On a clear night in the northern hemisphere at about thirty-five degrees from the celestial pole, one can see the constellation the Great Bear. Ursa Major stands out like a beacon in the sky. In our latitudes this constellation is circumpolar and is therefore visible the whole year round. Due to its striking shape, it is perhaps the best known constellation, but this is maybe also because it points towards the Pole Star, in other words, due north, making it an important marker in the night sky. 

Ursa Major consists of seven bright stars. Each of them is associated with a specific aspect of the work of Stansfield/Hooykaas. The various aspects are interrelated, just as the works allude to each other. The constellation of the Great Bear will thus serve as a chart for a journey navigating past their works, with the seven stars each shedding its own light on their œuvre. 

The heavenly bodies have always appealed to the imagination. Apart from the menagerie of the Zodiac and many other animals, the skies are populated with a huge variety of creatures, from unicorns and dragons to mythological figures such as Castor and Pollux or Andromeda. Ursa Major too and her ‘offspring’, Ursa Minor (Little Bear, or Little Dipper, as it is more commonly called) were known to antiquity. In Ovid’s ‘Metamorphoses’ we read how the nymph Callisto escaped the revenge of the jealous Hera because Zeus turned her into a she-bear and installed her in the
Voyage of Discovery

Kitty Zijlmans

heavens. Her son Arcas was turned into the Little Bear. Every constellation has its stories then, dating back to classical antiquity, the Babylonians, the early Egyptian dynasties and ancient China. Everyone’s journey to Ursa Major will engender a new tale. This is mine about the work of Stansfield/Hooykaas.

Playing with time

In the very first videos of Stansfield/Hooykaas we see a play on the relativity and simultaneity of time. The medium of video also lends itself exceptionally well to this – real time can be mixed with condensed and delayed time and a montage can be created of superimposed images. In ‘Split Seconds’ (1979) an axe splits both a block of wood and the video monitor in two, but the movement is quicker than the eye, and in ‘2 Sides of a Story’ (1981) the car journey is sometimes shown speeded up while the face that is projected semi-transparently onto the landscape is motionless. The fragments are constantly alternated with the identical shot of someone digging a spade in the soil. In the meantime a clock ticks away the real seconds and minutes. These four layers of time are complemented with time as experienced by the viewer, who is addressed by Elsa Stansfield with the statement that there are ‘2 sides of a story’. ‘Time Piece’ (1980) turns time into a dramatic subject with its use of the figure of the Grim Reaper, the traditional symbol of death. This gives the title an ambiguous additional layer. Time as experienced by the viewer always plays a crucial role in their video environments. The visual and auditory elements are benchmarks in a story that the viewers create themselves. Observer and observed are dependent on each other; they are ‘2 sides of a story’, and their interaction creates awareness and reality in the here and now. In the video installation cycle ‘From the Museum of Memory I–VII’ (1985–1988), which has memory and remembering as its theme, times present and past are confronted by an allusion to the atom bomb on Hiroshima, which left ‘shadow pictures’ on a wall. While it is true that we live in the present, it exists in constant tension with one’s own past and the past of the collective, which constantly flow through the present by way of memories and associations.

Another good example is the video installation ‘Vi Deo Volente’ (1985), in which three levels of time are intermingled: 1945, the bomb on Hiroshima, images of the Pope’s visit to New York in 1965 taken from, and thus alluding to, the important video artist Nam June Paik, and finally live tv images of the Pope’s visit to the Netherlands in 1985. Despite the twenty-year interval, certain events from the past and the present are intertwined and the title thus takes on a special charge. History is not just frozen time that can be contained in images, but is constantly being reconstructed in the present.

Another aspect of time is linked to the provisional character typical of installation art. Temporarily a meaningful site is created in which different strata of time are interlinked, and a site of experience comes about through the interaction between art work and visitor. No matter how short a time the visit to this site is, its effect can extend far into the future.

The power of memory

The atom bomb on Hiroshima was perhaps one of the most decisive events in human history. Never before had the destructive power of technology been so evident. In a sense Hiroshima could also be called a decisive point in the work of Stansfield/Hooykaas. The visit to the Peace Park in Hiroshima, built to commemorate the atom bomb, and containing photographs of the destruction, compacted human remains and an image of the Buddha that had been torn to shreds, made a permanent impression on the artists. We encounter references to this in the cycle ‘Museum of Memory’, especially in part I and in ‘Shadow Pictures’, part II. The destruction caused by atomic radiation is engraved in the stone, with only the silhouette of a body left in white on the charred steps. This memory has been preserved for us by Stansfield/Hooykaas via a
used to do from the North Star. The compass as an instrument for
finding one’s bearings recurs in many of the works of Stansfield/
Hooykaas, both in a literal and a figurative sense. In the video tape
‘The Force Behind Its Movement’ (1984), compass, wind and move-
ment interact to form an expanding stream of images, while the
installation ‘Compass’ (1984), shown during the exhibition ‘The
Luminous Image’ in 1984 in the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, is
concerned with the various points of the compass, with the fickle-
ness of the wind combined with carefully composed images and
sounds. Compass and map are closely intertwined and these relate
once again to the map of the heavens. They are elements that serve
as leitmotivs in many of their works such as ‘Point of Reference’
(1990) or ‘Solstice’ (1989) for the narrative that is eventually generated
by the viewer.

‘Point of Orientation’ is the title of the third part of the cycle ‘From
the Museum of Memory’ and it broaches another aspect of the
work of taking one’s bearings, the personal element in defin-
ing one’s place, again seen literally and figuratively. The question
is: what do you take your bearings from in life, what do you let
yourself be led by, what is it outside yourself that determines the
course you take and what is your destiny? We also see this depict-
ed in the later multiples, ‘Points of Orientation’ (1995), where a sheet
of buckled bronze represents a rugged landscape. Dangling from a
piece of wire above this landscape is a magnifying glass. You can
zoom in on the detail of the landscape, according to the position
you choose.

In the work of Stansfield/Hooykaas, the observer is gradually al-
located a larger role. From being a spectator outside the scene, he
or she increasingly becomes a ‘viewer from within’ in the installa-
tions until, in interactive works such as ‘Table of Orientation’ (1995)
and ‘Re:search’ (1995), he or she becomes a participant in making the
artwork. After all, it is the viewer’s interaction that completes the
work of art. Starting with a ‘guided’ reconnaissance the focus is in-
creasingly shifted to the most personal possible observation of the
subject.

The needle points north

‘Magnetism created the first order in chaos,’ Elsa Stansfield writes
in the catalogue of the exhibition ‘The Magnetic Image’ (1988). The
magnetic alternation of attraction and repulsion between materials
creates a certain cohesion in this world, with the two poles and the
field of tension and energy flux between them. Tapes are literally
magnetic tapes, but in a metaphorical sense you can also call them
audio/visual fields of tension.

The earth too behaves like a huge magnet, because a rotating rod
magnet turns with the same tip invariably facing the geographi-
cal North Pole. We can therefore take our bearings, just as seamen

video monitor. It is in the human mind that the power of memory
is revealed and this is also pointed out in their often quoted state-
ment: ‘The museum of memory could be located anywhere where
memory is. Remembering is at times the only way of keeping some
things from disappearing. This museum piece/video installation is
dedicated to a flash, a moment when stone became as sensitive
as photo paper, X-ray plates were automatically exposed, clocks
stopped, but not time.’

In the five other parts of the cycle too, remembering/memory
play a vital role, through themes such as travelling, nature (natural
materials, video and audio recordings) and F.A. Yates’s book ‘The
Art of Memory’ (1966), which deals with structures of memory
grafted onto an imaginary architecture. You could compare walk-
ing through an installation with an exercise like this, only here the
symbols intended to stimulate the memory are provided by the
artists.

The cycle ‘Museum of Memory’ is like a story with seven chapters
where the different elements all allude to each other. They tell a
provisional story through both the transience of the installation form
and the individual character of the visitors. Even so, one’s memory
is stimulated because elements from the cycle recur in later work,
recycled as it were.

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The experience of looking

‘Ways of Seeing’ is the title of a book by John Berger, which, although small, has retained its importance to the present day. ‘It is seeing which establishes our place in the surrounding world (...) [but] we never look at just one thing; we are always looking at the relation between things and ourselves.’ What Berger emphasizes here is that seeing is both selection and an act of reporting back to yourself as subject. It is thus an active undertaking that can immediately generate a train of thought as well. The ‘Personal Observatory’ installations (from 1989 onwards) by Stansfield/Hooykaas are focused on observation; in form they allude to instruments for observation, such as the satellite dish in ‘Radiant’ (1988–1989), ‘Echo’ (1990) and the ‘Abri’ (1995) in Wijk aan Zee, or in works like ‘Receiver’ (1989) and ‘Intermittent Signals’ (1991), but they also form sites of intensified sensory experiences. Sitting in the ‘Abri’ (shelter), you look out across the sea, feel the wind in your face and smell the salt water. From far across the sea, sounds come towards you that are received by the parabolic form of the dish. You are seated in the centre of this dish and begin to daydream... Your memory is stimulated and your imagination is set to work. ‘The past becomes a fiction without an index or a fixed point of reference,’ Elsa Stansfield says in the video of ‘Point of Reference’.

The notion of place

A place can take on a special meaning, as with Stonehenge for instance or Delphi with its oracle, or else it can acquire one through the way it is presented or marked out. A site like this is a place somewhere on the earth under the skies that has been chosen. It links the here and now with the universe, and significance is bestowed on it. This notion of place plays a great role in installation art – for a short while a place becomes one that is highly charged with meaning. It is put on the map and different histories converge on it – an experiential environment is created. The series ‘From the Museum of Memory’ is a clear case in point, but in the rest of the work of Stansfield/Hooykaas too the notion of place always plays a role. In it therefore we can also recognize a form of social criticism. Almost all their work refers explicitly to the earth and to nature by way of video images and photographs of nature, of the sea or mountain landscapes, a cyclone or running water, and of the world of animals, but also through the recording of natural materials such as stone, fossils or a bonsai tree, as in the video installation ‘A Living Tree in the Archive’ in Het Archief in The Hague in 1992. They are never laboured, these references to nature, but all of them remind us of the way that human beings behave towards nature. The earth is our place in the cosmos, but we don’t exactly behave towards it with consideration.

In the video ‘Vanishing Point’ (1993) this criticism is made visible. We see images of killer whales alternated with skeletons of extinct animals, but also with stuffed animals and rows of names of endangered species. The vanishing point in the video is an increasingly small square in the centre of the screen in which the endangered species are reviewed until the square vanishes into nothing.

Energy waves

‘S was the first letter telegraphed...’ is the text on the monitor in the centre of the satellite dish in ‘Radiant, a Personal Observatory’, a work from 1988–1989. In 1901 Marconi transmitted a message with radio waves across the ocean – three small dots standing for the letter ‘S’. In ‘Shadow Pictures ... from the Museum of Memory II’ we see X-ray photos on the monitors, referring both to medical technology and to the devastating radioactivity that was released by the atom bomb.

Energy is at the basis of everything, energy is mass and vice versa; it reveals but it can also destroy. Energy can also mean human energy, exchange and interaction and the generation of new ideas. Technology makes use of energy waves in order to observe or record things in different ways. Apart from that part of the
Comparable with this work is 'Wind Direction' (1982), a weather-vane with a camera in it that was installed on one occasion on the Dutch coast and on another on the Sint Pietersberg, a hill outside Maastricht. A monitor lying on the ground showed the live images of the horizon. You never know which way the wind is blowing and which images you will see.

This 'random' element forms a basic principle in their work and refers to the element of chance and unpredictability in life. You can also call this synchronicity - non-causal relations - to use Carl Gustav Jung's expression. In the work of Stansfield/Hooykaas numerous synchronisms occur, forms of reality that are brought to bear on human experience and consciousness and which are thus by definition linked in a non-causal fashion. Reality is first and foremost experienced fact. Their installations then do not allude to reality as such but to the individual production of reality and consciousness. In this regard they can be called 'experiential environments', assemblages of fragmented reality, which generate meaning in interaction with the visitor, and they do this not by way of well-trodden paths, but as the wind blows.

**Note**