

The Forager of Ustroń and the Threefold Expansion of the Archive

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“It is so nice to hear [!] that You too, Sir, are an unruly idealist who does not leech away at the times with a profiteer’s instinct but instead harkens back to those bygone days.¹ This summer, you will certainly see me come round so that together, we might complete our laborious investigations against the historical backdrop of the Cieszyn lands.”² So begins a letter to regional historian Jan Wantuła (1877–1953).³ Wantuła’s archive – understood simultaneously as a material collection and active practice of collecting and (re)constructing facts and generating meaning – is worthy

¹ In the original Polish, the adjective meaning “bygone” is in dialect: *czasy hańdownie*.

² Letter from J. Zahradnik, 2.12.1931, Biblioteka Narodowa [henceforth: BN] rps IV 7601, vol. VI, c. 71–72.

³ For more on Wantuła’s biography, see: A. Uljasz, *Jan Wantuła (1877–1953). Z polską książką do śląskiego ludu*, [in:] K. Heska-Kwaśniewicz, K. Tatuć (ed.), *Studia i rozprawy bibliologiczne*, Katowice 2012, pp. 142–156; Z. Hierowski, *Jan Wantuła*, [in:] J. Kantyka, W. Zieliński (ed.), *Śląski słownik biograficzny*, vol. 2, Katowice 1979, p. 265–268. It bears mention that in 1935, this folk writer received an award from the Polish Academy of Literature. After the war, he was accepted into the Polish Writers’ Union.

of attention. Wantuła, a landowner and steelworker from Ustroń, was an autodidact and polymath. He amassed an enormous collection of printed matter (comprising approximately 3000 volumes) that included Silesian materials, historical ephemera, and inscribed copies from Prus and Zegadłowicz, among others. The collection has been perused by scholars and writers. In his youth, Wantuła was active in social and national literary life, and later on, he turned his focus to the history of Cieszyn Silesia.⁴ The fruits of his research and countless forays into village huts to find material include many discoveries, such as the oldest known Polish peasant chronicle and the bookplate of Jura Gajdzica. Scholars and editors who knew Wantuła personally have noted the innovative spirit and great merit of his treatises. Each one “bears the stamp of scrupulous academic labor and demonstrates the writer’s complex skills, setting its readers off on a wander into the archives.”⁵

Changing the Paradigm

The interplay between institutional repositories of documents and Wantuła’s papers is fascinating, as what we observe here is a direct transmission recontextualized, redefined, and reevaluated against the elements of historical discourse. We should therefore refrain from assuming this

⁴ “He wrote of local and regional affairs, and with his doggedly acquired knowledge, he was able to discern parallels between the events of Silesia and global affairs. As a result, his brief articles are much more than local curiosities. They betray no naive amazement of one newly discovering the world [...]” – A. Radziszewska, *Jan Wantuła jako pisarz ludowy i społecznik*, [in:] T. Wojak (ed.), *Udział ewangelików śląskich w polskim życiu kulturalnym*, Warsaw 1974, p. 120.

⁵ W. Szewczyk, *Z Janem Wantułą*, “Trybuna Tygodnia” (insert in “Trybuna Robotniczej”) 70/1953, p. 1. Aside from Gajdzica, Wantuła’s other discoveries include the figure of Paweł Oszelda (a doctor and national activist during the Revolutions of 1848) and a transcript of Wacław Adam’s *Porządek kościelny* from 1569 that was long believed lost.

personal archive consists solely of personal materials and sentimental artifacts, for it is also a set of guidelines determining the classification, evaluation, and narration of events.⁶ While the collection (unlike Foucault's archive)⁷ functions on a micro-scale, it demonstrates that even a personal family tree may belong in the orbit of a specific ideology. Sociologist Jan Szczepański – godson of the peasant-bibliophile – has recalled: “I was perhaps in middle school [...] when Unc [dialect for “uncle”]⁸ Wantuła brought me a piece of paper detailing the findings of his extensive research in registries and parish records of several towns. I then found out ‘just where we came from.’”⁹ Investigating one's roots is naturally a way to ground one's identity in order to make such claims as “I come from a family that has lived here in Silesia for centuries.” Nevertheless, this statement is consistent with Wantuła's ongoing narrative as historian. Wantuła took issue with the argument voiced by several Czech historians and intellectuals that local Poles were either “Polonified Moravians” or recent arrivals from Galicia.

If we understand the archive in abstract terms, as an apparatus that lays a framework for the production of knowledge and becomes an instrument of selection and control, then this forager of Ustroń rejects the archive's mandate by complicating the discourse and carving out

⁶ In this article, depending on the context, I will discuss the archive in terms of its Foucauldian definition as well as the archive as an institution tasked with storing documents.

⁷ See: M. Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, trans. A.M. Sheridan-Smith, New York 2010.

⁸ In Polish, *ujec*. For the duration of this text, all notes in brackets are attributed to the author of this article.

⁹ J. Szczepański, *Przodkowie*, [in:] idem, *Korzeniami wrośłem w ziemię*, Ustroń 2013, p. 86.

a space for Polish Evangelical Lutherans. Novelist Jerzy Pilch's ironic take on the status of this religious identity indicates the gravity of Wantuła's intervention: "Being Lutheran in Poland means something subtler than being Jewish in Poland. Jews once lived in Poland and do no longer. We Lutherans, on the other hand, once didn't exist in Poland, and today, continue not to exist."¹⁰ By problematizing the conflation of "the Pole" and "the Catholic" and verifying the canon of national history, Wantuła (author of *Page from the History of the People of Cieszyn Silesia*) broaches the borders of the Foucauldian archive. We could, of course, follow Agamben and argue that all subjectivization is a priori mediated by the apparatus. In this case, there is no way to take possession of the archive – we can only annihilate it.¹¹ Wantuła, however, pulls off a subversive act of consequence: he expands the archive from within. Namely, by representing Evangelical Lutherans as the driving forces behind national consciousness in the Cieszyn region, he effaces the dividing lines that allow one to qualify them as a "foreign" group (for instance, by identifying them with Germans). In so doing, he challenges the system by which we generate statements of identity and community, giving voice to a people condemned to **muteness** by virtue of being cast among "the Germans."¹²

¹⁰ J. Pilch, *Tysiąc spokojnych miast*, London 1997, p. 10.

¹¹ See: J. Tagg, *The Archiving Machine: or, The Camera and the Filing Cabinet*, "Grey Room" 47 (2012), pp. 24-37.

¹² "The enormity of his work can only be grasped if we acknowledge how little had been written about the Evangelical Lutheran past of our nation in Polish" – H. Dominik, *Jan Wantuła (1877–1953)*, "Zwiastun" 18/1985, p. 269. Significantly, Wantuła wrote for mainstream cultural periodicals as well as for other members of his faith (as in the text "Poseł Ewangelicki") in order to raise morale – see: J. Wantuła, *Zasługi księgarzy polskich w dziejach odrodzenia narodowego*, "Silva Rerum" 7/1939, pp. 167–172; idem, *Pamiętnik gazdy Jury Gajdzicy z Cisownicy z początku XIX wieku*, "Zaranie Śląskie" 3/1930, pp. 146–152.

In this light, the private archive becomes a dynamic phenomenon: the process of individually constructing a specific identity narrative and, between the collected documentation and the final mediating representation, defining the tenets of the writer. So, when Morcinek anecdotally portrays Wantuła as bent over some religious manuscript (“from this Gothic mess of letters, he recovers some archaic Polish words and labors to arrange them into something legible”),¹³ what is at stake is not the decryption of illegible content but the construction of a broader narrative on this basis.¹⁴ After all, the forager of Ustroń scouted his records from materials of closed form and – having replenished them with energy¹⁵ and emotion – made them available as the components of an emancipatory narrative for Cieszyn Evangelical Lutherans.¹⁶

This emotional charge is precisely what qualifies these papers as private archive. Wantuła’s attitude is evident in a passage of his letter to literary scholar Tadeusz Mikulski:

“I read Berent’s *Trend (Nurt)* at least 8 [!] times. [...] I was taken with the news of Cieszyn Silesians, prisoners or de-

¹³ G. Morcinek, *Jan Wantuła*, Katowice 1959, p. 45.

¹⁴ “[T]estimony does not run its course with the constitution of archives; it reappears at the end of the epistemological inquiry at the level of the representation of the past through narrative, rhetorical devices, and images.” – P. Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, trans. K. Blamey & D. Pellauer, Chicago & London, 2006, p. 161.

¹⁵ In its colloquial sense, archiving refers to the act of isolating documents from the impact of real circumstances. Its contents are therefore not energy-saturated reminiscences, but memory cleansed of emotion. See: W. Ernst, *Archiwum, przechowywanie, entropia. Tempor(e)alności fotografii*, trans. M. Skotnicka, [in:] *The archive as project...*, p. 67.

¹⁶ For more on the connection between the emancipatory movements of various social groups and collective memory and how this relates to the political problem of building an archive, its contents, and its accessibility, see: J. Tagg, *The Archiving Machine...*, p. 52.

serters from the austr[ian] army who complain of ill treatment on the part of the Legion officers and addressed their grievances to Dąbrowski himself in epistles written (according to Berent) in old Biblical Polish. Well, that's how they spoke, the Cieszyns, whose daily bread and butter was reading the [Protestant] Gdańsk Bible [...] or the Old Polish postils.... Ach, if I only had the energy, I would try to find Dąbrowski's letters."¹⁷ This "pleasure of the text" seems symptomatic: the act of foraging reveals the historiographer's intimate bond with his sources.¹⁸ Here, this bond is imbued with the tenderness of an amateur (in the etymological sense of the word), for Wantuła also focused on knowledge of the local situation and its historical and geopolitical nuances. He therefore regrets that the collection of Priest Londzin (a nationalist activist of Catholic faith) would be cataloged by some newcomer who "was apparently a museum specialist but made no special impression" on Wantuła. He goes on to complain that the newcomer "treats the collection as a craftsman would, bringing no real love to the work – and he doesn't know our past. He has no understanding of Silesian affairs, much less of Polish Evangelical Lutheran ones."¹⁹ This affective approach does not indicate that Wantuła was a methodological dilettante. It does, however, suggest that he did not subscribe to the fallacy of the positivist

¹⁷ Letter to T. Mikulski from 12.17.1952., cited in: *Dzieje jednej przyjaźni*, ed. Z. Mikulska, "Zaranie Śląskie" 2/1971, pp. 378–379.

¹⁸ "This strategic choice [...] is less rational than the dry selection of sources may suggest [...]. The historian need not even deal with shocking [...] documents to become emotionally involved." – T. Wiślicz, *Smak archiwum i zapach krwi. Dwa poziomy badań terenowych historyka*, [in:] B. Wagner, T. Wiślicz (ed.), *Obserwacja uczestnicząca w badaniach historycznych. Zbiór studiów*, Zabrze 2008, pp. 115, 117.

¹⁹ Letter to his son Andrzej from 9.15.1930, family archive, b. sign.

historian²⁰ presumed to be neutral and innocent of all pre-judgments (Gadamer's term). Even more importantly, Wantuła's attitude becomes a tool of resistance mounted against the archive-as-institution and its power to impose templates. Wantuła's approach allows him to smuggle his own idiom into the discourse.²¹ Musing over an award he received from the Regional Board of Culture for a historical text, the bibliophile declared: "Whoever knows me [...] will recognize at once the writer behind these words. [...] Such is the fruit of my long life of poking around, even if I wrote the thing in eight days! I hardly used my notes. I wrote from memory [...]." ²² (*Nota bene*: his tendency to "privatize" information may be worth some scrutiny).

In his next letter, Wantuła offers a more detailed description of the lauded study: "As Pontius Pilate would say: 'what I have written, I have written.' In other words, I wrote according to how I felt and allowed those feelings to determine my argument. I avoided words that too bluntly criticized things as they were. It was not my goal to grasp things as they truly are."²³ This declaration touches on his conflict with the censors – an institution that exemplifies the archive conceived as a regulatory structure ordering the appearance of statements and suppressing those condemned by the regime. In the practice of "writing for the drawer",

²⁰ For an elaboration on these themes, see: E. Domańska, *Historie niekonwencjonalne. Refleksja o przeszłości w nowej humanistyce*, Poznań 2006, pp. 52–78; H. White, *Przeszłość praktyczna*, trans. A. Czarnacka, [in:] idem, *Przeszłość praktyczna*, ed. E. Domańska, Kraków 2014, pp. 50–66.

²¹ For an elaboration on these themes, see: M.P. Markowski, *Efekt inskrypcji. Jacques Derrida i literatura*, Kraków 2003, pp. 200–212.

²² Letter to T. Mikulski from 1.18.1953., cited in: *Dzieje jednej przyjaźni...*, p. 380.

²³ Letter to T. Mikulski from 1.22.1953, cited in: *ibid.*, p. 382.

so characteristic of totalitarian regimes, we can discern the attempt to create alternative private archives; in Wantuła's case, particularly essential was his (anti-) archive organized in the vein of a filing cabinet. "I still have the energy to read and rummage [...]. I have so much material, and I'm going through it bit by bit. I tuck it away in its proper compartments and publish v[ery] little. I cannot write for our moment. The censors suffocate."²⁴ One of his incriminating texts was an article on Father Adam Gdacjusz that "managed to describe the consequences of the Thirty Years' War so brilliantly that the text remains relevant in 1945."²⁵ In this example, older documents offer asylum from the present moment while providing deeper insight into it. For the Bibliophile from Ustroń, the archives necessarily become a private space: "[O]ld metrics can teach us a thing or two [...]. Although we have to read them attentively. This work may be more thrilling than ... reality ..."²⁶

Expanding the Register

Wantuła's historical and archival practice does betray a certain aporia when it comes to his pedantic rigor and special flair for arranging or modifying facts. His particular *idée fixe* comes across in a letter citing an article by regional historian Jan Broda about the residents of a village called Końska. Wantuła claims that the author "got the Buzek family all wrong"²⁷ and then instructs his addressee in detail

²⁴ Letter to Father J. Stonawski from 9.13.1951, cited in: J. Wantuła, *Listy do przyjaciół*, ed. J. Broda, mps, Górki Wielkie 1967, p. 108, Archiwum Muzeum Ustrońskiego, sign. MU/A/25 (JB).

²⁵ Letter to T. Mikulski from 11.23.1949, cited in: *Dzieje jednej przyjaźni...*, p. 344.

²⁶ Letter to Father O. Michejda from 7.26.1950, cited in: J. Wantuła, *Listy do przyjaciół...*, p. 77.

²⁷ Letter to L. Brożek from 1.02.1951, cited in: *ibid.*, p. 87.

(including dates of birth and death) about the family tree. His perceives his own research, on the other hand, as mere contributions, trusting that those who come after him will study the subjects in full, for he himself lacks the **full range** of materials.²⁸ He “expands the archive” on yet another level with his ardent proliferation of excerpts, textual groupings, and open forms. This suggests that Wantuła was deeply concerned over the infinitude of perception and imagination.²⁹ If we think of the list as a melancholic attempt to reconstruct the world in its “entirety” in the face of its disappearance³⁰ (or in this case, under threat of war and the passage of time), then the bibliophile, through his scrupulous cataloging, is creating new material on the basis of fragmentary sources.

When we read Wantuła’s biographical notes on his Ustroń roots, we see how he resembles Benjamin’s chronicler who “narrates events without distinguishing between major and minor ones [and] acts in accord with the following truth: nothing that has ever happened should be regarded as lost to history.”³¹ Yet, if we attempt to account for all moments

²⁸ See: Letter to his son Andrzej from 9.29.1930, family archive, b. sign. These studies reinforce the author’s conscience: “The philological precision and orthodoxy with which the auto-didact worked is astounding [...]. [For years,] he labored to correct errors and oversights in every article, adding comments, decoding pseudonyms, and correcting the data.” – Z. Hierowski, *O Janie Wantule. Wspomnienie*, [in:] J. Wantuła, *Karty z dziejów ludu Śląska Cieszyńskiego*, ed. R. Rybacka, Warsaw 1954, pp. 23–24.

²⁹ See: U. Eco, *The Infinity of Lists*, New York 2009.

³⁰ See: M. Bieńczyk, *Melancholia. O tych, co nigdy nie odnajdą straty*, Warsaw 2000, p. 41.

³¹ W. Benjamin, *On the Concept of History*, trans. H. Zohn, [in:] idem, *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Volume 4, 1938-1940*, Cambridge 2006, p. 390. Our Ustroń forager demonstrates a similar tendency in his historical essays: “There was something more moving in Wantuła’s definition of human mental work. Something of the prudent love of the land proper to the peasant who knows the high costs of cultivating the land and therefore even studies crop failures [...]to appreciate [...] the human labor and good will that went into them.” – D. Kucharska-Zarzycka, *Ostatnie jabłko Jana Wantuły*, “Kalendarz ‘Zwrotu’” 1958, p. 153.

of existence, we are quickly entangled in a dilemma that calls to mind a well-known episode from Gombrowicz's *Diary*, where the author scrambles to rescue beetles on the beach. Because there are so many, Gombrowicz knows that sooner or later, he will have no choice but to abandon his mission. With the mania of the list, Wantuła finds himself at an impasse. This dilemma is illustrated in the essay *From Memory and Experience (Ze wspomnień i przeżyć)*, where the author goes off on tangents of his own contrived logic until the text cuts off mid-sentence. The segregating force of the archive proves to be irreconcilable with the sheer multitude of events and names, all of which are seeds of their own stories. In spite of all this, the peasant-bibliophile labors to honor his mission to accumulate documents and facts. For instance, hearing tell of a certain reference to Paweł Oszelda, he approaches the curator of the Cieszyn museum with the following request: “[S]ince for me, every day might be my last, I wish to know what was written there and if it somehow goes beyond what I wrote.”³² He continues to expand his registry of data and, perhaps driven more by the (inevitable) lack of closure than by fear of death, he refuses to give up: “But I have so many notes, so many outlined thoughts, that I never managed to follow through on!”³³

Significantly, in addition to his library, Wantuła left behind an enormous volume of materials ranging from collector's curios to correspondences with Maria Wysłouchowa, Julian Ochorowicz, Karol Koniński, Stanisław Pigoń, and Witold

³² Letter to L. Brożek from 3.29.1951, cited in: J. Wantuła, *Listy do przyjaciół...*, p. 99.

³³ He expressed such sentiments to many, including the editor of his collected letters. See: R. Rybacka, *Słowo wstępne*, [in:] J. Wantuła, *Karty z dziejów...*, pp. 42–43.

Lutosławski (among others). Upon his death, friends who valued him rushed to demand that the documents be protected. In a letter of condolence to Wantuła's son, Andrzej Wydrzyński expressed his concern that the legacy containing "so much of His life, labors, and care" not be "scattered or fall into the wrong hands."³⁴ These anxieties were not unfounded: "Here and there in the Cieszyn region, you hear various voices inquiring after the great collections of Jan Wantuła. Rumors say the materials have been divvied up or destroyed. Safeguarding what remains is of utmost importance."³⁵ Wantuła's son, who would go on to become Bishop of the Augsburg Evangelical Lutheran Church, did keep a small portion of his father's books in the family home. Some political publications and regional periodicals he donated to the Cieszyn Museum. He incorporated manuscripts and the remaining papers into his own collection in Warsaw, which he later entrusted in full to the Library of the Synodal Church. A close friend of his father marveled at this gesture: "I cannot comprehend how such a great scholar [...] gave away his father's library and a portion of his own without any kind of inventory. Now no one will ever know which books were donated and how many there were in full."³⁶

Around this time, historian Władysław Chojnacki wrote to Jan Broda with the following news: "[S]o pleased to hear that my gift of a small portion of Jan Wantuła's es-

³⁴ Letter from A. Wydrzyński from 8.15.1953, BN rps IV 7601, vol. VI, c. 46.

³⁵ J.S. Polaczek, *Co słycać na Gojach*, "Poglądy" 6/1965, p. 12.

³⁶ J. Piłch, *Dziennik. Zapiski bibliofila i dziejopisa z lat 1963–1995*, ed. K. Szkaradnik, Ustroń 2013, p. 310 (note from 11.8.1978).

tate has brought you joy. It was otherwise meant to be burned. [...] [t]he lion's share of the manuscripts are rough drafts of various speeches [...] and excerpts of articles on patriotism or arguing against alcoholism, and so on. Then there are letters accumulated over half a century – several hundred in total – that I must bring to the National Library, where Bishop Wantuła donated the bulk of his father's letters.”³⁷ Today, it is true that the library's holdings include a collection of letters addressed to the historian, while another portion is kept in his home in Ustroń (in particular, his correspondence with clergymen, although one also finds individual letters corresponding to sets at the National Library).

A Legate's Undertaking

The archive of the Ustroń forager has therefore been dispersed. Aside from his notes on Silesian pastors and teachers, the archive included research on folklore (a lexicon of the regional dialect, so-called “Silesian tales” (*powiarki*), and place names).³⁸ Today, however, there is no way of knowing how and where we might track down this work. Surely, this is not the only material that has been moved since 1976, when Józef Pilch was invited by Wantuła's second son to go through the estate: “The older son, Andrzej, was supposed to do it, but never managed to. [...] I looked through an already diminished pile of materials with little of value (postwar newspaper clippings,

³⁷ Cited in: D. Sieradzka, H. Langer, *Z dziejów książki śląskiej – listy Władysława Chojnackiego do Jana Brody*, “Śląskie Miscellanea” 18/2005, pp. 45–46 (letter from 2.1.1977).

³⁸ See: J. Broda, *Zapiski folklorystyczne Jana Wantuły*, “Poglądy” 24/1977, pp. 7–8.

sheet music for hymns, ledgers of household expenses, and so on). Much of this we recycled. Staś gave me a few brochures, and the rest we tucked away. [...] [In the attic,] I found several yearbooks published by ‘Sociological Review’ [...] ‘Culture and Upbringing,’ and ‘Art’ from 1911-1915 [...]. Looking over it all, it’s hard to say what Wantuła didn’t take an interest in.”³⁹

The diversity of Wantuła’s interests is evident even from the scarce remainders still kept in Ustroń: inedita (like his study of the “Ślązakowski” movement commissioned by the Polish Sociological Institute); “portraits” of Ustroń locals (as recorded in the tales of an old raconteur and diligently annotated by Wantuła); notebooks with inscriptions like “Independent Thought” (betraying Wantuła’s critical attitude toward religion); research on subjects of personal fascination such as astronomy (was he drawn to this by his passion for infinitude?); drafts of lectures on fruit cultivation, authors, and other topics; meeting minutes he transcribed as the secretary of various organizations; a telegram from Władysław Orkan announcing his arrival; publishers’ catalogs; initial ideas for articles, and press clippings The inconveniences of such an archive have been described by Ewa Daszewska in the context of Krystyna Iłakowicz-Daszewska’s estate: “Kika was a good custodian [in the past tense], but when she passed away, she left behind an incredible mess. She tried to hold onto everything. This was her error, and also her great risk. In such a pigsty, it’s easy to lose what should really

³⁹ J. Pilch, *Dziennik...*, p. 267 (entry from 9.12.1976).

be remembered.”⁴⁰ In Wantuła’s case, those bits and pieces judged to be trivial were consigned to oblivion. What we are left with amounts to excerpts, abbreviations, surnames, numbers, and vague keywords only be legible to their author. While the archive, by definition, suspends time, it too is subject to entropy: material entropy (yellowed scraps; faded ink) and an entropy of meaning – meanings the archivist took with him to the grave.

Is this, then, an issue of disorder? Perhaps we can expand Foucault’s conception and claim that the private archive also “determines that all these things said do not accumulate endlessly in an amorphous mass [...], nor do they disappear at the mercy of chance external accidents; but they are grouped together in distinct figures, composed together in accordance with multiple relations, maintained or blurred in accordance with specific regularities [...]”⁴¹ The motifs still visible in his articles, historical essays, letters, and memoirs⁴² indicate that Wantuła’s archive portrays the bibliophile as an idealist and advocate for the people, a learned man of peasant stock, a defender of Evangelist Lutherans, and a free thinker. The archive reveals how he constructed the foundation of his identity. Why dwell on this particular archive? Perhaps only out of the belief that its meaning exceeds the archive itself. As Wantuła’s friend Jan Hempel, another Ustroń local, once noted: “Why do you say you won’t write about personal

⁴⁰ E. Daszewska, *Dada, Iłha, Kika. Listy z komody*, Katowice 2016, p. 32.

⁴¹ M. Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge & The Discourse on Language*, trans. A.M. Sheridan-Smith, New York 1982, p. 129.

⁴² See: K. Szkaradnik, “Przyświecały mi pewne ideały...” *Autokreacyjne strategie i pułapki we wspomnieniach i korespondencji Jana Wantuły*, “Autobiografia” vol. 7 (2017) [forthcoming].

matters anymore? [...] [t]hese life documents are important, and after all, you're so different from the average fellow that your personal affairs quickly accumulate meaning and surpass you as an individual."⁴³ Perhaps this is why the third dimension of "expanding the archive" entails treating Wantuła's archive as one aggregate document and reinterpreting this legate's undertaking as a **preserved** legacy for all who take interest in Cieszyn Silesia. This does, however, beg the question: to what end should we produce additional texts, thereby expanding on what is already a prolific archive? The basis for this practice can be summarized – in the spirit of both Derrida and radical hermeneutics – in the figure of "using one trace to find others," or writing as a way to keep "reading and interpreting [...] the traces of a world, life, existence and tradition, organizing their histories, narrating them and responding to them – or perhaps responding by means of them – by the traces they supply."⁴⁴ In Wantuła's archive, in this fever for foraging, noting down, and listing, the self (however distinct its signature may be) renders a service to salvaged traces and (re)constructed meanings: "Thank God – I still have it in me to read and to forage, and sometimes to write – life passes so quickly. Sometimes I am only missing something I could have learned years ago from older [...] people and today, put to use. There is so much **value** in these things I found out and recorded."⁴⁵ Perhaps this is what is at stake in the pri-

⁴³ Letter from J. Hempel from 9.30.1915, cited in: *Listy Jana Hempla do Jana Wantuły*, ed. W. Stankiewicz, "Rocznik Biblioteki Narodowej" vol. 6 (1970), p. 466.

⁴⁴ A. Zawadzki, *Literatura a myśl słaba*, Kraków 2009, p. 261.

⁴⁵ Letter to Father J. Stonawski from 12.23.1951, cited in: J. Wantuła, *Listy do przyjaciół...*, p. 118.

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vate archive and in the act of writing about the archive as well: to strengthen reverse entropy with the knowledge that as the forces of disintegration take their toll, something will persist. Recorded absence will never become presence, but nor will it succumb to nonexistence.

Translated by Eliza Cushman Rose