Lisa Stansbie has undertaken residencies and shown across Europe and in the USA. Her films have been shown in The Athens Video Art Festival 2007, Siberia International Film in London, The Olympolis Project in Pieria, Greece, Art Tech Media Festivals in Puerto de la Cruz, Tenerife and Cordoba, Spain, and she was also selected as part of Purescreen 2008 at The Castlefield Gallery, Manchester. In October 2007 'The Zeppelin Bend' exhibition at Alsager Arts Centre, U.K explored the relationship between Stansbie's digital archive and her film-based practice. Her films were recently screened at The Window, University of Auckland Gallery, as an online exhibition titled 'Hackamore' curated by Anna Parlane, and selected for Outcasting: Season 7 (an online film screening) and The Text Festival, Bury U.K. Stansbie leads the Contemporary Arts BA course at the University of Huddersfield and is currently completing a PhD at Leeds Metropolitan University. She is also the co-founder and co-editor (with Derek Horton) of the magazine project Soanyway (www.soanyway.org.uk).

Lisa Stansbie:
The Wings
1st – 14th September
2009

Vyner Street
Gallery,
London

Vyner Street Gallery,
23 Vyner Street,
London,
E2 9DG
020 8980 1224

Exhibition opening times
Private View Tuesday 1st September 6.30 - 8.30 pm
Thursday 3rd September 11am - 9pm,
All other days: Wed-Sun 11am-6pm

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The Disorder of Things: The Work of Lisa Stansbie
By Anna Parlane

"This book first arose out of a passage in Borges, out of the laughter that shattered, as I read the passage, all the familiar landmarks of my thought – our thought, the thought that bears the stamp of our age and our geography – breaking up all the ordered surfaces and all the planes within which we are accustomed to tame the wild profusion of existing things, and continuing long afterwards to disturb and threaten with collapse our age-old distinction between the Same and the Other. This passage quotes a 'certain Chinese encyclopedia' in which it is written that 'animals are divided into: (a) belonging to the Emperor, (b) embalmed, (c) tame, (d) sucking pigs, (e) sirens, (f) fabulous, (g) stray dogs, (h) included in the present classification, (i) frenzied, (j) innumerable, (k) drawn with a very fine camelhair brush, (l) et cetera, (m) having just broken the water pitcher, (n) that from a long way off look like flies'. In the wonderment of this taxonomy, the thing we apprehend in one great leap, the thing that, by means of the fable, is demonstrated as the exotic charm of another system of thought, is the limitation of our own, the stark impossibility of thinking that."

The opening passage of Foucault's *The Order of Things* describes the moment of comprehension of the classifying framework which underpins our knowledge; precisely at the point of its collapse in the face of contradiction. If, somewhere in the world, a group of people could legitimately create a taxonomic distinction between animals that had just broken the water pitcher and those that belonged to the Emperor, what claim can the distinction between vertebrates and invertebrates have to objectivity? The logic which governs conceptual links is shown to be culturally conditional: constructed and learnt rather than transparent, natural or neutral. Classifying systems which group the world into things alike and things different are not based on an inherent logic within the things themselves but on an imposed structure, itself just one of many possible systems. The absence of an accepted order of things, the loss of ability to accurately name, describe or categorise is unsettling: the world without order becomes a homogenous and confusing mass.

Artist Lisa Stansbie's works invent schemes of rationalisation based on the mechanised logic of internet search engines. Digital data retrieval functions by matching search terms with words or phrases in the text regardless of context, and can often yield incongruous results. Stansbie capitalises on this potential for absurdity: wading through the unedited glut of information that is the internet, she follows connective threads that defy logic to create works which tease meaning out of meaninglessness. *Apprehension (2007)* takes as its title and starting point the name of a race horse. The film's spoken narrative, a story about the delivery of a package, was constructed using a chronological list of the names of the horses in Apprehension's 'breeding tree', while the film itself was edited from home movies, purchased through ebay, of 1950s horse shows. Stansbie allows Google search to 'co-author' her narrative of connection, opposing her own attempt to construct a rational story to Google's less discriminating offerings.

Stansbie's ongoing project is the construction of a digital archive of internet-sourced information. The internal logic of the archive is based on seemingly arbitrary connections between terms rather than the content of entries. Thus an entry regarding the history of a confectionary item produced by the Huntly and Palmer factory which included an image of a polar bear on its packaging is linked via the phrase 'polar bear' to an image of a protester in a polar bear costume at a political demonstration by the Canadian Youth Climate Control Coalition. The archive cannot be mined for information in the way a traditional database can be searched; users must wander through its labyrinthine structure, tracing the threads of its irrational connections.

Stansbie uses the web of terms and connections in her archive as a starting point for the creation of 'satellite' works, which then become enmeshed within its structure and generate further connective branches. When removed from the context of the archive however, these filmic narratives function as an index to Stansbie's wider practice, revealing a common theme of connections, collections, deliveries and journeys. The phrase 'the emperor of the moon', the name of a cruise ship included in the archive, is also the final sentence of Norman Mailer's 1975 bestseller *The Fight*. Stansbie's *The Emperor of the Moon* structures its story, a narrative of the beginning of a journey, around the titles of Mailer's bestsellers. By pairing this jigsaw of text with film footage of a water ferry approaching a cruise ship, the work references both its own maritime origin and the motif of travel. *The Cloud Collector* similarly uses a bestseller list, itself a catalogue or index to information, as the framework for a story which opens with the delivery of a newspaper and concludes with a description of a carefully classified collection: the collection of photographed aeroplane cloud trails which constitute the visual component of the film. *Odoo* was made in response to an actual journey: as Stansbie's contribution to an exhibition held in Central Ulanabaataar, Mongolia, the film traces its own passage from the United Kingdom to Mongolia through a series of banal internet-derived connecting images and facts. *Odoo* resembles a documentary film, with the surreal absurdity of its content providing a comical contrast to the blandly instructive tone of the narrator's voice.

Stansbie's work exploits the internet's capacity to make connections despite distance, while also highlighting the online conflation of time. A recurring sense of nostalgia pervades her films, and is perhaps most palpable in *Apprehension*. The post-apocalyptic tone of the narrative and the melancholic music of its soundtrack locate the innocent, all-American horse show imagery in a fondly remembered but distant past. The boundary between past and present is hazy on the internet. Texts written in 1950, digitised and included in an online collection, are as easily accessed as those written and uploaded last week. The metaphor of the archaeological dig, apt for researchers excavating boxes of papers, rummaging through store rooms and venturing into dusty warren-like archives, has become redundant with the uniform accessibility of information online. In Stansbie's work, nostalgia - the wistful reminiscences of the protagonists in *The Cloud Collector* and *The Emperor of the Moon*, the reconstruction of the glorious genetic inheritance of the race horse Apprehension - rubs shoulders with the sense of geographic and chronological dislocation created by *Odoo*.

Stansbie's determined rejection of the inherited logic "that bears the stamp of our age and our geography" results in a collection of material which, through the failure to provide a coherent system of access or a categorical collection policy, renders itself functionless as a source of information. For centuries archivists and librarians have attempted to construct systems to provide practical access to the information in their collections. The librarian's fantasy of a universal code, within which all knowledge can coexist and through which all knowledge is accessible, was articulated with quaint optimism by H.G. Wells in a 1937 essay. Wells viewed the potential of the emerging tec hnology of the microfiche in terms which strongly foreshadow the appearance of the internet nearly half a century later:

"By means of the microfilm, the rarest and most intricate documents and articles can be studied now at first hand, simultaneously in a score of projection rooms. There is no practical obstacle whatever now to the creation of an efficient index to all human knowledge, ideas and achievements, to the creation, that is, of a complete planetary memory for all mankind. And not simply an index; the direct reproduction of the thing itself can be summoned to any properly prepared spot. A microfilm, coloured where necessary, occupying an inch or so of space and weighing little more than a letter, can be duplicated from the records and sent anywhere, and thrown enlarged upon the screen so that the student may study it in every detail."

This enthusiasm, while remarkably far-sighted, to the contemporary reader seems slightly naïve and subtly tinged with the hue of imperialism. Wells' vision of the "real unification of our race" takes place through the assignment of metadata which adequately describes and incorporates the infinitely contradictory ideas humanity has produced to date. This mammoth intellectual task seems, in Wells' fantasy, little more than a trifle. However, any single 'all-encompassing' system can only exist to the exclusion of alternative possibilities, alternative mappings of conceptual space. Stansbie's works chart tentative tracks which intersect with the information highways, proposing new hierarchies of information. Imposing order on the chaos of a vast mass of data, digital search tools like Google are designed to cut through swathes of material by using, rather than a fixed and pre-defined vocabulary or classifying system, words of the researcher's choice. By focussing her attention on the 'false hits' generated by this approach, Stansbie creatively mis-uses digital search results to create a nonsense code which provides, instead of access to information, the possibility of an alternative encyclopedia.

J. Borges' nightmare invocation of the library in his 1962 short story *The Library of Babel*, where characters live and die in the endless Library, searching in vain for a mythical code which will give meaning to the gibberish in the books, resonates with Stansbie's suggestion that the attempt to find meaning in a cacophany is an intrinsically human gesture. Her repeated reference to written fiction, both as source material and narrative style, alludes to the notion that there is truth to be found within fiction and sense within nonsense. Readers of fiction and viewers of art approach texts with interpretive intent: prepared to decode, decipher, deduce and figure out, they anticipate obliqueness of meaning and underlying truths. Re-curating information, connecting the baffling and senseless, the arbitrary and illogical, Stansbie reveals the human capacity to make sense.

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