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# Making the Documents Speak—A Creative Exploration of the Mihai Pop Fonds

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## ABSTRACT

In 2016, the Mihai Pop Fonds was established as part of the Image Archive at the Romanian Peasant Museum, and this past year has seen a real effort to organize the documents left behind by the scholar. The Fonds brings together key documents: a rich correspondence with Romanian and foreign researchers; Mihai Pop's field notes from the sociological research campaigns; his PhD thesis, which has yet to be published; documents related to his participation in national and international congresses; his notes for the folklore lectures he gave at the University; and many other documents.

The paper aims to present how an interdisciplinary team of ten researchers and artists organized various types of documents from the personal archive of Mihai Pop in order to make it accessible to both specialists interested in the topic and the general public. The paper highlights the contents of the Fonds and focuses on the difficulties involved in organizing a personal archive. The paper will show not only how the Mihai Pop Fonds was shaped in the process, but how the network of people interested in his work has grown and come together in this process, generating new knowledge and new perspectives.

## KEYWORDS

Mihai Pop, personal archives, interdisciplinarity, social sciences in Romania.



## Introduction

Born in 1907, Mihai Pop first developed an interest in linguistics—attending the meetings of the Prague Linguistic Circle in 1930s and studying in Poland. He continued with sociology and ethnomusicology, as a participant in the research campaigns initiated by the sociologist Dimitrie Gusti,<sup>1</sup> before he finally turned to the study of literary theory in Bonn. From 1949, when the Folklore Institute was established, he became a specialist in folklore studies, which he started teaching in the 1950s. In the 1960s, he became interested

in semiotics, and, along with Tudor Vianu<sup>2</sup> and Alexandru Rosetti,<sup>3</sup> he ran the Circle of Poetics and Stylistics. On his visits to the United States, Pop discovered the American school of anthropology, and, in addition to studying anthropology, he made an important contribution to the spreading of anthropology concepts and literature in Romania. “Looking into someone’s life with help from instruments such as pictures, recordings, letters feels almost sacred. It feels strange, sometimes voyeuristic, and it comes with a deep responsibility of holding in your hands a snippet of someone’s personal history.” It is with these words that the Black Horse Mansion<sup>4</sup> video collective captured

1) Dimitrie Gusti (1880 – 1955), Romanian sociologist who taught at the University of Iași and the University of Bucharest and served as Romania’s Minister of Education in 1932–1933. Being the creator of the Bucharest School of Sociology and of several other Institutes, he led, between 1925 and 1948, research campaigns in several Romanian villages.

2) Tudor Vianu (1898 – 1964), Romanian literary and art critic, poet, philosopher, and translator.

3) Alexandru Rosetti (1895 – 1990), Romanian linguist, editor and memoirist. He was the promoter of new research directions, such as mathematical linguistics and structuralism. In 1961, Rosetti established the Romanian Academy's Center for Phonetic and Dialectological Research. In 1974 this Center merged with the Institute of Ethnography and Folklore.

4) Black Horse Mansion is a video production studio born out of the pleasure of creative collaboration. Miruna Vasilescu, Ana Banu and Alina Manea are collectively exploring the world of video art, site-specific installations and performance, creating inspiring video content.

5) Project team: Rucsandra Pop, Grațiela Bădescu, Cristina Țineghe, Denisa Pleoscariu, Paul Drogeanu, Alex Iorga, Mirela Stan, Andrei Roșca, Ramona Barbu, Ana Banu, Miruna Vasilescu, Alina Manea, Alexandru Vlad, Simona-Ioana Ghiță. In the second part of the article the role of each member will be described in detail.

the experience of working for almost one year on a project meant to shape, categorize and showcase to the public the Mihai Pop Fonds. Indeed, immersing yourself into a professional yet very personal archive is an intimate experience and a powerful way to connect different generations and histories. The experience is even more intense if the owner of those documents has touched so many lives, as professor Mihai Pop has.

This paper aims to present how an interdisciplinary team of over ten researchers and artists<sup>5</sup> immersed themselves into the massive body of documents that constitute the Mihai Pop Fonds to structure it and to make it visible for both the specialists interested in the topic and the general public. The paper, while obliquely highlighting the contents of the archive, mainly focuses on the exploratory research challenges involved in structuring a personal archive. It includes many voices, with the purpose of showing that, while the people involved in the project had different approaches, personal motivations, and findings, there was a clear common purpose: to stimulate critical thinking around Mihai Pop's cultural legacy and bring to light as many facets as possible of his complex personality. The diverse points of view of the researchers led to different ways of understanding and processing the material. We treated the body of documents as a living organism that was being structured by the researchers and, in return, (re)structured them, their way of thinking, and their research methods. The paper shows not only how the Mihai Pop Fonds was shaped in the process, but also how the network of people interested in his work has grown and come together in this process, generating new knowledge and new perspectives in a reflexive and multi-vocal way that we further develop here (see also Kaplan 2002 and Zeitlyn 2012).

To our knowledge, this is a singular attempt to discuss the long neglected personal archives in the context of Romanian archival practices in an institutionalized environment and from an interdisciplinary

perspective. It is largely acknowledged among Romanian scholars and practitioners (Grosu 2014; Chirilă 2016) that archives were and still are depositaries of materials and documents about various issues and elements related to national identity. Although the very first archives in Romania emerged from personal initiatives and collections, the conceptual structure of archives is that they should follow a specific institutionalized agenda oblivious of the personal fonds, data, and collections which were incorporated into larger archival projects to varying degrees. Unlike other traditions of archival practice based on personal fonds and collections, archives in Romania, more specifically professional ones (*vs.* bureaucratic and state archives), were collective efforts documenting specific elements considered for preservation and further investigation. Dealing with personal archives involves new challenges (Chirilă 2016). What happens with personal archives of prominent figures that were discovered by serendipity?

In line with Kaplan's 2002 seminal paper, as well as Pop's own thoughts (further developed below) and Barthes' point of view (1972), we deemed it necessary to use an approach both interdisciplinary and anthropological in organizing the materials from the Mihai Pop Fonds as part of the Image Archive of the Romanian National Peasant Museum (Arhiva de Imagine a Muzeului Național al Țăranului Român). In this paper, we have chosen to engage in a descriptive and a self-reflective approach to files, documents, and the whole work involved in organizing the Fonds and less in issues related to their content, as we decided to emphasize the practice of managing a personal archive and no theoretical and content related issues were at stake. Personal objects and formal/institutional items from the Fonds shed light on Mihai Pop's biography as well as on the history of European linguistics, semiotics, sociology, ethnology, folklore, and anthropology. As our paper emphasizes, the Mihai Pop Fonds goes straight to the heart of the history, iden-

tity and memory of these disciplines. Our purpose is to highlight both a general and a personal process of experiencing *memory, history and forgetting* (Ricoeur 2004) related to working with the Mihai Pop Fonds from an interdisciplinary point of view.

In the case of this project, things are all the more exciting as the subject itself is interdisciplinary. Mihai Pop was one of the key figures in the institutional continuity of a number of disciplines—linguistics, folklore, sociology, anthropology and semiotics—but also an innovator and an important agent of interdisciplinary mediation, theoretical change, and modernization during communism. We understand interdisciplinarity as Barthes defined it:

Interdisciplinary work, so much discussed these days, is not about confronting already constituted disciplines (none of which is willing to let itself go). To do something interdisciplinary is not enough to choose a subject (a theme) and gather around it two or three sciences. Interdisciplinarity consists in creating a new object that belongs to no one (Barthes 1972: 1).

Interdisciplinarity was actually one of the theoretical issues tackled by Mihai Pop on several occasions. In the interview conducted by the sociologist Zoltán Rostás in the 1980s and published in *The Bright Room [Sala Luminoasă]*, Pop distinguishes between *multidisciplinarity* and *interdisciplinarity*, pointing out that the first real interdisciplinary researches conducted in Romania in the field of social sciences took place in the 1970s in the Cosău Valley, Maramureș. The statement is intriguing, given the fact that the research campaigns led by Dimitrie Gusti almost annually in the 1930s were supposed to have had an interdisciplinary approach.

*Multidisciplinarity*, says Mihai Pop, is what the sociologists did. I mean they were people from different fields, each of them investigating a certain reality from the perspective of his

or her discipline, and afterwards working towards a synthesis of that unit. For example, considering that a village was a unit. But it was not interdisciplinarity. In order to speak about interdisciplinarity, it is necessary for the researchers in the team to try to think the same, to have the same view of the reality that they are investigating (Rostás 2003: 345).

In his view, interdisciplinary research involves the whole of the researched reality as an object of research itself, which must be defined in a unitary vision. Pop continues by highlighting that the interdisciplinary researchers do not have to be specialists in all the fields; they just need to know the principles of each discipline. He sees the necessity of training a new type of researcher who is capable of thinking about culture by assuming a method of embracing the techniques of various atomized disciplines. The ambition of the project was to create the space for this new type of researcher to manifest creatively, while not abdicating the imperative rigor of scientific research.

Looking at Pop's definition of *interdisciplinarity*, we notice that there are too few contexts and initiatives in which Pop's personality and legacy are investigated using interdisciplinary formulas. He is usually trapped in a box where researchers look at him as one of the founding fathers of modern folklore studies in Romania, while the other aspects of his intellectual persona are being completely overlooked. One proof of this oversimplified reading of such a complex intellectual is the fact that Mihai Pop is rarely studied outside the folklore studies curricula. In the opinion of anthropologist Vintilă Mihăilescu, formulated in an interview conducted by Rucsan-dra Pop in 2009:

It is complicated to say what the role of Mihai Pop was in the development of social sciences in Romania. At the Institute (of Folklore) he had a role, at the University a different role, and a completely different role internationally. And he contributed to importing a structuralist-semiotic vision





Photo 9. In the Image Archive at the Romanian Peasant Museum, even the gloves are smiling as the documents in the Mihai Pop Fonds are being organized. Photo credit: Mihai Pop Association.

to Romania, vision which he promoted, encouraged and, to some extent, shaped (Mihăilescu, February 19<sup>th</sup>, 2009).

That is why we have called on an interdisciplinary team consisting of archivists, ethnologists, anthropologists, sociologists, writers, actors, and film makers: to make sure that we capitalize on the full potential of the documentary material and that we will be able to trace and reveal as many as possible places of memory (Nora 1984) throughout the process. The project has also brought together several generations of researchers—from scholars who worked closely with Pop to students who interacted with him only through his works. As the Mihai Pop Fonds requires an understanding of its uniqueness and complexity, we felt the need to recreate this complexity at the level of people who brought their diverse expertise into the project. Each specialist involved in the project had a different understanding of Mihai Pop's personality and most of them already had interdisciplinary training and the ability to see how a new space is born at the intersection of the disciplines they served. This team studied, classified and

digitized the documents in an effort to offer to both academics and a wider audience a more sophisticated, unprejudiced understanding of him and his activity. Moreover, we wanted to innovate and to use new technologies to bring Pop's intellectual biography to the attention of a wider audience, and to encourage researchers already interested in the topic to look at it critically, from new perspectives. At the end of the project, part of the materials were used in an artistic project—a performative installation—with the purpose of offering to the specialized and general public a coherent image of Mihai Pop, as he is reflected in these documents.

The Mihai Pop Fonds is hosted by The Image Archive of the Romanian National Peasant Museum in Bucharest. The Museum is a partner in the efforts of the Mihai Pop Association to provide researchers with open access to this information, thus encouraging them to critically approach the work of a Romanian scholar with major contributions to the international history of these disciplines in the twentieth century. The idea of a museum hosting the Fonds was both salutary and future-oriented. In Kaplan's words:

6) Harry Brauner (1908 – 1988), Romanian ethnomusicologist, composer, and music teacher. He managed the Folklore Archive, as deputy director, he founded the Folklore Institute, and led the first ethnomusicology laboratory in Romania. During his career he recorded about 5,000 Romanian folk songs.

7) Constantin Bră iloiu (1893 – 1958), Romanian composer, music critic, ethnomusicologist, folklorist, and professor. He founded, along with other composers, the Society of Romanian Composers and he initiated the Folklore Archive. He had a prolific international career in ethnomusicology and he is considered the founder of the Romanian School of Folklore and Ethnomusicology.

[...] practice is the archivist's *raison d'être*. Archival ideas could never be an end in themselves: archivists do what they do so that others (scholars, students, administrators, government officials, citizens, genealogists), whether now or in the distant future, can do what they do (2002: 217).

The Mihai Pop Fonds consists of a rich correspondence with Romanian and foreign researchers (Harry Brauner,<sup>6</sup> Constantin Brăiloiu,<sup>7</sup> George Călinescu,<sup>8</sup> Roman Jakobson,<sup>9</sup> Piotr Bogatyrev,<sup>10</sup> Julien Greimas,<sup>11</sup> Alan Dundes,<sup>12</sup> Margaret Mead,<sup>13</sup> or Katherine Verdery,<sup>14</sup> to give just a few examples); Mihai Pop's field notes from the interwar sociological research campaigns he participated in; his PhD manuscript—which has yet to be published; documents related to his participation to national and international congresses; notes of lectures he gave at various universities, and many other documents. Another part of the Fonds is composed of materials (mostly video and audio interviews) collected over fourteen years of research by Rucsandra Pop—currently a PhD candidate at the University of Bucharest working on Pop's intellectual biography.



### Short bio

To put in context this archival work, one needs to have an overview of Mihai Pop's life and career. Mihai Pop's family life as a whole offers an interesting plunge into Romania's recent history. He was born in 1907 in Glod, Maramureș, then part of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire, in a family of Greek-Catholic priests from Maramureș. His mother's brother, Ilie Lazăr (1895-1976)—with whom he had a very close relationship—was a politician and a Member of the Romanian Parliament in the interwar period. Under his influence, Mihai Pop started a political career at a very early age,

which he did not pursue. It was also due to his uncle that he came to study in Bucharest. In 1940, Mihai Pop married Irina Sturza (1916-2000).<sup>15</sup> The two had met in 1939 when Pop was conducting field research in Dâmbovnic. The marriage with Irina Sturza was in itself a gesture with great political and social implications, considering that at that time the marriages between Transylvanian noble families and the boyar families in the Romanian Old Kingdom were an exception.

Pop belonged to the generation of Romanian intellectuals who emerged between the two World Wars. With graduate studies in Prague, Krakow, Warsaw and Bonn in the 1930s, he earned his PhD in Bratislava, where he served as a diplomat during the Second World War. After completing his BA studies in Bucharest, he decided to continue his studies in Prague, because of his interest in linguistics and Slavic languages. Soon after he arrived in the capital of the Czechoslovak Republic, the Romanian scholar connected with the Prague Linguistic Circle, notably with its Russian core members—Roman Jakobson, Piotr Bogatyrev, and Nikolai Trubetzkoy. He became part of an international network of scholars who were invited to take part in sessions held by the Prague Linguistic Circle. By participating in these meetings, as well as attending the First International Congress of Slavists that took place in Prague in 1929, Pop had the chance to witness the birth of structuralism, the theoretical paradigm that dominated the first half of the twentieth century.

While studying abroad, Pop returned to Romania for the summer months each year. It was during that time that he engaged in the most important Romanian social sciences project—the monographic campaigns led by sociologist Dimitrie Gusti. During the campaigns which took place at Fundu Moldovei (1928), Drăguș (1929), Runcu (1930), and Cornova (1931), he worked in Constantin Brăiloiu's team, the famous musicologist. Surrounded by specialists from so many different disciplines, the young Pop also became interested in various aspects of the community. In time, Pop became one of

8) George Călinescu (1899 – 1965), Romanian critic, literary historian, writer, journalist and member of the Romanian Academy.

9) Roman Ossipovich Jakobson (1896 – 1982), Russian thinker who became one of the most influential linguists of the twentieth century, laying the foundation for the development of the structural analysis of language, poetry, and art. He was one of the leaders of the influential Prague Linguistic Circle and, later, of the Linguistic Circle of New York. He had a profound influence on general linguistics and Slavic studies, but also on semiotics, anthropology, psychoanalysis, ethnology, mythology, communication theory and literary studies.

10) Petr Bogatyrev (1893 – 1971), Russian folklorist, ethnologist, linguist, literary scientist, theatre scientist and translator. He was one of founding members of the Prague Linguistic Circle and a member of the Moscow Linguistic Circle.

11) Julien Greimas (1917 – 1992), Lithuanian literary scientist who wrote most of his body of work in French while living in France. He is considered one of the most prominent French semioticians.

12) Alan Dundes (1934 – 2005), American folklorist at the University of California, Berkeley. His work is said to have been central to the establishing of the study of folklore as an academic discipline.

13) Margaret Mead (1901 – 1978), American cultural anthropologist who served as president of the American Anthropological Association in 1960 and held various positions in the American Association for the Advancement of Science. She worked with Mihai Pop due to their common interest in ethnographic films.

14) Katherine Verdery (b. 1948), American anthropologist and author, Professor at City University of New York. Starting with 1973, she did extensive fieldwork in Romania.

15) A young agricultural engineer descending from an old boyar family. She was part of the research team that did fieldwork in Dâmbovnic in 1939. The campaign was coordinated by Anton Golopenția and Mihai Pop.

16) Anton Golopenția (1909 – 1951), Romanian sociologist and statistician. In 1932-1933, he worked as chief of cabinet—and then secretary to his professor Dimitrie Gusti, who held the office of Minister of Education. Later Golopenția became editor of *Sociologie Românească*, a teaching assistant at the Gusti-chaired Sociology, Ethics and Politics Department, and a director at the Social Institute founded by Gusti. Due to differences of opinion regarding the methodology and purpose of sociological research, he left both the department and Gusti's Social Institute in 1939, after conducting field research with Mihai Pop in Dâmbovnic.

the core members of the teams gathered by Gusti around the Romanian Social Institute. In 1936, he was given the task of relocating a wooden church from Maramureș to the newly created Village Museum in Bucharest, contributing to the birth of this ambitious project. In 1939, he conducted field research in Dâmbovnic, following a methodology developed by Anton Golopenția,<sup>16</sup> which was slightly different from Gusti's.

His encounter with sociological research impacted Pop's future career. The materials collected in Brăiloiu's archive during the interwar campaigns constituted the basis on which the Folklore Institute<sup>17</sup> in Bucharest was built. The creation of the Institute was put in motion as early as 1948, when, together with his friend and colleague Harry Brauner, Pop began to plan its future development. Mihai Pop worked in this Institute for almost thirty years, until his retirement. While the years in Prague gave him a strong theoretical background and international openness, the experience with the Gusti teams offered Pop not only solid research know-how, but also a good understanding of the art of managing a research institute. As director of the Folklore Institute (1965-1974), Pop initiated numerous fieldwork trips, which culminated with the campaigns in Cosău Valley, Maramureș, in the early 1970s, where he led interdisciplinary teams of Romanian and foreign researchers. Pop was also the editor of the *Journal of Ethnography and Folklore* [*Revista de Etnografie și Folclor*], the scientific publication of the Institute. From 1958 onward, and parallel to his activity at the Institute, he taught Folklore at the University of Bucharest. In 1976, Pop published two books: *Romanian literary folklore (Folclor literar românesc)*, written in collaboration with Pavel Ruxăndoiu<sup>18</sup>—book that became “the Bible” for generations of folklore studies students—and *Romanian traditional customs [Obiceiuri tradiționale românești]*.

The 1960s were marked by Pop's interest in semiotics. Beginning in 1963, Pop headed The Circle of Poetics and Stylistics, along with Tudor Vianu and Alexandru Rosetti.

Together they formed a generation of semioticians. Mihai Pop also participated in the summer schools organized by the International Centre for Semiotic and Linguistic Studies, in Urbino, Italy. There, together with his younger Romanian colleagues, he worked with Umberto Eco,<sup>19</sup> Julien Greimas, Maria Corti,<sup>20</sup> and other major semioticians of that time. It was also in the 1960s that Pop was reunited with his interwar international connections and resumed his international activity. Roman Jakobson (1896-1982) played the role of intellectual godfather for Pop, connecting him with prestigious scholars and institutions in the United States and Europe.

Unlike other social sciences, ethnology and folklore survived in Romania during communism, mainly because it was instrumentalized by the political regime, but this only after the 1950s.

First, they were perceived as ‘too national’ in an era of Soviet imposed internationalism. Secondly, in Romania, folklore and ethnography were traditionally associated with the peasants, initially suspected in the Leninist vein everywhere in the Soviet sphere of influence (Leonard and Kaneff 2002), and later on barely accepted as a secondary ally of the proletariat. Consequently, folklore and ethnography, in their original form, were also suspected—or had to adjust their interests to the new imperatives of the proletarian culture (Hedeșan 2008: 24-25).

Things changed in the early 1960s, after the death of Stalin and the emergence of the nationalist type of communism promoted by Ceaușescu. Due to Ceaușescu's policy of independence from Moscow, Romania became an interesting research area for American, French and Belgian sociologists and anthropologists. Katherine Verdery, Gail Kligman<sup>21</sup> (United States), Claude Karnoouh,<sup>22</sup> Jean Cousinier<sup>23</sup> (France), Marianne Mesnil<sup>24</sup> (Belgium), and others were all introduced to their Romanian fieldworks and supported by

Pop. Paradoxically, during the 1960s and 1970s, there was no lag between Romanian ethnology and Western research.

Pop was a member of various international associations and had lectured in Germany, France, and the United States. In 1975, Pop retired but continued to advise generations of PhD students, as Professor Emeritus at the University of Bucharest. He set up “his office” at home, in a house in central Bucharest. No longer having a full-time institutional affiliation, he became an institution himself. His home was a meeting place for researchers from Romania and abroad, as well as a place where new ideas and initiatives came to life. Just after the fall of communism, Pop contributed, among others, to the creation of the Romanian Society of Cultural Anthropology. In addition, he was an advisor to the team of researchers that left the Folklore Institute in order to start the Romanian Peasant Museum in the early 1990s. He died in 2000, at the age of 93. After Pop’s death, his intellectual portrait was completed with the publication of a series of articles he had written between 1937 and 1940, signed with the pseudonym Peter Buga. The articles were accidentally discovered by the sociologist Zoltán Rostás, in 2009. The collection of articles, published in *The Romanian World [Lumea românească]* and *Today [Azi]*—two Romanian interwar publications—were gathered in the volume *I also want to be revised [Vreau și eu să fiu revizuit]*. Many of the articles cover topics of national and international politics, revealing a young Pop with interests going beyond the scholarly realm.

Even without producing an extensive theoretical work, Pop held a prominent position in the field of ethnology and anthropology in Romania, as well as in Europe and, partly, in the United States. Considered the creator of the Bucharest Ethnological School, Pop did not leave behind a one-sided vision. Instead, he opened up several lines of research and reflection, which were later adopted by various groups of ethnologists and anthropologists.



## The seasons of the archive

Winter was about dusting and sorting a heap of documents that had belonged to Mihai Pop. The documents were kept in big plastic bags in a basement belonging to Anisia and Gheorghe Stănculescu—Mihai Pop’s niece and nephew who took care of the documents left behind in the Caragea Vodă Street house, where the Pop family had lived for almost half a century. The work was done by the project core team and a few volunteer undergraduates from the Faculty of Letters (University of Bucharest). In the meantime, other students were transcribing interviews about Mihai Pop and doing more interviews with people that had known and worked with him. Some of the students later joined the research team as full members.

Dressed in doctors’ gowns, armed with masks and gloves, we went through the papers one by one and jumped with joy for

Photo 3. Before being brought to the Romanian Peasant Museum, the documents in Mihai Pop’s personal Fonds were stored in the basement of the house belonging to Anisia and Gheorghe Stănculescu—Mihai Pop’s niece and nephew who took care of the documents left behind in the Caragea Vodă Street house. Photo credit: Mihai Pop Association.



17) Since the Folklore Institute has changed its name several times over the decades, further in the text we chose to simply name it the Institute.

18) Pavel Ruxăndoiu (1934 – 2015), Romanian folklorist, who worked closely with Mihai Pop at the University of Bucharest. He co-authored with Pop the book *Romanian Literary Folklore*.

19) Umberto Eco (1932 – 2016), Italian novelist, literary critic, philosopher, semiotician, and university professor.

20) Maria Corti (1915 – 2002), Italian philologist, literary critic, and novelist.

21) Gail Kligman (b. 1949), American sociologist, Professor UCLA and Director of the Center for European and Eurasian Studies. Her research and teaching focus on ethnographic and historical comparative studies of politics, culture, and gender in Eastern Europe, during and after communism. Kligman has done extensive fieldwork in Romania.

22) Claude Karmouh (b. 1940), French anthropologist and sociologist, who has done extensive fieldwork in Romania.



Photo 7. Sanda Golpenția and Constantin Eretescu, both former collaborators of Mihai Pop, visited the archive in June 2018. In the image, Sanda Golopenția, Rucsandra Pop and Paul Drogeanu trying to decipher a letter from the Fonds. Photo credit: Mihai Pop Association.

every treasure we found. Then we went for a coffee and a pretzel and discussed how to shape the Fonds. It was not simple, as this was the first project of this kind that we had ever worked on.

In spring we dusted off once more all the documents we found and put them in boxes. The boxes were sent to the National Institute of Materials Physics for decontamination with gamma-ray irradiation. The operation is supposed to kill off all living organisms in the papers, but it does not remove the dust. The dust remains no matter how much you shake it off. So do the coughing and skin irritations that come with it. In spring we started enlarging the team, as the funding from The Administration of the National Cultural Fund (Administrația Fondului Cultural Național) had finally come. Nature awakened and so did we. We took the boxes of documents to the Romanian Peasant Museum and put them next to those donated to the Image Archive by Andrei Pop-Jora, Mihai Pop's youngest son. We were satisfied with our work so far. We did not realize how much work still lay ahead of us.

In the summer we began the sorting process. We spent our time poring over letters almost impossible to read, matching papers with the same texture and written in the same ink, pulling out and throwing away all the office clips from the papers and the rusty rails from the folders. We bundled, indexed, catalogued, and scanned

documents. And when we finally felt like we knew what we were doing, Cristina Țineghe came and initiated us for the second time in the art of archiving. And we realized we had to restructure the Fonds completely. And also our minds. We should have paid more attention to Cristina in the beginning, when she told us it was not easy to organize a personal archive. Luckily for us, she was by our side throughout the stages of the project. After all, she was the only specialist in archives and the history of Maramureș, the only one to have dealt with a personal archive before. We began inviting Pop's close collaborators, all of them specialists in his life and work, to join our project: Ioana Popescu,<sup>25</sup> Zoltán Rostás,<sup>26</sup> Sanda Golopenția,<sup>27</sup> Constantin Eretescu,<sup>28</sup> and Nicolae Constantinescu.<sup>29</sup> Each of them brought a bit more light into the process, helping us to connect the dots and better understand the content of the documents.

In autumn we began to reap the fruits of our labor. After long conversations and many hours of work, the "skeleton" of the Fonds began to take shape, and now we could add muscles to it. Every facet of Pop's personality became clearer right after a first round of sorting through the documents. We discovered many artifacts: a rich correspondence with Romanian and foreign researchers; Mihai Pop's field notes from the research campaigns part of the Gusti School of Sociology; personal notebooks with Slavic words and verb tenses; flash cards with the notes he made while studying in Prague and Bonn, his unpublished doctoral work; documents related to his participation in national and international congresses; telegrams; flight tickets; notes from courses he attended or taught; lists of books; documents related to his work at the Folklore Institute and many more. And we realized that each piece of the archive could be turned into a book. After prioritizing what should reach print first, we started scanning documents. The opinion was unanimous: the correspondence should be published as soon as possible,

23) Jean Cuisenier (1927 – 2017), French ethnologist, specialist in French and European ethnology, in particular Romanian folk arts and traditions, and more particularly rural architecture. Starting with 1973, he did extensive fieldwork in Romania.

24) Marianne Mesnil (b. 1944), Belgian anthropologist, specialized in the study of Romania, where she went for the first time as a student in 1967. She then made many field trips throughout the period marked by the Ceaucescu regime. She is now an honorary professor at Université Libre de Bruxelles.

25) Ioana Popescu (b. 1949), Romanian ethnologist, who worked closely with Mihai Pop at the Folklore Institute. After 1990, she was Research Director at the Romanian Peasant Museum and was in charge with the Image Archive.

because it highlights the many roles that Pop played, his stature, and the value of his relationships.

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### The Mihai Pop network

The Mihai Pop Fonds could be defined by drawing up the list of the people with whom he collaborated throughout his career spanning nearly seven decades. Pop was a member of many important scholarly networks and international professional associations in the field of ethnography, anthropology, and semiotics. He lectured at over twenty universities in the United States and Europe, and he participated in an impressive number of international congresses and events. Actually, his international career could be the topic of a PhD research, and there are many folders containing documents that could inform such research. An address book from the 1970s is perhaps the most eloquent and condensed document of the Pop Fonds. It includes many of the names and contact details of the researchers he worked with—some of them renowned, such as Claude Lévi-Strauss or Umberto Eco, others known mainly in their fields, like the German ethnologist Ingeborg Weber Kellermann or the folklorist Carl-Herman Tillhagen.

Photo 5. The Mihai Pop Fonds contains hundreds of business cards showing how extensive Mihai Pop's professional network was, both nationally and internationally. Photo credit: Mihai Pop Association.



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### The archive is about:

*Data and information:* In many of the texts about Mihai Pop, there appears a long list of international scientific bodies of which he was a member. Beyond the fact that this long list is only partially correct and is usually carelessly copied from one article to the other, very few scholars go deeper into the roles these professional organizations played, and how the history of the respective fields flows through them. One cannot understand the development of folklore or anthropology unless one has background data on the history of these professional associations. And there is a lot of this data in the Pop Fonds. Now that the data is available, the biography of Mihai Pop will surely be re-written in a more detailed and precise manner.

*People and stories:* Apart from Mihai Pop, whose archive we were researching, the papers bring to light other people with whom even the most cold-blooded researcher would fall in love. One of the scholars whose personality is revealed by the documents in the Fonds is Constantin Brăiloiu. When reading letters signed by the well-known musicologist, he turns from a Wikipedia entry into flesh and blood. A letter addressed to Harry Brauner, brought Brăiloiu to life for us, the research team:

I'm glad Pop arrived and brought all the stuff. I included a note for him, too. I'm also glad that the latest concerns of His Magisterial Serenity (Dimitrie Gusti) confirm beyond any doubt all the flattering views I have always had regarding His brilliant intelligence. Don't forget my devilish Decalogue for the 1931 monograph, consisting of four points (\*as any respectful Decalogue should):

1. Thou shalt not kill, respectively commit suicide.
2. Thou shalt beautifully gather beautiful things.
3. Thou shalt form a state within the state.
4. Thou shalt crush monographic sociology

26) Zoltán Rostás (b. 1946), Romanian sociologist of Hungarian origins. He is specialized in the history of the Gusti School of Sociology and founder of the research group Cooperativa Gusti. In the 1980s, he has done extensive oral history interviews with the researchers who participated in the monographic campaigns initiated by Dimitrie Gusti, including Mihai Pop.

27) Sanda Golopenția (b.1940), Romanian linguist, now Emeritus Professor at Brown University, Providence, Long Island. She worked at the Folklore Institute, doing extensive fieldwork with Mihai Pop. She published several books on linguistics and semiotics and edited the work of her parents Ștefania Cristescu-Golopenția and Anton Golopenția, both members of the Gusti School of Sociology and close friends of Mihai Pop.

28) Constantin Eretescu (b. 1937), Romanian folklorist, who worked closely with Mihai Pop at the Folklore Institute. In 1980, he fled to the United States and taught cultural anthropology at Rhode Island School of Design, Providence.

29) Nicolae Constantinescu (b. 1934), Romanian folklorist and professor, who was Mihai Pop's assistant at the University of Bucharest.

under smiles of contempt.  
Here, I enjoy moments of perfect silence,  
propitious to a radical concealment.  
(...)

With all my love, Constantin Brăiloiu.<sup>30</sup>

This witty letter made us look for more information on Brăiloiu, it made us look at his photographs with different eyes. This man somehow came to life in the generous office of the Image Archive. And this was the case with all those other deceased people locked in these files and boxes—for a few minutes, or for a few days, they would become alive in our minds and our souls. It was emotionally intense for us to realize that our team found a letter from Marcela Focșa at the same time the Museum team found one of her notebooks with her drawings and her notes from the Gusti campaigns. Another project that connected our work with the activity of the Museum was the research they were conducting on the interwar photographer Aurel Bauch.<sup>31</sup> The two had worked together in the Dâmbovnic campaign—Bauch even took photos of Pop at that time and on different occasions. Of course, the two teams cooperated. In fact, working on the Museum premises, the Mihai Pop Fonds benefited from having an extended research team. It was a continuous dialogue between the different fonds and their researchers.



### The research team

As a professional exercise questioning subjectivity and reflexivity, we asked team members to write down statements about their experience working with the Fonds. The reflections were an important part of the general framework of the project. We have reproduced them below with minor changes regarding biographical notes only.

The team was led by Rucsandra Pop, who had a triple affiliation—first with the family,

as granddaughter of Mihai Pop, secondly with the University of Bucharest where she is working on her PhD, and last but not least with the Mihai Pop Association [*Asociația Academician Mihai Pop*], the organization which initiated the research project.

It was equally difficult and intriguing to wear all the three hats at once. As a granddaughter, it was an emotionally difficult period. Digging into your family's history always is. While doing such work it is impossible not to re-discover yourself in relationship with your ancestors. The information about my family I have access to goes back seven generations, both on my grandfather's and on my grandmother's side. And this is a lot of information to process. It generates internal processes and it changes the relationship with other members of the family. Intense is a soft word, when it comes to such a journey of self-discovery.

The role I played as a scientific coordinator of the entire project was also intense. It was my first time coordinating such a big research project, a project that was outside the realm of my expertise. Working with archives was also a first. I took an exploratory approach. The wisest thing to do was to find specialists with more expertise than I had. But as the work was very time-consuming, and it involved a lot of attention to details and digital skills, it was also important to find young people willing to participate in a project that could open for them new professional perspectives. The team was very mixed: the people came from both different fields and generations. It took a long time to put the team together and to find a method that would fit us all and guarantee the best possible results.

I also had to deal with the institutional side—the cooperation with the Museum was excellent, both in practical terms and at the level of expertise we could access. There were also other partners—the Faculty of Letters and the Faculty of Sociology and Social Work at the University of Bucharest and the Faculty of Letters from Brașov. I felt great satisfaction to see that my project, which had started as

30) This letter is very revealing for the differences between Constantin Brăiloiu and Dimitrie Gusti on how to approach field research.

31) For more about Aurel Bauch, see the study by Viviana Iacob in this *Martor* issue.



Photo 1. Part of the Mihai Pop Fonds project team during a working session. From right to left: Ramona Barbu, Mirela Stan, Andrei Roșca, Paul Drogeanu, Alex Iorga and Rucsandra Pop. Photo credit: Mihai Pop Association.

an independent project, was embraced and supported by institutions that understand the importance of the role that Mihai Pop played in the development of social sciences throughout the twentieth century. The biggest gratification I had working on this project was to bring together such a large community of researchers interested in my grandfather's work.

A few months before the project was awarded AFCN funding, a group of undergraduate students and a group of graduate students at the Bucharest Faculty of Letters volunteered for the project, as part of their fieldwork practice. An important contribution by the students was transcribing the interviews and documents and starting to build a virtual map of Pop's professional network. Another contribution was to sort the papers. With each day

they spent among the papers, some of the students took one step further in becoming specialists of Mihai Pop's biography and work. In fact, the volunteering turned into a talent hunt for the project. Some of the undergraduates were recruited as full-time researchers in the project.

The graduate students were given assignments closer to their area of interest—e.g., editing the interviews, conducting new interviews or even creatively reinterpreting the archive material.

Working with archive material has always intrigued me, so when Rucsandra Pop offered us the opportunity to “drift” into the universe of the Mihai Pop Fonds, I became quite enthusiastic about it. I personally enjoyed the freedom given by Rucsandra—to explore the archive in a rather creative way. It was a challenge to work with the material, applying



my own artistic view to it, which led me to uncover one of Mihai Pop's many portraits, as shaped by people who knew him. Furthermore, I actually got the chance to exercise a few new skills, including collage-making and drawing calligrams (Felicia Hodoroabă-Simion, graduate student at the Faculty of Letters, University of Bucharest, 2018).

Rucsandra's project of bringing to light and, why not, to life, Mihai Pop Fonds has rewarded me in an unexpected way. As a child, my first dream was to become an archaeologist, but life had different plans for me. However, anthropology got me closer to my dream than I had ever hoped. So, getting to know better Mihai Pop's personality was like diving into one of the most colorful oceans, full of unimaginable life. It was enthralling to get to know him even if vicariously, through the eyes and stories of the people who met and worked with him. Listening, transcribing and translating interviews with collaborators, former students and professors, etc. who crossed paths with Mihai Pop was like looking through a stained-glass window, where all the colored pieces recreated the great ethnographer's personality. He was a strong, restless, highly erudite man who kept his feet on the ground and easily related to all kind of people. (...) I am grateful to have met

Photo 4. The students of the Faculty of Letters of the University of Bucharest had their practical training in the Peasants Museum Image Archive, helping organize the documents in the Mihai Pop Fonds. Photo credit: Mihai Pop Association.



him, even though the meeting was mediated by other people (Andra Samson, graduate student at the Faculty of Letters, University of Bucharest, 2018).

Working with Rucsandra Pop to develop the Mihai Pop Fonds has given me the opportunity to learn and apply research methods, to think and build an interview, and last but not least to grow as a researcher. My contribution consisted of conducting an interview with Ștefan Petreuș, one of the Petreuș Brothers—folk musicians, who were famous for performing songs from the Maramureș area. The Petreuș Brothers were born in Glod, the same village where Mihai Pop was born. In this interview, I attempted to capture Ștefan Petreuș's life history focusing on the village of his childhood, the community and the relationship with the church, the mentalities of the people, the institutionalization and the dislocation of the folk artist, the relationship with Mihai Pop, and the way the means of mass reproduction and dissemination of folk music influenced their career. The fact that I come from the Maramureș area helped me a lot, as I understand the thinking of the people there, the way they speak and their connection to their ancient traditions. I had had the opportunity to meet Ștefan Petreuș many years before, but the interview gave me the chance to find out more interesting details about how he entered the field of music, to which I am no stranger, as well as important information about Mihai Pop (Delia Kohut, graduate student at the Faculty of Letters, University of Bucharest, 2018).

Denisa Ploscariu enrolled herself in the "army of Pop" one evening when the project was at an early stage, and everything was still very unclear. Denisa expressed her discontent towards the way things were organized and offered her help in setting up an effective work flow for the students volunteering for the Mihai Pop Association. Shortly after, Denisa was invited to join the management team.



Photo 2. Rucsandra Pop and Ramona Barbu organizing a pile of documents.  
Photo credit: Mihai Pop Association.

The work in the archive was a true challenge for me as I took care of the managerial part of the project alongside the identification of the documents. I was in charge of work strategies, organizational methods, new working techniques—like describing and categorizing the documents. The most interesting activity I participated in was deciphering Pop’s correspondence, which allowed me to discover the professor’s essence through the letters he wrote to people. At the same time I had access to some different types of documents, one example being the documents from the folder “Manuscript—The Ethnographic area of Lăpuș” which I had to actually piece together in order to digitally archive it. During the project I discovered a lot of things related to Mihai Pop’s field of research, as well as the methods he used. I felt gratitude every time I realized how precious are all the documents that passed through my hands, all of them emanating history and life at the same time. It is amazing to see how the past transcends the future, projecting the future. For me it was important to be involved in this project. Together with the entire team we succeeded to keep alive the personality of Mihai Pop and to make it possible for the next generations to have access to it (Denisa Pleoscariu, undergraduate student at the Faculty of Letters, University of Bucharest, 2018).

Andrei Roșca, Mirela Stan and Ramona Barbu were also “recruited” for the project among those undergraduate students who did practical training at the Mihai Pop Association. It was their curiosity and their interest in the project that got them the job. To some extent, one can say now they are the best specialists in very specialized aspects of Mihai Pop’s intellectual biography such as his participation to national and international congresses and his affiliation to various scholarly organizations.

For me, working with the Mihai Pop Fonds was like reading a story and, with time, becoming a character in it. Dealing with the old documents was challenging in the beginning—at first trying to decipher all the documents I had in front of me—from letters to Pop’s personal notes—and then arranging all the pieces of the puzzle into a story that had to be presented, to be told. I would say that this was the most beautiful part of the project, alongside working with the people involved in it. Rucsandra, the project’s coordinator, was always saying that this whole archive is about Pop as much as about our own perspective, about us trying to understand Pop, his professional life as a scholar, and as a human as well. And knowing that, I personally tried to do this, and that’s the reason I felt like a character in this whole story. Understanding Pop was the starting point of the archival work, and with time it happened to be about understanding myself as well as understanding the people involved in the project. The reflections of each of us on what a document meant and is supposed to mean in the present are reflected in the way the archive was defined in the end (Mirela Stan, undergraduate student at the Faculty of Letters, University of Bucharest, 2018).

My archival work in the summer of 2018 included the classification of the documents and papers concerning Mihai Pop’s participation to congresses and his affiliation to professional associations. The experience of eight hours spent every day, for a month,



32) Richard Dorson (1916– 1981), American folklorist, author, professor, and director of the Folklore Institute at Indiana University.

33) Sigurd Erixon (1888 – 1968), Swedish ethnologist and culture historian.

among papers and documents that had belonged to one of the most important Romanian ethnologists was impressive. During this month, I sorted the documents according to the name and year of every international meeting that Pop had attended. Working in the archive was an extraordinary chance to study the documents of an anthropologist and to understand what it meant to be in contact with international associations and scientists all over the world, and what it meant to participate at the highest level of anthropological studies. The letters exchanged between Pop and the organizers make up the main part of the congress documents, and they have the value of a temporal instrument that anyone who is interested in these documents can use to follow the congresses. It was therefore astonishing to have access and to read simple documents such as the conference invitations or programs, letters to and from important anthropologists and ethnologists, such as Richard Dorson,<sup>32</sup> Jean Cuisenier, Sigurd Erixon,<sup>33</sup> or Alan Dundes. As all the documents were ordered chronologically, whenever a folder was completed, I had the impression that in front of my eyes some kind of a story had come to an end. The most impressive folder was the one on the International Society for Ethnology and Folklore, containing documents from almost every year Pop was a member of it, from 1965 to the 1990s. As I was indexing the papers, the sequence of documents gave me a bizarre feeling of melancholy when I reached the end of those international meetings. At some point, while working on the documents of another folder, for a Tokyo congress, I was so immersed in arranging the documents (dinners, restaurants, congress program, brochures, notes) that I had the impression that I left Tokyo with Mihai Pop (Andrei Roșca, undergraduate student at the Faculty of Letters, University of Bucharest, 2018).

The folklorist Paul Drogeanu, a former student and collaborator of Mihai Pop at the Folklore Institute, gave us precious insight,

especially since many of the documents came from his student years or the years he spent working at the Institute, and he personally knew the documents' theme or the people they referenced. Paul was probably the one who got totally immersed in the archive as pieces of it contained him as well.

What I liked most from my 2018 journey into the archive hosted by the Romanian National Peasant Museum (as part of a group led by Rucsandra Pop) were the stories. In fact, it was not so much like a trip but like a residence or a workshop, hosted by the Museum's Image Archive, which became a kind of research hub for the Mihai Pop personal archive. *Why was it enjoyable?* Because the stars lined up at each stage. The Museum was the perfect place where an unconventional archive could be put together rigorously. The hosts had as a legacy from the Museum's founders the appropriate mindset for such an approach. It was *enjoyable* because cubic meters of papers in cardboard boxes (dusty or cleaned and even irradiated) had to be converted into linear meters of documents. Then they became hundreds of elements, some humble (like business cards, airplane tickets, invitations to balls or congresses), others impressive (geo-political analysis reports, research papers, columns, cultural policy strategies), but each of them representing a surprise and anticipating an amazing body of work.

The experience was different for each member of the team. The diversity of the team was subtle and apparently random, working together in a fruitful compatibility. It was enjoyable because I had stage fright (and only a talented actor can feel stage fright, as a director of the National Theater once said). I felt just like before an exam with a beloved professor, an exam where I finally got an A+ without too much effort. There was great anxiety due to the fact that most of the team had no training in working with archives. But it was gratifying to see that, after the work had been done and honored, our ethnological intuitions (trained or being



trained through studies of philology or history) were confirmed even by modern archivists. In many of our discussions it was said that this is not a typical archiving project, and so it cannot conform to the common practices and definitions. I had mixed feelings of incompetence and doubt. But in the end we managed to archive the documents, on time and almost “by the book.” Although we had been congratulated on our work, both by a competent authority in archives and by Rucsandra Pop, the initiator of the project, I turned to the intellectual’s most faithful servant: the available literature. I still felt unsure about a few things, including the status (still ambiguous) of some personal documents (in the case of a famous figure in a given field). And the ever faithful literature confirmed my expectations, although *post festum*, on topics like: closed fonds, but not completed; private archives belonging to researchers *vs.* personal public archives that are produced as part of a public scientific activity by a public figure. “The originality of the ensemble consists, in fact, in the juxtaposition of private archives (family correspondence and other personal notes) with documents produced by public bodies.”<sup>34</sup> In an effort to set up, in 2005, at the *Maison des Sciences de l’Homme* in Dijon (France), the personal fonds of researcher *Andre Varagnac* (1894 – 1983)—a personality just as famous as *Mihai Pop*—in the field of folklore as a distinctive scientific discipline (and we know that notoriety is decisive for the creation of fonds), it was noted the original nature of this archive, the result of a personal production, that of the researcher, while being of public interest, as long as it is produced in public institutions.

*Why were there so many stories?* Not only because we had a personal, subjective and emotional relationship with Mihai Pop, both Rucsandra as his granddaughter and PhD candidate working on his biography and myself as a disciple and former employee of the Folklore Institute, but because the public reason for an archive to exist is the *notoriety* of its author/producer. And that notoriety is

the result of facts that deserve to be told, on the occasion of these interpretive acts. The identification of the documents, decisive for their classification, is done by putting them in context. *Excursus*: the documents speak of action—the actions create reality—Pop created institutes, research projects and education fields, vocations and careers. His actions left behind a trail of documents. When you put a document into context, you ask a witness to tell a story. The stories are not just behind the document you need to classify. They go beyond it. What you read in the document you just classified is not a simple text anymore, it becomes a palimpsest. In this manner I have read—sometimes for myself, other times for my colleagues—the admirable actions of Mihai Pop. For example: a manuscript shows that Mihai Pop, while working with Gusti’s royal teams and thus involved in the Sociological School in Bucharest, had the vision of creating the Folklore School of Bucharest (sic!). Another document shows that at the time when he was in charge with the academic study of folk culture, he tried to support the establishment in Bucharest of an Institute of Ethnography, precisely to separate folklore (seen as ethnology) from ethnography (seen as museography). Being given the chance to interpret the documents as a story or as proof of an untold story was the privilege I enjoyed during this journey into the Mihai Pop Fonds at the Peasant Museum (Paul Drogeanu, 2018).

The one who linked the current academic perspective with Pop’s years of teaching was Alexandru Iorga, who had undertaken the sorting of the lecture notes in the Fonds. He also invited the students of the Faculty of Sociology and Social Work to get acquainted with the project and contribute to the organization of the archive, thus rebuilding a natural link between Mihai Pop and sociology. Alexandru Vlad was the man who dug into other archives in search of documents to help us deepen our understanding of what we already had. As

34) Alazard, Céline. 2011. “Fonds personnel de chercheur : André Varagnac.” *ArchiSHS, Archives scientifiques des sciences humaines et sociales*, August 11 [available online at : <https://archishs.hypotheses.org/514>].



Photo 6. Actress GrațIELA BăDESCU performing in front of the audience at the performative installation showcased in November 2018 at the Romanian Peasant Museum in the villa that belonged to Alexandru Tzigara-Samurçaș. Photo credit: Mihai Pop Association.

a historian, Alexandru Vlad was in charge of the documents accounting for the time when Mihai Pop worked at the Ministry of Propaganda and was delegated to the Foreign Affairs Ministry as Press Secretary at the Romanian Legation in Slovakia.

GrațIELA BăDESCU (actress and art performer) juggled between the role of project manager and the much more creative role of artist in the performative installation. Together with the Black Horse Mansion team—Ana Banu, Alina Manea and Miruna Vasilescu—GrațIELA built the final moment of the project in which we planned to bring Mihai Pop to the audience through a performative video installation. The Black Horse Mansion team created two video collages: one that was portraying Mihai Pop as a scholar and another looking at his family life. The videos were projected in separate rooms: one imagining an auditorium at the University, where Pop had taught for two decades, and the other re-creating the atmosphere of Pop's family home, an old house situated in the center

of Bucharest. The audience was guided from one room to another by GrațIELA BăDESCU, who performed parts of the letters sent or received by Mihai Pop. The actress also interacted with the video material, enriching it with dance movements, a symbolic recreation of traditional folk dances. The installation also included a culinary experience, as the audience was offered *horincă* and *slănină*,<sup>35</sup> as any guest in the Pop house would have been. The performative installation was designed as an invitation for people to step into Mihai Pop's universe not only through words or pieces of paper, but also through image, music, food, drinks or objects that belonged to him. The installation was performed twice—the first time in GrațIELA's apartment, as part of the HomeFest, a "home-made" art festival, and the second time at the Romanian Peasant Museum in a villa that belonged to Alexandru Tzigara Samurçaș.<sup>36</sup>

When it comes to video, the feeling of holiness is even stronger because the person

35) Plum brandy and cured pork fat, drink and food from Maramureș.

36) Alexandru Tzigara-Samurçaș (1872 – 1952), Romanian art historian, ethnographer, museologist and cultural journalist. Tzigara was the founder of the National Museum, the nucleus of the present-day Romanian Peasant Museum. His house now hosts the Museum's offices.

you are searching for is right there inside a file—moving, talking and reacting, giving you precious real content, stuck-in-time, contributing to your own understanding of time and people. Putting together a video installation based on the archive documents of Mihai Pop's life and legacy felt like working with a rough diamond to find ways to expose it to people, while keeping some of the dust time had laid on it—this “dust” is time itself, making the object of pursuit shine brighter. For a short while, it felt like we were inside Mihai Pop's life, being able to take a good look, while taking turns to play the parts of people in his life: a student, a friend, a colleague, a niece, or even his wife. And when the video experiment was shown, we got to observe conversations build around it, as everyone who had anything to do with Pop held a piece of his memory, triggered by the images. A rich experience of present and future came together (Black Horse Mansion 2008).

I became acquainted with Mihai Pop Fonds long before the project even started to crystallize, by listening to Rucsandra's stories about her PhD research. When we wrote together the funding proposal for AFCN, the project seemed clear, at least on a theoretical level. The idea of making a performance installation came to us while we were brainstorming the best possible way to give the general public access to Mihai Pop's legacy. Although while working on ways to organize the overwhelming amount of documents we had, I became also responsible for the management of the project, my role as a performer was never sidelined. The fact that I was involved in moving the documents from a basement to the Museum's Image Archive, and the time spent in Rucsandra's house, where I was a guest and had access to the room where some of the original documents were stored, kept me in close contact with all the information that was surfacing. On one hand I was discovering a fascinating professional trajectory, and on the other, an alluring personal component, especially as showcased in the letters. Meanwhile, the management side had begun

to absorb me, but Rucsandra was sending me a photo or a message from time to time with what she had found in the correspondence. These small details kept me motivated, while the team crystallized the structure for sorting the papers.

The video was put together in such a subtle and elegant way, almost Dadaist, by the Black Horse Mansion girls. What needed to be done now was the text. It seemed essential to me to capture the human component of Pop's written conversations (without invading his privacy/personal space), but also the perspectives of those who saw him, and whom Pop had “changed.” The main pillars to build the text on were two letters. One of the letters was written by Irina Pop, his wife. It was a playful letter in which she invited him to the movies and scolded him with elegance, ironically signing her letter as “your humble wife, committed and obedient.” The second letter was written by Pop, in 1935, when he was 28. The letter is in fact a meditation on the way people have transformed both life and love into bourgeoisie: “This is how bourgeois love was born and how true love died, just as people killed the life given to them by God to create their own lives.” The two spaces that hosted the performance installation also contributed to its final structure. The first was the house where I had just moved in, an interwar apartment that became the space for hosting a culture

Photo 8. Screen shot from the video installation made by the Black Horse Mansion collective. The collage has in its center an image from the interview with Mihai Pop taken by Gheorghe Deaconu and Ioan Șt. Lazăr in 1997 and on the sides items from Pop's field notebooks during the monographic campaigns led by Dimitrie Gusti. Photo credit: Mihai Pop Association.





festival in my home, called HomeFest. The living room became the Caragea Vodă room, and what we called “the office” became the University auditorium. Nearly thirty viewers walked about the rooms freely, looking for Pop in documents printed from what we had digitized from the Fonds, in videos and the music from the Gusti campaigns, in which Pop had taken part. The second house that hosted the show was Villa Tzigara Samurçaș at The Romanian Peasant Museum, where the experience was inaugurated with *slănină* and *horincă*, and the audience had the opportunity to get somewhat closer to “Moșu.” Each of the performances ended with discussions, where people displayed their emotions and memories that the installation had stirred. The most exciting thing was that now I was able to see how the things I had found in the documents resonated with the personal history of the people in the audience. A piece of the lives of some of the people in the audience was being reconstructed in front of their eyes (Grațuela Bădescu 2018).

Cristina Țineghe was the specialist who guided us by making a diagram for the Fonds and sharing with us secrets of the archivist’s profession. Cristina taught us how to make the papers speak, but also how not to let ourselves be swept away by each document and thus lose sight of the bigger picture and miss the common thread of the archive.

The archival processing of the Mihai Pop Fonds started with the attempt to classify the huge number of documents according to the main issues they were reflecting. The principle is simple but its implementation was difficult to achieve due to the huge complexity of the activities carried out by Mihai Pop in the course of his life. Another difficulty was the fact that the documents revealed successively many aspects of his personality, more or less known, some even surprising. After this fascinated scrutiny of the records that make up the Mihai Pop’s personal Fonds, we still have the impression that, despite the substantial

volume of new information, they only outline the main directions of Mihai Pop’s activity, and to highlight his real contribution would require the completion of the documentary corpus with testimonies found in the archives of the institutions he worked for (Cristina Țineghe 2018).

Throughout the process, we learned many things from Iris Șerban and Mara Mărăcinescu working at the Image Archive of the Romanian Peasant Museum, who have gathered around them a community of archive-minded people, people who are willing to share knowledge and to professionalize in this domain. Luckily we have teamed up also with Ioana Simona Ghiță, who is more than a financial manager, because she is passionately supporting independent cultural projects, helping artists or researchers to keep their budgets from the brink. Neither was Adnana Cruceanu only our communication manager—with a Master’s in Anthropology, she has come up with a double perspective, a person passionate about the discipline and a communicator who knows how to put complex things into simple words. We have tried and will continue to keep close to the project the “elders of the tribe,” people who were close to Pop and who understand the layered depths of the documents and the times in which he lived.



### Final remarks

Given the overall lack of tradition in working with personal archives in Romania (Chirilă 2016), the project is innovative mainly because it involves a public-private partnership—the Academician Mihai Pop Association and the Romanian Peasant Museum have assumed a common mission to structure, make it grow, and leverage the Fonds. Moreover, the project partnered with



Photo 10. Between 1971 and 1982, Mihai Pop was the president of the International Society of Ethnology and Folklore (SIEF). The participants at the City Rituals conference - the 13th conference of the The Ritual Year working group of SIEF - visited the Image Archive at the Romanian Peasant Museum. During the visit, they learned more about the Mihai Pop Fonds and the contribution of the Romanian researcher to SIEF. Photo credit: Irina Stahl.

three important academic institutions—the Faculty of Letters, the Faculty of Sociology and Social Work (University of Bucharest), and the Faculty of Letters (Transylvania University). The project was not only presented and promoted among the students, but the students have enormously contributed to the archival work—some on a voluntary basis, others as paid staff. Through these partnerships, a personal research project is institutionalized, open to other researchers or institutions in the field, and also to the general public. This project is an invitation to openness and collaboration for other institutions in the country or abroad that have valuable documents that could contribute to a better understanding and visibility of Pop's personality. Mihai Pop's cultural influence and career are little known in Romania, despite the fact that his work has been and still is extremely important in terms of institutional development and the history

of ethnology, folklore, sociology, semiotics, and anthropology.

Although he led the Folklore Institute and taught this discipline for twenty years, Pop cannot be reduced to the role of founder of modern folklore in Romania. With a European formation at the intersection of several disciplines—linguistics, literary theory, sociology, ethnography, and folklore—he became interested in semiotics and cultural anthropology at a later stage in his career, being among those who imported ideas from these disciplines into the Romanian academic environment. Pop was a Socratic personality. He had the great ability to engage in dialogue with people from all social backgrounds and to influence the destinies of many of those he met. Mihai Pop embodies almost perfectly the Socratic model, as his written work is far less consistent than the influence he exercised through direct contact with his disciples. That's why

his published works offer a limited view of the influence his personality had in the field. The archive offers numerous documents that create a much broader picture. Mihai Pop's legacy is an intersection, and the more light we put on it, the more sophisticated and clearer it becomes. To borrow the notorious Saussurian terms, Mihai Pop needs to be analyzed at both a syntagmatic and paradigmatic level.

Moreover, the experience of working with the personal archive, which contains so many elements from different periods of Mihai Pop's life, not only offers a better knowledge of his intellectual practices, but also complements the intellectual elements with pure biographical ones, which have either become myths in the absence of concrete factual references, or have been considered to be of minor importance.

The project's aim was to disseminate and enhance the cultural heritage of Mihai Pop, a charismatic personality of the twentieth century, who influenced in a subtle, but profound manner several areas of Romanian and international intellectual life, connecting

the local scientific scene with the international market of ideas. One of the ambitions of this project is to inspire new critical approaches. Another ambition is to popularize the activity of this "niche personality" and to bring in the forefront this modern Socrates—who can still be a valuable mentor for the younger generations at a time when the Romanian society seems to have lost its compass. Told in a creative and convincing way for the young generation, Mihai Pop's story can be a plea for the fact that socio-human sciences can represent an exciting career choice, as they offer keys to understanding the society we live in. Using the digital environment and innovative approaches, Pop can be brought closer to new specialists in the field and to young people interested in the recent history.

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