

# THE ETHNOLOGICAL ARCHIVE: MEMORY AND TECHNOLOGY

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Abstract: This paper frames an analysis of the ethnological archive, in relation with time, from two points of view: of the content and of the store up settings of archived information. The material encompasses two distinct, but complementary, methodological settings: the first is an anthropological study and the second one is a technical approach on the digital archive. This research is an application on the archive of the Folklore Club of the Faculty of Letters, “Babeş-Bolyai” University of Cluj-Napoca, Romania.

## 1. The Archive - Place of Memory

This paper frames an analysis of the ethnological archive, in relation with time, beginning with the interpretations about the phenomenology of memory proposed by Paul Ricoeur<sup>1</sup> and with Pierre Nora's<sup>2</sup> conceptualizations regarding the place of memory. The present study makes an applied intercession on the archive of the Folklore Club of the Faculty of Letters, "Babeş-Bolyai" University of Cluj-Napoca. At the basis of this research lay various years of work in this archive. The preoccupation for means of preservation, accessibility, practical application and the re-interrogation of the cultural memory that resides here, have materialized in a project for the digitization of the archive, submitted in the year 2008. Starting with 2009 this project is in progress, financed by the National Council of Scientific Research of Upper Education, Romania.

A virtual archive encompasses three ages and contains a testimony of a triple metamorphosis: from the fact of life, to the written document and to the digitized one. The study follows the cognitive, ideological, pragmatic and technological implications that these mutations inveigle.

The ethnological archive anchors in a specific way the question of temporality, because it is a specific means to recapture and preserve a segment of the past, precisely a cultural heritage. Borrowing Pierre Nora's expression, I consider the ethnological archive as a "*lieu de memoire*"<sup>3</sup>.

Large institutional programs, national and international, of document digitization and accessibility through internet, exteriorize an *acceleration of history*. "La conscience de la rupture avec le passé se confond avec le sentiment d'une mémoire déchirée; mais, où le déchirement réveille encore assez de mémoire pour que puisse se poser le problème de son incarnation"<sup>4</sup>.

The incubation of these *places of memory* expressed the decay, sometimes even the evaporation of the *settings of memory*.

An ethnological archive turns into heritage the representative elements for the immaterial culture: facts of life lived in real time and space, habits practiced according to a traditional ideology, transmitted orally to insiders of folkloric collectivities.

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Memoria, istoria, uitarea* (eng: *Memory, History, Forgetting*), Timisoara, Anarcord, 2001. in this volume, Ricoeur makes a triple analysis on the phenomenology of memory:

<sup>2</sup> Pierre Nora, *Entre Mémoire et Histoire*, în *Les lieux de mémoire*, ed. Pierre Nora, Paris, Gallimard, vol I, 1997, p. 23-48.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 23.

Making the archive means moving from the oral to the scriptural and transforming the lived fact into “*the warmth of tradition, the silence of the common law, the repeating of the ancestral*”<sup>5</sup> into a written document. The changes implied by this process regard multiple levels: concrete-material, ideological, methodological, of accessibility etc. once with moving the material on a concrete support, memory is exteriorized in testimony, taking the form of declarative, discursive memory.

From a technical point of view, the chronology of ethnological field investigations has three moments: handwriting (on paper), tape recording (phonograph cylinder, magnetic tape, audio tape) and using analogue means of recording (audio and video).

The methodology of field research is marked by the ideology and scientific approach of the era, but also by the experience, thematic priorities and the skill of each researcher. From the perspective of the communication relation, the addressee of the document is not the member of the community from which the testimony has been taken, but the specialist consulting the archive. The physical space, even the original one, is no longer a limited, closed one and the time it talks about is always a past time. “Passing through the doors of archives, testimony enters a critical zone where it is not only submitted to the harsh confrontations among competing testimonies, but absorbed into a mass of documents that are not all testimonies”<sup>6</sup>.

The digitization marks a third stage, where the document is simultaneously the same and also different. By scanning it, the entire initial information remains intact, but in a different form. Passed through the filter of technology, the testimony receives a brand new life: a digital one. In a certain sense, the circle closes by returning to the immaterial, but the relation of communication already established is no longer organic but electronic. The metamorphosis implies not only the dematerialization but also the accessibility, the document being addressed not only to specialists, but to anyone anywhere. Depending on the purpose one has in accessing, the new format can feed the moment of reflection or it can replace it.

## **2. The ethnological archive: memory and cultural identity**

The ethnological archive is at the crossroad between the question of memory and that of identity, both collective and personal. In such a place not only once have the folkloric productions been used in search of cultural identity. It is a delicate and complex operation, endangered by the risk of drifts and handling: “*too much memory, in a region of the world, hence an abuse of memory; not*

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Memoria, istoria, uitarea*, p. 177.

enough memory elsewhere, hence an abuse of forgetting. It is in the problematic of where we have to seek the cause of the fragility of memory manipulated in this way.”<sup>7</sup>. The traps of such an approach can be surpassed by questioning the concepts from a dynamic-contextual perspective, more precisely, by understanding identity as a construct constantly changing: “the primary cause of the fragility of memory we must cite its difficult relation to time; this is a primary difficulty that, precisely, justifies the recourse of memory as the temporal component of identity, in conjunction with the evaluation of the present and projection of the future.”<sup>8</sup>.

Inside an ethnological archive the relations with time always take the shape of tradition<sup>9</sup>, of cultural heritage, which, in the specific case of Romanian research, is the rural heritage. *Tradition* is an important concept in the definitions of culture in general, but folklorists have especially emphasized *traditionality* as an essential trait of folklore, associated at first (the second half of the Nineteenth century, but also later) with the movements made to build the nation. For a length of time, the discipline of folklore had as object of study the tradition itself, “that is the entirety of people’s knowledge placed in the a-temporal continuity of tradition”<sup>10</sup>. According to this belief, they tried to gather “texts and text fragments (customs, ballads, beliefs, proverbs etcetera) to rebuild the eponymous Urtexts of the nation, without taking into account the context of their present existence. [...] Thus, separated as ‘text’ from the entirety of ‘folkloric culture’, ‘the folklore’ is placed in a different context, abstract and valorized: that of ‘the soul of the people.’”<sup>11</sup> Therefore, one of the major difficulties that the ethnological archives raise is that they deposit a body of traditional knowledge, “mute” and “orphan”<sup>12</sup>: the testimonies taken out of their original context, separated from their authors and their organic receivers, left to the competent ones to give them a voice again.

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 103.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 103.

<sup>9</sup> The word *tradition* comes from the Latin *traditio*, derived from the verb *tradere*, which means ‘to pass forward’, ‘to transmit’. The Romans used this term giving it, at first, a concrete, material meaning: to give something to someone from hand to hand, to entrust your follower with an object that had been in your care, to give (your) girl (in marriage) to someone. But the transmitted goods may not be material. It could be a teaching, for example, or a custom: this also is, figuratively speaking, a *traditio*. Jean Cuisenier, *Traditia populara (La tradition populaire)*, Cluj-Napoca, Casa Cărții de Știință, 2005, p.8.

<sup>10</sup> Vintilă Mihăilescu, *Antropologie. Cinci introduceri, Iași, Polirom*, p. 248.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 249.

<sup>12</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Memoria, istoria, uitarea*, p. 204.

Containing oral documents (originally), such an archive poses another series of delicate problems, connected to the rough trait of information and to the exigency of readability, of the possibilities of data handling and circulation. *“It indirectly appears that, no matter how rich in interpretation hints, an archive is destined to remain the appanage (eventually the exclusive one) of some people who, through the nature of their job, have access inside it. On the contrary, for the others, specialists in their own field, but part of other institutions, accessing its funds becomes at least a difficult problem, I not completely impossible”*<sup>13</sup>. A solution to surpass this difficulty may be the digitization of the archive and accessing it through the internet. Although pretentious, because this needs long and hard work, transposing it in digital format facilitates the access to documents by any literate and e-literate person, not just a limited number of field specialists. The digital archive represents a means through which cultural heritage can interact with the present and the future. Receding from the idea of closing it in an institutional form accessible only to experts, giving it to any internet user, tradition can find its way, through these metamorphosis and technical extensions, in the daily life of the Twenty-first Century, even if this means completely changing its original purposes and, with those, the meaning its producers and interpreters have given it<sup>14</sup>.

### **3. The Folklore Club Cluj Archive (ACFC)**

#### **3.1. History**

The ethnological archive from the Faculty of letters, “Babeş-Bolyai” University of Cluj-Napoca has been established in 1958, related to the Literary Folklore course that was being held at that time. After Second World War, Literary Folklore was introduced in the curricula of Faculties of Letters, and Musical Folklore in the curricula of Faculties of Music starting with the year 1949. Primarily part of the Romanian Literature course, Folklore had the status of “preamble” for written literature and was being examined with the instruments of esthetics, theory, history and literary criticism. This approach is part of a Romanian academic tradition from the first part of the Twentieth Century<sup>15</sup>. Researching folklore was foreseen in the beginning as being directly linked to philology, so in framing this discipline, during the communist period, in the Faculties of Letters

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<sup>13</sup> Otilia Hedeşan, *Folclorul. Ce facem cu el?*, Timișoara: Editura Universităţii de Vest, 2001, p. 12.

<sup>14</sup> “citat”

<sup>15</sup> In 1909, Ovid Densușianu unveils the first Folklore course at the Faculty of Philology from Bucharest.

and studying it with specific means for written literature constitutes the continuation of a research direction that already existed<sup>16</sup>.

Literary folklore became an autonomous discipline in the academic year 1952-1953, its first tenurial at the Faculty of Letters being Professor Dumitru Pop. Treating it as part of literature is obvious even from the name it had in that period: Popular Literature. Correlative to the mainly theoretical trait of the course, a practical application was thought of with the carrying out of field inquiries and collecting “in situ” and “in vivo” material. Thus, in 1955, professor Pop founded a Folklore Club together with students that started to unfold field inquiries in the rural parts of Transylvania, but also in other regions of the country. Lead successively by Dumitru Pop, Nicolae Bot (tenurial at the department of Romanian Literature since 1961) and Ion Șeuleanu (member of the ethnology collective at the same department since 1961), the Club has functioned continually for five decades, having a real formative value and representing a place of initiation for philology students. Some of them have continued with the ethnology research, as part of profile institutions, and have become field specialist.

The purposes of the Folklore Club has been the registration, conservation and archiving of the main customs and traditional text of the rural communities, especially the Romanian ones, from all parts of the country, especially Transylvania. The results are over 12,000 field slip-files gathered from all over the Romanian territory, most of them from Transylvania, organized within the Folklore Club Cluj Archive (ACFC). The documents are kept on paper, being written down, dictated or following direct field observations, or they represent magnetic tape transcripts.

### **3.2. Methodology**

From a methodological point of view, the Folklore Club and, by default, the archive built from its unfolded activity, have covered two distinct moments: a folkloristic one and an ethnological one. Being conceived as a means to complete the Literary Folklore course, the Club was preoccupied, firstly, only with literary texts, gathered from the field according to criteria particular to literature, the most important being the esthetical criteria. Most of the slip-files from the first 10 years of research (1955-1965) contain many texts and relatively few contexts. There are, among then, descriptions of rituals, but not only once are they schematic and resumptive. This is the folkloristic moment, and its original purpose was to draw near certain segments of traditional culture in a

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<sup>16</sup> Regarding this, see Rodica Zane, *Etnologie la timpul present*, București: Editura Universității din București, 2007, p. 11-21.

direct, immediate way: through affective, friendly relations, that had been formed out in the field, between the students and their interviewees. “*To us it was important to have the possibility to work with students on the field, to draw them closer to researching the field live and to put them in direct contact with the peasantry. Regarding this, the results have been exceptional. Admirable ties have been made between the villagers and the students, to such an extent that students would go there, to their hosts, like to their kindred; and the villagers, sometimes coming to Cluj, would bring packages to campus students*”<sup>17</sup>, remembers the founder of the Club, professor Dumitru Pop, in a biographical book.

Starting with 1970, an important methodological change can be noticed, the text being more and more often accompanied by descriptions of the context of the performance, notes on the context of the recording, informant slip-files, personal narratives that not only replenish and enlighten the documents, but, moreover, make them coherent and alive. Many slip-files stopped mentioning literary texts and contain descriptions of customs, information about beliefs, about how to use plants, accounts about the daily life, complex interviews. This second moment allows the passing from folkloristic to thorough ethnological research, where the main interest is no longer *folklore* in a narrow sense, but the *folkloric culture*, a lot more ample and complex than artistic manifestations.

In this stage, the methodological change can be noticed by the Club’s collaborations with specialists from other institutions of the same specialization: ethnologists from the Department of Hungarian Literature of the Faculty of Letters and from the “Folklore Archive” Institute of the Romanian Academy, Cluj Branch, sociologists from the faculty of History and Philosophy of “Babeş-Bolyai” University of Cluj-Napoca, musicologists from the “Gheorghe Dima” Music Conservatory of Cluj-Napoca (which has become, after 1990, the Music Academy). Field researches have unfolded, over many years, in multidisciplinary teams. Such an example are the

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<sup>17</sup> Dumitru Pop, *Martor atent și modest părtăș la istorie*, Cluj-Napoca: Todesco, 2005, p. 152.

inquiries unfolded between 1974 and 1978 in Țara Oașului, by complex teams, in a gustian<sup>18</sup> manner, that made a monographic research on this particular north-western part of Romania<sup>19</sup>.

Both moments are defined by thoroughness, according to the rules of the ethnological research of the era. The thoroughness of the professors may be seen in their students' slip-files. The elaboration of documents complies with all the scientific parameters, containing the identification data used in the methodology of field research in that certain era: the name and surname of the informant, name before marriage (for women), nickname, village, commune, age, main occupation, knowledge (schools attended), information regarding the source of the text (from whom does one know it, where had one heard/learned it), the date and place of the field recording, the name of the researcher. Also, it can be noticed the attention put into the accurate transcription of the phonemes and the pronunciation of the interviewees particular to the areas where the ethno-folkloric inquiries had been unfolded.

### **3.3. Archiving**

The archiving has been attained following the classical classifications of folkloristic, the thematico-typological criteria being fundamental. The text have been ordered by species and theme, by categories: wedding songs, nuptial poems, hollers, funeral songs, laments, love songs, alienation songs, affliction songs, military and war songs, satirical songs, historical songs, shepherd songs, lullabies, songs of people and parties, *doinas*, riddles, proverbs, ballades, fairy tales, stories, anecdotes, carols, disenchantments etcetera.

After 1970, once with the investigation of folkloric culture from an ethnological perspective, the slip-files betray the precariousness of the classical typologies, using the term 'information' every time the document contains something other than literary texts, enclosable in the classification system of literature encyclopedias. Titles such as 'wedding information' or 'funeral information' appear for describing rituals, but also 'evening sitting of village women information', 'occasional

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<sup>18</sup> The gustian model is inspired by Dimitrie Gusti (1880-1955) Romanian philosopher, sociologist and esthetician. During the inter-war period, he initiated and coordinated the monographic research of the villages of Romania, through research made with multidisciplinary teams, sociologists, ethnologists, geographers, botanists, philosophers etcetera.

<sup>19</sup> The monography of Țara Oașului was part of an extensive project, coordinated by the University of Cluj-Napoca, to which researchers from different domains collaborated: history, geography, economy, agronomy, sociology, folklore, ethnography, medicine, biology, demography etcetera. The multidisciplinary research was initiated by professor Ion Aluaș, from the Faculty of Philosophy. Under his supervision the Oaș Interdisciplinary Collective was established, that sustained field research between 1974-1978. During the first three years, the folklore students where guided by Nicolae Bot, joined by Dumitru Pop in 1977. Part of the results of the research where published in journals and collective volumes (articoles and studies by Ion Aluaș, Nicolae Bot, Dumitru Pop).

group work information' or 'dance information' - for traditional social events. It is also now that observation slip-files appear, like: 'funeral observations', 'wedding observations', 'Sunday shindy observations' etcetera.

The information becomes diverse, but not only from a methodological perspective, but from a thematic point of view: research on magic and popular demonology is intensified, subjects forbidden in the communist period. In spite of the interdiction, these aspects of tradition have been approached in the field inquiries, even if the research results could not be published during that era. The archive has a rich content of information regarding magic, the magical protection of the house, household and domestic animals (there are, for example, ample information about the *mana* of milk, the taking and bringing of *mana*), the magical medicine, disenchantments, witches, the divination of the future husband (*orânda* - the husband is appointed by fate to each girl) etcetera.

The file for popular mythology encloses narratives about the Girl of the Woods, the Man of the Woods, Dragons, The Fates, Wraiths, *Borscoi*, *Vâlve*, Evil Spirits, Devils, Wewolves, The Hag, *Marțolea*, and The Plague and so on. It is as well in the '70s that appear ample and shaded information about construction rites, basic traditional occupations in the Romanian rural space: agriculture and grazing (agrarian and pastoral rites), about the popular calendar and the recurrent rites, about empirical medicine, about juridical customs, about popular meteorology, about beliefs and superstitions, and, not least, about dreams. It is also visible the preoccupation for popular botanic, ethno-botanic is a recently introduced discipline at that time in the field of ethnologic sciences. Most of the slip-files that express this thematic and methodological change are signed by Nicolae Bot, the most attentive, the most thorough and the most eager of the professors that had done field research together with students, as part of the Folklore Club of the Faculty of Letters, "Babeș-Bolyai" University - an ethnologist that, besides his excellent training and vast experience, had something else: vocation for the field.

### **3.4. The content of the archive**

The content of the **ACFC** sums up over 12,000 slip-files, keeps fragments of the traditional Romanian culture, joining other bodies of documents that exist in other institutions of the same field: "Constantin Brăiloiu" Ethnography and Folklore Institute of Bucharest, "The Folklore Archive" Institute of the Romanian Academy of Cluj-Napoca, The University of Timișoara, The University of Iași, Ethnographic Museums etcetera. As places of memory, these archives imply a

fundamental relation between the present and the past, as traces of a traditional culture, working as “holograms”<sup>20</sup>. They suggest a recollection of „the people in time”<sup>21</sup>, in the situation of the dissolving of a culture under the pressure of globalization, mass-media coverage. It is about a culture of peasants, purely “colectivité-mémoire”, using the phrase of Pierre Nora<sup>22</sup>.

*“Lieux donc, mais lieux mixtes, hybrides et mutants, intimement noués de vie et de mort, de temps et d'éternité; dans une spirale du collectif et d'individuel, du prosaïque et du sacré, d'immuable et du mobile. Des anneaux de Moebius enroulés sur eux-mêmes. Car s'il est vrai que la raison d'être fondamentale d'un lieu de memoire est d'arreter le temps, de bloquer le travail de l'oubli, de fixer un état des choses, d'immortaliser la mort, de matérialiser l'immatériel pour - l'or est la seule mémoire de l'argent - enfermer le maximum de sens dans le minimum des signes, il est clair, et c'est ce qui les rend passionnants, que les lieux de mémoire ne vivent que de leur aptitude à la metamorphose, dans l'incessant rebondissement de leurs significations et le buissonnement imprevisible de leurs ramifications”<sup>23</sup>*

#### **4. Digital memory**

One of the forms of this metamorphosis is introduced together with the development of new technologies: the possibility of archive digitization implying the increased accessibility to the body of documents.

The ACFC faces a third moment, enters into a new “age” due to a project of document digitization and conceptual redesign. The project started in 2009, is currently evolving and financed by the National Council of Scientific Research of Upper Education, Romania. The aims of the project are increased accessibility and openness to the body of documents and creating a new context for it, from an updated contemporary scientific and rigorous perspective.

The new form of archive presentation consists in the transposition of the paper files on the screen of the personal computer, increasing the efficiency of research work. The digital archive management system was planned based on the original structure of the primary documents, but also taking advantage of the opportunities offered by the digital technologies.

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<sup>20</sup> Edgar Morin, *La Méthode. 4. Les Idées. Leur Habitat, leur vie, leurs moeurs, leur organization* (Paris : Seuil, 1991) 59, via Otilia Hedeşan, *Folclorul. Ce facem cu el?*, p. 13.

<sup>21</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Memoria, istoria, uitarea*, p. 206.

<sup>22</sup> Pierre Nora, *Entre Mémoire et Histoire*, în *Les lieux de mémoire*, p. 23.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.

This project's propose is to implement the new communication and information technologies as new ways of accessing the folkloric and ethnologic material available in the ACFC. Those innovations at the level of memory supports will achieve the conservation of the original documents (by digitization), increased accessibility to the folkloric and ethnologic material (by implementing a digital archive system), the conceptual redesign of the body of documents (by classifying the archive material using new items and metadata fields) and a conceptual redesign of the preserved data.

#### ***4.1 Archived memory - data and support (information and support)***

Currently, the challenges of new technologies are forcing the archivists, ethnologists and experts from different fields to rethink their priorities and strategies, to work closer with the experts from the field of digital technologies.

This context of *acceleration of history* calls for a different questioning of the relation with time. The metamorphosis endured by the archived memory nowadays, in the digital and post-digital age, will be briefly analyzed. Correlative to the analysis, the suggested perspective will be mainly a technical one, focused on the basic technical and technological elements that the archive implies, as a *setting of memory*, and the archiving process, as a *process applied to the memory*. One of this basic facts is that all the documents contained in any archive hold a bit of information, - either related to history, ethnology or other disciplines, - embedded in a physical support.

Parallel to the three ages of the archive, three forms of physical support can be observed, or, put in another way, three forms of memory incarnation: analogue, digital and post-digital.

The analogue format involves various ways of memory preservation: handwriting, sound imprinted on wax cylinders or magnetic tapes, video recording or photography on celluloid and many others. The digital format involves memories translated into the binary code and preserved on physical supports such as floppy disks, CDs, DVDs or HDDs. In the post-digital environment, the physical support of the encrypted binary memories becomes invisible and intangible. The memories are invoked from places inaccessible directly, from unknown, remote locations and any hints to the physical support are hidden. The server farms are condensing into clouds from where memories descend ephemerally onto the surfaces of the displays.

These transformations are marking successive transitions from the material to the immaterial: if in the Nineteenth century the archives were mainly kept on paper, the Twentieth century brings a diversification of memory supports, but they still remain physically accessible. The last decade, the

beginning of the Twenty-first century, introduces new forms of memory preservations that have the tendency to return more and more to immaterial forms.

If we were to use a metaphor to describe concisely the metamorphosis of the digital memory supports or the evolution of archived documents from one format to another, this would be the slide from one state of aggregation to another. In the analogue stage, the memories were strongly embedded in the physical support, creating a solid document. The document was simultaneously the information and the physical support. Then the binary code, the basic form of translating any information into digital language, started to be implemented, in the beginning of the '50s, imitating the analogue ways of preserving the information. The binary data was imprinted into huge magnetic disks or magnetic tapes in an analogue manner. With the widespread of cheap digital support (CDs, DVDs, HDDs), the information became more independent from the storage support, more fluid, but still tangible, at hand. We are now witnessing the process of data evaporation, its hiding on remote, unknown locations. The preserved digital records are streamed from clouds, from distant servers, and any direct link between information and physical support is lost.

Those techniques and technologies caught our interest due to their interaction with time, more precisely they are creating the opportunity for conserving the body of documents over time and the activation of memory in the present and in the future. Those are modern, contemporary ways of passing the heritage equal to the main way of passing the tradition forward in the past that was the orality.

#### ***4.2 The first age: analogue memory. The organic link between content and its support.***

Analyzing the analogue method of memory exteriorizing (handwriting, light imprinting, magnetic tape recording), we can easily notice that information is deeply inscribed into the support, creating an organic unity. The document consists not only of the memory preserved, but also of its material support. This way of memory imprinting does not allow the perfect reproduction of the document. In the analogue state of aggregation of memory there is always an original, a first imprinting of memory. An analogue copy is plagued by errors and distortions that are amplified in following reproductions. For example, a document that was typewritten could be reproduced using a photocopier. Unlike the original, small spots or uneven color intensity may appear on the copy. If we were to repeat the process always recopying the last copy after several steps we would end up with an unrecognizable copy of the original. Another particularity of analogue

documents is the direct access to the information and the physical interface. Direct physical contact with the analogue sources of memory are common: you have to take a vinyl disk, feeling the fine grooves engraved on it with your fingers, put it on the turntable, turn it on. The physical dimension of the analogue document is extremely present and important.

#### ***4.3 The second age: digital memory. Content and support - a precarious relation.***

The digital method of capturing memory is radically different to the analogue one. First of all there is no privileged original, especially when it comes to digital native documents. Also the information is independent from its support, this resulting in the perfect reproduction of the same document even after an undefined number of recopies. The document becomes the information, the recorded memory and becomes fluid. Any copy is identical to the original and even more, the original disappears. If the digital devices work properly, no errors interfere in the copying process. The information support remains locally accessible, at hand, and it is binary encoded. A processor must be used to decode the data and to access the information. The digital encoded information becomes ubiquitous and the devices to access it are widespread. It can be said that the digital memory is in a liquid state, flowing from one support to another easily (from floppy disk to paper or display, printer or scanner). The typewritten document from the previous example can be easily scanned. The obtained image can be transformed into a proper digital text using OCR (optical character recognition) software and infinite copies of it can be made without any quality loss. The access to the same memory can take different forms: the text can be printed again, projected on a surface or read from a display. The information flows easily from one type of support into another, from an electronic form into a physical, tangible, but optional one.

#### ***4.4 The third age: post-digital memory. The reign of the content and the dismissal of the tangible support***

In this stage, the information exists strictly in a binary form and the support is no longer accessible. The DVDs or the HDDs are obsolete by now, anything being directly accessible from the “clouds”, an undefined virtual space from where all the information descends on the multi-touch displays. Even though the information exists in analogue and digital forms, kept in the initial, original archives, those forms are not currently used. The originals can still be consulted by researchers, but only according to draconian rules, meant to preserve the integrity of the physical documents. The first digital transcriptions may also be preserved on local supports (HDDs,

servers, personal computers), but only as a second backup of the initial digitization process. The main content is available from a remote server and it can be accessed only online. From now on, the archive is permanently accessible without any technical restrictions. With the physical support out of the way the precautions related to the integrity of the documents can be eliminated. Once digitized, an archived document can be easily accessed, read, studied, researched, interpreted via the Internet, regardless of its initial material form. The support becomes invisible, even though the encoding is still digital. This allows anyone to access a document on a personal computer, mobile phone, our body or our clothes, invoked from a server that we know nothing about. The access to the information is deeply mediated and simultaneously ubiquitous: we are surrounded by display-portals that are offering us instant access to information. The processors, the decoders of this highly encoded information are becoming also smaller and less visible, spreading rapidly in our pockets and in the devices around us. The information is in a constant flux and its ubiquity becomes the main feature. The state of aggregation corresponding to this stage is the gaseous one, immaterial and unstable.

Paradoxically, the memory returns to the initial state, having an augmented immaterial form. The access to information becomes local, each individual can access it alone in front of a screen, but the information itself is a-local, living in the clouds, on remote servers, becoming available only through an online connection. The data is spread in our surrounding environment, in a wireless, permeable and perforating form: we pass through it and it is passing through our bodies in the same time, becoming superfluous, always ready to display itself. It became polymorphous, taking form as a search result or as an answer to our inquiries, but always ephemeral, hiding again once our attention moves away. The classic operating systems (OS), Windows, Linux or Mac OS X, are now becoming obsolete. The new generation OS, like Google Chrome, are nothing more than a browser, a minimal framework that allows direct access not only to documents online, but also to software. No more local installation of the software, the servers will run any programs we need from now on. The interface also faces a paradigm shift - the mouse, keyboard, monitor paradigm is the past, and multi-touch is the future.

## **Conclusions**

We could ask ourselves which form of memory preservation will win the battle with time, which is the best way to keep the memory for the long term. The answer is apparently easy: modern technology is the right answer. But at a closer look we notice that it is not that easy to answer: the

paper, the original support for documents can last for 1000 years, while the digital technologies are in a constant change, created for short term use and with a low lifespan. The paper is more suitable for the long term preservation of memory, while the digital technologies are working with a short term memory. Having a history of just a few decades, the digital technologies still have to find solutions for the long term preservation.

Refocusing on archives and their relations with time, on one hand, and with the technology, on the other, we could ask ourselves if the three ages (analogue, digital, post-digital) of the archives aren't somehow comparable with the three moments from the interpretation offered by Paul Ricoeur to the phenomenology of memory: remembrance, history, oblivion. Or, we could ask, using Pierre Nora concepts, if these almost omnipresent settings of memory, immaterial, virtually accessible aren't expressing exactly the fracture of the memory supports, just another form of forgetfulness?

In the present the digital ethnological archive aim to a constructive goal, despite fears of tradition de-structuring: increasing the accessibility to the cultural heritage, updating it, putting the spotlight on identity features in the context of globalization of culture.

What becomes obvious as a result of archive research and of the supports on which the information is preserved is that there are two types (flavors) of time. Using Claude Levi-Strauss' terminology we could affirm that the first one is a cold time, of the long term, in which the changes are taking place slowly, the time of the traditional societies, where the memory is shared by the insiders, being alive (animated), and the second one is a warm time, of sequences of metamorphosis - an age of archiving and of information storing on different supports, material or immaterial, in which the memory is brought to surface and accessed only through organic, technical or virtual intermediaries (in-animated): paper, photography, magnetic tape, floppy disks, DVDs or the personal computer.