

## Re Enacting the Self in the Archive

### Maria Manuela Lopes

Dr.

University for the Creative Arts – Farnham, UK  
maria1manuela@clix.pt

### Paulo Bernardino Bastos

Prof.

ID+, Research Institute for Design, Media & Culture,  
Universidade de Aveiro, Portugal  
pbernard@ua.pt

Our paper explores the evolution of the research project and installation work *THE ARCHIVE* of Maria Manuela Lopes in which the author seeks to construct connections between visual art practice and neuroscientific research studies in the field of Alzheimer's disease. In this process the assessment and categorization of Alzheimer's patients and their exposure to various therapies is documented, as well as molecular and cellular research laboratory procedures and laboratory materials are collected. The aim is to explore the representational strategies that each laboratory is producing through art practice and to evoke the nature of autobiographical memory. This paper introduces the overall concept of archiving and its circulation on the design framework in relation to the concepts and production of the installation. The work produced is analyzed in relation to Foucault's theories of clinical manipulation of records and surveillance and strategies - as well as re-creating and critiquing both scientific and artistic processes of archiving and display.

In 2002 Bastos and Lopes produced together an art project, *ROUNDAABOUT*, which depicted the memory of an experienced past, present and secret desires. Personal experience on gaining and losing weight and documentary remains of the experience were brought together in a multimedia installation work comprising videos and photography of medical performance and guidance, as well as daily practice of the reshaping of body, routines and feelings. When aligning that collaborative demanding practice with the experience of Lopes' two pregnancies we realized our attention was turned into the life sciences and the concept of memory and identity collided with medical experiences and scientific representational strategies.

#### The Archive:

Understanding of memory has shifted from a simple store of fixed, retrievable data to a 'personal, subjective concept, permanently under reconstruction' [1] and "a key to our emotional understanding of ourselves and the world"[2]. Archives are integral to the functioning of society

and have therefore attracted considerable attention in the field of art. Archival strategies are a key methodology in our work. The word 'archive' is traditionally understood as a physical collection of data held in a collection, usually associated with text and writing; It evokes images of dusty rooms filled with secrets on mouldering stacks of paper. The notion of archive is underpinned by the relationship of past and present. In *Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault uses the archive as a way to describe the "space of dispersion"; the systems that "establish statements as events"[3]. The archive is neither a virtual memory space nor a safe realm of storage for future use, but the systematisation of a more general ordering structure. Foucault suggests that the decentred structure no longer stores, but generates signification [4].

In the design framework of Lopes' research, her interpretation of archive depends on a complex negotiation of the space and time between people, objects and concepts. Unlike a traditional archivist, who might be concerned with the recovery and perception of presence from an established set of records, Lopes' follows Foucault's suggestion that an archive may become a generator of signification, evoking autobiographical memory. It is regarded as a fluid generation methodology, envisioned as a network of four virtual intertwined archival spaces: 1) The patient; 2) The art studio; 3) The Alzheimer's research laboratory (Dementia Lab); 4) The Cellular and Molecular Research Laboratory.

This departs from the understanding of Berg and Mol that medical and scientific investigation is based on practices of construction, assembly and incorporation of techniques, habits, images and conversations [5]. The enactment of the archive depends on circulation through these real and virtual spaces, physical areas and conceptual domains.

In this circulation, fragments are both produced and collected, disrupting a temporal assumption that links through deferral the part to the whole; the past to the present. Copies of archival fragments of neuroscientific records or direct

records of laboratory and studio sessions relate, to something other than themselves, thus functioning at the level of evocation or memory. Foucault critically studies the role played by the archive in the construction and realization of government [6]. This interaction of archive, writing and the state reveals the importance of visual traces in the construction of identity and collective memory, identifying archival strategies as a method of maintaining control. In the medical arena, the archive is the structure of the process that enables medical practitioners to relate the partial symptom to the totality of the disease, and the path of the absent subject to the present disease. These empirical techniques involve comparing organisms, recollecting normal functions, enumerating frequencies, and post-mortem examination. Engaging with Foucault's understanding of the archive in the medical arena, Lopes is exploring the notion that the archive establishes a suggestive and complex set of relations.

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, according to Sturken and Cartwright, photographs of bodies were catalogued to create archives of 'typical' pathologies for institutions including hospitals, asylums and prisons [7]. Scientific studies of pathologies including criminality, prostitution and hysteria by Francis Galton, Alphonse Bertillon and Jean Martin Charcot involved multimedia fragments such as drawings, live performances and photographic sequences used for visual motion studies. These were supported by the pseudo sciences of physiognomy phrenology and craniology and are therefore less credible today, but are useful in terms of establishing the archive's regulatory system and the institutions' operating categories [8]. They further constitute a visual theme in a scientific discourse that encompassed multiple strategies and disciplines (anthropology, anthropometry, photography, medicine, optical precision, statistics and refined physiognomic atlases) to establish the subjective bodies as objectified subjects of study [9]. Focusing on witnessed procedures such as repeated sounds and gestures that qualify the neuroscientific discourse on memory and 'representational strategies' Lopes is assembling a parallel set of fragments to record the multimodal network that is hidden from public view [10]. Her archive's heterogeneous form of capturing lived events mimics the multimodal system of autobiographical memory and resembles the 19<sup>th</sup>-century studies cited by Sturken and Cartwright.

Alzheimer's disease continues to threaten public consciousness because of its effects of effacing memory, self-stories and self-sufficiency. Despite advances in scientific research, medical diagnostics and treatment approaches, there is still no cure. In the public domain, representational strategies for visualizing Alzheimer's disease are uncommon. Within neurological discourse and practice,

attempts are made to understand the phenomenon by observation, visualization, measuring and archiving methods. These ascribe meanings that are confined to specific areas of knowledge and therefore correspond to standard ways of understanding. These models of knowing are inaccessible to those outside the specific biomedical field and are thus unable to evoke the subject of memory and fail to reflect the agony of being lost in oneself.

Cultural representations of Alzheimer's disease usually appeal to the idea of the perfect model of care in the family or nursing home. These images are charged with emotion, compelling us to reflect on our own mortality and ethical values. Images in the medical arena, however, usually show the disease in terms of imaging technologies, invariably in fragments such as analyses of cells, brains, spinal fluid or blood. The patient is thus located in terms of the disease, stripped of identity and objectified. In recording laboratory data or copying MRI scans, ECGs or microscopy images Lopes is using appropriating and re-contextualizing images as a familiar methodological tool. Alzheimer's disease produces few tangible signs and is mainly revealed by the debilitating effects it produces, such as disorientation, inability to read or – in its latter stages – to control the simplest physiological needs. As a consequence, probably more than in other health condition, the need to equate seeing with understanding reinforces the reproduction of brain images. These fragments hold the promise that an invisible problem of the mind may be translated into a present record of it in the patient's brain.

This is Foucault's turn to the medical gaze described in *The Birth of the Clinic* [11]. This gaze allows the passage from small-scale practice to an archival kind of functioning, substituting body presence for large manipulation of coded records permanently present. This 'approval' of the instrumental image as a provider of access to invisible truths is linked to the growth of institutional regulation and categorization or archiving [12]. This allows the clinical gaze to extend from the individual body to the wider population, subsidizing a stronger weaving of technology, culture, medicine and society.

Specialist modes of knowing and rules of representing and constructing the archive are necessary for the scientific process. Lopes' appropriation and artistic deployment therefore aims to reframe and disrupt their systematic visual order, re-constructing by juxtaposition and montage the idea of a complex self-body equating the constructed nature of memory. For Foucault the patient is a 'construct' of medical science and medicine is understood as a practice that invests politically in the body through the gaze [13]. The establishment of a system of presences and absences was one of Foucault's aims, and implied

knowledge of where and how to locate individuals and to set up useful communications. 'Disciplinary spaces emerge from the division of space into as many sections as there are bodies or elements to be distributed' [14]; thus rendering possible the supervisory role undertaking a classifying and surveillant gaze [15]

#### The Archive – Installation work:

The Archive is not a unitary installation work that can be reproduced in different contexts; it rather consists of multiple evolving works/exhibitions presented in different locations. These were:

A Natural History Museum, Cabinet d'Amateur exhibition, July – Oct 2010.

Work title: *Do Not Allow Me to Forget About Me*.

B The Knowledge: Pavilion, CorpoImagem, February – March 2011

Work title: *Drawing the Invisible*.

C James Hockey Gallery, UCA Farnham, Concept & Context in Practice, March 16 – 26, 2011

Work title: *Lost Words: Retracing*.

D Institute of Molecular Medicine (IMM) March 18 – 25, 2011

Work title: *Enactment/Re-enactment of the Archive*.

Each venue provides access to different audiences using strategic modes of addressing.

Work A: *Do Not Allow Me to Forget About Me*.

This installation, presented in the context of a group show, comprised a short video (remember – knowing – being) and some personal objects placed on the exhibition room floor, covered in talcum powder. Beneath a closed window, a yellow sticker bears the hand-written phrase *não me deixes esquecer de mim* (do not allow me to forget about me). The video represented an attempt to provoke viewers to testing their own memory functions. It comprised a sequence of numbers spoken aloud, with intervals during which the viewer is expected to silently reproduce them. Superimpositions of neuropsychological assessment sessions and Lopes self-assessment studio sessions are viewed using subtracting filters so these two moments meld into a new possible reality.

Work B: *Drawing the Invisible*.

This fragment of the archive, viewed in the context of image in art and science, comprises three video drawings formed from manipulated laboratory images (i.e. microscopic sequences and MRI scan). The images are edited to invert their original greyish contrast and are transformed into an apparent black and white drawing. Their original timeframe is slowed to a rhythm that allows the viewer to conceive their biological and technical modulation as something that results from the act

of bringing them to existence through drawing or metaphorically remembering.

Work C: *Lost Words: Retracing*.

Fig. 1. *THE ARCHIVE I, Lost Words: re-tracings*, 2010, Maria Manuela Lopes, video still, copyright Maria Manuela Lopes (Used with permission)

This comprises two video works presented on two screens placed side-by-side; a choice of viewing is implied. The images show Lopes, retracing projected sentences written by Alzheimer's patients during assessment sessions onto a blackboard. These 'lost words' are fragments of the medical record, revealing the loss of the cognitive capacity to articulate writing as the disease progresses. They simultaneously evoke a sense of lost and last words, as from session to session patients' ability to understanding the meaning of sentences and their ability to execute the task of writing diminish. The first film shows Lopes mimicking their actions of retracing their words in a parallel exercise of memory. She must remember the position of the projected line when her body obscures the projected light. The second film presents images of laboratory apparatus and performances, as well as a slow video scan of Lopes naked body horizontal on the studio floor, as though in a MRI scanning tube. The soundtrack mixes sounds of chalk on a blackboard, her hand erasing the written sentences and also sounds of an actual MRI session undergone by a patient.

Work D: *Enactment/Re-enactment of the Archive*

Fig. 2. *THE ARCHIVE I, Enactment/Re-enactment of the Archive*, 2011, Maria Manuela Lopes, performance work documentation, copyright Maria Manuela Lopes (Used with permission)

Following mimicking, re-enactment and displacing strategies Lopes' constructed (using materials provided by the laboratories, the patient and the studio), four interconnected spaces on the ground floor of the building in which both laboratories physically exist. The patient space was filled by a table, chair and monitor exhibiting a video made from patients' drawings, as a way of implying a presence thought the fragmentary result of a previous action, as happens with the medical record data. The studio space was constructed from materials brought from Lopes' own studio (board, tripods, lamp, sketchbook, ink, pencils, brushes, video camera or plaster casts). The ground floor of the building became a studio for the week, and all regular and casual visitors to the space, were potential witnesses and participants. The other two tables were constructed from materials (laboratory books, Petrie dishes, texts, test-tubes, pipettes, flasks, films, MRI scans) gathered from the physical laboratories that

constitute Lopes' archival spaces. The work incorporated the evolution of the selection of space for placing objects, their placement and organization, self-assessment and drawing sessions, editing the video of the patients drawings, the recording of the evolution of the installation and all the events that surrounded the action.

#### Reflection on THE ARCHIVE

Part of Lopes reflection on the archive or its construction, and the possibility of circulating between investigative dimensions, relies on the possible consequences of her project. It may provoke valuable social engagement within the process of production by inviting patients to take a leading role in hospital recordings and by the re-enactment of the archive and public presentation, if the results of the medical/scientific output and studio production are seen simultaneously.

The enactment of the archive, through self-assessment sessions and collecting copies of material produced by and with the patients also provides numerous memory traces. These, by being reproduced and connected (re-enacted) in a non-sequential or fixed way create various divergent and possibly contradictory narratives.

Of interest to this investigation are the oppositional relationships between body and fragment, presence and absence in the scientific archive and indexical artistic mediums. Casting, drawing, photography and video combines that which is present with that which is not, the residue that forms as a memory in the viewer's mind. In this multiform installation, Lopes explores the disjunction between the fragment and the whole by using a structure in which disparate meanings are simultaneously possible. The different values attributed to the fragments of scientific research in the studio or exhibition context, or in the quasi-original context of the recordings or performance, coexist in no hierarchical order in the heterogeneous space created by the works. When all four installations are taken as part of the larger piece THE ARCHIVE, the viewer is aware of an intrinsic aspect of the research: the 'epistemic space of visibility' constituted by an archive, as well as the emphasis on the experience of artist as witness [16].

The work evolved from a transposition of critical strategies from ethnographic documentary film and photography to a sculptural and live performative field. Through this extended action Lopes is weaving a story – that of the representational strategies of Alzheimer's disease research – by presenting documentation and editing as interpretation. This refers directly to autobiographical memory as 'personal interpretation rather than truthful record' [17].

Despite the emotional tension raised by immersion in the 'patient's space' the installation aims to acknowledge the implicit regulatory power of the representational strategies, emphasizing certain parts and erasing or effacing others. As implied by Foucault in the panopticon aesthetic and the ethical regime of visibility, encountering the image of someone's brain or other diagnostic objects sets up feelings of uncertainty and ambiguity. These feelings are codified in practices that disguise the power operating in and through them.

The display of objects from the laboratories used in various ways in the studio emphasises visual spatial order, and refer directly to the workings of autobiographical memory, and thus resemble mnemonic traces of a lived experience. The actions of mimicking and staging live performance and enacting/re-enacting the archive set up a rhythm with an experienced and relational nature that is comparable to the nature of episodic memory.

FCT grant SFRH/BD/37721/2007 support Hospital Santa Maria and Institute of Molecular Medicine, Lisbon

[1] Harold Rosen, *Speaking from Memory: The Study of Autobiographical Discourse*. (Staffordshire: Trentham Books, 1998).

Belina Nunes, "Nota Prévia – Explicar a Memória", in *Memória: Funcionamento, Perturbações e Treino*, ed. Belina Nunes (Lisboa:Lidel, 2008), xvii-xxiv.

[2] Joan Gibbons, *Contemporary Art and Memory: Images of Recollection and Remembrance*, (London: I.B.Tauris & Co Ltd., 2007), 4.

[3],[4],[6], [16] Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*,(London: Routledge,1997),128-129.

[5] Marc Berg & Annemarie Mol (ed). *Differences in Medicine: Unravelling Practices, Techniques and Bodies*, (USA: Duke University Press, 1998), 3.

[7], [8], [9], [12], Marita Sturken, & Lisa Cartwright, *Practices of Looking: an Introduction to Visual Culture*. 2nd edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press ,2002), 281-285.

[10] Michael Lynch, and Steve Woolgar, "Introduction: Sociological Orientations to Representational Practice in Science", *Human Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 2/3, *Representation in Scientific Practice* (Apr. - Jul., 1988), pp.99-116 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20009022> (accessed January 05,2010).

[11], [13] Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic: Archaeology of Medical Perception*, (Taylor & Francis, e-Library, 2003).

[14], [15], M. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, (Second Vintage Books Edition, New York: Vintage, 1995), 143 + 25-26.

[17] Daniel L. Schacter, *The Seven Sins of Memory: How the Mind Forgets and Remembers*, (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2001), xx.