



<https://doi.org/10.48417/technolang.2023.02.07>

Research article

Memory Technology in the Philosophy of Nikolai Fedorov

Vera Serkova (✉) 

Peter the Great St. Petersburg Polytechnic University, St. Petersburg, Polytechnicheskaya, 29, 195251,
Russia

henrypoodhel@rambler.ru

Abstract

Nikolai Fedorovich Fedorov is one of the most original interpreters and critics of the direction of technical progress, which he identified with the beginning and development of industrialization. His “Philosophy of the Common Task” is well known. However, the theoretical “substructures” which are not directly related to the theory of the “Common Task” deserve attention in how they strengthen its basis. Thus, his views on cultural memory and the ways of fixing it remain little explored in the philosophical literature. The purpose of the study is to analyze the importance of cultural memory for the formation of the national spirit and connection of generations, and the role assigned to the museum in this process. This research is based on an axiological method, drawing on critical studies of Fedorov's philosophy in Russian and international interpretations of his work. The function of the museum in the processes of preserving the memory of the preceding culture is revealed. The ways of inheriting basic cultural values through the meaningful collection of museums are analyzed. This understanding of the importance of the museum in the life of people is compared with contemporary concepts and discussions around the museum as an institution or a business. The discussion of Boris Groys and Douglas Crimp on the purpose of the museum in contemporary cultural practice is taken as the basis for this.

Keywords: Russian religious philosophy; Nikolai Fedorov; Cultural memory; Museum; Cultural oblivion; Boris Groys; Douglas Crimp

Citation: Serkova, V. (2023). Memory Technology in the Philosophy of Nikolai Fedorov. *Technology and Language*, 4(2), 64-71. <https://doi.org/10.48417/technolang.2023.02.07>



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/)



УДК 1:069

<https://doi.org/10.48417/technolang.2023.02.07>

Научная статья

Технология памяти в философии Николая Федорова

Вера Анатольевна Серкова (✉) 

Санкт-Петербургский политехнический университет Петра Великого, Санкт-Петербург,
Политехническая, 29, 195251, Россия

henrypoodhel@rambler.ru

Аннотация

Николай Федорович Федоров – один из самых оригинальных интерпретаторов и критиков направления технического прогресса, которое он принял с начала индустриализации. Его “Философия общего дела” хорошо известна, однако те теоретические “подструктуры”, которые не имеют прямого отношения к теории “общего дела”, заслуживают внимания, тем не менее они укрепляют ее основу. Таким образом, его взгляды на культурную память и способы ее фиксации остаются малоизученными в российской философской литературе. Цель исследования заключается в анализе важности культурной памяти для формирования национального духа и связи поколений, а также роли, отводимой музеем в этом процессе. Исследование основано на аксиологическом методе при поддержке критических исследований философии Н. Федорова в российской и зарубежной аналитике. Раскрывается функция музея в процессах сохранения памяти о предшествующей культуре. Анализируются способы наследования основных культурных ценностей через содержательное собирание музейных коллекций. Понимание важности музея в жизни народа сравнивается с современными концепциями и дискуссиями вокруг музейного дела. За основу взята дискуссия Бориса Гройса и Дугласа Кримпа о назначении музея в современной культурной практике.

Ключевые слова: Русская религиозная философия; Николай Федоров; Культурная память; Музей; Культурное забвение; Борис Гройс; Дуглас Кримп

Для цитирования: Serkova, V. Memory Technology in the Philosophy of Nikolai Fedorov // Technology and Language. 2023. № 4(2). P. 64-71. <https://doi.org/10.48417/technolang.2023.02.07>



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/)



Nikolai Fedorovich Fedorov is one of the most original Russian thinkers of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Fedorov was perhaps the most irreconcilable critic of the direction of technical progress that modern civilization had taken. Its essence becomes from the end of the 19th century technical progress, slipping out of moral control, the consequence of which is that both science and the society that generates it are transformed into “slaves of industrialization” (Fedorov, 1982, p. 487). This progress becomes a dangerous uncontrollable force, not subject to any considerations, the logic of consumerism and economic gain. It is this, according to Fedorov, that becomes the cause of the self-destruction of culture and the basis of future historical cataclysms. Fedorov believes that it is high time to ask the question about the real usefulness of science: “about science as it is and as it should be” (Fedorov, 1982, p. 489). The concept of “revival of the dead” “resurrection of the fathers” is the basis of Fedorov's philosophical teaching. It was sharply criticized, starting with Nicholai Berdyaev, who saw in Fedorov's main ideas “religious naturalism” (Berdyaev, 1989, pp. 441, 447). Fedorov was seen as a representative of Christian anthropology (*N.F. Fedorov: pro et contra*, 2004, p. 127), orthodox Christianity, and even “a precursor of transhumanism. This extremely difficult question has more than once been a stumbling block in understanding the essence of Nikolai Fedorov's teachings. Valentin Nikitin puts the question like this: “Before assessing Fedorov's doctrine, it is necessary to understand, and this is fundamentally important: does the era of God's Revelation continue in history and human creation, according to the New Testament words ‘The Spirit breathes where it wants’ ” (John 3:8) and “Here I create everything new” (Rev. 21:5)? Or these great words exhausted themselves, the completeness of Revelation has already been given to us and its epilogue was the VII Ecumenical Council?” (Nikitin, 2004, p. 751). Nikitin suggests that Fedorov's Orthodoxy is “Orthodoxy prophetic” (p. 754). O. Masloboeva (2020) sees Fedorov's Orthodoxy in the contexts of practical, near and far, goals of humanity. Fedorov's Orthodoxy has been questioned on more than one occasion: Georgy Florovsky, Vasily Zenkovsky, Vladimir Ilyin, Sergei Bulgakov, and Georgy Fedotov (*N.F. Fedorov: pro et contra*, 2004, p. 753) have evaluated the dogmatic meaning of Fedorov's doctrine. Discussions continue today (Cantarelli, 2018; Fukui, 2021, Masloboeva, 2020, Mjør, 2020). The orthodox basis of N. Fedorov's worldview is the subject of analysis in *The Oxford Handbook of Russian Religious Thought* (Emerson et al., 2020). A remarkable researcher and commentator of Fedorov's works, Svetlana Semyonova analyzes all the “stumbling blocks” on the way to the ideal of the Universal Cause, not being afraid to voice and comprehend with all seriousness and without any reduction those questions that arise from Fedorov's opponents (as cited in Gacheva, 2021, p. 20).

Semyonova has carried out enormous research work, prepared a collection of Fedorov's works for publication, and she and Gacheva have valuable commentaries on Fedorov's works (Gachev, 2022; Gacheva, 2021; Semenova, 2020a; 2020b; 2022). But with few exceptions (Alekseeva & Alekseev, 2018), the side, but extremely important as an essential addition to the basic philosophy of Common Task, Fedorov's ideas about its cultural staples and foundations, in particular the concept of memory developed by him, are not considered.



But the problem of true and worthy application of the achievements of science has another side, connected with history, with the inheritance of the culture of the past, with memory as the basis of any future development.

Fedorov believed that human genius, especially in the sciences, is spent on the destruction of culture. The destructive energy should be redirected to create an authentic, dignified human existence. In Fedorov's work "The Museum, Its Meaning and Purpose" he writes that his contemporary "Iron Age" is marked by a scornful and arrogant attitude towards the "traces of the past," which are seen as "museum dust," "museum garbage," "museum scrap," "rags," while the museum itself looks like the "tomb of things," their "sarcophagus." In this light, the museum becomes a symbol of a collection of unnecessary objects, things that are out of use. Museum values seem to demonstrate their helplessness, inactivity and uselessness, contrasting with utilitarian, "necessary" and "useful" objects. Meanwhile, according to Fedorov, a culture based on a blind theory of progress, without history and memory, is an example of a "chaotic civilization" that has lost its kinship (Fedorov, 1899/1995b, p. 114). This culture cuts off its origins, it is doomed to disappear, and therefore humanity should think about ways to overcome this vice of a civilization built on an unthinking theory of progress (about the consequences for us of such a civilizational "bias" – Shestakova, 2021). The philosophy of memory, in which a huge role is given to the museum, can be a counterbalance to the ill-conceived policy of progress. The metaphor of a museum for Fedorov is an "ark" in which everything that is the past is collected, stored for future life and held as a living present. The museum is the social institution that protects and even brings back to life certain fragments of reality. This applies, above all, to memorial museums, but both art repositories and natural history collections are filled with objects and the memory of events necessary for the historical existence of people and culture. A museum is primarily a preservationist construct. But it is necessary to find heirs and recipients of this memory: when the past is seen from the position of "outdated" and the present is governed exclusively by considerations of benefit, the inheritance becomes problematic.

When utilitarian values completely determine the ontological significance of an object, the internal organic logic of life is violated. If values are grounded, antiquity seems absurd – a transcendental dimension ("eternity") is not possible in culture, and the museum becomes superfluous, an unnecessary luxury. Even man himself, in the dimension of "usefulness" alone, can at some point be written off as a decrepit, worthless creature. From Fedorov's point of view, the constricted currents of spiritual inheritance will not allow the people to remain the same kindred spiritual and natural organism in the future. The people need a soil and blood kinship, they need a foundation, the unity of origin, the commonality of origins, loyalty to historical destiny. These themes were raised by Fedorov in the context of the analysis of the museum as a living hearth of culture: "the transfer of all remains of life to the museum were transferred to a higher authority, to the field of research, in the hands of descendants, one or more generations" (Fedorov, 1899/1995b, p. 372). In a review article on the French Exhibition of 1899 in Moscow, Fedorov writes of the temptations of a foreign culture as "a Pandora's chest" (Fedorov, 1906/1995a, p. 442) This exhibition made a stunning impression on Fedorov with its imposed and totally alien form for Russian worldview: "The French Exhibition



in Moscow is an invitation to a governess or governess for all Russia. In our subjugation to the West, our depersonalization, we cannot go any further” (Fedorov, 1906/1995a, p. 451). The collection of things of this kind, common at the time of Fedorov's life, is reinterpreted by him from the perspective of cultural teleology: a museum is not so much needed for storage, it is not an end in itself, and not even just for research, but for the life of the past in a present living recipient. Nikolai Fedorov develops the ideas of authentic inheritance. A museum, in this light, must live up to its purpose – to be the guardian of the spiritual connection of generations: 1) it should unite science, religion and art; 2) collections should not be a random collection of incompatible objects; 3) science should rebuild and serve life, not destruction and destruction; 4) the museum should become a “cathedral of scientists,” 5) scientists should investigate the reasons for the separation of scientists and non-scientists (Fedorov, 1906/1995a, p. 377).

The different attitude towards the museum is reflected in the contrast of the two symbols of the museum: 1) as a repository for the preservation of historical heritage and antiquity; 2) as a grave, a collection of dead objects, ashes, lifeless, dead, as a graveyard for useless, non-functional, hopeless “martyred” material.

For Fedorov, an even more important mission of the museum opens up: a museum is needed to resurrect everything that has died. Nikolai Fedorovich Fedorov was one of the few Orthodox Christians who truly and seriously embraced the dogma of resurrection from the dead.

Fedorov's religious ideas are the most difficult and controversial point for understanding his philosophy. But without them it makes no sense at all. Fedorov is a religious philosopher; it would be more accurate to say that he is a deeply religious man. He is a Christian who is not a Sunday churchgoer, but subordinates his entire existence to Christian precepts. In his life, this true ascetic of the faith embodied what in Russian culture is commonly called “righteousness.” He was an ascetic in everyday life, hence his maximalism, and the impossibility to exclude from his integral philosophy the idea of the “resurrection of the fathers.” He believed that in the twentieth century, when science became the main form of knowledge realization, it should be questioned in a special way. The Museum offers the possibility of embodying one of the points of the Christian creed – “resurrection from the dead,” that is, the idea of material resurrection, when “all that felt will also be restored, in the resurrected generations all worlds will unite and a boundless field for their union will open, and only it will make internal discord unnecessary and impossible” (Fedorov, 1906/1995a, p. 377-377).

In the light of avant-garde pragmatics, the dispute about “museums and archives” only aggravates with time, and the problem of confrontation between culture and civilization acquires a new meaning. Oswald Spengler's (1918/2021) ideas which Fedorov developed in his own way turn out to be important in assessing the consequences of the utilitarian strategy and complete orientation on technological progress in the cultural self-actualization of the people.

In relation to cultural memory this is a question about the purpose, organization, sources of funding, structure, exposition concept, communication policy and even about the necessity of the very existence of the museum as a cultural institution. Pragmatism and utilitarianism of modern culture, attempts to “desacralize,” “deconstruct,”



“deontologize,” “depoliticize,” in a word, new forms of its separation from the collective basis and collective values, negate the meaning of inheriting cultural codes. Already in the twenty-first century, a debate between Boris Groys (2013) and Douglas Crimp (1995) on the purpose of the museum has emerged as a continuation of the utilitarian “reassessment of values”. This controversy stems from an awareness of the obvious changes that are building up in contemporary art (sometimes it is worth specifying, in what can now be called “art”) in the “postmodern” era. In general, Crimp’s argument boils down to the thesis that such contemporary art (without a claim to uniqueness, without a fixed artistic work, without a creative credo, usually fictitious), does not need to be kept in a special repository. The structure of contemporary art has changed, and with it the traditional exposition policy in contemporary museums has become a thing of the past. Only the old museums are on the defensive, and all this leads to the following, as Anatoly Rykov (2014) accurately (and in full accordance with Fedorov’s worst expectations) expresses the state of contemporary museology: “The concept of ‘museum’ <...> has almost exclusively negative connotations. The museum is associated with the dominant ideology, the political establishment, intellectual corruption, cultural conservatism, totalitarianism, populism, the fetishization of art for commercial purposes, colonialism, and so on” (p. 94).

Groys (2013), while generally sharing Crimp’s fears about the favorable prospects for the museum in the new “post-reality” and criticizing the museum as a place where artifacts are snatched from their related historical and cultural surroundings, still believes that there is no worthy substitute for the museum exhibition as a place for concentrating art objects according to the principle of “originality and authenticity” (p. 41).

A museum is the “keeper” of culture. In a broad historical and cultural context, it is also a collection of qualified specialists – art historians, tour guides, restorers, experts, researchers, curators of museum values. It is a memorial complex of artifacts, selected according to a certain principle, and a place to store this collection. It is also the public, enlightened to the extent of their knowledge, education, taste, ability to see and understand works of art, to keep the memory of the achievements of national and world culture. An enlightened public is also a national treasure. Art, memorial, biographical, historical, archaeological, natural science and technical museums perform extremely important functions of a center of cultural memory and education of contemporaries, transmission of values, connection with the glorious past of the people and humanity (Serkova, 2020).

Nikolai Fedorovich Fedorov was convinced that there is no future for a people’s culture without the past. This idea, which might have been called trivial at the end of the 19th century, has to be defended and justified today. Without it, however, we risk to fall from our century, which Fedorov called “iron,” straight into the Stone Age.

REFERENCES

Alekseeva I. Y. & Alekseev A. P. (2018). *Filosofiiia Istoricheskoi Pamiati*. [Philosophy of Historical Memory]. *Voprosy filosofii*, 10, 67-76.



- <https://doi.org/10.31857/S004287440001152-2>
- Berdyaev, N. A. (1989). *Filosofiya Svobody* [Philosophy of Freedom]. In *Filosofiya Svobody. Smysl Tvorchestva* [The Philosophy of Freedom. The Meaning of Creativity] (pp. 12–250). Pravda.
- Cantarelli A. (2018). Nikolai Fedorov: Russia’s Forgotten Thinker <https://www.russianartandculture.com/>
- Crimp, D. (1995). *On the Museum's Ruins*. The MIT Press.
- Emerson, C., Pattison, G., & Poole Randall, A. (Eds.). (2020). *The Oxford Handbook of Russian Religious Thought*. Oxford University Press.
- Fedorov, N. F. (1982). *Sochineniya* [Compositions]. Mysl.
- Fedorov, N. F. (1995a). Vystavka 1899 goda. [The 1899 exhibition] In *Sobranie sochineniy v 4 tomah* [Collected Works in 4 vol.], (Vol. 2, pp. 442-458). Progress. (Original work published 1906)
- Fedorov, N. F. (1995b). Zametki o Stat'e V. S. Solov'eva “Lermontov” [Notes on Solovyov's Article “Lermontov”]. In *Sobranie sochineniy v 4 tomah* [Collected Works in 4 vol.] (Vol. 2, pp. 80-87). Progress. (Original work published 1899)
- Fukui, Y. (2021). *Liturgical Dynamism in N.F. Fedorov's Philosophy of Kinship*. In D. V. Baranovsky, O. D. Masloboeva & I. A. Safronov (Eds.), *Cosmism and Organism: Evolution and Relevance: Proceedings of the VIII International Scientific Conference* (pp. 114-129). Publishing house of St. Petersburg State University of Economics and Finance.
- Gachev, G. D. (2022). Zhenskii Logos Svetlany Semenovoi [Women's Logos of Svetlana Semenova]. In G. D. Gachev, *Russian Duma: Portraits of Russian Thinkers* (pp. 577-668). Academic Project.
- Gacheva, A. G. (2021). Kniga Svetlany Semenovoi “Tainy Tsarstviia Nebesnogo” kak Filosofskoe Ispovedanie Very [Svetlana Semyonova's book “Secrets of the Kingdom of Heaven” as a Philosophical Confession of Faith]. In D. V. Baranovsky, O. D. Masloboeva & I. A. Safronov (Eds.), *Cosmism and Organism: Evolution and Relevance: Proceedings of the VIII International Scientific Conference* (pp. 13-24). Publishing house of St. Petersburg State University of Economics and Finance.
- Groys, B. (2013). Pochemu Muzei? [Why a Museum?]. *Art magazine*, 8, 39-44.
- Masloboeva, O. D. (2020). Metodologiya Proektivnogo Myshleniya v Uchenii N.F. Fedorova. [Methodology of projective thinking in the teaching of N. F. Fedorov]. *Solovyov's Studies*, 3(67), 48-61.
- Mjør, K. J. (2020). Russkaia Religioznaia Filosofiiia v Sekuliarnyi Vek [Russian Religious Philosophy in a Secular Age]. *Historical and Philosophical Yearbook* 35. 263–282. <https://doi.org/aquilo.2020.41.87.001>
- Nikitin, B. A. (2004). Uchenie N. F. Fedorova i Glavnye Hristianskie Ispovedaniya. [The Teaching of N. F. Fedorov and the Main Christian Confessions]. In *B. N. Fedorov: Pro et Contra* (Vol. 1, pp. 748-776). Publishing house of Russian Christian Institute for the Humanities.
- Rykov, A.V. (2014). Temnaia Storona Muzeia. K Voprosu o Vospriatii Kul'turnoi Institutsii v Sovremennoi Zapadnoi Teorii [The Dark Side of the Museum. On the



- Perception of Cultural Institution in Modern Western theory]. In *Museum and museum professionals: problems of professional education, proceedings of the international conference* (pp. 48-50). The State Hermitage Museum.
- Semenova, S. G. (2022). Pieces of time (Records and fragments of the Diary of the second half of the 1960s – early 1980s). In *Literary dating*, 8, 78-165.
- Semenova, S. G. (2020a). *Creating the future: Philosophy of Russian cosmism*. Noocracy.
- Semenova, S. G. (2020b). *The Foolishness of Preaching. Metaphysics and Poetics of Andrei Platonov*. IMLI-RAN.
- Serkova V. (2020). The Digital Reality: Artistic Choice. *IOP Conference Series: Materials Science and Engineering*, 940(1), 012154. <https://doi.org/10.1088/1757-899X/940/1/012>
- Shestakova, I. (2021). Progressofobiia v Novoi Temporal'nosti Tsifrovogo Mira [Progressophobia in the New Temporality of the Digital World]. *Voprosy filosofii*, 7, 61-71. <https://doi.org/10.21146/0042-8744-2021-7-61-71>
- Spengler, O. (2021). *The Decline of the West*. Arktos Media. (Original work published 1918)

СВЕДЕНИЯ ОБ АВТОРЕ / THE AUTHOR

Вера Анатольевна Серкова
henrypoodhel@rambler.ru
ORCID 0000-0003-4543-0496

Vera Serkova
henrypoodhel@rambler.ru
ORCID 0000-0003-4543-0496

Статья поступила 16 января 2023
одобрена после рецензирования 24 апреля 2023
принята к публикации 11 июня 2023

Received: 16 January 2023
Revised: 24 April 2023
Accepted: 11 June 2023