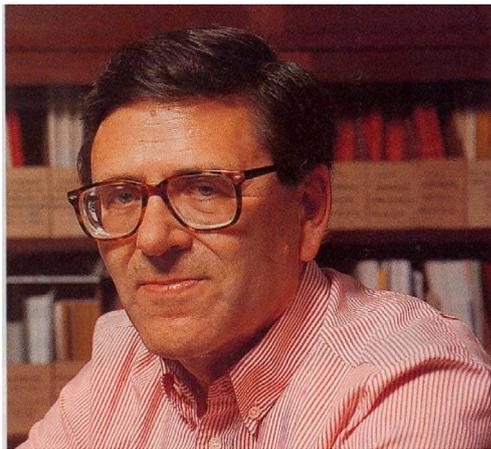


Obituary

In Memoriam: Fernando Lopes da Silva (1935–2019)



Fernando Lopes Da Silva, June 2002.

On May 7, 2019 Fernando Lopes da Silva died at an age of 84. Fernando received his M.D. from the University of Lisbon in 1959 and joined the Psychiatry Department of the Medical Faculty to set up an experimental neurophysiological laboratory in 1960. Thanks to a Gulbenkian Scholarship (1962–1964), he went to the Imperial College of the University of London to follow a post-graduate course on Engineering and Physics for physiologists and worked at the Department of Physiology and Pharmacology of the National Institute of Medical Research (Mill Hill).

Thereafter, he went to Utrecht, The Netherlands, to become member of the research staff of the Institute of Medical Physics (TNO) where he worked for the Ph.D. thesis on System Analysis of Visual Evoked Potentials and obtained this degree from the University of Utrecht.

Fernando was appointed full professor in General Animal Physiology at the Faculty of Sciences at the University of Amsterdam in 1980. He taught Neurophysiology (from 1975 to 1985) as a visiting professor at the Twente University (THT, Enschede) as part of the program Bio-Medical Engineering. In 1985, he was elected member of the Netherlands Royal Academy of Arts and Sciences. In 1993, he was appointed Scientific Director of the newly created Institute of Neurobiology, and member of the Scientific Directorate of the Graduate School of Neurosciences Amsterdam. Since 1995, he was Scientific Director of the Institute for Epilepsy “Meer en Bosch” in Heemstede.

Internationally, acknowledgement for his work is reflected in a large number of scientific awards. In 1997 he received the degree of Doctor Honoris Causa of the University of Lisbon, Portugal. In

1999 he was selected by the American Clinical Neurophysiology Society as the recipient of the 1999 Herbert H. Jasper Award. In 2000 he was awarded the degree of grand-officer of the Order of Santiago da Espada by the President of the Republic of Portugal, that is given for distinction in the fields of science, art and literature. In March 2000 he was elected Invited Professor of the Faculty of Medicine of the University of Lisbon. He was Honorary Member of the Dutch and British Societies of Clinical Neurophysiology. In September 2000 he became Emeritus Professor of the University of Amsterdam due to reaching the official retirement age. In March 2001, he was awarded by the Queen of the Netherlands the degree of knight of the order of the “Nederlandse Leeuw.” In 2002 he received Doctor Honoris Causa of the University of Porto, Portugal.

His research interests were mainly the study of the basic electrophysiology of the brain, in particular of the limbic system, and the origin of epileptic phenomena. He performed groundbreaking research to fundamental mechanisms involved in the generation of brain rhythms, in particular the alpha rhythm, and brain plasticity. Epilepsy has been a research area throughout his career, focusing on fundamental causes and novel diagnostic techniques. His inspiration and vision have made huge impact to (pre-)clinical epilepsy research and treatment of epilepsy in the Netherlands. This includes elucidation of dynamical mechanisms involved in the generation of absence and temporal lobe seizures, where he and his co-workers showed that seizure prediction in absence seizures was fundamentally impossible. Furthermore, he studied the functional organization of neuronal networks in relation to memory, attention and consciousness.

His productivity is reflected in over 400 publications, including his major contribution to the standard ‘bible of EEG, ERPs and MEG’: *Niedermeyer’s Electroencephalography*.

Cees van Huffelen has known Fernando since the 70s, when Fernando was working at TNO in Utrecht. Fernando’s PhD supervisor was Prof Storm van Leeuwen and was at that time already involved in the “epilepsy surgery workgroup”. Prof Cees van Huffelen: “I think Fernando was the most productive neurophysiologist of our generation with a strong interest in fundamental questions. He always showed interest in the scientific work of his colleagues and always willing to provide relevant advice and suggestions”. Van Huffelen adds: “His contribution to Niedermeyer’s ‘EEG bible’ is well recognized. He has supervised a very large number of PhD students, and has without any doubt been a tremendous coach and source of inspiration.”

Walter van Emde Boas has known Fernando since the 70s as well, even before his specialization to neurology (1975–1980). Their collaboration started when Fernando joined the epilepsy institute in Heemstede as a scientific director. “Fernando was not

only a very good scientist but also a very likeable person, who always showed interest in your work and personal circumstances. He also had very good skills to manage not only the primary scientific content of projects but also to perform ‘control steering’ if projects were at risk to deviate from essentials or when collaboration with diverse participants was at risk to become impaired by non-scientific issues, including politics.”

Piotr Suffczynski met Fernando first in 1993, when he came to Amsterdam for the student exchange program. “My boss at that time, prof. Katarzyna Blinowska, was a close friend of Fernando and she gave me a recommendation letter. I presented this letter upon arrival and Fernando put me in touch with his collaborator late Jan Pieter Pijn, who was doing epilepsy research at SEIN in Heemstede. I became trainee of Jan Pieter and Fernando supervised our work. Thanks to these contacts, later, I got a PhD fellowship to study in the Netherlands and Fernando was my mentor. After my PhD, I got a research position at SEIN and we became very close collaborators.”

After Piotr moved back to Poland, the close contacts with Fernando and the research group at SEIN were maintained. Fernando visited Poland 3 times - twice to give invited lecture and once as a habilitation thesis reviewer. He was involved in scientific research till his last days. Piotr: “Two weeks before passing away, Fernando sent us his comments on the paper we were working on, illustrating his enduring interest in science. He was very passionate about research and had great intuition about topics that were worth pursuing. He had very, very broad knowledge of Neuroscience in general. It was truly unique even among most eminent neuroscientists of his generation. And he was always happy to discuss research matters and share his knowledge – both with freshman students and his senior research fellows. While being world-famous and exceptional scientist he remained very modest and friendly person. Fernando had almost a constant smile on his face. His warm kindness and positivity are how he will be remembered”.

About 15 years ago, Michel van Putten had the pleasure to collaborate with Fernando and Prof Maria Peters (University of Twente) on a MEG project to identify and characterize epileptiform discharges. His profound interest and knowledge of both

physiology, mathematics, physics and signal processing was impressive. The last time Michel met him was only a few months ago at the 125th anniversary of the Dutch Epilepsy Foundation. He was already ill at that time, but still interested in personal matters and science. He has been a tremendous source of inspiration to many, and his legacy to our field is not only scientifically impressive. He also served as a mentor, inspirator and personal friend for many, ranging from students to scientists.

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