

Delivered at the XII. International Conference of the British Comparative Literature Association: 'Archive' University of Kent, Canterbury, UK, 5–8 July 2010.

NB: This article was submitted for the “Archive” issue of the “Comparative Critical Studies”, but not accepted. The number of the journal has meanwhile been published (2011, Volume 8, Number 2-3). The editors and conference organisers, Ben Hutchinson and Shane Weller (both University of Kent), were so kind as to include my considerations on naive and sentimental archives in their introduction; unfortunately, they decided not to mention the source of which they have availed themselves.

Jürgen Thaler

Some Remarks on the Aesthetics of the Archive

The aesthetics of the archive concern the relationship of perception (*aisthesis*) and institutions. Therefore, the following considerations are centred on the concept of the archive *not* as a seminal source of metaphors or as a ‘cultural trope’ (Kristin Veel) but in the very material sense of the word.<sup>1</sup> My concept of the archive, in other words, differs essentially from those used by Michel Foucault or Giorgio Agamben in their respective theories. The archive as a

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<sup>1</sup> A good survey of the different uses of the ‘archive’ concept in Philosophy and Art Theory can be found in the compilation *The Archive. Documents of Contemporary Art*, edited by Charles Merewether (London: Whitechapel and Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press 2006).

place of storage and tradition is neither the *paradigm* of Agamben's theories nor the *concept* or *law* as in Foucault. Nonetheless, it seems advisable to keep these urged definitions of the 'archive' at the back of one's mind, even though what I am dealing with in the following is not the archive in general, but the literary archive in particular, which still holds an intermediate position between the library and the archive proper.

I shall look at this 'void' between archive and library in the first part of my paper. The second part deals with Wilhelm Dilthey's article 'Archive für Literatur'<sup>2</sup> (*Archives for Literature*) and its contemporary discussion, a historical situation crucial in our context. In the third and last part I shall, then, introduce two *concepts* closely and originally related to the literary archive, the concept of *order*, on the one hand, and that of the *archontic principle*,<sup>3</sup> on the other.

## I

There are two institutions that have evolved for the purpose of storing written documents, namely libraries and national archives. Each of them fulfils entirely different functions. One can indubitably hold lengthy and profitable

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2 Wilhelm Dilthey, 'Archive für Literatur', in *Deutsche Rundschau* 58 (1889), pp. 360–375. Unfortunately, an English translation of this fundamental essay is not available.

3 The archontic concept, which was first coined in ancient Rome, is prominently introduced by Jacques Derrida in his theory of the archive. See Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1996).

discussions about the difference between libraries and archives. To my mind, the distinctive features that matter are the following. Libraries usually purchase, store and give access to printed works that are to be made available for the general public. Archives, on the other hand, store and give access to administrative documents in order to guarantee the legal security of citizens and to satisfy the legal requirements. From this it follows that historical research on archival material is, in a manner of speaking, *secondary*, and that the *primary* purpose of storage is research in libraries. As Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi puts it, ‘ideally an archive should be naïve, that is it should have been created and maintained for purposes other than those which we, as historians, seek.’<sup>4</sup>

What matters is the distinction between two species of archive, the *naïve* and the *sentimental archive* (if it be permitted to transfer Yerushalmi’s ideas to a different field). The well-known dichotomy from Friedrich Schiller’s seminal essay *Naïve and Sentimental Poetry* can, as a matter of fact, be productively used to differentiate two types of archives. As it is, one can understand archives as different *genres of tradition* competing with other genres. While the naïve archive is sufficient unto itself, the sentimental archive is at variance

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<sup>4</sup> Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, ‘Series Z. An Archival Fantasy’, in *Psychomedia: Journal of European Psychoanalysis*, (Spring 1997/Winter 1997), pp. 21–31. This lecture was originally delivered at the conference on ‘Memory: The Question of Archives’ under the auspices of the Freud Museum and the Société Internationale d’Histoire de la Psychanalyse, London, June 3–5, 1994. It was at this conference that Derrida delivered the lecture that was later published as *Archive Fever*.

with itself and stands in need of technical support in the form of classification, age determination, etc., which are applied to its material from outside.

Hidden behind any printed work there lurks an infinite material which, sentimentally (in the above sense), lies prior to the book and promises totality and hermeneutical signification to the work: manuscripts, letters, diaries – all of which, depending on the literary-theoretical faction one belongs to, may be of some significance for understanding an author's work, its composition, language, etc. To make room for these documents, whose importance has long been established, libraries began to set up special collections. From the viewpoint of archival theory, there are essential differences between (a) book collections and (b) manuscript collections in libraries and (c) archives. With regard to the above said, I shall name but one of these differences. While the so-called national or administrative archive forms *one* large archival body, at the head of which a civil servant is placed as *archon*, that is to say, as the guardian of the archive (known to us from antiquity), the field of the manuscript tradition is more complex because, here, the creators of the material, i.e. the authors, assume themselves a dominant role in the archival system. If one were to enter them into this archival matrix, the authors, who by way of their registry essentially determine the order and structure of the displayed material, would take up the position of the administration. Thus, while the national archive consists of *one* large archival body, whose order is imposed by an anterior registry (from which the archive originates), the interplay between author, manuscript material and archive is more complicated. Here, interestingly, it is not the laws of the library that are applied. Rather, the administrative structure is transferred to the texture of the literary estate.

## II

As is often the case, it is the renewed *beginning* of reflection about the relationship between material and institution that, upon closer inspection, offers substantial insights. By transferring materials to an archive (or to a library), these self-same materials are subjected to the 'law of the archive'. Their very status changes by their being incorporated. From a structuralist

point of view, there is the archive and the non-archive, just as there is the raw and the cooked, the framed and the material outside the frame, the described and the non-described, also within the archive. Put differently, there is always a non-archive within the archive itself.<sup>5</sup>

It is not only in texts by Jacques Derrida or Michel Foucault where one encounters the suggestive phrase of ‘the law of the archive’. According to Foucault, ‘the archive is the first law of what can be said’<sup>6</sup>; to Derrida, it is a place ‘where men and gods command, there where authority, social order are exercised’<sup>7</sup>. Obviously, both Derrida and Foucault in these contexts are thinking of the archive in terms of national archives. The ‘principle of the archive’, however, is a phrase one already finds in the very founding document of the literary archive, namely in Wilhelm Dilthey’s above mentioned essay ‘Archive für Literatur’ (*Archives for Literature*). This law, if it is one, serves at least three purposes. First, it determines the influx to the archive, that is to say the question as to what is being archived at all. Second, it determines the visibility and legibility of the archived material in that it subjects this material to a specific order and a specific structure. This is to say that, third, there are different laws outside the archive and that the archive, by virtue of its own law, marks out its *proper* realm. What is crucial in this context is that there is a proper legal form for literary materials which must clearly distinguish itself

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5 See Nan Goodman, ‘The Law of the Literary Archive: The Case of the Early American Period’, in *English Language Notes* 45:1 (Spring/Summer 2007), pp. 33–39.

6 Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge & Discourse on Language* (New York: Harper 1972), p. 128.

7 Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever*, p. 1.

from both the laws of the library and those of the archive. Wilhelm Dilthey puts it thus:

‘Just as the state archive receives its character and particular governing spirit from the nature of political papers, so, too, a genius loci will emerge in these rooms, and from the estate of eminent authors and its nature will develop the character and the law of the archive.’<sup>8</sup>

Dilthey presented his request for the establishment of literary archives in the context of a lecture given in 1889 at the invitation of the newly founded ‘Gesellschaft für Literaturgeschichte’ (*Society for Literary History*). The moment was a critical one. Weimar was about to set up the Goethe and Schiller Archives. In 1885, Goethe’s estate had come into the ownership of the Grand Duchess Sophie von Sachsen-Weimar-Eisenach. In 1889, when Dilthey made his request for the establishment of literary archives, Friedrich Schiller’s estate was bequeathed to the Goethe Archives. Weimar was in the midst of becoming the first institution to define itself exclusively via its ownership of literary estates. The interest triggered by Dilthey’s lecture was so great that a new society, which named itself ‘Litteraturarchiv-Gesellschaft’ (*Society for*

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<sup>8</sup> Wilhelm Dilthey, *Archive*, p. 367: ‘Wie aus der Natur der politischen Papiere das Staatsarchivs seinen Charakter und den besonderen in ihm wirkenden Geist erhielt, so wird in diesen Räumen gleichsam ein genius loci sich ausbilden; aus der Natur des Nachlasses bedeutender Schriftsteller wird der Charakter und das *Gesetz der Archive* sich entwickeln.’

*Literary Archives*) and pursued the goal of establishing a special archive for literature, was founded on the self-same evening.<sup>9</sup>

Another important point for discussion is the fact that manuscript estates were stored in libraries or national archives until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. As so often, evidence thereof can be found in Goethe, two of whose texts deal with the archiving of literature. More specifically, these texts deal with the structuring of Goethe's own estate. One of them, 'Archiv des Dichters und Schriftstellers' (*The Poet's and Writer's Archive*), was written after completion of this work, and it makes a telling reference to the insecurity arising from the question as to whether the handling of manuscript collections falls into the responsibility of archives or libraries.

'This business has now been accomplished – a sprightly young man, well-versed in *library and archival affairs*, over the summer saw to it that not only published and unpublished matters, collected and miscellaneous works are *compiled in a perfectly ordered way*, but also that diaries, letters received and dispatched are incorporated into an archive, a register of which with general and special headings, letters and numbers of all kinds I have in front of me. Surely, this will make any work I will undertake a good deal easier and greatly serve those of my friends who wish to take care of my estate.'<sup>10</sup>

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9 See Heinrich Meisner, *Die Litteraturarchiv-Gesellschaft während der fünfundzwanzig Jahre ihres Bestehens 1891–1916* (Berlin: Litteraturarchiv-Gesellschaft 1916).

10 Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, 'Archiv des Dichters und Schriftstellers', in Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Werke*, Hamburg edition in 14 volumes, vol. 10 (München: Beck 1981), pp. 532–534, this quotation pp. 533–534: 'Dieses

The 'sprightly young man' who put order into Goethe's archive was Friedrich Theodor Kräuter. Goethe's wavering as to what concept he should use becomes apparent when he speaks of 'library and archival affairs'. Incidentally, the insecurity about the 'genre' responsible for the preservation of literary estates seems to have continued to the present day.

In a text written by Jacques Derrida on the occasion of the transfer of Hélène Cixous's literary archives to the *Bibliothèque nationale de France* in Paris, we read of an 'archiviste bibliothécaire':

'L'archiviste bibliothécaire aura toujours du mal à décider si le référent de tels textes et documents est réel ou fictif, voire, dans le cas de textes de rêves, encore plus indécis entre réalité et fiction, matériaux sans emploi, si je puis dire, ou matériaux encore non littéraires en vue de la littérature, disponibles

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Geschäft ist nun vollbracht, ein junger, frischer, in *Bibliotheks- und Archivgeschäften* wohl bewanderter Mann hat es diesen Sommer über dergestalt geleistet, daß nicht allein Gedrucktes und Ungedrucktes, Gesammeltes und Zerstreutes, *vollkommen geordnet beisammensteht*, sondern auch die Tagebücher, eingegangene und abgesendete Briefe in einem Archiv beschlossen sind, worüber nicht weniger ein Verzeichnis, nach allgemeinen und besonderen Rubriken, Buchstaben und Nummern aller Art gefertigt, vor mir liegt, so daß mir wohl jede vorzunehmende Arbeit höchst erleichtert, als auch denen Freunden, die sich meines Nachlasses annehmen möchten, zum besten in die Hände gearbeitet ist.' (Italics mine, J. T.)

pur la littérature, explicitement ou implicitement destinés à leur mise en œuvre littéraire, donc *déjà* littéraires quoique *point encore* littéraires, etc.’<sup>11</sup>

Derrida’s reflection on Hélène Cixous’s literary archive aims at distinguishing literature from the (pre)literary work to which she attributes nonetheless a quasi literary status. What Derrida points out with regard to Cixous’s work is, however, valid for the ‘literary archive’ in general, at least in two respects. First, the materials preserved in the archive, because of their literary quality, elude the competence of archivists and librarians alike. Second, as Derrida points out, the archive librarian or library archivist will find it difficult to deal with the material since he is unable to decide whether, in its inedited state, it belongs in the realm of literature or not. Therefore, it is hardly surprising that not archive librarians or library archivists first assumed the role of literary ‘archivists’ but scholars and editors. For it is only through editing an author’s estate that its literary quality can be established. This difference between archive and library already gained prominence rather vehemently around 1900.

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11 Jacques Derrida, *Genèses, généalogies, genres et le génie: Les Secrets de l’archive* (Paris: Galilée 2003), pp. 68–69: ‘The librarian will always find it difficult to decide if the referent of such and such a text and document is real or fictional or in the case of the texts of dreams, even more undecided between reality and fiction.’ (Jacques Derrida, *Genesis, Genealogies, Genres, and Genius. The Secrets of the Archive* [Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press 2006], p. 57). This text makes a good supplement to Derrida’s strongly, if not too strongly received *Archive Fever*. For an ironically critical commentary on *Archive Fever*, see Carolyn Steedman, *Dust* (Manchester: Manchester University Press 2001), pp. 1–16. See also Richard J. Lane, *Functions of the Derrida Archive: Philosophical Reception* (Budapest: Akad. Kiado 2003).

For it is apparent that Dilthey in his aforementioned lecture did not only draw attention to this very difference but also to the one obtaining between the kind of archived material and the institution.

Since leading figures in the archival field around 1900 felt their status had been challenged, it was no surprise that Dilthey's venture for the foundation of literary archives triggered a heated debate. If one were to summarise his rather dense text one could say that Dilthey wanted to see proper archives for literature established, first, because he thought it was necessary for the understanding of literature to preserve not only what he calls the 'cold' publications but also the 'hot' manuscripts; and second, because he considered this material essential for the understanding of literature. In opposition to the *principle of provenance*, Dilthey incidentally demanded that literary archives for specifically defined collections and tasks be set up at different locations in Germany – for instance, Humanism in Heidelberg, Enlightenment in Berlin, Classics in Weimar, Romanticism in Berlin, the 'school' of Swabian poets in Tübingen or Stuttgart; artists' manuscripts in Munich; and in Vienna, a local aspect, an archive for Austrian literature.

Fully aware of the situation these collections and their tradition found themselves in, Dilthey continues: 'Having realised the ever-increasing tasks incumbent upon them, libraries ought to ungrudgingly surrender tasks, which it is high time to cede, to their new-born sister institutions.'<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Dilthey, *Archive*, p. 374: 'Die Bibliotheken müßten im Bewußtsein ihrer eigenen, immer wachsenden Aufgaben neidlos den neuen Schwesternanstalten Aufgaben überlassen, für deren Abtrennung von den ihren nun einmal die Zeit gekommen ist.'

One of the reasons why Dilthey's considerations did not go unchallenged was the fact that his impetuous lecture instantly led to the foundation of the 'Literaturarchiv-Gesellschaft' (*Society for Literary Archives*), his demands being thus immediately implemented into practice. This society had set itself the goal of establishing its own stock of literary estates and collections.

'In the first meeting [...], opinions on the possibility of establishing literary archives differed in that the majority emphasised that it was upon the state to take the establishment of literary archives in hand, whereas a minority believed they should set to the task with their own resources.'

The enterprise was bound to bring the society's officials into direct competition with the Goethe and Schiller Archives in Weimar. While these were privately organised, Dilthey sought to obtain the Minister of Culture's assurance that the state would itself take in hand the establishment of literary archives. Dilthey's venture led to parliamentary repercussions. Hermann Kropatschek, a deputy of the German Conservative Party in the Prussian Parliament, made it his concern to react to Dilthey's ideas – and to do so in the negative (Kropatschek needs to be mentioned here by name, since it is probably the first and the last time that problems concerning literary archives were ever discussed in parliament). Basically, he takes up the cudgel for the libraries which, he thinks, are weakened if they are to cede their manuscript collections to the newly-established literary archives.<sup>13</sup> Another person to

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13 'Protokoll der zweiunddreißigsten Sitzung am 12. April 1889', in *Stenografische Berichte über die Verhandlungen der durch die Allerhöchste Verordnung vom 28. Dezember 1888 einberufenen beiden Häuser des*

engage in the discussion was the librarian Adolf Langguth. His essay ‘On the question of Literary Archives’, published in a librarian periodical immediately after Dilthey’s lecture had appeared in print, favourably adopts the latter’s propositions. The central argument he makes is that libraries did not handle literary archives properly: ‘And where one is inclined to bequeath an estate to a library, one usually seeks to get rid of the scholarly material. Letters, on the other hand, are not part of the bequest, and if they are, there is little to do with them.’<sup>14</sup>

From all this it becomes obvious, once again, that the main issue was the possible risk that the material might not be handled according to scholarly – and around 1900, this is to say, editorial – principles.

Yet also the friends of the Goethe and Schiller Archives in Weimar were opposed to the Berlin initiative of the Literary Society. The art historian and writer Herman Grimm (a son of the famous Wilhelm Grimm), who had been full of praise for Weimar on other occasions already, commented on the Berlin undertakings in a published letter. His focus is primarily on the battles which,

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*Landtages. Haus der Abgeordneten. Zweiter Band: Von der dreißigsten Sitzung am 8. März 1889 bis zur Schlußsitzung der vereinigten beiden Häuser des Landtages am 30. April 1889* (Berlin 1889), pp. 986–988.

<sup>14</sup> Adolf Landguth, ‘Zur Frage der “Archive für Litteratur”’, in *Centralblatt für Bibliothekswesen* 6:10 (1889), pp. 425–446, this quotation p. 437. ‘Wo aber die Neigung besteht, einen Nachlass in Bibliotheksbesitz gelangen zu lassen, da sucht man sich in der Regel des wissenschaftlichen Materials zu entledigen: Briefe hingegen werden nicht mit übergeben, und wenn es geschieht, so ist doch wenig damit anzufangen.’

in the field of literary archives, were waged for distinction and, consequently, attention. What he takes exception to above all is the Society' collecting profile and its claim to document the literary tradition 'in its broadest scope'. Such a claim, to Grimm's mind, obviously thwarted his own strategy to set up a 'German Archive' in Weimar, and he therefore emphatically demanded that, on the one hand, the 'Litteraturarchiv-Gesellschaft' in Berlin take a clear stand and that, on the other hand, the Goethe Society come to an understanding of the aims of its Weimar institution and raise money for purchases.<sup>15</sup>

The 'Litteraturarchiv-Gesellschaft' in Berlin undauntedly pursued its targets in compiling estates and other stocks by way of acquisitions or donations. Interestingly, Dilthey himself set out to create a first imaginary central archive for estates by inquiring at all libraries for information about their manuscripts.<sup>16</sup> In Dilthey's own estate, which is preserved in the archives of the Berlin Academy of Sciences, scores of notes can be found of the information he had gathered on the manuscript collections of German libraries. The collections of the 'Litteraturarchiv' Society, however, never managed to equal the glamour of Weimar, and the Society disbanded after World War I.

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<sup>15</sup> See Herman Grimm, 'Das Goethe- und Schiller-Archiv zu Weimar', in *Nationalzeitung*, 6 March 1892.

<sup>16</sup> The idea was only taken up after World War 2 in Berlin, first in analogue, then in digital form. See *Handbuch der Handschriftenbestände in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, Wiesbaden 1992, and the online directory of Deutsches Bundesarchiv in Koblenz, [www.nachlassdatenbank.de](http://www.nachlassdatenbank.de), as well as the central directory <http://kalliope.staatsbibliothek-berlin.de>.

### III

It is apparent that Dilthey's remarks were occasioned by a shortcoming that he himself had experienced. At the time of his reflections on the literary archive Dilthey was engaged in editing the works of Immanuel Kant; his lectures on Kant's manuscripts (stored in Rostock) date from the same years as his considerations on 'Archives for Literature'. Consequently, Dilthey, in these considerations, takes the perspective of the scholar. In his understanding, it was not civil servants or librarians who, as 'archons', should be entrusted with heading literary archives and with formulating its laws, but the scholars demanding prompt access to the manuscripts.

The two axes alongside which the aesthetics of the literary archive were to evolve have been identified. The one could be called the *institutional axis* – from it emerges the difference between literary archives, on the one hand, and national archives and libraries, on the other. The second axis could be designated as the *archontic axis* – on it, the decision is taken as to the person responsible for the order and structure of the collections. What is important, too, is the question who determines whether a text belongs in the realm of literature or not. Since Dilthey is speaking from a scholar's point of view, he gives only a few hints as regards the suitability of archival structures for making collections accessible. One of them can be glimpsed in the following quote: 'The pleasure and understanding of our literature is incalculably increased by these manuscripts, and scholarly knowledge plainly depends on the opportunity of using them as extensively as possible.'<sup>17</sup> Although Dilthey

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<sup>17</sup> Dilthey, *Archive*, p. 363: 'Genuß und Verständnis unserer Literatur empfängt aus diesen Handschriften eine unberechenbar werthvolle

further on speaks of the ‘convenient order’ of manuscripts and of ‘well-ordered collections’, in effect, he has, in effect, little interest in order and structure. His real concern is the rapid, pragmatic access to the materials. What is problematic about these scholarly ‘archons’ which we encounter in Dilthey’s imagination, is the fact that they usually take their knowledge on archives with them into the grave.

Subsequent decades saw heated debates on whether writers’ estates belong in national archives or libraries (the civil servant as ‘archon’ as opposed to the librarian as ‘archon’). Put simply, both the coarse, registry-aided methods of the national archives and the library’s highly accurate approach of access (which capitulates in the face of the sheer quantity of existing documents) fail to do justice to manuscript materials – Derrida’s formulation of the ‘library archivist’ is a late repercussion of these debates. Making visible the manifestations of literature in their oscillations between the unfinished and the published state is the task set to the literary archive, for whose becoming an institution Wilhelm Dilthey paved the way. It must (now) assert itself between the archive and the library as the locus of literary tradition

*Translation Christoph Nöthlings*

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Bereicherung, und die wissenschaftliche Erkenntnis ist an ihre möglichst ausgiebige Benutzung schlechthin gebunden.’