

# REBELLION AGAINST THE ARCHIVAL INSTITUTION AS THE ERASURE OF COLLECTIVE MEMORY:

A Consideration of Theater Archives in Albania<sup>1</sup>

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*Abstract:*

Today's debates on archival practices, especially in the era of widespread digitalization, are focused on theories and practices aimed at making archives more accessible for all. Archiving today speaks to new dynamics. Theater archiving in particular brings its own specific problems, problems that

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<sup>1</sup> Translated into English by Raino Isto.

derive both from the need to archive a whole collection of elements in a variety of mediums, and from the challenge of archiving the un-archivable: performance.

However, the main problem that theater archives in Albania have faced is connected to the specific practices that characterized archiving before and after the 1990s. The loss of archives through destruction, theft, and neglect—a common occurrence after 1990—also affected theater archives, causing some actors to take materials from public archives and store them in their homes, if for no other reason than to protect them from obliteration and obscurity. This process was paradoxical, since in the moment that these materials passed from the public into the private sphere, they also entered into a territory of collective forgetting. Rendering these archives inaccessible to researchers, the relocation of these materials to the private sphere also contributed to the very actors who took the archives being forgotten themselves.

The period following the shift in Albania's political system in 1990, especially during the first decade after state socialism, was characterized by a collective rejection of communist heritage. This was reflected not only in the looting of buildings that represented the former regime, such as factories and warehouses, but also in the destruction of archives: dossiers were often thrown away or burned. These acts of destruction were part of a broader phenomenon in society at the time: theater archives, like other materials, were treated as private property that needed to be protected by their creator—although sometimes this came from the need to keep these materials from disappearing in the face of collective and

institutional ruin. The problem of the individual preservation of artistic materials lies in their corollary disappearance from collective memory, which in turn poses a challenge for researchers, who often encounter archival lacunae in their efforts to conduct research. So: what is the state of theater archives today in Albania?

**Keywords:** archive, theater, performance, acting, collective memory, theater archive

## **I. Introduction**

As technology advances, our methods of preserving our memories change as well, and the more that technology allows us to preserve, it seems, the less we hold on to in our own memory. In these conditions, our memories become all the more unstable, and we turn more and more to institutions of memory, and particularly to archives.

Archives are generally thought of as places of power. One of the broadest, and most debated, concepts related to the issues of archiving remains the idea that Derrida gives in the introduction to the book *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, where he presents the public with the concept of the *arkhe*, the place where preservation begins and at the same time the place from which power derives.

*Arkhe* ... names at once the *commencement* and the *commandment*. This name apparently coordinates two principles in one: the principle according to nature or history, *there* where things *commence* ... but also the

principle according to the law, *there* where men and gods *command*, *there* where authority, social order are exercised, *in this place* from which *order* is given—nomological principle.<sup>2</sup>

The French historian Jacques Le Goff, referring to the politics of the archived memory, argues that in ancient times, those who had the ability to archive were those who held political power—those who decided who would speak and who would remain silent, in both public life and in the records of the archive. This is because in ancient times, the archive was both a source of legitimacy for political power and a means of marginalizing those who possessed no power.<sup>3</sup> But Jimerson takes this point further, framing the archive as a tripartite site of political power: the “temple” that reflects the power of authority and veneration, the “prison” that has the power of control, and the “restaurant”, which exercises the power of interpretation and mediation. These three elements reflect the functions of the archive: “selection, preservation, and access”.<sup>4</sup> Bernstein reminds us that however much books or forms of speech can represent a piece of the archive, they can never show us its entirety. The existence of the archive also presupposes the

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<sup>2</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, Chicago, USA: University of Chicago Press, 1996, p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> Terry Cook, “What Is Past Is Prologue: A History of Archival Ideas Since 1898, and the Future Paradigm Shift”, *Archivaria*, no. 43, Spring 1997, p. 18: <https://archivaria.ca/index.php/archivaria/article/view/12175> [last accessed 16 January 2022].

<sup>4</sup> Randall C. Jimerson, “Embracing the Power of Archives”, *The American Archivist* vol. 69, no. 1, Spring/Summer 2006, pp. 19-20: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40294309> [last accessed 16 January 2022].

unspoken and the unwritten, creating the possibility of a social space where individuals, interacting with each other, given an actual form to the archive, or complete it.<sup>5</sup> And we must not forget the premise that Farge has offered, arguing that the archive does not tell the truth itself, but only a part of it.<sup>6</sup> But it is precisely these delineations and differentiations in the definition of the archive that lead Derrida to put into question the future of archival material: “the technical structure of the archiving archive also determines the structure of the archivable content even in its very coming into existence and in its relationship to the future”.<sup>7</sup>

In this context, the former president of the Canadian Council of Archives, Jean-Pierre Wallot, laid out a new guiding task for archivists: “building a living memory for the history of our present”, in which the “houses of memory” hold “the keys of collective memory”.<sup>8</sup> This not only establishes a new duty for archivists; it also also raises new debates that now impact the field of archiving from numerous viewpoints: the

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<sup>5</sup> Carol L. Bernstein, “Beyond the archive: Cultural memory in dance and theater”, *Journal of Research Practice* vol. 3, no. 2, 2007, p. 7: <http://jrp.icaap.org/index.php/jrp/article/view/110> [last accessed 16 January 2022].

<sup>6</sup> Sidmar Silveira Gomes, “An Archive on Theater and Education: problematizations in the field of invention”, *Educação & Realidade, Porto Alegre* vol. 46, no. 3, 2021, p. 3: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1590/2175-6236104309> [last accessed 16 January 2022].

<sup>7</sup> Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, p.17.

<sup>8</sup> Jean-Pierre Wallot, “Building a Living Memory for the History of Our Present: Perspectives on Archival Appraisal”, *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* vol. 2, no. 1, 1991, p. 282: <https://doi.org/10.7202/031037ar> [last accessed 16 January 2022].

digitalization of archives,<sup>9</sup> decisions about the frameworks through which to engage archives, postmodern approaches to the role of the archivist as the key mediator who controls access to the knowledge within archives,<sup>10</sup> questions of objectivity and neutrality, issues of economic or political power, and so on.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, archival thought and practice need to continuously evolve, adapting to changes in the nature of recording and in recording devices, systems of information storage and the use of information, as well as broader cultural, legal, technological, social, and philosophical shifts that are part of the development of the society at large.<sup>12</sup> But beyond these debates, there is another specific problem that emerges in the case of theater archives: what to archive, and what not to archive?

## II. Archiving the Theater

It is much easier to speak about archiving literary documents, or other materials related to individual artistic

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<sup>9</sup> Mathew J. Gorzalski, “Archivists and Thespians: A Case Study and Reflections on Context and Authenticity in a Digitization Project”, *The American Archivist* vol. 79, no. 1, January 2016, p. 162: [https://opensiuc.lib.siu.edu/morris\\_articles/65/](https://opensiuc.lib.siu.edu/morris_articles/65/) [last accessed 16 January 2022].

<sup>10</sup> Tom Nesmith, “Seeing Archives: Postmodernism and the Changing Intellectual Place of Archives”, *The American Archivist* vol. 65, no. 1, Spring/Summer 2002, p. 25: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40294187> [last accessed 16 January 2022].

<sup>11</sup> Randall C. Jimerson, “Embracing the Power of Archives”, *The American Archivist* vol. 69, no. 1, Spring/Summer 2006, p. 22: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40294309> [last accessed 16 January 2022].

<sup>12</sup> Terry Cook, “What Is Past Is Prologue: A History of Archival Ideas Since 1898, and the Future Paradigm Shift”, p. 20.

output; it is something else to debate about archiving collective artistic production. Kate Dorney adeptly summarizes this situation in her article “The Ordering of Things: Allure, Access, and Archives”, where—among other things—she describes her experience as curator in the Theater Department of the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. Among the elements involved in documenting theatrical performances, she lists: gathering articles from the contemporary press related to plays; gathering and taking photographs; keeping a list of plays that are put on; purchasing books and journals for the library; gathering costumes, costume design and scenography sketches, as well as lighting guides, posters, tickets, sets, and props.<sup>13</sup> In addition to the items listed by Dorney, I would add written materials, such as scripts and the director’s concept, everything related to the music arrangement of the show, and set maquettes. We might also add administrative information about casting, technicians, the number of tickets sold, and the number of shows. Thus, archiving in the context of the theater requires gathering together a wide and disparate range of elements, some of which exist in quite different mediums.

But the broader debate concerning archival practices in the context of the theater relates specifically to the question of how to archive acting. This debate stems from discussions on performance in a broader sense, but it applies to the same degree to the case of theatrical performance in particular. There are two reasons for this: 1) because theatrical performance is an

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<sup>13</sup> Kate Dorney, “The Ordering of Things: Allure, Access, and Archives”, *Shakespeare Bulletin* vol. 28, no. 1, Spring 2010, p. 26: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26348420> [last accessed 16 January 2022].

extremely short-lived phenomenon that never repeats itself the same way twice; and 2) because theatrical performance is a collective activity, not an individual one. In this way, performance becomes an intangible cultural manifestation, one that is tremendously fragile and in danger of being lost to oblivion, since its unrepeatable qualities make it likewise difficult to document.<sup>14</sup>

The most significant contributions to the debates on the documentation of performance come from Diana Taylor and Rebecca Schneider, but the writings of Peggy Phelan have also shaped the discourse on the subject—especially her characterization of performance as a phenomenon that belongs to the present moment. She writes, “Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations *of* representations. [...] Performance’s being, like the ontology of subjectivity [...], becomes itself through disappearance”.<sup>15</sup>

Schneider poses the question of why we consider performance as a process of disappearance, in comparison with other kinds of material traces that are left behind (of the kind that Jacques Le Goff qualifies as documents): does such an approach not confine us to understanding performance only through the pre-existing logic of the archive? Because according to this logic, in the case of a play, the performance of the actors on stage would be precisely the element that would

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<sup>14</sup> Gorzalski, “Archivists and Thespians: A Case Study and Reflections on Context and Authenticity in a Digitization Project”, p. 166.

<sup>15</sup> Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*, London, Great Britain: Routledge, 1993, p. 146.

not endure.<sup>16</sup>

Diana Taylor considers it impossible for a performance to pass through the archive because—according to her—even the video documentation of a performance is only a single part of what she calls the repertoire, a concept that plays an important role in her theorization of performance. Taylor believes that embodied memory surpasses the archive’s capability to register it completely, and thus the repertoire, like tradition, functions as a kind of mediator in the process of selection, memory, and embodiment, acting according to its own ritual structures and codes. The repertoire transmits collective memory, history, and values from one group of people or generation to another: “Embodied and performed acts generate, record, and transmit knowledge.”<sup>17</sup>

It is true that there have been instances in which the repertoire has escaped from collective memory, as in cases when an entire culture is destroyed. In Cambodia, for example, the only archive of traditional dances was constituted by the very bodies of the dancers who performed them.<sup>18</sup> But we must not forget that even the public that watches a performance or a play takes that experience with it as an ‘archive-repertoire’, as “their souvenir, their remembrance of the performance [...], so

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<sup>16</sup> Rebecca Schneider, “Archives Performance Remains”, *Performance Research - A Journal of the Performing Arts* vol. 6, no. 2, 2001, p. 100: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13528165.2001.10871792> [last accessed 16 January 2022].

<sup>17</sup> Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Pepertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*, Durham, USA: Duke University Press, 2003, pp. 20-21.

<sup>18</sup> Bernstein, “Beyond the Archive: Cultural Memory in Dance and Theater”, p. 9.

that the object can participate in that personal archive, that space of self”.<sup>19</sup> And here we return to the initial matter. That which the memories of a given generation contain has no longevity if it cannot be preserved in materials that can be passed down in some way. If it is passed down through oral communication, other problems arise, an issue that Le Goff addresses: “writing provides historical consciousness [while] orality provides mythic consciousness”.<sup>20</sup> Manzella and Watkins also insist that documentation is frequently the only manner in which the researcher can interact with a performance work; quoting Amelia Jones, they argue: “The body art event needs the photograph to confirm its having happened; the photograph needs the body art event as an ontological ‘anchor’ of its indexicality”.<sup>21</sup> As Dorsey suggests, it is true that through photos and videos we are not be able to consider elements such as the changes in an actor’s performance from one night to the next, or the reaction of the audience on the occasions when a play is put on. But of course, there are also other pieces of information we might consider, such as the date, the location, and the number of audience members in attendance that nonetheless give the researcher some possibility of

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<sup>19</sup> Peter David Holland, “‘The Lost Workers’: Process, Performance, and the Archive”, *Shakespeare Bulletin* vol. 28, no. 1, Spring 2010, p.12: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26348419> [last accessed 16 January 2022].

<sup>20</sup> Taylor, *The Archive and the Pepertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*, p. 21.

<sup>21</sup> Amelia Jones, qtd. in Christina Manzella and Alex Watkins, “Performance Anxiety: Performance Art in Twenty-First Century Catalogs and Archives. Art Documentation”, *Journal of the Art Libraries Society of North America* vol. 30, no.1, Spring 2011, p. 28: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27949564> [last accessed 16 January 2022].

understanding the general conditions of a particular acting group and its public, as part of a particular social and historical context in a specific place and time.<sup>22</sup>

### **III. The Issue of Theater Archives in Albania, before and after the 1990s**

Fortunately, theater archiving in Albania does not begin with the creation of the professional theater in 1945; rather, we find materials related to plays put on before these years in Albania's Central State Archive. Nonetheless, it was only after the creation of professional theaters in the postwar period that we see the beginnings of specifically archival practices in the context of theatrical production.

But even the creation of these archives needs some qualification. From the interviews on archiving conducted in the National Theater, and the theaters of Durrës, Korça, and Shkodra, we note that even in the period of relatively rigorous archival practices between 1945 and 1990, these theaters did not have a dedicated archivist on staff. Generally, the task of archiving fell to an actor, or to another staff member such as a prop maker, recorder, etc. The practice was almost the same in every theater: dossiers generally contained the title of the play; the scriptwriter and director; the cast and technicians; the year; the script; the director's concept; costume design and set sketches (if they existed); in some theaters a set maquette; the musical score of the play; banners; flyers; photographs of the performance and articles from the press related to the play; and

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<sup>22</sup> Dorney, "The Ordering of Things: Allure, Access, and Archives", p. 22.

finally a page containing a summary that included the number of times it was performed and the audience attendance, created when the play was no longer part of the repertory. Variations in the amount of material gathered were dependent on the seriousness of the individual tasked with archiving duties. During this period, the only archivist who was both an actor but also possessed experience with archiving was Paulin Lacaj, at the Theater of Shkodra; he had previously worked at the local court, later as the secretary of the public high school of Shkodra, and finally in the bailiff's office, where he was responsible for the archives. He brought this experience to the theater in Shkodra, putting in place a set of archival protocols for his successors, who included Mefail Piraniçi, Gjon Kola, Gjovalin Gjoni, and Merita Smaja. These later archivists followed the structures that Lacaj put in place.<sup>23</sup> This same set of practices were implemented in the theaters of Durrës and Korça, and in the National Theater. The actors, directors, and administrative employees tasked with carrying out the work of archiving in these institutions include Gjon Karma, Koço Qendro, Pandi Toçe, Gjovalin Gjoka, Anil Frashëri, Mirush Kabashi, Todi Thanasi, Haxhi Rama, Merita Devole, Genc Resuli, and Kristo Çala.<sup>24</sup>

In an article published in the weekly cultural newspaper *Drita* in 1982, Nikolla Mullisi examines a chronological series of dossiers in theater archives, collected on the initiative of

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<sup>23</sup> From an interview with Astrit Fani, archivist in the “Migjeni” Theater of Shkodër, conducted for the purposes of this article.

<sup>24</sup> From an interview with Hervin Çuli, director of the National Theater, and Zamira Kita, director of the “Andon Zako Çajupi” Theater of Korça, conducted for the purposes of this article.

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Gjon Karma, the volunteer archivist for the National Theater starting from May 30, 1945. Mullisi writes that in these files, he has found scripts with comments and corrections, as well as 16 photographs, including one of director Sokrat Mio, images of the sets and actors from the premiere of the play, and one that shows two actors selling tickets, standing alongside the banner for the play. In another file, Mullisi notes that he discovered—in addition to the script of the play—a playbill listing the cast, a copy of the advertisement for the play, sketches of the sets, a historical note about the context in which the play was written, Gjon Karma’s own personal reflections (he played the lead role), various newspaper clippings focused on the performance, and finally a note indicating “[The play] was performed four times to an audience of 2500 people”. The article also describes several files focused on special events, such as theater festivals or tours in Kosovo, as well as ones focused on particular actors. These dossiers contain photographs, letter exchanges, diplomas, personal memoirs, and lectures. In addition, archivists kept financial information (such as ticket sales and costs associated with the production of plays and set models), and outside the archive itself—in special storage facilities—they also preserved costumes, and sets and props (with the latter sometimes being preserved for re-use). Mullisi also touches on the existence of photographic negatives, medals, awards, diplomas, gifts from other theaters, and audio recordings of various plays,<sup>25</sup> although with the development of television cinematography, we begin to also see video recordings, making theatrical productions part of

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<sup>25</sup> Nikolla Mullisi, “Arkivi i një teatri [The Archive of a Theater]”, *Drita*, 30 May 1982, p. 12.

the archive of Albanian Radio and Television (RTSH). The article notes that however helpful these existing materials might be for researchers, there is still “a lack of materials originating from the state administration, such as official resolutions, decrees, instructions, the minutes from the meetings of the directory and of the artistic council, as well as other correspondence concerning specific premieres, or focusing on the duties and necessary orientation of the theater in Albania, and the People’s Theater especially. These kinds of original documents would not only make the archive more complete; they would also increase its value for researchers”.<sup>26</sup>

As we noted in the introduction, Derrida saw the archive as a source of power for the person who controls it, and in fact this is precisely what theater archives from the years 1945-1990 in Albania testify. In them, we naturally find details about the theatrical style cultivated during this historical period. We cannot expect to find works in these archives that did not correspond to the ideological and aesthetic frameworks established by Marxism, much less any evidence of the effort to publicly perform or archive the works of those who were deemed enemies of the regime, such as Gjergj Fishta, Martin Camaj, or Kasëm Trebeshina. However, we do find preserved in these archives works that were subsequently banned because they were deemed ideologically problematic. Such works include Minush Jero’s *The Dark Spots* or Fadil Paçrami’s *The Case of Engineer Saimiri*, which were set aside in special dossiers devoted to banned works, and which—fortunately—were forgotten in these archives, thus escaping destruction.

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

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Thus, we are provided with the opportunity to see them once again, despite the fact that their authors destroyed the copies in their personal archives (probably for no other reason than to remove any traces that might be used to further incriminate them). In his article “Archive of a Theater”, Mullisi sees precisely in such cases the need for theater archives to be completed with documents that testify to official decrees, as well as artistic information: the inclusion of such material constitutes “a necessary condition for knowledge of our new tradition [here I emphasize *our new tradition*—auth.], for the development of studies and of new creative production in the field of literature and the arts”.<sup>27</sup>

The arrival of democracy in Albania would bring with it radical changes; Albanians faced decollectivization, capitalism, and the arrival of the free market. Michael Burawoy and Katherine Verdery, in their book *Uncertain Transition: Ethnographies of Change in the Postsocialist World* write that “For totalitarian theory the collapse of the party state entails the breakdown of the entire order, including the institutions of day-to-day life. To be sure, daily life under post-socialism is beset with uncertainty, but it manages to recompose itself even in countries where the political system had permeated it the most deeply and repressively [...] and in spaces where the collapse was felt most intensely”.<sup>28</sup>

In this sense, in the post-socialist period, archives were

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Michael Burawoy and Katherine Verdery, *Uncertain Transition: Ethnographies of Change in the Postsocialist World*, Maryland, USA: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999, p. 7.

particularly targeted as representative elements of the communist past. Especially in the first decade after the change in the political system, there was a collective rejection of communist heritage, a phenomenon that manifested not only in the looting of buildings that symbolized the past, such as factories and warehouses, but also in the destruction of archives. Sometimes burned, sometimes abandoned, and sometimes misused: the buildings that had housed the archives of the dictatorship became spaces that held information no one needed anymore.

We can identify three phenomena that generally characterize the post-socialist treatment of theater archives: a generally dismissive attitude towards these spaces, which now reflected the former regime; the lack of continued development and expansion of these archives (and here we can also note the lack of production of the very materials that would have been kept in these archives, such as banners, flyers, maquettes, and so on); and finally the removal of material from official theater archives in order to create personal archives, treating the materials found in these dossiers as if it were private property. Of course, this removal of material in order to store it privately was also often done to protect archives from the collective and institutional breakdown that took place after the regime change.

And this is precisely the Achilles Heel of the post-socialist treatment of theater archives. There is nothing wrong, per se, with an artist having their own personal archive. Derrida, when he writes about the transformation of Freud's personal archive into a public archive, addresses precisely the inverse of this process: their new location, where these materials would be

preserved in perpetuity, signals their transferal from the private realm to the public,<sup>29</sup> a transferal that is not necessarily always synonymous with the shift from the secret to the openly known. But when the archive moves from the public sphere to the private one, as was the case with archives in Albania, openly known documents might turn into secret ones, if for no other reason than that it is impossible to find their location. Pearce identifies three kinds of possible relationships that define the collection of objects: souvenir, fetishistic and systematic. “In souvenir collecting, the individual creates a romantic life-history by selecting and arranging personal memorial material to create what, in the light of what has just been said, might be called an object autobiography, where the objects are at the service of the autobiographer. In fetishistic collecting, the objects are dominant and the collector responds to his obsessive need by gathering as many items as possible: here, in contrast to souvenir collecting, the objects are allowed to create the self. In systematic collection, an ostensibly intellectual rationale is followed, and the intention is to collect complete sets which will demonstrate understanding achieved.”<sup>30</sup> I cannot say, specifically, what drove artists in Albania to gather the materials from institutional archives and make it their own, but we can observe that materials once filed according to performance were subsequently transformed into a myriad of

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<sup>29</sup> Carolyn Steedman, “Something She Called a Fever: Michelet, Derrida, and Dust”, *The American Historical Review* vol. 106, no. 4, October 2001, p.1161: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2692943> [last accessed 16 January 2022].

<sup>30</sup> Susan M. Pearce, *On Collecting: An Investigation into Collecting in the European Tradition*, Oxford, Great Britain: Routledge, 2005, p. 32.

objects collected together by a single individual, taking on new classifications (or not) within a personal archive, a process that simultaneously produced a lack of knowledge and public attention to the achievements of individual actors.

The good news is that after 2010, theater archives in Albania began to become aware of the importance of returning materials to the archives of from which they had been removed, as well as of the unrivaled historical potential of those very archives. In 2013, the theater of Durrës announced the addition of a staff position for a photographer-archivist, a position held for several years by Luan Jaupi, who leant weight to the significance of the position as part of the institution itself, and who—through calls to the community—successfully brought about the return of a number of materials to the archive housed in the theater. Currently, Gëzim Domi holds the position of photographer-archivist; at the time of writing, he is at work digitizing the dossiers held in the archives, having processed more than 200 of them.<sup>31</sup>

In 2015, in the theater of Shkodra, Astrit Fani was appointed to the position of archivist. Fani has taken it upon himself as both a professional and as a citizen to fill in any lacunae in the institution's existing archival materials, while he also moves forward following the historical practices first put in place by Paulin Lacaj when Shkodra's theater was opened. Fani's work to complete the archive takes place both through calls for citizens to return materials to the theater's archive, as

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<sup>31</sup> From an interview with Gëzim Domi, photographer-archivist in the "Aleksandër Moisiu" theater of Durrës, conducted for the purposes of this article.

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well as in his ongoing efforts to complete missing pieces of information in the files kept on plays that have been performed. He also conducts interviews with actors and directors, in cases where the theater's files contain no information whatsoever about a particular play.<sup>32</sup>

The restoration of Korça's theater also brought back the archives of this institution. Koço Qendro, the actor who spent many years as the caretaker of the theater's archive, also took a portion of the archive and kept it safe in his home, in order to protect it from both neglect and destruction. Thanks to his care, the portion of the archive that he took from theater has now been returned in its entirety. The directory of the Korça theater, Zamira Kita, is also in the process of raising awareness about the importance of other artists and actors returning materials they might have taken to the theater, so that its files can be complete once again.

At the National Theater, there is still no real archivist position. While it is true that people working there have tried to return to the system put in place by Gjon Karma before the 90s, most of those employees have technically held the position of recorder and archiver, and the archival work they did relates more directly to official documents. The maintenance of files on performances became extra work, only carried out by those with a particular passion for the task. Despite the return and systematization of files to the premises of the archive at the National Theater, there is still no true, dedicated archivist position in the institution, a position that would greatly

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<sup>32</sup> From an interview with Astrit Fani, archivist in the "Migjeni" theater of Shkodra, conducted for the purposes of this article.

expediate processes such as the gathering of archival materials for the institution's files, the digitalization of these materials, and the raising of awareness about the importance of returning materials taken from the archive to the theater.

#### **IV. Conclusions**

Archives across the world are currently debating matters of digitalization, of the restructuring and classification of information in order to make it more accessible to all audiences, in keeping with new technological forms. At the same time, there are also widespread debates about the impossibility of archiving performance, about the challenges that the performative repertoire presents for traditional practices of archiving. Meanwhile, in Albania, discussions are still focused on a return to those traditional methods of archiving, and on the need to return old archival materials to the archives from which they have been removed. We should congratulate institutions on taking important first steps, such as employing archivists in theater institutions, and making efforts to fill in the gaps in archives, as well as in beginning to undertake digitalization projects. But there remains a great deal to be done. From a researcher's perspective, I have personally experienced the challenge of coming face to face with an empty archival file, and nonetheless trying to analyze and imagine the staging of a play. By the same token, I have experienced the great joy of discovering, within theater archives, dossiers that were considered to have been long lost.

Beyond the duties that theater archivists have taken on—as both professionals and as citizens—it still remains for

artists to let go of their personal egos and make their materials part of official theater archives, if for no other reason than to assure that they do not fall prey to collective oblivion. The Canadian archival scholar Barbara Craig writes, “Just as personal identity is anchored in a strong historical sense so is our professional identity—both come from the ability to experience self as something that has continuity. Surely if you have nothing to look backward to, and with pride, you have nothing to look forward to with hope”.<sup>33</sup> In the case of theater archives, what hope can actors have for the future if the materials once removed from archives—to prevent their destruction, I am certain—are never accessible to researchers, even to those seeking to touch the feelings of pride we have for past? Artists themselves should be motivated to return their materials to the state theater archives, because in this way these documents transcend the character of being simple a series of disconnected pieces of information and become part of a logically structured system of representation, one with many authors and many readers, in which information can be combined in different forms, according to the needs of researchers.<sup>34</sup>

Ultimately, what researchers and students of the theater want today is a twofold approach to the archive: a return of its

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<sup>33</sup> Barbara L. Craig, “Outward Visions, Inward Glance: Archives History and Professional Identity”, *Archival Issues* vol. 17, no. 2, 1992, p. 121: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41101829> [last accessed 16 January 2022].

<sup>34</sup> Janine M. Utell, “The Archivist, the Archaeologist, and the Amateur: Reading Joyce at the Rosenbach”, *Journal of Modern Literature* vol. 31, no. 2, Winter 2008, p. 54: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/30053268> [last accessed 16 January 2022].

authority, as a trusted and constant preserver of information, but at the same time a kind of interactive dissolution of this authority, enabled through the possibility of easy access to the archive's contents, making researchers into collaborators, at least as long as they have digital access to the archive wherever they might be physically located. I dare say that theater archives in Albania are still on their way to regaining a position of authority, helped along by the return of documents to those archives, and by the production of new documentary materials to fill in the gaps in knowledge. The institutional will to regain this authoritative position has certainly seen advances. Speaking as a researcher, I would hope to see theater archives devote more attention to gathering the kinds of materials discussed by Mullisi, but also to archiving video materials, or interviews focused on the experiences of the past. Focusing on the process of documenting the theater would not only strengthen the archives in question; it would also increase the capacity of researchers to analyze this material. (If we consider the examples of some of the archival dossiers below, we see that a researcher hoping to learn about the production of a single play would have to examine materials held by a wide variety of institutions, or else to establish contacts with several individuals, to get a full understanding of the performance.) On the other hand, some archives still face the broader challenge of increasing access to materials through digitalization, but we can't say that steps have not been taken in this direction. This gives us some hope that theater archives might (again) become centers of authority (in a positive sense), easily accessible for all those interested in the history of the Albanian theater.

**TEATRI KOMBËTAR**

**DOSJA**

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**TITULLI:** " SHKELQIMI DHE RENIA E SHOKUT ZYLO "

**AUTORI:** ANDON QESARI

**DATA E PREMIERËS:** 31/03/1983

**Dokumenta në dosjen artistike :**

1. Poster 9 cope 9 flete
2. Flete volante 26 cope 26 flete
3. Ftesa 7 cope 7 flete
4. Rreth premieres 1 cope 1 flete
5. Liber "Teater" Nr. 3 1983 - 1 cope 78 flete
6. Fotografji te madhesive te ndryshme 12 cope
7. Skica kostumografie 22 cope
8. Dikutime "Mbledhje e komisionit te repertorit " 06.11.1982 dhe 23.03.1983  
Shenime me dore ANDON QESARI 1 cope 39 flete
9. Pjese gazete :
  - a- "Drita" 08.05.1983 1 cope 2 flete
  - b- "Zeri i Popullit" 05.04.1983 1 cope 1 flete
10. Platforme regjisoriale Dt. 15.01.1983 2cope (2\*11) 20 flete
11. Analize e shfaqjes 2 cope (2\*10) 20 flete

ANXHELA HOXHA (ÇIKOPANO)



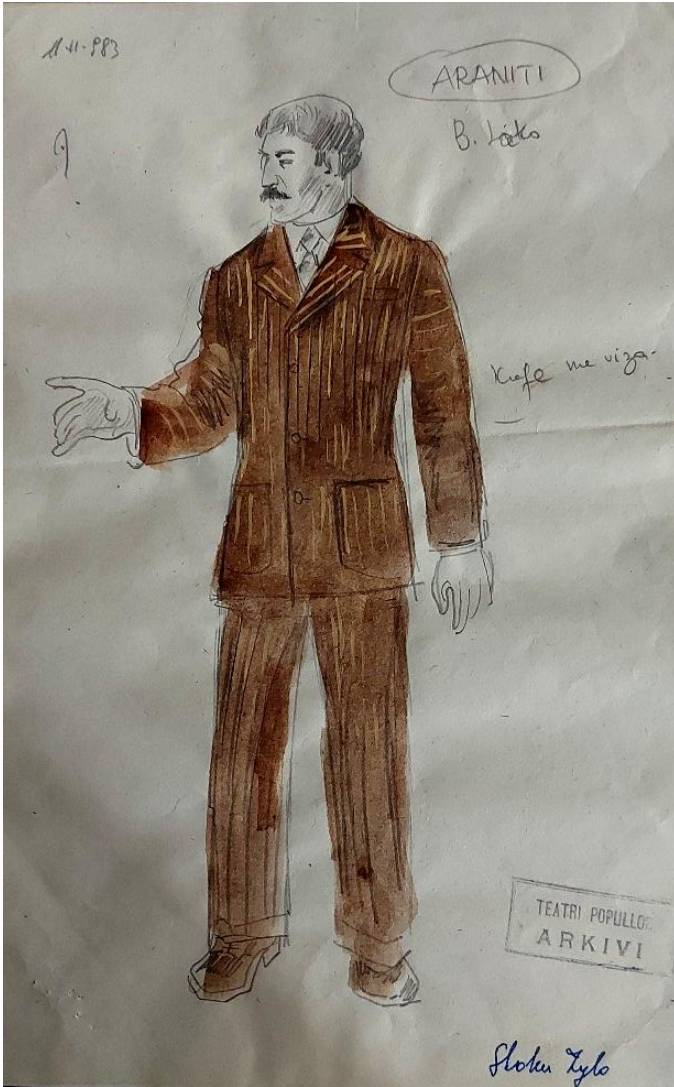
Rebellion against the Archival Institution...



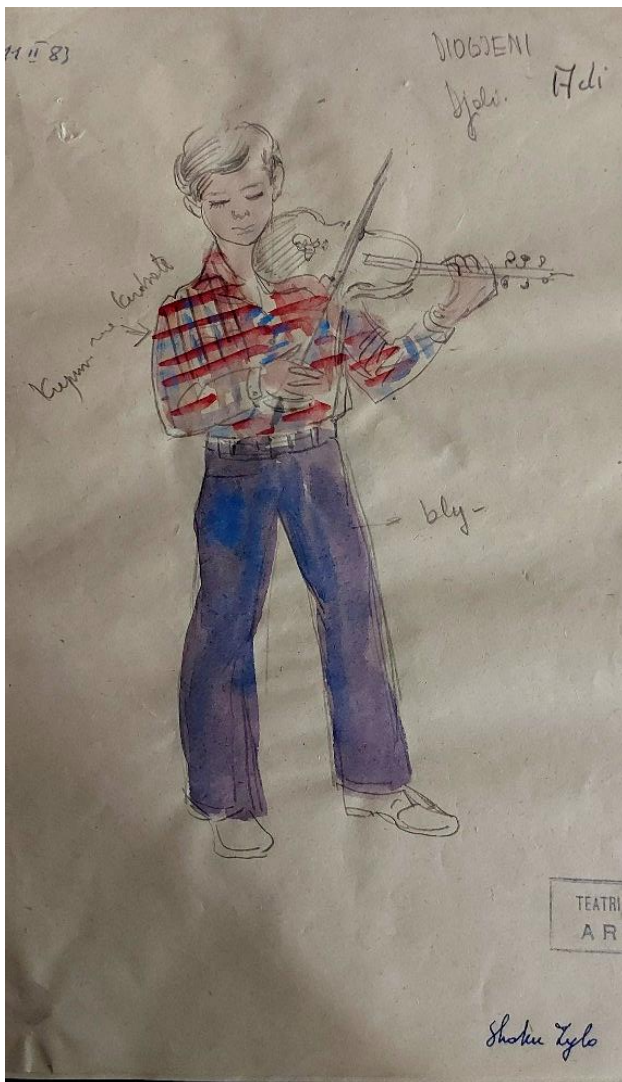
ANXHELA HOXHA (ÇIKOPANO)



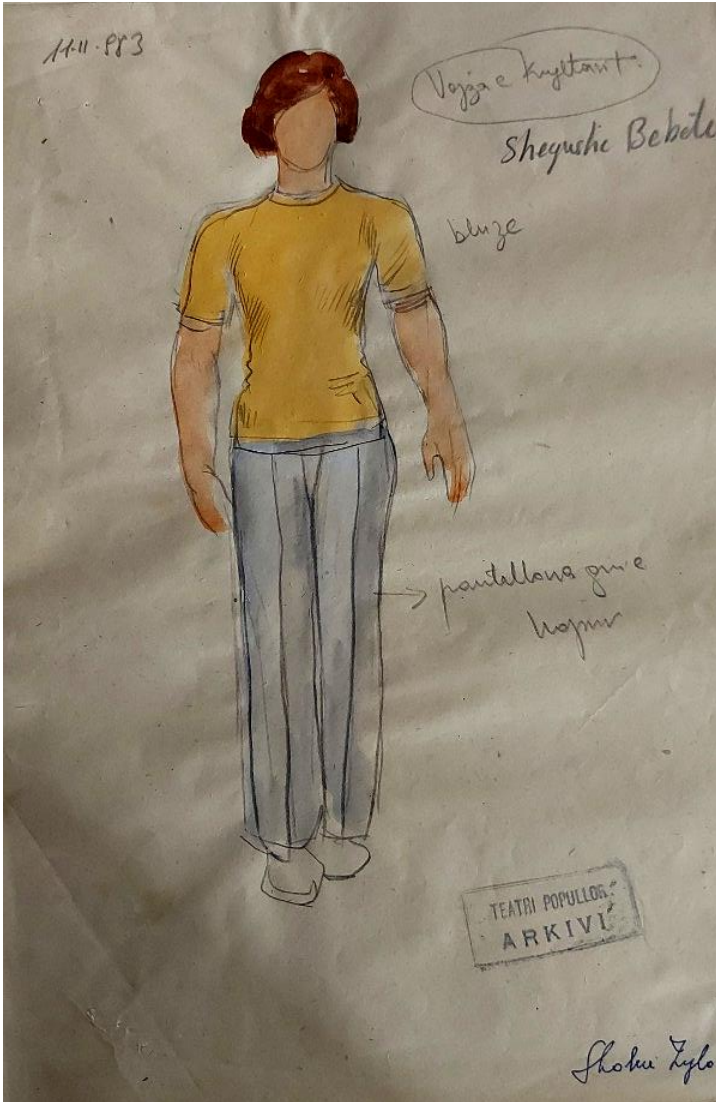
*Rebellion against the Archival Institution...*



ANXHELA HOXHA (ÇIKOPANO)



*Rebellion against the Archival Institution...*



ANXHELA HOXHA (ÇIKOPANO)



Rebellion against the Archival Institution...



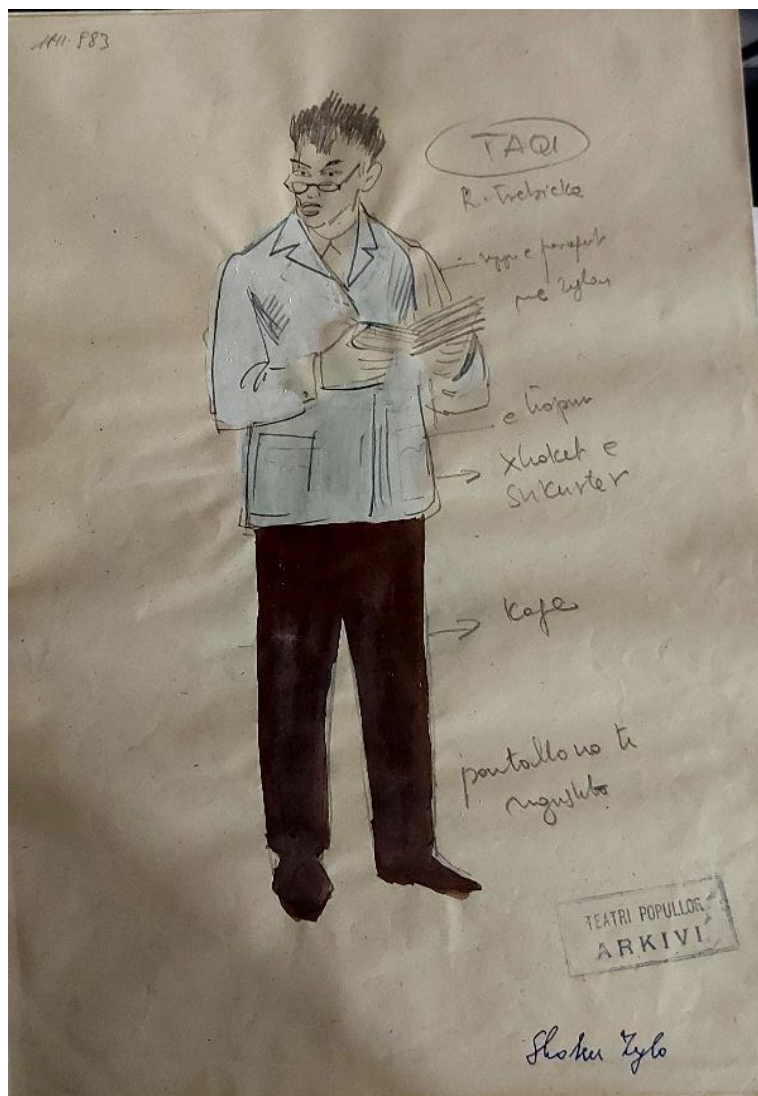
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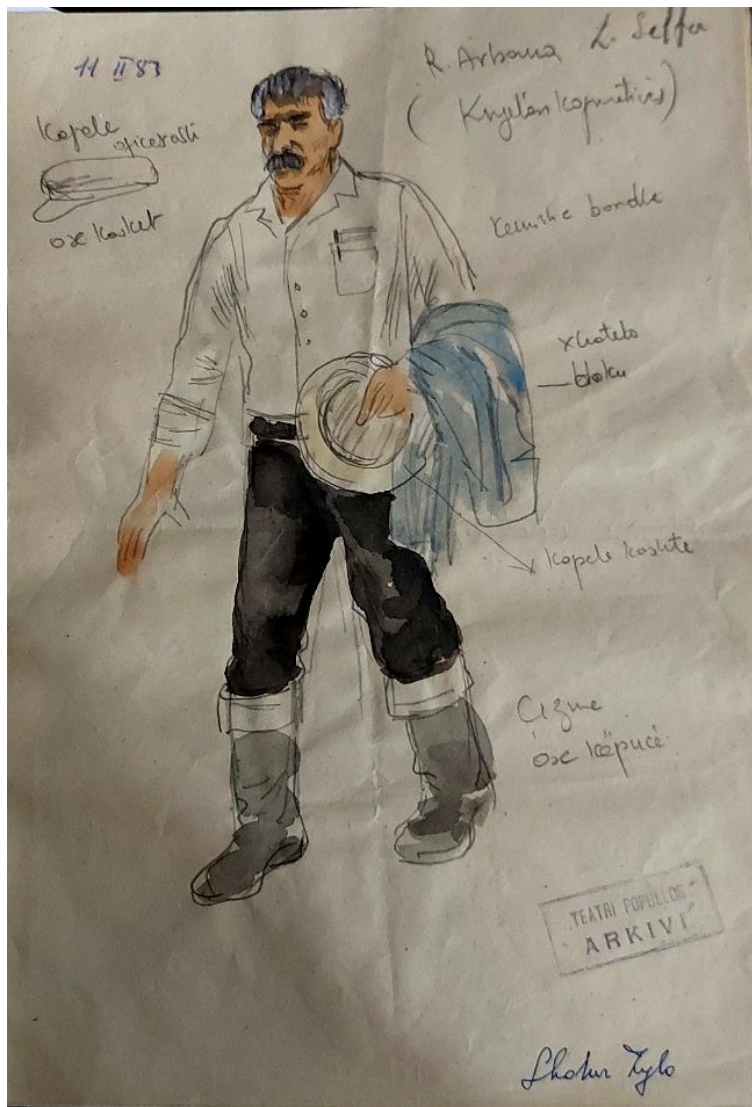
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Fig. 1. Selection of items from an archival folder in the archive of the National Theater – Performance of *Shkëlqimi dhe rënia e shokut Zyllo* [*The Rise and Fall of Comrade Zyllo*].



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Fig. 2. Selection of items from an archival folder in the archive of the theater of the city of Durrës – Performance of *Zjarr mbi thashethemet* (Blitz on Gossiping).