

Foucault's Inventory Log

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Brief 2
Cataloguing
Written Response

Methods of

Moreover, it is not simply the oddity of unusual juxtapositions that we are faced with here. We are all familiar with the disconcerting effect of the proximity of extremes, or, quite simply, with the sudden vicinity of things that have no relation to each other; the mere act of enumeration that heaps them all together has a power of enchantment all its own: 'I am no longer hungry,' Eusthenes said. 'Until the morrow, safe from my saliva all the following shall be: Aspics, Acalephs, Acanthocephalates, Amoebocytes, Ammonites, Axolotls, Amblystomas, Aphislions, Anacondas, Ascarids, Amphibaenas, Angletworms, Amphipods, Anaerobos, Annelids, Anthozoans. ...' But all these worms and snakes, all these creatures redolent of decay and slime are slithering, like the syllables which designate them, in Eusthenes' saliva: that is where they all have their like the umbrella and the sewing-machine on the operating table; startling though their propinquity may be, it is nevertheless warranted by that and in on , by that , by that whose solidity provides proof of the possibility of juxtaposition. It was certainly improbable that arachnids, ammonites, and annelids should one day mingle on Eusthenes' tongue, but, after all, that welcoming and voracious mouth certainly provided them with a feasible

Text chosen:
The Order of Things by Michel
Foucault [preface]

Reading Foucault's preface, I was drawn to his fascination with systems of classification—how knowledge organises itself, and how those systems eventually fracture. His reference to Borges' "Chinese encyclopedia" exposes the instability hidden within all forms of order, the point where logic turns absurd. This became the starting point for my exploration: to use cataloguing not as a tool of control, but as a method for revealing failure. In response, I developed an inventory of the preface itself, a structured list that documents how Foucault constructs, questions, and ultimately undoes the idea of order.

ENTRY 1 / ORIGIN

Source..... Borges' encyclopedia
Classification..... Imaginary (Type B)
Function..... Diagnostic absurdity
Notes..... Provokes epistemic laughter

This passage quotes a 'certain Chinese encyclopaedia' 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 that stark impossibility of thinking .

half-philosophical. It
is comforting, however,
and a
source of profound
relief to think that
man is only a recent
invention, a figure not
yet two centuries old,
a new wrinkle in our
knowledge, and that he
will disappear again as

ENTRY 2 / OBJECT

Designation..... "Man," a recent invention in the archaeology of thought
Condition..... Fading "like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea"
Interpretation..... A vanishing entry in the library of knowledge

But as things
become increasingly
reflexive, seeking
the principle of
their intelligibility
only in their own
development, and
abandoning the space of
representation,

man enters in his turn,
and for the first time,
the field of Western
knowledge.

Strangely
enough, man - the study
of whom is supposed by
the naïve to be the
oldest investigation
since Socrates - is
probably no more
than a kind of rift in

and also a table, a ,
that enables thought
to operate upon the
entities of our world,
to put them in order,
to divide them into
classes, to group them
according to names
that designate their
similarities and their
differences - the table
upon which, since the
beginning of time,
language has
intersected space.

ENTRY 3 / SPACE

Type..... The table or grid, where order is materialised
Contents..... Words, species, disciplines, resemblances
Instability Index.. High - lines blur between categories
Observation..... The table is less a surface than a stage for disappearance

...the linking together
of things that are
inappropriate; I
mean the disorder in
which fragments of
a large number of
possible orders glitter
separately in the
dimension, without law
or geometry, of the
heteroclitite
; and that word should
be taken in its most
literal, etymological
sense: in such a state,
things are 'laid',
'placed', 'arranged' in
sites so very different
from one another that
it is impossible
to find a place of
residence for them, to
define a beneath them
all. common locus

That passage from
Borges kept me laughing
a long time, though
not without a certain
uneasiness that I found
hard to shake
off.

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

ENTRY 4 / TONE

Register..... Clinical, archaeological, self-erasing

Temporal Setting... Outside time, between laughter and erasure

Effect..... Authority without stability

Comment..... The voice of the archivist becomes the echo of the archive

The uneasiness that
makes us laugh when
we read Borges is
certainly related to
the profound distress
of those whose language
has been destroyed:
loss of what is
'common' to place and
name.

(a) belonging to the Emperor, (b) embalmed, (c) tame, (d) sucking pigs, fabulous, (g) stray dogs, (h) included (i) frenzied, (j) innumerable, (k) drawn brush, (l) et cetera, (m) having just broken the water that from a long way off look

Aspics, Acalephs, Acanthocephalates, Amoebocytes, Ammonites, Axolotls, Anacondas, Ascarids, Amphisbaenas, Amphipods, Anaerobes, Annelids,

The animals '(i) frenzied, (j) fine camelhair brush'

'laid', 'placed', 'arranged'

(e) sirens, (f) in the present classification, with a very fine camelhair pitcher, (n) like flies'

Amblystomas, Aphislians, Angletworms, Anthozoans.

innumerable, (k) drawn with a very

ENTRY 5 / METHOD

Description..... Excavation rather than construction

Tools..... Analogy, irony, repetition

Outcome..... Discovery that all systems of order are contingent fictions

Residuals..... Dust, laughter, and the faint trace of classification itself

Constructing this inventory revealed that the act of cataloguing is never neutral. Each entry, however precise, carries the residue of its own perspective. Foucault's text became a mirror for my process: an effort to name the mechanisms of order while recognising that those mechanisms will always fail to contain meaning. The grid, the archive, the taxonomy, all eventually collapse into the laughter that opens the preface. My inventory is therefore both a study and a performance of instability, a way to think about how systems of knowledge are built and how, inevitably, they fall apart.

Bibliography:

Foucault, M. (1966) 'Preface' in *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*. London: Routledge, 1989. pp. xvi-xxvi