

Being Archive

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When Gilles Deleuze, referring to Michel Foucault, stated that “there is a new archivist in town”, he was laying the foundations for a new way of understanding and relating to each other through data, information and bodies, especially after Foucault declared the symbolic death of the library as a sacred space of knowledge and announced the archive as a democratizing replacement of thought. Well conversant with the theories of both philosophers, Professor Miguel Morey argued that the archive is what we fall back on when we want to learn more about the evils of our time, once we have pinpointed what they are. Jacques Derrida first spoke, and then wrote, about the archive as a symbol of both the “origin” and the “control” of power. In perspective, he foresaw that the archive fever would spread like a virus in Western societies. Of course, contemporary art embraced these formulations of space, time and desire like a convert to a new dogma: without looking back, nor weighing up the future benefits or drawbacks resulting from such a decision.

The historian Aby Warburg invented a “nameless science” which should rewrite the history of art based on the harmonious contiguity between images (in his Atlas mnemosyne) as symbolic relational constellations; this arrangement could be applied also to books, as he did with his sophisticated and obsessive library. Hanne Darboven and Gerhard Richter created atlases of documents and images that mirrored the complexity of German history as to the shock that followed World War II, when it seemed as if looking back over their national past could only be done through a kind of visual therapy made possible with the compilation of those documents and pictures. In this case, the quantity of elements meant a new qualitative evaluation of the mourning. On Kawara insisted on the scrupulous certification of the routine as his signature trademark: a recording of lived time of which he would be a prisoner and whose pictorial enactment would paradoxically become his own liberation. Besides recording her activity, Ana Amorim also includes the action of daily time in a specific physical place and the heightened consciousness of the passing of time in actions in which she counts seconds and notes them as they transpire.

The first issue of the Internationale Situationniste addressed the meaning of the construction of a situation in the following terms: “The situation is created to be lived by its builders”; and then, later on: “The situation is also a unitary ensemble of behaviour in time. It is composed of gestures contained in a transitory background.” Ana Amorim does not build situations per se given that she does not organize them collectively or for a collective, but it is fairly obvious that her routes, which later become encrypted maps that may be difficult to read for a public who has not been in these spaces, are units of behaviour in time. The elements that condition Amorim’s signature work are the everyday chores associated with her life and their subsequent rendering in maps.

For Borges, a map was both a labyrinth and its solution, while for Baudrillard it was more of a simulacrum of the real space it represents — in other words, its replacement. Didi-Huberman gave the map a social function by taking it down from the sacralised wall of art and placing it on the table: the board of a game of collective action that plays with the symbolic through consensual instructions derived from the real. But, above all else, a map is the certification of something that originally seemed ungraspable and unintelligible, concentrating it into a manageable space and making it understandable. A translation that draws space and compresses time — something akin to what Ana Amorim does in inventorying her everyday contribution to the world.

It is probably best to start at the beginning, the personal commitment of the Brazilian artist (São Paulo, 1956) with her own work. In 2001, she made a conceptual work that was effectively a contract (Art Contract) by which she agreed not to exhibit her work in any public or private space that uses a distinctive brand or logo. In fact, she had actually already taken on this commitment in 1988, when she accepted the ineffaceable symbiosis between her life and her artistic production. The latter would be the product of the former, which, in turn, would never be the same again once it was aware that anything she does, however banal it might seem, would become part of an artwork. Her Map Books are compilations of the maps made from her chronicling of her everyday routes and routines — every day, a map; every year, one or various books. And so on over the course of her decade-long project 10 Year Performance Project 1988-1997. The contract remained in force until 2016, and now, by exhibiting in a gallery and also in Spain for the very first time, her personal and professional positions are utterly different, but she resolutely continues her analysis and her obsessive recording of time with the same uncompromising attitude.

Actions — any action — insert time into space. They function similarly to sound or to music. Ana Amorim's performances are in essence an analysis of this temporal component implicit in any action. What she does in her Counting Seconds Performance is to count the seconds for various hours. For each second, she makes a small horizontal mark on the page of a notebook. She carries out this practice in public spaces (the artist sits at a table and a notebook is filled up with lines) and also as an everyday action. Every day, for one hour, Ana Amorim counts the seconds and makes a note of them. In a certain way, this passion for the passing of time and her obsession for recording it, when rendered in perspective, come from her father's akin everyday practices. He filled the family home with clocks and calendars; he loved trekking in nature and, during and after his daily walk, he would make notes of the weather conditions, the route he had taken, the hours and minutes it had taken him, and so on. Time is expressed in the constant process of distillation.

The artist numbers her maps and collages with a code that includes several items which are not always used in the same order. In this numerical code of sorts one can make out the date or the numbering of drawings and works, but also other figures that respond to the numbers of days since a certain meaningful day in her life (weddings, divorces, medical operations) or the days remaining until the end of the year (or the drawing in question). Everything is noted; every ordinary action she does is

reflected in the maps as a statement of her existence, with the goal of “putting life on hold” and becoming fully conscious of its passing. We seldom have the chance to discover a body of work of this magnitude —representing a life dedicated to its own consciousness— all at once and in such a varied and extensive manner. It is seldom that we are presented with vital and artistic exercises so inextricably bound together, of such coherence and detail. Ana Amorim is not an artist who works in the hackneyed field of the archive; she is an archive in herself and, she seems to tell us, her chief action is being an archive.