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Connecting the Unconnected
Lisa Stansbie

Nicholas Bourriaud suggests in *Postproduction* (2002) that:

> The artistic question is no longer: what can we make that is new? but how can we make do with what we have? In other words, how can we produce singularity and meaning from this chaotic mass of objects, names and references that constitutes our daily life?

My practice *makes do with what we have*, but the chaotic mass of objects, names and references used are those that constitute the expanding contents of the internet, connecting information online that may never be connected otherwise. Using the internet as a research source for the creation of art work allows instant access to and collection of unedited information and images.

The process of curating and collecting using the world wide web is undertaken in order to create my own ever expanding digital archive, which can function as a useable object. The intention is that the digital archive might potentially interrogate notions of appropriation and reinterpretation through constructing and connecting existing internet-based material. This *interactive archive* utilises a dialectical approach that intentionally searches for apparently random associations between information, images and objects. However, that which appears to be random is always governed by myself as the author of the archive. In Georges Perec's novel, *Life a User's Manual* (1978), he explains that the art of making jigsaws,

> begins with wooden puzzles cut by hand, whose maker undertakes to ask himself all the questions the player will have to solve, and, instead of allowing chance to cover his tracks, aims to replace it with cunning, trickery and subterfuge.

The construction of the archive is made with the player/user/viewer in mind and deliberately creates paths of a labyrinth that sometimes end, overlap, repeat and occasionally finish where they begun.

Using digital media has allowed the expanding connections to be created through the use of search engines as the *connectors* and the internet as its source (the internet itself being a mammoth archive). As a basis for creating knowledge, this largely unedited source could be said to undermine the traditional associations of *fixed knowledge*, often associated with the conventional material archive.

However, with the continued expansion of the archive it has now developed into a tool to produce further work. Archive entries are used as points of departure to create further artworks in the form of satellite narrative film works.

The film works that have developed from the archive also have the potential to expand ideas located around site(s) for the work. Currently, the films exist simultaneously within and outside the digital archive in multiple sites and formats. Already in material art practice it is common to have different versions of a work. Using the digital, however, allows the work to be continually fluid by means of re-sampling/editing and allowing it to be shown in a variety of material and immaterial sites.

In considering sites for the presentation of work, the development of the archive itself as a tool for research has enabled me to consider its presentation alongside the satellite works which have been generated from it. When displayed in material spaces it can be used by a viewer and seen in relation to the other works that have been derived and constructed from it.

Each narrative film work evolves from an archive entry and from this point onwards the methods used to create the film's narrative are similar to the rule-based constrained writing processes used by writers associated with the Oulipo group, such as Georges Perec. Perhaps most ambitiously demonstrated in Perec's novel *A Void* (1962), written entirely without the use of the letter 'e'. This procedure of developing constraints within which the narrative is structured is used across all three film works to create their narrative. For example in *Apprehension* (2007) the starting point is the word Apprehension (in an archive entry) which was found through internet research. Apprehension's *breeding tree* was then also

discovered from a stallion-breeding website and the names from the breeding tree are systematically used (in order) to hang the narrative around. The resulting stories, read in each case by voice-over artists, have narratives which are sometimes difficult to follow. This difficulty stems from the seemingly arbitrary nature of each narrative as it weaves a path directed by each name sequentially taken from the lists.

The Emperor of The Moon (2006)
Film 2 min 16 secs with digital narration

"The Emperor of The Moon" is the final sentence from the author Norman Mailer's best selling book *The Fight* (1975). Through search engines a list of Norman Mailer's best-selling books was discovered and a narrative is created by using the titles of these books in the order they appear in the list.

The Emperor of The Moon

The executioner's song was playing on the radio as we left. It was too stuffy to concentrate on the book and in my mind I replayed the fight scenes from the previous night. The men had all lain there breathless, chests steadily rising until no more, surrounded by the naked and the dead I decided it was time to leave.

Why are we at war? A feeling of hopelessness washed over me along with a sense of distance. My father had told me it was once referred to as an American dream. In the ancient evenings it was different. I remember times when Oswald's tale wagged so frantically that it shook his body and we would walk for hours through dimly lit streets in the meat-packing district.

This of course was before the unholy alliance of the two states. Things were never quiet after. One place was left untouched and it became a shrine to nostalgia. They called it the castle in the forest, yet it was no more than a stone house, decorated with greenery.

As a child I was told never to come to the castle as it was rumored there was a harlot's ghost that walked down the corridors past the spooky art that had been hung and forgotten. The castle now stood alone except for the company of the deer park.

I went back to the book 'The gospel according to the son' was the first section, but my heart was not in it. We began to pull away and as the tilting rocked me, I drifted off. I was awoken suddenly by a commotion. Passengers were looking around, straining to see from the small windows. The young girl next to me, with a concerned look, asked 'why are we in Vietnam?'

The Cloud Collector (2007)
Film 2 min 15 secs narrated by Gerard Fletcher

The Cloud Collector tells of an elderly man (The Cardinal) who since the 1950's has developed an obsession with taking photographs of the jet streams left in the sky by aeroplanes. *The Cloud Collector's* narrative is written to include the top ten best-selling novel titles from the 1950s in their 'list' order from 1 to 10. It stems from the archive entry '1950s'.

The Cloud Collector

Delivering the news to those who still required it in paper form, he rode his rusted BMX along Joy Street each morning. His route took him across the river and into the trees where the drone of the tarmac subsided into an uneasy silence, and then he would often see the colourless figure of the cardinal in the misty leaded window and feel slightly uncomfortable about his silhouette.

Since the 1950s the cardinal had been a collector. From his window, the wall opposite was etched with years of abuse and when he stared across, he would see fantastical arrangements within this urban

monolith. His gaze was only broken intermittently by an expectant glance to the sky. Today he considered how the imprints on the horizon were reminiscent of the pattern on the pedestal his father had left him all those years ago, which now served as a plinth for his camera.

The flood tide from three years ago had damaged his best work, but the tattered ones were still included alongside the pristine books. The parasites that shared the books' wooden shelves crawled invisibly through the important images they contained, each one was religiously classified with sticky video numbers, like star money, that came, unintentionally, to enumerate the later years of his life.

Occasionally when he looked up to the traces in the sky they reminded him of a time when as a boy he had taken part in the jubilee trail and gained a trophy for his success as an adventurer. Thinking of these lost years often made him a disenchanted man

Apprehension (2007)
Film 2 min 53 secs narrated by Mary Healy and music by Jeff Harbourne

Apprehension is a word within an archive entry and after research on the internet it was also found to be the name of a race horse. Following on from this *Apprehension's* 'breeding tree' was collected. Using the names of the horses a narrative was written to include each name in the order it appears in *Apprehension's* breeding tree.

In contrast to its source, the film's narrative is based around the delivery of a package, in a time when electricity and water have become scarce. However, the film's imagery references the structure of the narrative by showing horses which are edited from home movies from the 1950s.

Apprehension's Breeding Tree

In The Wings	GB	1986		First Kiss	GB	1983
Saddlers Wells	USA	1981		Kris	GB	1976
Northern Dancer	CAN	1961		Sharpen Up	GB	1969
Nearctic	USA	1954		Doubly Sure	GB	1971
Natalma	USA	1957		Atan	USA	1961
Fairy Bridge	USA	1975		Rocchetta	GB	1961
Bold Reason	USA	1968		Reliance	FR	1962

Special	USA	1969		Soft Angels	GB	1963
High Hawk	IRE	1980		Primatie	FR	1975
Shirley Heights	GB	1975		Lassie	GB	1956
Mill Reef	USA	1968		Vaguely Noble	GB	1965
Hardiemma	GB	1969		Vienna	GB	1957
Sunbitten	GB	1970		Pistol Packer	FR	1968
Sea Hawk	FR	1963		Gun Bow	USA	1960
Pantoufle	GB	1961		Georges Girl	USA	1959

Apprehension

It was with apprehension that we delivered the package to the man in The Wings. It was nearly six months since the last of the saddlers' wells had dried up and everyone, even the northern dancer, was forced to deal with the drought and periodic power cuts. The bars that lined the main street were now places of solace.

We had heard yesterday that Nearctic was now also without power and as we stood waiting nervously, Natalma the owner was already lighting candles in readiness around the semi-circle of the bar. This gave it the appearance of a fairy bridge, propped up with soulless creatures who, without a bold reason to consider leaving, remained in their special places.

The Wings was a dreary place, even with power. The grimy image hanging above the bar of a high

hawk appeared to be circling over the customers, most of whom were out of work miners from Shirley Heights.

In whispered moments throughout the journey we had speculated about the contents of the package. It could contain the results of drilling from the Mill Reef, but Hardiemma didn't agree and explained that if drilling had taken place, the rest of the group would surely have appeared sun bitten or shown some signs of a tussle with the sea hawk.

The bartender offered us pantoufle with our drinks and we accepted, even though it was now triple the price. Placing one in my mouth and leaving it to melt I thought of the time I ate it in the orchard during a sticky summer after my first kiss with Kris. I must sharpen up I thought, Atan Rocchetta had entrusted us with this duty and we must be doubly sure to live up to his reliance on us.

The first thing that caught my eye was the Soft Angels' insignia on the back of his jacket. As we sat down he identified himself quietly as Primatie, and introduced us to Lassie, his companion. His vaguely noble air made me think he must have connections with the Vienna block. A man dressed like this, dignified and elegant didn't merge well with the pistol packers at the bar. I had begun to relax by studying him carefully but then, quite unexpectedly I felt a gun bow at my knee. Trying to steady my shaking voice as I spoke, I used my only escape route, 'I am George's girl'.

Borriaud Nicholas, Postproduction (New York: Lukas & Sternberg, 2002), 11.
Perec Georges, Life A User's Manual (London: Vintage 2003) Preamble