

## The archive as an auratic space of images of insanity

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**Abstract:** In this article we seek to problematize the role of the archivist in the cataloging of creative works produced by the Creativity Atelier at the São Pedro Psychiatric Hospital in Porto Alegre, RS, Brazil. Within this undertaking, we deem it possible to conduct an exercise in the dismantling of a territory instituted on an ethical decision sustained by a mode of narration and analysis of creations produced by individuals relegated to the margins of society, namely those who are institutionalized for lengthy periods of time in a psychiatric hospital. In this sense, our intent goes against the grain of hegemonic pathologizing discourses in order to produce other propositions about the mentally ill and their discordant languages. As cartographers of memory and oblivion, the archivists of the Creativity Atelier invest themselves in experimenting with new sensibilities in their encounter with auratic images. As the number of studies grows every day, the archivists affirm the fragmentary nature of memory and the characteristic incompleteness of the continuous consignment to an interminable archive.

**Keywords:** archive, memory, insanity, image.

### The territory

When facing the São Pedro Psychiatric Hospital (HPSP), we stand before a testimony to the history of mental health in the Brazilian state of Rio Grande do Sul. Whether because of the centennial building, or the lives that are entangled in it, its histories and works, we come across a huge collection of documents that invite our interest to know. These documents are impregnated with criticism regarding the psychiatric procedures that institutionalized and marginalized the lives of infamous people afflicted by insanity. It is thanks to the scope of the Creativity Atelier Collection, installed there since 1990, that we have the opportunity to peruse the numerous works painted in bizarre and out-of-tune languages. These, totaling more than 100,000, attest to us that, despite their insanity, the subjects emit voices of resistance to their silencing, keeping alive their expressive voice and narrative through the production of images.

Composing and deriving from the activities of the Atelier, since 2001 it has constituted the Collection, which brings together the academic, professional, technical and community field in order to save, organize, catalog and disseminate expressive works produced by the patients. Such tasks are developed by a solidarity network that integrates teachers, researchers, undergraduate and graduate students, trainees and volunteers, as well as HPSP staff members. Using this network, we created a way of working that is marked by interinstitutional

and interdisciplinary characteristics, which result in the continuous production of training in research, teaching and extension.

We started to call as the HPSP Collection of Memory of Insanity the territory of these important archives, giving it a patrimonial approach, running and rethinking conservation and storage care to avoid the threat of their extinction. Thus, stacked and kept, more than 100,000 works, wrapped in brown paper, arranged in packages that are regularly composed and aligned, look at us and await us as if inviting us to grasp and open them, so that they will surprise us with what they still contain of the voices and gestures of these silenced and cloistered lives. Therefore, in the search for silences and the remains of infamous lives submitted to the regime of long-term institutionalization, we can, while ordering the Archive collections, stir up the forgotten matters.

The process of cataloging these works thusly leads us beyond museological and conservation actions, leading us to perceive them as a matter of creation and resistance, that is, as traces of psychiatric activity in bodies that appear inert to time and space. The assembly of these archives not only provides the necessary conditions to produce a reference center for studies regarding the relationship between art, insanity and society, but also creates a space to welcome life histories that has been forgotten in an asylum called São Pedro.

The archive and the testimony, in this case, provide evidence of another memory and another history of insanity in the State of Rio Grande do Sul, and our insertion in such an empirical field of research allows

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us to undertake, through these images, a crossing that allows for legibilities and other visibilities to be placed against the representations that establish the insane in a fixed, immutable and negative identity. Historicization by evocation of what has been forgotten, by the traces left by those who were once touched by the light of the psychiatric and legal powers that removed them from anonymity to make them forever infamous, to use Foucault's expression (2003).

The process of cataloging the works of the Creativity Atelier advances and provides conditions to trace another history of insanity, now told in the first person, assuming the testimonial content of those who have suffered their own history as trauma and alienation. Above and beyond the cataloging and assembly of an archive, our research proposes to practice this testimony as an active position to make it possible to produce another about insanity. Contrasting with the various medical charts that hover over the lives of these subjects, the expressive works constitute varied narratives, proper to each one's style, operating as an encrypted language that offers itself to the translation of archivists-researchers.

This is why we find ourselves faced with the need to question such an archive that has been happening in the spaces of the Creativity Atelier, betting, with Barros and Passos (2009), on a disassembly exercise of such territory from an ethical choice on a certain way of narrating it. Not intending to be totalizing, such experimentation carries with it the power of a confrontation with the official archives of knowledge about insanity, as its evil or ruin, to use one of Derrida's term (2001), because, now, it is about putting other experiential and subjective elements in play which, even without the quality of completeness, being impartial, and perhaps faltering, nevertheless become a gesture whose historical and clinical function corresponds to facing the infamy of insanity as existential and historical trauma.

### **Clinical power of the memories of insanity**

We can say that the interest of our research is plural: from a point of view of the insane-artists-subjects, we want to make known that which resists the suffocation of its vital forces; from a point of view of the accumulation of works produced by them and which are piled up day-by-day in the Archive, we want to refer to it as a sort of archive of social memory, that is, as a memory that speaks of the infamous lives rather than isolated individuals, people that came from the poor and uneducated layers and found themselves trapped by the meshes of a "psychologizing" knowledge-power that exiled and secluded them in the name of sanitizing the city.

By bringing together the pluralization of our intentions, we converge on a research process that points us to the clinical power of the memories of insanity, considering every procedure that produces criticism, crisis and deviation from traditional representations as clinical,

thereby opening up possibilities for a new sociability in living with the difference, as well as new modalities of attention to mental health.

Currently, three collections have already been cataloged in the Creativity Atelier Collection, which were especially chosen for their aesthetic potential. At this moment, we continue cataloging artist Natalia Leite, who is one of the few patients who still resides in the psychiatric hospital, being an assiduous attendant of the Atelier. Natalia has a very significant expressive production: more than 6,000 works of the artist have now been cataloged to date, covering the period from 1990 to 2007. It is estimated that there are still more than 5,000 works to be organized and cataloged, as Natalia keeps regularly producing them in the Atelier, each day enlarging her archive and the work of the group of archivists.

To catalog and not to forget: it is by this proposition that our archival and reflexive practice is developed; however, it is important to emphasize that when we speak of this need to not forget, we are not referring to a desire to keep everything, we are not maintaining a resentful attachment to the past. We understand, with Benjamin (1994), that "the past can only be captured as an image that flares irreversibly at the moment of its cognizance" (p. 243), that is, to articulate the past historically does not mean to know it as it was indeed, but to appropriate a memory at the time it came into being, i.e., always in the now, *kairos* time, the source of every and any origin.

We affirm, instead of an attachment to the past, that this is an historical construction of our own present, pointing to other clinical and social practices that may indicate points of anchorage, within the social, for all those made hapless by mental suffering, those who are bearers of the radical difference that opposes the modern principles of the ability to promise and pay their social debts, to let themselves be tamed by the patterns of production that govern social ordering. Here we talk about men and women of difference, whose lives have faced obstacles to their citizenship and acceptance in the world for centuries. We speak of subjects of difference that break the frontiers of normalized thinking because of their irreversible schizoid and schizophrenic functioning. We also speak of tiny, infamous and miserable lives whose record could otherwise only be found in the laconic medical records of the "psychopathologizing" and normalizing polices and sciences, but who, by leaving their marks in the Atelier inside the old psychiatric hospital, despite the obstacles to their expression, are no longer reduced to silence, but rather become the producers of self-expressions that can fascinate and displace our gaze. It is from this standing of the archivist before the works, from a certain displacement of the gaze produced in such encounter, that we launch the possibility of problematizing the relationship of the archivists with the territory that they inhabit and with such endless archive, emphasizing the importance of opening up to the experimentation of new sensibilities, to the crossing

of the forces that inhabit the archive and to other ways of narrating, taking here the movements of cartography as a conceptual and methodological contribution.

## Cartographies

There are things in the old madhouse that have never changed, and there are also things that have and do change, such as the grass that grows, covering the way and making it possible to remake every step. The zigzag path that leads to the imposing centennial building begins with the obligatory passage that anyone who enters or leaves must take. It is possible to follow the angles of the concrete sidewalk in a disciplined way, or else take a chance on the path that cuts through the grass traversed by the trail of many feet, highlighting the memory path of other pathways, where the curve was perhaps milder. On this path, which allows us to face the immense building, we ask ourselves: are what resists here the walls or the life that is born in the moss, in the weed and in the unexpected tree in the middle of the cement, those which at the same time in which they consume the building, do they also take it as home?

On the thick walls that seem to have been made to last forever, small cracks sigh, opening the way to things that create life on the spot. But there is something beyond moss, plant, and infiltration cracking the immortal walls of São Pedro, there is something that comes to life in the whispering movement of our steps, in the wandering between the stairs and the corridors, in our little routines of changing the place of everything, rearranging the temporal and spatial logic that imposes itself on the immense archive in an unsuccessful attempt to organize it.

The silence of the archive screams a long process, personified with the years that followed in the events produced with paint, paper and people. On top of each folder, the name of the author, the date of their work, and underneath this information the testimonies of their lives. We note that a certain order was established on each shelf, but before we unveil it, we ask ourselves: what are we looking for? The ignorance of not knowing what is hidden inside each envelope transfers us to a state of suspension in terms of what looks at us: the folder-envelopes are arranged as in a game between a smooth space and a striated space. The latter corresponds to the art galleries and shelves, namely the stacks of paper envelopes. The striations are the keys on the doors, the chronological order of the museological organization, the moorings that remain of the asylum. The smooth is sea, they are waves that connect the whole structure in fluidity. It is the content of the work, the intensity with which the archivists are touched before their daily life. Smooth is also the subversion of the office workers as they transform the Creativity Atelier into a space of coexistence – it is smooth to allow us to be affected. From what Deleuze and Guattari (1997) point out, when referring to the rules of the Go game, in which the field is made with each position in the

territory, between the smooth and the striated, we think that the cataloging process also paradoxically enters in a field of dispute and composition, alternating the pieces of the board while seeking strategies of political-ethical-aesthetic occupation of the territory.

As a living archive, the folders invite us to reshape them, to see what is inside them, to understand the reasons why they are there, and change their places. This uninterested wandering, without a path that has already been mapped by the methodologies in the hunting of its enlightened objects, opens us to a sensitive method of perception of our *desterritory*. The intensity of the archivist's production always occurs at the molecular level of these glances-events, inviting us to what is unnoticed by the ordinary, light and passing look. From the numerous rooms and corners, in endless hiding places that the light of the big windows does not reach, new clues constantly emerge that rearrange the memories and also our way of archiving them. With each work that comes up unexpectedly, a time changes, a letter, a March that comes after September, a 23 that follows a 42, an old man who is born after a boy.

The works produced in the Atelier speak of the lives of the outside, they are translated in their expressions, they impose obstacles to their deciphering, pushing back those with an easy and hurried inclination to seek definitive explanations. In such a Collection, each case becomes a maze of possibilities, and all of the cases, entwined, they appear as a kind of Babel that is very analogous to the irreconcilable sympathies between men and their differences. The infinity of the Library of Babel, described by Borges (1970) in a short story, approximates here the exhaustive work of cataloging that makes up the Collection as a possibility of an unarchivable archive.

The chaos of signs, as in Borges's imaginary library, eludes the attempt to classify; it puts the archivist in a process that, at the same time as it gathers and selects fragments, excludes other possibilities of future promises. The number of language possibilities that are available in this Babel mixes with the works that dance and express themselves on the shelves: "it is time to shout," it may be said; however, with shouts of infinite dialects, the allegory of imaginary possibilities awaits, in an almost timeless moment, to pass through the hands of the archivists, to be, finally, translated into Braille, with its unknowable signs that do not offer themselves to the perception to be interpreted, but rather to produce deviations, increasing the feeling of eternal incompleteness and constant movement of the consigned archive.

We recognize that the archive implies a direct relationship with memory due to forgetting itself: the very volatile status of memories and the inability to capture them in a box or drawer bring the need for the archive. From this process, paradoxically, there arises what Derrida (2001) conceptualizes as the archival evil, in which the archon that constitutes, guards and commands the archive, accepts and affirms its insufficiency of keeping



everything, since, at the same time he selects and excludes, he produces a saying and an unsaid of the present about the past, a kind of consignment that, unlike what we can think at first, is not turned to the past, but to the future, since it never closes.

Derrida (2001) thus brings the archive as a promise, extolling the archivist as one who, writing to remember, also writes to be able to forget, so that the archives are opened by others and for others in the material durability of virtual possibilities. It is thusly understood that the archive is not a memory of the past, since it no longer exists in the condition of the first instance, as a supposed original to be guarded. On the contrary, the archive points to another direction in the arrow of time, there remains only an experience of the future, since we keep the one who promises to an existence one's duration in time and, consequently, a possible, a future to come. As new archivists, to use Deleuze's term (1988) in referring to Foucault's archaeological work, we bring works and pieces of life from infamy to the virtuality of possibilities, so that they can be opened by other hands and felt by other bodies.

Words, in this sense, never manifest in a single truth, but rather contain relationships of contradiction, of particle flow, articulation, aesthetics, memories and prominent durations of an experience, and it is in this inability to be a single truth that many stories can be told. In this way, no origin will be preserved, except the very difference of the event, enunciating discourses inside out, dismembered of its materiality, going through sensitive cartographies of affections, within the very power of the dialectic of the archive.

### **The archivist as an agent of institutive propositions**

The work in the Acervo is not a purely mechanical practice, since it involves the development of the archive by observing each work and with the implication in the continuity of the production. With this proper articulation of the archivist craft, the cataloging stage opens up to another one, one which gives legibility to what the eyes see and what the hands touch. The sensitive materiality needs to be rendered immaterial; images need to be revealed in language, in visibilities and legibilities, procedures that imply a search not for purposes of evidence, but for the details, the trivialities, and the remains that lie silently in the plane of each work. Excavating the surface to allow us to see and read what was made to kindle in each work.

In Didi-Huberman (2013a), we find that even such choices are dangerous, as there is, on the one hand, the danger of contemporary logocentrism and, on the other hand, "an empty totalitarianism in which the past would act as an absolute master. Between the two, there is the salutary practice: to dialectize" (page 51). For the author, faced with the image, "we certainly have access to the subtleties of a time in which we strive to understand through its own intelligibility" (p. 51), but it would still

be necessary to know how to break the ring if we want to understand intelligibility itself. And this is only achieved at the price of a distanced look that floats in the knowledge of the present and makes it fertile.

It is still with Didi-Huberman (2010) that we understand what can be defined as taking a stand, an attitude that occurs in a critical and political dimension, when an artist or researcher, or, in our reading, the archivist, chooses the images and places them in a position that creates what the author calls an effect of readability. From every ordinary procedure of cataloging, from the making of small choices, to the way we decide to see the archive and speak of it, not only are statements made about insanity, the insanes and their art, but others are also affirmed about the very notion of archive and memory. Just as Didi-Huberman (2013b) rips the birch bark from the former Nazi concentration camps into living memories that escape the materiality of wood when they cross their experience, we pull accumulated objects out from a regime of knowledge and assemble them somewhere else, in other arrangements of images, so that new statements can thus fulgurate.

We can say that the daily life of the old madhouse has changed with the Atelier, and it changes now, with the gestures of archivists who may disrupt the established truths of the statements, diverting the macro-cuts and promoting micro-tearings. Thus, the work of archivists in the Creativity Atelier Collection introduces new visibilities and new fields of readability about the madman, madness, madhouse, hospital order, and control. In the act of registering each work, through their cataloging record on its back, the product status shifts from therapeutic to expressive-work, with the notion of authorship also shifting from crazy user to artist. However, this change of status does not visibly transform the condition of what and whom is talked about, but it produces intangible transformations, it attributes, it makes up in the significance chains the preposition "and" instead of "or", causing the deviation of the only and Utopian truth towards indeterminacy, which in its heterogeneity allows the emergence of other discourses.

The role of this new archivist does not stand here as that of a chronological historian, but as that of a hunter of possible statements sunk in time. These, as Foucault (2007) and Deleuze (1988) understand, are not what is in the meaning (words) or signifier (things), but what takes the enunciation as transversal, in a chain of relationships superimposed with other signs/signifiers. That is why there is always a production, an enunciation being made by the insightful search of each drawing, of each writing that we weave, inferring micropolitically in these various axioms that subjectivize us, as if what were previously remains were now transformed into insistence, from will into power.

What this new archivist does is transform the archive into pure language, intangible heritage, because it is about a work with social memory through images. It is

situated, in this way, in a space that carries a becoming. The great archive has a territory inviting to be known as a latent event, which needs to be mapped and is unveiled by the paths of the archivist at the threshold of the experiences that the archive enables to territorialize. The archive itself is a space, a sign, which gathers and organizes the past, updating its life span into the present. Its materiality is the strength of the event, whose foundations are established in an organization of chronological order, a measurement of the documents and so many other functions that transform the striae of the material. The archive is not static, its food is the movement of the archivists and its predator is time (fungi, moths, rain, lightness and oblivion).

It is in this way that the production of archives is not done mechanically at all, since it does not refer only to the empirical plane of the collected materials, but rather it consists of an experience of openness, where the tracks, remains and faults invite us to a cartography of memory and oblivion. The production of a file turns the daily life into an event when it constitutes a discontinuity in the course of history. Opening the archive corresponds, therefore, to injecting violence into daily life and into thought, constituting itself as an eventful act that desecrates the statements that marked the lives of these infamous men and women.

Thus, the work of the archivists in the Collection is performed with the assumptions of cartography as a knowledge production strategy. This is a kind of “de-archiving” that presents itself as a mapping of fragmentary passages, not as an attempt to recover a total past. Relinquishing the attempt at classification turns out to be necessary in the endless desert of works, escaping from what is given, what is visible, de-archiving to, and also, to be relocated, at the same time different in front of the same work that is no longer the same. From this perspective, before expressive works, for the second, third or fourth time, for thousands of times, the archivist observes the branching of statements that confer unusual and numerous places to their authors. They are positions that derive from the statement itself, because, for example, before Natalia’s works, what the archivist looks at is no longer translated as what he sees as sensitive evidence, i.e., the figurative plane of perception. Now it is the aura that surrounds the whole and guides the interest and commitment to showing, imagining and rediscovering.

## **Between history and living memory**

Facing the territory that is created from the Creativity Atelier Collection, some issues arise as problematic of this space as archive, accumulation of objects, collections of works, embroideries and canvases. Pierre Nora (1993), in conceptualizing what he calls Places of Memory, tells us of the necessity of recording and preserving the totality of what we do not want to forget, of archiving images and objects as a current symptom of our time. From the daily records of each fleeting second of personal lives to

collections in large museums and other spaces, in which several ways of apprehending a time that inevitably escapes are created. For the security of history and for the insecurity of what is lost over time, we constitute these places of memory; however, what are the effects of this practice?

Nora (1993) states that if memory itself were experienced in the possibility of its recall, in other words, accepting that what happened cannot be stored exactly as it was, it would not be necessary to construct such places of memory and, possibly, we would be dealing with memory as a living matter of a transmission. In dealing with these places of memory and their objects, we are always dealing with the remains of a story, with the gaps and ashes of what is left, and it is in this lack that Nora presents us with an antidote to the compulsion to build these places and the need to live with the memory above and beyond the material that is stored, to reinvent it, to recall it.

We live, in fact, within history, not true memory, for where there is trace, mediation and distance from the places and objects of a past, we are no longer dealing with living memory, but with a history told. So what is the point of keeping everything if everything is an illusion of the totality of the past? Faced with this problem from our field, we ask ourselves some questions: how do we inhabit the places of memory? How do we make memory alive, and not just archive it in order to forget it? What is the role of a Collection of expressive image works produced by madmen, in the enclosure of a Psychiatric Hospital, regarding the preservation of memory? Is it a struggle against oblivion?

In Nora’s (1993) opposition between memory and history, we are offered possibilities of how to look at our archive, and how our archival practice is operating in this territory and with these objects from a past. What will be said of these archives and what attributions will we give them on account of these two concepts that move us towards an ethical choice and positioning in the space of the Collection? Archive for history or archive for memory? According to Nora (1993), memory is life, it is open to the dialectic of memory and oblivion, while “history is always problematic and incomplete reconstruction of what no longer exists.” (p. 9) In our opinion, in this excerpt, it seems that the distinction is based on intentionality, on the choice of what one intends with that which is a matter of the past.

History carries the attempt to reconstruct what no longer exists, while memory brings, from this relationship of time discontinuity, the power of lack as a possibility of invention. In the face of this archive, which today occupies our effort to catalog it and open it, an moreover, to preserve it, to describe it and to make it speak from its silences and enigmas, at the same time we profane it, consign to it its own evil, accepting the insufficiency of reaching a totalizing memory. Permitting to make of past archives and objects a narrative of reinvention of the present affirms the transmission power of a memory

that embraces affects and intensities that can only be accessed in the now. Thus, archival evil and memory will dialogue into imagination and remembrances, becoming accomplices in the formulation of new visibilities and readabilities.

## The auratic allegory

Natalia's city was lively, it was a place made of gouache, dyed by continuous and thick brushstrokes. The usual scenario of an archivist was now in motion, each work in dialogue with another, almost a Nativity scene, combining its characters in a leisurely and joyous stroll. Lent, the body lying as a passage to memory in movement brings the works out as an experience that breaks the daily life of an archivist.

The dream in the form of a collective assemblage, a re-signification of images seen day by day: repetition that can even express a certain freeze, paradoxically, in action. An Assemblage between instances of becoming: becoming-child of an archivist, becoming-memory of Natalia, becoming-animal-of-the-ox-type, becoming-artist-of-an-archivist of Natalia. An overflow of assemblages in full line of escape, the escape of an archivist who dreams of a story he does not know, an escape in the form of curiosity, building power and cinema, a kinetic and aesthetic, building experience.

What is the story of the animal cow or ox? What do they compose with the central clay-colored church and colorful little houses put as neighbors? The plant heads of jellyfish and some trees that spring summer earrings, what do they tell? In vanishing lines, the search for a story merges with the awakening, for the awakening kept the symbols unforgettable, however, it brought the oblivion, it carefully undid the story and any interpretations of a remote past. However, did this dream tell us something? What tale did an archivist want?

Walking through the works produced by Natalia becomes an unsettling experience because in her repertoire of expressions and memories we have the same of the same, but also the same of the different. Each drawing, each paper carries a memory that transforms, we look with the eyes of the present at this curious and elusive past. However, perhaps, curious is the archivist who, while diving in drawings of *machined red* – Natalia's favorite color, strong and expressive clay-red, named so by the artist herself –, almost creates a time machine, this ceaseless desire to return to this somewhere-else-place, to feel the unimaginable reality of its past.

With the images produced by Natalia before us, we are placed in a sort of archive threshold, before a still of the imagination for the contemplation of a still possible memory. Before the image and its aura, because auratic images are those that, as they look back to us, refer our gaze to a distant, as stated by Didi-Huberman (1998); we move into a weave of space-time, we find ourselves caught in a story that just left tracks and that can no longer be

retrieved by consciousness and memories that are still a part of our present. Faced with auratic images, we seek to fill the gaps produced by oblivion. Our narrative about them becomes fictional, extracting a new possible imagined from what is absent, yet still supported by the history that happened. We are placed in a constant coming and going, for what looks into us in what we see is absent whenever we think we have it grasped, it plays the power of the distance with us, turning out to be distant when near and near when farther.

That is why, as scrap dealing archivists, here adapting a term used by Gagnebin (2009), we recover the remains, fragments, shards, elevating them to another position, in which a displacement of the eye opens them to other compositions. Scrap dealing, as the Benjamin-inspired author tells us, is not about collecting the great deeds, but picking up everything that is left aside as something that has no meaning, something with which official history did not know what to do. Such traces, unintentional presence-absence, left behind or forgotten, may then be taken as signs to be deciphered, but without having been left with the intention of meaning. It is, in the end, as scrap dealers who roll memories, that we collect, store and take care of such fragments, that we reassemble them in another value system, thus reinventing its history and its possibilities.

## The fragmentary memory and the archival practice as power

The joy of being fragmentary, of having a piece of writing that matches the archive function – to provide conditions for experimentation memory – is made of incompleteness that unsettles our gaze. As archivists forming a constellation, we flow into the mysteries that surround and haunt the asylum territory, seeking escape routes to the panoptism induced by anti-bodies-without-organs. Such a control state is present in the various diagrams of our spaces. We are always in territories marked by historical sayings and enunciation forces of knowledge, power, individualization of matter for what is by right. We are subjectivized by the laws, by the architecture of a city, the hierarchical positions of the guidelines, in a game of war and competition all the time. Still, we are part of an enunciative strength, and, in our ethical becoming, we think that the archive needs to be read in order to assert the power that memory holds, i.e., a power that makes itself affirmative insofar as it goes against the grain of what has been thought and believed.

The archivist attaches to the archive inasmuch as he collects testimonies of a cartography of his ignorance, or rather, an ignorance of his own folly and signs that vectorialize this territory, like the diagnoses about the trait of uniqueness. This new archivist, a category in which we would like to include ourselves, welcomes the trait that pulsates and vibrates an errant and deviant trait within



each intern in the psychiatric hospital. It is not a quality of madness that we begin to realize when we come into contact with these materials, but a quality of life showing its infinite power to affect and compose with new bodies. By surrounding the forces that lead to the emergence of the archive, we realize that it is no longer about looking at the works, folders, shelves, arrangements, but about feeling that there is an affection and a new percept to be created, a force that pulses life and gives rise, even in the concrete cracks, to a plant, a trail of history, a new visibility.

Before the archive, we need to see without knowing, we need to divest ourselves of representations that capture images in anticipatory interpretations. Before the archive, we therefore have endless opportunities for learning signs, for apprehending temporalities in coexistence, in short, a symptomatic situation that tells us we are always in signic openings to what the world shows us as its appearance. Tearing the appearances in order to enter the fire that weaved them, going in search of a lost time to interpret it with the lenses of our present, and transfiguring the present by the infection of new statements in what mere sight does not reveal.

It is in the struggle about the marked streaks of insanity, about what has become established and believed about the insane and insanity itself, that we open to an auratic space to show both the lives and works from other possibilities. Gardeners of past lives, water bringers on land scorched by the heat of slogans, we are placed both near and far from what is set before us, we seek its distant murmur, its rumor, we long for it to come and introduce strangeness in what is so repeated and familiar. To put it another way, to think otherwise, not from tired and mono-centered repetitions, about the very thing that characterizes the big night of man himself, his abysmal and involuntary dimension, both unconscious and enigmatic. To say the other of man by the gesture sustained on a belief in the future, by the look endowed with the gift of visibility, involved, as Benjamin (1994) tells us, in a visual paradigm that presents itself above all as a power of the distance. Aura, as a unique weave of space and time,

as a subtle fabric or as a single event, strange, that it would surround us, it would get us, it would catch us in its web. And eventually it would give rise . . . to something like a specific visual metamorphosis emerging from this very fabric, this cocoon of time and space. (Didi-Huberman, 1998, p. 147)

Under our eyes, but out of our vision: something that speaks of an absence in the presence, of a distant in the proximity, of a stranger in the familiar. The object itself becomes thus the index of a loss that it supports through a movement that comes and goes, as it only shows to assert its remoteness, however close its apparition. The auratic object implies an incessant coming and going around an involuntary memory that surrounds it and unfolds it in its images, opening it both in its appearance and meaning.

In the encounter with the auratic images, it is as if the archivist were constantly doing micro-cuts, assemblages that change the legitimacy of a work, raising it to another system value. Incisions on the surface that communicate it with its own depth, with its temporal thickness. Tearings that change constellations of meaning that give structure to the shower of stars shooting in the direction of our gaze. The value of tearing, of hammering to break the unity of the crust, the value of an incisive gesture articulates and even comes from what drives us to say and write about what emerges before our eyes are just as unintelligible and deranged. The idea of a carnal memory in the images of the past is not strange nor is it neglected by us. The object we see is put into perspective and has its visible face placed in opacity. We suspect that what is depicted in the image is not simply “representing”, but is configured as a symptom in the body, as an embodied memory. Saying incarnation for memory means bringing a whole history contracted into a single body which, by its artistic and formal expression, allows us to open the visible to visual work, and the readable to the work of exegesis or proliferation of meaning. Between a life and its work there is an incarnation economy that exposes what was done and achieved as much as what is yet to come. This suggests something of a counter-history, both of medical science and psi and the Arts.

We are situated, therefore, in an area where the image is, in a way, miraculous, by making “itself virtue and power of incarnation” (Didi-Huberman, 2013a, p. 244). The challenge becomes to extract the historical conditions that constituted its expression from the experienced in the body. To take the image from itself, to perform a metaphysics that is also revealed as a transmission of what that body captured and believed as its destination. Putting expression as a symptom of a scrambled time and out of kilter, as an intrusion and catastrophe in a living body and located in space and time, means putting ourselves on a threshold that allows our fishing net to only capture well-formed fish, and let the sea itself drain (Didi-Huberman, 2013th). Our fishing net, led by the desire to know, always lets us see that the sea withdrew, leaving us only a few traces of its presence. The retreated sea kept mysteries, its fish are right there, but we can only glimpse an opaque moisture at its edges. What do the images we see and that look at us think? Their thought, as we can attest in our trials, is made of holes, of tears, of extensions that are difficult to locate, and of deformations.

The sea that recedes and leaves us with only its wet fish, still unknown and distant, is like the past that, always dark in its entirety, recedes every time it is excavated by recall, to which only tracks and images are left to be unwrapped from their origin in endless transformation. We recognize, with Gagnebin (2009), that even in the moment of the purest memory – as with the involuntary memory of Proust – the past always still shows itself as obscure and elusive. Faraway, it may be said again, in relation to its belonging in the aura as its potential for an infinite

interpretation. In this sense, we speak of an acceptance of all that is death in the past, of its inevitable character of loss, not in the sense of resigned acceptance, but as a statement of such fragmentary feature, for it is from these fragments that come to the fore, from a deviation held in the encounter of the archivist with such fragments, that we can create other histories.

What exists is therefore much more the work of crossing, of “a grasping exploration of a vast unknown territory . . . . There is no immediate reunion with the past, but rather of its slow search, full of detours, meanders,

losses” (Gagnebin, 2009, p. 159-160). Then when we speak of another history of insanity, we speak of a development that involves not only a search, a rescue, but also a creation, an ever active production. If the Collection is growing every day, and with it the tireless work of archivists, we can only go with the flow of constant reinvention, the untimely encounters, small day-to-day resurrections, while at the same time we affirm, by resuming the fragmentary character of the past, the incompleteness of the archive and the experience which corresponds to it: that of the unarchivable.

### **O arquivo como espaço aurático de imagens da loucura**

**Resumo:** Neste artigo temos como objetivo problematizar a função do arquivista no trabalho de catalogação das obras expressivas da Oficina de Criatividade do Hospital Psiquiátrico São Pedro, localizado em Porto Alegre, RS. Entendemos que, neste procedimento, é possível realizar um exercício de desmontagem do território a partir de escolha ética sobre o modo de narrar e analisar as criações daqueles que foram levados a viver na marginalidade da sociedade, asilados por longo tempo em hospital psiquiátrico. Nesse sentido, nossa intenção segue no contra fluxo dos discursos hegemônicos patologizantes, produzindo outros enunciados sobre o louco e suas linguagens destoantes. Como cartógrafos da memória e do esquecimento, os arquivistas da Oficina de Criatividade lançam-se à experimentação de novas sensibilidades em seu encontro com imagens auráticas. Com o acervo crescendo a cada dia, os arquivistas afirmam o caráter fragmentário da memória e a incompletude característica da contínua consignação de um arquivo inacabável.

**Palavras-chave:** arquivo, memória, loucura, imagem.

### **L'Archive comme espace auratique des images de la folie**

**Résumé:** Dans cet article, nous cherchons à problématiser le rôle de l'archiviste dans le travail de catalogage des œuvres expressives de l'Atelier de Créativité de l'Hôpital Psychiatrique São Pedro, situé à la ville de Porto Alegre/RS, au Brésil. Nous comprenons que dans cette procédure, il y a la possibilité d'un exercice de démontage du territoire, soutenu par un choix éthique sur la façon de raconter et d'analyser les créations de ceux qui ont été marginalisés de la société, abrités pendant longtemps dans l'hôpital psychiatrique. En ce sens, notre intention est à contre-courant des discours hégémoniques pathologisants pour produire autres énoncés sur le fou et ses langages dissonants. Comme cartographes de la mémoire et de l'oubli, les archivistes de l'Atelier de Créativité se jettent à l'expérimentation des nouvelles sensibilités dans leur rencontre avec les images auratiques. À la mesure que la collection croît, les archivistes affirment le caractère fragmentaire de la mémoire et l'incomplétude propre de la progressive consignation d'une archive interminable.

**Mots-clés:** archive, mémoire, folie, image.

### **El archivo como espacio aurático de imágenes de la locura**

**Resumen:** En este artículo se pretende analizar el papel del archivero en el trabajo de catalogación de obras expresivas del Taller de Creatividad del Hospital Psiquiátrico São Pedro, ubicado en la ciudad de Porto Alegre, Río Grande do Sul (Brasil). Entendemos que en este procedimiento se puede realizar un ejercicio de desmantelamiento del territorio con base en una decisión ética acerca del modo de narrar y analizar las creaciones de los que fueron llevados a vivir a las márgenes de la sociedad, asilados durante mucho tiempo en un hospital psiquiátrico. En este sentido, nuestra intención se presenta en contraflujo de los discursos hegemónicos patologizantes, con el fin de producir otros enunciados sobre el loco y sus lenguajes disonantes. Como cartógrafos de la memoria y del olvido, los archiveros del Taller de Creatividad se lanzan a probar nuevas sensibilidades en el encuentro con las imágenes auráticas. A medida que la colección crece día a día, los archiveros afirman el carácter fragmentario de la memoria y la incompletud característica de la asignación continua de un archivo sin fin.

**Palabras clave:** archivo, memoria, locura, imagen.



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