesthetic practice of self-archiving: an imitation of institutionalized cultural selection and a cult of rubbish. The tradition of the "early-conceptual" underground circle of Lianozovo group leads to the late one: Timur Novikov's "New Academy of Fine Arts" performed ludistic bureaucracy, produced papers, seals, reports, certificates and resolutions.

Fourth, members of the Soviet underground, as mentioned above, often became analysts, historians and archivists of the past culture, especially of the avant-garde and modernism. Of importance are not only private collections, but also the scholarly meta-position of the involved stakeholders. As members of *transfurists*, Ry Nikonova wrote reviews of Leningrad magazines and Sergei Sigei published archival materials of the avant-garde, he also corrected errors in its Western publications. Furthermore, *transfurists* initiate a project to preserve the memory of the deceased poets and artists and to develop their initiatives. Lev Losev, a member of the *Philological school*, later became a professor of literature. For many years, Leonid Chertkov studied forgotten authors of the early twentieth century, and Vladimir Erl' co-published the works by Daniil Kharms and Aleksandr Vvedenskii. The experiments of *Khelenukts* with the poetry of the Russian Silver Age are also symptomatic from this perspective.

Of particular interest are, *fifthly*, late patterns of self-description, which can be found in numerous publications by and on underground artists from the 1990s to the present: interviews, memoirs and diaries. This auto-memorialisation reflects not least the attempt to capture the uncodified, intangible, "ephemeral": everyday life, oral communication, the scarcely archivable world of the underground milieu, which existed to a large extent not in artefacts, but in the practices of communication (cf. multimedia editions of *Gazanevshchina* or *APTART* with photographs, poems, drawings, catalogues and memoirs).

Finally, the topic of the archive is revealing in the light of the latest developments in humanities. The last two decades, and especially the 2010s, have marked a new turn in the documentation and canonisation of the underground heritage. The works of samizdat,

tamizdat and magnitizdat are being digitalised; new anthologies, catalogues, collections of works and memoirs are published and translated into different languages (but mostly in English); competitions and awards bear the names of major representatives of unofficial literature. What do these trends mean for the future perception of Soviet unofficial culture, and can we refer to any "symptoms" of late re-actualisation and postmemory (e.g. in the heyday of non-authoritarian regimes)?

The focus will be on the following topics (with many points overlapping):

1. Practices and semantics of preservation, maintenance and concealment of archives in the underground environment; archive as a tabooed zone of knowledge (including the creation of secret communication and distribution networks, for example, transporting artefacts abroad or the samizdat libraries);
2. Performative archives ("Collective Actions", MANI, N.A.I.I., APTART, TOTART, etc.);
3. (Counter-)archival devices in poetry and art: seriality, numbering, questionnaires, cataloguing, false/ironic ordering and selection, life-art practices of destruction;
4. Auto-archiving and auto-documenting as a form of self-description and self-analysis;
5. Members of underground culture as art historians and philologists;
6. Practices of documentation of life worlds (then and now): of communication, everyday life, improvisation (Anatoly Zverev, Osip Driz, etc.), performances and events;
7. Technical and medial tools of (auto-)archiving: typewriter, paper, photos, tape recorder, apartments as museums and libraries; privacy of archives and its (after-) effects;
8. Mobile archives: memory transfer, forced transnationality (tamizdat, collections and exhibitions abroad, etc.);
9. Archives of the KGB: Soviet regime as a subject of the underground memory (secret documents, reports, etc.);
10. Archiving the underground today: digital archives, performing archival websites (e.g. RAAN Archives, Garage, MANI, igrunov.ru); collections of the "Memorial", Bremen University and others;
11. The late (auto-)memorialisation and (auto-)canonisation of unofficial culture (e.g., the 1998 reissue of "Travel Out of Town" [Поездки за город]; memoirs of Georgii Kizeval'ter, Grisha Bruskin, Ilya Kabakov, Mikhail Grobman, etc. in "Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie"; nostalgia for samizdat, or stylisation of samizdat editions after 1989; albums, catalogues, and audio recordings by Günter Hirt and Sascha Wonders [George Witte and Sabine Hansgen] – Präprintium, Lianosowo, etc.).

The conference intends to provide a preparatory discussion platform for the publication of a **collective volume** in 2022.

Organiser of the conference: Department of Slavic Literature, Institute of Slavic Studies of Technische Universität Dresden, Professor Klavdia Smola. Please send applications (**title and an abstract of the paper up to one page**) to: klavdia.smola@tu-dresden.de. The deadline for applications is **15. May 2020.**