Chapter 2

Inside/Out: Looking Back into the Future

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ABSTRACT

Technologies, for memory preservation and enhancement of our humane bodies, are developing at a fast pace, and the corresponding dystopic and utopic future scenarios are presented in speculative news reports, science research studies and popular culture such as science fiction films. Lopes’ artistic/research projects explore ways of expanding concepts of memory, body, and representation/mediation, using art as a tool to enhance public awareness of several anxieties and technologies, raising ethical dilemmas and questioning norms of behavior and normality. This chapter is an exploration of the issues raised on the development of several artwork projects during the course of the author’s PhD and present Postdoc research, when in residency at several Medical and Scientific Research Institutes, dealing with distinct studies on memory (functioning, loss and enhancement).

INTRODUCTION

The author’s PhD research – Representational Strategies on Alzheimer’s disease Studies: A Practice-Based Arts Research in a Neuroscience Laboratory - was in the Instituto de Medicina Molecular and Hospital Santa Maria in Lisbon. This provided a unique fieldwork and complementary scientific/laboratory/artist studio in which to develop a progressive and situated practice-based inquiry into how memory loss (e.g. Alzheimer’s Disease) is scientifically researched. Science and health philosophers Marc Berg and Annemarie Mol (1998) claim that medical and scientific investigation is based on practices of construction, assemblage and incorporation of techniques, habits, ideas, images and conversations. This represents L. concept of an archive, envisioned as a network of four intertwined ‘archival spaces’ (Figure 1):

- The patient;
- The art studio;

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The Alzheimer’s research laboratory;
The cellular and molecular research laboratory

In this process the author documented the assessment and categorization of Alzheimer’s patients and their exposure to various therapies. XX also documented molecular and cellular research laboratory procedures and collected laboratory materials. In order to maintain a common thread when approaching these spaces, methods have focused on neuroscientific diagnostic images (MRI and PET scan), graphs, diagrams, notes, models, photographs, instruments, physical space conditions and hybrid forms of these, and establishing a critical link to art practice. In laboratory studies these visual approaches are designated representational strategies or practices (Lynch & Woolgar, 1990: 1-18).

The human brain is a kind of an archive (L., 2013) that retains traces of our experience of the past, yet is often unreliable and arbitrary when we attempt to gain access to it. The images and experiences we retain, the places we have known and the feelings we have experienced tend to become fragmented and reorganised when our brain attempts to recall them. The result is a collection of subjective adapted recollections as, in the process of evoking past experience, our memory reconstructs, converts and updates it.

Aims of the Investigations

In the Doctorate period L. was aiming to develop strategies for evoking the nature of autobiographical memory within a contemporary art practice, by generating installations using a period of residency at Lisbon’ University’s Instituto de Medicina Molecular (Institute of Molecular Medicine); to explore the representational strategies of Alzheimer’s studies in the scientific laboratory through art practice;