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AROUND HER TABLE: A DIGITAL COMMUNITY ARCHIVE
FEATURING AZOREAN-AMERICAN WOMEN IN NEW ENGLAND

by

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ABSTRACT

Around Her Table: A Digital Community Archive
Featuring Azorean-American Women in New England

Suzanne Lyn Parenti Sink
Old Dominion University, 2019
Director: Dr. Daniel P. Richards

Around Her Table is a born-digital dissertation dedicated to collecting, preserving, and validating the Azorean-American woman's immigrant experience and cultural identity through the transformative power of participatory archives. The site address is www.aroundhertable.org. The digital exhibit features the oral histories and artifacts related to the domestic sphere of six Azorean-American families, with particular emphasis on artifacts related to the kitchen, hand-worked textiles, and religious practices. Driving the urgency for the creation of new archival records for this community is that fact that despite the nearly one million North Americans who trace their ancestry to the Azores, traditional institutional and civic archives have largely overlooked Azoreans' presence and contributions. These obscurations are even more profound for Azorean-American women whose lives are primarily connected to the private sphere of the home. This dissertation begins to redress these archival erasures while arguing for the need to devote greater resources to the documentation of the Azorean-American experience, contributing to equitable representation in the archival record upon which our histories are written.

In addition to generating and exhibiting these digital artifacts, this dissertation is also an analytic autoethnographic study of the archival production processes. This method is grounded in reflexive narratives that document the researcher's situated decision-making and affective experiences that are then analyzed, in relation to current scholarship, in order to identify key considerations for developing cultural participatory archives. These narratives explore the

archive's conceptualization, participation, funding, institutional influences, data collection procedures, and interface design. While inviting methodological critique, narratives inclusion also recognizes the influential forces that shape the archive, and thus frame users' experiences and meaning-making activities, providing transparency and enabling future researchers' need to account for implicit biases and critically consider the implications of the archival apparatus. This dissertation draws on feminist rhetorical and historiographic practices, operating with critical reflexivity and an ethics of care framework that prioritizes cultural stakeholders while honoring affective connections to scholarship. It is also positioned within archival studies' post-custodial turn that takes responsibility for the archive as a political space and calls for activist-archivists to generate new archival records in an effort to mediate social injustices through archival evidence and representation.

For my family, whom I love, and the people of the Azores everywhere.

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I also extend my deepest gratitude to the participants who made this work possible. Leo Areia’s enthusiasm and openness helped me grow as a researcher while contributing powerfully to the archive. I am grateful to Shannan Davis for not only agreeing to participate, but for bringing together her mother Zita Soares, her aunt M. Eugenia Machado, and her first cousin Sandra Rezendes to meet with me, literally around a table, and make me feel like a part of her family. The discussion that day cemented my vision for the archive and will help future researchers truly see the heart of the Azorean woman. Lorraine Beaumont and Tiffany Beaumont

Worthen spent a beautiful day with me in a sunny garden in Newport, sharing photos and stories, and made significant and supportive contributions to the archive. Christine Furtado's knowledge and passion for the Azorean culture made was a tremendous gift, and I am honored to be entrusted with her contributions. Isabel Andrade's generously offered time and support have also been meaningful for me as a researcher and for the archive itself. Lastly, I want to acknowledge the love and support of my beautiful great-aunt Elsie Sousa Cabral Correia, my grandmother's sister, and the last remaining link we have to our Sousa family ancestry. The gift of her recorded interviews will continue to enrich the lives of the four surviving children of the three Sousa sisters, Mary, Almerinda, and Elsie, their fourteen grandchildren, their twenty-three great-grandchildren, and their two great-great grandchildren, with many more to come in the future. I would like to thank my cousin Kerry Martin and her husband Bobby for opening their home to me, our lovely 5 Manchester street, the home my grandfather built and mother grew up in, which was the perfect place from which I could work to build this archive.

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Writing, of course, often benefits from dialog and collaboration as well as from participating in a community of practice. I am fortunate that I belong to two such communities, one at Old Dominion University and one at Florida Atlantic University. The 2015 cohort of Dissertation Seminar students, especially Megan McKittrick, Jessica Saxon, and Sarah McGinley, and the ODU Diss Bootcamp group have been instrumental in keeping me grounded, motivated, inspired, and accountable. I am so fortunate to be part of this amazing group of writers and to be in an academically supportive environment with the utmost collegiality. The crew in the University Center for Excellence in Writing at FAU is also an amazing support system with consultants who have graciously endured the many years of my work, lending an ear and a thoughtful comment. I especially wish to thank Dr. Kathryn Wolfe for her instrumental role in helping me organize the theoretical framework for this project. Thank you to other members of my support community, Dorothy Zbornak, Blanche Devereaux, Rose Nyland, and Sophia Petrillo. Thank you for being a friend.

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INTRODUCTION

Around Her Table is a digital exhibition of artifacts from Azorean-American families living in Bristol, Rhode Island. The archive and supporting scholarship that comprise this dissertation are located online at www.aroundhertable.org. The content of the site is also preserved permanently online through the Internet Archive, located at the stable url: <https://web.archive.org/web/20191115202845/http://www.aroundhertable.org/>.

The primary purpose for this archival project is to generate digital records of the Azorean-American community, especially those that reflect the experiences of women and domestic culture, preserve the records in an archive, and present them to a broader audience to expand representation and access to cultural identity markers. However, this project is also serving as a born-digital dissertation in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English at Old Dominion University.

As a dissertation, this archive is a digital rhetoric and cultural studies project that aims to map the decision-making processes and influences that shape archival design and delivery, and to render transparent the archivist as a locatable agent within the archive. The chapters included in this section of the archive position the dissertation within current scholarship in related fields while also providing data regarding the methods used to construct the archive and curate the digital exhibition. For archivists and historiographers, these chapters offer insight into significant procedural, ethical, and theoretical factors that need to be considered in the development of participatory cultural archives, while presenting the justifications and rationales for the design decisions for critical analysis and discussion. For researchers interested in Azorean-American culture, these chapters provide transparency into the archive's composition and the appraisal decisions that have shaped the available artifacts and how they are purposefully framed.

As an interdisciplinary project, this dissertation occupies the intersection of several fields, including archival studies, rhetoric, and interface design. As a boundary object, the archive is studied across the disciplines and is examined through both practical and theoretical lenses.

Within the scholarship from each field, there is recognition that the archive functions as a site of power in addition to serving as a site of preservation. This is a power that can be harnessed to enact social justice by increasing visibility for marginalized groups and creating a more equitable representation in the archival record, but it is also possible for oppressive social structures to be reinscribed in the archive as a reflection of dominant cultural and institutional values and norms.

As archivists, rhetoricians, and interface designers increasingly engage in the development of new archival records and exhibits, it is important to understand the traditions and emerging contributions that each field's theories and practices offer as they relate to the archive—its construction, reception, and use. Examining the scholarship from each field reveals important insights into the archive although they come from different perspectives, and overlaying these transdisciplinary discussions can lead to useful implications for archival work, specifically in linking archival design processes to users' meaning-making activities. The purpose of this chapter is to review the relevant scholarship from these disciplines to illustrate the ways in which they overlap, while also making an argument for how synthesizing concepts between them is mutually beneficial, enriching each field's approach to the archive and enhancing the connections between archival theory and practice for those within these disciplines. In identifying the reciprocal gifts that can be shared between archival studies, rhetoric, and interface design, this chapter is also identifying the positionality of this project within each field and articulating the broader scholarly purposes of this project.

This dissertation engages theories and practices from archival studies, rhetoric, and interdisciplinary approaches to the interface. In developing a digital archive of the domestic artifacts and oral histories of Azorean-American women, the project builds on the kinds of archival activism working toward equitable representation for marginalized groups that is explored by scholars in the post-custodial turn. However, by having a focused interest on women's role in maintaining and circulating cultural identity in their rhetorical practices, the project is also operating with feminist rhetorical practices in the historiographic recovery tradition of rhetoric. Rhetorical theories are also applicable to the dissertation in that by recognizing the rhetorical implications of the archival space at every level and using autoethnographic methods to trace the archive's development, the project seeks to richly map the connections between the archivist's purpose, archival processes, and, in future studies, users' meaning-making activities. Lastly, in presenting the archive in an open-access digital exhibit, this dissertation must also confront the issues of user influence and embedded cultural values that are raised by scholars working with computer interfaces. From the vantage point of this dissertation at the intersection of these fields, it is clear that although there are valuable insights articulated within each tradition, there are mutually reinforcing ideas that can be shared across disciplinary lines. This dissertation works in part to illustrate what each field contributes to how we understand archives and present arguments for what each field could usefully provide to the others.

In the previous discussion of scholarship within each field, it is clear that archival studies understands the power that archives contain and assert, with a growing acknowledgement that archivists must take responsibility for user impacts. However, the field has not yet fully developed a theoretical framework for understanding users' role in making meaning from

archival materials and how archivists' processes influence that potential knowledge production—how archivists can assume the mantle of knowledge-managers. There are also deep tensions in the field between traditionalists and post-custodial activist archivists about the nature of the archive and the role of archivists, whether the archivist should focus exclusively on processing received records or if they should engage deeply in appraisal practices that lead to the assessment of archival gaps and the generation of new records. In rhetoric, there is also a deep understanding of the archive as site of politics and power with significant implications for marginalized people who are underrepresented in the evidentiary body of the archive. However, because rhetoricians are attuned to thinking about discursive production in terms of the elements of the composition process and about how an audience engages that discourse, rhetorical theories can ground archive production, particularly for archivists who seek approaches to their work that more effectively connect action to intention.

Thinking about the rhetorical situation along with how selection, appraisal, description, access, and preservation can be understood in terms of the canons of rhetoric—invention, arrangement, style, delivery, and memory—helps address archival studies' need for a theoretical framework to guide the creation of new archival compositions. Employing feminist rhetorical practices can also be useful in guiding the process of making new archives, particularly in approaching marginalized groups with an ethics of care to avoid inadvertently re-representing dominant forces in the archives. Rhetorical theories that illustrate the co-construction of meaning with users and the values of user-centered design are also useful in reinforcing activist archivists' efforts to incorporate users' needs into the development processes, while genre theories can be applied to expand the field of archival studies to accommodate and validate both traditional and generated forms of the archive. Lastly, theories of narrative and history help to highlight the

interested and biases nature of writing histories, which empowers archivists with greater critical reflexivity for the influences working to shape their decisions and how those decisions may influence users. However, rhetoricians engaging in archival work as part of historiographic recovery efforts need to engage the traditions with archival studies to engage best practices and acquire training in sound archival processes to support more sustainable projects. Archival studies and rhetoric both approach the archive, in terms of the forces that bring them into existence and the forces that extend outward into society as a result of their formation, but they should work together more closely to share the important knowledge traditions each has developed around their shared object of study.

Interface design is explored in rhetoric and new media, but with little exception, the archival interface is largely unexplored. With the increase in digital archives, and the digital nature of this dissertation, the interface is an area that needs further consideration as a key part of the digital exhibition of archival materials. However, interface studies are typically generalized and not specifically examine them in terms of the archive. What is useful to archive development though is that interface scholars illustrate how these access points constrain and influence users, while highlighting the reinscription of cultural values in computational artifacts, which may generate more awareness of how designers function as authors in interface design and thus how they may better control for the reconstruction of oppressive values in the interface. These concerns are especially significant for archivists whose goals include an increase in justice for non-dominant cultures. Since this scholarship is rarely connected specifically to the digital archive interface though, it obscures the material realities of archive production and fails to account for archival processes that comprise the mediation of non-digital forms of the interface, like appraisal and description, that also shape the user experience by shaping the raw elements

that the interface is seeking to organize and represent. A deeper understanding of archival processes, some analog and some digital, would be relevant to thinking about interface design since these processes constrain design in meaningful ways. It is also important given that organization of content is a key aspect of the interface's function, but organization is also a key aspect of archival studies. How an archive is organized, although it does reflect to a certain degree the archivist's appraisals and descriptions, is largely driven by standards in the field that privileges provenance and original order (*respect des fonds*) in addition to standards of categorization in digital archives set by the Library of Congress, both of which are likely to factor significantly into the interface's organizational structures. More collaboration between archivists and interface design scholars would productively offer recommendations for designs that better suit archival needs with respect to field standards.

In merging knowledge from each field, digital archives can be more robustly and intentionally developed, taking users' needs more fully into consideration while creating archives of lasting value to scholars and cultural communities. Archivists can engage rhetorical theories to enrich their understanding of users and the implications of their own processes, while historiographic scholars can engage archival studies to provide sound methods and practices for building archives. Whether approaching archive design from an archival studies or rhetorical perspective, those engaged in digital archive development need to attend critically to the questions of interface design while interface design scholars could map the relatively uncharted territory of the archival interface. Through these reciprocal gifts and mutual reinforcements, the archives created will only be strengthened in more ethical practices with transparency and responsibility for the power and influence of the archive. It is also the intersection at which this dissertation is positioned and to which it intends to speak.

The project consists primarily of three major objectives. The first objective is to compile a robust digital archive featuring the domestic artifacts and oral histories of Azorean-American women from Bristol, Rhode Island. The digital images included in the archive will be co-selected with archive contributors and will feature the kinds of objects central to the preservation and exchange of cultural identity. Objects represented in the archive, such as religious altars, traditional recipes, handwork like embroidery and crochet, keepsakes, and family photographs, are all traditionally maintained by women in this community and represent rhetorical practices that inscribe cultural values and knowledge. However, as an immigrant community that has been historically marginalized, particularly in terms of economic and educational opportunities, Azorean-Americans are underrepresented in current archival records. Women in this community are even further marginalized due to the prescribed gender roles that limit their visibility in the civic and business contexts that often comprise archival records, despite the significant role they have in cultural circulation. In choosing to generate new records and preserving them in an archive, this dissertation is engaging in the kind of activist archival work prevalent with the post-custodial tradition. However, in having a specific purpose of recovering cultural rhetorical practices of marginalized women, the project is also aligned with feminist rhetorical practices of historiographic research. Furthermore, because I am a member of this community myself, the project represents a research endeavor that is closely connected to affective attachments, which is also an approach to scholarship validated by feminist practices.

The second objective is to present the archival materials to users in a digital exhibit online. By making the records publicly available, the exhibit should support future scholarship related to describing and understanding Azorean rhetorical practices while generally facilitating greater awareness of the cultural contributions of this community. This work draws on interface

scholarship and raises issues of how design reflects the author's intentions and situatedness. The issues of bias and interested representations of history are also associated with the processes involved in the archive construction itself, so the decisions made in developing both the archive and the exhibit becomes significant to their interpretation. To acknowledge and take responsibility for the influence of my positionality within the archive and exhibit, and to potentially mediate the invisibility of the interface function and the archivist's hand, the dissertation relies on autoethnographic methods to leave as much evidence as possible about the purposes and constraints shaping the design decisions. This third objective of transparency will trace the purpose and process for making the archive, what Derrida calls the archivization of the archive. The processes are organized into six major narratives. The Concept chapter explores the rhetorical situation that gave rise to the archive and the scholarly biography that illustrates important aspects of my positionality. The Participation chapter recounts how contributors were selected and the issues surrounding an approach to collaboration driven by a feminist ethics of care. The Funding chapter reveals the implications and constraints of limited funding and the decisions made about how best to use available resources to meet the overall objectives. In the Institutional Influence section, the narrative reveals further implications of my situatedness and how the negotiation between multiple professional and academic identities influences the archive development. The Data Collection and Management discussion traces decisions about what kinds of artifacts were selected and why, how the images and recordings were made, and the rationale for how to describe and organize the artifacts. This section also explores the utility of autoethnographic data and its relevance to the critical-making movement that advocates for ways of knowing that combine the theoretical aspects of an object of study with the practical skills of making them.

The chapter, Digital Exhibit and Archival Interface, provides a log of activities and decisions that trace the evolution of the digital exhibit and interface design, with attention to the difficult balance between the ideal and the possible. They explore how the archival interface constructs an argument, what decisions are possible, and what influences the archivist's decisions in the design process while also attempting to answer the call by rhetoricians to engage in interface development. In their totality, these narratives offer a method for employing the critical reflexivity called for by feminist rhetorical practices while illustrating the material realities of this kind of work, the practical aspects of applying rhetorical theory to archive design, demonstrating what it looks like to work from a rhetorical perspective with awareness of potential user influence at every level. It is also a powerful way to provide transparency, which is ethically important to address issues of bias, but they are also important in that they embed—in real time—important data about purpose and positionality that influence the shape of the final archive. In the final chapter, From Fieldwork to Formalization, offers a summarization of the emergent issues from across the autoethnographic chapters. In coding the autoethnographic data, several key issues appear repeatedly in multiple narrative discussions. This chapter articulates these conclusions, drawing out generalized implications for rhetoricians engaged in archival work and archivists working to better occupy their roles as knowledge-managers.

The autoethnographic chapters are also especially important for future objectives related to this archive that include conducting user experience testing in an attempt to connect the intentions of design decisions to users' actual meaning-making, to see whether the intended outcomes are achieved by the design, which may lead to archivists being more effectively able to assume the role of knowledge managers. This kind of testing would be potentially useful in better connecting process to outcomes. For example, archival processes of selection, description,

arrangement, and access are all understood to be influential in shaping the archive and users' experiences of it; however, the scholarship does not offer clear insight into the specific influences different decisions will have or why. Selection and access can be understood on the surface as influencing the corpus of information that users will see, which clearly influences what they can know by defining the boundaries and data set from which they are learning. However, how does organization influence users? What do different taxonomical structures do to influence users' understanding of a particular artifact's significance? What do different approaches to descriptive choices do to shape understanding? What do stylistic characteristics of digital design signal to users about authority or significance? In order to answer these questions, the foundations that determined the formation of the structures will need to be documented.

Ultimately, this project is deeply rooted in the theories from rhetoric and archival studies that archives can *do* something and not just *be* something. It also positions the archivist in a powerful role of both conceptualizing and generating records that to mediate a specific exigency or erasure or marginalization. This is a theoretical stance from the post-custodial turn and historiographic recovery work that archives are not merely passive storage and cataloging facilities, but rather they, and by extension their creators and users, are active participants in numerous aspects of our constructed society and selves. The dissertation occupies the intersection between the three fields in exposing the processes that shape the archivist, the archive, and the interface, with the knowledge that these processes meet users in a co-construction of knowledge. Hopefully, in better understanding these processes, we can learn not only about what is made possible by the archive, but also more about how and why it is possible. This dissertation is trying to map the process of developing an archive with attention to intentions and design. It is building a bridge between archivists and rhetoricians who both think

about what an archive is, conceptually, and what it can do, or how it can be used, in society in terms of knowledge-production and social justice action. It recognizes that archivists have the tools and methods for the sustainable and practical production of archives, which is vital to rhetoricians who enter into archival production as historiographic work. However, it also recognizes that rhetoricians have rich theories about why and how discourse is produced as well as why and how an audience interacting with that discourse can produce knowledge and action, which are useful theories for archivists wanting to gain more insight into users' engagement with the archive and more intentionality about their own archival compositionary actions. The necessity for each field to inform the other is a gap that this dissertation seeks to address by working to show the connections between theory and praxis. That is to say, where we have come to accept in both fields a sense that archive design and development serves a persuasive function, we have yet to trace how those development processes are shaped by archivist's intentions and the material and institutional constraints of their situatedness, connecting process to outcomes. This dissertation will begin to map these connections, working mindfully to observe and apply the mutual gifts of archival studies, rhetoric, and interface design, culminating in greater understanding of the archive as the nexus of artifact, archivist, interface, and user.

One of the primary methods employed in this dissertation is analytic autoethnography. Autoethnography is a method that uses narrative documentation to capture data about researchers' activities and reflexive observations. This data can be coded to identify emergent themes, which can potentially be usefully generalized to the larger field. In analytic autoethnography, the narratives themes are placed in conversation with relevant scholarship to both locate the researcher's experiences within the field and to evaluate the application of theoretical and experiential concepts in project-specific contexts.

There are six autoethnographic chapters collected here, each focusing on a specific aspect of the archive's development from its initial conceptualization through to the design of the digital exhibit. The chapters all follow a similar format: a brief introduction that establishes the purpose of each chapter, a narrative detailing the specific actions and justifications for the decisions made as they relate to the chapter's topic, and lastly a section called "considerations," which are organized discussions of significant issues raised by the narrative experience and grounded in interdisciplinary scholarship. The chapters are presented in an order that best replicates the archive's chronological development, although these categories have imposed artificial boundaries on recursive and interdependent processes. It is not necessary to read these chapters in the suggested order, and inter-chapter links have been embedded as needed to identify key points of recursivity.

The Concept chapter represents the origin story of the archive and locates the archivist's positionality in a scholarly biography. The considerations include discussions of the links between cultural archives and identity formation, implications for affective ties to research subjects, and Azorean-American archival representation. The Participation chapter provides a record of how archival contributors were identified and selected for inclusion in the archive. The considerations explore participatory archive scholarship with a focus on establishing trust and working with an ethics of care for privileging cultural communities' needs and control over their own representation. The Funding chapter details the archive's funding sources and the associated costs of its development. The considerations explore the material constraints of funding on archival design and the ongoing challenge of funding digital archives for sustainable access and preservation. The Institutional Influence chapter illustrates how the positionality of the archivist within various institutions influences the archive design. The considerations explore these

experiences through the lens of constrained agency and in the context of continual renegotiation of multiple stakeholder interests; a method of institutional critique is employed to locate mutable boundaries where institutional change is possible. The Data Collection and Management chapter describes the technologies and organizational systems used to generate and store the archival records and to generate the autoethnographic data. The considerations discuss the affordances and constraints of the selected methods with particular attention to the ethics of archival transparency and the importance of methods that support the enmeshing of theoretical writing and maker practices. Lastly, the Digital Exhibit and Archival Interface chapter is comprised of a series of autoethnographic data organized into Curation Notes. These notes provide of log of specific design decisions related to the delivery of archival records through the digital archival interface, with particular attention to the website layout, navigational structures, and content arrangement. The considerations explore the ethical management of exhibiting oral histories, the tension between ideal and possible design features, and the limitations of working within a content management system.

A separate chapter, *From Fieldwork to Formalization: Implications for Archive Development*, is presented to discuss considerations that emerge across the autoethnographic chapters and how these can be productively applied to future archival projects. Researchers may also be interested in further discussions of relevant scholarship and this project's situatedness in the fields of archival studies, rhetoric, and interface design, available in the chapter *Reciprocal Gifts: A Theoretical Framework for Developing a Rhetorical Archive*.

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