The Present Absence

A Thesis

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By

Virginia Kathryn Colwell

Graduate Program in Fine Arts

The Ohio State University

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Thesis Committee:

Carmel Buckley, Advisor

Michael Mercil

Suzanne Silver
Abstract

When I was ten my father died of cancer. He was an FBI agent and he kept an archive of his professional life that included newspaper clippings of his cases, memos from agents, official letters, mug shots, and photographs of his arrests. Since an FBI agent’s career is secretive, I only know the most superficial things about his work.

Two years ago I began researching some of the stories of the archive and from my research producing artworks. This written thesis is an exploration of my research into my father’s archive, its relationship to the past and to current events. Also included are memories and experiences that have influenced my understanding of the archive and my artwork. Scattered between the stories are documents from the archive and from my own research.
Dedication

For my mother, my favorite collaborator and research partner.
Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Carmel, Suzanne, and Michael for their guidance along a path that required the faith and encouragement of great mentors to traverse.

I have been so fortunate and I hope that by sharing countless cups of tea I have shown a small portion of my appreciation.
Vita

2002 .................................................................B.F.A. Virginia Commonwealth University,
Richmond, Virginia, USA

2008 .................................................................M.A. Architecture and Urban Culture,
Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya,
Barcelona, Catalonia, Spain

2010 - 2011 ........................................................Graduate Teaching Associate, Department of
Art, The Ohio State University, Columbus,
Ohio, USA

Fields of Study

Major Field: Art
Table of Contents

Abstract............................................................................................................................... ii

Dedication .......................................................................................................................... iii

Acknowledgments............................................................................................................ iv

Vita ...................................................................................................................................... v

Table of Contents .............................................................................................................. vi

List of Figures................................................................................................................... viii

Forward .............................................................................................................................. x

The Wallendas.................................................................................................................... 1

Procedure.......................................................................................................................... 7

Audio for the Future......................................................................................................... 12

Souvenirs .......................................................................................................................... 15

The Declassified.............................................................................................................. 21

On Reading His Archive ................................................................................................. 25

Interviews and Admissions............................................................................................... 27

Hallways............................................................................................................................. 31
# List of Figures

**Figure 1:** Microfilm scan, ‘Beginning’ ................................................................. xii

**Figure 2:** FBI Academy in Quantico, Virginia, 1980 .............................................. 1

**Figure 3:** Video stills, Rick Wallenda, 1980 ............................................................. 4

**Figure 4:** Karl Wallenda's fatal tightrope fall .......................................................... 5

**Figure 5:** Blank microfilm scan ................................................................................. 6

**Figure 6:** Altered archive document .......................................................................... 10

**Figure 7:** Blank archive page ..................................................................................... 11

**Figure 8:** Blank microfilm scan ................................................................................. 13

**Figure 9:** Blank archive page ..................................................................................... 14

**Figure 10:** Mug shot of Freddie Lee Morgan ............................................................ 18

**Figure 11:** Folder 1 of 2, William Morales ............................................................... 19

**Figure 12:** Signed extradition agreement (later retracted), William Morales .......... 20

**Figure 13:** William Morales, *El Mundo*, June 30, 1988 .......................................... 22

**Figure 14:** Page from Folder 2 of 2, William Morales ............................................ 24

**Figure 15:** Microfilm scan, ‘Missing Pages’ ............................................................. 26

**Figure 16:** The Confessions of Majid Jamali Fash .................................................... 28

**Figure 17:** Letter to the Editor San Juan Journal Star ............................................... 29

**Figure 18:** Blank microfilm ....................................................................................... 30
Forward

There are those who think a story is told only to reveal what is known in this world. But a good story also reveals the unknown.

Susan Griffin, *A Chorus of Stones*¹

Let me tell you a story.

Please be patient because this story is in progress.

First the facts:

- My father was an FBI agent.

- He died when I was 10.

- He left behind a large, black, three-ring binder with materials saved from his FBI career. The contents of this binder are *His Archive*.

- There is no index to *His Archive* but the items fall into the following categories: letters from FBI headquarters, newspaper articles, mug shots, investigative reports, and personnel documents.

*His Archive* contains about ninety pages in total.

-Recently, His Archive expanded to include the videos and photographs
he took that demonstrate his surveillance training and the Cowboy
Westerns he enjoyed enough to dub onto VHS.

- His Archive is augmented by my research into several of his cases,
suspects, and cryptic memos.

Normally my story is told through artwork: videos, audio installations, sculptures,
and drawings. But in this instance I will be telling stories about my experience of His Archive
that have influence the artwork. Some of these experiences come directly from researching
my father’s archive, others are childhood memories, and some events are related because
they inform my perception of His Archive. Between the texts are original pieces from my
father’s archive and documents from my own research that I have added to it.
The precise geography of the facts I am going to relate hardly matters.

-Jorge Luis Borges “The Man on the Threshold”

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Two weeks after I was born my mother, father, and I moved to San Juan, Puerto Rico. The FBI placed us in temporary quarters while we waited to move into our new house. The furnished apartment was in a tall condominium building on San Juan’s northern coastline. I only know this because my father took video footage of the apartment with the camera he bought after finishing the FBI’s advanced photo training course at the academy in Quantico, Virginia.

The video that my father shot in the apartment is now washed out and jumpy. It is fuzzy and turquoise from age, the horizontal lines are strong. The scenes my father shot are
narrated to my grandparents. My parents used video as a way of keeping family in Nebraska in touch with our life in Puerto Rico. My father would make a video, take it to the FBI A/V lab to make two copies, and then mail these copies to the grandparents.

The scene opens up with my mother wearing a light blue sundress, holding her infant, and talking about the heat of the island and the color of the sea. Then it cuts to a panning shot of the coastline taken from the apartment balcony, finishing with a shot looking at the waves crashing into the seawall below. Afterwards, there is a cut to my mother holding the infant, followed by a cut to the infant in a crib looking glassy-eyed at the camera.

Suddenly the video jumps, turns to fuzz, a blue screen, more fuzz, and then a cyan sky above a condo building with many small balconies. A man, wearing a blue suit that matches the color of the sky, is standing above the building. His right foot is placed in front of the left and he is holding a long pole horizontally. He slides the right foot forward and the pulls up his left, carefully placing it in front of the other. He continues like this across a large void: one foot slides forward, stabilizes, the other is gently picked up, place in front, stabilized, one foot slides forward and so on until he reaches the other side.

Although I remember watching this scene as a child, it was only when I started researching His Archive that I found out who this man was. When I began my research I asked my mother to send me the seven VHS tapes that my father filmed. One day when we were talking on the phone I mentioned the scene with the tightrope walker. It was then that she told me the story of Rick Wallenda.

Rick Wallenda is the son of Karl Wallenda. Karl Wallenda established the family of circus performers The Flying Wallendas.
On March 22, 1978 Karl Wallenda, at the age of seventy-three, was crossing a tightrope strung between two condominiums in San Juan, Puerto Rico. Midway through his walk the wire swayed and bucked and he fell to the ground one hundred and twenty-one feet below.

Two years later my father was making a film for my grandparents with a scene showing a tightrope walker. The man he captured on film was Rick Wallenda. He was retracing the same fatal tightrope walk that his father left uncompleted.
Figure 3: Video stills, leading up to scene with Rick Wallenda, 1980.
Figure 5: Blank microfilm scan from research at the Puerto Rican Newspaper Archives, 2010.
**Procedure**

Politely, he directed me into the questioning room.

I stepped up to go inside. The entire room was raised about eight inches above the floor of the rest of the security area. The awkward threshold seemed out of place in an environment where power and order were intended to be absolute. At the time I thought that the eight-inch threshold was a design error. While it was that, it also was a reminder of the ramshackle security solutions quickly put into place in 2001.

The questioning room was built inside a larger room. The larger room was about the size of a doublewide trailer and made of the same prefabricated building materials. From the outside the detention center was just a long one-story box inside the vast glass atrium of the London Stansted airport.

There was nothing special about the architecture; it was like any other government office or medical waiting room. The space had a vending machine, a hot chocolate machine, a TV suspended in a corner, long blue vinyl airport benches set in a rectangle, a gridded drop-down ceiling, florescent lighting, vinyl faux-marble floor tiles, and white walls without windows. What was special about the space was how it was used. In front of the door that led to the airport’s atrium sat three security professionals from a private firm. The bathroom was all smooth stainless steel with only half of a door. All of my belongings were locked in a
storage closet, which also held boxes of microwave dinners. The lights and television were never turned off.

The questioning rooms were along one wall of the waiting area, each room had windows on three sides. When you were inside a questioning room you could look through the row of identical rooms on either side. It was like a long line of glass study cubicles at a university library.

He opened the door to the middle glass room and gestured for me to enter. I stepped up the eight-inch threshold and stood inside to the left of the doorway as he entered behind me, closing the blue door. In front of me there was a two-foot by four foot Formica table with metal legs. On either side of the table were boxy chrome-plated chairs with square, squishy blue seats.

He motioned for me to take the chair on the left. As I eased onto the seat I noticed that it did not shift in response to my weight. Neither did it budge when I bumped it with my heel. I looked down. Each chair leg had been secured to the floor with screws and small metal angle braces. The legs of the table were secured in the exact same way.

The man was from Bangladesh. He asked me questions and wrote my answers out longhand with a dull pencil on ruled sheets of paper. I remember his scrawling, slanted handwriting and his effort to write quickly in order to keep up with my long answers. In response, I slowed down the pace of my story. A couple of times we discussed the spelling of a word: is it with an el or a le, an a or an e? In the end we agreed that my report would have spelling errors.

More than anything else, I found the most overwhelming aspect of the detention center was the ubiquitous presence of procedure. My interaction with my guards and my
interrogator were friendly. They tried hard to distance themselves from the rules they 
enacted. They were empathetic and personable. While they performed the policies of the 
security system, they didn't embody the system's anxiety. They were just the buffer between 
those who made the decisions and the people those judgments affected.

I talked to a decision-maker once during the whole detention process. He asked for 
my forgiveness and apologized for his inability to change procedure. It was then that I 
understood that the steps laid out by regulations absolved even the administrators from 
critical decision-making.

Looking back I wonder if my twenty-four hours in the Stansted detention center was 
like being inside His Archive. The center's standard architecture, like the standard filing 
systems, pages, margins and formality of His Archive, frame and flatten human relationships. 
In both the paper archive and the architecture of bureaucracy, adherence to procedure 
supersedes the ability for people to relate to one another according to normal social 
structures. There is clarity to filed pages and rules that provide safe guidelines for how 
people are interpreted and judged. For both, decisions that might otherwise be obfuscated 
by empathy or doubt are rationalized and ordered.

After a night spent on one of the long vinyl benches, I was escorted to my plane 
with a security officer at each shoulder. As I walked with them through the terminal I 
remembered my mother telling me that my father believed that all citizens should tour a 
prison system at least once in their life. Not as a deterrent to crime but so that we have 
some sense of what's on the other side of our rules.
Figure 6: Altered archive document, 2010.
Figure 7: Blank archive page.
When I turned ten it became evident that my father was going to die before the year’s end. In light of this fact I made a request. Would he make a tape for me? I wanted him to dictate a cassette tape that I could listen to after he died. I imagined that on this tape he would tell me things that would guide me as I grew up.

He agreed and one day he brought home from the FBI office an audiocassette recorder and a microphone. He kept the audio recorder and microphone at the foot of his chair, beneath the side table in the living room. When I came home from school I would make sure to glance at the recorder. I tried to judge if it had moved that day—if it had been used. Sometimes if I couldn’t tell if the microphone had shifted, I would casually ask if he had recorded anything.

I remember the first time I listened to that audiotape.

It was twenty minutes long.

In a tired voice he apologizes to me, knowing that no length of tape would be enough.
Figure 8: Blank microfilm scan from research at the Puerto Rican Newspaper Archives, 2010.
Figure 9: Blank archive page.
Souvenirs

I imagine him sitting down at a typewriter. He takes a blank index card and places it into the feed, positioning it carefully, exactly on center. Then he presses the caps lock and types:

FIRST ARREST

42

FREDDIE LEE MORGAN

Then he would have rolled the plastic feeder knob one-quarter turn with his right hand, while his left hand pulled out the cleanly labeled index card.

I wonder if he then prepared a space in his desk drawer where he planned to accumulate all photographs of those he arrested? Or did he label a new file folder to hold the mug shot of Freddie, that index card, and all later mug shots?

Later on, probably on a Saturday morning, he took his collection of mug shots and began to organize them. He used a black vinyl two-inch three-ring binder. The pages in the binder were like photo album pages: black pulpy construction paper sandwiched between one stiff sheet of clear acetate with three lozenge-shaped holes along the side.

Why did he save such things?
I have been searching for information about Freddie Lee Morgan on and off for about a year. I have yet to find anything more than what I have from *His Archive*. Part of the problem is that I only have a name, date, and place. The public library had a folder of newspaper clippings of all local bank robberies between 1970 and 1980 but it was ‘NOT RETURNED BY PATRON’.

Yet even if I knew more about Mr. Morgan, I still would not know why my father saved this document. I want to be able to put the two together—who my father was and who Freddie Lee Morgan was. Right now they both exist as separate but parallel lives that momentarily intersected.

In the 1950s there was a television show called *This is Your Life*. The show brought together people, like my father and Freddie Lee Morgan, from parallel but emotionally intertwined lives. The show filmed the reactions of siblings separated at birth and celebrities meeting high school sweethearts in front of a studio audience. In one episode the host Ralph Edwards is interviewing a Japanese pastor. The pastor had brought to New York a group of young women from Hiroshima. The women had been disfigured by the atomic bomb and were to receive charitable reconstructive surgery. In the beginning the episode appears to be about the pastor’s charitable foundation but after a quick discussion about the dropping of the bomb Edwards introduces the pastor to a military man. Silhouetted behind a screen the man gives a personal account of the day he piloted the plane that dropped the atomic bomb. The scrim is then pulled away and the camera cuts to the pastor, sitting up very straight with a profoundly blank stare into space.

That episode was a clumsy attempt to juxtapose two parts of the same story. The whole event took place in the wrong venue. It seems that the idea behind the episode was a
simple, albeit naïve, interpretation of reconciliation. But in the method of unfolding the two lives Ralph Edwards comes off as profoundly reckless.

By placing myself between my father and the arrested men I worry that I too might be as fallible and reckless as the television host.
Figure 10: Archive page, mug shot of Freddie Lee Morgan and index card, September 11, 1973.
Figure 11: Folder 1 of 2, Declassified Mexico State Department Archives, William Morales.
Figure 12: Signed extradition agreement (later retracted), Folder 1 of 2, Declassified Mexico State Department Archives, William Morales.
On my birthday in 2010 I sat waiting on a blue vinyl chair in a basement room with a low ceiling and strong florescent lighting. After a half an hour Jorge appeared. He laid two thick blue file folders the size of sheet cakes on the long Formica table in front of me. I thanked him and pulled the folders across the table so that they sat level with my breastbone.

Lying next to each other, with my hands still on top, it looked as if I was blessing the files or taking an oath. For a while I wondered who would have been the last person to look at these papers. Both folders were compressed showing time spent lying flat beneath heavy weight. The files were held together with string woven through the three-ring binder holes and tied together in tight bows. For me the unusual, simply crafted binding demonstrated a mark of human care that I didn’t anticipate finding in the government archives.

The bound files were a record of the Mexican government’s diplomatic call-and-response on the case of William Morales. Morales was a Puerto Rican terrorist who blew off his hands while wiring up a homemade bomb in his apartment in New York City. During his recovery at a high security hospital he escaped by fashioning a rope ladder from bed sheets. He first fled to Mexico, killed a policeman, was caught, and then became involved in a long diplomatic tussle over his extradition to the US. Eventually, Mexico let him out of prison and permitted him to seek political asylum in Cuba where he still lives today.
I’m not sure what, if any, contact my father’s work had with his case. The extradition pleas happened while my father was working on cases of Puerto Rican terrorism so I assume he was very familiar with the case. On every page of Morales’s folder I looked for a record of the FBI. On some yellowed papers there were quick statements about torture, a signed form agreeing to extradition (later retracted), and newspapers that quoted agents who were working on the case.


Looking back I believe I thought I could will my father into the file’s pages. Even if I didn’t find his name spelled out in those papers I was certain that I was surveying a landscape where he had been. I knew I was unlikely to find even a trace of what I was
looking for. But there is something to be said about giving into an urge for proximity to a ghost.

In the late 1800s the explorer Percy Fawcett and his son Jack entered the Brazilian rainforest certain that they knew where a fabled lost city was located. They never returned and their legend lured many to follow their fate into yet unmapped jungles in the hopes of finding them. After World War Two Percy’s surviving son, Brian began researching his father’s expedition logs, maps, and papers. He assembled them into the book *Exploration Fawcett*. In a letter to his mother from that time he writes that while researching his father, "seems very close to me, as though I were collaborating at his conscious direction." Shortly after the publication of his research he made the last effort to locate his brother in the rainforest. He rented a small plane and flew over the area where his father and brother were last seen. There he dropped thousands of papers like confetti onto the forest canopy below. The papers said: "Are you Jack Fawcett? If your answer is yes then make a sign holding your hands above your head."\(^3\)

The likelihood that Brian Fawcett could find his brother by scattering papers over the rainforest was slim. So futile as to make his efforts almost absurd. But I feel I understand his need to survey the landscape knowing you would only find an absence and that the confirmed absence would have to be enough.

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Morales: FBI allowed beating

MEXICO CITY (UPI) — Puerto Rican terrorist William Morales said in an interview that FBI and New York police agents were in the next room while he was beaten and refused to help him.

The mother of the Puerto Rican independence movement leader, who is imprisoned in a New York prison, said she was not present and did not know the circumstances under which the FBI conducted the interview.

Morales said he was detained by Mexican agents and agents in a New York prison, and the FBI was in the next room and could have been complicit.

He said he was returned to the interview room where the U.S. agents were present, and they asked him to make the Mexican story.

He alleged the agents were beating him.

Morales said he was transferred from interrogations in New York to Puerto Rico in the late 1970s, and his lawyer said he could appear before the Senate on charges of harassment, extortion, and violation of the civil service code.

A U.S. embassy spokesman said that a U.S. embassy official had been arrested in Puerto Rico, but declined to comment about the torture charges.

“Is it not what you would do? This is the press,” he said.

The government of Puerto Rico, along with the United States government, has expressed concern over the treatment of Morales.

Morales said he was held in the same cell with a man who was beaten and in a room with agents who were not from the FBI.

William Morales’ mother, Lucy Morales Lopez, asked Mexico to give her son asylum or deportation.

In an appeal to the extradition court, she said she had no intention of political asylum in the United States, and she was concerned about the treatment of her son.

Michael Detrich, the Chicago attorney, said: "If this is a matter of political asylum, Mexico is making a mistake. This is a political asylum of political asylum, it is not a political asylum of political asylum."
On Reading His Archive

Recently, I began rereading a book on my shelf about a man's search for the family he lost in World War Two. On page thirty-two I had folded down the top left corner of the sheet and underlined a long passage in pencil. In the underlined part the author talks about his impulse to “impose order on a chaos of facts by assembling them into a story that has a beginning, a middle, and an end.” A thin penciled asterisk in the page’s margin points to the next passage—the part that probably prompted all my underlining in the first place. “I felt a kind of pain, a form of anxiety even, when confronted by masses of information that seemed to resistant to organization.”

I’ve felt something similar with His Archive. The parts I want to know—who the arrested men were, what so-and-so did, how the cases ended—are all missing. My father knew those things, for him the archive was complete. For anyone else it is horribly fragmented.

As a child I often looked through His Archive. It was kept at the bottom of a stack of family photo albums in a large cherry wood buffet in the living room. While I only remember a few of the pages, I do remember feeling disappointed that the contents were not more interesting. Nonetheless, I kept returning to the binder hoping it would reveal more to me. But each time the newspaper clippings were like all newspaper clippings, the

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formal letters like any other, and there were not enough other pictures to show what actually happened.

Figure 15: Microfilm scan, ‘Missing Pages’, scan from the Puerto Rican Newspaper Archives, 2010.
Interviews and Admissions

In *His Archive* there is one letter that congratulates my father on his ‘commendable services’ and the ‘arrest and interview of Pierce which resulted in his admission of guilt.’ I assume that an interview is similar to an interrogation or a questioning or at least they are only a few degrees apart. I have often wondered what that interview entailed. Not the questions so much as what it felt like.

When you come into the room to question someone how do you remain neutral? Do you notice that his nails are surrounded by jagged skin, freshly split and tender? Do you see that his eyes are the same color as your grandmother’s? How do you know if his panic incriminates him or just shows that his is worried about the upcoming call to his family? Is his arrogance a sign of his fear or a knowing signal that you're being duped? Does your attention linger on the way he laces his shoes? The worn texture of mismatched socks? His poorly hemmed pants? Do you worry about where to rest your gaze? Do you try not to fidget with your pad of paper when he gives answers that are too long? How do you not show disappointment when he doesn’t know what you are looking for? What does it feel like trying to ensnare someone in a lie?

Two years ago, around the time I started researching *His Archive*, Iran claimed that they had captured a citizen who was a Zionist spy. They set the man before a camera and interviewed him. The interview was televised, posted on the Internet and covered by many
international newspapers. I found it on the BBC and saved the video with the man who confesses his past deeds working for Mossad. When I saw the interview I kept watching the man’s eyes and his few gestures. I was trying to see if there was anything that indicated that he was lying. But I don’t know what to look for.

**Figure 16**: Video stills from the Confessions of Majid Jamali Fash for Iranian Television, 2011.
Figure 17: This photocopied article was sent to my grandparents. To the left of column are my mother’s notes: “Letter to the Editor San Juan Journal Star. Article written by Jack (my father) for Held (head of the San Juan FBI).” At the time my father wrote this article he was in charge of counter intelligence for the Caribbean region, including Cuba.
Figure 18: Blank microfilm scan from research at the Puerto Rican Newspaper Archives, 2010.
Hallways

Many prestigious archives have a romantic architecture to them: old library architecture that recalls the Enlightenment, learned collectors of books, and the stacked organization of the wunderkammer. While I enjoy researching in these places, I don’t believe that they are the architecture for archives today.

Recently I found the architecture of today’s archives. It’s in the US Library of Congress. Not the historical building with the painted murals, marble staircases, and brass fixtures, but beneath this building.

Across the street from the old Library of Congress is another wing of the library, the Madison Building. There is a tunnel that runs under Independence Avenue connecting the two buildings. The tunnel is about 10 feet wide, it has a low ceiling lined with exposed ductwork, data cables, electrical conduit and plumbing. The concrete floor slopes downward and veers westward. Along the corridor are various generic industrial doors to unknown rooms. After walking more than the length of a city block, you arrive in the basement of the Madison Building. The only clue that you have crossed a threshold is that there are suddenly many signs. The signs are numbered, they are color-coded with department titles and have arrows pointing in every direction. But no quantity of signage in the world could help orient you here. More than any airports I’ve been in, the basement tunnel at the Library
of Congress lacks place entirely. It is functional and disturbingly generic, echoing Borges’s fictional Library of Babel.

“The universe (which others call the Library) is composed of an indefinite, perhaps infinite number of hexagonal galleries. . . One of the hexagon’s free sides opens onto a narrow sort of vestibule, which in turn opens onto another gallery, identical to the first—identical in fact to all . . . Light is provided by certain spherical fruits that bear the name “bulbs.” There are two of these bulbs in each hexagon, set crosswise. The light they give is insufficient and unceasing.”

In the Library of Congress I walked around the basement’s square, circuitous hallways several times before taking the elevator up to the newspaper collection (on another wide, circuitous, blank hallway). My favorite moments in this library tunnel were the times when there was no one in sight. It is strange to be the lone figure in such a quiet, public place, underground and gazing at the recessed doorways that interrupt the walls at regular intervals.

This is the architecture of today’s archive.

Figure 19: Blank microfilm scan from research at the Puerto Rican Newspaper Archives, 2010.
Figure 20: Jumping in, video still from home movie, 1982.
Proof

Recently I found a note to myself that reminded me of my childhood pastime of feverish memory-making:

![Image of notebook page](image)

Figure 21: Notebook page, 2010.
I remember making home movies as a child.

More accurately, I remember them being made.

My father’s last video camera was a large, black Panasonic VHS recorder kept nestled in grey ‘egg crate’ foam in a rigid plastic brief case that snapped shut and locked. He had several other video cameras but this is the only one I remember. I can recall the camera’s gears groaning when one zoomed and I can remember the camera’s uncomfortable weight perched upon my thin shoulder.

My father was enthusiastic about documenting casual family events. But the family videos are not like most home movies because they bear the mark of his surveillance training. Usually the camera sits still on a tripod, sometimes the filming is done from his shoulder but the image rarely moves around or between people. Instead he zooms in on the event, pans, and narrates the scenery along with the back-story to the event. Often he’s just quiet.

At some point during my childhood I must have understood that video was intended to be a memory device—that video creates a trace of something we wish to return to in the future.

But the videos of my childhood didn’t preserve the things I was counting on them to preserve. As I child I hoped that videos could be vivid evidence of a man I knew was dying. As an adult I’ve come to know them as a record of the way that one man saw and documented the world around him.

Perhaps if I had been the one behind the camera I would have preserved what I thought video could preserve. I can only imagine that had I taken the heavy camera on my shoulder I would have made a study of my father. My videos would have been hopeful that
the moving image would capture something that could be useful proof of a man and his relationship with his daughter. It would have been a study not unlike his surveillance films.

Figure 22: Agents in the pool, video still from home movie, 1984.
Figure 23: Blank page from archive.
The Panoptical

I passed through the metal detector at the Mexican National Archive's main entrance. After collecting my things from the x-ray's conveyer belt, I was stopped by plump woman with a tight ponytail and blue eye shadow that matched her officer’s uniform. She told me that I could take into the archives only a digital camera, a pencil, and sheets of loose-leaf paper. I pulled each item from my bag and placed them on the table in front of her. Pushing my digital camera aside, she drew the sheets of white paper towards her. She flipped over each one and stamped them individually like a librarian stamping the due date in a book. Upon my exit she would do the same, stamping each sheet to make sure I hadn't nabbed any of the archive’s materials. After she checked the papers she radioed my name and topic of research to the next security station and waved me through the turnstile, which counted the entrance and exit of all visitors.

I made my way down the long sun-lit corridor that lead to the central atrium of the building and the archives. The Mexican National Archives are housed in an old prison in Mexico City. The prison was designed in the panopticon style, allowing guards to view all prison cells from a central area. The prison’s long cellblocks radiate out from a circular central area that recalls a both the Roman coliseum and old European train stations. Between the radiating cellblocks are triangular courtyards that abut the massive wall encircling the compound.
The National Archive’s organization of manuscripts, microfilm, and books and the prison’s architecture for the organization of people continuously reflect upon each other like a hall of mirrors. There is the repetition between the roster of prisoners housed in cells and the record of people’s lives held between thick files. While there are no longer guards stationed in a central viewing area, there are librarians and information specialists sitting at central information desks. Each file, like each former prisoner, is recorded and organized into a system for efficient housing and retrieval.

Standing in the central atrium I was reminded of something I had read years ago about A.R. Luria, a Soviet psychologist who studied memory. He believed that our sense of the world was made up of two parallel versions of the same reality. According to Luria both versions of reality, even if they are contradictory, are understood and organized simultaneously by the nervous system. One part of our perception is like a panorama, in which we assess everything that surrounds us all at once. The other, simultaneous version of reality is organized to take in the specific things we are seeking in our surroundings.6 Essentially, it’s like looking through the National Archive’s card catalogue while standing within the prison panoptic on. There we can understand the messy chaos of the past in a space designed to control those who disobeyed the order of the living.

I crossed the vast circular panorama to cellblock number seven. At the door to the cellblock I signed in with the security officer anticipating me. He told me to wait, confirmed my research topic, and then radioed to the archivist inside. With his walkie-talkie still at his ear he nodded, making a quick gesture with his head toward the door.

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Figure 24: Folder 2 of 2, Declassified Mexico State Department Archives, William Morales.
In Miniature

My father and his partner did surveillance on a Puerto Rican organized crime ring of jewelers. As a toddler I called my father's partner 'Uncle Wozle', named after the Heffalumps and Woozles that Winnie the Pooh thinks are going to steal his honey.

![Figure 25: Me, my father, and Uncle Wozle, video still from home movie, 1983.](image)

During one particularly long surveillance project my father and Uncle Wozle decided to build model sailboats to pass the boring hours of surveillance. They each picked their own model boat from a catalogue and ordered the kits from the US. Next to cameras, film, microphones, wiretap records, logbooks, and video equipment they set up an area with
tiny saws, wood glue, vices and model boat plans. They split up their surveillance time so that while one agent was watching the jeweler’s business the other would be constructing his boat. When the surveillance ended they packed up the equipment and placed the unfinished model boats in separate cardboard boxes.

I only recently came to know about the surveillance project. I remember the boat from the last months of my father’s life when he could no longer go to work as an agent. At home he was restless, so he unpacked the model boat he had begun years ago. I remember coming home from fifth grade to find him hunched over a small vise placing wood strips into place with capillary pinchers. His shirt was usually off, exposing his olive-toned skin and the long thin tube that carried morphine to an IV that went straight to his heart. He would have Lonesome Dove or The Godfather running on the television. Movies he didn’t need to watch but which kept him company.
Figure 26: Photographs of boats crafted during Puerto Rican surveillance operation.
Figure 27: Film stills from the movie G-Men, 1935. G-Men was slang for FBI (government man).
Figure 28: Microfilm scan, ‘End’, from research at the Puerto Rican Newspaper Archives, 2010.
References


Appendix A: Influences

During the artistic process there were numerous sources that shaped my understanding \textit{His Archive} and guided my research. The following is a list of influences that had special weight throughout.

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textit{Archive Stories: Facts, Fictions, and the Writing of History}, edited by Antoinette Burton
  \item The work of \textit{Atlas Group (Walid Raad)}
  \item \textit{Dust: the Archive and Cultural History} by Carolyn Steedman
  \item Bruce Conner’s \textit{Report}
  \item \textit{Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia} by Andreas Huyssen
  \item Gerhard Richter’s \textit{October 18, 1977} cycle and Robert Storr’s writings about it
  \item \textit{Regarding the Pain of Others} by Susan Sontag
  \item The work of Doris Salcedo
  \item \textit{Haunted Land: Facing Europe’s Ghosts After Communism} by Tina Rosenberg
  \item My memory of my first visit to the US Holocaust Memorial Museum at the age of 12.
  \item The films of Chris Marker
  \item Alain Resnais’s films \textit{Hiroshima Mon Amour} and \textit{Night and Fog}
  \item \textit{Empathic Vision} by Jill Bennett
  \item The writing style of W.G. Sebald
  \item Alfredo Jarr’s work \textit{Lament of the Images}, 2002
  \item Annie Dillard’s \textit{For the Time Being}
  \item The Guggenheim exhibition \textit{Haunted}, 2010
  \item \textit{The Past is a Foreign Country} by David Lowenthal
  \item The National Security Archive’s coverage of \textit{The Guatemalan Police Archive}
  \item \textit{Flesh of My Flesh} by Kaja Silverman
\end{itemize}

My brother and sister who are both amazing storytellers.