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## Un/Dead Animal Art: Ethical Encounters Through Rogue Taxidermy Sculpture

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in Women's Studies and Feminist Research

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## Abstract

Beginning in 2004, the *Minnesota Association of Rogue Taxidermists* began an art movement of taxidermied animal sculptures that challenged conventional forms of taxidermied objects massively produced and displayed on an international scale. In contrast to taxidermied ‘specimens’ found in museums, taxidermied ‘exotic’ wildlife decapitated and mounted on hunters' walls, or synthetic taxidermied heads bought in department stores, *rogue* taxidermy artists create unconventional sculptures that are arguably antithetical to the ideologies shaped by previous generations: realism, colonialism, masculinity. As a pop-surrealist art movement chiefly practiced among women artists, rogue taxidermy artists follow an ethical mandate to never kill animals for the purposes of art and often display their sculptures in ways that are self-reflexive of speciesism and express criticisms of anthropocentrism.

Through an intersectional feminist lens and alongside critical insights from (and debates within) postcolonialism, deconstruction, and affect theory, I analyze the art pieces created by Sarina Brewer, Angela Singer, Polly Morgan, Scott Bibus, and Robert Marbury. In doing so, I explore the ethical ambiguities of using postmortem animal bodies in an art movement that is informed by animal rights, and also discuss the complexity of animal-human relationships in the face of human conceptualized impressions of life and death. Brushing up against the history of public autopsies and other forms of body preservation, I look to the ways in which bodies are made ‘taxidermic’ through violence, trauma, objectification, commodification, bio-engineered artificiality, extinction, and the discriminatory practices that represented certain (animal and human) bodies as ‘unruly.’ Tackling the frames that produce ‘taxidermic’ bodies (as exposable and exploitable skins), I challenge the anthropocentrism foundational to human thought and highlight the ways that humans produce and perpetuate hollowed out crypts of meaning as it applies to animality. Essentially, this project attempts to undermine anthropocentric worldviews that construct humans as separate and unique from what is understood and described as the ‘nonhuman,’ and, also, invites readers to confront and acknowledge how vulnerability and mortality are shared among humans (animals) and other nonhuman beings.

## Keywords

Taxidermy, Animal Studies, Art, Feminism, Colebrook, Butler, Derrida, Postcolonialism, Speciesism, Anthropocentrism, Extinction, Ethics, Deconstruction, Affect, Exceptionalism, Ontology, Post-mortem, Corporeality, Dolly, Cloning, De-extinction, Cryptozoology

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*For*  
*Lyyli “Lily” Maria Niittynen*  
*(Mummu)*

*&*

*“Auty”*

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## Preface

From the outset of this project, I could not have imagined or anticipated what complex personal challenges I would face in writing a dissertation about taxidermy. While writing this project, my twelve-year-old cocker spaniel and animal companion, ‘Auty’ (whom I’ve had the pleasure and authority to name and call my own), was diagnosed with a heart condition. Unclear whether she would last the year, I was forced to address my present grief and anticipate my future mourning, while writing about dead animals in the art gallery. At various points of the project, I found it difficult to delineate her *face* from the many taxidermied animal examples that I encountered or viewed in gallery spaces or hung on bar walls. Writing about death has been both difficult and cathartic and while I have lost many loved ones throughout this process, I can say that no one has played a greater role in forming this project with me than my dog who, day in and day out, laid at my feet with undiminished devotion and curiosity. Given Auty’s heart condition, my writing has taken many emotional twists and turns, as I have rigorously tried to remain responsible to all the persons and beings that I’ve sought to ethically represent in my work.

Throughout this process, I have come to see in greater detail that intersectional feminist work is an ongoing process; it is a process that calls for regular revisioning and increased inclusive strategizing. I echo the voices of influential feminist scholars writing in the field of ethnography who acknowledge that their privileged position as a researcher has given them the power to decide in what ways their research subjects will be portrayed. Feminist ethnographers have taught me that research is perhaps always a failure from the outset, given the difficulties and risks of ethically representing others from a privileged academic position. From this self-reflexive critical revision process, I have perhaps failed to ethically juggle my responsibilities to humans and nonhuman animals; I have perhaps critically underestimated the depths of anthropocentrism when calling for intersectional inclusions and considerations of nonhuman animals alongside other oppressed groups; or misjudged the potential dangers and harms of comparing animal exploitation to other forms of human oppression.

Despite my project’s potential shortcomings, I have strived to address what I have recognized as the unmistakable connections between human and nonhuman animal bodies that are considered and treated as ‘taxidermic.’ I have sought to highlight the oppressive frames that have informed a world that allows nonhuman animal and human animal bodies to be violated

after death. I came to this project looking to weigh the interconnections between critical intersectional feminism, anticolonial scholarship, and the field of animal studies. In these fields, among others, I have sought to locate a language to critically engage contemporary forms of rogue taxidermy art. It has never been my intention to simply compare animal and human oppressions as one and the same. Rather, I have sought to trouble these simplifications and acknowledge that human relationships to animals are culturally diverse and ethically fraught. Simple comparisons risk various socio-cultural erasures and disregard the ways in which companion animals are provided *liveable* and *recognizable* lives in ways that many humans across the globe are refused. In a similar vein, unclaimed animals are often hunted, abused, and consumed by humans who bear no consequences for their actions. From these realities, I have sought to navigate animal and human oppressions as chiasmic, interconnected but never wholly integrated or identical.

Growing up in northwestern Ontario, on the border of Ontario and Minnesota, my previous encounters with taxidermy were unremarkable. North American hunting culture was very much a part of my everyday life in Thunder Bay, despite (and perhaps informing) my decision as an adolescent to practice a vegetarian diet. Before deciding to research rogue taxidermy art, I encountered Chris Jordan's *Midway: Message from the Gyre*, an ongoing art project that photographs dead and decaying baby albatross bodies mistakenly fed fatal amounts of plastics from their parents who collected it from the ocean.<sup>1</sup> Around the same time that I was moved by Jordan's photographs, British Columbia artist Amy Nugent was interviewed by *The Canadian Press* for creating sustainable roadkill art made from porcupine quills.<sup>2</sup> I was pulled towards artworks that addressed animal deaths – art that I saw as ethically challenging and important.

My curiosity brought me to the *Minnesota Association of Rogue Taxidermy*, a taxidermy art collective that started up in Minneapolis, the closest major city to my hometown. Rogue taxidermy is a pop-surrealist art movement that fuses elements of traditional taxidermy with mixed media design. In opposition to traditional taxidermy approaches, rogue taxidermy artists create nonrealist and unconventional representations, while also following an ethical mandate to

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<sup>1</sup> Chris Jordan's project can be found on his artist website; see  
< <http://www.chrisjordan.com/gallery/midway/#CF000313%2018x24> >

<sup>2</sup> An article about Amy Nugent's art can be found at the following link,  
< <https://www.treehugger.com/style/high-end-completely-sustainable-jewelry-made-from-roadkill.html> >

never kill animals for the purposes of art. Intrigued by these artistic spectacles, I began to encounter taxidermy from a different perspective. I was drawn to the many ways that rogue taxidermy artists played with traditional taxidermy that I often encountered back home. Employing a surrealist technique, these artists create fantastical, monstrous, and abstract figures fusing together multiple animal body parts and popularly recognizable (often kitsch) objects, alternative materials, and dyes. Throughout this process I have come to realize that outlining a survey of the rogue taxidermy movement is no easy feat, given that rogue taxidermy sculptures encompass a diverse and broad set of aesthetic media and styles, spread across a number of geographical and cultural borders. For this reason, I have focused on specific artists, as opposed to specific styles. Discussing this broad and diverse artistic practice, I break down this project in the following chapter overview.

Chapter 1 is a cultural history of taxidermy, which highlights the various influences and styles of traditional and realist taxidermy that informed how rogue taxidermy has come to be an artistic (and arguably antithetical) practice in the present day. In doing so, I analyze the role of taxidermy in the formation of empire and the ways in which prescribed gender, class, racial, physiological, sexual, and species norms are carried out over time. Alongside my analyses of the interconnections between rogue taxidermy and previous traditions, I discuss the ethical ambiguities and implications of using nonhuman animal bodies as objects for political art, as rogue taxidermy artists are simultaneously politically conscientious, while violently implicated in the domination of nonhuman animals. I conclude this chapter by thinking through skin and the ways in which postmortem human bodies were historically (from a western European context) kept intact because of their ‘sacred’ status, while animal skins were constructed and treated as ‘profane.’

Chapter 2 looks at the *unruly body* through the artwork of Sarina Brewer. Analyzing her *Carnival Curiosa* series, I discuss how Brewer challenges Enlightenment and colonial constructions of species boundaries through her taxidermy art. Discussing the ways in which interspecies blending between humans and animals constructs bodies as ‘monstrous,’ ‘profane,’ and ‘unruly,’ I use this chapter to discuss the techniques of preservation and display used in human taxidermy. Using Kelly Oliver’s notion of the ‘autopsic gaze,’ I show the ways in which taxidermy is informed by Enlightenment and imperial visual norms that seek to control and contain perceived bodily difference. Through various examples of taxidermy and preservation, I



forge a ‘chiasmic’ line of shared relationality and vulnerability between animals and humans (past and present).

Chapter 3 addresses the *dead body* through rogue taxidermy art sculptures that are created to be ‘purposely confronting.’ In other words, sculptures that stage and expose various forms of violence and trauma inflicted on animals by humans and human-made technologies. In this chapter I discuss the art pieces and installations created by Polly Morgan, Angela Singer, and Scott Bibus, artists that have confronted animal death and mortality through their art. I argue that bearing witness to animal death (in opposition to staged animal life) in rogue taxidermy has the potential to affectively unsettle and haunt viewers through what I have called ‘retributational agency.’ I describe ‘retributational agency’ as an affective engagement of awareness of animal (and self-) death that intentionally provokes an unsettling but valuable response.

Chapter 4 focuses on the taxidermied *body as object* in the product packaging and marketing of Scottish craft beer business, Brewdog. Drawing from my personal encounter with Brewdog’s taxidermied beer bottles made from squirrel and stoat bodies, I look at the ways in which the company appropriates the unconventional aesthetics of rogue taxidermy in order to advertise their consumer products. I also address the specific animals used in Brewdog’s taxidermy marketing in order to give wider context as to why some animals over others are taxidermied and displayed. From this framework, I discuss the underlying anthropocentrism of postmortem bodily consent through Brewdog’s advertisements.

Concluding this project with the *artificial* and *extinct body*, Chapter 5 discusses the artificial origins and ends found between the taxidermied remains of Dolly the Sheep, the world’s first cloned mammal, in conversations with Robert Marbury’s ‘vegan taxidermy’ art pieces (repurposed from discarded plush toys). I argue that rogue taxidermy sculptures help humans think through the limits of human knowledge that cause anxiety, such as death, mass species extinction events, and what is more recently discussed as the ‘Anthropocene.’

Drawing together the differentiating themes that make bodies *taxidermic*, I acknowledge throughout each chapter the various ways in which socio-cultural norms place the concept of the ‘human’ in a state of exception from a range of other beings, including the nonhuman animal and the dehumanized ‘other.’ I look to the ways in which rogue taxidermists trouble these anthropocentric norms and how sculptures are staged to question this human-specific exceptionalism. I show how animals are made unique or special solely for human desires and

how constructed taxidermy sculptures reflect current generational values, points-of-view, and anxieties circulated among human groups. Human values towards animals have shifted over time, though, this certainly does not mean that humans have eradicated the many oppressive acts inflicted on animals. Through their sculptures, rogue taxidermists communicate self-reflexivity on the status of the (dead) body in art and, in doing so, they also express the pressing issues that continue to harm nonhuman animals in the present day. What sets this project apart from those before are my intentions to request that we, as humans, take some time to analyze and mindfully consider the bodily rights of postmortem animals beyond our hasty inclination to focus on the conservation of animal life. Put simply, I invite my readers to ponder over and think outside of the ways in which we conceptualize life and death, human and animal, and, most importantly, our ethical stakes in sharing a world with other beings.

## Chapter 1

### 1 From Botched to Rogue: Taxidermic Roots and Ruptures

#### § 1.1 Histories of Taxidermy

Taxidermy is the art of stretching skin over an artificial body to mimic and reanimate an image of the living animal before its death. Taxidermy involves the preservation of birds, fish, mammals, and reptiles. If one were to ask where taxidermy originated, the answer to this question would be complicated at best. While there is speculation that taxidermy holds historical roots in the mummification processes practiced in ancient Egypt, taxidermy is separate from embalming, as traditionally taxidermy was founded on unbinding and preserving the skin of a dead corpse.<sup>1</sup> Animal skins have been used in various ways and by diverse groups of people in ancient to modern times across the entire globe. To pinpoint an original cause as to why humans create taxidermy, specifically, and how it has become an artistic medium in the present-day risks various erasures, fictions, and substitutions. As Pauline Wakeham points out, taxidermy has historically been used as a tool to erase violence inflicted on Indigenous peoples through colonialism. She writes in *Taxidermic Signs: Reconstructing Aboriginality* that “[t]axidermy’s origins are often shrouded in a haze of mythologies and mistaken assumptions that have contributed to the problematic construction of a proximity between taxidermy and aboriginality” (8). What is clear to Wakeham is that mythologies tying taxidermy to Indigenous peoples’ practices problematically work to conceal taxidermy’s role in colonial projects to impose fixed representations of difference (8). Mythologies, narratives, and cultural stereotypes fuel the ways in which animal bodies are constructed in taxidermy and this practice has helped validate discriminatory human social norms. Animal bodies and skins are used to inform harmful

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<sup>1</sup> Pauline Wakeham draws a clear line between embalming and tanning skins in contrast to taxidermy. She writes that “unlike practices of embalming or tanning, taxidermy developed with a double function: namely, the artistic pursuit of imitating nature and the scientific enterprise of collecting and preserving natural history specimens” (9). In equal value, however, Giovanni Aloï writes that the connection between taxidermy and mummification are a metanarrative of a speculative history. He states that “[t]he need to address the connection, or lack thereof, between Egyptian mummification and taxidermy seems to be caused by a desire to legitimize, characterize by a deep, yet unnecessary, preoccupation with the separation of the secular from the spiritual. Distancing taxidermy from mummification only attempts to validate the former as a rational, secular, and thus scientifically valid epistemic tool—it reassures the author (and thus the reader) that they are not dabbling in the mystifying spirituality of mummification, something that might diminish the seriousness of their subject of study” (*Speculative Taxidermy* 46).

narratives against human bodies that fall outside of white, national, and masculine ideals. In contrast to the various ways in which taxidermy has historically staged cultural and social difference among humans (discussed throughout this project), contemporary rogue taxidermy artists play with constructed animal bodies through acts of inversion, fabulation, and satirical mimicry to call attention to these harmful representations. In doing so, rogue taxidermists show the ways that taxidermy has furthered exploitation of both animal and human bodies.

I write this project to carve out a history of cultural acts, discourses, and, most specifically, styles that have formed what is called contemporary ‘rogue’ taxidermy (also known as ‘alternative’ taxidermy) in the present day. At the risk of producing a genealogy of taxidermy that would involve both the “desire and disorder of the archive” (Derrida, *Archive Fever* 81),<sup>2</sup> I attempt to bring together significant moments in the practice of taxidermy from human (who are also animals)<sup>3</sup> histories. No clear or singular genealogy can be formed, as what would be considered ‘traditional’ or ‘realist’ taxidermy has no fixed or singular model to follow. Though simplified knowledge constructs and narratives of singularity of animal species are produced in the microcosm that is the natural history museum, there is no model or system that can underline or unify all forms of taxidermy. Moreover, I attempt to demarcate and highlight various styles of taxidermy, while acknowledging the ways in which socio-political factors have shaped what was considered ‘worthy’ of historical record or documentation. I ask in what ways contemporary taxidermy is still in conversation with earlier styles and traditions and how aesthetic styles have

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<sup>2</sup> In seeking to map the history of how taxidermy has come to be in the present today, I acknowledge Jacques Derrida’s argument in *Archive Fever* where each desire to preserve is simultaneously the desire to destroy. Derrida writes that “[t]here would indeed be no archive desire without the radical finitude, without the possibility of a forgetfulness which does not limit itself to repression. Above all, and this is the most serious, beyond or within this simple limit called finiteness or finitude, there is no archive fever without the threat of this death drive, this aggression and destruction drive” (*Archive Fever* 9). I discuss later in this chapter the examples of female taxidermists who were historically refused recognition in the historical archive. With this understanding in mind, there are many histories that remain unwritten (in every act of writing) when it is decided which historical records will be discussed in favor over others.

<sup>3</sup> I use ‘human (animal)’ here as a descriptor to acknowledge the long history of anthropocentrism that has constructed *Homo sapiens* as separate from and normalized as superior to other animal species. Though I acknowledge and attempt to diminish the anthropocentric compulsion to place humans in a state of exceptionalism above animals, I simultaneously acknowledge arguments by Kelly Oliver where she writes that humans cannot be reduced to animal or machine or that animals and machines can be considered simply ‘persons’ (*Technologies of Life and Death* 139). From this position, Oliver importantly states that there is always something that exceeds the “limits and borders that we erect, most particularly the border between *us* and *them*” (*Technologies* 140, original emphasis). Put simply, the designated categories of human, animal, and machine cannot be collapsed into one neat category without risk of erasure. I explore this complexity further in § 2 **Autopsic Gaze: Chiasmic Encounters with ‘Unruly’ Bodies** where I argue that animal and human oppression is chiasmically related. In other words, animals and humans share similarities, but these similarities are never fully collapsed into the same.

transhistorically dispersed locations and borders. The process of creating this picture involves many difficulties and aporias and this project is not meant to provide a complete historical account. I do not mark a clear chronology; rather, I point to the matrixes, fractures, ruptures, and assemblages that are found within a fragmented western society.

There is not one simple practice in preserving the skins of animals, nor is there a one-size fits all model for displaying animal bodies. But if one were to begin to draw a line in history and pose a significant moment in time as the origin of taxidermy, it would be – as Wakeham points out – the sixteenth century, when it was documented that a wealthy Dutch entrepreneur “sought to retain in deceased form a collection of birds that suffocated during transportation from the East Indies” (10). Preservation of animals returned from colonial explorations was part of the desire to provide evidence for these explorations and to display the unknown objects and creatures of ‘exoticized’ worlds to groups of Europeans. According to the *Encyclopedia Americana*, the first recorded document on the topic of taxidermy was written by René Antoine Ferchault de Réaumur, a French naturalist from the eighteenth century, who had his own large *Wunderkammer* (otherwise known as a cabinet of curiosities).<sup>4</sup> The purpose of taxidermy exhibited in museums alongside other curious oddities found in *Wunderkammern* was to stage objects of otherness and preserve animals that were previously unencountered. Originating in sixteenth-century Italy, cabinets of curiosities were popular in Renaissance Europe as privileged sites of collection that were markers of high-class status for worldly and well-traveled men (Aloi, *Art and Animals* 31). Objects collected in these cabinet displays were meant to store what were considered obscure objects and these were presented and preserved for encyclopedic purposes. Alexis Turner writes that the sixteenth- and seventeenth-centuries’ cabinets of curiosities were created by “European princes and scholars” and these cabinets included a “crude form of taxidermy” that was developed and displayed alongside other objects considered outlandish (20). These displays included “seashells, corals, horns, skulls, sawfish, pufferfish, chameleons and such animals as crocodiles, tortoises and armadillos, whose hard outer carapaces made them easy to preserve” (Turner 20). Parts of preserved animal bodies were one component of a larger

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<sup>4</sup> Aloi states that the first use of French word *taxidermie* was found in a document by French naturalist Louis Dufresne in 1803-1804. Prior to the use of *taxidermie* the word *empailler* (meaning to ‘stuff with straw’) was commonly used to describe the preservation of bird skins in the late eighteenth century (*Speculative* 49). For more information on the historical intricacies of the terminology, see Aloi’s subsection “Taxidermie” in *Speculative Taxidermy: Natural History, Animal Surfaces, and Art in the Anthropocene*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2018. 47-53.

collection of antiques, rocks, and other historical relics found throughout colonial expeditions -- where all sorts of animal species and objects were encountered, collected, and brought back to western Europe.

The sixteenth-century cabinets were empire's claim to hold possession over and to control objects of 'wonder' that fueled the imaginaries of western Europeans who were unaware of, and sought control over, the (human and nonhuman) diversity of the planet. Over time, curiosity cabinets transformed from cabinets of strangeness and wonder into natural history cabinets. In eighteenth-century France, natural history cabinets were created by the social elite and tended to include objects known for their beauty and taste, but also for their necessity in furthering enlightenment knowledge (Poliquin, *The Breathless Zoo* 57).<sup>5</sup> In comparison to later taxidermic practices that sought to create realistic effects (including nature backdrops), eighteenth-century taxidermied animals were absurd. Early forms of taxidermy involved the removal of skin from a dead animal, tanning animal hides, and 'stuffing' bodies with hay or cotton that were then shaped with wire or wood to hold form. These taxidermied animals were overstuffed, brittle, and barely resembled the living animals that these dead objects sought to replicate. People in the west who encountered taxidermy in the eighteenth century and prior, however, lacked knowledge of what each species resembled in the wild and thus these figures of overstuffed skins remained mysterious and otherworldly to those who encountered them within collections (Poliquin, *Breathless* 61).

Decay and insects threatened early forms of taxidermy from the eighteenth century and prior, and it was not until the innovation and perfection of arsenical soap by French ornithologist Jean-Baptiste Bécœur that taxidermy could withstand the elements and insects. Likewise, bell jars and other air tight cases were created and used to protect specimens from insects (among other and more violent scientific experiments, discussed further in **§ 2 Autopsic Gaze: Chiasmic Encounters with 'Unruly' Bodies**). In a four-year process, Bécœur experimented with fifty different chemicals on fifty different specimens, successfully saving only four from insect infestation. Successfully combining ground arsenic, camphor, potassium carbonate, and

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<sup>5</sup> In the eighteenth century, the popularity of taxidermy was also deeply implicated in the drive to bring nature back to human life after industrial expansion and urban city infrastructure for population growth that began to overtake parts of the natural world. According to Giovanni Aloï, the industrial revolution "recklessly redesigned the boundaries between the wild and the urban, nature and culture" (27). The scale to which animals were collected for the purposes of knowledge in the eighteenth century is now replaced with exhibits about animal extinction and species endangerment in museums and galleries.

powdered calcium hydroxide with a soap substance, Bécœur created arsenical paste<sup>6</sup> for taxidermy preservation (Poliquin, *Breathless* 66) – a toxic substance still used by some contemporary taxidermists.

Taxidermy reached its peak (known as its ‘golden age’) during the Victorian period (1837-1901), when the slaughter of animals through big game hunting was the popular and defining sport of the British empire. Hunting and collection of large game became the emblem of burgeoning masculinity and character building of young men in the Victorian period. The ‘conquest’ of large game animals shaped western European ideologies of white civilization and masculinity. These staged animal bodies made into objects gave evidence of the power, fitness, and tenacity of young adult white men who were able to further the ideals of imperial expansion. As Eva Hemmungs Wirtén notes,

Boys became men in the confrontation with nature, and gained in moral as well as physical strength as the result of that meeting. Not any old quarry would do the trick, because as a rite of manhood hunting had to involve the confrontation with an adult male, preferably as big and ferocious as possible. A Bildungsroman on how to become a man able to shoulder the demands and challenges of the Empire, such a narrative describes an almost suffocatingly homosocial milieu. (83)

Trophy displays began to appear more threatening and menacing to champion the guise of masculinity, setting the stage for the realist style that dominated the early twentieth century. While game hunting shaped gender ideals during this period, it was not the only reason why Victorians hunted and killed animals. Michelle Henning writes that “[a]nimals were killed indiscriminately by all social classes, on the basis of superstition, for the pleasure of hunting, for food, or for the trade in feathers and fur” (671). In the Victorian period taxidermy broke out of the cabinet and was part of everyday life within British culture. Sarah Amato writes that taxidermied ‘exotic’ animals and other wildlife “were fashioned into possessions of surprising diversity, such as chairs, lamps, ornaments, monuments, trophies, clothing, scientific specimens,

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<sup>6</sup> Discussing the history of preservation, Karl Schulze-Hagen, Frank Steinheimer, Ragnar Kinzelback, and Christoph Gasser write in “Avian Taxidermy in Europe from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance” that “[a]t first the mummification method dominated [taxidermy], in which the viscera were removed and the remainder of the body then dried in an oven and/or salted. However, we know that since Olina (1622) and Aitinger (1626/31) at the latest, the feathered skin was pulled over an artificial body following the removal of the flesh. The durability of such specimens was poor. This was only gradually improved by specimens being kept in well-sealed cases and using arsenic, which had actually been employed in Germany at least 70 years before its ‘official introduction’ by Bécœur” (459). For more information on earlier preservation practices prior to Bécœur’s arsenic paste, see Rachel Poliquin’s book, *The Breathless Zoo: Taxidermy and the Cultures of Longing*. Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2012: 65.

and a variety of museum installations” (183). Human relationships with animal companions were different from the wildlife that were hunted and subsequently taxidermied into objects. Pets that were taxidermied and preserved were kept as objects of memory, mourning, and commemoration of the animal that was once known and loved. Likewise, human teeth, locks of hair, and ‘death masks’ (otherwise known as ‘death souvenirs’) of lost loved ones were displayed, kept, and adorned as many Victorians had personal experiences with death, given that births and deaths were part of everyday existence and took place in the intimate spaces of the home (Poliquin, “Objects of Loss and Remembrance” 5).

Taxidermied wildlife and exotic animals that held less personal ties to individuals were disseminated as objects of everyday life such as housing décor for wealthy aristocrats. In *Beastly Possessions: Animals in Victorian Consumer Culture*, Amato points out that taxidermy objects “reflected the Victorian and Edwardian belief that animals should be *useful* to humans, even in death” (183, emphasis added).<sup>7</sup> Famous British taxidermist James Rowland Ward (1848-1912) was known for innovating big game trophy taxidermy and taxidermy commodities, such as

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<sup>7</sup> Though wild game was used in creating taxidermied objects, Victorians did have complex ideas about the value of animals. Indeed, historians of the Victorian period note that 1847 was an important historical event for the contemporary idea of vegetarianism because of the establishment of the British Vegetarian Society (Gregory 1; Yeh 298) – an organization notable for creating the label, ‘vegetarian’ (Regan 275). Class differences played a significant role in dietary choices towards vegetarianism; some people saw vegetarianism as a moral act, while others were forced into vegetarian diets to supplement economic hardships. Likewise, vegetarians were perceived with suspicion by groups who portrayed them as playing into “employers’ hands in its guise as a campaign for thrift and economy” (Gregory 2). British imperialism in India informed carnist perceptions about Britain’s superiority over Hindu people who refused to eat beef in their diet. Marguerite Regan writes that “[i]n eighteenth-century writings on India, the vegetarianism of the Hindus was at first considered a curiosity and later as evidence of racial inferiority”; “The English have associated their own hearty consumption of beef with military superiority”; “A vegetable diet, it was thought, contributed to weakness, indolence, and military ineptitude and, consequently, races like the East Indians were destined for subordination” (275). Vegetarian diets, argues Regan, were considered evidence of Indians as “uncivilized and effeminate people” within these extremely violent imperial projects (276). Vegetarian movements taking place in Britain were often informed by other nonviolence movements and homogenous with temperance, feminist, and health reform movements in this period. In *Of Victorians and Vegetarians*, James Gregory writes that vegetarians in the Victorian period were “often against war, against capital punishment and violent punishments in general” (1). The history of British vegetarianism has brushed up against animal welfare and human/animal histories, argues Gregory, who states that vegetarianism was also tied to anti-vivisection movements in this period. Discussing feminist involvements in the vegetarian movement, Gregory writes that feminists, informed by “temperance and purity,” played a prominent role in the circulation of vegetarian ideals, which included discussion in women’s co-operative circles and other published materials such as women’s journals and cookery books (166). For more information on the dietary choices of Victorians, see James Gregory’s book, *Of Victorians and Vegetarians: The Vegetarian Movement in Nineteenth Century Britain*. London: Tauris Academic Studies, 2007; Hsin-Yi Yeh’s article, “Boundaries, Entities, and Modern Vegetarianism: Examining the Emergence of the First Vegetarian Organization.” *Qualitative Inquiry* 19.4 (2013): 298-309; and Marguerite Regan’s article, “Feminism, Vegetarianism, and Colonial Resistance in Eighteenth Century British Novels.” *Studies in the Novel* 46.3 (2014): 275-292.





Figure 1.1: James Rowland Ward, *Chair Made from a Baby Giraffe*. Image from the 1896 article, “‘Animal’ Furniture” by William G. Fitzgerald.

chairs, liqueur stands, and frozen hall-porters (Fig. 1.1).<sup>8</sup> Ward was founder of the firm Rowland Ward Limited of Piccadilly, London -- the largest and most well-known taxidermy firm at the time. “The ‘Wardian-style’ was particularly celebrated for producing realistic taxidermy mounts,” writes Merle Patchett in her mapping of how Ward’s apprentice – Charles Kirk – transferred Wardian-style aesthetics from England to Glasgow, Scotland (“Historical Geographies of Apprenticeship” 34). Ward’s popularity as perhaps one of the most famous of Victorian taxidermists had much to do with the influence of his family, who also practiced taxidermy, as well as his personal connections to celebrated hunters (Patchett, *Putting Animals on Display* 205; Poliquin, *Breathless* 92). The *Rowland Ward’s Record of Big Game* “was the prime resource of trophy hunters and the centre-

point of an obsessive quantification through which hunters could calculate their relative standing in the annals of sporting history” (Miller 51).<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> The photograph is an image of Ward’s transformation of a hunted baby giraffe into a domestic commodity item. The small dog on the seat of the chair is the Scotch terrier, ‘Punch,’ an animal companion to Mr. Gardiner Muir who hunted the giraffe. Other examples and photographs of Ward’s taxidermy, such as a “gigantic bear holding an electric light,” an “elephant’s foot as liqueur stand” (see § 4 **Taxidermied Commodities: Selling Death as Life**), and a “small elephant made into a hall-porter’s chair” can be found in William G. Fitzgerald’s 1896 article, “‘Animal’ Furniture”; see, William G. Fitzgerald. “‘Animal’ Furniture.” *The Strand Magazine* (1896): 273–280.

<sup>9</sup> For more information on Ward’s biographical history, see Pat Morris’s book, *Rowland Ward: Taxidermist to the World*. London: MPM Publishing, 2003 and Merle Patchett’s article, “Historical Geographies of Apprenticeship: Rethinking and Retracing Craft Conveyance over Time and Place.” *Journal of Historical Geography* 55 (2017): 30–43.

Trophy taxidermy and animal furniture were popular symbols of colonial rule over the wild game of the exotic east. Ward's aesthetic also marks a discourse where animal bodies were taxidermied for the purposes of useful commodities. Turning an exotic animal into a chair or a lamp was not simply for decoration, but a marker of human (particularly masculine) domination over animals and the 'other' worlds from which they were found. Throughout the Victorian era, hunting was encouraged in order to meet demands for specimen collection in encyclopedic records and natural history museums; however, this process of gaining objects to further Enlightenment knowledge led to killing and decimating animal populations on a grand scale (Wirtén 88).

According to many scholars, the use of animal bodies as taxidermied commodities began with the 1851 Great Exhibition held at Hyde Park in London (Wirtén 78; Amato 210).<sup>10</sup> The exhibition was known for its groundbreaking innovation in representation and technological progress (Wirtén 78-79). The Great Exhibition hosted many anthropomorphic taxidermy displays. Verity Darke writes that because of the Great exhibition, taxidermy manuals began to see taxidermy sculptures as characters – influenced by literary narratives – and as historical documents, not solely as objective specimens (8; 10). The anthropomorphic aesthetic of Hermann Ploucquet's taxidermy was a major influence on British taxidermists that followed him (Amato 210) and his work was rumored to be the chosen favourite of Queen Victoria (1819-1901) at the Great Exhibition (Wirtén 78). Ploucquet (1816-1878) was a German naturalist and taxidermist known for his anthropomorphic tableaux<sup>11</sup> that staged taxidermied animal bodies partaking in human actions in social situations (including nursery rhymes, stories, or historical events). Scholars have argued that Ploucquet influenced the aesthetic and style of Walter Potter (1835-1918), another of Britain's most famous taxidermists -- who was only sixteen at the time of the Great Exhibition (Henning 667). Henning argues that Potter's style "outdid Ploucquet in the sheer number of animals in his tableaux and the lengths to which he took his anthropomorphism" (667); Potter "overpopulates his tableaux with members of the same species" (Henning 669), unlike Ploucquet who displays different species in each individual

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<sup>10</sup> Rowland Ward's father, Edwin Henry Ward (1812-1878), had made a name for himself as a leading taxidermist by the time of the Great Exhibition (Patchett, *Putting* 205).

<sup>11</sup> According to Henning, taxidermy tableaux are "in-situ displays, which construct a small contextual world around the animals represented"; they "invite the viewer to imaginatively enter the scene and daydream" (664). Tableaux are different from natural history dioramas because tableaux depict a "narrative form: animals are frozen in action to suggest both the scene's immediate past and what will immediately follow" (Henning 664).

encounter. Potter's taxidermy aesthetic, however, is perhaps most strongly influenced by Ploucquet's<sup>12</sup> because "Ploucquet was particularly skilled at a branch of taxidermy which endowed animals with human traits" (Amato 219).

Even within the confines of the Victorian period, many taxidermists explored individual styles and types of display, which make mapping this period no simple task. For instance, Henning compares the significance of three Victorian taxidermists: Ploucquet, Potter, and Charles Waterton – each having produced anthropomorphic and obscure taxidermy displays that fell outside of traditional scientific form and preservation (676). Henning is careful not to homogenize the style of each taxidermist, as she points out the ways in which Ploucquet, Potter, and Waterton diverge from each other. In their similarities, Ploucquet, Potter, and Waterton utilized small animals from local areas in their displays and this contrasted with the more monumental displays of hunted big game that were found in Ward's designs. Wirtén points out, however, that "[i]n their respective artificiality, both extremes [the big animals of Ward's taxidermy or small animals in tableaux by Ploucquet, Potter, or Waterton] illustrate how the display of stuffed animals provided the Victorians with an outlet to act out different dimensions of the colonial experience" (94). Further, Wirtén writes that "[m]uch of the attraction of the zoo and the museum derives from placing the foreign within the visitor's reach" (97).

Potter's<sup>13</sup> approach to taxidermy involved anthropomorphism; his taxidermic aesthetic depicted animals in human actions and clothing in tableaux that Henning likens to dolls and doll houses (670-671). Conor Creaney writes that "over a sixty-four-year career, Walter Potter constructed fourteen taxidermic tableaux" (7). Potter's dioramas or tableaux were displayed at his museum in Bramber, Sussex, England (until its closure in the 1970s). The tableaux included

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<sup>12</sup> For a more nuanced interpretation of the historical context and the interconnections between Hermann Ploucquet's and Walter Potter's taxidermic craft, see Rachel Youdelman's article, "Iconic Eccentricity: The Meaning of Victorian Novelty Taxidermy." *PsyArt* 21 (2017): 38-68.

<sup>13</sup> For more information on Potter's taxidermy and biography, see Sarah Amato's chapter, "Dead Things: The Afterlives of Animals" in her book, *Beastly Possessions: Animals in Victorian Consumer Culture*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015: 182-223; Pat Morris and Joanna Ebenstein's book, *Walter Potter's Curious World of Taxidermy*. New York: Blue Rider Press, 2014; Rachel Poliquin's book, *The Breathless Zoo: Taxidermy and the Cultures of Longing*. Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2012:182-190; Conor Creaney's article, "Paralytic Animation: The Anthropomorphic Taxidermy of Walter Potter." *Victorian Studies* 53.1 (2010): 7-35; and Michelle Henning's article, "Anthropomorphic Taxidermy and the Death of Nature: The Curious Art of Hermann Ploucquet, Walter Potter, and Charles Waterton." *Victorian Literature and Culture* 35 (2007): 663-678.

common animals and pets, such as birds, cats, covies, toads, squirrels, rabbits, and rats<sup>14</sup> – animals that “resided in close proximity to humans and were easily acquired in the local environs” (Amato 218). In the tableaux displays, animals “play sports, get married, fill schoolrooms and clubs, but they also illustrate well known sayings, rhymes, and rural myths” (Henning 663).

Entrenched gender roles and sexual norms were played out through Potter’s anthropomorphic tableaux<sup>15</sup>-- the most prominent example being Potter’s famous *The Kittens’ Wedding* that dressed and staged kittens as either female or male in a heteronormative wedding ceremony.<sup>16</sup> Scholars are particularly intrigued with Potter’s *The Kittens’ Wedding*, an 1890 tableau that includes twenty taxidermied kittens dressed in formal clothing posed upright in an anthropomorphic scene (Amato, “Dead Things”; Creaney, “Paralytic Animation”; Poliquin, *Breathless*). For Amato, *The Kittens’ Wedding* in particular and Potter’s tableaux in general, symbolized “Victorian sensibilities, consumer practices, and the diverse meanings [that] Victorians ascribed to taxidermy” (182); “His vignettes show no signs of industrialism, poverty, class struggle, political strife, or imperial expansion; instead his animals all seem to know and enjoy their place in the social order” (Amato 219). In other words, Potter’s “museum most explicitly offered Victorians [idealistic] views of themselves” (Amato 216) through carefully constructed tableaux of anthropomorphic interactions between animal bodies. Likewise, Henning

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<sup>14</sup> According to Pat Morris and Joanna Ebenstein, birds were donated to Potter after found dead by telephone wires or having been killed by local cats (19). They note that Potter received most of his kitten bodies from a farm near Henfield, “where a number of cats roamed freely and bred without restraint” (19). They also state that “it was customary for cat owners, in those days before spaying or neutering was widely performed, to keep one kitten from a litter and destroy the rest; the proprietors of the Henfield farm donated their disposed stock to Potter *to be put to good use*” (Morris and Ebenstein 19, emphasis added). Young rabbits, like kittens, were in plethora due to surplus breeding and infants’ deaths. They were donated to Potter by Mr. Feast, a breeder who lived down the road (Morris and Ebenstein 19). Further, Morris and Ebenstein write that “squirrels, red ones in those days, were shot by local foresters and gamekeepers, especially in nearby Wiston Park (20). Likewise, farmers encouraged their dogs to catch rats for Potter (Morris and Ebenstein 20).

<sup>15</sup> Creaney writes that Potter’s anthropomorphic displays are disturbing because “taxidermy’s effects are one of immediacy and presence” (8); “The piece reads today as the over-decorative efforts of a well-meaning but indiscriminating amateur, unable to see how kitschy [his] bejeweled little creatures are” (Creaney 9). Discussing Potter’s *Kittens’* work, Creaney argues that “the work’s categorical clumsiness is damning: the taxidermist, in the attempt to make humans out of animals, treats them as things and turns them into grim, ossified commodities” (9).

<sup>16</sup> Following Jane Desmond, we might thus argue that traditional taxidermy reproduces a narrative of normative and sanitary behaviour (359). This ‘limited repertoire’ all too often does not include representations of sexual behaviour: “the moment of coitus,” as Desmond puts it, is “apparently tacitly forbidden” (“Postmortem” 359). For a larger analysis of taxidermy as it relates to sexuality, see my article, “Animal Magic: Sculpting Queer Encounters through Rogue Taxidermy Art.” *Gender Forum* 55 (2015): 14-38.

argues that Potter's work combines Victorian fascinations "with the miniature, the natural history and with folk culture"; his style is "a microcosm of an era in which the accelerated destruction of the old social order and of nature was accompanied by an increasing obsession with preservation and memory" (Henning 671). In line with this analysis, Rachel Youdelman argues that anthropomorphic taxidermy is perceived to be eccentric as well as iconic of Victorian visual culture (39).

Potter was not only interested in creating anthropomorphic taxidermy emblematic of Victorian ideals of domesticity; he also preserved and collected animals with perceived physical 'abnormalities,' otherwise known as 'freaks of nature' (*lusus naturae*). Among these animal bodies were a three-legged piglet, a four-legged chicken, a two-headed lamb, a two-headed kitten (Fig. 1.2), and a six-legged cat, each donated to Potter's collection by local farmers (Morris and



Figure 1.2: Walter Potter, Kitten with Two Faces & 4 Eyes. Photo postcards from Potter's collection at the Bramber Museum (closed in 1970s).

Ebenstein 18; Amato 217). The collected 'aberrations' were particularly popular with museum visitors. The two-headed lamb, for instance, was featured on postcards and sold at the museum as confirmation of these animals' existence (Morris and Ebenstein 19). In line with Potter's anthropomorphic tableaux that were reflective of Victorian ideals and behaviours, his 'aberrations' marked the line outside normal and normative bodies. Amato writes that "Potter's museum was a nineteenth-century curiosity cabinet, a hodgepodge of wonders, housing thousands of curios, including miniature newspapers, dollhouses, a cannibal's fork,<sup>17</sup> and

<sup>17</sup> It cannot go unnoted that Potter's staging of the cannibal fork within his museum microcosm of animals and objects was part of the ongoing colonial project that sought to dehumanize non-white and non-European groups by

Chinese spectacles” (217); “His museums also contained hunted trophies, such as giraffes, rhinos, and lions, stuffed animals that had formerly been his pets, and personified beasts” (Amato 217).

Unlike Potter’s taxidermy tableaux that included a large number of the same species,<sup>18</sup> Waterton’s taxidermy experimented with the blending of species boundaries through his satirical and ‘nondescript’ creations (discussed in § 2 **Autopsic Gaze**). Waterton (1782-1865)<sup>19</sup> was an English Roman Catholic aristocrat, naturalist, and taxidermist, who reached fame through his 1825 publication: *Wanderings in South America* (Henning 671). Waterton created traditional taxidermy,<sup>20</sup> but he was also known for taxidermied “pastiches,” “creations” or “assemblages” using the remains of various animal bodies (Grasseni 285; Henning 672).<sup>21</sup> His taxidermy was

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associating them closer to animals. This staging also employed constructed narratives about cannibalism that were colonizing tropes used to justify maltreatment of racialized groups. Jeff Berglund writes the following, “[t]he word ‘cannibal’ is indelibly linked to notions of Americanness since its entry into the Western Lexicon coincides with the founding moment of ‘the Americas.’ The Carib Indians’ name, bastardized to *canibale* by Columbus, came to signify, in the English and Spanish lexicons, *anthropophagy*: literally, ‘man-eating.’ Before Columbus physically observed any such acts, his slurred name for the Indians—in the printed words of his journals—came to signify this horrifying practice. Eric Cheyfitz says that, ‘beginning with Columbus, the idea of cannibalism developed not as an anthropological fact but as a political fiction that the West employed to justify its exploitation of Native Americans.’ One conclusion to draw from this imaginative naming is that cannibalism is often a verbally created reality predicated on false evidence, fanciful imagining, or ideologically inflected logic. The birth of such terminology arises from the logic of binaries. This moment is a classic example of Othering” (3). Specific to the cannibal fork, Berglund states that “[t]he cannibal fork, the fishhook made of human bone, and the like, are substitutable, interchangeable with the cannibal ways, with the cannibal Fijians for that matter. The fork, for example is an efficient means to estrange the familiar. While the forks resemble those Westerners used, contemporary readers of accounts such as Thomas Williams’ *Fiji and the Fijians* would have known, for example, that the cannibal fork was ‘used for taking up morsels of the flesh when cooked as a hash, in which form the old people prefer it’ and was taboo for other purposes” (44).

<sup>18</sup> Not all of Potter’s tableaux include the same species. His pieces “Monkey Riding a Goat” and “The Death and Burial of Cock Robin” (1861) are exceptions that include encounters across species.

<sup>19</sup> For more information on Waterton, see Julie Blackburn’s book, *Charles Waterton, 1782-1865: Traveller and Conservationist*. London: Bodley Head, 1989; Cristina Grasseni’s article, “Taxidermy as Rhetoric of Self-Making: Charles Waterton (1782-1865), Wandering Naturalist.” *Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences* 29.2 (1998): 269-294; and Michelle Henning’s article, “Anthropomorphic Taxidermy and the Death of Nature: The Curious Art of Hermann Ploucquet, Walter Potter, and Charles Waterton.” *Victorian Literature and Culture* 35 (2007): 663-678.

<sup>20</sup> Waterton’s collection was housed at his old school, Stonyhurst College in Lancashire, UK, and was later transferred to the Wakefield Museum where it remains on display (Turner 23). Waterton is known for creating a new technique of preservation that involved chemically hardening the skin of specimens and then shaping it to look more realistic than previous taxidermy mounts (Henning 672). Instead of ‘stuffing’ his taxidermied animals, his preservation technique (which involved soaking the skins in a solution of dichloride of mercury and alcohol) allowed these skins to firm and keep form without collapsing (Edginton 63). Cristina Grasseni points out that Waterton had created his own technique in preserving taxidermy to replace arsenic soap, the latter which deterred insects, but destroyed taxidermied skins (283). The fact that Waterton’s taxidermy is still on display at the Wakefield Museum is testament to Waterton’s taxidermy techniques, argues Alexis Turner (23).

<sup>21</sup> Cristina Grasseni writes that “Waterton’s favourite pastime was to shape *pastiches* of animal bodies, such as ‘Martin Luther after his fall’ (a monkey with horns), ‘Noctifer, or the spirit of the Dark Ages, unknown in England

anthropomorphic, though, in ways that are dissimilar to Ploucquet's or Potter's tableaux (Henning 671). He crafted human faces on animal bodies and – through his mixture of human facial attributes on animal skins – he produced creatures that were considered 'grotesque' or 'fantastical' [discussed further in § 2 **Autopsic Gaze**] (Henning 672). Henning writes that Waterton "was pioneering in his attitude to conservation and ecology, and particularly irritated by the tendency of other naturalists to present animals as fierce and dangerous in order to exaggerate their own bravery" (672). Unlike the taxidermy of Ploucquet or Potter, Waterton's taxidermy was overtly political. Waterton used the craft of taxidermy to create political satires, which included his famous *John Bull and the National Debt*<sup>22</sup> (Fig. 1.3 and Fig 1.4) -- a porcupine (who symbolized England) in a tortoise shell, whose scowl is "weighed down by the National Debt" (Pearce 191). The six lizards (meant to symbolize devils) that were displayed with the tortoise hybrid "surround and surmount the caricatural image of a country overburdened by its newly acquired debts and obligations" (Bann 10).

Waterton's style has had an important influence on contemporary forms of taxidermy art. Representing an alternative to older styles of taxidermy, contemporary rogue taxidermy artists have adopted older practices to play with and reconfigure animal bodies for political and artistic means. These sculptures artistically show the historical tensions that come from forms of monstrous species blendings of humans and nonhuman animals. For instance, dead (preserved) and manipulated 'nondescript' creatures (beings that could not be deciphered within the constructs of taxonomy), evoked criticisms, responses, discomfort, and outrage because these taxidermy sculptures threatened the supposed fixed boundary between human and animal species (see § 2 **Autopsic Gaze**). Not only does rogue taxidermy art open up the constructed norms of species formations, so too do these artists explore the illusion of sublime 'nature'<sup>23</sup> in realist

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before the Reformation' (created from the head of an eagle owl, body and legs of a bittern and wings of a partridge), 'England's Reformation in its infancy with Edward 6th, and his sister Betsy at lunch' (lost); 'Testudo nocivissima, Eribi et Noctis Sata' (a tortoise with the skin of a lizard, 'the most noxious offspring of hell and darkness')" (285, original emphasis).

<sup>22</sup> 'John Bull' was the name of a satirical caricature who stood for the personification of the United Kingdom, created by Dr. John Arbuthnot. Michelle Henning writes that "[t]he national debt is represented as two sacks slung across John Bull's tortoiseshell back, on which sits a ferocious little reptile with animal claws as spines. Other little beasts with curled-up tails cluster around his four hairy feet, while porcupine spines poke out from under his shell" (674).

<sup>23</sup> I emphasize the word 'nature' throughout this project to acknowledge that the word itself is an ungraspable concept. In a critical reading of the various ways in which literature and art produce a grand narrative of 'Nature,' Timothy Morton writes that nature "appears like a ghost at the never-arriving end of an infinite series" (18). He states that nature is not an object that can be pointed to or grasped in full. Within western conceptions of nature, the





Figure 1.3 and 1.4: Charles Waterton, John Bull and the National Debt. Taxidermy.  
Image permission courtesy of Wakefield Council © Wakefield Museum.



taxidermy to expose the underbelly of existence, disharmony, and violence that nonhuman animals experience in a world that consists of relations and encounters with humans. Indeed, rogue taxidermy art is influenced by styles from previous eras, such as the amalgamation of multiple animal bodies or the anthropomorphizing of taxidermied creatures, but the end products of contemporary artists speak to human and nonhuman relations that haunt the current period.

Satire is one means, among the many, that contemporary rogue taxidermy artists have

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concept appears to hover between the spiritual and the material (Morton 18-19); he writes that “‘nature’ is an arbitrary rhetorical construct, empty of independent, genuine existence behind or beyond the texts we create about it” (21-22).



applied in their work. Waterton's taxidermied 'creations' took on the role of satire, often to critique government policy and Protestantism (Henning 672). Speaking to Waterton's aesthetic, Cristina Grasseni argues that taxidermy shares "aspects of partiality and artifice as in monstrosity" (286) – an important aesthetic reproduced by artist Sarina Brewer who recreates taxidermy mounts of historical creatures, such as the fictitious gaff of the 'Feejee Mermaid' that was famously displayed as part of P.T. Barnum's touring circus. Brewer's sculpture, *Viva La Barnum* (2007), is one of the many reproductions of the circus object found across North America and Europe; however, Brewer's interpretation and reproduction of the mermaid (informed by the circulation of images of the Feejee Mermaid that have been historically preserved) speaks to the loss of an 'original' and the plethora of reproductions made to commemorate obscure objects that circulate in American popular culture (discussed further in § 2 Autopsic Gaze). Brewer's use of satire, species blendings, and the recreation of taxidermied animals into popular commodities – such as lamps – is influenced by the production of aesthetic commodities fashioned in the Victorian period; however, Brewer's sculptures speak back to forms of mass consumer culture. The politics and motives for producing these art pieces derive from encounters and contacts between (dead) animals and humans in the past and in the present day. Nonhuman animal life continues to be undervalued by anthropocentric ideologies and the various technologies of animal domination and ownership, such as (though not limited to) factory farming, over-hunted populations, museum preservation, environmental depletion, animal agriculture, habitat loss, commodification, biomedical testing, and the multiple ways we, as humans, exhibit animals for our entertainment. The various avenues of animal exploitation are approached and highlighted by the artists of the *Minnesota Association of Rogue Taxidermists* (MART) – artists that depict unconventional creatures and encounters through, arguably, ethical means. The following pages will introduce the foundations and intricacies of the MART art movement.

## § 1.2 The Minnesota Association of Rogue Taxidermists

In 2004, artists Sarina Brewer, Robert Marbury, and Scott Bibus started the *Minnesota Association of Rogue Taxidermists*.<sup>24</sup> 'Rogue' taxidermy is a form of contemporary pop-

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<sup>24</sup> In a 2011 interview with Christine Colby, Brewer describes how MART came to be. She states, "Scott Bibus, a classically trained taxidermist gone rogue, invited me to an art crawl. Robert Marbury happened to be showing his

surrealist sculpture that surpasses and exceeds traditional and realist taxidermy principles by creating sculptures that are at once fantastical, monstrous, and aesthetically abstract.<sup>25</sup> Brewer is an American artist working in Minneapolis, Minnesota.<sup>26</sup> A self-described sculptor, Brewer did not train as a taxidermist.<sup>27</sup> She gives credit to Walter Potter as a major influence on her taxidermy art; she states that Potter was a “genius and revolutionary taxidermy artist” (Hodges, “Custom Creatures”). Her style also takes up the aesthetics of ‘cryptozoology,’ a parascience of unknown, rumored, or hidden creatures that question the normative classification of species based on discovery. Brewer utilizes cryptozoology and monstrous aesthetics in her hybrid sculptures that are interblended with diverse genres – posing encounters with species that are

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work in one of the other spaces. Bibus already knew him and wanted to introduce us and show me Marbury’s work. When I walked into the space and saw his creatures made from Polystyrene taxidermy armatures and faux fur, I immediately saw a relation between what he did and what I did. I thought the three of us would make a cool, offbeat theme for an exhibition. I approached Marbury and casually suggested a group show. At this point in the evening it was mostly the beer talking—and the flask of vodka in my purse—but he contacted me immediately after the show to pursue the idea. We named the event ‘Rogue Taxidermy,’ and the name stuck. We got amazing press because of Marbury’s efforts, which soon led to our names splashed across the Arts section of the *New York Times*. Other artists working with similar materials started to come out of the woodwork, and all were ecstatic to find others working in the same vein. It was clear to us that we needed to form a group where like-minded artists could come together. We came up with the name ‘The Minnesota Association of Rogue Taxidermists’ over drinks at a local tiki bar, but, in actuality, we’re an international guild and have members from all over the world” (Colby, “Creature Feature” 75). For more information about Brewer’s interview, see Christine Coby’s article “Creature Feature.” *Penthouse Magazine* (2011): 74-77.

<sup>25</sup> In an interview with Joshua Foer, Robert Marbury stated that Walter Potter’s style of anthropomorphic taxidermy became popular in 2003 due to his entire collection being sold off and disbanded. Potter’s aesthetic is largely practiced in taxidermy workshops run by rogue taxidermy artists such as Katie Innamorato. Marbury states that Potter’s aesthetic is desirable for beginners because it is “small and quick” involving the bodies of mice (Foer 14).

<sup>26</sup> Brewer received a Bachelor of Fine Arts in 1992 at the Minneapolis College of Art and Design where she incorporated mummified animal remains and other found objects in her early oil paintings and sculptures (Butzler 29; Rivera, “Sarina Brewer: Rogue Taxidermy”). Working as a conservationist and former wildlife rehabilitator, Brewer has volunteered at the biology department of the Science Museum of Minnesota for the past decade (Rivera, “Sarina”). For more biographical information on Brewer, see Christy Desmith’s article, “Body of Work: Dissecting the Audacious Animal Art of Taxidermist Sarina Brewer.” *Bust Magazine* 55 (2009): n.p. and Quinton Skinner’s article, “Artist Sarina Brewer Expresses Herself through Taxidermy.” *Minnesota Monthly* 15 Oct., 2015. Web. < <http://www.minnesotamonthly.com/Lifestyle/People-Profiles/Local-Artist-Expresses-Herself-Through-Taxidermy-Creations/> > Also see the Twin Cities PBS Film, “Sarina Brewer: Rogue Taxidermy Sculptor” at < <http://www.sdpb.org/filmfestival/2017-festival/sarina-brewer/> >

<sup>27</sup> In an interview with Christine Colby, Brewer is asked about her role with museums in Minneapolis. Brewer’s response is as follows: “I’ve been volunteering my skills in the biology department of the Science Museum of Minnesota for eight years. My duties including cleaning skeletons and preparing study skins. I think most people have seen a study skin in a museum but they didn’t know what it was called; mammals are skinned just like they are for the regular taxidermy mount, but instead of mounting the skin to an animal-shaped armature, the skin is simply filled with cotton and sewn up. The finished specimens lie on their bellies so they can be stored side-by-side in flat file drawers. The birds are mounted flat on their backs, corn-dog style, with a thin wooden dowel up their rump. Since study skins are used only for scientific purposes, they are a no-frills affair and have cotton in the eyeholes. We catalog information on each animal—measurements, date and location where the animal was found, its sex, etc.—then save the data along with the study skin for scientific use by the museum and by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources” (Colby, “Creature Feature” 76).

referential to the anthropomorphic, literary, mythological, and historical. Her techniques include skinning carcasses with a scalpel, tanning hides, and creating a clay mold of the skeletons. Final skins are glued to the constructed animal mannequin. Each mannequin must be built from scratch, as Brewer's taxidermied animal creations take on shapes not found in the natural world and cannot be bought at taxidermy supply stores (Desmith, "Body of Work"). Drawing on Potter's taxidermied animals (such as two-headed lambs or chicks), Brewer's 'chimeras' tap into the historical display of 'abnormal' or 'unruly' bodies (discussed further in § 2 **Autopsic Gaze**).

Also stationed in Minneapolis, Bibus is the only MART co-founder to be classically trained in taxidermy.<sup>28</sup> Bibus utilizes a "zombie aesthetic" to engage with the "savage, obscene, gruesome and silly" themes drawn from human understandings of 'nature' (Bibus, "Dead Animal Art"; Chin, "Caution"). Bibus's representations of 'nature' are expressed through visual scenes of violence (as 'events' of death), which are, in turn, in opposition to images of liveliness and solitude found in realist displays (discussed further in § 3 **Dead Gazes: Haunting Back and Retributional Agency**). Bibus's taxidermy represents suffering, disease, decay, torture, and pain, as a snapshot of the traumatic 'events' of death or moments prior to an animal's death. In Bibus's sculptures, animals eat their own flesh or are depicted as dining on human flesh, such as fingers and toes. One sculpture depicts a turtle eating a human eyeball, emblematic of the *visual* consumption of animals as objects for display. A squirrel eating a human finger or a frog that eats a human toe are a few among the many taxidermied displays that Bibus has created to depict unacknowledged forms of interspecies eating (including microorganisms). Bibus's art attempts to expose the "human rank in the food chain" (Chin, "Caution"), a realization highlighted by ecofeminist philosopher Val Plumwood after her encounter with, and attack by, a previously endangered saltwater crocodile<sup>29</sup> while canoeing in Australia. Bibus's taxidermied creatures are a nod to the relationship that humans only eat animals (and are only allowed to kill and eat nonhuman animals) and not the other way about.

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<sup>28</sup> Bibus graduated from Augsburg College in Minneapolis and trained in a course on traditional taxidermy at a technical college in Pine City in 2003. He works out of his Minneapolis studio and has also worked in making fright props for haunted houses and other attractions.

<sup>29</sup> Plumwood writes that saltwater crocodiles were considered endangered prior to the early 1980s, due to commercial hunting in Australia's north; however, protection laws have helped replenish the population ("Human Vulnerability" 29).

Marbury is the only artist out of the three co-founders that avoids using real dead animal materials to construct his taxidermy art.<sup>30</sup> Creating what he has called ‘vegan taxidermy,’ Marbury resurrects discarded plush toys and reconstructs their bodies in order to create his series of sculptures entitled the *Urban Beast Project* (discussed in **§ 5 Apocalyptic Time: Vegan Taxidermy, Bio-engineered Art(ificiality) and the Nonexistent Animal**). In a description of his art practice, Marbury states that his efforts to construct real animal parts with synthetic materials is a way to bring “childlike fantasy and wonder into contemporary art through humor and ridiculousness” (Marbury, *Taxidermy Art* 167). As a multi-disciplinary artist who works with fabric, photography, and fur, Marbury’s *Urban Beast Project* borrows the narratives of naturalism and conservationism to play with taxonomy and display through the intentional and satirical collection of feral and unencountered creatures (Marbury, *Taxidermy Art* 167; Marbury, “Info/Contact”). What separates Marbury’s art from Brewer’s – beyond their choice in materials – are the ways in which Marbury’s urban beasts are placed in urban landscapes, such as the city, to evoke discussion on the current state of animal existence (if such measurements can be made). Encounters between animals and humans are commonplace with the spread of the urban infrastructure, an increasing human population, and the expansion of agriculture; urban sprawl, however, has resulted in large-scale depletion of wildlife habitats, forests, and waterways. By making creatures that are not normally encountered or identifiable, and that appear feral, Marbury creates a narrative that runs against the beliefs that humans can conceptualize and thus take possession of the natural world. The purpose to resurrect plush toys from decay in spaces such as dumps and trash bins does not simply give these found objects a ‘second life’; the repurposing of disposable trash responds to the mass hyper-consumption of humans in contemporary life. Creating unidentifiable, unique, and uncanny creatures through synthetic materials, Marbury’s work is in concert with innovations in biomedical technologies and experiments, such as cloning, analyzed in more detail in **§ 5 Apocalyptic Time**.

Differing from the MART co-founders, artist and animal rights activist Angela Singer utilizes gender norms through her taxidermy sculptures that stage animal skins with kitsch jewelry and other complex objects symbolic of women’s craft (discussed in more detail in **§ 3 Dead Gazes**). Singer is a British artist situated in New Zealand who creates sculptures that

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<sup>30</sup> Marbury received a B.A. from Connecticut College and a post-baccalaureate from the Minneapolis College of Art and Design and now practices his art in Baltimore, Maryland (Marbury, “Info/Contact”).

confront traditions of hunting and mounting animals – among other visual depictions of violence. Having spent her early career as an animal rights activist for Animal Liberation Victoria as antivivisection campaign marketing manager in Melbourne, Australia, Singer incorporated her political position on animal rights in her work as a visual artist studying fine art in the mid-1990s (Singer, “Making” 162).

In an interview, Marbury states that the three MART co-founders were especially intrigued by curiosity cabinets from the eighteenth century; the *Minnesota Association* sought to celebrate the “showmanship of oddities” (Topcik, “Head of Goat”). Despite Marbury’s celebratory attitude towards eighteenth-century curiosity cabinets and their oddities, this project analyzes how the histories of human and nonhuman animal display are informed by violent discourses that used bodies to stage difference from white European humans. I address the many ways that rogue taxidermists subvert these narratives, but also how rogue taxidermy is at risk of continuing the violence of these narratives, histories, and tropes through postmortem bodily displays. From this position, I address rogue taxidermy from a critical feminist lens and, in doing so, I work to incorporate the rights of animals into feminist intersectional circles more broadly beyond my discussion of taxidermy art. The next section will unpack the connections between Victorian taxidermy and the exhibitionary practices of twentieth-century art galleries so as to explore how the incorporations of animals in art galleries changed the values and interpretation of animal life in human social frameworks.

### § 1.3 Taxidermy’s Resurrection in Contemporary Art

In contrast with its present popularity, taxidermy experienced a lull in the early to mid-twentieth century. Popularity declined after the First World War, mainly the result of modern technologies, such as hand-held cameras, that replaced taxidermy as a tool to ‘capture’ and represent the natural world. While photography (and early forms of film) became a major contribution to the innovation and refinements of realist taxidermy aesthetic,<sup>31</sup> capturing wildlife with cameras was

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<sup>31</sup> Jane Desmond writes that “[t]he development of early motion pictures and the increased availability and portability of still cameras during the early twentieth century also contributed to changes in taxidermic aesthetics. Experiments like [those of] Eadward Muybridge, renowned for his motion-study, still-photo sequences of both humans and animals during the 1870s through the ’90s, helped change scientific knowledge of biomechanical motion. No longer limited to sketches to capture live images to work from, taxidermists placed more emphasis on rendering movement and musculature in greater detail” (“Postmortem” 350-351).

considered less strenuous and time consuming than mounting an animal.<sup>32</sup> It is also speculated that the printing and distribution of texts, such as bird watching guides, have contributed to the lack in demand to collect animal specimens for knowledge gain (Williams 284). Scholars have also posited that the horrors of World War II led to the decline in popularity, as images of death and trauma were commonplace as a result of the atrocities of war, while taxidermy, as dead animal matter, began to unsettle widespread groups of people.<sup>33</sup> Scholars Helen Gregory and Anthony Purdy write in “Present Signs, Dead Things” that

from the 1940s onward, taxidermy began to decline as a legitimate scientific profession that required of the taxidermist a comprehensive scientific training. The shift is charted by Susan Leigh Star, who traces its evolution from a “lower status auxiliary scientific craft, which strove for a time to be a full-fledged partner in science,” to its eventual marginalization in the 1970s, by which time it had come to be seen as an activity more appropriate to hobbyists. (66)

Shifts in game hunting and the implementation of wildlife conservation acts led to greater difficulty in obtaining exotic animals for purposes of taxidermy and the availability of international travel and ecotourism made the reasoning and purposes for hunting, preserving, and observing dead animals appear less relevant – and outdated.

Writer and curator Rachel Poliquin notes that the real-time encounters with animals in zoos and the introduction of live-action television shows of animals in the wild prevailed over traditional taxidermy displays in museums (“The Matter” 124). Because of the cultural and technological shifts in representation and modes of entertainment, museums in North America were forced to adapt to more updated displays, what Stephen Asma labels ‘edutainment.’ For Asma, ‘edutainment’ is the result of museum directors’ attempts to update the museum experience with contemporary advances in technology that help boost admission sales (15). The shift from what is considered more ‘mundane’ museum displays was replaced with more entertaining displays involving films, robotics, and other types of ‘spectacle’ that are likened to

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<sup>32</sup> Donna Haraway notes that there were extensive economic and technological efforts to bring intact animal corpses back from exotic locations to make taxidermy. She writes that returning animal corpses took “all the resources of advanced guns, patented cameras, transoceanic travel, food preservation, railroads, colonial bureaucratic authority, large capital accumulations, philanthropic institutes, and much more” (*Modest-Witness@Second* 236). As a result, Wirtén writes that the “camera gave animals eternal life, surpassing their limited existence as sentient beings in the wild or as stuffed and dusty taxidermy mounts in the museum. The lens brought them closer to us than ever before, but it also distanced the animals even further from humans, their presence made definitive by celluloid” (86).

<sup>33</sup> Interestingly enough, Jane Desmond writes that comical anthropomorphic taxidermy that was seen most prominently in the Victorian period, for example “rabbits playing poker and chipmunks dressed in tuxedos,” became popular throughout America in the 1930s and ’40s (“Postmortem” 353).

amusement parks and are used to excite museum goers in ways that taxidermy did in earlier eras. Discussing the edutainment changes to the Natural History Museum in London, Petra Lange-Berndt writes that “[t]oday most of these displays made of fragile organic materials—a legacy of the Victorian era—have been replaced. Visitors are guided through multi-media, information-rich environments that are barely distinct from our everyday experiences of digital technology. The history of nature is condensed into a spatialized app while mounted animals [in the museum] are a rarity” (268).<sup>34</sup>

Alongside the advancements in modern technologies that eclipsed older forms of display, the latter half of the twentieth century saw the museum as a hegemonic institution, one that perpetuated colonial projects of the west (Patchett, *Putting* 12; Poliquin, “The Matter” 123). Patchett writes that problematic displays that reinforced colonial practices, and the scientific tools that advanced these projects, led to “taxidermy displays [being] dismantled and mounts relegated to ‘backstores’ to gather dust” (*Putting* 12). Most contemporary museums are founded on private collections of wealthy Europeans which enabled colonizers to rob resources, animals, and humans from disenfranchised nations and groups from around the world. Poliquin writes that “museums with nineteenth century roots have been criticized as complicit with the colonial project, and their collections branded as imperial archives” (“The Matter” 123). These realities have resulted from “Enlightenment discourses, such as the cult of domesticity and social Darwinism, [that] promulgated the tautology of biological difference. These norms divided humans according to certain putative natural traits, such as sex and skin color, and inscribed them with cultural hierarchies of social meaning”; “[p]ropertied white European males were posited at the peak of hierarchies and seen as the most desired model of being,” writes Maneesha Deckha (“The Salience” 5). While taxidermy in contemporary museums is dwindling due to the use of digital technologies and ethical concerns for the legacies of colonial pasts, Samuel Alberti argues that museums are important for animal studies scholarship to keep alive the histories, cultural records, and other living traces of animals that are now taxidermied. Using his edited collection to assemble what Alberti calls “animal biographies,” his book *The Afterlives of*

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<sup>34</sup> Despite criticisms of museums’ shift towards edutainment, a number of critical disability studies and museological scholars have published on the importance of multimedia and other technologies for more inclusive learning for persons with physical and learning disabilities. For more information, see Caroline Lang, Reeve John, and Vicky Woollard’s book, *The Responsive Museum: Working with Audiences in the Twenty-first Century*. Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2006 and Nic Hollinworth et al., “Interactive Sensory Objects for and by People with Learning Disabilities.” *The International Journal of the Inclusive Museum* 9.1 (2016): 21-38.

*Animals* “trace[s] the shifting meanings (scientific, cultural, emotional) of singular animals and their remains” (1). In contrast to this claim for animal studies, I argue that the narratives, frames, and proper names for fetishized animals in museums are part of human circulation and speak very little of animal existence prior to and after death.

As taxidermy began to disappear from the museum space, the practice began to flourish in the art world. Today, taxidermy no longer holds the same cultural weight it had in the twentieth century, as the practice of alternative art and non-realist taxidermy has become mainstream in popular culture and as a popular artistic medium. According to Lange-Berndt, a renewed interest in taxidermy began in 2000 alongside the rise of social media (268). She states that the “mounting of animals has been popularized to a degree that it has almost become the new knitting” (Lange-Berndt 268). Interests in taxidermy as a form of artistic craft have grown in part by women involved in contemporary art spaces. Popularity in taxidermy can also be seen through the growing number of workshops offered in urban cities – where (mostly) women taxidermy artists teach interested people how to stuff squirrels or mice.<sup>35</sup>

Still relatively young for an art movement, rogue taxidermy has grown into a global phenomenon and has changed the ways in which art and aesthetics use nonhuman animal bodies in contemporary twenty-first century art. Rogue taxidermists follow an ethical mandate to never kill animals for art and rogue taxidermy is practiced chiefly among women artists across North America,<sup>36</sup> though the ‘rogue’ taxidermy title is shared with various taxidermy artists across the

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<sup>35</sup> Access to discarded, old, and unused taxidermy in museums has increased for animal artists, given the shift towards modern technologies in North American museums that no longer receive attention for their outdated forms of visual representation. Whereas access to museums was historically considered ‘high’ brow to an intellectual elite, museums must adapt to the changes of culture resulting from the internet age. In contrast to the museum that finds traditional forms of display no longer attract younger generations, visual artists working with dead animal materials have placed taxidermy into what Brian O’Doherty describes as “the economy of the white cube” (in Lange-Berndt 270). Professional and traditional forms of realist taxidermy were “destined [...] for lowbrow status” (211), writes Dave Madden in *The Authentic Animal* – whereas rogue taxidermy symbolizes something different. He states, “rogue taxidermists have managed to blend the low and the high” (Madden 211) in terms of culture and social status. Rogue taxidermy sculptures take up the signs of low and high class in order to highlight these distinctions.

<sup>36</sup> Some notable Canadian rogue taxidermy artists include B.C. artist Amy Nugent (the now executive director of Inclusion BC Foundation) who used roadkill animals to create abstract sculptures and jewelry. In her piece, *Roadquill*, Nugent pieced together 30,000 quills from porcupines that were killed by vehicles into a large round abstract object. Nugent also makes ‘roadquill’ jewelry from roadkill porcupine quills. Like Nugent, Montreal artist Kate Puxley also uses roadkill to practice her own form of critically reflexive rogue taxidermy. Puxley’s taxidermy artworks include sculpting a pheasant with its head stuck in a used food can or a wolf that adorns a plastic bag like a cape. Puxley’s 2011 sculpture *Take Out* (that stages a taxidermied weasel inside of a Styrofoam take out box) was spurred on by her anger towards former Canadian prime minister Stephen Harper (2002-2015) for his many damaging government policies. Puxley stated that her work responded to the Harper government, by which she evoked the harm done “towards art and culture [in Canada] as well as [human] relationship[s] with animals and the



globe. The range of rogue taxidermy art is expansive and there are no set boundaries that define the aesthetic style of each individual artist; however, the movement noticeably depicts either the *unconventional practice of taxidermy with dead animal materials* or the *symbolism of taxidermy as an aesthetic object*. Employing a variety of surrealist techniques, rogue taxidermy engages animal rights, environmental destruction, human-centered policies, politics, and the treatment of animals in many fields, including critiques of taxidermy used in the arts.

Why rogue taxidermy art has now come into the current social and artistic milieu is still open to debate. According to taxidermy artists Divya Anantharaman and Katie Innamorato, taxidermy is experiencing a modern-day renaissance “probably due to a renewed interest in making and collecting, as well as the fresh accessibility of ideas that were once obscure” (10).<sup>37</sup> In *Taxidermy Art*, Marbury writes that the rogue taxidermy movement is a “return to craft” and can be considered alongside other self-sustainable cultural practices such as preserving vegetables and yarn bombing<sup>38</sup> (13). Indeed, the resurgence of taxidermy in the mainstream can be partially explained through the popularity of craft aesthetics; however, the specific proliferation of rogue taxidermy art can also be associated with the amplification of animal rights movements and increased interests in counteracting ‘speciesism’ in the west. In the event of these cultural shifts, it is not surprising that the majority of rogue taxidermy artists are women, as this practice attempts to reject the gender norms bound up in the traditionally male pursuits of hunting, killing, and mounting wild game. Rogue taxidermy disrupts hegemonic ideas of women’s essential connection to nature, while simultaneously reinforcing the arguments that rogue taxidermy artists do not, and must not, explicitly engage in the act of killing animals for

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natural environment” (Winton, “Love and Death on the Side of the Road”). Puxley’s criticisms have been extended to her ‘Flat Daddy Harper’ project where she staged photographs of herself with Stephen Harper (who holds a kitten) underneath a pride flag. Puxley stated the following, “I created a Masonite cut-out of Harper, and also made magnetic accessories, each representing a different art. Canadian artists have been suffering for some time from an absence of recognition for their societal contribution. Flat Daddy Harper is a representation of this absence” (Winton, “Love and Death”). Many of the Harper government’s conservative policies and ideologies were against immigration, LGBTIQ2 peoples, Indigenous peoples, and women, among many other minorities living in Canada. For more information about Kate Puxley, see her artist website, < <http://www.katepuxley.com/taxidermy/> >

<sup>37</sup> In making unconventional sculptures, rogue taxidermy art begs the question: why is animal art so provocative to the extent that taxidermy art has had its own contemporary resurgence? Similar to the discourses that taxidermy was created in order to bring nature and wildlife into the private sphere, Divya Anantharaman and Katie Innamorato speculate that the renewed interest in contemporary taxidermy may have to do with larger populations moving into urban cities and away from nature’s rich spaces and, thus, “taxidermy offers a way to reconnect with the natural world” (14).

<sup>38</sup> Yarnbombing is otherwise known as ‘guerilla knitting’ or ‘knitted graffiti’ and has become popular across North America.

their art. In the next section, I explore the intricacies of the rogue taxidermy movement in relation to previous taxidermy art aesthetics popular in late twentieth-century art galleries.

## § 1.4 From Botched to Rogue

Giovanni Aloï marks taxidermy's first appearance in the art gallery with American painter Robert Rauschenberg's infamous piece *Monogram*.<sup>39</sup> Having found a taxidermied Angora goat in the window of a secondhand office-furniture store in New York, Rauschenberg integrated the pre-existing taxidermy sculpture in his combine<sup>40</sup> painting, which included his stylistic incorporation of a raft and tire. In *Art and Animals*, Aloï writes that Rauschenberg's 1955-1959 combine sculpture was an isolated work; however, Rauschenberg's piece embodied the "essential anxiety which most contemporary taxidermy will come to embody in the 1990s and 2000s" (27). Whether this anxiety is as prominent going forward, as Aloï argues it was in 2012, is perhaps still up to debate. Taxidermy is growing in popularity and can be found in literature, celebrity art collections, reality television series,<sup>41</sup> do-it-yourself manuals, and workshops, and –

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<sup>39</sup> An image of Robert Rauschenberg's famous combine *Monogram* can be found on the New York Museum of Modern Art website, see < <https://www.moma.org/audio/playlist/40/648> >

<sup>40</sup> A 'combine' is a hybrid combination of paint and sculpture and was coined by Rauschenberg who produced this entirely new artistic category in the 1950s.

<sup>41</sup> Representations of taxidermy vary from literature, how-to books, TV series, films, and poetry. Books like *Crap Taxidermy* by Kat Su and *Much Ado about Stuffing: The Best and Worst of @CrapTaxidermy* by @CrapTaxidermy and Adam Cornish treat taxidermy as objects of ridicule. These books include photographs of taxidermied sculptures from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that are, by contemporary standards, considered absurd. Popular literary examples such as Yann Martel's *Beatrice and Virgil* (2010) use taxidermy to pathologize the taxidermist as evil – a trope used in Robert Bloch's book *Psycho* (1959) about a taxidermist turned serial killer. *Psycho* was adapted into a film in 1960, directed by Alfred Hitchcock, and has most recently been made into a television series entitled *Bates Motel* (aired 2013-2017) – as a prequel to the original story. Other notable contemporary literary fiction examples represent taxidermy in a more positive light; these include Alissa York's 2007 novel *Effigy*, Barb Howard's 2012 collection of stories *Western Taxidermy*, and Jenny Lawson's 2012 text *Let's Pretend This Never Happened: A Mostly True Memoir*. Taxidermy as an artistic hobby can be seen in season 10, episode 14 of the animated television series, *King of the Hill*, where characters Peggy and Dale start taxidermying small animals (aired in 2006). The collection of taxidermy as a popular pastime is found in mainstream celebrity culture and reality television. Actress Amanda Seyfried is known for having a large collection of taxidermied animals and White Stripes's singer Jack White is also known for having a large collection of taxidermy trophies, such as an elephant's head. Taxidermy has been on reality television series such as *America's Next Top Model* (as a model 'theme' for the show's competition) and, most recently, *The Bachelor* (a hobby of one of the romantic contestants). Competitive taxidermy-specific reality television series include *Immortalized*, *American Stuffers*, and *Mounted in Alaska*. Famous artist and children's author, Theodor Seuss Geisel (Dr. Seuss), created a series of 17 sculptures from 1934 to 1936 entitled his *Collection of Unorthodox Taxidermy* that were exhibited at The Liss Gallery in Toronto, December 3-January 2, 2017. Dr. Seuss's sculptures included real beaks, horns, and antlers of animals, while the remainder of the sculptures we made with artificial materials. The exhibits are an example of the playful construction of species difference in Seuss' writings. Specific to rogue taxidermy, poet Emily C. Paskevics

specific to this project – the product packaging of a craft beer in Scotland (discussed further in § 4 **Taxidermied Commodities: Selling Death for Life**).

Despite the fascination with taxidermy found in mainstream celebrity and popular culture, the art gallery remains a space where taxidermied animals are critically discussed and not treated solely as mockeries or gawked at as ‘kitsch.’ Rauschenberg’s *Monogram*, among many other examples of animal art, is what Steve Baker has called ‘botched taxidermy.’ Baker’s neologism ‘botched taxidermy’ is informed by postmodern aesthetics that trouble simple designations and question strict identity markers known to erase bodily complexity and difference. ‘Botch’ is the English word ‘to perform (a task) in an unacceptable or incompetent manner’; in other words, *to botch* is to ‘make a mess of something.’ Baker describes botched taxidermy as a diverse range of mixed-media artworks “in which the image of the animal takes an unconventional and sometimes startling form” (“Something’s Gone Wrong Again” 4). He writes that a botched taxidermy piece “might be defined as referring to the human *and* to the animal, without itself being either human or animal, and without its being a direct representation of either” (Baker, *The Postmodern Animal* 75, original emphasis). Placing human-animal studies in conversation with postmodern aesthetics, Baker’s botched taxidermy troubles the established and abstract conceptualization of ‘animal’ (what he sees as conventional taxidermy’s illusion of animal life) discussed in Jacques Derrida’s book *The Animal That Therefore I Am*. Derrida’s neologism of *l’animot* calls into question the ordinary use of ‘animal’ in the French language. For Derrida, *l’animot* is “a chimerical word that sound[s] as though it contravene[s] the laws of the French language”; Derrida writes that “[he] would like to have the plural *animals* heard in the singular” (*The Animal* 41, original emphasis). As definite articles, *l’* and *le* in the French language are meant to be read as masculine singular nouns. The monstrous figure, what Derrida calls the ‘chimerical word’ lurking from his use of his neologism, gives multiple meaning to the term, *l’animot*. Derrida’s word is not simply animals (*animaux*), nor is it the singular *mot* – meaning word. *L’animot* is meant to be read as animals (in the plural), but also ‘the animal,’ an animal, in the singular; a criticism of the capitalized *Animal*, understood as a general concept or grand narrative of the many intricate and different forms of being(s). Derrida’s intentions were to

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published a series of poems in her 2014 collection entitled, *The Night was Animal (or: Methods in the Art of Rogue Taxidermy)*.

have the word be read or heard in the doubled sense; the neologism disrupts the seemingly untroubled general use of a word that acts as an erasure of difference.

In several texts, Derrida argues that the “appellation ‘Animal’ in the singular” (Derrida and Roudinesco, *For What Tomorrow...* 63) is at best a problematic descriptor of multiple difference. According to Derrida, ‘the Animal’ “in the general singular is perhaps one of the greatest and most symptomatic *asinanities* of those who call themselves humans” (*The Animal* 41, original emphasis). ‘The animal’ problematically stands as the noun for a multiplicity within a general singularity; it is, Derrida argues, a “hypostatic fiction” (*Beast Vol. I* 106). Rather than *Ecce Homo*, Derrida writes, “*Ecce animot*. Neither a species nor a gender nor an individual, it is an irreducible living multiplicity of mortals, and rather than a double clone or a portmanteau word, a sort of monstrous hybrid, a chimera waiting to be put to death” (*The Animal* 41, original emphasis).

Citing Derrida, Baker writes that botched taxidermy “occup[ies] a space which will not readily distinguish art and the animal”; it is “[n]i une espèce, ni un genre, ni un individu” [Neither a species, nor a genus, nor an individual] (*Postmodern* 75). Botched taxidermy, then, is “open both to endless interpretation and, more compellingly still, to the refusal of interpretation” (Baker, *Postmodern* 75). Botched pieces are, in other words, “*questioning entities*” (Baker, *Postmodern* 73, original emphasis). Botched taxidermy is not defined by the necessary symbolism of taxidermy mounts nor does it always utilize the materials of taxidermied animals; rather, botched taxidermy is defined by the unconventional representations that display the “imperfectly preserved animal body in different ways” -- art pieces that seek to make “the animal body ‘abrasively visible’” (“Something’s” 4).<sup>42</sup> For Baker, botched taxidermy troubles simple representations through mixed materials, simulation, hybridity, and messy confrontations. Botched taxidermy is not necessarily *taxidermy* (the practice of using animals skins), nor is it restricted solely to the symbolism of mounting animals in taxidermic poses. This is one of ways that ‘rogue’ taxidermy is distinct from ‘botched’; even when *real* skins are exempted from

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<sup>42</sup> For Aloï, conventional taxidermy supplies viewers with a “predictable animal,” whereas botched taxidermy “upsets this harmony through its loud demands for attention, not because of its overwhelming beauty but for the opposite: its abrasive incoherence” (42). Put simply by Aloï, “botched taxidermy asks the viewer to work harder at undoing original meaning while preventing the opportunity for perceiving the animal body as a romantic and nostalgic safe retreat. Botched taxidermy relies on the *abject*” (42, original emphasis).

examples of rogue taxidermy sculptures, it is the *idea* or illusion of taxidermy *proper* that persists.

Baker's definition is important in defining the ways rogue taxidermy is influenced by and diverges from botched aesthetics. Unlike botched taxidermy that offers a very broad spectrum of animal representation, examples of rogue taxidermy invite more narrowed interpretation. To that end, rogue taxidermists want to convey (and in many ways condemn) the violent acts that are inflicted onto animal bodies. The 'rogue' in rogue taxidermy comes from the Latin expression of *rogō*, meaning 'I ask' or *rogare*, 'to ask.' Indeed, rogue taxidermy, like most challenging artworks, leads to endless interpretations; however, unlike botched taxidermy that is influenced by postmodern questioning, rogue taxidermy is not necessarily (or self reflexively) constitutive of postmodernism. Rogue taxidermists utilize collective and recognizable human norms about animals in order to play with and disrupt these conventions without losing sight of the animal (a previously sentient being) that they seek to emphatically represent. By definition, rogue taxidermy artists place importance on the ethical and critical use of animal bodies. I cautiously 'taxonomize' the practice of 'rogue' taxidermy as separate from other mediums of animal art; however, rogue taxidermy does have its own guidelines and definition. Rogue taxidermists follow an ethical mandate to never kill animals for art (discussed in more detail below), whereas botched taxidermy may include bodies that were hunted and killed for the art piece.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> For instance, Baker discusses UK artist Damien Hirst, who displayed various animal bodies in glass crypts filled with formaldehyde. Hirst's famous (and highly criticized) art piece *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living* (original in 1991), stages a tiger shark in a tank. The shark was hunted and killed for the art piece in 1991. Hirst's animals are not considered taxidermy because they do not involve the removal or recast of the animal's skin; rather, his sculptures are more closely aligned with different types of body preservation. For brevity, I use Hirst's art piece as an example despite the fact that Baker uses many other art examples that are far more sophisticated to depict the postmodern aesthetics taken up in botched taxidermy. My reasoning for discussing Hirst's art are to highlight that botched examples, such as Hirst's, include animal bodies that were hunted to make the sculpture. The act of deliberately hunting and killing an animal for art is strictly forbidden by rogue taxidermists. Rogue taxidermists (unlike *all* botched artists), first and foremost, practice under an ethical mandate to never kill animals for art.

For clarity, I am not arguing that Baker endorses art that kills animals; that is not at the root of his arguments. Rather, as a critical theorist, Baker sees the effectiveness of animal art that produces human viewers as witnesses to violence and animal death. There is no simple separation between ethically right or wrong animal art for Baker. This is made clear in his chapter, "'You Kill Them to Look at Them': Animal Death in Contemporary Art" where he addresses critics that were disturbed by animal art examples. He states that "[t]he dead animal of botched taxidermy is not the dead animal of the hunting trophy, though each might be said to haunt the other. Hirst's aphorism 'You kill things to look at them' does at least have the value of recognizing that what is at stake here is an intense and inventive looking, a rigorousness of investigation, which has to be coldly unapologetic in its attitude to the looked-at being. This, arguably, is what any serious art does. And in botched taxidermic trophies, it seems, the killing is addressed by investigating the looking. In this sense, far from being sensationalist, these works do indeed constitute what Lapointe calls 'a place for the spectator to think'" (Baker, "'You Kill'" 92). For more information see Steve

The lines that separate rogue taxidermy from botched taxidermy are unclear beyond, perhaps, botch taxidermy artists' expansive exploration of genre or rogue taxidermists' restrictive ethics. Indeed, the difference between 'botched' or 'rogue' is perhaps only semantic. When used as a noun the term rogue (or rogues in the plural) elicits someone who lives as a beggar, lives unpredictably, or as a vagabond. Used as an adjective in the English language, the word 'rogue' describes an animal or human 'going *rogue*.' Derrida makes the comparison in *Rogues*, where he unpacks the term at length:

From there the meaning gets extended, in Shakespeare as well as in Darwin, to all nonhuman living beings, that is, to plants and animals whose behavior appears deviant or perverse. Any wild animal can be called rogue but especially those, such as *rogue elephants*, that behave like ravaging outlaws, violating the customs and conventions, the customary practices, of *their own* community. A horse can be called rogue when it stops acting as it is supposed to, as it is expected to, for example as a race horse or a trained hunting horse. A distinguishing sign is thus affixed to it, a badge or hood, to mark its status as rogue. This last point marks the point rather well; indeed it brands it, for the qualification *rogue* calls for a marking or branding classification that sets something apart. A mark of infamy discriminates by means of a first banishing or exclusion that then leads to a bringing before the law. (93-94, original emphasis)

Rogue is a mark or brand of difference that brushes up against the law.<sup>44</sup> In the case of rogue taxidermy, the law can be read as the aesthetic ideal of realist depiction; the conceptual production and display of an individualized and sanitized living creature; a singular sculpture that stands for an indexical species; common theatrical 'spectacles' of different species encounters; the threats to humans through species extinctions (and the list goes on). Rogue taxidermists blur indexical species through inter-species hybrid creations, sculpting uncommon encounters between species or objects, and posing animals in painful or torturous depictions in the 'event' of death through the aesthetic of gore. In turn, taxidermists go *rogue* in their practice against traditional taxidermy displays, competitions, practices, and *gendered* conventions –

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Baker's chapter, "'You Kill Them to Look at Them': Animal Death in Contemporary Art" in the Animal Studies Group's collection, *Killing Animals*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006. 69-98.

<sup>44</sup> Derrida states further that "[a]n article in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* notes, 'in the animal kingdom, a rogue is defined as a creature that is born different. It is incapable of mingling with the herd, it keeps to itself, and it can attack at any time, without warning'" (*Rogues* 94). Derrida writes that it is the English translation that takes up the definition as a masculine figure; He states in footnote 37 of *Rogues* that "[e]ven though the French dictionary *Littre* makes reference in the entry on the adjective *rogue* on the English word of the same spelling ('In English, *rogue* means rascally as well as mischievous'), and even though the two words probably share the same origin in the Scandinavian *hrok* or *hrokr*, the French usage seems to emphasize the sense of arrogance, rudeness, or haughtiness. In English, as we will see, the emphasis is rather on the sense of defiance and offence, on an infraction against or an indifference to the law. Hence the translation into French as *voyou*" (167).

carefully troubling the definition of ‘rogue’ defined as a “dishonest, or unprincipled *man*” (Soanes 989, emphasis added). Indeed, the Minnesota branch of rogue taxidermy is coined by two male artists and one female; however, as the art movement has grown since its 2004 inception, women now predominate its practices. In this sense, the rogue taxidermy art movement challenges the gendered connotation of ‘rogue’ as a masculine figure and this undoing is implicit in disruptive actions used to define the term (discussed in more detail below).<sup>45</sup>

Moving away from what is considered ‘traditional’ or ‘realist’ representations of animal bodies found within natural history museums, rogue taxidermy appropriates these traditional and realist styles to push forth a conversation or implement an idea about human relationships with animal bodies. Calling forth the standards of ‘successful’ taxidermy, which decree that each sculpture or ‘specimen’ must never uncover any visual fabrications of the taxidermy process, rogue taxidermists partake in critical unfoldings and undos of the principles that make this craft. To simply define the genre, rogue taxidermy artists create art in the following ways: rogue taxidermists expose cuts, wounds, and stitches on the surface of animal skins that were produced through violent means of acquiring animal bodies; artists incorporate dyes on skins to change the colours, styles, and norms of realist representations of animals in the wild; artists combine multiple animal body parts in order to make abstract, chimerical, and unidentifiable animal bodies; and several rogue taxidermy art examples break apart the fixed and indexical compulsion to generalize animal existence. As Jane Desmond points out in *Displaying Death and Animating Life*, rogue taxidermists use their art as a form of social and political commentary. With her expertise in ethnographic displays and critiques of colonial representations, Desmond recognizes the self-reflexive edge of rogue taxidermy art pieces that seek to unfold the norms of realist displays (32). Pointing out that rogue taxidermy is often barred from conventional and realist taxidermy competitions, Desmond acknowledges the importance of the rogue art movement in dismantling the structures of taxidermy in competitions or natural history museums (*Displaying* 32). In the next section I will discuss the ethical framework used in creating rogue taxidermy art that seeks to never harm or kill animals for the purposes of art.

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<sup>45</sup> Women’s intervention in taxidermy art is not the only intervention in the fields of mortuary arts. As of 2016, women occupy more roles as funeral directors, women are targeted now in sport and hunting industries due to growing interests in women as hunters -- and let us not forget the occupation women had as professional mourners, called *moirologists*, in ancient cultures. Moirologist is from the Greek word for *μοῖρα* (meaning “fate”) and *λόγος* (for “logos”). In Indian traditions, women public mourners are known as *Rudaali*.

## § 1.5 The Ethical Ambiguities of Rogue Taxidermy Art

According to MART's ethical mandate, rogue taxidermy artists source their animal materials through "roadkill, discarded livestock remnants, casualties of the pet trade, animals that die of natural causes, and destroyed nuisance animals that are donated to the artists" (Minnesota Association of Rogue Taxidermy, "Primary Directive of MART"). In an interview, rogue taxidermy artist Katie Innamorato states that she utilizes animal bodies from "roadkill, scrap skins from the garment industry, nuisance animals, and pet-industry casualties" (Foer 12). Marbury writes that "the art of taxidermy is never a rationale for killing" (*Taxidermy* 27); therefore, MART has developed an 'ethics charter' that "prohibits members from killing animals for the purposes of their work" (Marbury, *Taxidermy* 14-15). Artists are encouraged to "reduce waste by using as much of the animal as possible; follow local, national, and international wildlife laws; develop a dialogue about taxidermy art (especially with critics); and actively take part in the conservation and care of animals" (Marbury, *Taxidermy* 15).

Despite the rogue ethics charter, there are many ethical stakes in the Minnesota collective's unproblematic choice of the common term *nuisance animals* (specifically, small rodents such as mice or squirrels). Animals are constructed as 'nuisances' when they break the boundaries of human defined and imagined spaces (such as farms, houses, attics, or gardens). Nuisance animals are selectively disposed of in order to preserve the illusion that human communities must be separated from 'nature' and also to uphold a founding colonial narrative of particular human entitlement to encroachment. According to Innamorato, nuisance animals donated to her are animals from peoples' attics that cannot be released or "they'll keep coming back. So they get put down" (Foer 12). Disposable or nuisance animals are bodies that move around in ways that are predictable, unexceptional, and encountered all too often. Yet, the production of rogue taxidermy with 'nuisance' animal bodies is in contrast to the exoticisms tied to traditional mounts of rare animals. In *Trash Animals*, Randy Malamud writes that there are fetishistic principles tied to encounters with animals that are deemed 'rare' or 'endangered' in contrast to the animals that regularly cross the paths of humans in the everyday (ix).<sup>46</sup> Malamud

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<sup>46</sup> In an interview, Brewer has stated that she uses 'common' animals. She states that "[a] lot of my work is with very common animals. There's nothing super exotic that I work with for that reason. I use what comes my way"; "The animals are donated, considered roadkill, or died by natural causes, such as a monkey that perished in a zoo.



further states that “[t]here is a range of nonhuman animals who are despised or feared or mocked because [humans] have constructed them as the disgusting ‘other’ in our anthropocentric fantasies of existence” (xi). The use of commonly encountered animals staged with the representational markers used for the display of exotic animals does, indeed, have the potential to produce new encounters. For instance, Brewer has staged mice heads in ways that are similar to mounted trophy heads in her art piece *Liberace Lodge* (Fig. 1.5). Such stagings have the potential to show the frames that display larger wildlife bodies in trophy hunting and display. Decisions to violently discard or remove these disposable animals, however, are informed by human prejudices, taste, and habits (Malamud xi). The use of postmortem ‘nuisance’ animals in rogue taxidermy further complicates the ethics practiced by artists that take possession of animal bodies that have been killed because of their ‘nuisance’ status.



Figure 1.5: Sarina Brewer, *Liberace Lodge*, 2012. Taxidermy and mixed media. Image used with permission from artist, © Sarina Brewer.

There are other complex implications that can be drawn from MART’s ethical framework, not simply the labelling of encounters with certain animals as nuisances. Motor vehicular accidents, casualties from the trading and transportation of pets, and the discarded materials from slaughterhouses, butchers or garment industries are a few systems among the many that make humans responsible for the deaths of various animals. Though not directly guilty of these actions, rogue taxidermy artists, like all humans (myself included), are complicit in the systems that

exploit and destroy animal life through human-made technologies. For instance, roadkill is “evidence of one of the deadlier forms of the complex relationalities between humans and wild creatures that are brought to the fore by our intersecting mobilities” (Koelle 653). Likewise, humans are complicit in the daily use and purchase of animal byproducts that propagate an

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Everything is ethically sourced. That’s been the primary directive throughout my artistic career. Nothing is ever killed for my artwork” (Riviera, “Sarina Brewer”).

economic system founded on animal bodily materials. The saturation of animal byproducts within consumer products is so deeply entrenched that the difference between animal and commodity cannot be easily delineated. Dead materials, of course, permeate human existence and this relationship to nonliving material is not exceptional specifically to animal art.

In various ways, humans are indirectly (and directly) implicated in the deaths of animals used for rogue taxidermy art. Expanding his discussion, Marbury lists various ways in which potential and future rogue taxidermists can find nonliving animal materials for art. Marbury advises in the ‘how-to’ section of his book that taxidermists should “freeze the animal before working with it” to “*kill* any insects and most parasites” (*Taxidermy* 183, emphasis added).<sup>47</sup> Here Marbury proposes a hierarchy within animals and insects and, in doing so, misses any critical reflection on how the processes of carcass freezing directly terminates living creatures and organisms. In *The Gift of Death*, Derrida writes that “I cannot respond to the call, the request, the obligation, or even the love of another without sacrificing the other other, the other others” (69); “I can respond to the one (or to the One), that is to say to the other, only by sacrificing to that one the other. I am responsible to any one (that is to say to the other) only by failing in my responsibilities to all the others, to the ethical or political generality” (71). Indeed, while there are many complications in arguments for preserving microorganisms and insects that threaten to destroy dead animal skins, my point is that words such as ‘kill’ in this context are automatically reinforced by an anthropocentric framework that designates which bodies are valuable (to humans) over others (and also a general attack on the processes of bodily decay).

There are also a number of complications in the MART mandate that involve direct human interference in the lives of animals. Several sources listed by MART, including those considered as deriving from ‘natural death events,’ are effects of environments created by humans who live alongside and are responsible for animals (such as farms and pet ownership). Furthermore, a deeper nuancing of what is deemed *natural deaths* is needed to disentangle rogue taxidermy artists from the illusion of human centered ethical innocence. Marbury states that “pet stores and animal food suppliers sell frozen ‘feeder animals’ like mice, guinea pigs, rabbits, piglets, and chicks, intended for snakes, raptors, and other carnivorous domestic pets”

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<sup>47</sup> Katie Innamorato stated in an interview with Joshua Foer that she freezes everything before starting taxidermy because “fleas and ticks will stay on a carcass and live for a while” (12). In describing her craft, Innamorato states that “[f]reezing helps kill off mites and parasites, [or] at least slow them down” (Foer 12).

(*Taxidermy* 175). This resource for dead animal materials, however, leaves one to ponder what environments and interactions led to the deaths of the animals listed above. Such examples also acknowledge the role of other animals in killing and consuming different species.

In their most recent book *Stuffed Animals: A Modern Guide to Taxidermy*, female rogue / alternative taxidermy artists Divya Anantharaman and Katie Innamorato write that “[t]axidermy is all about appreciating nature, preserving and paying respect to something that would otherwise be *left to rot*” (9, emphasis added). Similarly, Brewer’s artist website states that “she believes wasting any part of an animal is disrespectful to Mother Nature, so out of respect for the animal she adheres to a strict ‘waste not, want not’ policy in her studio”; “Virtually every part of the animal is recycled in some manner” (Brewer, “About the Artist”).<sup>48</sup> From this, Brewer advises artists to capitalize on what is deemed as ‘waste’ produced through the taxidermy process. Brewer’s conceptualization of nature to the female maternal body goes against what Stacey Alaimo has reminded her readers in *Undomesticated Ground: Recasting Nature as Feminist Space* is a risk: that “portraying the earth as a mother also contributes to a domesticating discourse that is harmful to both women and the environment” (173). In other words, the use of ‘Mother Nature’ risks essentializing and relegating women’s bodies to the act of fertility.<sup>49</sup> From

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<sup>48</sup> In lieu of not ‘wasting’ the animal body, Bibus serves roadkill jerky to his participants while teaching taxidermy in his workshops. Likewise, Marbury warns future rogue taxidermists in his ‘how-to’ guide not to use harmful chemicals such as borax in the taxidermy process if one is intending to eat the skinned animal or serve the meat to feed their pets (*Taxidermy* 182). Certainly meat production has been a major concern for various animal rights groups and is the political foundation of the growing acceleration in vegetarian and vegan diets; however, I agree with Derrida and Kelly Oliver that ethics are complex due in part by our general accountability to beings on the planet that are sacrificed through a competing demand. Oliver states that “[e]thics cannot be founded on counting how many species are sentient or suffer, whether one eats shellfish or so-called animal products like dairy. What about bacteria, viruses, and fungus that feed on humans? Aren’t they living beings too? Should one kill them? Can one be open even to the other who feeds? Derrida is adamant that an extreme ethics allows that one can never know from where – or from whom – an ethical call will be heard. Ethical responsibility is motivated by radical differences that multiply rather than diminish or calculate the species of ethical calls” (“Derrida and Eating” 461-462). Debates involving the production and consumption of meat are beyond the scope of this project; however, it is clear that contemporary debates over the ethics of eating animals is complex and contextual. From a North American perspective, vegan activists on the one hand argue for the abolished exploitation and consumption of animal bodies that are oppressed widely through food economies. Veganism as an ideological project, however, has been critiqued as a white neoliberal movement, founded on class privilege. Food choices are based on a complex and culturally specific basis. Interestingly too, a colleague of mine, artist Ruth Burke, informed me that philanthropic programs collect fresh roadkill to feed poor communities in Michigan. There are larger socio-economic discussions to be had on arguments about food choice. For the purpose of scope, I direct readers to a resource that provides more nuanced perspectives on critical veganism: see Jodey Castricano and Rasmus R. Simonsen’s edited collection, *Critical Perspectives on Veganism*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan Animal Ethics Series, 2016.

<sup>49</sup> By highlighting this risk, I do not disregard Indigenous feminist scholarship that speak to traditions of the earth mother outside western conceptions of gender essentialism. Though the publications on Indigenous feminist scholarship that discusses women’s connection to nature outside of western constructions of gender is expansive,

a different perspective, Anantharaman and Innamorato's rhetoric idealizes 'nature' as impervious to change through acts of preservation. In the case of traditional types of taxidermy that are heavily rooted in essentialist ideals of pure 'nature,' Helen Gregory and Anthony Purdy state that "the paradoxical notion that you had to kill animals in order to preserve them derives from the desire to maintain a social or ecological system in a fixed and undefiled state of purity that could be appreciated and studied by future generations" (67). Traditional types of taxidermy used to educate future generations of ecological systems used a rhetoric of preservation that involved expanding knowledge of environments that were not readily accessible by groups. In contrast to narratives of 'nature' and fixed 'wildlife,' rogue taxidermists utilize the rhetoric of environmentalism and sustainability through 'recycling.' Claire Colebrook writes that notions of a stabilized nature that are also considered "cyclically compatible with production" ("We Have Always Been Post-Anthropocene" 18) are founded through anthropocentric frames. Popular engagement with conservation powered by western anxieties over mass extinctions and the destruction resulting from mass consumer waste seemingly underlay the motives behind preserving and utilizing what MART artists label and deem as 'waste.'

In *Animal Capital*, Nicole Shukin highlights the ways in which ecological discourses that propose "closed loop" recycling is preconceived under a capitalist rhetoric. "Closed loop" recycling involves the collection of waste that is used to produce new consumable objects. These "redemptive" and "subversive" solutions that Shukin highlights through the logic of closed loop recycling animal byproducts risk repeating the processes of capitalist consumption. Shukin writes that

Resource and animal conservation discourses need to be examined for how they may inadvertently advance rather than antagonize the hegemony of capital. For a logic of recycling first developed around animal rendering arguably supplements the wasteful hyperproduction and consumption of commodities with an ecological ethic of material efficiency and waste recovery that surreptitiously supports the sustainability of capitalism. (70)

Rogue taxidermy materials can be sourced through arguably 'nonviolent' means and, in many

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some notable works include Joyce Green's book, *Making Space for Indigenous Feminism*. Winnipeg: Fernwood Publishing, 2007 and Nathalie J. Kermoal, Isabel Altamirano-Jiménez, and Kahente Horn-Miller's collection, *Living on the Land: Indigenous Women's Understanding of Place*. Edmonton: Alberta University Press, 2016. It is also important to note that "Native women employ motherist rhetoric in their critiques of Western feminism as a response to their history of enforced sterilization" and also to highlight Indigenous women's leadership roles, dignity, and contributions to their communities and cultures (Zinn et al. 328).

cases, rogue taxidermists recycle discarded taxidermy from natural history museums. Indeed, recycling materials attempts to remedy the exploitation of other resources; however, the production and preservation of animal bodies in taxidermy creates art objects and these objects, like consumer commodities, withstand decay only through environmentally harmful means.

Furthermore, Brewer creates her own subsidiary sculptures using the method of what she has termed ‘esodermy,’ in order to avoid ‘wasting’ animal flesh and bone. Brewer uses the internal flesh of animal corpses typically discarded in the taxidermy process. The term ‘esodermy’ is “drawn from ancient Greek; eso (within) and dermy (dermis/skin), which translates to ‘within skin’” (Brewer, “Esodermy”). Informed by the lifelike poses of French anatomist Honoré Fragonard and the practices of plastination created by Gunther von Hagen for his *Body Worlds* exhibits,<sup>50</sup> Brewer’s ‘esodermy’ involves the skinning and display of the animal carcass and plastination processes that make these art materials impervious to decay. Christy Desmith writes that “unlike traditional taxidermists, who preserve only animal hides, Brewer tries to avoid wasting the innards. As a consequence, she makes a fair amount of carcass art, which she creates by chemically treating muscle tissue before fashioning them into a whimsical pose—like a sculpture of dancing squirrel guts” (“Body of Work”). The skins that are stripped from the animal carcass are graphed onto a related art piece, while the esodermy sculptures are created (and sometimes painted) as a separate sculpture. In lieu of ‘better’ and ‘improved’ art practices that prolong the *lifespan* of the art object, Brewer represents these sculptures, through her website, as environmentally ‘ethical’ and made from ‘recyclable’ materials. She writes that this practice is a “*responsible* use of [the] animal,” while she advocates “nothing that was once living should be *wasted* or *taken for granted*” (Brewer, “Esodermy”, emphasis added). Repurposing skinned leftovers of a carcass has been, traditionally, unheard of in the world of conventional taxidermy, argues Brewer, when discussing her ‘ethics’ and ‘recycling’ practices (Brewer, “Esodermy”).<sup>51</sup> Indeed, discourses on environmental ethics have helped draw attention to Brewer

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<sup>50</sup> Human bodily exhibitions are still prominent today; for instance, German anatomist Gunther von Hagens’ exhibition of plasticized bodies in his exhibit *Body Worlds* has international recognition. Desmond writes that there is something significant about skin that in its absence “facilitates the ‘right to look’ under the twin supports of discourses on anatomy and art” (“Postmortem” 349) and this ‘right’ is supported by the popularity of exhibits such as *Body Worlds*.

<sup>51</sup> Brewer states: “I believe all organisms are an engineering marvel. I think animals are just as wondrous and awe-inspiring on the inside as they are on the outside. Many people think my esodermy pieces are for shock value, but in actuality that couldn’t be further from the truth. I create them to showcase the underappreciated beauty within, and as a form of complete recycling” (Colby, “Creature Feature” 76).

as a sustainable artist and taxidermist. The discourses that encourage others to adopt her "waste-not, want-not" philosophy, however, are based on complex premises. Just as rogue taxidermy art is informed by an ethics of sustainability, in the pages that follow I look at the narratives of extinction that continue to inform human-animal relations in the present day.

## § 1.6 Taxidermy as Fetish Object

Digital images of traditional taxidermy as 'bad art' have been popular on the internet in the twenty-first century. For instance, Kat Su's release of *Crap Taxidermy* – a blog turned table book – features images of bloated and amateur taxidermy found across the globe. Unlike these strange and supposedly 'humorous' images, realist taxidermists sought to create mimetic representations of animals in the wild. Pioneered by Carl Akeley in the early 1900s, a realist aesthetic dominated taxidermy displays throughout the twentieth century.<sup>52</sup> Akeley (1864-1926) was America's most famous taxidermist.<sup>53</sup> He incorporated papier-mâché, scientific measurement, photography,<sup>54</sup> and landscape preservation.<sup>55</sup> Akeley's contribution to the field involved advancing taxidermy as an

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<sup>52</sup> For more information on Akeley's career, biographical details, and critical readings of his role in twentieth-century taxidermy display, see Donna Haraway's chapter, "Teddy Bear Patriarchy: Taxidermy in the Garden of Eden, New York City, 1908-1936" in *Primate Visions: Gender, Race, and Nature in the World of Modern Science*. New York: Routledge, 1989. 26-58; Dave Madden's book, *The Authentic Animal: Inside the Odd and Obsessive World of Taxidermy*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2011; and Nigel Rothfel's chapter, "Trophies and Taxidermy" in *Gorgeous Beasts: Animal Bodies in Historical Perspective*. Eds. Joan B. Landes, Paula Young Lee, and Paul Youngquist. Pennsylvania: Penn State University Press, 2012. 126-136.

<sup>53</sup> For a comprehensive history of taxidermy and specimen production in the United States, see Mark V. Barrow's article, "The Specimen Dealer: Entrepreneurial Natural History in America's Gilded Age." *Journal of the History of Biology* 33.3 (2000): 493-534.

<sup>54</sup> For more information on the use of photography in Akeley's work, see Stephanie Turner's article, "Relocating 'Stuffed' Animals: Photographic Remediation of Natural History Taxidermy." *Humanimalia* 4.2 (2013): 1-32, Mark Alvey's article, "The Cinema as Taxidermy: Carl Akeley and the Preservative Obsession." *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media* 48.1 (2007): 23-45, and Helen Gregory and Anthony Purdy's article, "Present Signs, Dead Things: Indexical Authenticity and Taxidermy's Nonabsent Animal." *Configurations* 23.1 (2015): 61-92. Gregory and Purdy write that "[s]ince Carl Akeley's work during the 1920s and 1930s, 'museum taxidermy has been done by carefully measuring and photographing the corpse of an animal, and making a sculpture based on these specific measurements and photos. Casts of the sculpture are then taken, and used to make a hollow form, over which the skin is stretched'" (66).

<sup>55</sup> Collecting and preserving the natural landscape where the animal was killed adds to the display of resurrected life. Wakeham writes that Akeley also, beyond his innovations in taxidermic craft, "developed the habitat diorama, which sought to provide an environmental context for specimens by synthetically recreating their natural surroundings" (11). The purposes for reconstructing the natural environment, argues Wakeham, were to hide the violence that took part in the construction of a coordinated and peaceful depiction of wildlife, prior to the rupture of human intervention. She states that "[t]he diorama structure returned violently extracted and reconstructed animal corpses to a phantasmatic scene of wildlife's origins that further accentuated the taxidermic quest for human mastery over the natural world" (Wakeham 11).

art form, turning taxidermy into sculpture (part of a nature scene), rather than simply specimen preparation. He saw traditional forms of taxidermy as simply “upholstery” and chose to refine the practice by creating clay molds recast into papier-mâché to replace stuffing skins with straw (Alvey 25). Akeley’s changes to the craft “involved a transformation from basic techniques of stuffing skins toward refined forms of sculpture that reconstructed dead animals in more fluid, lifelike, and ostensibly natural poses” (Wakeham 11). In Akeley’s habitat dioramas, writes Henning, “the wilderness is represented as the sublime”; “These dioramas are conventionally empty of human presence, and every species is represented in family groupings or herds, each with their own individual diorama” (Henning 674). Akeley developed his techniques in the 1920s at the American Museum of Natural History in New York; the African Hall is notably popular among scholars studying Akeley’s aesthetic in taxidermy (Haraway, *Primate Visions*; Henning, “Anthropomorphic Taxidermy”; Alvey, “The Cinema as Taxidermy”; Wakeham, *Taxidermic Signs*; Madden, *The Authentic Animal*; Miller, *Empire and the Animal Body*). While human superiority to and domination of wildlife were key aspects of British masculinity in the Victorian period, changes to the ways in which taxidermy was produced and displayed recreated the norms of masculinity from the earlier model of the nationalist hunter into the restrained, rational, and concise scientist and artist. John Miller states that during Akeley’s time, naturalism was as valued as hunting, and intellectually managing animals overshadowed the blood thirsty sport of hunting – two different forms of control over the natural world (71). Taxidermy was not simply about displaying man’s natural right to dominate animals; it was also bound up in the racial projects of modern eugenics, an argument highlighted in Donna Haraway’s widely discussed chapter “Teddy Bear Patriarchy: Taxidermy in the Garden of Eden, New York, 1908-1936.” For Haraway, the natural history museum was not simply a force to control animals, but was also a project in fastening colonial control over civilization and the influx of new immigrants (*Primate* 29). Likewise, when discussing the African Hall, Wakeham writes that “[b]y freeze-framing the gorillas and lions of Africa in poses of eugenic fitness, white men such as Akeley marked their communion with and yet mastery over nature as proof of the virility of their own species” (12) and race.

According to Haraway, it was Akeley’s craftwork that made taxidermy “the art more suited to the epistemological and aesthetic stance of realism” (*Primate* 38). Because of the indexical narratives placed alongside the displays of taxidermied animals, the museum

‘specimen’ stands in as one body used to capture the image of many other bodies. Taxidermy upholds the spirit of what a singular body, known as the ‘specimen,’ symbolizes for the plurality of other individuals beings, a taxonomic symbol that serves to capture of the ‘natural’ world in all its diversity. The specimen stands as a hollowed-out crypt of animality. In other words, the ‘ideal’ animal is represented, while all animal life, presence, or existence (animal *proper*) is emptied out from the taxidermy sculpture. As Wakeham argues, taxidermy is the “lost object of frontier wildness – a fetish object that is powerful precisely because its imagined referent is irretrievable” (75).

Today, narratives of extinction flood the museum with *affective* presence. As a multifaceted concept, affect is defined by Jasbir Puar as “the body’s hopeful opening, a speculative opening not wedded to the dialectic of hope and hopelessness but rather a porous affirmation of what could or might be” (19). Put simply, affect theory focuses on corporeality beyond Cartesianism; it is understood as the happenings, intensities, and sensations (on or with the body) before consciousness recognizes or reflects on this realization. The moment that cognition or discursive funneling attempts to express these pre-discursive sensations, something is lost. Puar’s stream of affect theory is influenced by scholars that see affect as a creative opening, not easily defined or grasped, given that such conceptualizations would lose sight of affect’s potential. She states that “the affective turn, alongside the critical deployment of affect as a rubric of analysis and inquiry more potently signals the contestation over the dominant terms of critical theory itself and the limits of poststructuralist interpretative practices that focus solely on language, signification, and representation” (Puar 18). For Sara Ahmed, however, affect is associated with feeling, emotion, and response; affective economies are created by circulation between subjects and objects, not stagnation (*The Cultural Politics of Emotion* 6; 8; 15; 28).

In the case of taxidermy and extinction, singular animal bodies stand as *affective* monuments of nostalgia, mourning, and longing in the contemporary museum setting and this is the result of the depletion of animal populations on a global scale. Animals matter more in human social worlds when ‘at risk.’ In *Imagining Extinction*, Ursula Heise critiques fantastical narratives that place ‘nature’ as a separate system that was untouched by human impact until recently. She writes that “[r]egret, mourning, and melancholy over aspects of nature that were degraded or lost in modernization processes [...] turn into more than personal emotion in this context, as public grief over what most societies have not normally considered worth mourning



becomes an act of political resistance” (Heise 8). The mobilization (and subsequent fetishization) of animal endangerment is prominent in von Hagen’s *Body Worlds: Animals Inside Out*, where dead animal bodies (like the previous human displays) are now considered ‘worthy’ for study and display. The animal displays in *Body Worlds* are discussed as ‘special’; they are worthy of grief and now used to educate and fundraise for species endangerment.<sup>56</sup> Likewise, fixations with extinct animals has led to the call for biobanks and the implementation of cryopreservation projects of extinct species at ‘frozen zoo’ storage facilities, such as the Institute for Conservation Research in San Diego, California. These frozen zoos are scientific attempts to collect, preserve, and resurrect extinct animals – the most popular instance being plans to resurrect the long-extinct woolly mammoth. As such, extinct animals become publicly remarkable when displayed and represented as *the last of their kind* (§ 5 **Apocalyptic Time**).

Prior to the recent effects of overconsumption, environmental destruction, and decreased animal populations, taxidermy sculptures in American homes were symbols of social status and education. This is partially because taxidermy (of ‘exotic’ wildlife) is associated with museums and other institutions of education and other scholarly ties to the elite class. Taxidermy began to lose its prestige when it became a commodity and a form of home decoration (Bryant and Shoemaker, “Dead Zoo Chic” 1021). In spirit of this realization, Rikke Hansen writes that ‘dead’ animal skin is ubiquitous in contemporary culture: “from the general use of leather for shoes and

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<sup>56</sup> In 2015, the Ottawa Canadian Museum of Nature hosted von Hagen’s *Body Worlds: Animals Inside Out*. When entering the exhibit, I encountered videos about extinct and endangered species and at the end of the exhibit, a donation box was left to encourage patrons to pay proceeds to the *World Wildlife Foundation*. From this framework, the *Body Worlds* exhibit was created as a political resistance to animal deaths; however, examples such as these exhibits point to the growing anxiety about human species extinction. High rates of nonhuman animal species extinction is a reflection of impending threats to the human species extinction. In a doubled sense, the schools of anatomy, biology, and taxonomy that sought to control animal species (through the acts to preserve what was understood as animal life) has led to the ideological structures that have destroyed animal diversity and populations. Also, *Body Worlds* exhibits that utilize (and also *plastinate*) dead animal bodies are, strangely and paradoxically, used to fundraise for the protection and conservation of animal life.

Moreover, under the category of ‘Body Donation’ on the *Body Worlds* website (that currently advertises the *Animals Inside Out* exhibit), the following can be read: “*All anatomical species on display in the Body Worlds exhibitions are real*” (emphasis added). This statement captions the following paragraph that adds, “[t]hey belonged to people who declared during their lifetime that their bodies should be made available after their deaths for the training of physicians and the instruction of laypersons [sic]. Many donors underscore that by donating their body, they want to be useful even after their death. Their selfless donations allow us to gain unique insights into the human body, which had previously been reserved for physicians. Therefore, we wish to thank the living and deceased body donors” (*Body Worlds* website). By advertising the *Animals Inside Out* show, the website further highlights that anthropocentrism informs the exhibit. The body donation process involves the consent of humans to use both animals and human bodies for human means and purposes. For more information, see the *Body Worlds* website at, < <https://bodyworlds.com/plastination/bodydonation/> >

bags, to the current popular and artistic interest in taxidermy” (11-12) – dead animal materials pervade most objects, foods, clothes, and other consumer products. But the shift between taxidermy as craft hobby into art, according to Clifton Bryant and Donald Shoemaker, is no more evident in an American context than through the “mounting of big game trophies” (1020). Bryant and Shoemaker argue that those who acquire exotic safari animals for taxidermy present these specimens as a symbol of their wealth to travel continents and acquire foreign species (1021-1022). This argument is highlighted in Nigel Rothfel’s chapter “Trophies and Taxidermy” where he writes that his encounters with contemporary American hunters, as well as historical documents about Akeley, show that “these hunts are fundamentally about the performance of a spectacle *back home*” (134, emphasis added). In other words, to gain prestige within their local communities, hunters bring animal carcasses to family and friends by way of a trophy for display. Moreover, Kelly Oliver states that “[h]unting itself as a trope has become a trophy of sorts in the rhetoric of political image making. And meat eating or eating flesh is a sign of strength and fortitude” (*Animal Lessons* 104). In tandem with this line of thought, Miller writes in *Empire and the Animal Body* that “[t]he commodity, importantly, is a closely related form of animal representation to the trophy. Although trophies were preserved principally as souvenirs, more often for personal gratification than as part of a larger entrepreneurial enterprise, mounted heads and skins of a hunter’s prey evidently had economic value, as the number of commercial taxidermists in Victorian Britain testifies” (47-48).

Hunting became a symbol of status not simply for the resources acquired through the hunting of animal bodies, but by the symbolic exchange that takes place between hunters and their social matrixes upon their return; i.e., relations that are shaped by one’s gender, class, race, and other social relations of making empire. In this regard, Oliver discusses the autopsy of King Louis XIV’s elephant that died in his menagerie; she writes that “[s]overeignty requires the spectacle or performance of sovereignty and the testimony of an intermediary both uniquely present at this performance and yet necessarily absent from the ‘official aesthetic’ of sovereign rhetoric” (*Technologies* 139). The exchange of animal objects has much to do with the social relations involved in such events and these events are presupposed by masculine, racial, and class privileges.

In “Elusive Material, What the Dog Doesn’t Understand,” Rey Chow draws out the legacy of Marxism and the poststructuralist turn in discussing matter and ideology. Discussing

the work of Sohn-Rethel, Louis Althusser, Slavoj Žižek, and Rene Girard, Chow shows the ways in which these theorists have marked a social-material reaction to the desire of consumption under contemporary capitalism. Chow writes that “Girard reconceptualizes ‘desire’ by showing how, rather than residing in a repressed manner inside individual human beings, desire may be seen as the outcome of social or group relations: we desire something, he suggests, not because that something is intrinsically desirable but because we notice that someone else desires it. Desire (like consciousness) is thus mimetic, to be located in the interstices of interactions between people” (228). Likening this group effect as like a ‘mob’ – a mob that follows or surrenders to an authority, albeit religious (Althusser), totalitarian (Žižek), or in this case to the social conditions or norms of gender, class, and race (Chow) – the physical response is played out through re-actions. Chow writes that “[e]ven in the case of the commodified exchange abstraction, as Sohn-Rethel presents it, what is clearly foregrounded is a kind of automatized habit or reflex action – a ‘doing’ that proceeds matter-of-factly without the actors’ ‘knowing’ or ‘reflecting’” (228). The reflexes to consume are interesting when one is to think of the taxidermy object as a fetishistic commodity.

Karl Marx writes in *Capital* that “[i]t is as clear as noon-day that man, by his industry, changes the forms of the material furnished by nature in such a way as to make them useful to him. The form of wood, for instance, is altered by making a table out of it, for all that, the table continues to be that common every-day thing, wood. But, as soon as it steps forth as a commodity, it is changed into something transcendent” (76).<sup>57</sup> If the table begins as nothing

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<sup>57</sup> In *Specters of Marx*, Derrida likens Marx’s table to a “prophetic dog”; he writes at length that “[t]he capital contradiction does not have to do simply with the incredible conjunction of the sensuous and the supersensible in the same Thing; it is the contradiction of *automatic autonomy*, mechanical freedom, technical life. Like every thing, from the moment it comes onto the stage of a market, the table resembles a prosthesis of itself. Autonomy *and* automatism, *but* automatism of this wooden table that spontaneously puts itself into motion, to be sure, and seems thus to animate, animalize, spiritualize, *spiritize* itself, but while remaining an artificial body, a sort of automaton, a puppet, a stiff and mechanical doll whose dance obeys the technical rigidity of a program. Two genres, two generations of movement intersect with each other in it, and that is why it figures the apparition of a specter. It accumulates undecidedly, in its uncanniness, their contradictory predicates: the inert thing appears suddenly *inspired*, it is all at once transfixed by a penuma or a psyché. Become like a living being, the table resembles a prophetic dog that gets up on its four paws, ready to face up to its fellow dogs: an idol would like to make the law” (192, original emphasis). In response to Derrida’s reading of Marx’s table as an animate “prophetic dog” (alongside Derrida’s other discussion of an encounter with his cat companion’s gaze in *The Animal* that I discuss in more detail in § 3 **Dead Gazes**), Shukin writes that Derrida falters by making the animal a specter (a fetish within deconstruction) through what Shukin has called “*animalséance*.” This *animalséance*, writes Shukin, strips the animal of its material reality. She warns that these examples of spectral animality go against the subversive politics of deconstruction because such claims would “drain animals of their historical specificity and substance” (38). In other words, making animals spectral to be used for philosophical arguments is “deeply idealistic” (Shukin 37).

more than an everyday thing, or ‘wood,’ in Marx’s words, then taxidermy is nothing more than animal skin and flesh before it is repurposed into a fetishistic sign – that of the sublime object or taxonomized specimen in realist taxidermy. Ahmed remarks, however, that “[t]he object is not reducible to the commodity, even when it is bought and sold. The object is not reducible to itself, which means it does not ‘have’ an ‘itself’ that is apart from its contact with others” (“Orientations Matter” 243); it is the meaning that social relations and matrixes cast onto taxidermy objects that reproduce the production of these pieces and also the fetishism that is tied to them. Take, for instance, the Dodo as a figure of mourning and loss due to the colonial expeditions that led to its extinction. As a collective, humans mourn the fact that there is little known material evidence of the Dodo’s existence. The Dodo was a flightless bird of the Island of Mauritius that went extinct in 1662 due to habitat destruction, overhunting,<sup>58</sup> and the introduction of invasive species to the island.<sup>59</sup> Unable to be preserved in the natural history museum (save for the Dodo’s skeletal remains), depictions of the Dodo involve written

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In a similar vein, Haraway critiques western philosophers’ use of animals as metaphors and analogies. She argues that philosophers tend to ignore *real* animals in order to advance their own philosophical claims. In *When Species Meet*, Haraway, like Shukin, also criticizes Derrida’s use of his cat companion; she writes that “Derrida failed a simple obligation of companion species; he did not become curious about what the cat might actually be doing, feeling, thinking, or perhaps making available to him in looking back at him that morning” (20); “Incurious, he missed a possible invitation, a possible introduction to other-worlding. Or, if he was curious when he first really noticed his cat looking at him that morning, he arrested that lure to deconstructive communication with the sort of critical gesture that he would never have allowed to stop him in his canonical philosophical reading and writing practices” (*When* 21). Furthermore, Haraway states about Marx that “[o]f all philosophers, Marx understood relational sensuousness, and he thought deeply about the metabolism between human beings and the rest of the world enacted in living labor” and, yet, “[i]n the end, no companion species, reciprocal inductions, or multispecies epigenetics are in [Marx’s] story” (*When* 46). Though the discussion and arguments surrounding cognitive, living, and breathing nonhuman animals cannot be expanded on in full in this project that is centrally focused on the artistic use of dead animal materials, my point in bringing these theorists into conversation is to highlight the ways in which speaking of animals in the abstract, or as philosophical examples, risks further exploitation of animal existences. I, too, equate animal existence with non-sentient materials such as Marx’s table. This equation of creature and table enacts a potential risk of perpetuating the longstanding human tendency to not see animals as sentient beings. My reasons for equating tables with creatures in the following pages, however, is to point out how animal imaginaries are constructed through human social and cultural frames. Specifically in the context of taxidermy art, animal materials are constructed into figures and shapes by human artists who already work within a social system that consents for animals (after death) and agrees that animal bodies are acceptable materials for artistic use.

<sup>58</sup> Recent forensic scanning technology on the last skeletal remains of the Dodo at the Oxford University Museum of Natural History in the U.K. have found that the animal had died due to a gunshot wound, not the pre-existing belief that the Dodo had died by natural causes. For more information see Kas Roussy’s article, “Dodo Whodunit: Feathered Creature Died from Shotgun Blast to Head.” *CBC* 19 April, 2018. Web.  
< <http://www.cbc.ca/news/technology/oxford-dodo-shot-to-death-1.4626656> >

<sup>59</sup> Chernela writes that the Dodo was “discovered in Mauritius in 1581 but went extinct soon after with little public outcry. The demise of the dodo is directly attributable to the arrival of Europeans who overhunted the birds, destroyed their forested habitats, and introduced dogs, pigs, cats, rats, and macaques into the island, where they ravaged nesting sites”; “Today a number of environmental organizations use the image of the dodo to promote the protection of endangered species” (21).

documents and histories, artistic renditions, and casted sculptures – the feverish impulse to create a record of something lost. Janet Chernela writes that the Dodo “has come to stand for extinction” in part by the growing popular discussion of the Dodo in Charles Darwin’s 1859 text, *On the Origin of Species*, and Lewis Carroll’s 1865 fantasy, *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (21). Because there are histories written about its existence, unlike the relics of prehistoric creatures for which humans have no recorded experience, the Dodo is both within and outside of human epistemological grasp. Due to the threat of extinction and the fear of loss of knowledge of what lived and what remains on the planet, animal bodies are fetishized when they become ‘at risk.’

It is, also, the narratives through which these bodies are memorialized that makes them special and unique. Similar to the fetishization of the Dodo is the preservation of Martha the passenger pigeon (1885-1914) on display at the Smithsonian. Because she is the *last* of her kind, Martha is given a name, a biography, and placed on display. Martha’s body is a hollowed-out crypt preserved as a statue or monument. She was part of the population of passenger pigeons that, in North America, went extinct due to over-hunting, loss of habitat, and flock destruction at the hands of humans; subsequent efforts to revive the species failed due to the birds’ inability to reproduce following the mass destructions of their population. This narrative places Martha in a state of exception. Representations of the *last* or *only* one are overshadowed by romantic narratives of singularity, which include literary constructions of the ‘vanishing Indian’ that can be found in American fiction by imperial romance writers (the connection between Martha and the museumification of Indigenous bodies is explored further in § 2 **Autopsic Gaze**). In his criticism of James Fenimore Cooper’s novel *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826), Saddik Gohar writes that “[v]iewing the Indian as a barbarian, Cooper attempts to mystify the actual/brutal process of conquest by making it seem to be the inevitable result of sweeping historical forces” (146). For Warren Cariou, the exhibition of North American Indigenous peoples (who were the most common performers in European human zoos) stood as “objects of a powerful rhetoric of impending extinction” (26). He writes that “[t]he trope of the ‘dying Indian’ was already well established by the Victorian period, and it would only grow in popularity as the nineteenth century progressed. But the idea of the dying Indian was more than a cliché; it was also an alibi that enabled colonial culture to avoid responsibility for the genocidal actions that were perpetuated against Indigenous peoples during the nineteenth century and beyond” (26). The

trope of the vanishing or dying ‘Indian’ situates Indigenous groups as figures of a disappearing past. Such narratives seek to cleanse the ongoing colonial enterprise responsible for the genocide of Indigenous peoples across North America.

When animals are put on display, the ways in which their bodies and biographies come to be known are through the circulation of social discourse. Placed on display for historical purposes, bodies (nonhuman and human) are symbolically celebrated because of their (sacred) exceptionalism or (profane) abnormality. In both cases, the fetishistic aura of these taxidermied figures results from the ways in which human desire and experience are circulated in social frameworks. These social frameworks derive not from personal encounters with animals in the material world, but from the mystery and romanticism of the unknown or the unencountered. These narratives are also made obvious by the ways in which representations of Big Foot or the Loch Ness Monster are reified in the social relations of humans to the nations associated with these cryptid creatures. Creatures are made real through the circulation of social relations; thus, Ahmed writes that “[w]hat we need to recall is how the ‘thisness’ of this table does not, as it were, belong to it: what is particular about this table, what we can tell through its biography, is also what allows us to tell a larger story: a story not only of ‘things’ changing hands but of how things come to matter by taking shape through and in the labor of others” (“Orientations Matter” 243).

In a capitalist society that uses animal byproducts on the regular, it is not surprising that Jay Johnston and Fiona Probyn-Rapsey have argued that “animal death becomes the background noise of everyday life: routinised, normalised, mechanised and sped up” (xiv). Indeed, animal parts permeate everywhere and are present as products in most human materials. According to Poliquin, “[t]he visibility of death is the second aesthetic quality of taxidermy”; even realist displays do not escape the “presentation of death” (*Breathless* 108). Traditional forms of taxidermy, she writes, is unlike leather furniture or a steak, objects that lack the symbolism of a whole or real animal. Poliquin also argues that what affects perceivers who encounter taxidermy are the animated features of the animal that impress on the viewer, the suggestion that the “thing just might reanimate” (Poliquin, *Breathless* 108). Similarly, Haraway writes that taxidermy “had always threatened to lapse from art into deception” (*Primate* 41). According to Carol Adams, one does not hear the animal or see the animal in the piece of meat and this allows humans to remain separate from the realities of the violences that make up the food industry. Adams’s

notion of the ‘absent referent’ as an object that separates relationality from living beings slaughtered for human ends, addresses the ways in which animals are made into objects. Such objectification makes it possible to not ‘see’ that the object being consumed was a living animal. In contrast to the seeming liveliness of the animal in realist taxidermy, if we do not see the animal in meat, do we really see the animal in taxidermy? Like meat, the production and acceptance of traditional taxidermy has made this practice and encounters with these objects conventional and normalized. Derrida argues that “[t]he autonomy lent to commodities corresponds to an anthropomorphic projection” (*Specters of Marx* 197); likewise, the narratives, indexical translations, categorizations, biographies, and taxonomic labels are but the symbolic transactions humans have with other humans. These narratives are nothing more than normative frames that move and affect us as we transact (in)visible animal crypts within various social economies. These narratives are anthropomorphic as much as anthropocentric, designating animality as emptied out for the processes of human social circulation.

## § 1.7 The Role of Gender in Taxidermy

As the previous pages have shown, celebrated taxidermists were historically male; however, women also practiced taxidermy on a regular basis in the Victorian period. The craft of taxidermy has been practiced historically to economically ‘uplift’ women. According to the 1891 national census of Britain, of the 369 taxidermists listed as working in London, 122 were women (Youdelman 38). Turner writes that the contemporary revival of taxidermy has been largely due to the efforts of women practitioners (26; 28).

Martha Maxwell (1831-1881)<sup>60</sup> was an American naturalist, artist, and taxidermist. She began practicing taxidermy in Baraboo, Wisconsin, later moving to Colorado.<sup>61</sup> It was at the Centennial Exhibition in 1876 where Maxwell exhibited her work in the display entitled

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<sup>60</sup> For more biographical information of Maxwell, see Maxine Benson’s book, *Martha Maxwell: Rocky Mountain Naturalist*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986; John Moring’s book, *Early American Naturalists: Exploring the American West, 1804-1900*. Lanham: Taylor Trade Publications, 2005; Robert W. Lackmann’s book, *Women of the Western Frontier in Fact, Fiction, and Film*. Jefferson: McFarland, 1997; Laura Browder’s book, *Her Best Shot: Women and Guns in America*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006; and Gayle Shirley’s book, *More Than Petticoats: Remarkable Colorado Women*. Guilford: Morris Book Publishing, 2012.

<sup>61</sup> Maxwell’s earliest taxidermied mounts were seen in Boulder, Colorado, where she displayed her taxidermy and “converted her house into the Rocky Mountain Museum in 1873” (Lackmann 118). Moving her museum to Denver after she found increased interest in her taxidermy, Ronald Lackmann writes that Maxwell came “to the attention of state legislators who asked her to display her work at the Centennial Exhibition” in Philadelphia (118).

‘Woman’s Work’<sup>62</sup> and became known as ‘The Colorado Huntress.’ John Moring writes that “[w]hat distinguished Martha from other taxidermists of the day was that Martha Maxwell always attempted to place stuffed animals in natural poses and amongst natural surroundings” (177). Likewise, Gayle Shirley writes that Maxwell was “later recognized as the first taxidermist ever to place her specimens in realistic poses and settings” and that her tableaux “offered visitors from eastern cities a glimpse into an unknown world” (68) at the time of the Centennial Exhibition. Maxine Benson writes that Maxwell was not an outstanding taxidermist solely because she was a woman working in a field that underrepresents women; rather, she argues that Maxwell’s technique and style in the late 1860s and early 1870s surpassed all others of that time and was found in an “isolated settlement at the edge of the Rocky Mountains in Colorado Territory” (90). Despite Maxwell’s groundbreaking aesthetic in taxidermy at the time, she did not receive the recognition and financial security she had hoped and as Shirley writes in *More Than Petticoats: Remarkable Colorado Women*, five years after the Centennial Exhibition, Martha died “a lonely, despondent, and impoverished woman” (70). Because of social gender roles, Benson argues that it comes as little surprise that a young taxidermist William Hornaday (1854-1937)<sup>63</sup> would create taxidermy a few years later that was “similar in principle” to Maxwell and become one of “the most celebrated taxidermists of the nineteenth century” (Benson 90).<sup>64</sup> As Benson explains, Maxwell’s technique “seem[ed] to be developed through a combination of trial and error, augmented by observations in the field and enhanced by her innate artistic tendencies” (91); whereas there is no evidence that Hornaday knew of her work at the time (Benson 91). Access to travel and the leisure time enjoyed by men allowed men to

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<sup>62</sup> Shirley writes that the exhibit “‘Woman’s Work’ proved to be one of the most popular exhibits at the Centennial Exposition, an event described by one author as ‘a kaleidoscope of wonders, a complex mixture of *patriotism* and celebration that was the event of a lifetime for all who were a part of it’” (68, emphasis added).

<sup>63</sup> Chernela writes that Hornaday is credited as the first to compile a list of extinct species. Hornaday is also known for placing Ota Benga, a native of the Congo Ituri forest, in a live exhibit at the New York Zoological Park in the Bronx in 1906 (Chernela 24).

<sup>64</sup> Benson writes that “[t]he center for taxidermic work at the time in the United States was Ward’s Natural Science Establishment, founded in Rochester, New York, in the 1860s by merchant-entrepreneur Henry Ward, a one-time University of Rochester professor. Ward’s dealt in natural history specimens and museum displays and served as well as the preeminent training ground for young taxidermists. Yet when the eighteen-year-old Hornaday arrived in Rochester in 1873 as an apprentice, he found the taxidermists there still stuffing animal skins with straw. As Hornaday’s recent biographer observes, ‘taxidermy was still in a primitive state when young Hornaday began his work at the Establishment, even though the best taxidermy in the United States was performed there.’ After completing a series of worldwide collecting expeditions beginning in 1874, he returned to Ward’s and by 1879 developed his technique of mounting lifelike specimens on clay-covered mannequins” (90-91).



succeed in taxidermy where women could not--Maxwell had many responsibilities as a wife and mother.<sup>65</sup>

While taxidermy was recognized and celebrated as a practice for men in the Victorian era, men have also dominated the contemporary art world in the twentieth century. Indeed, many women working within the field have experienced explicit gender discrimination.<sup>66</sup> Though different from Colorado, my home town of Thunder Bay, Ontario, sits on the border of Ontario and Minnesota and is strongly influenced by, and part of, the hunting culture that is found throughout the northwest. In 2015, local Thunder Bay taxidermist Jamie Black, owner of Black and Tan Taxidermy, did an interview with the CBC about being a woman working in a traditionally male-dominated profession. Black stated that “[j]ust being female in the industry has been difficult” and, as a result, Black has decided not to put her name on her business cards because she has lost patrons who realized a woman was crafting their taxidermy mounts (Ellis, “Thunder Bay Woman”). While Black struggles to work in taxidermy because of her gender, the city of Thunder Bay installed two commissioned pedestrian-size bronze sculptures (molded out of taxidermy sculptures) in the city’s downtown core in 2016 by Hamilton artist Brandon Vickerd.<sup>67</sup> Both bronze sculptures are dressed in masculine clothing, draped over what is assumed to be a (male) human body, while animated animal heads and bodies protrude from the bodies’ necklines and arm sleeves.<sup>68</sup> These sculptures are significant not simply for their

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<sup>65</sup> While Maxwell was historically underrecognized for her innovations in taxidermy, her role as a white woman taxidermist further served the interests of the nation after a settler colonial war that excluded, segregated, displaced, and killed Indigenous peoples across the American west.

<sup>66</sup> In my article “Animal Magic: Sculpting Queer Encounters through Rogue Taxidermy Art,” I wrote that “[d]espite their political mandate not to kill for art, female taxidermists Lisa Black and Sarina Brewer have stated that they have received violently sexist online harassment and even death threats due to their involvement in taxidermy. In contrast, and, at least from a feminist perspective, somewhat unsurprisingly, MART co-founder Robert Marbury explains in a 2014 article that men usually do not receive sexually aggressive responses to their involvement in the art movement in the way that women do. These responses seem to demonstrate that there are insidious cultural beliefs surrounding gender that elicit such aggressive reactions to women’s role in the contemporary rogue taxidermy movement – reactions which arguably address, and attempt to sanction, an unwanted female ‘intrusion’ in traditionally masculine trades such as taxidermy and hunting” (Niittynen 18).

<sup>67</sup> Vickerd’s bronze sculptures were installed for the beautification project ran by the City of Thunder Bay’s Public Art Committee. Both sculptures were placed on two curb extensions in the downtown core on Algoma Street South. The sculptures, entitled *Wildlife* or *In the Wild*, “depict animal species native to the Thunder Bay area,” such as deer, black bears, squirrels, ducks and beavers (City of Thunder Bay, “Wildlife”; Brandon Vickerd, “Wildlife”). For the artist, these bronze sculptures are meant to be a conversation piece in the downtown area and to remind each passerby of the close relationships humans have with local nonhuman animals and nature. One statue stands, while the other statue sits, “appearing to be citizens leisurely going about their day” (Vickerd, “Wildlife”) and marking a liminal space where nonhuman animals encounter humans in this small Northwestern Ontario community. For more information see Brandon Vickerd’s artist website at < <http://brandonvickerd.com/> > and The City of Thunder Bay

hybridization of the (male) human body merged with nonhuman animals, but also because they were pre-existing taxidermy molds prior to their being cast in bronze.<sup>69</sup>

Despite these histories, some scholars argue that contemporary taxidermy art has the potential to be read in feminist terms (Cammarata-Seale, “Petah Coyne”; Straughan, “Entangled Corporeality”<sup>70</sup>). American artist Petah Coyne faced challenges as a female artist in the 1970s when her male colleagues would not respect her nor believe in her success as an artist because of her gender (Cammarata-Seale 11). Similarly, rogue taxidermy artist Kate Clark has stated that she experienced gender bias as a female artist. Clark, who specializes in creating large scale sculptures of animal bodies with molded human faces, has stated in a 2014 interview that the field of contemporary art was “exceptionally male-dominated” and that she often experiences the expectation that her art is created by a male artist when audiences discuss her sculptures with the masculine pronouns, ‘him’ or ‘he’ (Voon, “Meet”). Clark’s work seeks to blur identity markers, placing faces with what might be read as feminine attributes onto the body of a male stag. The works of female rogue taxidermy artists, however, not only deviate from the realist forms and masculinist representations found in traditional displays, they also, through their rogue aesthetic, seem to contradict historically entrenched notions of a ‘peaceful’ and sentimental connection

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website, <[http://www.thunderbay.ca/Living/culture\\_and\\_heritage/Public\\_Art/Art\\_Collection/Outdoor\\_Installations/Wild\\_Life.htm](http://www.thunderbay.ca/Living/culture_and_heritage/Public_Art/Art_Collection/Outdoor_Installations/Wild_Life.htm)>

<sup>69</sup> My encounters with Vickerd’s art is by no means exceptional. Taxidermy pieces can be found around the city, frequented in local pubs and within the homes of Thunder Bay’s hunting community (inside and outside the city limits). Thunder Bay straddles the border of Minnesota, U.S., and is one of the closest Canadian major cities to Minneapolis, Minnesota – where the *Minnesota Association of Rogue Taxidermists* was first established. The landscape and culture of Thunder Bay is likened to Minnesota not simply by proximity, but the communities’ shared interests in fishing, hunting wildlife, and creating taxidermy. What is clear about the Vickerd sculptures are the various ways in which taxidermy-specific art travels and is incorporated within mainstream North American culture. Vickerd’s artwork “straddles the line between high and low culture,” the artist writes on his website, as his work is one example among the many that have incorporated the ‘low brow’ craft of taxidermy into high art spaces (including efforts to ‘beautify’ the outdoors). From a bobcat that adorns a tiara and holds a disco ball, to a muskrat with a blonde wig with pigtails named ‘Verna,’ and a stag with interchangeable hats, depending on the season, Thunder Bay displays (conventional and unconventional) taxidermy art in many of its locations.

<sup>70</sup> Taking a feminist materialist approach, Elizabeth Straughan sees taxidermy as not simply the mounting of a dead animal body, but that it is charged with “interconnectivity of both live and dead bodies” (374) as she borrows from Jane Bennett’s notion of ‘vibrant matter.’ Having interviewed female taxidermy artists in the UK (Jasmine), Straughan concludes that the taxidermist’s ethical philosophy (such as Jasmine’s position as a vegetarian) make her taxidermy art more tolerable to the public that encounter her work. Like Straughan, who shares a degree of empathy with taxidermy practitioners, Heather Cammarata-Seale finds ecofeminist politics in the artworks by taxidermy artist Petah Coyne. American sculptor Coyne does not practice taxidermy in her art, but, rather, repurposes discarded taxidermy materials. Cammarata-Seale’s arguments about the feminist potentials of Coyne’s art have more to do with analyses of her finished art pieces than the affective and tangential experience of splitting flesh, preserving taxidermy skins, and mounting skins onto a sculpted body, as seen in Staughan’s arguments. These arguments provide a different type of knowledge that perceives taxidermy art as rife with ecofeminist messages.

between women and nature. Reactions to women's involvement in taxidermy or sport hunting not only show how sexist beliefs and sexual violence against women are normalized more generally but also how women's specific participation in these male preserves is perceived as a threat to masculine power.

In 2015, Kelly Oliver was interviewed in response to the angry reactions to the then nineteen-year-old Texan cheerleader, Kendall Jones, who posted photographs of the Big Five game animals she shot in South Africa. In the article, Oliver extended her arguments from a 2013 article entitled "Hunting Girls" where she stated that the "hunting girl" holds a dual position as a figure of "patriarchal fantasy" and of "feminist progress"; women are thus both *hunter* and *prey* (Kwong, "Kendall Jones"; Oliver, "Hunting Girls"). Following her article and her interview with the CBC, Oliver published her book *Hunting Girls: Sexual Violence from The Hunger Games to Campus Rape* that analyzed the complex position women hold as hunters in popular culture, where they are also 'prey' to masculine violence.<sup>71</sup> Oliver's book opens with the 2012 photoshoot from the television series *America's Next Top Model* where the models were posed as taxidermied animal heads mounted onto the wall. She states that "[m]imicking the animals on the wall, [the models] stared wide-eyed into the camera with their mouths slightly open, as if surprised to be 'dead'" (Oliver, *Hunting Girls* 1). From this early example in her book where the camera is used to capture the models as hunted trophies, Oliver discusses 'creepshots,' a form of sexual assault that involves photographing women in sexually explicit positions without their consent. She writes, "[c]reepshots display not only the 'sexy' girl or her body part but also the hunting prowess of the creeper photographer. The same applies to raping unconscious girls. Their lack of consent is the conquest, documented now through 'creepshot' photographs posted online as trophies" (*Hunting Girls* 104). The 2012 photoshoot of *America's Next Top Model* that mounted women's heads as taxidermy on walls was by no means original. Sexist advertisements for the Honor House Products Corporation of Lynbrook, New York,<sup>72</sup> sold "'Stuffed' Girl's

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<sup>71</sup> Oliver extends her analysis to the crisis of sexual assaults on university campuses in America that have only recently been brought to the attention of the public due to a number of institutional cover ups, but also by an ever-rampant rape culture that blames women for the violences inflicted on them. More information can be found by screening the 2015 documentary *The Hunting Ground*, directed by Kirby Dick. Also see Kelly Oliver's book, *Hunting Girls*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2016.

<sup>72</sup> Honor House was a novelty company that Edwin Wegman founded in 1951. The company closed in the 1980s and was known for their exaggerating advertisements that delivered cheap goods.

Heads” as perverse gag gifts (Fig. 1.6),<sup>73</sup> wherein an artificial woman’s face was staged as a taxidermy mount with the words “conquest” at the bottom.<sup>74</sup> The advertisement reads:

Blondes, redheads and brunettes for every man to boast of his conquests...the first realistic likeness of the exciting women who play an important part in every man’s life...and one of the nicest qualities is that they don’t talk back! Accurately modelled to three-quarters life size of real gals and molded of skin-textured pliable plastic, these heads are so life-like they almost breathe. Saucy glittering eyes, full of sensuous mouth and liquid satin complexion, combined with radiant hair colors give astonishing realism to these rare and unique Trophies. Blonde, redhead or brunette mounted on a genuine mahogany plaque is complete and ready to hang on the wall for excitement and conversation. Only \$2.98 plus 37¢ shipping charges. Full Money Back Guarantee. Specify Blonde, Brunette or Redhead.

As the word ‘conquest’ on the Honor House gift shows, such acts of mounting animal heads is incorporated into the aesthetics born from imperial expeditions in Britain and the expanded exploitation of American colonies. Deckha writes that “[c]olonized women, and their perceived deep affiliations with the natural, the instinctual, and the animals, were a crucial element in the production and reproduction of Empire”; “Further, the discourse of Empire imagined lands inhabited by indigenous peoples (and other beings) as Nature in its most virginal state, ready for and in need of civilized masculine domination” (“The Salience” 24). Other than these novelty items, the 1960s Newcastle band “The Animals” first performance of “It’s My Life” in 1965 included a number of live women trophy heads on the walls throughout their performance (Fig. 1.7).<sup>75</sup> The video begins with a woman’s ‘deadpan’ face looking into the camera and then zooms out towards the band. The woman’s head, mounted on the wall, sits atop of a telephone and is placed as any other object on the wall. The women, who at first remained still as taxidermy mounts, eventually start moving and bopping their heads along with the live performance.<sup>76</sup> As Deckha points out, “[t]he violence in hunting [...] is not restricted to animals alone”; “the violence of hunting derives substantial force from gender, class and racial discourses of

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<sup>73</sup> The vintage ‘Stuffed Girl’s Heads!’ advertisement can be found on Lisa Wade’s blog *The Society Pages*, see < <https://thesocietypages.org/socimages/2011/03/24/taxidermied-girl-parts/> >

<sup>74</sup> Thank you to my colleague Andie Shabbar for bringing to my attention this vintage advertisement.

<sup>75</sup> Image is a still from the video of The Animals live performance. For full viewing of live video, see The Animals – “It’s My Life” video screened on YouTube at, < <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BxJxcvS8gck> >

<sup>76</sup> Later instances of women’s heads mounted on walls like taxidermy can be seen in the first filmic adaption of Frank Miller’s *Sin City*, released in 2005. The graphic novel depicts the serial killer ‘Kevin’ eating the flesh of women sex workers that are kidnapped and mounted on his walls – likened to hunted wild game.

sexuality, femininity and tradition” (“The Salience” 34). Many feminist scholars have highlighted the ways in which the nature-culture divide has shaped the ways in which certain bodies have been historically oppressed. Lynda Birke states that “nature is not something out



Figure 1.6: Honor House Products Corp. Advertisement. Image accessed on The Society Pages blog.

there, but rather is something we [humans], along with many others, create” (307). Birke points out that it is the association between ‘women’ and their closeness to ‘nature,’ animals or the body that has made some feminists “reluctant to widen the political net to include nonhuman animals” (308). From these deep-seated beliefs, Deckha writes that Enlightenment ideologies as dualistic thinking meant that the “rational, cultural, and masculine triumphed over the emotional, natural, and feminine Other, who was morally debased and mentally impaired” (“The Salience” 5). Likewise, Oliver has stated that the “nature-culture divide has played a crucial role in sexism, slavery, genocide, and animal slaughter, among other social concerns that we now consider unjust or wrong” (*Technologies* 8).

In contrast to these violent depictions of ‘mounted’ women’s heads, female rogue taxidermists challenge the history of trophy mounts that objectify animals to uphold the masculine domination of the male hunter. For instance, Clark comments that she wants her audience to be humbled through encounters with her sculptures,

not to experience fear. Clark states in a 2015 interview that “I want all of my sculptures to appear dignified. The expressions are calm, and I generally have them meet the viewer at eye level, upsetting the hierarchy of man over animal” (Mufson, “Meet the Artist”). Alternative aesthetics by female artists can be seen in the work of Angela Singer, who uses women’s craft and other textiles to create scenes of animal violence at the hands of humans; however, these depictions of

violence are arguably less unsettling because of the feminine materials and aesthetics that Singer utilizes (more on this subject in § 3 **Dead Gazes**).



*Figure 1.7: Film still from the 1965 performance of “It’s My Life” performed by The Animals on the Hullabaloo television show.*

Influenced by past and contemporary ecofeminist writings when discussing the artwork of Coyne, Heather Cammarata-Seale writes that “taxidermy serves as an interesting medium for the female artist for it offers ways to transcend the physical borders of the human body, enter the realm of the animal, and comment on contemporary ecological and political issues” (14). “In ecofeminist terms,” Cammarata-Seale states that “taxidermy ‘help[s] heal the wounds of patriarchy where cognitive and behavioural strategies alone are not enough’ by challenging binarism and ‘re-find[ing] cohesion in a shattered world’” (16). Cammarata-Seale makes the argument that “[t]axidermy, as an artistic medium, aids artists in asserting their identity. Taxidermy signifies an individual’s desire to be seen as distanced from typical notions of humankind—an ‘othered’ yet empowered individual” (14); however, her discussion of Coyne’s taxidermy art is perhaps too generous, swept up by the questionable belief that women hold an intrinsic relationship to nature. Such arguments also ignore the ways in which white women have historically played part in the colonization of racialized bodies. Claiming that Coyne’s art “creates an ecofeminist reality by undoing histories of oppression and finding holism in a world rife with multiplicity” (Cammarata-Seale 16) is naïve, given that the history of taxidermy is founded on colonial and imperial constructions of animal and human alterity.

Cammarata-Seale argues that Victorian housewives who engaged in taxidermy broke the norms of a predominately male-centered craft, as taxidermy was conventionally practiced by

men in the spaces of natural history (11).<sup>77</sup> Calling these interventions into a male-dominated trade a “feminist Victorian” endeavor (13), Cammarata-Seale’s position on women’s role in the preservation and recycling of taxidermy too easily erases the violence of taxidermy on the animal body and also the erasure of colonial histories (and current realities) that haunt from the history of museum displays and ethnographic and anthropological exhibits. Deckha points out that “when British women argued for their emancipation from a sexist patriarchy, while supporting imperialism, they contradicted their own efforts because the gendered norms which saturated European society were integral to the maintenance of imperialism and organized its narratives. Both were based on the same metaphoric hierarchies of European gender roles – the lack of culture and reason” (“The Saliency” 33). Indeed, one can argue that women’s emergence into men’s trades are liberatory acts; however, Cammarata-Seale’s article erases a long history of colonialism involved in taxidermic sign systems that preserve white nationality, to borrow from Wakeham in *Taxidermic Signs*. Wakeham writes that taxidermy “became a vital technology that aided and abetted the collection of ‘the planet’s life forms’ and the systemization of nature as part of Western society’s project to master the unknown and to impose a colonial order of things upon the world” (10).

Cammarata-Seale argues that taxidermy in art *transcends the physical borders of the human body* in order to *enter the realm of the animal*. I am reluctant to argue that taxidermy’s political potential is simply found by a subversion of gender norms. Even in moments when contemporary taxidermy art holds a potential to be subversive, each piece is haunted by the cultural histories that have decimated animal populations for the purposes of trophy collection or

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<sup>77</sup> Susan Hamilton has collected a number of primary historical documents of feminist movements involved in animal welfare and anti-vivisection activism from the period of 1870-1910. In an essay entitled “Our Object” from *The Animal World* journal published in 1869, women advocates call for better treatment of animals in the following, “We shall advocate the better treatment of animals during their transit from place to place; the improvement of appointments in railway cattle-trucks and in the holds of cattle carrying steamboats; a more frequent supply of food and water during transportation and in markets and fairs; the erection of public abattoirs; the more humane slaughter of animals intended for food; the suppression of slow-breeding cruelty to calves; the protection of sheep from the shearers during the inclement months of the year; the abolition of muzzles for dogs; improved horse-shoes; *the removal of barbarous instruments of torture used in the preservation of game*; the discontinuance of clubs formed for the destruction of pigeons and for rewarding the destroyers of small birds; improvements in the construction of roads; the abolition of injurious bearing-reins, and the introduction of appropriate harness for draught animals; the entire suppression of experiments upon animals made for discoveries in science when conducted with torture; the employment of anaesthetic agencies when surgical or other operations are made upon animals; the enactment of improved laws for the protection of animals; and all measures tending to amelioration of the condition of animals” (3, emphasis added). For more information, see Susan Hamilton’s collection, *Animal Welfare and Anti-Vivisection 1870-1910: Nineteenth-Century Woman’s Mission*. New York: Routledge, 2004.



involved the preservation and display of human others deemed as ‘abnormal’ by their race, sexual, gender, and bodily differences. One cannot enter into the realm of the animal, as ‘the Animal’ (a ‘whole’ and inclusive category) remains a figment of human discursive imaginaries. Such beliefs are heavily fueled by early (and particularly liberal) feminist arguments that the central issue of oppression first and foremost involves gender. Cammarata-Seale is not alone in this emphasis on gender in feminist discussions of human and nonhuman animal relations; it is found throughout scholarly work in animal studies.

In her article “Toward a Postcolonial, Posthumanist Feminist Theory: Centralizing Race and Culture in Feminist Work on Nonhuman Animals,” Deckha evaluates feminist posthumanist writers in the past decade. She writes that that “posthumanist feminist theory is replicating the problematic and now discredited premises of second-wave feminist theorizing in addressing animal suffering by implicitly prioritizing gender while hoping and claiming to address women’s and animals’ oppression in a way that stresses context, complexity, and multiple differences” (Deckha, “Toward” 529). Deckha calls for further intersectional work to be done, as “[c]onceptions of animals and idealized humanity are also deeply culturally contingent” (“Toward” 537). A reciprocal relation ties gender to animals and polarizes the various ways in which animality intersects with constructions of race, class, ability, sexuality, and culture. Deckha points out that western cultural constructions of animality, taxonomy, and hierarchy place white humans above and beyond different humans and other animal species. From an intersectional perspective, Haraway states that before WWII, “versions of Darwinianism, as well as other doctrines in evolutionary biology, had been deeply implicated in producing racist science as normal, authoritative practice” (*Primate* 199). More recent analyses by Sunaura Taylor highlight that human history is founded on an ableist narrative. “From the belief that man was created in God’s image to the belief that human beings are the peak of evolution,” Taylor writes: “our anthropocentric worldview is supported by ableism” (58).

As the remainder of this project will show, contemporary rogue taxidermy art, though at odds with historical examples of realist and traditionalist masculine displays, echoes the cultural history of racism, ableism, sexism, and speciesism that informs the mounting of dead animal (and human) bodies for display. Taxidermy is in tension with feminist politics that would argue in the name of bodily integrity and consent in relation to the production of preserving animal



bodies. Taxidermy is not, at least not unproblematically, a feminist tool for the artistic manipulation and repurposing of a body.

## § 1.8 Conclusion--Thinking Through Skin

Traditional forms of taxidermy display seek to conquer and conceptualize an authentic and stable animal ‘other,’ and these displays are informed by zoological, anatomical, and indexical knowledge constructs that have sought to justify the ideologies that nonhuman animals are inherently inferior. Animal skin can be associated with knowledge formation, as skins were used as paper in books to replace scrolls from the Middle Ages onward. The taxidermied animal on display is perceived as a kind of snapshot of ‘nature’ in its purest form. The word taxidermy has its roots in the Greek *τάξις* (*taxis*), ‘arrangement’ or ‘order,’ and *δέρμα* (*dérma*), meaning ‘skin.’ Skin is the prerequisite to taxidermy (Desmond, *Displaying* 34); skin is posthumously tied to the *image* of the animal even after the remains of the body have been removed (Hansen 14). Distinct from animal skins, taxidermy sculptures include synthetic and artificial materials that are used to portray the animating features of the living animal and are used to replace parts of the body that are unable to be preserved.<sup>78</sup> According to Hansen, “[i]n Latin, there are two main words used for skin: *cutis*, signifying human skin, and *pellis*, which refers to animal skin. The latter term also stands for dead, flayed skin. In other words, the body contours *as* remains suggest a becoming-animal of the skin itself” (12, original emphasis). Traditional taxidermy, Hansen goes on, “pushes forward the belief that animals *are* their skin” (14, original emphasis). When skin is flayed from the body, the skin becomes animal. In other words, the removal of skin and fur (that is then made into an object) is only permitted when the body is considered less than or non-human. Similarly, Taylor writes that “[a]nimals are a category of beings that in the Western tradition [humans] have decided that [they] rarely, if ever, have duties toward—we [humans] can

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<sup>78</sup> *Praeservāre*, the Latin root of preservation, is the late fourteenth-century Anglo-French word for “keep safe” or “guard beforehand,” concerning the treatment of fruit and organic bodies. Unlike Roman saints that are worshipped in their purity, alterity shaped which human bodies would be taxidermied for the sake of colonial display. The word preservation is extended to animal bodies through *conserve*, meaning to “keep, preserve, keep in intact, guard” in safekeeping of animal and other organic bodies – including the environment. The etymology involves an impulse to keep, hold, and restrict existing conditions of what once was, to immortalize and keep something within the fixities of temporality. The impulse to conserve is often pre-established by an anthropocentric framework to hold on to the organic bodies used to inform and nourish human subjects. This sense of stasis includes what was experienced before the event of animal death.

buy them, sell them, and discard them like objects. To call someone an animal is to render them a being to whom one does not have responsibilities, a being that can be shamelessly objectified” (108). In the context of nineteenth- and twentieth-century ‘freak’ shows (staging ‘freaks of culture’<sup>79</sup>) and human zoos (living exhibits), humans were staged with live animals or adorned in animal skins in order to exaggerate exoticism and further the dehumanization process [discussed further in § 2 **Autopsic Gaze**] (Taylor 108-109; Bogdan, *Freak Show* 26; Bogdan, *Picturing Disability* 18).

Thinking about animal skin as material surfaces in art, Ron Broglio troubles the relationships humans have with nonhuman animals – what he has called a “surface encounter” with animal beings. “Surface encounters,” argues Broglio, are beliefs that animals are limited in cognitive depth and this thin layer of knowledge about animals leads to cruel acts against them (xvi-xvii). Amato writes in *Beastly Possessions* that “Victorians went to great lengths to ensure that most human bodies remained intact at death,” while the displacement of skins in the practice of taxidermy were commonplace when dealing with animal corpses (190). Amato stresses that beliefs about the “sanctity” of the human body, that humans were “higher beings and spiritual entities,” allowed animals to be treated as raw material and turned into objects (183). Not all humans were treated equal, however, as Amato explains that there were clear exceptions to the rule such as humans with “perceived deformit[ies] and racial difference[s]” (183). She writes that “humans perceived to have abnormal bodies were sometimes treated like animals and natural history specimens, anatomized after death and preserved for future study and display. This was the final stage in the process of dehumanization” (Amato 183).

Val Plumwood writes that “[i]n the West, the human is set apart from nature as radically other. The threat of boundary breakdown lies behind Platonic-Christian accounts of death as the separation of the immaterial, eternal soul as continuing human essence from an inessential, perishable and animal body” (“Human” 34). The bodies of saints placed on display in Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox monasteries involve the preservation of the whole body, not displacement of skin from flesh. Roman saints and the preservation of notable political leaders,

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<sup>79</sup> “The freak simultaneously testified to the physical and ideological normalcy of the spectator and witnessed the implicit agreement assigning a coercive deviance to the spectacle,” writes Garland-Thomson, who further writes that “[t]his determining relation between observer and observed was mutually defining and yet unreciprocal, as it imposed on the freak the silence, anonymity, and passivity characteristic of objectification” (*Extraordinary Bodies* 62).

such as Vladimir Lenin (1870-1924), were preserved without the removal of their skin and this is significant in contrast to the preservations and public autopsies of ‘abnormal’ and racially ‘othered’ human bodies. Examples of these dehumanized persons include the preservation and tour of the postmortem remains of Julia Pastrana (whose circus stage name was ‘The Ape Woman’) and her son who were toured across Europe and America, and also the man named only as ‘El Negro of Banyoles’ who died sometime in 1830 and was taxidermied by two French taxidermists and displayed (amongst taxidermied animals) at the Francesc Darder Museum of Natural History in Banyoles, Spain (discussed in more detail in § 2 **Autopsic Gaze**). White European bodies, especially those of the educated male elite, were chosen for specialized mortuary arts, such as sainthood, and these types of displays were considered closer to godliness not simply by religious doctrine, but also by the beliefs that reason led to further enlightenment. Though separate from the sanctified display of human bodies in a religious context, philosopher Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) requested in his will that his body be preserved and displayed for the purposes of serving science, despite nineteenth-century beliefs that human bodies were sacred and should never be utilized for research (Amato 183). Amato writes that “Bentham intended his corpse to become an instrument of science, scientific comparison, and public pedagogy, as well as posthumous materialization of his lifetime achievements” (222); “The term ‘Auto-Icon’ was a neologism Bentham invented to connote a man who becomes after death ‘his own statue,’ his ‘own monument,’ and entirely ‘his own image’” (Amato 184). Requesting to be displayed as an ‘Auto-Icon,’ Bentham went against Victorian conventions of human bodily treatment after death.<sup>80</sup> The mortuary arts used on Bentham’s body are closer to the practises of taxidermy rather than other forms of preservation, such as the practices used to mummify saints. Bentham felt that the burial of human bodies was a waste in resources and that human corpses should be used for scientific knowledge (Amato 184).<sup>81</sup>

Giorgio Agamben writes in *Nudity* that the sacred and profane are born onto specific types of skin. Whiteness and white clothing symbolize purity, whereas dark animal skin is a symbol of death and sin. In later Christian traditions, Agamben writes, “[t]he clothes, which the

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<sup>80</sup> For more information on the connections between Bentham’s ‘Auto-Icon’ and the cultural practices of taxidermy, see Amato’s chapter, “Dead Things: The Afterlives of Animals” in *Beastly Possessions: Animals in Victorian Consumer Culture*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015. 182-223.

<sup>81</sup> It may be of interest to note that Bentham is known as an early proponent for animals rights because he brought to the fore animals’ capacity to suffer.

baptized trample on with their feet, are ‘the clothes of shame,’ heirs of the ‘tunics of [animal] skins’ that our progenitors [Eve and Adam] wore at the moment they were expelled from paradise” (*Nudities* 72). The only differentiating factor that separates the closely connected sacred body from the profane body, writes Agamben, are the rituals that set the sacred apart from everyday life. For Agamben, the sacred and the profane are never mutually exclusive; he states, “[i]nsofar as these operations refer to a single object that must pass from the profane to the sacred and from the sacred to the profane, they must every time reckon with something like a residue of profanity in every consecrated thing and a remnant of sacredness in every profaned object” (*Profanations* 78). For Agamben, the sacred and profane are inseparable. He states in *Language and Death* that the sacred is “necessarily an ambiguous and circular concept” (105). Moreover, “[t]o profane,” writes Agamben, “means to open the possibility of a special form of negligence, which ignores separation or, rather, puts it to a particular use” (*Profanations* 75). Profane objects are thus free to be used, unlike sacred objects that are restricted by rituals. This is important in discussing how historically bodies have been celebrated as sacred (white able-bodied humans were not used in scientific dissection, only preserved for their saintly nature); whereas animals, racialized, and physiologically ‘abnormal’ others were studied, autopsied, and experimented on as dead matter (and ungrievable upon death).

The next chapter will discuss human and animal bodies that have been taxidermied, autopsied, and publicly displayed because of their designation as ‘monstrous.’ I also discuss the use of animal bodies and their skins staged in ways that further dehumanized humans that were socially and culturally distinguished as ‘other.’

## Chapter 2

### 2 Autopsic Gaze: Chiasmic Encounters with ‘Unruly’ Bodies

#### § 2.1 Taxidermic Encounters

Animal taxidermy displays (as human interpretations of animal life) take form through various types of contacts with human bodies. Taxidermy involves the staging of spaces, the formation of encounters, and the ideologies of cultures that shape the ways in which humans *look* at other beings in the world. Animal taxidermy in the present day is placed on display: put into glass cabinets, encountered in white cubes, cabins, bars, museums, among many other locations. Any representation of animal nature is constructed as a human interpretation; however, traces of exploitation towards other human persons for their supposed bodily differences haunts through these displays. Traces haunt, not simply because the materials were once attached to a living (animal) being, but because human socio-cultural frameworks place value onto certain materials, objects, and other constructed forms. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, animals were used to further pathologize humans through socially oppressive discourses that deem some bodies as ‘normal’ and others as ‘abnormal.’ This chapter looks at the sculptures that evoke traces from the history of display that staged and represented bodies (animal and human) as ‘unruly’<sup>82</sup> and how such discourses also informed nineteenth-century anxieties about human-animal interspecies blending.

Having produced a number of experimental sculptures that were historically taxidermied for their physiological variances, Sarina Brewer’s *Carnival Curiosa* series (re)creates sculptures of famous animals considered ‘strange’ or ‘abnormal’ from eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Euro-American imaginaries.<sup>83</sup> Brewer’s hybrid rogue taxidermy sculptures include two-headed

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<sup>82</sup> The word unruly is defined as ‘amenable to rule’ and is also described as ‘wild’ and ‘uncontrollable.’ I use the term because it poses resistance against law or religious rule and thus evokes an agency against norms, established rules, proper names, and conventions. Similarly, the construction of ‘the wild’ also evokes an interspecies relationality, a going against the grain of laws that seek to firmly establish animal from human.

<sup>83</sup> Discussing the aesthetics of *Carnival Curiosa*, Brewer has stated the following in an interview, “[t]he first thing I ever mounted was a two-headed squirrel. Each subsequent mount just got weirder. I will occasionally mount a bird or a small game animal in a traditional or normal manner, but I concentrate on the more outlandish pieces. I’ve always been infatuated with circus sideshows and freaks of nature. I have my own private ‘odditorium’ in my home. So initially I was mounting the fake freaks for my own collection, since real two-headed calves were out of my price

sheep, mermaids, and other ‘nondescript’ creatures that blur the boundaries of established species taxonomies. Brewer’s hybrid creatures, such as her sculpture *Jabbercocky* (Fig. 2.1), are copies of historical ‘monsters’ (the Feejee Mermaid), literary monsters (such as Lewis Carroll’s ‘Jabberwocky’), or new amalgamations founded on the principles of cryptozoology, a parascience of unencountered creatures.



Figure 2.1: Sarina Brewer, *Jabbercocky*, 2016. Taxidermy and mixed media. Image used with permission from artist, © Sarina Brewer.

Encounters with rogue taxidermy show that, at its core, the politics of this art movement remain ethically ambiguous. The ethical implications of using nonhuman animal bodies as objects for political art entangle rogue taxidermy artists in the ongoing domination of nonhuman animals (alive and dead). The access and permission to place animal bodies on display (from the outset) shows a normalization of human domination over nonhuman animal bodies, similar to humans’ use of animal byproduct materials rendered into consumable products. The artistic objects of rogue taxidermy also embody traces of the historical (and ongoing) preservation and

display of animal and human remains that were (and continue to be) encased in glass crypts inside museums across the globe. Like taxidermied animals, human bodies (alive and dead) have historically been placed on display in a number of different contexts. Licia Carlson writes that “[h]istory bears witness to a whole bestiary of human *others*, human beings that have been defined as ‘subhuman’ and animal-like. Examples can be drawn from a wide variety of groups and contexts, including women, individuals who belong to a particular race, ethnicity or nationality, criminals and other ‘deviant’ individuals, and the physically and mentally disabled” (117, original emphasis). In addition to people who fell outside the norms of the white-able

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range. Then I discovered there was a market for these faux freaks, or ‘gaffs’ as they are called in the sideshow business” (Hodges, “Custom Creatures”)

bodied male, cross-dressers, intersex and transgender persons were also exploited and dehumanized through a representational system that shaped their perceived ‘differences’ as a threat to Victorian normative ideologies about sex and gender (Craton 156). In the frame of the entertainment industry, Sunaura Taylor writes in *Beasts of Burden: Animal and Disability Liberation* that

In the spectacle that is the sideshow, animality was front and center – with the most demeaning of animal comparisons being reserved for people of color and for intellectually disabled persons. In the sideshow animality was used to spark the imagination by transgressing common categories and distinctions with theatrics and spectacles, while also legitimizing scientific racism, imperial expansion, colonization, and fear of disability. (104)

Throughout her book, Taylor describes the ways in which animals were staged alongside humans in order to exaggerate ‘abnormalities’ and ‘exoticisms’ that were shaped by an ableist and imperial worldview. As a result of the various social norms that permitted the display and exploitation of human bodies when these persons were alive, such norms continued after death when bodies were displayed and toured across European and North American cities for public entertainment. There are several human rights violations recorded in response to the preservation of postmortem human bodies that are marked as ‘monstrous’ by their gender, ability, race, sexuality, class, and species classification.

Given that the practice of taxidermy was historically bounded with norms of anthropocentrism, masculinity, the projects of modern eugenics, and various forms of colonial contacts, this chapter engages with *encounters* and points to the ways in which rogue taxidermy artists account for the long forgotten trauma of historical preservation and display that staged and created animal and human bodies as ‘unruly.’ Encounters and reception to art are not easy to describe, nor are encounters generalizable by the art piece’s viewing audience. As Sara Ahmed states, face-to-face encounters are “mediated precisely by that which allows the face to appear in the present” (*Strange Encounters* 7). In other words, social norms, and cultural conventions mediate how the self will translate the objects, subjects, and ‘faces’<sup>84</sup> that they encounter. Ahmed furthers this argument where she writes that “[t]he face-to-face is hence not simply about two persons facing each other – the face to face cannot be thought of as a coupling. This encounter is

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<sup>84</sup> I argue that rogue taxidermy sculptures, indeed, have faces, and follow from Matthew Calarco’s arguments that animals in general *do* have faces (an argument against Emmanuel Levinas, who could not extend his concept of the face to animal existence). I develop this argument further in § 3 **Dead Gazes**.

mediated; it presupposes other faces, other encounters of facing, other bodies, other spaces, and other times” (*Strange* 7). For Ahmed, humans encounter subjects and objects with pre-established baggage that filters understanding. These translations of norms are dependent on past encounters, accesses, inheritances, and experiences. Her argument is further fleshed out in *Queer Phenomenology*, where she argues that norms emerge and congeal through the social lines that are drawn prior to, and are necessary for, subject formation. She writes that “[t]he social depends in part on agreement about how we measure space and time” (13) and groups do not necessarily make this ‘agreement’ at one singular time or space, but through an ongoing set of social norms that are reproduced through the systems of gendered, racial, physiological, and sexual differences and privileges. The inheritance (of social norms and privileges), for instance, involves what is given to or withheld from specific bodies. Inheritance involves a pre-given reachability; it is not simply the objects, wealth, or access of inheritance that privileged bodies receive, but also the norms and access to further privileges that are authorized to some bodies over others (*Queer Phenomenology* 86; 125). Given that taxidermy, as a practice, relies on *visual* contacts, the next section discusses the power of vision in projects that exploit bodies and construct others as ‘monstrous.’

## § 2.2 Autopsic Gaze and Animal Crypts: Spaces of Display

The figure of the monster has been culturally deemed ‘unruly’ since the antiquity (Shildrick, *Embodying* 53; Garland-Thomson, “Making Freaks” 129). Anna Kérchy and Andrea Zittlau describe and list the genealogy of display of ‘monstrous’ and ‘unruly’ bodies that came to be in the earliest forms of recorded history. They mark this genealogy in the following statement,

Already Stone Age cave paintings depict wondrous-horrendous human-anomalies, Antiquity praises sacred *lusus naturae* and sacrifices the deformed, Medieval treatises speculate about marvels and monstrosities, the Renaissance nobility’s cabinets of curiosities house collections of human (and non-human) oddities, the Enlightenment establishes “museums of living pathology,” late nineteenth century witnesses the heyday of the display of corporeal anomaly for the sake of entrepreneurial profit and mass entertainment on the form of the famed “freak show” attractions, the 1960s’ human rights movements embraced physiognomic deviation as a token of egalitarian political subversion, and the freak-hype of today’s post-industrial consumer societies functions as a mode of volatile self-expression. (Kérchy and Zittlau 3-4)



Through their analysis and reading of historical European ‘freak’ show celebrities, Kérchy and Zittlau situate curiosity cabinets, anatomical museums, and travelling circuses as the spaces that bridged the display of these different types of bodies (11). Likewise, Pascal Blanchard, Nicolas Bancel, Gilles Boëtsch, Éric Deroo, Sandrine Lemaire, and Charles Forsdick situate the exoticism of human zoos (otherwise known as “living” or “ethnographic” exhibits) with earlier phenomena, such as the chambers of marvels in the great courts of Europe at the end of the sixteenth century (in menageries and zoological gardens) and seventeenth- and eighteenth-century cabinets of curiosities (1). In *Human Zoos*, Blanchard (et al.) write that early forms of menageries created a framework of understanding how humans were later placed within zoological gardens (2). They write that it was not until science began to widely conceptualize, understand, and categorize animal and vegetal life that interests in “human morphology” became more prominent. As a result, human zoos became realities alongside the growing rate of cross-continental imperial and colonial expeditions (Blanchard et al. 3). According to Blanchard (et al.), “during centuries of discovery and conquest, travellers and explorers brought living or dead human ‘specimens’ to the courts of the European monarchs. The strange, the different and the monstrous have thus long been objects of a lively curiosity” (4). Menageries were early forms of zoos that kept exotic animals on display. They did not exist for the purposes of educational science, but, rather, as symbols for aristocratic wealth and the reach of empire. The most famous menagerie was built at Louis XIV’s palace in Versailles in the south-west part of the gardens (designed and built after 1663).<sup>85</sup>

In *Beast and the Sovereign Vol. I*, Jacques Derrida analyzes the grand autopsy of an elephant that took place at Versailles in 1681. Derrida writes that “[u]nder the title of knowledge, science or conscience, as to ‘the beast and the sovereign,’ one can arrange all fields of theory and ontology”; “theoretical knowledge is, at least in its dominant figure, a seeing, a theatrical *theorein*, a gaze cast onto a visible ob-ject, a primarily *optical* experience that aims to touch with the eyes what falls under the hand, under the scalpel—and the optical model can be a sovereign autopsy, as in the case of the great elephant autopsied, inspected, dissected under the gaze of Louis XIV (1638-1715) during the ceremony or lesson of anatomy in 1681” (227). The elephant

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<sup>85</sup> For a more in-depth analysis of animal-human relations in Louis XIV’s Versailles menagerie; see Peter Sahlins’s article, “The Royal Menagerie of Louis XIV and the Civilizing Process Revisited.” *French Historical Studies* 35.2 (2012): 237-267.

autopsied in what Derrida has discussed as a grand spectacle was sent from the Congo to France, as a gift for Louis XIV, from the king of Portugal. This elephant lived the rest of its life inside the Versailles menagerie. The grand spectacle of the autopsy constructed knowledge through the act of grandeur *sight*. In a 2010 exhibit entitled, 'The Chateau de Versailles Presents: Science & Curiosities at the court of Versailles,' the following description of the autopsy can be read

The Academy was ordered to dissect an elephant from the Versailles Menagerie that had died; Mr. du Verney performed the dissection, Mr. Perrault wrote the description of the main parts and Mr. de La Hire made the drawings. No anatomical dissection had ever been so dazzling, because of the Animal's size, the meticulousness with which its various parts were examined or the skill and number of Assistants. The subject was stretched out on a sort of fairly high theatre stage. The King deigned only to attend the examination of some of the parts, and when he came he hurriedly asked who the Anatomist was, for he did not see him; Mr. du Verney immediately rose from the Animal's flanks, which had swallowed him up, in a manner of speaking. (The Chateau de Versailles Presents: Science & Curiosities at the court of Versailles, An Exhibition from 26 Oct 2010-27 Feb 2011)

Discussing the scene of elephant autopsy in *Technologies of Life and Death*, Kelly Oliver states that the dead eyes of the elephant are "like the return of the repressed body, the body become corpse, [the eyes] look back at the living even in death" (139). Furthermore, the eyes in her discussion "do not yield to the autopsic gaze"; they go beyond the limits of human seeing, understanding, control, and mastery (Oliver, *Technologies* 139). Similar to traditional forms of taxidermy, the 'autopsic gaze' is the "desire to dissect the mysteries of life (and death) under a laboratory spotlight"; "The autopsic model of knowing is one of prying things open, exposing" (Oliver, *Technologies* 140). Further, she discusses the "invisible revenant beyond autopsy" and suggests that forms of elephant mourning (or mourning in general) can resist against the autopsic framework through a refusal of giving up one's secrets (Oliver, *Technologies* 140). In the case of the elephant autopsy, the secrets involve the existence of animal life (elephant life), the existence of being a "living being" (Oliver, *Technologies* 140).

It is in relation to ironic slippages and the ways in which animal bodies do not conform to the meanings and representations imposed upon them that rogue taxidermy sculptures have the potential to trouble the power dynamics of display. Resisting any simple autopsic gaze of a dead animal, Brewer's *Gilded Grotesques* sculptures are mummified animals concealed in a layer of gold leaf. Her sculptures play on reliquaries that encased the relics and remains of saints, martyrs, or other religious figures after death. Reliquaries were artifacts that were "designed to contain these sacred bodily vestiges," writes Seeta Chaganti. She states that "[r]eliquaries ranged

enormously in shape and nature, from caskets and portable disks, to objects shaped like body parts held up in ceremonial processions, to large and elaborate altarpieces decorated with busts containing relics” (Chaganti 1). In her sculpture *Musings of an Afterlife (the one-way mirror)* (Fig. 2.2), Brewer stages a cat body transforming into gold through a stand that is symbolic of a time warp. The back half of the black cat is taxidermied, while the front half is esodermied and layered with gold leaf. As a temporal figure, Brewer’s cat floats in two constructed realms of existence (the sacred and the profane). On the one side, the cat is culturally sacred and staged as



Figure 2.2: Sarina Brewer, *Musings of an Afterlife (the one-way mirror)*, 2017. Taxidermy and mixed media. Image used with permission from artist, © Sarina Brewer.

part of a reliquary through the symbolic layer of gold -- a precious metal that humans associate with wealth. On the other side, the *black* cat symbolizes the superstitious and paranormal. In opposition to the gold, the animal skin is symbolic of the profane body; the black fur of the cat is associated with misfortune and gendered sin (through witchcraft). Addressing the constructed dualisms between sacred/profane, human/nonhuman, I argue that rogue taxidermy art confronts the histories of bodily exploitation. By situating rogue taxidermy in relation to the oppressive

racist, sexist, ableist, and speciesist past that objectified and publicly displayed certain bodies, I show the ways in which rogue taxidermists resist (and at times reproduce) postmortem human and nonhuman body oppression. In the sections that follow, I discuss the ways in which bodies are made unruly by the past and present discourses that shape normalcy as it applies to body formation and representation.

### § 2.3 ‘Unruly’ Bodies: Animal and Human

The practice of taxidermy cannot be contextualized outside of the historical representation and display of bodies deemed “other” by traditional western beliefs apropos alterity. First, as I have been arguing, taxidermy must be situated within the history of exhibitions involving the display

of deceased bodies in order to show how these bodies are marked as ‘monstrous’ by their gender, race, sexuality, class, ability, and species classification. For example, there are countless examples of human rights violations that involve the display and preservation of postmortem human bodies; these examples include the ongoing debates on the treatment of Indigenous remains as ‘artifacts’ in archaeological research<sup>86</sup>; Peter the Great’s<sup>87</sup> collection of ‘abnormal’ children in his 1718 *Kunstkamera*<sup>88</sup>; the preservation and subsequent display of famous ‘freak’ show entertainer Julia Pastrana (1834-1860)<sup>89</sup>; and the display (against his wishes) of Mr. Charles Byrne’s (1761-1783, otherwise known as ‘The Irish Giant’) skeletal remains at the Hunterian Museum in London. As the previous chapter **§ 1 From Botched to Rogue** has laid out, Jeremy Bentham’s body made ‘Auto-Icon,’ which is celebrated because of his gendered, cognitive, and racial privileges, was one of several human bodies preserved and displayed for human exceptionalism. Other examples include the preservation and display of Russian communist revolutionary Vladimir Lenin, another figure celebrated for his political intellectualism. Save for these few examples of celebrated men who were preserved in honour of

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<sup>86</sup> For more information on the treatment of Indigenous remains in the field of archaeology, see Bill Sillar and Cressida Fforde’s edited collection, *Conservation, Identity and Ownership in Indigenous Archaeology*. London: Earthscan/James & James, 2005; also see Joe Watkins book, *Indigenous Archaeology: American Indian Values and Scientific Practice*. Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 2000.

<sup>87</sup> Peter the Great was a Russian czar from 1682-1725.

<sup>88</sup> Peter the Great preserved and displayed three children. Foma died in 1736 after living fourteen years at Peter the Great’s *Kunstkamera* (derived from the German word *Kunstkammer*, meaning ‘Art Chamber’). Because he was considered ‘abnormal’ by the normative ideologies of the time, Foma was represented as ‘monstrous’ in Peter’s live exhibit for being born with ectrodactyly (Anemone 593). After Foma’s death his body was dissected, writes Anthony Anemone, who states that “[s]everal of [Foma’s] organs were preserved in the collection of pathological anatomy, while his body was stuffed and put on display” (593). In addition to Foma, Anemone writes that Peter had two other children living in the exhibit. Anemone confirms that Iakov was an intersex child; however, he is unable to describe exactly why Stepan was kept for display. When Iakov died in 1737, his body was autopsied and preserved for display at the *Kunstkamera* (Anemone 593). Anemone writes that eighteenth-century Russian anatomists had particular interest in intersexuality because they knew very little about genital variance (590; 595). For more information on the story of Foma, Iakov, and Stepan, see Anthony Anemone’s article, “The Monsters of Peter the Great: The Culture of the St. Petersburg *Kunstkamera* in the Eighteenth Century.” *The Slavic and East European Journal* 44.4 (2000): 583-602 and Stephen Asma’s book, *Stuffed Animals and Pickled Heads: The Culture and Evolution of Natural History Museums*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001. It should be noted that the above sources are not written from a critical feminist, gender, or disability studies perspective. For this reason, the language used to describe Foma, Iakov, or Stepan fails to counter the biological determinisms waged against intersexed or disabled persons.

<sup>89</sup> For more information on Pastrana, see Rosemarie Garland-Thomson’s chapter, “Making Freaks: Visual Rhetorics and the Spectacle of Julia Pastrana” in *Thinking the Limits of the Body*. Eds. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen and Gail Weiss. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998. 129-143; Janet Browne and Sharon Messenger’s article, “Victorian Spectacle: Julia Pastrana, the Bearded and Hairy Female.” *Endeavour* 27.4 (2003): 155-159; and Lillian Craton’s book, *The Victorian Freak Show: The Significance of Disability and Physical Difference in 19<sup>th</sup>-Century Fiction*. Amherst: Cambria Press, 2009.

their accomplishments (an honour that is already founded on white, male, able-bodied privilege), other human displays include partial or full preservation, biopsies, autopsies, and displays of marginalized bodies. For instance, the invasive anthropometric biopsies on ‘criminal women’ (usually sex workers) conducted by Cesare Lombroso; the public autopsy of elderly African American slave woman, Joice Heth (c. 1756-1836); the exploitation and display of Indigenous man known as ‘Ishi’ (c. 1861-1916) who had his brain dissected (against his wishes) and preserved at the Smithsonian Institute;<sup>90</sup> and, more specifically, the preservation and display of African bodies seen in the cases of Saartjie Baartman (1789-1815, otherwise known as the ‘Hottentot Venus’)<sup>91</sup> and the man known only as ‘El Negro of Banyoles.’

‘Ishi’ was an Indigenous man from the Yahi people in what is now known as California. Anthropologist Alfred Kroeber had named the man ‘Ishi’ because the word meant ‘man’ in Ishi’s native Yahi language (Day, “‘Still Exploiting Him’”; Sodikoff 6). Mark Day writes that the Yahi people were wiped out during the California genocide, which included the “mass slaughter and displacement of more than 100,000 Native Californians”; “These killings took place from the 1849 Gold Rush to the 1870s when the federal government began moving survivors to reservations” (“Ishi’s Life”).<sup>92</sup> Day states that when Ishi was a child, “a white settler death squad had attacked him and his family at the Three Knolls Massacre in the foothills of Chico, California. Forty of his tribesmen were killed. He escaped with some family members and went into hiding for the next 44 years” (“‘Still’”). Ishi was first placed in a local jail where he was a

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<sup>90</sup> For more information on ‘Ishi,’ see Orin Starn’s book, *Ishi’s Brain: In Search of America’s Last ‘Wild’ Indian*. New York: Norton, 2004; Nancy Scheper-Hughes’s article, “Ishi’s Brain, Ishi’s Ashes: Anthropology and Genocide.” *Anthropology Today* 17.1 (2008): 12-18; Terri Castaneda’s article, “American Indian Lives and Voices: The Promise and Problematics of Life Narratives.” *Reviews in Anthropology* 38 (2009): 132-165; and Mark R. Day’s article, “‘Still Exploiting Him’: Remembering Ishi, the ‘Last Wild Indian in California.’” *Indian Country Today* 25 Mar., 2016. < <https://indiancountrymedianetwork.com/history/events/still-exploiting-him-remembering-ishi-the-last-wild-indian-in-california/> >

<sup>91</sup> In *Neo-Victorian Freakery*, Helen Davies writes that “[t]he alleged ‘savagery’ of the indigenous people of European colonies acted as justification for their subjugation; spurious stories of cannibalism and bestial inclinations positioned ‘Hottentots’ as closer to the state of animals than humanity, and in need of controlling” (27).

<sup>92</sup> Describing the California genocide of Indigenous peoples, Brendan C. Lindsay writes that “[t]he years 1846 to 1873 saw the creation, through the democratic processes and institutions of the people of the United States, of a culture organized around the dispossession and murder of California Indians. This paradoxical, democratically imposed system naturalized atrocity against Indian peoples and led to their near eradication by 1900, an extinction avoided in large part by the Native American’s own strategies of resistance and noncooperation” (2-3). Though the specificities of the genocide cannot be explored here, there is a plethora of books written on the topic, including (though not limited to) Brenan C. Lindsay’s book, *Murder State: California’s Native American Genocide, 1846-1873*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2012 and Benjamin Madley’s book, *An American Genocide: The United States and the California Indian Catastrophe, 1846-1873*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016.

“spectacle for townspeople” and later moved to Kroeber’s anthropology museum where he lived, worked, and was studied by Kroeber and his assistant, Thomas Waterman (Day, “‘Still’”). Ishi was publicly labelled the ‘last wild Indian in California.’ As I discussed in the previous chapter, the trope of the vanishing, dying, and *last* ‘Indian’ is a colonial construct that situates Indigenous peoples as temporally stagnant, incapable of meeting the demands of European ‘civilization,’ and ‘naturally’ prone to extinction due to their supposed ‘inferior’ status. The use of *wild*, found in the public description of Ishi, is an example of what Hayden White has called the ‘Wild Man’ trope. For White, the ‘Wild Man’ is neither fully animal nor human, but an in-between (159). The figure of the ‘Wild Man’ (constructed from ancient times to the present) is racially, physically, and cognitively othered (White 166); the figure is constructed as an antithesis to empire’s notion of humanity and civilisation (151). White writes that “to be wild is to be incoherent or mute; deceptive, oppressive, and destructive; sinful and accursed; and, finally, a monster, one whose physical attributes are in themselves evidence of one’s evil nature” (162).<sup>93</sup>

The display of Ishi as an object of his own extinction, advertised as America’s *last* and *wild* Indigenous man in California, has interesting ties to the fetishistic displays of extinct animals. Day writes that in 1916, Ishi “died a painful death of tuberculosis in his room at the Phoebe Hearst Museum of Anthropology in San Francisco, California” (“‘Still’”). As Warren Cariou points out, the trope of the ‘dying Indian’ displayed in museums and ethnographic exhibits “was well established by the Victorian period” (26). He writes that “[i]f these ‘savages’ could be constructed as passively fading away in response to the natural superiority of Europeans, then no blame could be assigned for the violence of colonization” (Cariou 26). The uptake of evolutionary theory to manufacture an image of white male eugenic ‘fitness’ helped to socially construct mass death as a narrative of ‘passive fading.’ Such narratives further eclipse the violent realities of colonial force and mass slaughter of marginalized groups (human and nonhuman). Though the story of Ishi cannot be compared to that of Martha (the last of the extinct passenger pigeons), it is through the colonial exploitation of lands and bodies that the romantic narratives of the ‘last one’ come to be used to advertise fascination and the autopsic gaze. As the

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<sup>93</sup> In *Black Looks: Race and Representation*, bell hooks writes that “[i]t is the young black male body that is seen as epitomizing this promise of wildness, of unlimited physical prowess and unbridled eroticism. It was this black body that was most ‘desired’ for its labor in slavery, and it is this body that is most represented in contemporary popular culture as the body to be watched, imitated, desired, possessed” (34). Further she writes that “[s]adly, black men often evoke racist rhetoric that identifies the black male as *animal*, speaking of themselves as ‘*endangered species*,’ as ‘primitive,’ in their bid to gain recognition of their suffering” (34, emphasis added).

previous chapter has shown, Martha's taxidermied remains can still be found on display in the Smithsonian institute. Passenger pigeons were slaughtered by the millions by American bird hunters between 1860s and 1880s.<sup>94</sup> William Souder writes that "Martha never lived in the wild. She was probably born into a captive flock at Chicago's Brookfield Zoo (her mother may have earlier resided in the Milwaukee Zoo). Martha was later donated to the Cincinnati Zoo" where she died in 1914 ("100 Years After her Death"). Like Ishi, Martha lived in a space of captivity, not simply by the walls that encased her, but by the ideologies and deadly actions that kept these bodies outside of the world formed by the European colonization of the North American continent.

The autopsic gaze can be seen in accounts about Saartjie Baartman, who was a Khoisan tribeswoman from South Africa who experienced various forms of physical exploitation because her body was constructed as racially and sexually 'abnormal.' Baartman was taken from South Africa in 1810 and brought to London by Alexander Dunlop, a military surgeon. Baartman was part of a live exhibit and her body was displayed so that the English public could observe her physical characteristics which were perceived as 'different,' 'abnormal,' and 'exotic.' Once Baartman was moved from England to France, she was exhibited in an animal show where zoologists and physiologists violently observed her body (Reiss 130). Describing the enslavement of Black women, bell hooks writes that "the black women whose naked bodies were displayed for whites at social functions had no presence"; "Their body parts were offered as evidence to support racist notions that black people were more akin to *animals* than other humans" (62, emphasis added). For Garland-Thomson, "[w]hat goes unremarked in studies of Bartmann's display, however, is the ways that the language and assumptions of the ability/disability system were implemented to pathologize and exoticize Bartmann" ("Integrating Disability" 260). Further, she writes that Baartman's "display invoked disability by presenting as deformities or abnormalities the characteristic that marked her as raced and gendered" (Garland-

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<sup>94</sup> David Soll writes that "[t]he rise of market hunting in the second half of the nineteenth century provides instructors a golden opportunity to explore the impact of new technologies and forms of economic organization on the relationship between humans and birds. Even after aggressive exploitation by generations of rural residents, passenger pigeons remained relatively abundant in the years immediately following the Civil War. But market hunters, who received word of roosts by telegraph and sent barrels of passenger pigeons to urban markets via railroad, began to decimate the species. Instead of waiting for the pigeons to come to their forests and villages, Americans traveled to the birds. Subsistence hunting for rural consumption quickly yielded to commercial hunting to satisfy urban demand. In 1878 market hunters in Petoskey, Michigan, shot and clubbed to death over 10,000 birds a day, every day, for nearly five months" (512).

Thomson, “Integrating Disability” 260-261). For Garland-Thomson, it was not Baartman’s body that was considered disabled, *per se*, but that disability framed the ways in which her body was received by the “western eye” (“Integrating” 261). After Baartman’s death in 1815, her body was dissected by French scientist Georges Cuvier who later publicly exhibited her genitalia and brain at the Musée de l’Homme in Paris, France. Benjamin Reiss writes that Cuvier “apparently sent her skin back to England, where it was stuffed and put on display” (130). Baartman’s skeleton and body cast were displayed for almost 200 years until her remains were repatriated in 2002 (Rapoo 137).

In a similar vein, the man known only as ‘El Negro’ was taxidermied after his death, which took place sometime in 1830 when French taxidermists Jules and Édouard Verreaux were said to have robbed the grave of a Tswana warrior buried in Botswana. While in Paris, ‘El Negro’s’ remains were taxidermied and displayed alongside taxidermied animals that were prepared by the Verreaux brothers (Martin-Márquez 64). ‘El Negro’ was placed on display at their Paris emporium before being transferred to the Francesc Darder Museum of Natural History in Banyoles, Spain, between 1916 and 1997. His body remained on display until 2000, when his body was repatriated and reburied in Botswana (Rapoo 137).<sup>95</sup> Examples such as these are a few among the many instances where human bodies deemed ‘abnormal’ or ‘other’ were preserved, taxidermied, and displayed because of perceived gendered, physiological, and racial differences to white European subjects. These examples draw out a complex social history that involved the collection, preservation, and display of human bodies that were staged and treated like animals in order to exaggerate their apparent ‘unruly’ similarities.

## § 2.4 Human and Animal Chiasm as Possible Shared Vulnerable (Worlds)

In *Bodies that Matter* and *Senses of the Subject*, Judith Butler describes the complexity of bodily living with reference to the theoretical work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Writing from Merleau-Ponty’s notion of flesh of the world, Butler writes in *Bodies* that “[l]anguage and materiality are

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<sup>95</sup> For more information on the preservation and repatriation of Saartjie Baartman and ‘El Negro,’ see Neil Parsons and Alinah Kelo Segobye’s chapter, “Missing Persons and Stolen Bodies: The Repatriation of ‘El Negro’ to Botswana.” *The Dead and Their Possessions: Repatriation in Principle, Policy and Practice*. Eds. Cressida Fforde, Jane Hubert and Paul Turnbull. New York: Routledge, 2002. 245-255 and Connie Rapoo’s article, “‘Just Give us the Bones!’: Theatres of African Diasporic Returns.” *Critical Arts* 25.2 (2011): 132-149.



fully embedded in each other, chiasmic in their interdependency, but never fully collapsed into one another i.e., reduced to one another, and yet neither fully ever exceeds the other” (38).<sup>96</sup> In other words, bodies are used to describe relations, but material *real*-ities are restricted by the linguistic frameworks already imposed on those relations. Materiality is described by Butler as “at once an instrumentality and deployment of a set of larger linguistic relations”; “The materiality of the signifier will signify only to the extent that it is *impure, contaminated* by the ideality of differentiating relations, the tacit structurings of a linguistic context that is illimitable in principle” (*Bodies* 38, original emphasis). ‘Chiasm’<sup>97</sup> is defined as an ontology in Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s working notes published posthumously in *The Visible and the Invisible*. For Merleau-Ponty, chiasmic-ontology was not defined solely by separated entities (what he calls a “me-other rivalry”); Being, rather, is simultaneously defined by Merleau-Ponty as “co-functioning,” unified and “one unique body” between self (world) and other (world) (*Visible* 215). As Margrit Shildrick explains, Merleau-Ponty’s notion of chiasm “is a dimension in excess of the interhuman connections that channel the co-construction of embodiment: the ‘flesh of the world’ in which we are all immersed, and through which we are constituted. It throws into doubt the very sense of self and other as distinct entities and speaks to a folding over of flesh that creates the possibility of difference within a unified but undifferentiated medium” (“Why Should Our Bodies” 15). Chiasmic relationships, then, posit that there are shared characteristics between humans and nonhuman animals and, through Butler’s arguments, language and material body are never wholly separate and yet never fully collapsed into the same.

Though uniquely different from Merleau-Ponty’s philosophical conception of chiasmic-ontology, Derrida writes in *The Beast and the Sovereign Vol II* that no beings experience the same world (neither inhabited or perceived) though there is an assumed discursive unity. He writes that “one can always question the supposed unity or identity of the world, not only between animal and human, but already from one living being to another. No one will ever be able to demonstrate, what is called *demonstrate* in all rigor, that two human beings, you and I for

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<sup>96</sup> In *Bodies*, Butler is careful to nuance her arguments involving language and the body. She argues that language and the body are not opposed, “for language both is and refers to that which is material, and what is material never fully escapes the process by which it is signified” (38).

<sup>97</sup> ‘Chiasm’ is from the Latinized form of the Greek word χιασμός (khiasmos), meaning ‘crossing’ or arranged diagonally. Chiasm is also from *chi* – the Greek letter for ‘X’ (inter-crossings). Butler describes the chiasm in Merleau-Ponty’s work in the following, “the rhetorical figure of the chiasm is such that two different relations are asserted that are not altogether communicated” (*Senses of the Subject* 169).

example, inhabit the same world, that the world is one and the same thing for both of us” (265-266). For Derrida, it cannot be confirmed that there is a shared world; he states that world remains ambiguous (there may be too much world, or no world at all). The conception of a ‘shared’ world, for Derrida, is an inherited agreement, a pretend meaning, a presumed and anticipated unity decided over millennia between living beings – what Derrida calls an “insurance policy” (*Beast Vol. II* 265; 267). Put simply, like Derrida’s neologism of *l’animot*, ‘world’ cannot be thought of as a unified or whole concept; rather, it is through the speaking of world that connections are phantasmatically created. He writes that “this uncrossable difference is what language and the address to the other cross lightly, I mean with the lightness of unawareness, at least for the time and space of an *as if* of social insurance” (Derrida, *Beast Vol. II* 267). This insurance policy is a reassurance that we do not all live on separate (abyssal) islands that have no shores<sup>98</sup> [though shareable solitude cuts the dogmatism of any limit] (Derrida, *Beast Vol. II* 267). The shareability of world which connects humans (sovereign) and animals (beast), is the possible shareability of mortal finitude. In other words, the sharing of mortality (as living beings that die). Despite Martin Heidegger’s arguments that animals lack in *weltbildend* (what Heidegger has called ‘world-making’), Derrida writes that “[t]his co- of the cohabitant presupposes a habitat, a place of common habitat, whether one calls it the earth (including sky and sea) or else the world as world of life-death. The common world is the world in which one-lives-one-dies, whether one be a beast of a human sovereign, a world in which both suffer, suffer death, even a thousand deaths” (*Beast Vol. II* 264).<sup>99</sup> Derrida’s arguments on shared mortality inform the shareability of precarious living in Butler’s work (I explore interconnections between mortal finitude more fully in the next chapter).<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> For further explanation of my discussion of ‘islands,’ Oliver describes in *Earth and World* that “[t]he island connotes isolation, even loneliness, cut off from civilization. Each singular life is an island cut off from all others” (8).

<sup>99</sup> In Oliver’s reading, she states that “[w]hat we learn from Derrida’s last seminar is that we both do and do not share the world. Emphasizing the profound singularity of each being—not just human beings—Derrida claims that with each one’s death the world is destroyed. This radical claim evokes a sense of urgency in relation to ethics and politics” (*Earth* 7); “We both do and do not share the world. With Derrida we get a sense of ethical urgency that we must return from the world to the earth. Even when the world is gone, the earth remains. Even if we do not share a world, we do share the earth” (8).

<sup>100</sup> Critiquing Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Derrida states that “[t]his solitude or this nonbelonging to humankind is due to the fact that suffering remains mute and closed in upon itself. Which signifies on the one hand that it cannot open itself, by the awakening of pity, to the suffering of the other as other; and on the other hand that it cannot exceed itself toward death. Indeed, the animal does have a potential faculty of pity, but it imagines neither the suffering of the other *as such* nor the passage from suffering to *death*. Indeed, that is one and the same limit. The relation with

For Butler, the word ‘human’ has many shortcomings and limitations; whereas, ‘human animal’ is described in her work as a ‘creature’<sup>101</sup> in chiasmic relation to the animal. Butler writes that “[p]erhaps the human is the name we give to this very negotiation that emerges from being a living creature among creatures and in the midst of forms of living that exceed us” (*Notes* 42-43). Likewise, in *Dispossession* Butler points out that the chiasmic relation implicit in her use of the human animal has a political basis. She writes,

If we are moving toward a relational view, then it would follow that the human not only has a relation to animals (conceived as the other), but is itself implicated in its own animality. That animality is its own and not yet its own, which is why both animal and life constitute and exceed whatever we call the human. The point is not to find the right typology, but to understand where typological thinking falls apart. The human animal might be one way of naming that collapse of typological distinction. (35)

The ontological precepts of ‘animal’ and ‘human’ are topological and Butler’s shift in language points to her politics of demonstrating the shortcomings of language. By conceiving the human in relation to the animal, the foundation of the human at the center of discourse begins to collapse. Humans are “linguistic creatures” (*Senses* 14) and “social creatures” (*Dispossession* 67), writes Butler.

Delving deeper into these arguments, Butler writes in *Giving an Account of Oneself* that subjects are co-produced through scenes of address that produce and are produced by “norms embedded in language” that police “what will and will not constitute recognisability” (23-24). Western philosophical traditions have reproduced an “exclusionary matrix” (Butler, *Bodies* 3) that divides selves from others (including humans and animals). This matrix defines the self in opposition to “those who are not yet ‘subjects’” – what Butler calls a “constitutive outside to the domain of the subject” (*Bodies* 3). The binaric logic running through this tradition is called into question by Butler in many of her writings.<sup>102</sup> In her vast theoretical body of work, Butler draws

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the other and the relation with death are one and the same opening. That which is lacking in what Rousseau calls the animal is the ability to live its suffering as the suffering of another and as the threat of death” (*Of Grammatology* 187, original emphasis).

<sup>101</sup> In discussing Theodor Adorno’s reading of the thinglike ‘creature’ character Odradek from Kafka’s short story “The Cares of a Family Man,” Butler describes Odradek as a “figure for the dehumanized being who is strangely animated by its dehumanization”; “whose status is radically uncertain”; “Odradek becomes a figure for the gesture that jettisons the very notion of will or *Entschlossenheit* by which the human is defined” (*Giving* 61). The image of the creature evades the human. Butler writes that “Adorno understands this character from Kafka as conditioned by a certain commodity fetishism, in which persons have turned into objects and objects have become animated in macabre ways” (*Giving* 61).

<sup>102</sup> By exposing the impossibility of the whole and authoritative speaking subject, Butler’s theory attempts to reduce the mastery held over ‘the other’ that is designated by markers of difference from the (western) self. Calling for

out the ways in which constructed societal norms establish unequal power relations between human selves and all that is living – including beings that are exempted or ‘othered’ from identifiable markers of proper ‘gender’ or ‘sex,’ as well as the notion of the ‘human.’ This process of othering, for Butler, marks the boundaries where select beings are considered to be intelligible, human, grievable and are, as a result, given proper recognition and rights. From the outset of her writing, Butler has sought to dismantle and upset the human *cogito* (the self or ‘I’) that is configured by societal norms. The speaking and ‘rational’ western subject is produced through, and dependent on, an inexhaustible list of societal and cultural institutions and ideologies, which include and are conditional on one’s language, geography, social environment. For Butler, the norms that formulate the human are the center of her focus. Similar to Derrida, who seeks to dismantle the truth claims found in western metaphysics, she unfurrows the assumption of a human centeredness, arguing that this centeredness is a narrative told to (certain) humans from the outset of their birth.<sup>103</sup> She expands notions of ‘liveability’ that exceed the human. For Butler, ‘human life’ functions relationally to the constitutive outside, a domain external to the subject (but never wholly external and what forms the subject) where a “range of living beings [that] exceeds the human” exist (*Undoing Gender* 12). She writes that “[i]n a way, the term ‘human life’ designates an unwieldy combination, since ‘human’ does not simply qualify ‘life,’ but ‘life’ relates human to what is nonhuman and living, establishing the human in the midst of this relationality. For the human to be human, it must relate to what is nonhuman, to what is outside itself but continuous with itself by virtue of an interimplication in life” (*Undoing* 12). In this vein, Taylor writes that “[s]peciesism doesn’t necessarily keep people from wanting to identify as animal; dehumanization does” (*Beasts of Burden* 110). Put simply, human living is established by a ‘relationality’ to the nonhuman and the nonhuman is established by bodies that are deemed abject (bodily and psychologically rejected)<sup>104</sup> in an exclusionary matrix that defines

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humility and undoing this notion of ‘self,’ Butler acknowledges that there is no notion of an identifiable and temporally linear subject that upholds this foundation when placed under question. There is no original or a priori knowledge or self from the outset, but rather, it is the external norms through language that frame the ways in which self (and relations to others) are situated. Thus, unfurrowing subject formation opens the possibility for rethinking the ways in which beings relate to one another in the quotidian world. Having this in mind, Butler has, in varying degrees, extended the condition of the ‘human’ throughout her texts – diverging from, and growing out of, her critiques of sex, gender, and western notions of selfhood.

<sup>103</sup> Like Derrida, Butler attempts to dismantle the western *cogito*; however, her political focus and purposes are directed toward what she sees as pressing political issues in the current era (issues that have further developed since Derrida’s passing in 2004).

<sup>104</sup> I treat Julia Kristeva’s concept of ‘abject’ more fully in § 3 **Dead Gazes**.

‘human life.’ Similarly, Maneesha Deckha argues that “social meanings ascribed to abjected animal bodies were and are generated from the same discourses which produce(d) abjected human bodies” (“The Salience” 19). In the pages that follow, I discuss the co-presence and co-construction of human and animal bodies as they are part of the construction of the ‘human.’ Arguing that ‘human’ as a norm, like ‘gender,’ upholds an exclusive and operating category that polices who and what will be given recognition and intelligibility, I unpack the complex chiasmic relationship posed by Butler that involves a philosophy of responsibility, vulnerability, and affect. In doing so, I discuss the norms of ‘species’ construction discussed by Deckha to further entangle the discourses of monstrosity as they work to inform dehumanization.

Butler writes that “[t]here is no self that is prior to the convergence or who maintains ‘integrity’ prior to its entrance into this conflicted cultural field. There is only a taking up of the tools where they lie, where the very ‘taking up’ is enabled by the tool lying there” (*Gender Trouble* 199). In similar moves as the undoing of gender (in using the gendered tools provided), one can also attempt to undo human through means that acknowledge and situate anthropocentric frameworks that are seemingly central to human interpretation and thought. In *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*, Butler writes that “[a]s much as we need to understand that norms of gender are relayed through psychosocial fantasies that are not first of our own making, we can see that norms of the human are formed by modes of power that seek to normalize certain versions of the human over others, either distinguishing among humans, or expanding the field of the nonhuman at will” (37). Butler’s understanding of ‘human’ is an intelligible, recognizable, and sustainable life and, as a result, is considered a life that is grievable upon death. Grievability is essential in understanding what makes a human life recognizable. To be grievable upon death presupposes that one was recognizable in life.

Relevant to the bodies that are stripped of their postmortem rights and are not repatriated to their homelands, buried, or symbolically recognized, Butler establishes that grievability takes place through avenues such as the obituary, which she discusses as a form of ‘nation-building’ in the context of U.S. war inflicted on Iraq. She writes that “[t]he matter is not a simple one, for, if a life is not grievable, it is not quite a life; it does not qualify as a life and is not worth a note. It is already the unburied, if not the unburiabable” (*Precarious* 34). Recognizability and livability define the degree to which bodies (animal and human) are vulnerable to violence. The shared vulnerability that comes to define precarious life is established by the potentiality of violence and

suffering.<sup>105</sup> Such vulnerability is not solely a human condition for Butler, where she writes that “[i]mplicit in this discourse of humanization is the question of grievability: whose life, if extinguished, would be publicly grievable and whose life would leave either no public trace to grieve, or only a partial, mangled, and enigmatic trace?” (*Frames of War* 75). In lieu of taxidermied animals, the transformation of the living animal into the lifeless specimen is, indeed, a mangled trace. Giovanni Aloï reminds his readers that dioramas are “assemblages” and “before all parts are composed together into a harmonious whole each single animal had an existence that transcended the concept of specimen” (*Art and Animals* 31); indeed, many animal existences ended through violent encounters. In *Frames*, Butler clarifies that “[i]t is precisely as human animals that humans suffer” (75). By definition, it is through the connected conditions between nonhuman animals and human (animals) that material bodies are vulnerable. More specifically, it is because bodies have skins, Butler writes, that bodies are “given over, in each other’s hands, at each other’s mercy” that we share vulnerability and precarity by way of an other (*Giving* 101; *Undoing* 21). Deckha extends this analysis to animal lives when she writes that “[t]he opening that vulnerability extends to non-humans is its focus on the material needs of embodied and corporeal existence. Animals can matter in vulnerability theorizations because they are beings leading precarious lives” (“Vulnerability, Equality and Animals” 60). Though it has been traditionally argued that the separation between animal/human fundamentally reduces animals to thoughtless matter (or ‘bête machine,’ in the Cartesian tradition), Butler and Deckha create an opening for positioning human (animals) as living matter and impressionable skins that are at risk by an alterity (discussed further in § 5 **Apocalyptic Time**).

Discussing the definition of ‘human’ Deckha writes that “there is no essence to being a ‘human.’ However the term is defined, it is always already incomplete and partial: a product of biological facts filtered through cultural discourses. The ‘human,’ like the ‘woman’ or the ‘man,’ is imagined” (“The Salience” 19). For Deckha the human starts not only with intersections between other humans but, also, through the construction of species that have established what she calls “intrahuman” differences (“The Salience” 33); she states that “[t]he ‘human’ is a term

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<sup>105</sup> Butler writes that “[p]recariousness is not simply an existential condition of individuals, but rather a social condition from which certain clear political demands and principles emerge. Under political conditions in which the denial of the colonizer’s precariousness in the name of invulnerable self-defense seeks to deny the condition in which human animals are each exposed to the other, and where precariousness is a generalized condition of living beings. Thus precariousness does not uniquely characterize a human life, but neither is human life exempt from the exigencies that attend to all living beings” (*Frames of War* xxv).

that has been both deliberately constructed as exclusive of some humans and all animals despite valid and compelling reasons to alter its defining contours” (“The Salience” 19). Like the construction of animal taxonomies, the “modern concept of race originated with [Carl] Linnaeus, who introduced the taxonomic way of grouping people” (Fara 101). The discourse of taxonomy was founded by Carl Linnaeus (1707-1778), a Swedish botanist, zoologist, and physician who wrote *Systema Naturae* in 1735. Linnaeus, otherwise known as the ‘father of taxonomy,’<sup>106</sup> did not distinguish living species from dead species because it was his belief that no distinctions were required (Kolbert 24). Patricia Fara writes that

Just as there were four rivers in the Garden of Eden and four continents, so too Linnaeus decided that there must be four human races. This also corresponded to Aristotelian ideas that the universe is composed of four elements – earth, air, fire and water – and that human health is governed by four humours. Unsurprisingly, Linnaeus’s top race was *Europaeus albus*, the ingenious and sanguine Europeans. The other three were the happy-go-lucky Red Indians, the melancholy yellow Asians, and the idle black Africans. (101-102)

Linnaeus had also placed *Homo sapiens* in the same order with apes<sup>107</sup> (a decision that was heavily criticized by his opponents), which was later disproved and challenged by English naturalist Joseph Banks [1743-1820] (Fara 102). Through a close reading of Linnaeus’s work, Banks’ contributed to the rewriting of Linnaeus’s taxonomic systems by expanding on species

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<sup>106</sup> In *Sex, Botany and Empire*, Patricia Fara describes Linnaeus’s role as the first taxonomist. Linnaeus organized the world by three kingdoms – plant, animal, and mineral – with subcategories of class, order, family, genus, and species. She writes that “[t]he 18th century is often dubbed ‘The Age of Classification’, and Linnaeus was the classifier *par excellence*. By 1799, over 50 different systems were available, but Linnaeus’s was the one that survived. In his *Geography of Nature*, he divided living organisms into different groups and sub-sets arranged in an orderly five-tier pattern of categories – classes, species and so forth. From now on, he said, every plant and animal should carry its own unique two-part label. Lemon trees, for instance, were called *Citrus limon* to distinguish them from their close relatives, orange trees, or *Citrus aurantium*. And Linnaeus also coined a new term to describe human beings – *Homo sapiens*, or wise man” (20).

<sup>107</sup> Fara writes that Linnaeus’s taxonomic structure of plants was pre-framed by norms of sexual reproduction and social gender norms. She writes that the “scientific language of botany was saturated with sexual references. [Joseph] Banks ardently supported the controversial Linnaean system of classification, which relied on counting the numbers of male and female reproductive organs inside flowers. To describe different groups of plants, Linnaeus had used extraordinary terms like ‘bridal chamber’ and ‘nuptials’” (11-12); “As his model for this supposedly objective system, Linnaeus turned to human relationships. The prejudices of Enlightenment Christian moralists are built right into the heart of this scientific plan for plants, which Linnaeus outlined by using romantic words such as ‘bride’ and ‘marriage’. In his anthropomorphic scheme, the most basic division is between male and female – exactly the same distinction as in the highly chauvinistic society of late 18th-century Europe. Linnaeus gave priority to male characteristics; in other words, he imposed the sexual discrimination that prevailed in the human world onto the plant kingdom. His first level of ordering depends on the number of male stamens, but only the sub-groups are determined by the number of female pistils” (21). For more information, see Fara’s book, *Sex, Botany and Empire: The Story of Carl Linnaeus and Joseph Banks*. Duxford: Icon Books UK, 2003.

he had encountered while on expeditions to Tahiti and also by placing humans in their own species category (Fara 108). Fara writes that Banks had “helped to consolidate the nascent science of anthropology by bringing back skulls so that naturalists could study the inhabitants of far-flung lands without leaving their European laboratories” (108). Nineteenth-century physical anthropology placed humans at the center of scholarly discourse, first by studying skeletons, then moving on to reconstructing mummified bodies and the live exhibition of cultures deemed ‘different’ by constructed narratives of race, geography, behavior, and other social strata (Blanchard et al. 3).

What is clear in both Butler’s and Deckha’s work is that the (species) category of the human, assumed to be natural, fixed, or bound, is porous, while those who do not fit under the category are withheld basic rights, survivable sustenance, and liveable recognition.<sup>108</sup> Describing the animal, Butler writes in *Dispossession* that “the animal has the status of being both inside and outside the human form” (34); “we have to struggle against those versions of the human that assume the animal as its opposite, and to instead propose a claim for human animality” (34-35). She writes that human animality helps rethink the “materialist basis of human” (Butler, *Dispossession* 35).<sup>109</sup> The chiasmic relationship between the self and the other (both having co-

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<sup>108</sup> These sentiments further nuance Butler’s earlier arguments in *Precarious Life* that humans are corporeally vulnerable beings to the actions of others. For Butler, violence by the will of another (involuntary and unanticipated) places corporeal beings in a shared realm of precarity (*Precarious* 29); however, some corporeal beings are more vulnerable than others. Drawing from Butler’s notion of ‘precarious life,’ Deckha states that “[w]hat is in need of questioning is why we terminate our deconstruction at the human/nonhuman boundary and why we are not as vigilant in contesting the naturalized boundaries between species as we are between sexes, races, classes, cultures, etc.” (“The Saliency” 7-8); “Species and ideas of humanness are social constructs similar to other intrahuman identity social locations that should be similarly deconstructed for the differences that are denied in order to facilitate one type of categorization over another” (Deckha, “The Saliency” 19).

<sup>109</sup> Butler has been critiqued for an anthropocentric bias in her texts (Taylor, “The Precarious Lives of Animals”; Oliver, *Animal Lessons*). Arguing that Butler’s philosophy has excluded the animal even when speaking about the “less than human,” Oliver states that Butler’s text *Antigone’s Claim* defines kinship as solely human and expresses that any exceptions from this definition are always already human from Butler’s point of view (*Animal* 226). Likewise, Chloe Taylor is critical of Butler for not extending ‘vulnerability’ and ‘life’ to corporeal beings outside of the definition of human (62). James Stanescu’s article “Species Trouble: Judith Butler, Mourning, and Precarious Lives of Animals” speaks in tandem with both Oliver and Taylor’s critiques of Butler’s anthropocentrism when he agrees that Butler has “repeatedly, especially until recently, engaged in explicitly anthropocentric rhetoric” and that her “comments on animals have been diffused, fragmentary, and lack any clear thesis” (571). Stanescu, however, attempts to salvage an animal rights politics from Butler’s work in the remainder of his article. Critiquing Agamben’s notion of “bare life” as exclusionary to animals by definition (574), Stanescu states that Butler’s writings can be read alongside Agamben’s, though, Butler’s notion of “precarious life” offers more for animals rights by expanding the margins of what types of beings are included in these categories. ‘Precarious life,’ writes Stanescu, is a shared *social ontology*, both animal and human, due to our shared vulnerability and finitude (575). From this shared ontology, an ethics and politics arise through a shared embodiment. That is, the vulnerability of the living body (Stanescu 575). As such, certain lives are more vulnerable than others and this is established by who is



functioning ‘worlds,’ separate and yet unified) is described as imperceptible and affective<sup>110</sup> yet bonded by a shared vulnerability.<sup>111</sup> In the next section, I describe the ways in which ‘animality’ is used to dehumanize human others through the discourses on ‘monstrous’ bodies.

## § 2.5      Monstrous Foundations and Species Blendings

In *Ecology without Nature*, Timothy Morton writes that “[i]n the Enlightenment, nature became a way of establishing racial and sexual identity, and science became the privileged way of demonstrating it. The normal was set up as different from the pathological along the coordinates of the *natural* and the *unnatural*” (16). Rogue taxidermy artists that create hybrid sculptures from numerous animal bodies utilize the aesthetic of ‘monstrosity’ as a means to reveal realism as an aggressive Enlightenment norm. In a similar vein, rogue taxidermy’s aesthetics of monstrosity may also be understood as a political strategy that serves to highlight the ways in which these sculptures haunt through colonial histories, imaginaries, and current realities (discussed in greater detail in § 3 **Dead Gazes**). As Deckha writes, “[h]uman problematizations about nonhuman beings are rarely ever just about the nonhuman, but mediated by other circuits of difference” (“Welfarist *and* Imperial” 515). Whether physically transported across geographical borders or symbolically used to define groups of humans as ‘inferior’ to white settlers, animals have figured prominently in the conquest of peoples, the appropriation of ‘exotic’ lands, and the exploitation of natural resources. According to Philip Armstrong, the longstanding resistance to bringing animal and human colonization into conversation is the result of a fear of “trivializing the suffering of human beings under colonialism” (413); however, as Rebecca Tuvel argues, these fears merely tend to reproduce narratives of animal alterity that are made not only at the expense of *nonhuman* animals, but also fail to question the extent to which

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grieved or considered a grievable subject. The different degrees to precarious life are pertinent in discussing animals rights, as animals are often not worthy of grief. From this position and these critiques, I highlight the many areas where Butler has incorporated the nonhuman animal in her work as a means to discuss how her theory can inform the historical destruction and subsequent exploitation of posthumous bodies in taxidermy, ethnographic exhibits, human zoos, ‘freak’ show displays, and natural history museums.

<sup>110</sup> While the multifaceted concept of affect has been described in the previous chapter as sensation, corporeal happening, and the circulation of emotions between bodies and objects, Butler reminds her readers that at every instance that one attempts to describe animate corporeal bodies through various types of ‘affects,’ one must recognize that they take up an impossible position to speak of these non-descriptive *real*-alities (*Senses* 4).

<sup>111</sup> In *Notes*, Butler writes that “some ethical claims emerge from bodily life, and perhaps all ethical claims presuppose a bodily life, understood as injurable, one that is *not restrictively human*” (118, emphasis added).

racist discourses work with and are reliant on notions of animal inferiority (223). Tuvel conveys how animal oppression and the exploitative imprisonment of Baartman<sup>112</sup> are implicitly related, arguing that the colonization of racialized bodies would look very different were it not first informed by our cultural understanding of *animal* alterity. In *Black Feminist Thought*, Patricia Hill Collins draws the line between the use of animals to debase and describe Black women's sexuality and also to refuse Black women of social and economic gain.<sup>113</sup> Collins highlights the ways in which the representation and display of Baartman as animalistic "formed one of the original icons for Black female sexuality" (136). She states that "[i]n the creation of the icon applied to Black women, notions of gender, race, nation, and sexuality were linked in overarching structures of political domination and economic exploitation" (Collins 137). By way of using animal alterity to construct Black women's bodies as 'unruly,' Tuvel argues that the

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<sup>112</sup> In "What Bodies Matter?: Feminism, Poststructuralism, Race, and the Curious Theoretical Odyssey of the 'Hottentot Venus,'" Zine Magubane argues that Baartman has since been re-objectified through texts that have tried to express her physical objectification (830). Magubane points out the various ways Baartman has been addressed as both a subject and an object. This double exploitation through theoretical texts is through the oversaturation of the 'Hottentot Venus' in theoretical texts as example. She states that "[t]he question must be asked why *this* woman has been made to function in contemporary academic debates as *the* preeminent example of racial and sexual alterity" (original emphasis), in relation to various other examples of persons exhibited or exploited for medical purposes (Magubane 830). Similarly, Rey Chow critiques Algerian theorist Malek Alloula who republishes postcards of Algerian women sent home by French soldiers in the early decades of the twentieth century in his book *The Colonial Harem*. Chow argues that Alloula is guilty of producing a 'second gaze' through his attempts to do justice to the women in the photographs. She writes that "because Alloula is intent on capturing the essence of the colonizer's discourse as a way to retaliate against his enemy, his own discourse coincides much more closely with the enemy's than with the women's" (Chow, *Writing Diaspora* 40). Beyond the fact that images of Baartman are largely exaggerated and visually misrepresented by artists and scientists who sought to depict her supposed bodily difference through the framework of a white western European gaze, I will not reproduce images of the humans discussed in this chapter. Though there are various examples of humans placed on display for having 'atypical' bodies, I have narrowed my focus to discuss humans who have been preserved, publicly autopsied, or taxidermied after their deaths. I also acknowledge that reproductions of rogue taxidermy art involve their own violence made apparent through these arguments. Canadian feminist historian, Jane Nicholas who studies the history of 'freak' shows states that the "[f]ragments of archival documents can raise important ethical questions of vulnerability, reproduction, and historian's complicity in the legacies of vulnerability and unequal power relations" (141). Stating that the oversaturation of photographs in the digital age gives access to peoples' bodies in ways that do not involve consent, Nicholas ponders over her own circumstances in attempting to be an ethical historian. Indeed, the visual (and written) consumption of bodies through photographs (and texts) is risky and I extend analyses such as hers to this project and seek to address the overrepresentation of taxidermy in the present day. In equal value, I also address in the next chapter the ways in which photographs can be used to provoke social change. Likewise, I also argue throughout this project that there are ethical stakes in creating taxidermy art and also political potentialities in analyzing and interpreting rogue taxidermy art that can, perhaps, provoke broader socio-cultural discussions that incorporate animals rights within debates about other power imbalances.

<sup>113</sup> Collins writes that Black women and Black female domestic workers were referred to as 'mules' (71; 139). She carefully forms the connection between women under slavery and animals that were both forcefully impregnated against their will. She writes that the prejudices that shape Black women's fertility as 'unruly' or 'uncontrollable' were part of the system that forcefully impregnated women under slavery (78; 135).

cultural concept of animal alterity is informed by tropes of ‘beastliness’ and ‘savagery,’ shaping Baartman’s supposedly ‘wild,’ unabashed sexuality (223).<sup>114</sup>

As transgressive, transformative, and metamorphic, Shildrick’s notion of the monster calls into question situated boundaries of the body. “The figure of the monster,” she writes, “is characterized variously as unnatural, inhuman, abnormal, impure, racially other”; “[i]n every case, it is marked against the primary term, the normative standard, as degraded or lacking, an oppositional category that is never of equal value” (Shildrick, *Embodying* 29). Monsters are produced by anxieties around the collapse of a ‘whole’ or ‘bound’ body and this is what makes monsters phantasmatically something to be feared (Shildrick, “Monsters, Marvels and Metaphysics” 304). The monstrous body transcends the separation between human and animal, culture and nature. Deckha writes that “[j]ust as new science was reshaping cultural ideas of sexual difference, it formed cultural ideas of species difference. This is the second way in which the term ‘human’ is revealed to be a social construction. We refer to ourselves as human even though science, however flawed it may be, tells us that we, too, are animal” (“The Salience” 10). Importantly, Shildrick notes that “[i]t is not that the monster represents the threat *of* difference, but that it threatens to interrupt difference – at least in its binary form – so that the comfortable otherness that secures the selfsame is lost. What lies beyond the unproblematic horror of the absolute other is far more risky perception that the monstrous is not so different after all” (“Monsters” 303, original emphasis).

There are significant ties of the ‘bestial’ to cultural understandings of the monster, as Pramod Nayar argues in *Posthumanism*. Nayar writes that the human expulses the ‘animal within’ and that, in turn, the very “presence of the animal makes the human monstrous” (85). Monsters (as liminal beings, neither fully animal nor fully human) threaten to puncture the borders of the inside that is considered ‘civilized,’ ‘natural,’ and ‘normal.’ It is through their ability to transgress species borders that monsters often embody human qualities that must be “repudiated” and “exorcised” by civil society (Dendle 196). For instance, Brewer’s sculptures in her *Carnival Curiosa* collection expose a history of exhibition shows which displayed humans (and nonhuman animals) as monsters and freaks in order to define the (bodily, gendered, sexualized, and racialized) normality and normativity of the ideal human. Describing the

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<sup>114</sup> Portions of this section have been published elsewhere. See Miranda Niittynen, “Animal Magic: Sculpting Queer Encounters through Rogue Taxidermy Art.” *Gender Forum* 55 (2015): 14-38.

‘grotesque,’ ‘uncanny,’ and ‘monstrous’ body in art aesthetics, Mary Russo writes that western subjectivity requires and must reproduce images of the grotesque body to inform difference. She writes following Mikhail Bakhtin that

The grotesque body is not separated from the rest of the world; “it is blended with the world, with animals, with objects”. Most of all, it is identified with the “lower bodily stratum” and its associations with degradation, filth, death, and rebirth. The images of the grotesque body are precisely those which are abjected from the bodily canons of classical aesthetics. The classical body is transcendent and monumental, closed, static, self-contained, symmetrical, and sleek; it is identified with the “high” or official culture of the Renaissance and later, with the rationalism, individualism, and normalizing aspirations of the bourgeoisie. The grotesque body is open, protruding, irregular, secreting, multiple, and changing; it is identified with non-official “low” culture or the carnivalesque, and with social transformation. (Russo 8)

Rogue taxidermists employ the very tools of ‘objectivity’ and ‘authenticity’ which lie at the heart of the dominant western epistemologies of science; however, it is through unconventional forms and ironic slippages that Brewer is able to articulate (through her sculptures) criticisms of science’s historical obsession with the display and mastery of the ‘unnatural’ and unknown. As mentioned in **§ 1 From Botched to Rogue**, nineteenth-century animal ‘aberrations’ taxidermied by Walter Potter were the most popular displays at his Bramber museum in Sussex, England. One of Potter’s ‘unruly’ taxidermy sculptures was a two-headed lamb (Fig. 2.3). While



Figure 2.3: Walter Potter, *Lamb with Two Heads & Four Eyes*. Photo postcards from Potter’s collection at the Bramber Museum (closed in the 1970s).

nineteenth-century displays of taxidermied ‘unruly’ animal bodies were exhibited as entertainment objects or for the purposes of education throughout western Europe and North America, advances in and the expansion of agriculture meant that ‘abnormal’ animals were not



Figure 2.4: Sarina Brewer, *Barnyard Bastard*, 2004. Taxidermy. Image used with permission from artist, © Sarina Brewer.

anatomically ‘fit’ to conduct the work expected of their bodies and, as a result, many of these animals were killed (Arluke and Bogdan 120).<sup>115</sup> As an intertext for her taxidermy, Brewer (re)created the sculpture of Potter’s taxidermied two-headed lamb, captioned with the title *Barnyard Bastard* (Fig. 2.4). Brewer’s decision to stage the two-headed lamb without a nature scene backdrop draws attention to the ways in which nonnormative farm animal bodies are made into objects through the autopsic gaze. As a stand-alone sculpture, onlookers are invited to recognize the taxidermied animal body, as an object, without the frame of the sculpture painted as a scenic backdrop that

so often produces the fantasy of animal life in harmony with sublime nature through realist aesthetics. Indeed, Brewer’s version of the two-headed lamb follows the aesthetic principles of traditional taxidermy championed by British taxidermists such as Potter and other American realist taxidermists like Carl Akeley; however, Brewer’s lack of backdrop and critical caption creates a different type of encounter. Brewer’s sculpture mocks the anxiety and guilt of progeny placed on women’s bodies through the symbolic use of ‘bastard’ – a derogatory word for an illegitimate child born out of wedlock.

According to Shildrick, monsters are produced by a “general anxiety about origins, and the relationship between maternal and foetal bodies” (*Embodying* 29). Likewise, Rosemarie

<sup>115</sup> While historically animals with disabilities were put to death for the inability to function as beasts of burden, Taylor writes that in the contemporary context of the factory farm, animals are manufactured to be disabled (“Vegans, Freaks, and Animals” 761). She states that “[i]ndustrialized farm animals not only live in such cramped, filthy, and unnatural conditions that disabilities become common but also are literally bred and violently altered to physically damaging extremes, where udders produce too much milk for a cow’s body to hold, where turkeys cannot bear the weight of their own giant breasts, and where chickens are left with amputated beaks that make it difficult for them to eat” (Taylor, “Vegans” 761).

Garland-Thomson writes that children born (dead or alive) in antiquity with atypical bodies were called “monsters and prodigies” and were “signs from the gods or omens about the future” (“Making Freaks” 129). Beliefs of god’s role in creating abnormal bodies in order to provide a message extended beyond the antiquity; however, as Shildrick writes, beginning in the late modernist period, the narrative about monsters changed to reflect more “naturalistic” and “scientific” hypotheses for ‘atypical’ births (*Embodying* 34). Shildrick states that eighteenth-century beliefs were a form of ‘epigenetics’ where monstrous births were a product of the mother’s impression of the external world. She writes that “[t]he concept of maternal imagination, or maternal impressions as it was more often known, held that the disordered thoughts and sensations experienced by a prospective mother during pregnancy were somehow transmitted to her foetus such that at birth the child’s body, and sometimes its mind, was marked by corresponding signs” (Shildrick, *Embodying* 32-33). The shift from “God’s will” to the “maternal imagination” more apparently shows women’s role in the creation of monstrous births (Shildrick, *Embodying* 34). Shildrick notes that monstrous births symbolized a number of different messages from god; she explains, “[f]or those births attributed to divine or supernatural intervention, their supposed purpose could cover a number of options: to foretell macro-calamities; to express God’s wrath or vengeance on a morally negligent population; or indeed to punish individual immorality such as sodomy, transspecies coupling, consorting with the devil, or intercourse on the Sabbath” (*Embodying* 20). In the nineteenth century, however, these beliefs began to diminish and were replaced by beliefs that bodily ‘abnormalities’ were “part of God’s great order of creatures and subject to scientific study and classification, as were all creatures” (Bogdan 27).<sup>116</sup>

Arguably, monstrosity becomes most threatening when the boundary of the animal threatens to blend the category of the human. Shildrick explains that the nonhuman animal monster alone does not unsettle the security of the human in ways that supposed ‘human-animal monsters’ did historically. She writes that “[a]lthough the purely animal monster might also be an object of curiosity or fear, and has a similar history of heralding events to come, of providing a material marker of divine affect, or later of signifying evolutionary diversity, it does not

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<sup>116</sup> These beliefs were not wholeheartedly diminished, however, as Lillian Craton points out, the shows of Juliana Pastrana continued to be disrupted in the nineteenth century in part by the presumed “public health risk” of Pastrana’s performance on the “unborn children of pregnant viewers” (2).

thereby unsettle the security of the human being” (Shildrick, *Embodying* 20). Further, Shildrick states that “[t]he animal is the other in the comforting guise of absolute difference, but in its lack of humanity it cannot appeal direct to the heart of our own being. Those monsters that are at least in an ambivalent relationship to humanity, however, are always too close for comfort. They invoke vulnerability” (Shildrick, *Embodying* 19-20). In chorus with Shildrick’s definition of human-animal (interspecies blended) monstrosities, Nadja Durbach explains that the ‘freak’ show performer was framed as monstrous “precisely because of the instability of its body: the freak could be both male and female, white and black, adult and child, and/or human and animal at the same time” (3).

It is possible that Brewer’s (re)production of a two-headed lamb (as well as her other sculptures that transcend animal-specific categories) will not push the boundaries or comfort zones of the human viewer, given that her sculptures do not surpass the species category of nonhuman animals. The nonhuman animal monster (seemingly) does not pose a threat to human security when it is presumed to be in the *comforting guise of absolute difference*. Indeed, Taylor makes this clear when she states that “[t]o call someone an animal is to render them a being to whom one does not have responsibilities, a being that can be shamelessly objectified” (*Beasts* 108). When the animal is understood as an absolute alterity (bestial, ‘wild,’ and animalistic), then, the beings that we call ‘animals’ embody a category that must be rejected by the human. In equal value, however, the animal monster has the potential to haunt not only through a shared (chiasmic) precarity as a living vulnerable body, but also as a body imperiled by its environment. This is perhaps where I digress from Shildrick’s point that animal monstrosity does not unsettle the human. Such potential unsettlings are highlighted throughout this project, where rogue taxidermy sculptures draw a line towards possible threats shared between animal and human beings/bodies (seen throughout the following chapters). An example of this shared vulnerability can be seen in Brewer’s 2005 sculpture *Chernobyl Chicken* (Fig. 2.5) that stages a taxidermied chicken with four claws. Both animal and human bodies were affected by the 1986 nuclear disaster that took place at the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant in northern Ukraine. It is not simply that humans and nonhuman animals cohabitate the planet, but they are interconnected by encounters and co-affected by the environments that they share. This example poses a chiasmic





Figure 2.5: Sarina Brewer, *Chernobyl Chicken*, 2005. Taxidermy. Image used with permission from artist, © Sarina Brewer.

relationship not simply because humans and nonhuman animals were mutually (though not equally) affected by the disaster, but affected differently since animals (not humans) were abandoned and left for dead in the disaster zones.<sup>117</sup> This is perhaps the political point to Brewer's sculpture, to acknowledge the effects of ecological disasters on animal life resulting from the actions of humans. Though her sculptures are certainly at risk of trivializing the existence of human and nonhuman animal survivors of the disaster, her sculptures simultaneously push recognition and responsibility onto

the larger systems and institutions that gain profit from nonhuman animal life – in all of its variances.

Just as animal monstrosity unsettles human perception through the realities of a shared bodily vulnerability (from a cohabitated environment), animal monstrosity also troubles the scientific ideals of taxonomy construction when bodies are interblended with different species. Rogue taxidermy art does this by producing creatures that work against narratives of authenticity in scientific recordings of taxonomies. While realist interpretations seek to freeze the animal in a moment in time, rogue taxidermists borrow from cryptozoology (animals out of time and space) in order to question the normative classification of species based on discovery. Following the

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<sup>117</sup> Initial responses to major environmental disasters begin with concerns solely over human wellbeing; the destruction to animals from the Chernobyl disaster were only a secondary concern. For example, in her book *Life Exposed: Biological Citizens After Chernobyl*, Adriana Petryna's study of the disaster treats animals as raw matter to be studied and tested for radiology levels. Little attention or empathy is paid to nonhuman animal beings. In contrast, Rebecca Johnson discusses the event and current state of nonhuman animal bodies affected by the disaster. She explains that farm and wild animals were abandoned (16), but, to the surprise of many researchers, various groups of animal, plant, and insect biodiversity thrived and reproduced in the abandoned zones of the disaster (Johnson 19-20).



work of Joan Dunayer, Deckha writes that “the science of taxonomy, like other sciences, is not a repository of objective truths but a particular, contingent method of ordering plant and animal life. The human category is a species category, but species are not static or natural. Scientists have grouped some beings together according to certain characteristics they have considered relevant, while others that would warrant a different grouping are minimized. This grouping belies difference as natural as is accorded the rank of universal truth by Enlightenment natural history” (“The Salience” 11). In chorus with Deckha, Gregory Forth points out that the taxonomic structure of cryptozoology is also partial because it is based on *western* specific perceptions of encounters and discovery. He writes that cryptozoology “too often displays a Western bias, and also what might be called a ‘visual’ bias, relying largely on the accounts of putative observations by Europeans or Euro-Americans” (201).

Despite these criticisms, rogue taxidermists utilize cryptozoology in their sculptures to challenge strict scientific classifications that produce a fixed knowledge and which, in doing so, pathologize, colonize, and erase bodily difference. In several instances, cryptozoology brushes up against the discourses of monstrosity; specifically, when creatures such as ‘Big Foot’ threaten the established boundaries set out by an anthropocentric divide between animal and human. Shildrick explains that it is this transgressive and transformative potential that makes monsters productive figures to question established boundaries. Because the monster is grotesque, abject and also signifies the leakiness of boundaries, it provokes anxieties about the collapse of a supposedly whole or clearly bounded body (“Monsters” 304). This yearning to know the strange and the unknown is highlighted by Peter Dendle who provides a genealogy of monsters in Western Europe. Monstrosity serves as a threat as “the roles of hunter and hunted, of civilized and uncivilized, of predator and victim, have become reversed in reports of contemporary cryptid encounters” (Dendle 199). Monstrosity forms from the hybridization of threatening animals and also the outcasts of minorities from distant and exotic lands. The creation of monsters is written alongside colonial narratives and is part of the colonial construct of cultural alterity. As scientists began to create taxonomies of the world’s discoveries, Dendle writes that racial minorities were seen as “miscreants who do not properly fit within the boundaries of the civilized world nor into the proper cycles of the natural world” (196). These beings inhabit outside spaces such as “remote islands or mountain ranges, deep ponds and lakes, swamps” (196). Thus the monstrous is the outsider, threatening all that is part of the constructed inside: the civil, natural, and normal.

In the next section, I discuss the tools used to further dehumanize humans through entertainment displays, such as ‘freak’ shows and human zoos.

## § 2.6 ‘Freak’ Shows and Human Zoos

The threat of bodily boundaries are what make monsters so frightening to humans. As Deckha writes, “[s]ameness, not difference, provokes our greatest anxiety (and our greatest fascination) with the ‘almost human’” (“The Salience” 13). While two-headed sheep may not create the same type of anxiety because these bodies do not go against the boundaries of the human-animal species divide, it is the taxidermied bodies that resemble human bodies that have the potential to be most unsettling. Shildrick writes that “against an ideal bodylines – that is the being of the self in the body – that relies on the singular and the unified, where everything is in its expected place, monstrosity in its various forms offers a gross insult”; “[monstrosity] destabilises the grand narratives of biology and evolutionary science and signifies other ways of being in the world” (Shildrick, *Embodying* 10). Specific to traditions in taxidermy, Michelle Henning writes that anthropomorphic taxidermy sculptures that transcended species boundaries [such as Charles Waterton’s sculpture *Martin Luther after his fall?* (Fig. 2.6)<sup>118</sup>] went against realist traditions and were rejected by Victorian and Edwardian natural history museums. Such taxidermied displays went against the natural history museum’s symbolic “vision of a natural world marked by clean boundaries between types and species” (Henning 673). Though monstrous or hybrid sculptures were kept outside the confines of the nineteenth-century natural history museum, this did not mean that these sculptures were not encountered by curious audiences. Henning writes that anthropomorphic sculptures were popular in the nineteenth century for “thrill-seeking audiences” and these sculptures played a similar role as the curiosity cabinet had in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (673). The thrill of encountering strange, ‘exotic,’ and unfamiliar bodies was part of the entertainment industry; bodies were represented with excessive exaggerations and fictional narratives in order to construct an alterity that was in waiting to be witnessed.

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<sup>118</sup> Waterton’s taxidermy sculpture *Martin Luther after his fall?* was constructed from the body of ‘Jenny,’ a young female ape that arrived in England in 1855. She was placed on exhibit while alive in an educational menagerie. Waterton often visited Jenny at the menagerie and, after she died, he taxidermied her body, added horns, and constructed her face with an anthropomorphic expression (Henning 672-673).



Figure 2.6: Charles Waterton, Martin Luther after his fall? Taxidermy. Image permission courtesy of Wakefield Council © Wakefield Museum.

According to Robert Bogdan, the “[e]nd of eighteenth century and into nineteenth saw an increase in humans displayed” (*Freak Show* 27). It was not until the turn of the twentieth century that interests in the ‘abnormal’ began to dwindle. Just as interests in taxidermy changed due in part by technological advances in photography and film, Blanchard (et al.) state that profits in ethnic shows grew financially until the beginning of the first world war (12). Similarly, as relationships towards death changed as a result of the world wars, taxidermy was no longer a desirable medium of research and became a mainstream hobby. The cessation of ‘freak’ show performances in the middle of the twentieth century were partly the result of extreme eugenic projects that took place at

the time. Kérchy and Zittlau remind their readers that “Nazi race-cleansing euthanasia programs, that undertook the systemic, total extermination of the ‘degenerate,’ contributed to the disappearance of many freak-show performers” in Europe (11).<sup>119</sup>

The exhibition of diverse groups of humans through ethnographic exhibits took place almost simultaneously on both sides of the Atlantic, argues Blanchard (et al.), and these representations “carried an identical message concerning exotic peoples” (3). In opposition to employment of ‘freak’ shows, Arnold Arluke and Robert Bogdan state that ethnographic displays and human zoos staged in early twentieth century America at World’s Fairs and Expositions were not “fashioned or initiated by the people being exhibited”; rather, they state that these exhibits were the “work of colonial governments and fair officials, with the help of anthropologists” (197). Garland-Thomson points out that “freak shows were a major site of

<sup>119</sup> For more information, see Anna Kérchy’s chapter, “From Showbiz to the Concentration Camp: The Fabulous, Freakish Life of Hungarian Jewish ‘Dwarf’ Performers, Zoli Hirsch and the Ovitz Family” in *Exploring the Cultural History of Continental Europe Freak Shows and ‘Enfreakment.’* Eds. Anna Kérchy and Andrea Zittlau. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012. 211-232.

employment for disabled people before 1930” (“Making Freaks” 131)<sup>120</sup>; however, Cariou writes that human zoos were complicated in terms of human agency. He writes that “some [people] were abducted and kept virtually imprisoned in their performance closures, while others had a greater degree of autonomy and even chose to become what Roslyn Poignant has called ‘professional savages’”; “Many others worked in a murky realm of partial consent, trusting their livelihoods and their lives to the promises of showmen” (Cariou 25-26). These realities are echoed in Blanchard’s (et al.) edited collection on human zoos where it is confirmed that various groups of peoples placed in exhibits experienced complex forms of cruelty and trauma, including “one-sided group contract[s],” public births and deaths, suicides on tour, and various scientific and anthropological studies conducted on living and dead bodies (13). In a similar vein, Taylor writes that many people placed in human zoos, alongside various animals, died from contagious diseases such as tuberculosis and smallpox and many were displaced from their families “due to cost, or to the colonization and destruction of their home communities” (*Beasts* 109).

Not separate from other entertainment displays of ‘unruly’ humans and animals, human zoos were stationed as part of various institutions of display, such as ‘freak’ shows, museums, and animal zoos (Cariou 25). Cariou writes that “[i]n all of these performance spaces, non-Europeans were displayed as examples of primitive or backward cultures, often being compared to animals or the vanished peoples of antiquity” (25). Ideologically, these spaces and stagings of humans cannot be separated as “[t]he show-personas presented communal anxieties and fantasies of Otherness in highly commercialized, fetishized, colonized forms, which served entertainment and educational purposes, conditioned responses of revulsion and pleasure, and consolidated the comforting, illusorily self-same identity of the ordinary average majority populace” (Kérchy and Zittlau 2).

Similarly, feminist scholars have discussed how scientific and anthropological schools used both animals and humans in the Enlightenment projects that situated the cultural ‘savage’ and nonhuman animal ‘other’ as separate from all that is civilized, autonomous, and sovereign.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Taylor writes that “[a]lthough oppression and coercion certainly takes many forms—one of which is the lack of alternative employment opportunities for disabled people—it is too simplistic to assume that all freaks were (or are) exploited. Might it also be problematic to assume that all animal comparisons were or are demeaning? Might some performers have reveled in their animal names? Might some freaks have embraced their animal comparisons?” (*Beasts* 113).

<sup>121</sup> For more information, see Donna Haraway’s book, *Primate Visions: Gender, Race, and Nature in the World of Modern Science*. New York: Routledge, 1989; Fatimah Tobing-Rony’s book, *The Third Eye: Race, Cinema, and*

In Trinh T. Minh-ha's words, "[t]he idealized quest for knowledge and power makes it often difficult to admit that enlightenment (as exemplified by the West) often brings about endarkenment"; "By attempting to *exclude* one (darkness) for the sake of the other (light), the modernist project of building universal knowledge has indulged itself in such self-gratifying oppositions as civilization/primitivism, progress/backwardness, evolution/stagnation" (40, original emphasis). These boundaries were based on a hierarchy established by race, sexuality, gender, and species differences. Scholars Fatimah Tobing-Rony and Pauline Wakeham depict the ways in which taxidermy has figured into natural history museum scenes that helped interpret, create, and (re)produce images of otherness. For instance, Wakeham states that taxidermy is "a mode of representation, a way of reconstructing corporeal forms, that immediately bound up with the colonial disciplining of both animal and aboriginal bodies" (5). In the context of contemporary taxidermy art, Wakeham cautions that taxidermists must interrogate "past cultural meanings" and never disregard "the persistence of colonial ideology bound up in taxidermic reconstruction" (15). Similarly, Fatimah Tobing-Rony shows the ways in which depictions of otherness (both human and animal, or a hybrid of the two) are created and produced through ethnographic spectacles in museums, films, and popular culture (i.e. *King Kong*). These modes of representation or modes of "inscription" share the same representational principles as taxidermy (Tobing-Rony 117). Taxidermic representations (museumological or filmic) are staged through racist (and I add ableist, sexual, and gendered) discourses that have effect on the ways in which subjects relate in the world; she argues that the production of racist images is a form of "fascinating cannibalism" where the west's obsession with alterity allows for an eating of the other that takes part through consuming images of bodies through ethnography, scientific museums and popular media (Tobing-Rony 10).<sup>122</sup>

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*Ethnographic Spectacle*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1996; Rachel Adam's book, *Sideshow U.S.A. Freaks and the American Cultural Imagination*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001. 25-59; and Pauline Wakeham's book, *Taxidermic Signs: Reconstructing Aboriginality*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008.

<sup>122</sup> In *Animal Lessons*, Oliver writes that "Derrida maintains that the oppositional limit between animal and man, and even between living and nonliving, has been challenged to the point that the ethical question in relation to animals is not whether they are subjects, sentient or feeling, and so forth and therefore should not be killed, but how to eat them in the most respectful way"; "By *eating* Derrida means not only the physical act of ingesting food but also the metonymical act of interiorizing symbols, language, and social codes. Experience and sensation also are implicated in this eating. All forms of identification and assimilation in relation to the Other (language, meaning, etc.) and others (including animals, plants, and rocks) are literal and/or metaphorical forms of eating" (104, original emphasis). For bell hooks, eating the other means to consume difference in ways that make it nonthreatening. hooks discusses how race and ethnicity are commodified and pleasurably consumed; she writes that "[w]hen race and ethnicity become commodified as resources for pleasure, the culture of specific groups, as well as the bodies of

Taxidermy is not separated from famous ‘freak’ shows or the display of humans in zoos as the examples above have shown that many living humans who were exhibited when they were alive, also had their bodies put on display after their deaths. Julia Pastrana, for instance, was displayed not simply because of her apparent bodily ‘difference’ (a genetic condition known as hypertrichosis terminalis), but also because she was racially dehumanized as an existence between species through the advertisements that labelled her either ‘The Ape Woman’ or ‘Bear Woman.’ Pastrana was a Mexican Indian woman born in 1834 in the Sierra Madre Mountain region of Mexico. She was exhibited in New York in 1854 and became famous in London after touring across Europe in the late 1850s. Taylor writes that “[Pastrana] was analyzed by doctors, anthropologists, and scientists who described her body as ‘hideous,’ ‘deficient,’ ‘extraordinary,’ and ‘hybrid.’” (*Beasts* 105). Analyzing how her gender and race factored into the descriptors of Pastrana’s supposed bodily difference, Taylor explains that “[s]cientists and showmen alike would speculate over whether she was human or ape or whether she might be of African descent (which is where the racist science of the day imagined that a ‘missing link’ between the two would be found). Her ‘feminine figure,’ small waist, delicate feet, ‘remarkably full breasts,’ and lovely singing voice were dramatically contrasted to her body hair, beard, and supposedly masculine and apelike facial features” (*Beasts* 105). Pastrana’s story is significant because after her death in 1860, shortly after birthing her first child, her husband (also her manager), Theodore Lent, had her and her child (who also died shortly after childbirth) embalmed by Professor Sukolov of Moscow University’s Anatomical Institute. After Pastrana’s and her son’s embalming, her husband repurchased their remains and continued to exhibit their bodies (Garland-Thomson, “Making Freaks” 130). Garland-Thomson writes that

By February 1862, Pastrana’s body, along with her baby’s, were being viewed again in London. Now billed as “the Embalmed Female Nondescript,” her viewers were often those who had seen her live performance only a few years earlier. Pastrana’s singular body, not with her son’s, continued to circulate on public exhibition in various museums such as the Prater in Vienna, in circuses, before Royal families, and in amusement parks for well over one hundred years. In 1972, Pastrana’s body toured the United States with a traveling amusement park called the Million Dollar Midways. Because public and religious objections now make Pastrana’s display an embarrassment, her embalmed corpse has been retired to the basement of the Institute of Forensic Museum in Oslo where it is studied by medical experts. (“Making Freaks” 130)

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individuals, can be seen as constituting an alternative playground where members of dominating races, genders, sexual practices affirm their power-over in intimate relations with the Other” (23).

After her death, Pastrana's remains were turned into an object and this process of specimen construction allowed for the autopsic gaze of the public to analyze her body. As of 2013, writes Taylor, Pastrana was finally buried in February after her postmortem remains were placed on display and toured across America for 112 years (*Beasts* 105). Pastrana was often described as a 'nondescript' as her appearance seemingly fell outside of the constructed categories of species formation. The following section will define the nondescript and discuss contemporary taxidermy art that blends the imaginary of human and animal species.

## § 2.7 'Nondescripts,' Mermaids, and the Threats of Human-Animal Taxidermy

In opposition to realist taxidermy aesthetic championed by Akeley in America, some early taxidermists, such as Waterton, have explored species boundaries and created 'monstrosities' through an assemblage of materials. As noted in the previous chapter, Cristina Grasseni has stated that taxidermy, at its core, shares aspects with monstrosity through partiality and artifice by using only parts of an animal body (286). In discussing the 'nondescript,' Grasseni shows how Waterton used his taxidermied creatures to explore his criticisms of the naturalists at the time. In other words, the nondescript criticized and called into question the indexicality of nature and the taxonomy of species through the inception of proper names. Created in 1825, Waterton's *Nondescript* (Fig. 2.7) was a hoax staged as a human-animal hybrid rumored to be a creature caught in South America. The skin on the face of the 'Nondescript' was that of a howler monkey, which was sculpted to resemble a human face.<sup>123</sup> The word 'nondescript' was "a commonly used terminology for animals not yet classified or described by science" (Bogdan, *Freakshow* 136). In eighteenth- and (early) nineteenth-century America, Bogdan states that "[m]any of the exhibits had yet to be classified by taxonomists. Such fields as endocrinology, genetics, and anthropology were in their infancy" (26-27). The nondescript, as a species hybrid, further evoked the discourses about monstrosity; Grasseni writes that "[t]he Nondescript questions precisely the relation of 'fidelity' to 'scientific responsibility': monstrosities are living

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<sup>123</sup> In *Science and Eccentricity*, Victoria Carroll writes that the response to Waterton's 'Nondescript' varied from intrigue to disgust. In one review of Waterton's text *The Wanderings*, the *Literary Gazette* accused Waterton of shooting and stuffing a "very respectable human native" (145). Once it was confirmed that the taxidermied object was sourced from a monkey, not from human flesh, the *Literary Gazette* retracted their statement.





Figure 2.7: Charles Waterton, *Nondescript*, 1825. Taxidermy. Image permission courtesy of Wakefield Council © Wakefield Museum.

debates about what constitutes ‘naturalness’, and about who has the authority to describe and appropriate it” (286). Situating dominant discourses at the time, Henning writes that blending between species (human and animal) created a great deal of uneasiness because such discourses were used to exemplify connections between people of colour and apes. These narratives were perpetuated for the imperial project and could be found in evolutionary texts and popular culture examples (672).

Brewer’s 2007 sculpture *Viva*

*La Barnum* is a taxidermied

nondescript that is a replica of P.T. Barnum’s circus object placed on display to the public as a human-animal hybrid. Brewer’s fascination with the aesthetics of freak shows<sup>124</sup> and nondescripts is influenced by P.T. Barnum (1810-1891), a famous showman who toured his circus across North America and Europe and ran a museum,<sup>125</sup> known as Barnum’s Grand

<sup>124</sup> For an analysis of Brewer’s 2007 sculpture *Forever Yours* that displays a taxidermy rabbit with two heads (one blue, one pink) which share the same body and are positioned in a kissing gesture with their hands and arms in an embrace, see Miranda Niittynen, “Animal Magic: Sculpting Queer Encounters through Rogue Taxidermy Art.” *Gender Forum* 55 (2015): 14-38.

<sup>125</sup> American showman P.T. Barnum had incorporated taxidermy into his many travelling circus shows, known as the “Greatest Show on Earth.” For instance, Barnum went on tour with the elephant known as ‘Jumbo’ who was held in captivity from 1882-1885. In an attempt to escape, Jumbo was hit and killed by a train in St. Thomas, Ontario. Using Jumbo’s death as an opportunity to enthrall patrons at his shows, Barnum told the story of saving ‘Tom Thumb,’ where Jumbo ‘courageously’ gave up his own life by pushing Tom Thumb (a dwarf elephant) away from the train. Jumbo was then stuffed (with bones preserved) by Akeley and displayed with the circus (Nicholls, “Jumbo the Elephant”). Taylor writes that “P.T. Barnum, known for his dazzling ability to make entertainment and profit off of human and animal ‘oddities,’ was an early target of criticism by animal advocates who saw his disregard for animals as an egregious example of the ways carnivals and zoos hid their cruelty behind a façade of family fun” (*Beasts* 108). For more information on the animal advocacy criticisms directed at Barnum’s circus, see Taylor’s chapter, “Animal Insults.” *Beasts of Burden: Animal and Disability Liberation*. New York: The New Press, 2017.101-110.



Scientific and Musical Theatre in New York City.<sup>126</sup> Brewer's *Viva La Barnum* (Fig. 2.8) is one of the many reproduced sculptures of what was once known as the 'Feejee Mermaid' – a 'freak' show gaff that originated in England before travelling to America. Lynette Russell explains a 'gaff' as a "false or fake exhibit"; "Gaffs included the display of Siamese twins that were not really joined and half-man-half-woman exhibits that were in fact men in women's clothing, or women in men's clothing. Exhibits also relied on exaggeration such as giants wearing platform soled boots to increase their size and midgets [sic] surrounded by oversized props to make them appear smaller" (Russell 59). The first display of the Feejee Mermaid took place in 1822 at the Turf Coffeehouse on St. James Street in London (Fig. 2.9). The mermaid was described as a "dried, shrunken and blackened corpse"; "manufactured by attaching the upper torso of a monkey to the body of a fish" (Leja 54). Like the visual caricatures used to overexaggerate and advertise the circus gaffs, the visual representation of the Feejee Mermaid was interpreted through a cultural lens that perceived bodily difference as 'perverse.'

The mermaid drew in large crowds of three to four hundred people a day. Responses to the exhibit ranged from shock of its hideousness (in contrast to representations of feminine mermaids in the eighteenth century) and skepticism over its authenticity (Luke 103; Streissguth 50-51). The mermaid was displayed until 1823 when it was confirmed a fake on December 1822 by Sir Everard Home and his assistant William Clift, the Conservator of the Hunterian Museum in London<sup>127</sup> (Laurent, "Monster or Missing Link?"). Béatrice Laurent writes that after leaving the London café, the Feejee Mermaid was shown at the Bartholomew Fair and the Horse Fair and then "taken to tour the provinces until 1825" ("Monster"). Circulation of the Feejee mermaid imagery began with its early inception. For instance, Steven Levi stated that the original mermaid body was created by a Japanese fisherman in the early nineteenth century who "paraded the curiosity in his native village, saying that he had captured it that day in his net, and claimed that the mermaid had made a prophecy that a great epidemic of sterility would sweep the islands.

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<sup>126</sup> Bonnie Carr O'Neill writes that P.T. Barnum's American museum constantly featured, with specific use of language, "gipsies [sic], Albinoes [sic], fat boys, giants, dwarfs [sic], rope-dancers, live 'Yankees,' ... [and] American Indians, who enacted their warlike and religious ceremonies on the stage"; "these exhibits are themselves characterized by their racial, ethnic, and physiological traits. These exhibits' success speak to the white audience's complete acceptance of its racial superiority as expressed by casual objectification of nonwhite bodies" (34). For more information of P.T. Barnum and his museum, see Bonnie Carr O'Neill's book, *Literary Celebrity and Public Life in the Nineteenth-Century United States*. Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 2017.

<sup>127</sup> The London Hunterian museum of anatomy was opened in 1813 at the Royal College of Surgeons of England.



Figure 2.8: Sarina Brewer, *Viva La Barnum*, 2007. Taxidermy and mixed media. Image used with permission from artist, © Sarina Brewer.

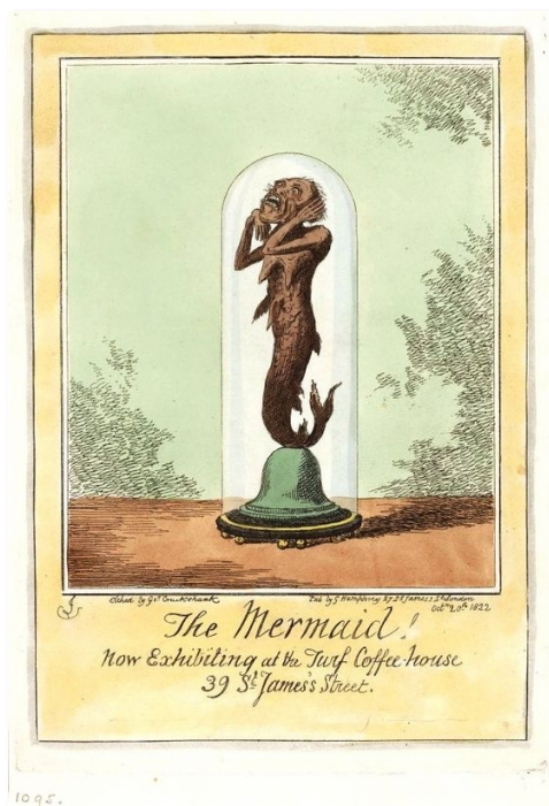


Figure 2.9: George Cruikshank, *The Mermaid!* print made by George Cruikshank in 1822.

The only preventative measure was the possession of a *picture* of the creature” (149, emphasis added). Stephen Asma writes that having left Japan, the Feejee Mermaid then “made its way to the United States in the possession of a sea captain, Samuel Barrett Eades, in the 1820s” (*On Monsters* 306-307 n22). The Feejee Mermaid was purchased in 1840 by “Captain Eades’s son and two American amusement entrepreneurs, Moses Kimball, the owner of the Boston Museum, and his friend, Phineas Taylor Barnum, the manager of the famous circus” (Laurent, “Monster”).<sup>128</sup> Laurent writes that eighteenth-century stories of men encountering mermaids on

<sup>128</sup> For more information about the nineteenth-century Feejee Mermaid, see Steven C. Levi’s article, “P.T. Barnum and the Feejee Mermaid.” *Western Folklore* 36-2 (1977): 149-154; Harriet Ritvo’s book, *The Platypus and the Mermaid, and Other Figments of the Classifying Imagination*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997; Jan Bondeson’s book, *The Feejee Mermaid and Other Essays in Natural and Unnatural History*. New York: Cornell University Press, 1999; Benjamin Reiss’s book, *The Showman and the Slave*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009; Timothy J. Luke’s book, *Politics and Beauty in America: The Liberal Aesthetic of P.T. Barnum, John Muir, and Harley Earl*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016; Michael Leja’s article, “Art and Class in the Era of Barnum.” *Visual Resources* 22.1 (2006): 53-62; and Béatrice Laurent’s article, “Monster or Missing Link? The Mermaid and the Victorian Imagination.” *Cahiers victoriens et édouardiens* 85 (2017): n.p.

ocean travels for colonial expeditions informed both the fascination and wonder of nineteenth-century English scientific and public discourse. These stories were shared orally and little to no proof confirmed these encounters.<sup>129</sup> After the Feejee Mermaid was confirmed a fake, Laurent writes that the “continuing success of the mermaid exhibit was sustained by the assertion that, even if this one specimen was a fake, this did not invalidate the existence of the whole species. Some scientists and a very large part of the common people were still convinced that hybrids did exist, either as contemporary composite animals or as remote ‘missing links’” (“Monster”). In 1842, the Feejee Mermaid was exhibited by P.T. Barnum and was considered one of Barnum’s most sensational exhibits (Levi 149). As I have previously discussed, the threat of collapse between the human/animal binary is what disturbs and unsettles the human viewer. Thus, the fascination towards the mermaid had more to do with locating the (porous) boundary between human and animal, as well as the gendered and racial politics that informed identity at the time. Barnum’s success with the mermaid also had much to do with the fetishization of the object, given that the existence of mermaids was questionable and ungraspable at the time. Michael Leja writes that Barnum “knew that few of his primarily middle-class patrons would accept the name supplied for this artefact, or those attached to his other humbugs, such as the weathered piece of wood he presented as a relic of Noah’s Ark or the old cane he exhibited as Napoleon’s own” (54).

Regarding the mermaid, patrons were mired by the narratives and advertisement hype applied to the object and, as many scholars have expressed, the authenticity of these objects was confirmed through Barnum’s accomplices who posed as naturalists or witnesses to his stories and displays. In the case of the Feejee Mermaid, Barnum’s accomplice, Levi Lyman who posed as Dr. Griffin, was staged as a naturalist from the London Lyceum of Natural History (Leja 55; Reiss 181). Highlighted by her choice to entitle the work *viva la* (‘long live’), Brewer’s replication of the mermaid in her *Viva La Barnum* sculpture shows how objects and narratives

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<sup>129</sup> Béatrice Laurent writes that “[s]ince ocean travels had expanded in the eighteenth century for the purpose of trade and exploration, mermaid sightings should have been reported throughout the globe. Evidence, however, had to be exhumed from distant sources: in the testimonies of a Portuguese, Demas Bosquez, who dissected a mermaid in 1560 and found it to be ‘in all respects conformable to the human’, of Sir Thomas Browne (1605– 1682), and of the Dutch minister and naturalist François Valentijn (or Valentyn) (1666– 1727). More recent sightings near home, off the coast of the Netherlands, of Scotland, of Ireland and even of England, were communicated orally and had not led to the capture, dissection or even drawing from life of a specimen” (“Monster”).

continue to be circulated through visual culture.<sup>130</sup> Since its inception and display in 1822 England, the Feejee Mermaid has continued to travel across cultures in symbolic presence. The original Feejee Mermaid is nonexistent due to its disappearance after 1842. It is rumored that the mermaid was destroyed in the fire that claimed Barnum's American Museum in 1865; however, other theories are that the mermaid burned with Moses Kimball's museum in the 1880s, as the mermaid was displayed between both museums for over twenty years. Since its inception, relics of Feejee Mermaid have been recreated, displayed, and continually encountered in the present day. Other mermaid adaptations are on display in Tombstone, Arizona, Bridgeport, Connecticut, Lewes, Delaware, New Orleans, Louisiana, among many other locations. Notable mermaid copies include the Feejee Mermaid at the Peabody Museum at Harvard University (gifted by the heirs of David Kimball) and The Banff Merman on display in Banff, Alberta, at the Banff Indian Trading Post.<sup>131</sup> The Feejee Mermaid on display at Harvard was rediscovered in 1973 and is speculated to be the 'original' body that was saved from the museum fires; however, the Feejee Mermaid at the Peabody Museum arguably does not resemble what was expressed of the original body (Peabody Museum, "Feejee Mermaid"; Levi 149). In the present day, Brewer is asked to commission sideshow gaffs in her art. She states that the gaffs that she has created and sold are "exhibited and presented to the public [in sideshows] by their owners as the real McCoy" (Colby, "Feature Creature" 76), like the Feejee Mermaids that continue to be displayed as the *original*.

## § 2.8 Conclusion--Creating the Nonhuman through Public Autopsy

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<sup>130</sup> The celebratory 'viva la' in Brewer's sculpture also highlights the popularity of P.T. Barnum as a celebrity icon in America, adding to the erasure of Barnum's exploitation of many nonhuman animals and marginalized persons. The celebratory tone of Barnum's past is no more evident than through Michael Gracey's 2017 musical, *The Greatest Showman*, which romantically depicts Barnum (Hugh Jackman) as a family man who is also an ally to the many human 'attractions' that were displayed in his museum and travelling circus show. Through a white-washed representation of Barnum's rise to fame, Gracey's musical shows Barnum as heavily invested in the lives and employment of the people he, in reality, exploited for economic gain.

<sup>131</sup> Tom Babin writes that "Norman Luxton, the larger-than-life Banff pioneer who founded the Trading Post at the turn of the last century was also a master showman" unveiling the merman in 1915. See Tom Babin's article, "Up Close and Personal with the Banff Merman at the Banff Indian Trading Post." *Calgary Herald* 28 Sept., 2012. <<http://www.calgaryherald.com/close+personal+with+Banff+Merman+Banff+Indian+Trading+Post/7316708/story.html>>

Before Barnum rose to fame with the Feejee Mermaid, his success began with the exhibition of elderly African American slave woman, Joice Heth.<sup>132</sup> In 1835, Barnum purchased and staged Heth as ‘The Greatest Natural and National Curiosity in the World,’ describing her as 161 years old and the former nurse of the infant George Washington (Reiss 1; Asma 135).<sup>133</sup> Heth was toured across America in Barnum’s travelling exhibit before her death on February 19, 1836. In *The Showman and the Slave*, Benjamin Reiss describes Heth as an object of fascination because of deep-seated prejudices surrounding her race and debility in America that allowed her body to be violently represented, mocked, and exploited. Likewise, Garland-Thomson writes that Heth held a “combination of characteristics [that] the ideal American self rejects”; “The black, disabled woman commodified as a freakish amusement testifies to America’s need to ratify a dominant, normative identity by ritually displaying in public those perceived as the embodiment of what collective America took itself *not* to be” (*Extraordinary Bodies* 59, original emphasis). Reiss writes that Heth “was advertised as weighing only forty-six pounds; she was blind and toothless and had deeply wrinkled skin; she was paralyzed in one arm and both legs,” following a description that likens her body to a bird where she had unkept “nails [that] were said to curl out like talons” (2). In addition to descriptors that likened Heth to an animal, her status as human

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<sup>132</sup> Barnum’s exploitation of humans and animals in his circus is wide-ranging beyond what can be addressed in this chapter; however, the argument that animals were used to further dehumanize marginalized humans is highlighted further in Jeff Berglund’s book, *Cannibal Fictions* -- specifically, the example of the Feejee Mermaid. Berglund writes the following (and I quote here at length), “The publication in 1871 of *Descent of Man*, a follow-up to *Origin of Species*, confirmed that Darwin’s revolutionary thinking was still influential, and Barnum was quick to appeal to the popular drama of evolution. In *Barnum’s Living Wonders*, an 1871 pamphlet, the narrator asserts, ‘[w]e understand how it is that in certain portions of Africa, a race of wild hair men exists, perhaps allied to the gorilla, whose entire persons are covered with a mass of long, disgusting hair.’ The confounding of the human/animal binary quite often condensed for Barnum the appeal to evolutionary thinking. According to George Odell’s *Annals of the New York Stage*, appearing during the 1873 season of the Theatre Comique were ‘some Fiji Island Cannibals (cousins, perhaps, to Barnum’s Feejee mermaid of long ago).’ This blurring of animal and human is exactly what I am arguing inheres in the figure of the ‘Fijian cannibal.’ From his display of The Missing Link, a.k.a. Zip the Pinhead, to his Feejee Mermaid (an unconvincing taxidermist’s rendition of a half-fish, half-monkey), to the Fijian Cannibals, Barnum focused Americans’ attention to the collapse of the human/animal binary. Barnum raised doubts in people’s minds about race by creating a substitute reality, by invoking a myth of an unknown (to white civilization) population of subhuman, animal-like beings. Moreover, by highlighting the barbaric practice of cannibalism—and in doing so, invoking metaphorically charged language, ripe with animal parallels—Barnum served to blur further the line between animal and non-Western human, a line non-assimilationists, anti-abolitionists, slaveholders, and pro-expansion Indian-haters were happy to see erased. Many of these so-called savages were nothing of the sort, but rather down and out people of color from Barnum’s own backyard, such as ‘missing link’ Zip the Pinhead, who in reality was a mentally impaired African American man (47-48). For more information, see Jeff Berglund’s book, *Cannibal Fictions: American Explorations of Colonialism, Race, Gender, and Sexuality*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006.

<sup>133</sup> Before touring with Barnum, Heth had been staged by showman R.W. Lindsay who was unable to profit from her exhibit and sold her to Barnum (Reiss 1).

was further called into question. She was the topic of controversy as a potential fraud staged by Barnum, whereas Reiss highlights that the New Haven newspaper “asserted that Heth was in fact a automaton made of India rubber, whalebone, and metal springs, whose voice was ventriloquized by an offstage puppeteer” (2). In advertisements for Barnum’s exhibit, Heth was described as a ‘specimen’ and ‘living skeleton’ (Garland-Thomson, *Extraordinary* 58). While alive, Stephen Asma writes, Heth “made Barnum a decent amount of money and he had glimpsed the potential posterity of showmanship” (Asma 135). In addition to the exploitation Heth experienced throughout her life (as both a slave and a ‘freak’ show curiosity), Barnum further gained a profit through the exploitation of her body after her death. Reiss writes that

In order to gratify public curiosity about Heth’s longevity, Barnum arranged to have an autopsy performed in public (charging 50 cents admission, of course). Over a thousand spectators gathered around a surgical table in a makeshift operating theater in New York’s City Saloon and watched as the respected surgeon David L. Rogers carve into her body. Tens of thousands more followed the story as it was covered in clinical detail and debated in the local papers. Rogers’s surprising conclusion was that Heth could not have been more than eighty years old and that every aspect of her story was therefore a hoax. (2-3)

Like the elephant that was publicly autopsied in Louis XIV’s royal court in 1681, Heth’s remains were staged as a grand spectacle and mistreated as dead nonhuman matter through the autopsic gaze of Barnum and his audiences. Heth’s postmortem body was autopsied six days after her death and made into an object for knowledge gain (the *truth* behind her actual age), the entertainment industry, and for Barnum’s personal profit. The use of animal exploitation helped to stage the dehumanization of Heth’s existence during a time that Black women and men were forcefully and violently enslaved, and also restricted all forms of human recognition, intelligibility, and identity.

Bringing the discussion back to her ties to the nonhuman, Butler’s address of chiasmic relations founded within subject formation complicates any strict divisions between human/nonhuman animal. While this statement is not explicit, I argue there is something worth acknowledging and unpacking from Butler’s writings that not only addresses the fraught terminology of that which we call ‘animal,’ but also expands various forms and potentialities of the nonhuman. As Butler highlights, chiasmic relations are (unmeasurable) forces impressed upon the viewer in ways that makes this relationship continuous and not diametrical. Butler writes in *Senses* that “I am also, as it were, in the ‘hands’ of institutions, discourses,

environments, including technologies and life processes, handled by an organic and inorganic object field that exceeds the human. *In this sense, 'I' am nowhere and nothing without the nonhuman*" (*Senses* 7, emphasis added). Butler adds that "prior to sensing anything at all, I am already in relation not only to one particular other, but to many, to a field of alterity that is not restrictively human" (*Senses* 8). Likewise, she writes that "I am affected not just by this one other or a set of others, but by a world in which humans, institutions, and organic and inorganic processes all impress themselves upon this me who is, at the outset, susceptible in ways that are radically involuntary" (*Senses* 6-7). Through shared corporealities (though not equal) humans and nonhuman animals are vulnerable because they have flesh and skin [or, outer carapaces and other exteriors that are susceptible to puncture] (Butler, *Undoing* 21). For Butler, animal and human are "co-constituted" (76); for the human to be human, she writes, "it must relate to what is nonhuman, to what is outside itself but continuous with itself by virtue of an *interimplication* in life" (*Undoing* 12, emphasis added).

In this chapter, I described the various ways in which bodies were historically conceptualized as 'profane' or 'unruly' and how connections can be drawn across humans and nonhuman animals, not simply by postmortem bodily rights violations, but also by the ways in which species confirm identity and difference. In the next chapter I discuss the shareability of mortality between animals and humans and discuss the complex understanding of death as a 'concept' in the western human purview.



## Chapter 3

### 3 Dead Gazes: Haunting Back and Retributional Agency

#### § 3.1 Purposely Confronting Animal Art

In 2017, the owners of Australian restaurant ‘Etica’<sup>134</sup> drew controversy over hanging a taxidermied cow<sup>135</sup> from the restaurant’s ceiling. The taxidermied cow, named ‘Schvitzy’ by the restaurant owners, is strung from her legs (Fig. 3.1), hung midair in a fixed position that

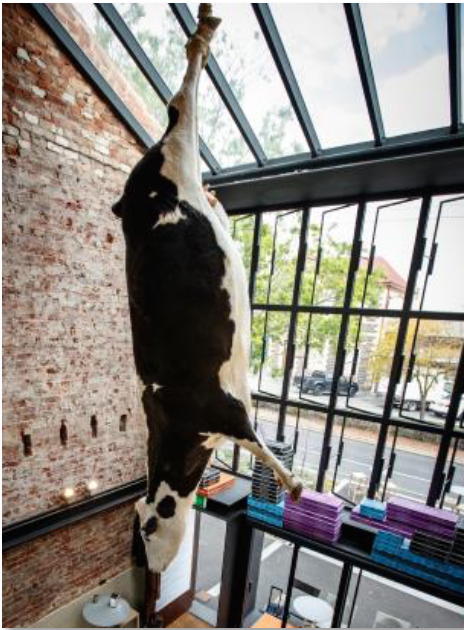


Figure 3.1: *Schvitzy*, taxidermy sculpture displayed at Etica restaurant. Image permission courtesy of Melissa and Federico Pisanelli.

all too affectively resembled livestock hung inside slaughterhouses (Fig. 3.2). Though the taxidermied cow is hung without the visual markers of a bloodied carcass, the sculpture is suspended, with eyes closed, in a speculative position that has the potential to provoke an unsettling mental image to those who encounter the cow inside the restaurant. Many who have responded in upset or horror over the sculpture were perhaps reminded of the violent realities witnessed of livestock in abattoirs, either through personal experience or representations -- such as captured video evidence.<sup>136</sup> In contrast to the violence of factory farms and the further

<sup>134</sup> The establishment is now renamed ‘Bar Etica.’

<sup>135</sup> ‘Schvitzy’ (the name given to the taxidermied cow) was a black and white Friesian-Hereford cross, commissioned from Melbourne Museum taxidermist, Dean Smith. She was slaughtered at Mt. Baker farm and her meat was ‘entirely consumed’ before her skin was taxidermied (Cook, “Social”; Hurst, “People are Really Mad”). The name ‘Schvitzy’ means ‘to sweat’ and calls forth the enforced animal labour and conditions on farms.

<sup>136</sup> Evidence of violence through factory farming and other types of animal exploitation can be seen in various documentaries. For example, Shaun Monson’s 2005 documentary *Earthlings* exposes various forms of violence that humans inflict on animals in order to retain various industries, such as pet owning, food, clothing, entertainment, and scientific research; Robert Kenner’s 2008 documentary film *Food, Inc.* shows the violent treatment of chickens on the farm; Mark Devries’ 2013 documentary *Speciesism: The Movie* shows undercover evidence of factory farms; and, more recently, the documentary release of *Dominion* in 2018, directed by Chris Delforce, advertised as a high definition representation of the violences of animal agriculture.



objectification of animal bodies that are rendered into various byproducts, Schvitzy is not solely



*Figure 3.2: Schvitzy, taxidermy sculpture displayed at Etica restaurant.  
Image permission courtesy of Melissa and Federico Pisanelli.*

symbolic of further objectification, as her taxidermied body, free-floating and upside down, has the potential to work against the objectification of cow hides used as products for décor or as carpeting. Through the Etica display, Schvitzy hangs as a reversal of the absent referent of meat consumption or disembodied consumer object; Schvitzy's bodily position haunts from the

concealed spaces of the slaughterhouse. According to the restaurant, the motives for hanging Schvitzky were to raise the debate over eating meat and other animal byproducts, such as dairy. The Etica display is meant to provoke dialogue about the choice one makes regarding consuming animals, as the restaurant's name is emblematic of moral debate: 'Etica,' is Italian word for *ethics* (Etica website, "Seasonal Menu"). Online social media responses called the decision to install the taxidermied cow "disgusting" and "obscene," while restaurant owners Federico and Melissa Pisanelli responded that the cow is "purposely confronting," used to "highlight the realities of the (dairy) industry" (Cook, "Social Media Backlash"). Federico Pisanelli further states that the decision to display the cow is not for the purposes of marketing their business, but is an "expression in line with [their] own principles" (Cook, "Social"). On the restaurant's door sign, the Pisanelli's have posted an ethical mandate to explain the taxidermy sculpture. The sign states that "[d]esigned to reflect a slaughterhouse x glasshouse, Etica Pizza a Taglio is dominated by themes of confrontation and transparency"; *"Eating is a decisive act. As food and dining culture evolves, we should not obscure from where our meal originates. Animal industries continue to grow more efficiently and intensively, yet consumers receive a misrepresented idyllic image of farm life. Industry bodies are diminishing our ability to make conscious decisions"* (Etica Project Mandate, emphasis added).<sup>137</sup> Etica's "Seasonal Menu" states that "all animal derived products are sourced from farms that practice with the highest animal welfare standards" (Etica, "Seasonal Menu").<sup>138</sup> The restaurant serves both dairy and meat products.<sup>139</sup>

The example of the Schvitzky sculpture displayed at Etica opens a larger dialogue about sculptures that are *purposely confronting* and seek to expose the violent realities of animal suffering. Artistic and taxidermic representations of the violent realities of factory farms add to the ongoing debates over animal rights and what it means to bear witness to violence inflicted on

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<sup>137</sup> The Etica Project Mandate includes statistical information on exploitative acts practiced by Australia's dairy industry. The mandate includes information on the horrible conditions and maltreatment of dairy cows through the artificial impregnation of female heifers (beginning at 15 to 18 months old) and continued impregnation until these heifers are no longer "financially viable" to produce milk, the forced removal of calves upon birth (which causes extreme forms of distress to mothers), the violent slaughter of 'bobby calves' (approximately 36,000 calves are slaughtered on a farm every year either by chemical euthanasia, firearm, or blunt force trauma), and the unaccountable maltreatment of breeder animals (vulnerable to unaccountable cruelty in importing countries). Thank you to Melissa and Federico Pisanelli for providing the project information, available at the Bar Etica restaurant.

<sup>138</sup> See the seasonal menu at < [https://etica.pizza/assets/2017\\_menu-7-june.pdf](https://etica.pizza/assets/2017_menu-7-june.pdf) >

<sup>139</sup> The Bar Etica owners have responded on social media that they are on a "moral journey" and that "[they] do not aim to [have] influence on whether one should consume dairy, but rather, [they] urge [their] consumers to understand the origin of their food in order to make a conscious decision on whether to eat it" (Cook, "Social").

animals. For instance, many animal rights activists use video evidence of factory farming to expose the processes that take place in producing dairy and meat products for human consumption (among many other institutions that violently exploit animals). Given that the Schvitzky sculpture only potentially provokes a mental image of the factory farms, it is important to ask what ‘haunting traces’ or ‘sticky affects’ sculptures such as these create when encountered by human viewers. There is no guarantee that rogue taxidermy sculptures can or will provoke reactions in the name of animal rights; however, it is important to discuss what Sara Ahmed calls the “affective economies” spurred on by the political tactics of animal rights activists and artists that use violent depictions of animal trauma and horror in their work. Ahmed explains affective economies as feelings that do not reside in subjects or objects, but feelings that arise as “effects of circulation,” relations, and contacts (*The Cultural Politics of Emotion* 8). In this chapter, I address some avenues whereby rogue taxidermy art may provoke ethical engagements and political insights for onlookers, while also acknowledging that taxidermy is always at odds with ethics because it involves the historical and colonial exploitation of dead animals.

This chapter discusses what Teresa Goddu calls ‘haunting back,’ a practice that utilizes the gothic or horror genre to rewrite, critique, and satirize ideals of colonial national identity. In this project, I discuss the illusion of animal *life* through rogue taxidermy that depicts various representations of animal *deaths*. I discuss how the taxidermy art of Angela Singer and MART co-founder Scott Bibus utilize ‘haunting back’ through representations of blood, violence, and what can be considered the ‘event’ of death in their art. Though different in their aesthetic practices, both Bibus and Singer display animal bodies in unsettling and gory spectacles; however, the use of spectacle is intentional in order to confront the often-invisible processes that exploit animals’ bodies. Both Bibus and Singer state that they use taxidermy to address animal rights abuses (Singer, “Making the Dead More Visible”; Chin, “Caution”; Minnesota Association of Rogue Taxidermy, “Primary Directive of MART”). Both artists show the violent acts inflicted on animals in order to unveil what is most often hidden through the practice of traditional and realist taxidermy. Singer does this by showing the violences that take place through the practice of hunting animals. She portrays blood and guts, wounds and scars that are hidden in the enactment of taxidermy. Bibus, on the other hand, shows the effects of industrialization and urbanization on animal bodies; his representations include roadkill, disease, and factory farming.

Unlike Brewer's hybrid creatures that are staged to speak back to the history of bodies on display (§ 2 **Autopsic Gaze**), Singer's and Bibus's art attempts to provoke response through the various ways in which animals suffer ecologically and at the hands of human-made historical and modern technologies, institutions, and philosophies. In this chapter, I unpack the ways in which rogue taxidermy artists produce unsettling sculptures through the visual portrayal of violence and death. Through a reversed logic, rogue taxidermists utilize realistic images of animal death and trauma to counter the historical display of animals represented as 'alive' and 'in-action' in traditional exhibits. I discuss the potential that Singer's and Bibus's art have to produce what I call a 'retributational agency' in their art. I describe retributational agency as an affective engagement of awareness of animal (and self-) death that intentionally provokes an unsettling (and, yet, arguably valuable) response. Unsettling rogue taxidermy has the potential to pressure viewers to disengage and refuse to look and this affective response is perhaps agential through each engagement and encounter. Describing affective discomfort, Ahmed writes that "[d]iscomfort is a feeling of disorientation: one's body feels out of place, awkward, unsettled"; "the sense of out-of-place-ness and estrangement involves an acute awareness of the surface of one's body, which appears *as* surface, when one cannot inhabit the social skin, which is shaped by some bodies, and not others" (*The Cultural* 148, original emphasis).<sup>140</sup> Her notion of unsettlement is furthered in *Strange Encounters* where she writes that "[o]ne encounters, one has a close encounter, where something happens that is surprising, and where 'we' establish an alliance through the very process of being unsettled by that which is not yet" (180). In the case of rogue taxidermy, the sculpture is unsettling because it shows the potential threats of something to come, such as the threat of bodily violence and vulnerability (within skins) or the decay of one's flesh through disease and decay. Such encounters are likened to Julia Kristeva's concept of the abject,<sup>141</sup> where the body reacts to the object or other that exposes a previous notion of selfhood

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<sup>140</sup> For Ahmed, disorientation happens when the dominant social norm of heterosexuality is upset by bodies that engage in nonnormative queer acts. The queer moment of disruption and disorientation of norms shows an underlying failure for Ahmed, who writes that "[i]f orientation is about making the strange familiar through the extension of bodies into space, then disorientation occurs when that extension fails" (*Queer Phenomenology* 11). Because of social norms, straight lines, alignment, and heterosexuality come to dominate our ways of thinking through a repetition of the norms of body and space and, as a result, disorientation, or the moment of queer perception, is continually reiterated, re-oriented, and redirected on the 'proper' or 'straight' path.

<sup>141</sup> Julia Kristeva writes that the abject is "the jettisoned object, [it] is radically excluded and draws me toward the place where meaning collapses"; "A massive and sudden emergence of uncanniness, which, familiar as it might have been in an opaque and forgotten life, now harries me as radically separate, loathsome. Not that. But not nothing, either. A 'something' that I do not recognize as a thing" (*Powers of Horror* 2).

that is presumably unthreatened by contagion.

The abject, as a provocation of disgust, is a reaction to what is already instilled inside of the self, as something that must be rejected and expunged from the body. When corpses are made present, through the aesthetics of revealing in rogue taxidermy, the recognition of dead matter is writ large through the potential affective responses on the human viewer.<sup>142</sup> Kristeva writes that the abject involves the self's reaction to spoiled or undesirable food and other materials such as dirt, waste, and fecal matter that are rejected and expelled from the body (*Powers of Horror* 2). In Singer's and Bibus's art, the abject matter of guts, blood, skin decay, pus, and other grotesque bodily fluids overflow and expel from the sculptures. For Kristeva, when one witnesses or encounters a dead corpse, it is the realization of becoming a potential corpse that unsettles the viewer. She writes that

The corpse (or cadaver: *cadere*, to fall), that which has irremediably come a cropper, is cesspool, and death: it upsets even more violently the one who confronts it as fragile and fallacious chance. A wound with blood and pus, or the sickly, acrid smell of sweat, of decay, does not *signify* death [...] corpses *show me* what I permanently thrust aside in order to live. These body fluids, this defilement, this shit are what life withstands, hardly and with difficulty, on the part of death. There, I am at the border of my condition as a living being. My body extricates itself, as being alive, from that border. Such wastes drop so that I might live, until, from loss to loss, nothing remains in me and my entire body falls beyond the limit – *cadere*, cadaver. (Kristeva, *Powers* 3, original emphasis)

Through various examples, Kristeva describes the abject as not simply a bodily reaction, but a psychological rejection of that which is already contaminated and lurking inside oneself. Reading Kristeva's concept of abject in conversation with her concept of affect, Ahmed writes that "[p]ulling back, bodies that are disgusted are also bodies that feel a certain rage, a rage that the object has got close enough to sicken, and to be taken over or taken in. To be disgusted is after all *to be affected by what one has rejected*" (*The Cultural* 86, original emphasis). In the case of taxidermy, it is not simply the witnessing of one's vulnerability (a shared vulnerability of having penetrable skins and vulnerable bodies to violence) that make humans experience disgust and discomfort, but it is the shareability of mortal finitude with animals that provokes an unsettling feeling through these encounters (more to follow).

Singer's and Bibus's sculptures are retributinal not simply because they have potential

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<sup>142</sup> For an analysis of Singer's artwork in conversation with Kristeva's notion of the abject, see Miranda Johnson's "'The Other Who Precedes and Possesses Me': Confronting the Maternal/Animal divide through the Art of Botched Taxidermy." *Feral Feminisms* 6 (2014): n.p.

to provoke an affective response from the horror witnessed by the taxidermied object, but also because the taxidermy sculpture is staged in counteractive acts against humans (such as consuming human flesh). The sculptures are made agential because the artists display animals as ‘beings-towards-death’ (self-aware of their death or ‘as such’) through representations on the faces of each sculpture. In other words, these sculptures work against the assumptions in continental philosophy that animals are unaware of their ability to die (and seemingly perish) and that humans, by contrast, are self-aware of what death is and what it entails -- though death, as a concept, remains defined solely in human terms (discussed further in this chapter). Jacques Derrida writes that “[n]o one can deny the suffering, fear, or panic, the terror or fright that can seize certain animals and that we humans can witness” (*The Animal* 26). Yet, he writes, “[s]ome will still try [...] to contest the right to call that *suffering* or *anguish*, words or concepts that would still have to be reserved for man and for the *Dasein* in the freedom of its being-toward-death” (Derrida, *The Animal* 26, original emphasis).<sup>143</sup> Unlike anthropocentric claims by scientists and philosophers (who historically argued that animals did not experience pain or did not suffer),<sup>144</sup> Derrida makes clear that animals can express their suffering. Ahmed does not

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<sup>143</sup> For Martin Heidegger, ‘Dasein’ (or ‘being-there’) is defined as the entity that thinks about and takes issue with its own existence. In *Sein und Zeit*, Heidegger writes that “Dasein is a being that does not simply occur among other beings. Rather it is ontically distinguished by the fact that in its being this being is concerned *about* its very being. Thus it is constitutive of the being of Dasein to have, in its very being, a relation of being to this being. And this in turn means that Dasein understands itself in its being [Sein] in some way and with some explicitness. It is proper to this being that it be disclosed to itself with and through its being. *Understanding of being is itself a determination of being of Dasein* [Seinsverständnis ist selbst eine Seinsbestimmtheit des Daseins]. *The ontic distinction of Dasein lies in the fact that it is ontological*” (Heidegger 11, original emphasis). Note that ‘man’ and ‘Dasein’ are not to be used interchangeably; as Claire Colebrook points out, “Heidegger’s *Dasein* aimed to be less of a single grounding substance (not a retrieval of what *really is*, and certainly not another name for man), and more of a way of thinking the ways in which something like ‘presence’ was unfolded *from* distributed or relational fields” (“Not Symbiosis, Not Now” 192, original emphasis). My discussion of Dasein is treated more fully later in this chapter; see § 3.4: **Dead Gazes and Death, as such**. For more information on the definition of Dasein, see the second edition of Joan Stambaugh’s translation of Heidegger’s *Being and Time*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010.

<sup>144</sup> Many rationalist philosophers in the west historically maintained that animals do not suffer and supported, practiced, and advocated for vivisection. Perhaps the most influential being the neo-Cartesian stream of thought by writers who disregarded animal sentience from Rene Descartes’ description of animals as “bête machine” (pure automata). From these sentiments, rationalists have argued that animals have no soul or capacity for reason and therefore could not suffer. Other thinkers and physiologists influenced by Cartesian philosophy on animals and/or practiced vivisection because they saw animals as machines were François Bayle, Antoine Le Grand, Nicolas Malebranche, and Antoine Arnauld. For more information on the influences of Cartesian philosophy on the treatment of animals, see Jordan Curnutt’s chapter, “History of Lab Animal Use and its Legal Regulation.” *Animals and the Law*. Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2001. 433-440; Erica Fudge’s book, *Brutal Reasoning: Animals, Rationality, and Humanity in Early Modern England*. Ithica: Cornell University Press, 2006; Jodey Castricano’s chapter, “Animal Subjects: in a Posthuman World.” *Animal Subjects: An Ethical Reader in a Posthuman World*. Ed. Jodey Castricano. Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier Press, 2008. 1-32; and Kelly Oliver’s chapter, “Biting the Hand that

assume that humans can read all types of emotions and responses made by others. This is the tangled web of affect that she describes; she writes that

Shared feelings are at stake, and seem to surround us, like a thickness in the air, or an atmosphere. But these feelings not only *heighten tension*, they are also *in tension*. Emotions in their very intensity involve miscommunication, such that even when we feel we have the same feeling, we don't necessarily have the same relationship to the feeling. Given that shared feelings are not about feeling the same feeling, or feeling-in-common, I suggest that it is the objects of emotion that circulate, rather than emotion as such. (*The Cultural* 10-11, original emphasis)

Representations of violence in these sculptures invite witnessing, but, as Ahmed reminds her readers, visual awareness and affective response is not clearly demarcated, nor do all humans respond or feel the same. Responses are dependent on who is looking and what pre-established experiences allow them to recognize these taxidermied sculptures as more than objects and offer up compassionate engagement as a witness to animal deaths.

In the sections that follow, I ponder on the effects of haunting through the following categories: § 3.4: **Dead Gazes**, § 3.5: **Zombie Aesthetics**, and § 3.6: **Interspecies Eating**. The taxidermy images that I discuss in this chapter do not simply look back at the audience, but invite humans to bear witness to, experience, and visualize an 'event' of animal trauma. The sculptures that I discuss throughout this chapter stage animals suffering and create visual imagery of the various ways that animals die by the hands of humans. Digging deeper into the history of colonialism that founded the production of taxidermic creatures, I look to the similarities between the figure of the 'un/dead' or 'zombie' to analyze the haunting effects of taxidermy – especially taxidermy that addresses human and nonhuman relations in the present.

## § 3.2      Death in Taxidermy Art

Prior to discussing the visual representation of violence and gore, I note that rogue taxidermists in various fashions employ a representational technique that responds to the display of alive and active animals in traditional taxidermic sculptures. Employing unconventional styles of body preservation, UK taxidermy artist Polly Morgan creates sculptures that depict animals as arguably peaceful, lifeless, in resting positions; however, her other sculptures and installations

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Feeds You: The Role of *Animals* in Philosophies of Man.” *Animal Lessons: How They Teach Us to Be Human*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2009. 1-22.

depict animals in anguish and haunted by death. Simply posing animals as dead as opposed to alive, Morgan's artwork directly responds to the history of taxidermy that has staged lifelike animal sculptures in nature exhibits. In her displays, Morgan plays with the tension between life and death. Because animals have been historically killed for the purposes of display, conservation is at odds with preservation, just as animal art and ethics are in immediate tension. As the previous chapters have discussed, animal skin is associated with the profane body, whereas whiteness is considered sacred in various cultural forms in the west. From these principles, Morgan's taxidermy art undoes several of the associations of race and class tied to religious mortuary rituals found within the Catholic Church.<sup>145</sup> For instance, Morgan uses glass coffins and religious texts as sacred sarcophaguses for her taxidermied bird sculptures. Glass coffins and religious texts are reminiscent of sacred objects used in the processes of preservation and display of worshipped Roman saints. In Morgan's sculptures, the taxidermied birds are given a dignified afterlife that involves the ways in which the staging of the birds with sacred objects goes against the norms and expectations of how animals are buried or displayed. Ahmed discusses the affective response of wonder, as a feeling when something happens out of the repetitions of the ordinary and, as a result, one is left surprised with what they experienced (*The Cultural* 180). Because the birds are celebrated in sacred ways normally offered to human bodies, the birds stand out as meaningful through the frames of human rituals.

In other examples of her work, Morgan places taxidermied animal bodies on display with aristocratic objects, such as chandeliers, beds, mirrors, and other objects that are suggestive of Victorian domestic furnishings, in order to give her dead animal sculptures 'dignified' afterlives. Morgan's *To Every Seed His Own Body* (2006), *A Thousand Years in Thy Presence* (2007) and *Vestige* (2009) each depict a singular bird – eyes closed and in its final resting position – on top of a prayer book inside a glass bell jar. Bell jars contribute to the production of vacuums, not simply in isolating a taxidermied object from outside elements and the various threats of infestation and decay, but, also, as symbols of anthropocentrism. The bell jar and other

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<sup>145</sup> Margrit Shildrick writes in "Monsters, Marvels and Metaphysics" that "[m]ore pertinent for its immediate context was the question of whether such a creature should be baptised. If the soul were an attribute of human beings alone, and baptism the necessary gateway to salvation, then the church faced a very real dilemma about the appropriate response to the monstrous births which confounded the putative boundaries of the human. The early seventeenth-century canonist, Alphonzo a Carranza, offered the formula that 'those having human form can and ought to be washed by holy baptism and those truly monstrous, which lack rational souls, not.' Nonetheless, the problem of radical hybridity, and what it signifies of inner being, remains" (309-310).



glass air pump receivers were technologies of the Enlightenment, designed and created in 1659 by natural philosopher Robert Boyle and his assistant Robert Hooke (Baudot 1). Boyle's first pneumatics<sup>146</sup> experiment involved a bird (skylark) trapped inside the air pump receiver from which the air was dislodged (Donald 6). The technological field of pneumatics was concerned with the mechanical property of gases and pressurized air and Boyle's experiments were meant to show that air is essential to sentient life. A century after Boyle's initial experiment, English painter Joseph Wright represented the experiment in his 1768 painting *An Experiment on a Bird in the Air Pump* (Fig. 3.3). The painting depicts a candlelit domestic scene where a long-haired man demonstrates the experiment on a white cockatoo to a group of women, children, and men. Some of the onlookers in the painting express their distress over the experiment on the bird that is imprisoned and lays lifeless at the bottom of the glass vacuum globe.

Boyle's experiments were normally demonstrated on undomesticated birds, such as sparrows, skylarks, and ducks (Siebert 66), whereas Wright's painting uses a rare white cockatoo. In *Picturing Animals in Britain, 1750-1850*, Diana Donald speculates that the cockatoo in the painting was a pet to the family, expressed not simply by the distressed appearance of one of the little girls, but also by the empty cage hung inside the room (1). Postmortem animals, through various human acts, are deprived of bodily rights and consent, but not all animals (pets and other animal companions) are objectified without human mourning.<sup>147</sup> Christina Colvin writes that "pets are not supposed to go through the process of taxidermy due to their 'more than animal' status" (69). Unlike pets, undomesticated animals were more frequently experimented on for scientific research. In contrast to Victorian (Wardian) styles of animal furniture that make animals into objects without *spirit*, Morgan's taxidermied bird sculptures are seemingly her attempts to stage animals in holy spaces to die; however, the encasement within bell jars plays on what Laura Baudot has discussed in Wright's painting as the dialectical relationship between "Christian interpretations of the world and Enlightenment science" (4). On the one hand, Morgan's birds are more than lifelike taxidermied specimens; they are separated from the symbolism tied to glass jars as her sculptures are given spaces to die. As Giorgio Agamben

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<sup>146</sup> Pneumatics is a field of physics or technology concerned with the mechanical property of gases and pressurized air. The experiment represented in Wright's painting was meant to show that air is vital to sentient life (Schlick 323).

<sup>147</sup> For more information on various cultural practices tied to animal mourning, see Margo DeMello's introduction to *Mourning Animals: Rituals and Practices Surrounding Animal Death*. Ed. Margo DeMello. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2016. xvii-xxv.



Figure 3.3: Joseph Wright, *An Experiment on a Bird in the Air Pump*, 1758. Painting. Image available in the Public Domain.

writes that “[r]eligion can be defined as that which removes things, places, animals, or people from common use and transfers them to a separate sphere” (*Profanations* 74) and that profane objects are “the thing that is returned to the common use of men” and are “pure, profane, free of sacred names” (73), Morgan’s birds are portrayed as encased and separated from the space of common use. Like saints that are more than human, Morgan’s birds become more than simply animal. In other words, Morgan’s taxidermied birds are offered not exclusively the sacred rituals of *humane*<sup>148</sup> deaths, but also the status of a saint. Because of these representations, animals are perhaps considered ‘worthy’ of human grief and mourning in their afterlives. Morgan’s resting animals thus work against a colonial history that perpetuates and constructs animals (and other nonwhite and/or disabled human bodies) as inferior, abundant, and valueless matter to be

<sup>148</sup> The word humane casts an imperceptibility of human presence. To be *humane* is to have qualities befitting to human beings and is in opposition to the *inhumane*, that of the ‘brute’ or ‘savage’ (the animalistic or nonhuman).

dominated, studied, and objectified upon death. On the other hand, Morgan's birds continue to be imprisoned by vacuumed glass jars that were historically used to torture, if not simply kill, birds for the advancement of Enlightenment knowledge. As Tamar Schlick interprets Wright's painting, she reminds her readers that "the bird's fate is controlled entirely by the demonstrator who can open the air passage or leave it shut" (2).

Different from the resting positions displayed in Morgan's bell jar stagings, her installation, *Carrion Call*,<sup>149</sup> depicts a darker portrayal of animal deaths. In her sculpture, a group of chicks are gathered and bursting from the cracks of an aged and decaying wood coffin.<sup>150</sup> Each bird is positioned beside another in a suffocating state of duress. Squeezed together closely within the cracks (like chicks slaughtered on the assembly line in chicken hatcheries), the birds publicly mourn death and decay. This is observable through the art piece's title, *Carrion Call* – the cry of un/dead animals haunting from their loss of life. The 'call' is not simply an adjective, but also a verb that urges viewers to witness the cries of the chicks in the sculpture. Bursting from the coffin – or the house of the dead – the chicks break through the restricted boundaries of human manufactured rituals and portrayals of death, as well as the human perceived authority over the slaughter of animal lives.

As the chicks squeeze through the cracks of the coffin, the viewer is reminded that, even in death, decay involves life and movement. Jeffrey J. Cohen uses the neologism 'grey ecology' to describe the invisible, yet animated, processes of death and decay. He writes that grey ecology "reveals the inhuman as a thriving of life in other forms, a vitality even in decay that demonstrates how the nonhuman is already inside, cohabitating and continuing" (Cohen, "Grey" 272). In concert with Cohen's description of what he calls 'grey ecology,' Derrida writes previously that

Beyond the edge of the *so-called* human, beyond it but by no means on a single opposing side, rather than "The Animal" or "Animal Life" there is already a heterogeneous multiplicity of the living, or more precisely (since to say "the living" is already to say too

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<sup>149</sup> Polly Morgan's 2009 installation *Carrion Call* depicts a decaying wood coffin that has taxidermied chicks bursting from its cracks. The image of the installation has been removed because of copyright restrictions. An image of Morgan's installation can be found on the artist's website, < <http://pollymorgan.co.uk/works/carrion-call/> >

<sup>150</sup> Polly Morgan's funerary sculptures of birds can be likened to Walter Potter's 1861 taxidermy tableaux *The Death & Burial of Cock Robin*. The tableaux included close to a hundred birds. Pat Morris and Joanna Ebenstein write that "[f]our species [of birds] are included that are now rare or extinct in Sussex (red-backed shrike, ciril bunting, wryneck, hawfinch)" (47). The animals are depicted in position of mourning, including "some shown crying glass tears," as pallbearer birds carry the open casket (Morris and Ebenstein 47). The scene is inspired by the nursery rhyme poem with the same title (Poliquin, *Breathless* 182).

much or not enough), a multiplicity of organizations of relations between living and dead, relations of organization or lack of organization among realms that are more and more difficult to dissociate by means of the figures of the organic and inorganic, of life and/or death. These relations are at once intertwined and abyssal, and they can never be totally objectified. (*The Animal* 31)

Both Derrida and Cohen highlight the ways in which perception and conception of the processes of life and death are ungraspable, indefinable, and flawed. Representations of events of trauma are complicated by conceptual frameworks that make translation of these experience difficult to express in human language; however, art opens up a plethora of different ways to express, interpret, and respond to trauma.

Singer and Bibus seek to make their taxidermied animal sculptures voice their own pain and suffering. Bodies in their work are temporal, affected by the environment, and exceeding the limits of constructed spatial boundaries. From this position, their taxidermied sculptures are not simply defunct objects, but are active in their cries of agony. As the following pages will show, both Bibus's and Singer's sculptures evoke the abject; specifically, each taxidermic body is displayed in agony, uncomfortable, dripping, protruding, and spilling over its tight-fitting skin. Using an aesthetic at odds with Bibus's, Singer's sculptures are portrayed through human manufactured materials, such as lace, synthetic flowers, strings, ribbon, buttons, and gems as symbols for blood and guts; however, these human manufactured materials are also heavily bound up with the animal byproduct industry that has a history of producing crafts from rendered animal bodies. For instance, sheep's wool has been used to make yarn, animal bone to make buttons, and the boiling down of animal connective tissue to make adhesives such as glue. Using these materials complicates the various avenues where animal bodies are exploited through artistic representation and how animal deaths (real and symbolic) circulate through everyday encounters with objects and products.

Some of Singer's sculptures are more approachable than Bibus's unapologetic zombie sculptures. Bibus's sculptures put into action the body in pain. The severity of his zombie depictions can throw the viewer into disorder and incite a form of disgust and fright. Both Singer's and Bibus's sculptures contrast sanitized displays of realism found within natural history museums—in ways, however, that are incompatible from each other. In *The Breathless Zoo*, Rachel Poliquin writes that examples of taxidermy in the nineteenth century sought to produce a spectacle of animal violence, such as animals hunting other animals, and this was for

the purposes of presenting the private life of animals for human curiosity (82). Poliquin stresses that the affective power of nineteenth-century taxidermy ‘spectacles’ rests in their “artful artlessness” (*Breathless* 83); in other words, realist taxidermy’s exposed function is to hide that it is simply a representation of life with dead animal materials. Likewise, Jane Desmond writes that “[t]axidermy presents specimens performing specific behaviours from a limited repertoire of approved activities,” providing viewers with what she calls activity “without risk” (*Displaying Death* 36-37). “The more invisible the technologies that make this preservation and presentation possible,” Desmond argues, “the more spectacular the spectacle” (*Displaying* 37). It is for this reason that Bibus’s and Singer’s art disrupts the spectacle in the traditional taxidermic sense. Both artists do not seek to simply titillate human curiosity through over exaggerated display; rather, they seek to engage viewers in bearing witness to animal trauma. They do this through unfolding the violence *on the skin* or suffering on the face of the animal by producing a reverse spectacle of the hidden and bloody processes of human technologies that have informed the practice of taxidermy.

### § 3.3 Taxidermy and Women’s Craft

Writing on the skin of a hunted animal, Singer’s sculptures are shown with unfolded scars and bullet wounds from the initial encounter between hunter and killed ‘prey.’ In her work, blood is portrayed through human manufactured objects, such as red beads and buttons, zippers, ribbons, yarn, or jewelry. For example, Singer’s sculpture *Catch-Caught* (Fig. 3.4) depicts a recycled taxidermy rabbit with its blood and entrails pouring from its abdomen. The rabbit hangs midair, like a puppet. The yarn holding red buttons is reminiscent of marionette strings, but also the blood pouring from the gutted body of the rabbit who has been hunted. Similar to Singer’s other sculptures, the staging of the rabbit is politically motivated, in order to unveil the violence that takes place when rabbits are killed, gutted, and hung for their meat and fur. Her motivations are to make visible the dead body as body, not simply the extracted skins from the once-living animal. Imitating the posture of a puppet, taxidermied animals are also hollowed out objects that come to life through the handiwork of humans. In Singer’s depiction, however, the insides are left on display to show what is taken away through the process of creating taxidermied objects for display.



Figure 3.4: Angela Singer, *Catch Caught*, 2007. Vintage taxidermy and mixed media.  
Image used with permission from artist, © Angela Singer.

Influenced by feminist animal rights politics, Singer's aesthetic utilizes women's craft as a means to juxtapose the human manufactured objects of 'value' with the (often donated) dead animal materials she repurposes. In her 2004 sculpture, *Recovered*, Singer refashions a buck's head that is mounted on a wood slab onto a headless taxidermied buck's body. This gesture highlights the processes of dismemberment (literal and symbolic) when taxidermied heads are mounted and subsequently hung on walls. Likewise, Singer's 2002 piece *Deer-atize* (Fig. 3.5) depicts a doe and fawn without heads. Unlike antlers mounted on a wall that are symbolic of trophy taxidermy, the headless deer bodies become symbols for the absent referent of hunting that utilizes the body for other types of exploitation, such as meat consumption. Singer's sculpture calls attention to what is staged and what is left behind when animal heads are mounted. The bodies haunt as traces of what once was in opposition to the surplus of objectified animal heads that are normalized in the west (discussed in greater detail in § 4 **Taxidermied Commodities**).



Singer plays with gender throughout her displays, attempting to create an activist and political response to her work. She states that, having been influenced by Carol Adams's work in the nineties, her work took on a feminist framework and she began to address the deep-seated objectification and oppression shared by women and animals (Singer, "Making" 162). Singer utilizes craft to make her sculptures beautiful, even as they depict animal death. Blood is symbolized through beads and other feminine objects.<sup>151</sup> Through her depictions of blood, Singer addresses the many ways that the historical practice of taxidermy erases and hides the blood and



Figure 3.5: Angela Singer, *Deer-atize*, 2002. Installation. Image used with permission from artist, © Angela Singer.

violence that takes place during the hunt. It is Singer's position to *make the dead more visible* ("Making" 164), which she attempts to evoke through her sculptures. Her art is arguably more palatable because of her use of feminine objects.

Addressing the gender dynamics in her own work, Singer states that she uses women's craft materials with taxidermy specifically to address the "materials devalued by the art world as lowly craft resources or feminine forms" ("Making" 164). Because taxidermy is associated with masculine practices, such as hunting, Singer's engagements with craft materials – traditionally associated

with women – trouble easy translations, such as complacent objectification of animals in realist taxidermy. Singer mixes dead skins and fur, what she calls the 'natural,' with jewelry, what she

<sup>151</sup> The objects she uses are not innately *feminine*; such arguments would be problematic at best. That is, the object itself is not feminine, but the associations and contacts with these objects are tied historically to women's labour and western gendered norms related to bodily adornment. The ties to femininity in the objects she uses involve the affective association of femininity to jewelry and other textiles that have historically been associated with women's work and craft.

labels ‘unnatural.’ Her choices for using jewelry are informed by its symbolic effect of “power, wealth and status” (Singer, “Making” 164-165); she states that in her art “[f]ur is encrusted with ornate or kitsch inorganic growth, infested with glinting jewels beckon” (165). Singer’s decisions to mix these two different materials (the natural with the unnatural; fur with jewelry) is her way to bring value back to the animal. Because jewelry is associated with class privilege and power, it holds affective weight and elite or monetary connotations for the human onlooker.



Figure 3.6: Angela Singer, *Still*, 2015. *Vintage taxidermy and mixed media*. Image used with permission from artist, © Angela Singer.

Even if jewelry creates an appealing response in Singer’s art, violence is always lurking in the background of her sculptures. Unlike Schvitzky’s floating body (that has eyes closed), the uncanny effects of traditional taxidermy function through the realism of each sculpture’s eyes or gaze. Historically, taxidermy was considered most successful when the animal’s eyes were realistic enough to capture an intimate gaze (albeit illusory) with the human onlooker. As Poliquin writes, “[t]here is no taxidermy without human longing to perpetuate the ability to *look* at animals”

(*Breathless* 82, emphasis added). It is for this reason that Singer’s 2015 *Dead Eyed* collection (Fig. 3.6) is significant for this discussion.<sup>152</sup> In Singer’s *Dead Eyed* collection, each sculpture lacks realistic

(lifelike) eyes and are, instead, replaced with ‘dead eyes.’ Through this gesture, Singer’s sculptures break the anticipated encounter between onlooker and a *living* animal’s gaze (or a realistic portrayal of a living animal’s gaze in taxidermy). Through cloudy dead eyes placed on her sculptures, Singer disrupts taxidermy’s fictitious claim to ‘capture’ the animal *as it is* before

<sup>152</sup> Jules Greenberg’s 2005 series of photographs, entitled *Fallen*, include several natural history museum specimens with cotton balls placed in their eye sockets. For the purposes of this project, I focus solely on sculpture in contemporary art; however, my arguments could be extended to Greenberg’s photographs. For further analysis of taxidermy outside the artistic medium of sculpture, see Greenberg’s photographic depictions of the hidden realities within the museum in *Dead Animals or The Curious Occurrence of Taxidermy in Contemporary Art*, a 2006 art exhibit, symposium, and collection at the David Winton Bell Gallery in Providence, Rhode Island. The exhibit, symposium, and art text were organized and curated by Jo-Ann Conklin.



(and through) its death. Her sculptures have the potential to remind onlookers that what they are bearing witness to are the remains of a dead animal. Jo-Ann Conklin describes Singer's sculpture, *Still*, from the *Dead Eyed* series; she writes that "[t]he disproportionately large and opaque eyes of the deer tell the story of *Still*. Their darkening is based on the effect of postmortem clouding, and their size indicates the embryonic age of the animal—stillborn at the hands of a hunter. Singer decorates the deer in ceramic and crystal flowers, making the work more appealing, but no less challenging" (29). In the pages that follow, I discuss the power that the gaze has for bearing witness to animal deaths represented by rogue taxidermy artists.

### § 3.4 Dead Gazes and Death, *as such*

As Derrida's work on 'the Animal' (*l'animot*) has shown, our encounters with nonhuman animals are unpredictable – they are events that can distort human ability to translate or understand ourselves *as humans* within the systemic anthropocentric divide (that situates animals as separate from and inferior to human existence). Through a face-to-face (or eye-to-eye) encounter with his cat in his bathroom, Derrida writes that standing naked under the gaze of this animal had the power to disorient his previous perceptions, assumptions, and philosophies of the differences between humans and nonhuman animals. 'Logos,' Derrida's cat companion, is a "real" cat, characterized by her "unsubstitutable singularity," and different from literary, historical, or other illusory cats (Derrida, *The Animal* 7-9). According to Derrida, Logos's gaze is enigmatic, abyssal, and bottomless and disrupts any simple translation, recognition, or encounter. Derrida's discussion of the eye-contact encounter with his cat is separate from a one-sided gaze that looks at (and is not returned by) taxidermied animals. As I will discuss below, however, it is through artists' unconventional aesthetics that an affective (perhaps even disorienting) response is opened up through the rogue taxidermy sculptures that is foreclosed through realist manipulations of dead animal materials. Derrida writes that this encounter with Logos's gaze caused him to realize that his cat companion has an "existence that refuses to be conceptualized" (*The Animal* 9). The power of Logos's gaze to disorient Derrida's previous frames of thought is described as a *contretemp*, a late seventeenth-century French word translated to mean 'against' (*contre*) / 'time' (*temps*). Historically, *contretemp* was used as a word in the practice of fencing as a term that denotes a "thrust made at an inopportune moment," a "motion out of time" or an "unfortunate accident" (*Online Etymology Dictionary*; Stevenson 379). The *contretemp*, as I take

up the concept, is a jolt to the system. It is an affective moment unable to be effectively captured in language or reduced by narrative conventions; however, it is felt and understood like a catalyst. In Matthew Calarco's words, the *contretemp* is close to 'madness' (125).

Through Derrida's descriptions of this encounter or *event* (what Derrida calls an 'extreme passion'), Logos's gaze shatters his preconceived notion of self; however, this shattering is only temporary -- always fleeting, and at risk of being lost to the next momentary lapse. The 'negative' connotations of the term *contretemp* are understood in Derrida's words as the gaze's power to completely disrupt ontology; to bring the human self, and its many descriptive conventions, under question. He writes in *The Animal* that

I am (following) it, the apocalypse, I identify with it by running behind it, after it, after its whole zoo-logy. When the instant of *extreme passion* passes, and I find peace again, then I can speak calmly of the beasts of the Apocalypse, visit them in the museum, see them in painting (but for the Greeks "zoography" referred to the portraiture of the living in general and not just the paintings of animals); I can visit them at the zoo, read about them in the Bible, or speak about them as in a book. (12, emphasis added)

For Derrida, the apocalypse is messianic, it is the "opening to what is coming, that is, to the event that cannot be awaited *as such*" (*Specters of Marx* 82). In other words, the apocalypse is without apocalypse; it is the condition of the impossibility of presence. Derrida writes, "[t]he condition on which the future remains to come is not only that it not be known, but that it not be *knowable as such*. Its determination should no longer come under the order of knowledge or of a horizon of preknowledge but rather a coming or an event which one *allows* or *incites* to come (without *seeing* anything to come) in an experience which is heterogenous to all taking note, as to any horizon of waiting as such: that is to say, to all stabilizable theorems as such" (*Archive Fever* 72, original emphasis). Derrida discusses the animal in reference to his reading of the genesis story where God made Adam the beneficiary and master of animals through providing them with proper names. In this process, the animals that were brought forth to Adam were simultaneously named and lost. The act of naming, writes Derrida, is "[a] foreshadowing of mourning because it seems to [him] that every case of naming involves announcing a death to come in the surviving of a ghost, the longevity of a name that survives whoever carries that name" (*The Animal* 18). This proper naming is found in various other discursive formations, such as anatomy -- what Derrida has called "taxonomical inscriptions" in a "well-kept pharmacy" (*Dissemination* 23). Animals preceded the concept of human, according to Derrida,

and *zoo-logy* began with naming and claiming the right to name under the guise of Man. The auto-biography of man (*The Animal* 24) founds the words of existence (or *Dasein*, as the entity that takes issue with itself as an existence) that must be crossed out, argues Derrida, as they are not applicable to animals and so cannot be used against or to define them as separate (*Beast Vol. II* 263). Derrida writes, “[s]trike out all the words if these words are determined semantically by *existence*. If the words are determined based on the existence of *Dasein*, none of these words is suitable for the animal” (*The Animal* 158).

For Derrida, encounters with the animal gaze are made into a “fictitious tableau” in his imagination, a freeze-frame in time that goes beyond the narrative conventions of ‘the Animal.’ The ‘extreme passion’ that Derrida states ‘passes’ is the moment against time (*contretemps*) in an encounter with the animal other. When this recognition passes, the recognition that animals are a complex and living existence, humans forget the lessons learned through this encounter and can safely and comfortably approach taxidermy in the museum, the haunting spirits of incarcerated animals in zoos, or read the illusory and harmonious animal caricatures in books without any sentimental or emotional difficulty. Unlike the taxidermy sculptures referenced in this project, “real” animals, such as Derrida’s cat companion, have the potential to show Derrida that something is looking back at him – even though he cannot conceptualize what that other presence may be (*The Animal* 13).<sup>153</sup> Trophy mounts or museum displays disguise unsettling confrontations that are otherwise invited through alternative styles in contemporary rogue taxidermy art. As I addressed above in reference to the work of Desmond, only selective representations of animal life (and, rarely, death) are displayed through traditional and realist

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<sup>153</sup> Encounters with living animals, especially pets, involve different types of affective responses than encounters with taxidermied animals. The presence of a living thing is separate from dead matter animated to look alive. Beyond this simple distinction, pet-owning involves different types of inter-species intimacy, where touch, smell, movement, and other emotions associated with pets are circulated and interchanged. This is not to say that humans do not love taxidermy when it is the taxidermied body of their former-living pet or another object of attachment. For instance, freeze-dry taxidermy is often recommended for pets because the process of extracting and graphing skin can take away the resemblance of the animal that used to live. David Madden highlights this in *The Authentic Animal*; he writes that “[p]ets today are preserved not by conventional skin-and-mount taxidermy but by freeze-drying, like we do with flowers or food for astronauts. There are multiple reasons for this. One is that most conventional taxidermists won’t touch pets because too much is at stake. We know these animals too well. A hunter, by contrast, knows his quarry for seconds before he pulls the trigger. Pets have a whole set of characteristic gestures and expression that no still image can capture in full” (21). Freeze-drying is a technique that uses a machine to suck out the moisture of the animal body placed inside. Internal organs are removed from the body, the body is wired into shape, the eyeballs are cut out, and the skull is drilled into to break apart the brain (Madden 22). Freeze-dry pets are most often staged as asleep because eyeballs must be removed as they do not last the procedure, nor can they be replaced by synthetic eyes that do not resemble the pet when it was alive.

taxidermy. In contrast, rogue taxidermy does the unsettling that is hidden by traditional and realist displays. When one feels uncomfortable by encountering rogue taxidermy (in its various forms), one is perhaps asked to encounter what it means to lack lively presence or struggle with questions about one's own life and death. In other words, to struggle with the idea to not *be*. Through examples of Singer's *Dead Eyed* series, human onlookers are asked to address the underlying disturbance one has with death as the *unknown*.

Through various forms of affective crafts-woman-ship, Singer's sculptures in the *Dead Eyed* series confront the congenial encounter of meeting one's eyes. The purpose of Derrida's essay *The Animal That Therefore I Am* is to undo the philosophical arguments that place humans separate from and superior to nonhuman animals; he writes, "according to what constitutes the logical matrix of my argument, it is not just a matter of giving back to the animal whatever it has been refused, in this case the *I* of *automonstration*. It is also a matter of questioning oneself concerning the axiom that permits one to accord purely and simply to the human or to the rational animal that which one holds the just plain animal to be deprived of" (Derrida, *The Animal*, 95, original emphasis). By undoing these arguments and showing the ways in which humans, too, do not adequately or successfully encapsulate the categories that make them 'human,' Derrida brings forth and ponders over arguments in the western philosophical tradition; specifically, the writings of male philosophers such as Aristotle, Rene Descartes, Immanuel Kant, Martin Heidegger, Emmanuel Levinas and Jacques Lacan. In the case of animal studies scholarship and because this project is specifically focused on dead animal materials, the philosophy of Heidegger is distinctive in disentangling the many ways in which prominent theoretical voices have shaped animal existence (and death). Philosophers and theorists have used many categories, such as language, reason, and ability to feel pain (or suffer trauma) as markers of separation between human and nonhuman animals. Most important for the arguments that follow are Heidegger's claims that animals are unable to die because he assumes that animals are incapable of experiencing death *as* death defined by human terms.<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> Despite Heidegger's arguments that animals do not experience their own deaths as death, Sunaura Taylor writes that "[i]t is presumptuous to assume that certain concepts of the future and death are the *only* capacities that can lead individuals to value their lives. Who's to say there aren't other ways in which sentient creatures might experience themselves as living and dying beings? We know that various animals will go to extreme measures to save themselves from death, including causing themselves extreme pain (such as when an animal gnaws off her own paw to free herself from a trap). It is clear that animals struggle to *survive*, even if they may not know that they could die at any time or that there is such a thing as death" (131).

*Dasein* is Heidegger's concept of 'being-there,' or a presence that allows Heidegger to ask the question of what it means to exist.<sup>155</sup> *Dasein* has knowledge 'as such' of the possibility of its own death; however, not what death might entail. *Dasein* is being-towards-death from the moment that *Dasein* comes to be. According to Heidegger, animals are unaware of themselves as existing by the terms set out to describe *Dasein*. At its rudimentary level and because animals are believed to be intrinsically separate from humans, a philosophical structure is (unjustifiably) imposed upon them. Animals are deprived of death because death, *proper*, is described for *Dasein* in Heideggerian terms (Derrida, *Aporias* 31). Death is then described as a space of exception to humans; animals are said to *merely perish* or "kick the bucket [*Creve!*]" (as a curse), writes Derrida (*Aporias* 40). When Derrida writes that the animal does not die "'properly,' *properly speaking*" (*The Animal* 151) he describes the exceptional linguistic framework that shapes death *for Dasein*. Disrupting the repeated citation by Heidegger in *Sein und Zeit* that *Dasein* dies and, yet, animals cease to exist (or merely perish), Derrida disentangles one of the many metaphysical assumptions Heidegger makes in his construction of *Dasein* in relation to death. Calling into question the underbelly of this anthropocentric logic, a logic that is foundational to western philosophy, Derrida argues that death is *enigmatic* or an *aporia*. To speak of death *as such*, writes Derrida in *Aporias*, means to lose translation, to lose direction. The *as such*, Derrida writes, is the meaning of death in the exact sense of the word. Derrida writes after (and in spite of) Heidegger that "instead of giving us added assurance about the experience of death as death, this discourse would lose the *as such* in and through the language that would create an illusion, as if *to say death* were enough to have access to dying as such—and such would be the illusion or the fantasy" (*Aporias* 36-37, original emphasis).

The question of death is a pertinent one for philosophical discovery; however, death is always described as missing its mark. In *Language and Death*, Agamben quotes Heidegger where he writes that "[t]he essential relation between death and language flashes up before us, but remains still *unthought*" (xi-xii, original emphasis), and it is this possession of the *faculty* for "language" and "death" that Agamben writes is understood as fundamentally human. The definition of death as *unthought* predates Heidegger's thought, given that Heidegger was an avid

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<sup>155</sup> Claire Colebrook writes that "[f]or Heidegger in-authenticity or humanism (where we simply take ourselves to be a privileged thing among things) is not an external and unfortunate event but has to do with the very mode of being's appearance: we see being appear, but do not attend to its coming into being" (*Death of the PostHuman* 15).

and close reader of ancient philosophy. For the Platonists, death was “the simple absence of all aisthesis” (Heller-Roazen 24). *αἴσθησις* (aisthesis) is perception produced by all the senses and its lack or absence defines death on the body. Death from this perspective is an alterity, an occurrence of the unknown that impacts the body. “To say we know what death is in truth is misleading,” writes Kelly Oliver, and such a belief would reproduce the metaphysical thought that Heidegger tries to avoid (*Earth and World* 142). In lieu of unthought, Levinas writes in *God, Death and Time* that “[d]eath is the irremediable gap: the biological movements lose all dependence in relation to signification, to expression. Death is decomposition; it is the no-response [*sans-reponse*]” (11); however, he then goes on to write that his “relationship with [his own] death is a nonknowledge [*non-savoir*] on dying itself, a nonknowledge that is nevertheless *not an absence of relationship*” (19, emphasis added). While Levinas’s notion of relationship with death has more to do with a human face,<sup>156</sup> Derrida points out, similarly to his arguments directed at Heidegger, that when philosophers deprive animals of human concepts, humans also buckle under the criteria. In the case of Levinas, Derrida writes that Levinas’s immediate ‘no’ to the animal having a face makes him wonder if man ‘really’ has a face under the “*rigorous purity* of the demands to which Levinas submits this concept” (*The Animal* 109, emphasis added).<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> For Levinas, the first principle of philosophy involves interpretive phenomenology and an understanding that intersubjectivity was at the core of human experience. The face was the object of moral responsibility to the other. It is through the other, that the self is called forth, while this calling is not necessarily uttered through words; rather, it is an affective encounter with another existing (human) being before the self. In *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas writes that “[t]he face, still a thing among things, breaks through the form that nevertheless delimits it. This means concretely: the face speaks to me and thereby invites me to a relation incommensurate with a power exercised, be it enjoyment or knowledge” (198). Further he states that “[t]he infinite paralyzes power by its infinite resistance to murder, which, firm and insurmountable, gleams in the face of the Other, in the total nudity of his defenseless eyes, in the nudity of the absolute openness of the Transcendent. There is here a relation not with a very great resistance, but with something absolutely *other*: the resistance of what has no resistance—the ethical resistance. The epiphany of the face brings forth the possibility of gauging the infinity of the temptation to murder, not only as a temptation to total destruction, but also as the purely ethical impossibility of this temptation and attempt” (199). The infinite, for Levinas, is something that is beyond everything and cannot be made intelligible through consciousness – such as the Other, ethics, or God. The face, as an object of moral responsibility, is an engagement with vulnerability; he states that “the epiphany of the face is ethical” (199); “Infinity presents itself as a face in the ethical resistance that paralyzes my powers and from the depths of defenseless eyes rises firm and absolute in its nudity and destitution” (199-200).

<sup>157</sup> For Levinas, ‘the face’ is not extended to animals. Derrida takes issue with Levinas’s belief that animals do not have a face under the terms that Levinas has given to ‘face-to-face’ encounters. Derrida writes that during an interview, Levinas was asked a number of questions: “For example: ‘Does the fact of having a face imply an aptitude for language? Does the animal have a face? Can one read ‘Thou shalt not kill’ in the eyes of the animal?’ with Levinas responding with the following: ‘I cannot say at what moment you have the right to be called ‘face.’ The human face is completely different and only afterwards do we discover the face of an animal. I don’t know if a snake has a face. I can’t answer that question. A more specific analysis is needed”’ (Derrida, *The Animal* 107-108). Unsatisfied with Levinas’s lack of response, a qualifier used to treat animals as inferior to humans who can speak

It is not withstanding that even in death traces are left, ghosts return, and bodies remain – bodies that are part of the ethical dialogue remaining here. If one is to think of relations with death, one could consider what rights do bodies have after death and, to what extent, do human relationships to dead animals enable a contretemp or jolt to the system? It is through mortality (or mortal *finitude*) that humans, animals, and other living beings (possibly) share something in common, argues Derrida throughout *The Animal That Therefore I Am*. Finding a loophole in Heidegger’s arguments, Derrida shows how Heidegger describes, in his essay “The Essence of Ground” that animals are ‘living things,’ separate from stones,<sup>158</sup> and thus have the possibility of death (*The Animal* 154). As with his arguments involving Descartes, it is the vulnerability of the body to “potential cadaverization” (*The Animal* 72) that Derrida draws out from the words and arguments of previous philosophers. Drawing in on the animality of *Dasein* (*The Animal* 155), as opposed to *Dasein*’s separation from animality, Derrida points to mortality of all living beings; the *ecce animot* – “an irreducible living multiplicity of mortals” (*The Animal* 41). Sharing our inevitability towards death and the vulnerability of being a living being, it is perhaps not the depiction of animal suffering that holds the most affective weight when approaching a rogue taxidermy sculpture, but the face or gaze of mortal *finitude* that shatters one’s ability to look. Mortality resides in witnessing suffering, states Derrida, where he writes that

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and know language, Derrida writes the following: “This response seems at the same time fine, dizzyingly risky, exposed, but also quite cautious. It presents itself in the first instance as a nonresponse. Better yet, an admission of nonresponse; a declaration of nonresponse: ‘I can’t answer that question,’ he says. Declining responsibility, if one can say that, Levinas thus replies that he can’t answer. He replies that he would very much like to respond, that no doubt he should, but he can’t. He is incapable of it. Not incapable in general of responding in general, as Descartes’ animal would be incapable of responding, but incapable here of responding *to* this very question and of answering *for* this question on the animal, concerning the face of the animal: ‘I can’t answer that question’ is what he says, according to John Llewelyn’s translation. But this response in the form of a nonresponse is human. Quite human, all too human” (*The Animal* 108-109). Calarco extends the Levinasian discussion of the face-to-face encounter to include animal bodies. He shows that the dividing line determining who and what can be understood as (not) having a ‘face’ in Levinas’s philosophy is based on an implicit anthropocentrism regarding the kinds of beings that may enter the sphere of moral and ethical consideration (68). As Calarco argues, we need to expand this line to include other, nonhuman beings and their potentials to “shatter our ontology” (71). As he goes on to explain, “[i]f it is the case that we do not know where the face begins and ends, where moral considerability begins and ends, then we are obliged to proceed from the possibility that *anything* might take on a face. And we are further obliged to hold this possibility permanently open” (71, original emphasis).

<sup>158</sup> In *Death of the PostHuman: Essays on Extinction Vol. I*, Claire Colebrook asks, “[a]fter humans have ceased to be present on the planet, their history will remain readable in a quasi-human sense: the earth’s strata will be inscribed with scars of the human capacity to create radical and volatile climactic changes. But one might consider a form of reading beyond this quasi-human and discerning mode if, following Heidegger, the stone has no world, how do we account for the fossil records or archives borne by the stone? [...] The fossil record opens a world *for us*, insofar as it allows us to read back from the brain’s present to a time before reading; strata will continue beyond human reading, but if inscription continues is it too much of a stretch to say that the earth will remain as a ‘reading’ of at least one point of the universe?” (23).

Being able to suffer is no longer a power; it is a possibility without power, a possibility of the impossible. *Mortality resides there, as the most radical means of thinking the finitude that we share with animals*, the mortality that belongs to the very finitude of life, to the experience of compassion, to the possibility of sharing the possibility of this nonpower, the possibility of this impossibility, the anguish of this vulnerability, and the vulnerability of this anguish. (*The Animal* 28, emphasis added)

Though taxidermy animal sculptures are unable to respond on their own, the attempts of these rogue artists to produce challenging sculptures have the affective weight to confront onlookers with a face of mortal finitude (or simulation of a gaze), even if it is, as in Derrida's case, momentary and fleeting. In the pages that follow, I address Bibus's artwork and the ways in which his sculptures haunt back through his use of zombie aesthetics.

### § 3.5      **Zombie Aesthetics and Retributional Agency**

Bibus's 'zombie' or 'gore' sculptures confront traditional and also ongoing violence inflicted on nonhuman animals. Arguing that his staged sculptures have the potential to depict, perhaps even enact, what I call a 'retributional agency,' I show how Bibus's art is displayed to speak back or 'haunt back' to broader violent effects of human-made modern technologies of capitalism, environmental destruction, disease, and meat consumption. Bibus's sculptures portray roadkill, the rot and decay of un/dead animals, and the violence and horrors of the food industry, such as his sculpture *Northwoods Sushi* (Fig. 3.7). He does this by invoking a zombie aesthetic--a tool that has been used in postcolonial literature, the horror genre, and neo-Marxist portrayals in popular culture. The 'zombie,' a figure of the un/dead, haunts back to the systems that create oppression.

Unlike Derrida's cat companion whose gaze is returned to the human onlooker (though, not without great complexity), Bibus creates the simulation of an animal's gaze on each of the faces of his taxidermied art pieces that are staged in a space between life and death. Cohen argues that the "[u]ndead names the zone of restless and perplexing activity from which monsters arrive, a sensual as well as epistemic threshold at which the familiar loses certainty. *Un-dead* marks a kind of contact zone between the human and the nonhuman, in which the human reveals the monster always already enfolded in whatever dispersed amalgamation we are" ("Grey" 273). Mary Louise Pratt describes a 'contact zone' as a "spatial and temporal copresence of subjects previously separated by geographic and historical disjunctures, and whose trajectories





Figure 3.7: Scott Bibus, *Northwoods Sushi*, 2005. Taxidermy and mixed media. Image used with permission from artist, © Scott Bibus.

now intersect” (7). Such contacts are asymmetrical because of colonial enterprises that oppress humans (and nonhuman animals). While popular culture representations of zombie figures are expansive, the zombie is appropriated through various contact zones that were formed by violent imperialist systems that sought to perpetuate white hegemonic norms through the production of racist stereotypes, mythologies, and representations about people from the Caribbean.<sup>159</sup> Bibus’s art is not devoid of the criticisms that popular zombie images appropriate Haitian culture, nor is

<sup>159</sup> In “The Sub-Subaltern Monster: Imperialist Hegemony and the Cinematic Voodoo Zombie,” Kyle Bishop writes the following, “the creative efforts of filmmakers lead them not to the usual mythologies of Europe but rather to exotic Caribbean travel literature. Sensational books like William B. Seabrook’s *The Magic Island* of 1929 had begun to draw the American public’s attention away from the Old World and toward the New, specifically the island of Haiti. According to Seabrook and other ethnographers, powerful voodoo priests, commanding the knowledge of African mysticism and ritual, were able to kill their enemies and bring them back from the dead as mindless servants. This violation of the taboos of death peaked people’s interest in a previously unknown horror: the zombie. It did not take long for this voodoo-based monstrosity to make the jump from folklore to popular entertainment, and the first true zombie movie arrived in 1932: Victor Halperin’s *White Zombie*”; “this movie presents audiences with the exoticism of the Caribbean, the fear of domination and subversion, and the perpetuation of the imperialist model of cultural and racial hegemony” (141). In a similar vein, Mimi Sheller writes that “[h]ere we see a strange currency in zombies, as they shift from a dread memory of slavery into a new idiom of forced labour, and then from a ghoulish monster in Hollywood movies they slip back into Haitian understandings of the US occupation. Thus occupation and the American cultural consumption of the uprooted figure of the zombie serve to reinforce its power, as it is re-grounded in contemporary Haitian culture” (146). For further reading on this topic, see Kyle Bishop’s article, “The Sub-Subaltern Monster: Imperialist Hegemony and the Cinematic Voodoo Zombie,” *The Journal of American Culture* 31.2 (2008): 141-152 and Mimi Sheller’s book, *Consuming the Caribbean: From Arawaks to Zombies*. New York: Routledge, 2003.

his art safe from the risk of displacing these histories of colonial violence. His sculptures do, however, haunt by highlighting the ongoing violence inflicted on animal bodies by humans and these realities are not separate from colonial projects that continue to oppress humans (discussed in more detail below). Bibus's sculptures haunt not simply through their blood and gore, but through the constructed trauma visible on the faces of his sculptures. Bibus's sculptures simulate trauma, pain, and agony – the event of potentially shared mortal finitude between animal and human. Through his art, Bibus further points to the perplexity of representing death in the human imaginary. Through its absence, death is represented in rogue taxidermy art through a temporal 'event' of the body in pain.

Through the vitality of temporal decay, Bibus's sculptures are at once alive and dead (un/dead) and it is through this in-between that the taxidermy sculpture may be agential in creating an affective response – so much that one may turn their gaze away from the violent image. Taking realism to its limit, rogue taxidermy artists that portray violence respond to the tradition of placing dead animal materials into synthetic displays of 'the wild' or encased in vacuum sealed bell jars, such as Bibus's 2004 sculpture *Cat Head Under Glass* (Fig. 3.8). Taxidermy sculptures are often dependent on the types of objects and backdrops that are staged alongside the animal body. While realist taxidermy is often defined by Carl Akeley's incorporation of nature scenes staged in the background of the taxidermy sculpture, rogue taxidermy artists that use objects such as bell jars or other objects of violence, such as knives, wooden taxidermy mounts, or decaying coffins show another depiction of animal existence – the violent realities of anthropocentrism.

Unlike Singer who utilizes women's craft to depict violence, Bibus uses masculine tropes of violence, such as realistic blood or the appropriated zombie figure,<sup>160</sup> to construct his taxidermy displays. Singer's depictions of blood and guts are discernibly synthetic, made with various types of craft materials. Singer's use of found feminine objects speaks to a longstanding gender relation between men's art and women's craft. Women's craft involves materials that are made accessible and affordable to women— art that has been historically dismissed because these practices and textiles fell outside of confines and expectations of masculine public art

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<sup>160</sup> Edible products are used to display blood and guts in Bibus's sculptures, such as gummy worms (that are sometimes made with animal byproducts such as gelatin). The choice of using gelatin products is co-implicated in the complex relationship humans have with capitalist systems that utilize animal byproducts everywhere.



Figure 3.8: Scott Bibus, *Cat Head Under Glass*, 2004. Taxidermy and mixed media. Image used with permission from artist, © Scott Bibus.

spaces. Bibus's gore aesthetic is more severe, threatening, and confronting than Singer's sculptures. Because Bibus evokes aesthetics from the zombie figure in popular culture, the affective engagements in his abject art are preconceived through masculine frameworks. Reception of masculine violence may be interpreted differently than the sticky affective engagements of women's craft. Ahmed writes that "objects become sticky, or saturated with affect, as sites of personal and social tension" (*The Cultural* 11). Notions of disgust or fear are shaped by *impressions*, writes Ahmed, and "[b]odies take the shape of the very contact they have with objects and others" (*The Cultural* 1; 6-8). As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, affective economies are created by circulation, contact, and relations. For instance, portrayals of blood through buttons or jewelry will cause different reactions or effects than more realistic and abject depictions; likewise, depictions of zombies in human form (also dependent on race) may produce different affects or responses to onlookers than artistic representations of zombie animals. Encounters are dependent on previous contacts or the discourses that shape these contacts. They are always shaped by mediation through social norms, cultures, and histories, as well as contacts and contagions with others. In *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Ahmed writes that

Each of us, in being shaped by others, carries with us 'impressions' of those others. Such

impressions are certainly memories of this or that other, to which we return in the sticky metonymy of our thoughts and dreams, and through prompting either by conversations with others or through the visual form of photographs. Such ‘withness’ also shapes our bodies, our gestures, our turns of phrase: we pick up bits and pieces of each other as the effect of nearness or proximity. (160)

Affects that stick involve experiences, interpretations, and perceptions that are shaped through contacts. Animal presence can cause bodily threat to subjects who have had threatening encounters or proximities with individual animals (real, represented, or imagined). Fears or discomfort resulting from encounters with these sculptures, however, point to a shared vulnerability of object bodies that are between the living and dead.

Bibus’s realistic stagings show the unaddressed suffering of animals that are killed by the technologies of modern human living and capitalist production. His sculptures of tormented and suffering animal bodies in pain are presented in less than subtle ways – they are offered to be viewed and circulated.<sup>161</sup> Pain (as an affect), writes Ahmed, is “crucial to the forming of the body as both a material and lived entity”; “It is through sensual experiences such as pain that [humans] come to have a sense of [their] skin as bodily surface, as something that keeps us apart from others, and as something that ‘mediates’ the relationship between internal or external, or inside and outside” (*The Cultural* 24). Ahmed writes that the pain of others is not a co-suffering and she warns against the appropriation and neutralization of others’ pain (21), but it is through skin that shared suffering is *paradoxically* found. She writes that skin “contains us” and is also “where others impress upon us” (25); “[t]his contradictory function of skin begins to make sense if we unlearn the assumption that skin is simply already there, and begin to think of skin as a surface that is felt only in the event of being ‘impressed upon’ in the encounters we have with others” (*The Cultural* 25).

Separate from depictions of co-sharing pain, Bibus’s sculptures depict pain on the animal that is impressed on their skins by human actions. Arguing that Bibus’s sculptures depict what I call a retributational agency, zombies haunt the technologies that produce the traditional or realist taxidermied animal. Returning from their resting place as pure body without personhood, cognition, or self-reflection, the taxidermied animal is posed in a permanent position of labour in

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<sup>161</sup> Writing about the feeling of pain (albeit emotion or sensation), Ahmed writes that “pain, as an unpleasant or negative sensation, is not simply reducible to sensation: how we experience pain involves the attribution of meaning through experience, as well as associations between different kinds of negative or aversive feelings” (*The Cultural* 23).

the name of education, scientific exploration, and a touchstone of masculine and colonial domination. In other words, Bibus's taxidermied animals do not rest. Describing the zombie, Cohen writes that

Whereas a ghost is a "soul without a body," the zombie (according to Zora Neale Hurston in her seminal account of folklore in Haiti) is a body deprived of soul. A corpse unearthed from the cemetery, the zombie is reanimated without possession of its personhood and forced into interminable labor on a Caribbean plantation. Zombies are therefore intimates of colonial history and the burgeoning of capitalism. ("Grey" 273)<sup>162</sup>

When rogue taxidermists utilize the realism of traditional forms of taxidermy for the purposes of undoing violent norms, they alter the reception of realism. Rogue taxidermists confront the principles of traditional taxidermy through undoing, by way of ironic intensification. The strategies to confront and show older traditions in the practice draw spectators' attention to the peculiarity of preservation itself. Rogue taxidermy art sculptures constitute an interactive display that resists traditions and transgresses restrictive boundaries. Many Indigenous and postcolonial scholars have engaged in conversation over the potential that mimesis harbours as a tool of "writing back" to the colonizer (Ashcroft et al. *The Empire Strikes Back*; Tiffin, "Post-colonial Literatures and Counter-Discourse"; Thieme 81).<sup>163</sup> 'Writing back' confronts the narrative constructs that shape language in the name of empire. Writing in counter discursive formats to show colonial languages, grammars, aesthetics, and narratives through parody, satire, and irony, Indigenous and postcolonial scholars bring to the fore the ways in which hegemonic cultural discourses reproduce inequalities. Postcolonial writing is perhaps the larger frame of haunting, as scholars reproach texts from the (neo)colonizers words. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak reminds her readers that haunting is a ghostly agency; [i]t is the subalternists who taught [her] to follow the ghost in documentary texts produced from the other side" (70).

I spend some time discussing Teresa Goddu's concept of 'haunting back' to draw the line of strategic presence in rogue taxidermy art. To reiterate, 'haunting back' is an approach that responds to hegemonic narratives and practices of body preservation -- alongside their unsparing history. Like 'writing back,' rogue taxidermy methods involve 'haunting back' and this is done

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<sup>162</sup> For a more in-depth and critical reading of Zora Neale Hurston's ethnographic fieldwork and study of Haitian culture, see Rita Keresztesi's chapter, "Hurston in Haiti: Neocolonialism and Zombification." *Race, Oppression and the Zombie: Essays on Cross-Cultural Appropriations of the Caribbean Tradition*. Eds. Christopher M. Moreman and Cory James Rushton. Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2011. 31-41.

<sup>163</sup> Portions of this section have been published elsewhere. See Miranda Niittynen, "Animal Magic: Sculpting Queer Encounters through Rogue Taxidermy Art" *Gender Forum* 55 (2015): 14-38.

through strategical inversions, mimicry, repetitions, and exaggerations of dominant norms. By employing recurring tropes, such as racist stereotypes of Blackness as ‘monstrous,’ haunting back refigures, mocks, and satirizes these tropes and the normalizing, dominative knowledges that have been crucial to the subordination of various groups (including animals). Monstrosity, zombies, and ‘freak’ show ‘abnormalities’ do not belong to the realms of either ‘the animal’ or ‘the human;’ rather, these figures are found within the scene of recognition, the display or the encounter that produces the “traditional human colonizing impulse” to either assimilate or differentiate (Nayar 98). Contemporary rogue taxidermy art echoes, with a difference, the history of racism, ableism, sexism, and speciesism that informs the mounting of dead animal (and human) bodies for display. Goddu states in relation to the gothic genre and stories of slavery that “conventions can both rematerialize and dematerialize history” (132). Representations of horror are not without risk, argues Goddu, who states that even in moments of “displacement, traces of the material remain to be read by those invested in remembering the horrors of history” (132). In the same breath, taxidermy is in tension with feminist politics that stress the importance of bodily integrity, respect, and consent in relation to the production and display of preserving bodies deemed profane. Not separate from this history, rogue taxidermists perform violences in their art, while also undoing violent acts through the techniques and tools of inversion and, specifically here, by way of the gothic genre. By using the un/dead, rogue taxidermists’ sculptures have the potential to haunt back by engaging the underrepresented subjugated bodies in histories left out of Enlightenment norms. Specifically discussing ‘haunting back,’ Goddu writes that American gothic stories produce histories of horror that must be repressed in order to create an ideal (and artificial) national identity (in Bodzioc 96). The gothic genre (or aesthetic) “is not a transhistorical, static category,” writes Goddu; it is a “dynamic mode that undergoes historical change when specific agents adopt and transform its conventions” (153). By rewriting, satirizing, and reproducing a story and doing so, on occasion, through humor (according to Elizabeth Young), these narratives can be retold as resistance strategies to the colonial narratives that normalize and reproduce discrimination, fear, and hatred towards different racial groups and other subordinated peoples.

### § 3.6 Interspecies Eating as Inversion of *Auto-deixis*

Bibus takes up the aesthetic of the abject in many of his artistic depictions. In some instances, his art depicts animals eating their own flesh; in others, the taxidermied zombie eats the flesh of humans. His depiction of nature takes a darker route from the soulful resting positions of Morgan's birds or the reinterpretation of blood and guts portrayed in crystal forms in Singer's art. Through his sculptures, Bibus's depictions of grotesque bodies include decay, burnt skin, vomit, disease, and representations of rabid behavior. His sculpture, *Zombie Chicken* (Fig. 3.9), expresses visuals of death and vulnerability in opposition to images of liveliness and solitude



Figure 3.9: Scott Bibus, *Zombie Chicken*, 2006. Taxidermy and mixed media. Image used with permission from artist, © Scott Bibus.

found in traditional mounts. The chicken represented in his sculpture has had its feathers plucked from its body and lays in a distressing position – with a traumatized facial expression and open sores on its body. Having come back from the dead, the zombie chicken haunts human sensibilities involving the consumption of meat. Bibus's sculpture resembles the body in pain as though it were being cooked alive. Some sculptures are displayed in preparation for human consumption (in bowls, cups, saucers, or cutting boards), while other sculptures are mounted on the wall in unconventional manners (with rusty, bent nails). Some sculptures lay in the position of a dissected carcass – similar to the body in the science lab or classroom. Many of Bibus's sculptures are also seemingly consumed by flesh eating diseases.<sup>164</sup>

<sup>164</sup> A 2018 CBC article confirmed that the incurable ranavirus that has caused large mortality rates among fish, frogs and salamander populations is now tested in two turtles found in the wetlands close to Hamilton, Ontario,





Figure 3.10: Scott Bibus, *Toe-Eating Frog*, 2004. Taxidermy and mixed media. Image used with permission from artist, © Scott Bibus.

Unlike the chicken that is conscious of the processes of its own consumption and in a state of distress and torture, Bibus's sculptures *Toe-Eating Frog* (Fig. 3.10), *Snapping Turtle Eating a Human Eye* (Fig. 3.11), and *Squirrel Eating a Human Finger* (Fig. 3.12) display the interconnectedness of interspecies eating. Each taxidermied animal eats human flesh without indication of pity, remorse, or guilt (a reflection of human indifference towards eating animals).

Unable to show the emotional capacity of self-reflection, Bibus's zombie figures eat in similar ways to animal characters in animal horror cinema who are described as "zombies, monsters, and psychopathic killers" and "relentless predator[s]" (Gregersdotter et al. 7). The intentions of filmmakers to represent predatory animal behaviour in horror vary from film to film, but these figures haunt through their ability to harness inner fears of beastly behaviours: irrational, dangerous, ruthless. These figures are not simply animals, but are unreasonable and murderous, seeking out human prey through vengeful (and yet 'thoughtless') means. In the case of Bibus's art, the animals haunt back by attacking comfortable encounters and the desire to *look* at taxidermy. As abject figures that unsettle sensibilities, these sculptures also draw out human realities that humans, too, are *food*; humans are flesh, blood, and are susceptible to pain at the hands (or jaws) of nonhuman animals.

Through what I have termed as a 'retribitional agency,' rogue taxidermy sculptures are staged as eating flesh, disrupting sensibilities, and destroying the representations that depict human and animal relations as harmonious and neatly arranged or ordered. Bibus's art attempts to expose the rank of humans within the food chain, a realization highlighted by ecofeminist and philosopher Val Plumwood after being attacked by a previously endangered saltwater crocodile

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Canada. B.C. pathologist Doug Campbell has stated that all of the turtles in Ontario are currently under threat for various reasons and the discovery of the virus is a large concern. Representations of disease and viruses are not normally represented in taxidermy displays, as historically the practice involved displaying the strongest and largest animals of a species population. For more information on the ranavirus found in Canada, see Dan Taekema's article "Virus that has Contributed to 'Mass Mortality' in Reptiles Confirmed in Canadian Turtle for 1<sup>st</sup> Time." *CBC*, 8 May, 2018. Web. < <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/hamilton/ranavirus-snapping-turtle-canada-1.4653798> >





Figure 3.11: Scott Bibus, *Snapping Turtle Eating a Human Eye*, 2005. Taxidermy and mixed media. Image used with permission from the artist, © Scott Bibus.

in Australia.<sup>165</sup> Plumwood writes that “an understanding of ourselves as food is the subject of horror as well as humor. Horror movies and stories reflect this deep-seated dread of becoming food for other forms of life: horror is the wormy corpse, vampires sucking blood and sci-fi monsters trying to eat humans” (“Meeting the Predator” 18). Humans *are* food for large animals and fish, as well as microorganisms, Plumwood argues. She goes on to state that “[o]ne reason why death is such a horror in the Western tradition [...] is that it involves the forbidden mixing of these hyper-separated categories, the dissolution of the sacred-human into the profane-natural” (Plumwood, “Human” 34). Plumwood notes the processes of decay are more complex than simply the loss of self, life, or spirit; however, these narratives of death are what is most unsettling as the result of this restrictive framework. Bibus’s various depictions are a monstrous staging of the ways in which animals eat other animals (human and nonhuman) and take on new form tied to the sacrosanct order of white human skin in opposition to skin’s revenant ties to the history of ‘profane’ bodies (human and nonhuman).

<sup>165</sup> Giving her own account of the attack, as a witness and to set the record straight of misinformed media coverage and the park’s account of what happened to her, Plumwood is cautious to hold the crocodile responsible for what happened. Acknowledging that the role the media played afterwards was “another element of Western dualistic thinking,” Plumwood tied sensationalism to what she calls the “prey phenomenon” (“Human Vulnerability” 34). She writes that after the attack, she had to experience herself as prey and this broke the anthropocentric framework that humans uphold; she states, “[t]he sense of gratitude was the gift of that searing flash of near-death knowledge, the glimpse ‘from the outside’ of that unimaginably alien world from which the self as centering observer is absent” (“Human” 32).

The relevance of Bibus's sculptures that eat eyes, fingers, and toes cannot be ignored here. As I will explain in the following pages, the extremities and organs hold symbolic weight with human self-directed epistemic abilities to reason. In other words, humans typically consider themselves a more developed species from other animals because they can position themselves in (human defined) self-existence (fingers: self-pointing through *autodeixis*), walk upright (toes),<sup>166</sup> and because they have communicated their own knowledge – a knowledge shaped through visual perception (eyes). Derrida writes in *The Animal* that Kant believed “[e]very human language has at its disposal this self [the ‘I’] ‘as such,’ even if the word for it is lacking” (93). Kant writes that “[a]ll languages must think it when they speak in the first person”<sup>167</sup> and it is this first person that is “radically deprived” from animal life (*The Animal* 93). Following Émile Benveniste, Derrida writes, under these strict conditions, that auto-reference and auto-deixis are shown through the “capability at least virtually to *turn a finger toward oneself* in order to say ‘this is I’” [emphasis added]; this gesture is ‘performed’ or ‘uttered’ in pronouncing the ‘I,’ he writes (*The Animal* 94). In response to Kant’s arguments of humans’ supposed ‘natural’ auto-deixis, Derrida writes the following,

that many animals in fact seem incapable of an auto-deixis or *literal* auto-reference, as in the visible form of an adept manipulation of the specular image or of the index finger turned back at oneself in order to speak or to manifest in saying “this is I who is showing me myself, I’ll answer for it.” Yet, *on the other hand*, it is not certain that this auto-deicticity is not at work, in various forms, evidently, in every genetic system in general, where each element of the genetic writing has to identify itself, mark itself according to a certain reflexivity, in order to signify in the genetic chain; nor is it certain that this auto-deicticity doesn’t take on highly developed, differentiated, and complex forms in a large number of social phenomena that can be observed in the *animot*. (*The Animal* 95, original emphasis)

Arguing that there is no significant evidence that animals (*animot*) are unable to conduct their

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<sup>166</sup> It should be noted here that walking upright and having toes is part of the idealistic ableist body that is perpetuated through the norms that critical disability scholars seek to expose. It is solely for the purpose of the arguments against animals’ capabilities (with the exception of certain animals, such as apes) that I use bipedalism as an example.

<sup>167</sup> While there are inherent flaws with Kant’s arguments involving first person positionality in human language(s), for the purposes of focus on the anthropocentric divide, I will not address the complexity of translation and first-person formation found throughout numerous feminist ethnographic studies. For interest on the ways in which positional relations are formed through language, see Dorrine Kondo’s ethnographic work on Japanese identity (pages 29-32) in her book, *Crafting Selves: Power Gender, and Discourses of Identity in a Japanese Workplace*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990 and Kim Anderson’s subsection, “Language” (page 131), about the intricacies of Mohawk and Ojibway languages in her book, *A Recognition of Being: Reconstructing Native Womanhood*. Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 2001.

own form of auto-reference and autodeixis or reflexivity, down to the genetic code, Derrida states that: “every living creature, and thus every animal to the extent that it is living, has recognized in it this power to move spontaneously, to feel itself and to relate to itself [...] No one denies the animal auto-affection or auto-motion, hence the self of that relation to the self” (*The*



Figure 3.12: Scott Bibus, *Squirrel Eating a Human Finger*, 2009. Taxidermy and mixed media. Image used with permission from the artist, © Scott Bibus.

*Animal* 94).<sup>168</sup> Like many of Derrida’s other arguments that break down the systems of thought that argue humans are superior to animals, his point is not simply the “matter of giving back to the animal whatever it has been refused” (*The Animal* 95); rather, he also seeks to make the argument that humans do not fit the mold that is created in their name. Derrida describes his arguments in the following words: “as every opposition does, this absolute oppositional limit effaces the differences and leads back, following the most resistant metaphysico-dialectic tradition, to the homogenous” (“Geschlecht II” 174). Derrida writes that what is being kept from *l’animot* is the “I of automonstration” (*The Animal* 95). The ‘I,’ here, is the power of self-reference; specifically, autodeictic self-reference – another word for indexical. This

indexical self-reference is the physical capability of turning the *finger* toward oneself in order to say: “this is I,” Derrida writes.

<sup>168</sup> In her article “Fingereyes,” Eva Hayward extends the analysis of animal sensibility and insight beyond the anthropocentric purview. She writes, “[t]hrough what other lenses might these engagements between human intentionality and the agency of multiple species, land and sea, ethics and knowledge production, be apprehended? How, for example, is this intertidal zone an arena where species meet not just as different critters, but also as objects and subjects of different sight, sense, sensibility, and sensuality? This arena can be usefully registered through a haptic-optic I call ‘fingereyes.’ I use *fingereyes* to explain the tentacular visibility of cross-species encounters and to name the synaesthetic quality of materialized sensation. Perceptions are moved (affected) by the movements and actions that they provoke in other organisms. Stirred by the ripples of investigation that emerge in the arrangement that we may touch, senses are amalgamated, superimposed, forging cross-species reticulations and sites of solidarity. This kind of transversing is navigated by constantly accessing the medium of the meeting and the accompanying beings and things. From this point of view/touch of fingereyes, species are impressions, thresholds of emergence” (580).

In the case of automonstration, Derrida writes in “Geschlecht II: Heidegger’s Hand” that the etymology of ‘monster’ means ‘to show’ or ‘demonstrate.’ He states, “[I]e monstre or la monstre is what shows in order to warn or put on guard” (“Geschlecht II” 166). Critiquing Heidegger’s text (and lecture) that maps how knowledge is gained and understood in western philosophy,<sup>169</sup> Derrida discusses the ways in which man *monsters* and is separated from the indefinable ‘geschlecht’ (untranslatable in English or French).<sup>170</sup> Discussing the history of German and Latin roots that created a concept of humanity that was always separate from animality, Derrida asks what one means when they say humanity or ‘mankind’<sup>171</sup> – a sign that signs and describes a spirit of a supposedly universal ‘we.’ “We ‘monster,’” states Derrida, through signification and showing – the very sign of showing/warning (“Geschlecht II” 167). This showing points to nothing, but it is in the showing that monsters are created – what Derrida

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<sup>169</sup> Specifically, Derrida is conducting a close reading of Heidegger’s text *Was heist Denken?* and his lecture on Trakl in *Unterwegs zur Sprache*.

<sup>170</sup> While untranslatable, Derrida writes that “according to the contexts that come to determine this word, it can be translated by sex, race, species, genus, gender, stock, family, generation or genealogy, community” (Geschlecht II 162); “this Geschlecht is not determined by birth, native soil, or race, has nothing to do with the natural or even the linguistic, at least in the usual sense of the term” (162); “*Geschlecht* is an ensemble, a gathering together” (163); “an organic community in a non-natural but spiritual sense, that believes in the infinite progress of the spirit through freedom. So it is an infinite ‘we,’ a ‘we’ that announces itself to itself from the infinity of a τέλος [end] of freedom and spirituality, and that promises, engages, or allies itself according to the circle (*Kreis*, *Bund*) of this infinite will” (163); “The ‘we’ finally comes down to the humanity of man” (163); “In the Heidegger text we shall be concerned with in a few minutes, the French translators sometimes speak of *genre humain* for *Geschlecht* and sometimes simply of species” (163).

<sup>171</sup> For Derrida, ‘mankind’ is one side of the spectrum between philosophical poles that place the animal in separation from the human. Like the animal, a term he is critical in debunking, Derrida questions mankind as a generality that consumes difference (*Beast Vol. 1*. 119). ‘Man’ or ‘Mankind’ is but one example of the many proper names that Derrida calls into question. In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida describes a proper name as “always caught in a change or a system of difference. It becomes an appellation only to the extent that it may inscribe itself within a figuration. Whether it be linked by its origin to the representations of things in space or whether it remains caught in a system of phonic differences or social classifications apparently released from ordinary space, the proper-ness of the name does not escape spacing”; “The literal [*propre*] meaning does not exist, its ‘appearance’ is a necessary function—and must be analyzed as such—in the system of differences and metaphors” (89).

In a reparative reading of Derrida’s oeuvre, Drucilla Cornell acknowledges the various critiques of the notion of ‘man’ or ‘mankind’ in Derrida’s writing. She writes that Derrida’s work is an “ethical and political exposure of masculine superiority as a ‘sham.’ Derrida continually pokes fun at the machoism of the so-called real man. He knows a ‘dick’ when he sees one and he knows the limit of its meaning. He agrees with Lacan that it is not pre-given libidinal ‘drive’ or anatomy that causes masculine privilege and the corresponding subjection and silencing in women. Instead, patriarchy perpetuates itself through the linguistic structures and cultural conventions that prop up patriarchy and have been repeated until they are melted into the unconscious and, indeed, even are the unconscious”; “Derrida argues that the very slippage of language, which breaks up the coherence of gender identity, makes it possible for us to undermine the rigid gender divide that has made dialogue between men and women impossible and the acceptance of violence toward women not only inevitable, but also not ‘serious’” (152). See Drucilla Cornell’s chapter, “Civil Disobedience and Deconstruction.” *Feminist Interpretations of Jacques Derrida*. Ed. Nancy Holland. Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997.149-156.

calls a “monstration” (“Geschlecht II” 167). Monstration is found as the hand (the monstrous sign) or “the proper of man as (monstrous) sign” (Derrida, “Geschlecht II” 168).<sup>172</sup> This hand designates, receives, welcomes, designs, signs, carries, keeps (Derrida, “Geschlecht II” 168). The hand that demonstrates difference through monstrosity is the symbolic hand that Bibus’s taxidermy sculptures consume, such as the finger that points to human autodeixis or points to the monstrous other. This Heideggerian hand that is thought, writes Derrida, is “reducible to the assured opposition of *giving* and *taking*: man’s hand *gives and gives itself, gives and is given*, like thought or like what gives itself to be thought and what we do not yet think” (“Geschlecht II” 175, original emphasis).

Discussing Heidegger’s point of view in his 1951-52 seminar,<sup>173</sup> Derrida states that the hand as a “monstrality [*monstrosité*]” – in other words, the act of monstration or pointing to – distinguishes ‘man’ from “every other *Geschlecht*, and above all from the *ape*” (“Geschlecht II” 169, emphasis added). This hand is not the actual hand attached to the body or ‘thing’ but “must be thought” since “it is thought, a thought, thinking” (Derrida, “Geschlecht II” 171). Nor is this hand organic or that which grips, grasps, scratches, catches on, or comprehends (Derrida, “Geschlecht II” 172), but is a hand symbolic of writing and of knowledge production through language. The hand becomes a metaphor for thought. While critiquing both Heidegger and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Derrida states that Heidegger “could not not let the thing say itself,” while Hegel’s work “relieves” the “sensible act of grasping” comprehension through mastering and “laying one’s hands on” (“Geschlecht II” 172). Both trains of thought seek to overpower matter through the philosophical tradition and monstration of proper man. Thus, Derrida also adds that while showing the monster through the hand (monstrality), the

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<sup>172</sup> Kelly Oliver writes in “Sexual Difference, Animal Difference: Derrida and Difference Worthy of Its Name” that “*Dasein* is not just different from other animals; it is ontologically different, specifically *because it has hands for taking and giving*. Derrida concludes: ‘Man’s hand then will be a thing apart not as separable organ but because it is different, dissimilar from all prehensile organs (paws, claws, talons); man’s hand is far from these in an infinite way through the abyss of being’ (64, emphasis added).

<sup>173</sup> For further clarification, Derrida writes “[i]n order to situate more precisely what one could call here the thought of the hand, but just as well the hand of thought, of a thought of the human *Geschlecht*, of a thought coming to be nonmetaphysical, let us remark that this develops itself in one moment of the seminar [Recapitulations and Transitions from the First to the Second Hour] that repeats the question of the teaching of thought, in particular in the university, as the place of sciences and techniques. It is in this passage that I cut out, so to speak, the form and the passage of the hand: the hand of Heidegger. The issue of *L’Herne* in which I published ‘Geschlecht I’ bore on its cover a photograph of Heidegger showing him, a studied and significant choice, holding his pen with both hands and above a manuscript. Even if he never used it, Nietzsche was the first thinker of the West to have a typewriter, whose photograph we know. Heidegger himself could write only with the pen, with the hand of a craftsman and not a mechanic” (“Geschlecht II” 168-169).

philosopher gives gifts to himself (“Geschlecht II” 174). While pointing the monster in the other – though the monster itself is in the act of naming (the hand gesture of *pointing* to the other) – man gives to himself and his fellow man. In discussing Heidegger’s theory, the abyssal difference between man and animal is “speech and thought”; Derrida writes, “Man’s hand is thought ever since thought, but thought is thought ever since speaking or language” (“Geschlecht II” 174).

Derrida’s concept of *the gift* is fleshed out further in *Given Time: 1. Counterfeit Money* where he states that the gift is always already assumed reciprocity. To give a gift is to “return payment to oneself” and thus “narcissistic gratitude” (*Given Time* 23). If monstrating is always to give back to the self – in this case intelligibility, power, and recognition – then the hand is a powerful symbol since it evokes men’s writing.<sup>174</sup> Put simply by Jasbir Puar (and tied to arguments highlighted above) “humans decide, based on the linguistic capacities defined by human language, that ‘language’ forever appears as human language, and this language by definition creates humans as superior to nonhuman animals” (27). Puar’s suggestion as to where to proceed within this problem is to first understand language that runs across species, not simply divided by human / nonhuman, and also to destabilize the power and primacy of language itself (27). As Puar points out, “language [is] the primary or even defining attribute that separates humans from animals at this current historical juncture—and it is worth noting, following Jacques Derrida, that the distinction is differently articulated in different eras and areas of knowledge, variously as one of sentience, of capacity to feel pain, and of subjective capacity” (27). It should also be noted alongside Puar’s discussion of the animal that Derrida already begins to demarcate species language across the anthropocentric divide, however, simultaneously warning humans that in wanting to gain knowledge (what he refers to as ‘purchase’ [*prise*]) one is at risk of perpetuating the system of philosophy that has created the “single living body at bottom,” “a single *corpus delicti*,” “a single discursive organization with several tentacles,” that is, “the single embrace” of western thought (*The Animal* 91). Through his response to Kant’s arguments for auto-deixis and auto-monstration, Derrida points out an example of the cuttlefish or octopus that expels its ink when taken hold of by human *hands* (*The Animal* 92); Derrida writes that “[i]ts ink or power would here be the ‘I,’ not necessarily *the power to say ‘I’* but the

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<sup>174</sup> Derrida warns us that “[m]onsters cannot be announced. One cannot say: ‘Here are our monsters,’ without immediately turning the monsters into pets” (“Some Statements and Truisms about Neologisms” 80).

ipseity of being *able to be* or *able to do* ‘I,’ even before any autoreferential utterance in a language” (*The Animal* 92, original emphasis). Simultaneously drawing in the animal as something he yearns to know, while also expelling the illusory corpus of the animal defined by western philosophy, Derrida self-reflects on his own desires to *touch*, as in know or purchase [*like a gift*], the singular animal being (such as his desire to know what is beyond Logos’s gaze). In Derrida’s own self-reflexive words: “I have the impression that I am myself trying to gain—as though wrestling, fishing, or hunting—a sufficiently expert or knowledgeable purchase [*prise*] on what might touch the nervous system of a single animal body. A little like someone who would claim to know which way to take hold of a cuttlefish or octopus, without hurting it too much, and especially without killing it, keeping it at a distance long enough to let it expel its ink” (*The Animal* 91); “I admit to that, to be trying to grasp it, to gain such a purchase on this concept” (92); “My sole concern is not that of interrupting this animalist ‘vision’ but of taking care not to sacrifice to it any difference or alterity, the fold of any complication, the opening of any abyss to come” (92). Each desire and effort to *know* the animal is thwarted by anthropocentric systems that historically took possession of animals through masterful forms of inquiry, such as autopsies, vivisections, zoos, scientific experiments, and taxidermy displays. It is perhaps through rogue taxidermy artists’ critical undoing (even when most unsettling) that humans are able to reflect on these masterful practices. In the next section, I conclude on some insights given about art that disturbs and unsettles the human viewer through the work of Judith Butler.

### § 3.7 Conclusion--The Value of Being Disturbed

Singer’s dead eyes are different from Bibus’s zombie art; however, both artists take on a singular event of death in representational time. Singer’s eyes are the focus of death in her *Dead Eyed* series, whereas Bibus’s abject taxidermy often shows the facial and visual expressions of trauma on the body that is in permanent (taxidermic) unrest. The jewelry in Singer’s sculptures take on gendered and class aspects in contrast to Bibus’s art that uses the aesthetic of gore to unsettle the viewer. We may be less likely to approach or encounter Bibus’s sculptures due to their constructed visual violence – an abject violence that places pressure on the viewer to turn their gaze away from the sculpture. In similar ways, Singer’s sculptures that depict animal death do so in more palatable means and her work begs the question what right humans have in visually

consuming these bodies. Answers to these questions involve no simple address or response. Uncovering the violent underbelly of taxidermy and the ethical dimensions of animal rights abuses in the world, Singer and Bibus pose taxidermy in violent depictions that haunt back to the systems that create such horrors.

Judith Butler writes that “every idea is born, as it were, in and through the sentient relation to an animating alterity” (*Senses* 48). According to Butler, humans are only agential through a relationality with a living world. She writes that “[o]nly in the context of a living world does the human as an agentic creature emerge, one whose dependency on others and on living processes gives rise to the very capacity for action” (*Notes* 44). Butler proposes that agency can be found in the various forms of *undoing*. It is from these agential movements that I propose there is an ambiguous ethical engagement found in rogue taxidermy sculpture. Though taxidermy animals are not alive and thus cannot act through agential means, the role of the rogue taxidermist is to meddle with norms to attempt to unravel anthropocentric acts, beliefs, and norms that go unnoticed or ignored in daily practices. Through their experimental and alternative displays of nonliving animal creatures, rogue taxidermy artists expose the various norms of anthropocentrism and play with the aesthetics of creaturely living – blurring the animal/human (through shareability of death) and living/dead (un/dead) divide. It is within Butler’s lesson on norms that rogue taxidermy aesthetic perhaps fits in its paradoxical position. Butler warns that

Of course, it is possible to break with certain norms as they exercise power to craft us, but that can happen only by the intervention of countervailing norms. And if the latter can and does happen, *it means simply that the “matrix of relations” that forms the subject is not an integrated and harmonious network, but a field of potential disharmony, antagonism, and contest.* (*Senses* 9, emphasis added)

Moments of agency and slippages of norms are vulnerable to the production of new norms. These norms have the potential to be dangerous in any given context and this is perhaps why encounters with un/dead animals in art can be risky, problematic, and jarring. In moments when rogue taxidermy is used to unravel the violence of colonialism that informs the history of taxidermy production, the artworks are at risk of being interpreted as a reproduction of, and confined within, violent norms. Perhaps the fundamental issue of these norms in rogue taxidermy involve the complexity of consent to use animal bodies in various types of displays and how this history of fundamental rights to bodies is informed by a long legacy of colonial and imperial expansion and exploitation. One must not forget that these artworks are preestablished by an



entitlement and a presumed right to use animal bodies in art pieces. These artworks are also haunted by institutions that allow dead animal materials to be used in general and placed on display within a larger history that used taxidermy as a means to preserve and display bodily difference. As Goddu warns, gothic representations are at risk of “dematerializ[ing] and displac[ing] the source of its effect even while representing it” (134). The value of difficult and unsettling encounters with art involves unanticipated responses and reactions, not easily measured or accountable. The larger socio-political context needs deeper evaluation and nuancing in relation to the production of politically informed art, especially art that engages in an animal rights position that simultaneously uses dead animal matter in that process.

In *Precarious Life*, Butler discusses the ways in which life is perceived as grievable or non-grievable through the western gaze. Butler writes in the context of war photography that images have the capacity to provoke political responses (*Precarious* 150). Taking the example of Vietnam to be representative of a larger whole, Butler argues that “it was the pictures of the children burning and dying from napalm that brought the US public to a sense of shock, outrage, remorse and grief. These were precisely the pictures that we were not supposed to see, and they disrupted the visual field and the entire sense of public identity that was built upon that field” (Butler *Precarious* 150). Postulating that representation of violence is a precondition to the resistance to that violence in a western context, she goes on to say that “if the media will not run those pictures,...we will not be moved” (Butler *Precarious* 150).<sup>175</sup> In her essay “Torture and Ethics in Photography,” Butler addresses the ambiguous meanings held by the photographs taken at Abu Ghraib. Although the photos are referential, their meaning is not stagnant through viewing or interpretation (Butler, “Torture and the Ethics of Photography” 957). Thus, drawing upon critical theory and historical precedence, Butler calls for the representation of the war dead,

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<sup>175</sup> When journalists inevitably captured visual images of the destruction of Vietnamese bodies the cultural and social backlash of the U.S. triggered reactionary political processes that ultimately subverted the goals and intentions of the U.S. imperial project in Southeast Asia. One would think that the visual images in the media following the Abu Ghraib torture scandal would have a similar effect, but this does not seem to be the case. In fact, the technological advances from the Vietnam war, through to the Gulf war, and finally to the current Iraqi occupation led by U.S. forces have made, in a literal sense, the victims of the U.S. imperial project more visual and visible in popular culture. For Butler, the visual representation of the war served the purposes of the political right as a means of framing the rhetoric in support of the current U.S. occupation. This framing of vulnerable bodies, through the means of imposing subjectivity onto dead American soldiers, has been used to render invisible Iraqi victims whose lives are, by contrast, considered ‘non-grievable.’ Such framing has been used to silence anti-war sentiments and control the gaze of those who witnessed in the west.

and conceivably the Abu Ghraib torture victims, within the western media so that moral outrage can displace the orthodoxy with which western citizens have interpreted the ‘collateral damages’ of the ‘War on Terror.’

The dissemination of photographs are, arguably, different from encounters with taxidermy sculptures in the space of the art gallery that preordains an encounter with an art object; however, taxidermy sculptures are circulated also as images through social media networks (and seen throughout this project). As I have addressed before, photography is not separated from taxidermy, given that the artistic medium of taxidermy helped inform and improve the manipulation of realism in twentieth-century taxidermy sculpture. Stephanie Turner writes that “the photography and the objects arrested in its image (as with the taxidermy and the animal it represents) are more proximate to each other than, say, the objects represented in a painting are to the actual objects” (6). Turner adds that “the photographic surface adds a layer to the dead animal object held in the viewer’s gaze, effecting perhaps a ‘safe’ distance from the materiality of the actual taxidermy” (6). Though the art mediums are not equivalent, both have the potential to bring to light the political issues at hand. Indeed, video evidence of violence inflicted on animal bodies can produce a separate effect than encounters with repurposed taxidermy sculptures and perhaps, following Turner, encountering taxidermy in the flesh is riskier and more unsettling. I argue, however, that rogue taxidermy does have the potential to create dialogue and elicit responses that may not normally be found through everyday encounters with realist taxidermy on display.

In “The Value of Being Disturbed,” Butler argues that contemporary western society has lost the significance of being disturbed by artworks.<sup>176</sup> Butler extends this analysis not just to artistic paintings, but also to the value of critical theory in general. Controversial artworks (or

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<sup>176</sup> In tandem with the political potentialities born from viewing difficult material, Butler addresses New York City’s mayor Rudolph Giuliani’s response to Chris Ofili’s 1996 ‘controversial’ painting *The Holy Virgin Mary* in her article “The Value of Being Disturbed.” Having produced a depiction of the Virgin Mary with pornographic cut outs and animal feces, Ofili was widely criticized for what was considered a sacrilegious depiction of a religious icon. The controversy surrounding Ofili’s painting, *The Holy Virgin Mary*, involves the use of pornographic vaginal cut-outs “that swarm around [the Virgin Mary] like flies or butterflies...” (Katha Pollitt quoted in Butler, “The Value” 3) and the use of elephant and cow excrement to paint the Virgin Mary. The use of animal excrement was described as sacrilegious (in a Christian context), while Ofili, in contrast, defended his use of these materials in his art because there are holy connotations to elephant excrement found within African religious practices. As Butler argues that Giuliani’s outrage might have been prompted by the ‘Africanized’ version of Virgin Mary that unsettles, troubles, and threatens the white purity of the Christian icon (“The Value” 3-4), this troubled response to the art may have more to do with the long tradition of animals as profane bodies and excrement as abject matter.

arguments) call into question the status quo, normative beliefs and presumptive frames that make up a comfortable worldview for the privileged. Beliefs that are founded on colonial narratives of bodily difference are called into question by the controversial Ofili painting that Butler discusses in her article. The reception of art is immeasurable and dependent on circumstance, circulation, and experience; however, moral judgments, argues Butler, are cleansed by the social and cultural norms that make up western society. She writes that “[f]ew, if any, [people] ask for such [artistic] disruptions, savor their consequences, want to live in the unknowingness they produce” (Butler, “Value” 8). For Butler people in the west “ask of art and language to give back a world that we already know” (“Value” 8), albeit a comfortable depiction of standards of ‘beauty’ or ‘the good.’<sup>177</sup> Whereas Elaine Scarry shows that the body in pain ensures unshareability “through its resistance to language,” she states, “an at least fragmentary means of verbalization is available both to those who are themselves in pain and to those who wish to speak on behalf of others” (*The Body in Pain* 13).

While traditionally taxidermy has been used ostensibly to encapsulate ‘nature’ in its purest form, the art of rogue taxidermists unravels this façade through forms of ‘haunting back’ and what I have described as rogue taxidermy artists’ production of retributational agency through the representation of violent events. Rogue taxidermy attempts to unravel the realities of animal-human contacts and exposes the complexities of these relationships. That said, rogue taxidermy art haunts with anxiety over the liminality of life and death. Posing only a snapshot of what is arguably the ‘event of death,’ Scott Bibus’s and Angela Singer’s works expose the anxieties surrounding the deaths of everyday (mortal) life and death as a larger construct through the staging of pain or the encounter of dead eyes. The elements of death/deaths haunt in the background and these art pieces perhaps say more about anxieties over human mortality than animal death. Rogue taxidermy provokes underlying anxieties of death as an unknowable concept. Perhaps it is in rogue taxidermy’s unconventional form that the *capturing* of time

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<sup>177</sup> Butler writes that “art should take our breath away, make us wonder which world we live in and why, and make us suffer what Wallace Stevens called ‘the exhilarations of change.’ This does not always happen through sensationalist means, and it can happen by a simple alteration of the way a frame works, or in the blending or texturing of color in ways that seem unprecedented...” (“Value” 8). Approaching and witnessing difficult art, for Butler, is about disrupting the self as one currently knows it. Difficult imagery such as photographs and art are meant to unsettle and make one *collectively undone* (“Value” 8). This undoing, she writes, “is the sign [...] of a healthy collectivity, one that does not need to remain itself, one that is willing to risk becoming other than what it already is, one that is even willing, against the odds, to pay for that very risk” (Butler, “Value” 8).

(finitude) is exposed and distressed. In the next chapter I discuss the ways in which animal and human death have been sold for economic gain in the marking of Scottish microbrewery, 'Brewdog.'

## Chapter 4

### 4 Taxidermied Commodities: Selling Death for Life

#### § 4.1 Encounters in Edinburgh, Scotland

The previous chapters have focused on artworks by specific rogue taxidermy artists. In the examples discussed throughout this chapter, I acknowledge the ongoing contradictory relationship held between unconventional aesthetics and the ways in which human beings manipulate and display nonliving animal bodies for anthropocentric purposes. Instead of focusing on another rogue artist, I analyze the ways in which the unconventional aesthetic style of rogue taxidermy has been appropriated to sell consumer products. Specifically, I negotiate my own personal experiences with taxidermy displayed at a microbrewery in Scotland.



*Figure 4.1: 'The End of History' taxidermy koozie at the Brewdog Edinburgh location, photographed September 2015 © Miranda Niittynen.*

In the fall of 2015, I traveled the United Kingdom to do research on historical styles of taxidermy that inform contemporary taxidermy art. After contacting a number of artists and actors in a literary arts collective in downtown Edinburgh about my research on contemporary forms of taxidermy in North America, I was informed of a microbrewery in the city known for its obscure taxidermy beer bottles. Arriving at the microbrewery the next day, I asked the bartender if they had any taxidermy 'bottles' on display at the bar. Without hesitation, the bartender handed me a stuffed stoat enclosing a plastic bottle (Fig. 4.1) and left me be to drink with the once alive, stuffed, and bottled creature. This taxidermied stoat-bottle, that I could touch and hold all I pleased, was unlike any other taxidermy piece I previously encountered in

either an art gallery or a museum — spaces that encase and withhold taxidermy away from the grasp of its patrons [away from Derrida's self-reflexive discussion of knowledgeable purchase

(*prise*) in § 3 **Dead Gazes**]. The local microbrewery, known as ‘Brewdog,’ is widely recognized for its crowdfunding projects, zany antics, unapologetic attitude, and incorporation of taxidermy ‘art’ within their craft beer marketing.

After leaving Scotland, I became more aware of the international reach that Brewdog exerts and their use of taxidermy to market their beer. Brewdog owners James Watt and Martin Dickie are simultaneously celebrated for their radical anti-establishment position against corporate monopolies and criticized for their problematic marketing projects. In a 2015 BBC article, Will Smale interviewed Watt and Dickie about their growing success in the craft beer industry. Smale simultaneously outlines Brewdog’s controversial antics and also celebrates Watt and Dickie’s success story: presently owning a multimillion-dollar craft beer company with bars located both nationally and internationally. Known for their positions against greedy corporations and bourgeois conventions, Brewdog owners have supported their company through crowdfunding projects – following their own self labeled ‘equity for punks’ philosophy. According to Brewdog, this approach seeks to “shorten the distance as much as possible between [themselves], and the people who enjoy [their] beers” (Brewdog blog, “Equity for Punks USA is now Open!”). This business model has shown unforeseen success, providing Brewdog with £27.5 million raised through crowdfunding, 42,500 shareholders, and success within 74 countries worldwide (Watt, TedX Talk).

Brewdog has used taxidermy in several of their marketing and advertising projects. Analyzing Brewdog’s use of taxidermy, I discuss the ways in which Brewdog’s pieces are different from (and yet influenced by) the pop-surrealist art movement founded by rogue taxidermy artists discussed in previous chapters. In this chapter, I analyze four taxidermy styles found throughout Brewdog’s marketing: Brewdog’s 1) taxidermy ‘koozies,’ (taxidermied squirrel and stoat skin bottles); 2) taxidermy ‘head taps’ (deer and moose heads that are mounted and repurposed into beer taps); 3) a ‘taxidermy taxi’ (a taxidermied donkey on wheels that transports patrons to the Brewdog Brighton location); and 4) taxidermy ‘fat cats’ (taxidermied cats in petticoats dropped from a helicopter in London, England, for a crowdfunding initiative). Brewdog’s pieces are used in the marketing for, and sometimes sold as the packaging of, their craft beer products. While the selling and distribution of taxidermy in capitalist society is vexed, Brewdog’s taxidermy beer koozies further extend the norms of spaces where taxidermy ‘art’ commonly resides. My own experience of Brewdog’s taxidermied koozie in Edinburgh, that I

was permitted to touch and hold, provided an alternative encounter from my previous experiences with taxidermy in galleries and museums.



Figure 4.2: Sarina Brewer, *Squirrel Liquor Decanter*, 2005. Taxidermy. Image used with permission from artist, © Sarina Brewer.

Brewdog's taxidermied pieces can, undeniably, be aligned with the aesthetic created by the rogue taxidermy art movement, spearheaded by the Minnesota collective. Brewdog's taxidermy pieces are fashioned with 'conventional taxidermy materials' and are, indeed, 'unconventional' in style (MART, "Rogue Taxidermy"). As written on Sarina Brewer's artist website, the subgenre of rogue taxidermy art is a contagious aesthetic that has "carried over into popular culture, as attested to by the countless window displays and home décor magazines featuring decorative objects that mimic taxidermy" (Brewer, "The Rogue Revolution"). Like the MART directive on ethically sourcing animal materials for art, Brewdog's taxidermy beer koozies<sup>178</sup> are said to be sourced by the remains of roadkill. Beyond these perceived 'good' intentions to source animal bodies for display and distribution

(if indeed there are any 'good' ones), I grapple with Brewdog's assertion that their taxidermy pieces are, indeed, art. I trouble the narratives of 'authenticity,' 'origin,' and 'oneness' related to rogue taxidermy art, as this language is used by Brewdog to market craft beer. In many instances, Brewdog's ambiguous politics and business ethics rub up against the ethical mandate posed by the MART collective. For example, Brewer constructed her own version of a taxidermied squirrel liquor decanter (Fig. 4.2), similar to the Brewdog koozie. But unlike Brewdog's choice to create a taxidermy koozie for shock value for the release of their specialty beer, Brewer's squirrel decanter was informed by her disapproval of masculine hunting culture in America. This is stressed through Brewer's satirical remark that her decanter was 'dedicated' to

<sup>178</sup> While it is stated on news articles and Brewdog's blog that the taxidermy 'koozies' were all sourced by roadkill, no other documents have stated that Brewdog's other taxidermy materials are 'ethically' sourced or repurposed.

the former guitarist of psychedelic rock band Amboy Dukes, Ted Nugent, for his outspoken gun advocacy and controversial opposition to animal welfare and animal rights movements (Hodges, “Custom Creatures”).

Brewer’s squirrel liquor decanter requires the removal of the squirrel’s head to access the contents inside the bottle, unlike Brewdog’s koozies that have the bottle lodged inside the mouth of the squirrel or stoat. Both sculptures make the animal body into a vessel that contains alcohol. Beyond the similarities between Brewer’s and Brewdog’s taxidermied liquor/beer bottles, Brewer has lamented the oversaturation of rogue taxidermy aesthetic that has appropriated the genre for unethical purposes. She states in an interview that “[u]nfortunately the term ‘Rogue Taxidermy’ has become bastardized [sic] in recent years and is used in the wrong context on a regular basis” (Brewer, “The Art Form Defined”). While the terminology of rogue taxidermy is not explicitly used in the marketing of Brewdog’s advertisements, the unconventional style and dialogue around ‘ethical’ sourcing point to the specificities of the art subgenre.

To reiterate from previous chapters, the history of taxidermy has described the practice as a business that provides a representational token or snapshot of a specifically human understanding of animal *life*. Taxidermy is also an object of socio-cultural exchange; it is the image of ideal wildlife that has been displayed as a trophy and used to broadcast and symbolize (masculine) human domination over nature. The uptake of animal bodies for décor has re-emerged in twenty-first century popular design. In “Postmortem Exhibitions,” Jane Desmond writes that taxidermy techniques did not change in the 1930s to the 1970s. Throughout this period, taxidermy normally involved the construction of purchasable pre-modeled urethane body molds. As a result of molds being largely produced and distributed by taxidermy supply companies, the production of taxidermy became easier for taxidermists who no longer had to mold animal forms from scratch (“Postmortem Exhibitions” 352). Because of the mass production of body molds, the profession became a popular hobby, rather than a fine art, until artists began to explore taxidermy in different forms near the end of the twentieth century.

From a contemporary lens, taxidermy is “profoundly polysemous” (63) argues Helen Gregory and Anthony Purdy. “Culturally speaking, taxidermy is a complex artistic configuration, and it possesses several identities within the context of social life” (1020), writes Clifton Bryant and Donald Shoemaker. Like all the different styles of taxidermy discussed in previous chapters, Brewdog’s taxidermy is also culturally intricate and socially problematic. In the following



sections, I negotiate the complicated relationship that rogue taxidermy artists hold within capitalist society and further mediate the use of unconventional styles of taxidermy in the marketing of consumer products. In addition to this analysis, I also spend some time discussing the specific animals used in Brewdog's taxidermy marketing in order to give wider context as to why some animals over others are taxidermied and displayed.

## § 4.2 Encounters in Providence, Rhode Island

I am drawn to the unlikely spaces in which rogue taxidermy art (and the offshoots of its aesthetic) take place. Only months after returning from the UK, I encountered Brewdog's taxidermy pieces again, at a three-day art symposium and exhibit in Providence, Rhode Island. The art exhibit and symposium, entitled *Dead Animals or the Curious Occurrence of Taxidermy in Contemporary Art* was hosted at the David Winton Bell Art Gallery at Brown University and included a number of scholars who have published in the field of animal studies and animal art. Each presenter discussed taxidermy art in its various forms and the exhibit included eighteen contemporary artists; notably, female artists Polly Morgan, Angela Singer, and Kate Clark. Among the scholarly presentations were talks by artists Bryndis Snæbjörnsdóttir and Mark Wilson, as well as MART co-founder, Robert Marbury (see § 5 **Apocalyptic Time**). Marbury paired his presentation with a collage of various examples of rogue taxidermy. Throughout his presentation, Marbury discussed his role in the contemporary taxidermy art movement, including his involvement as a host for early alternative taxidermy competitions and his more recent contribution, *Taxidermy Art: A Rogue's Guide to the Work, the Culture, and How to do it Yourself* – the first book solely dedicated to the subject of rogue taxidermy art.

Marbury focused on the surge of female artists entering the rogue taxidermy scene, as well as the laws surrounding the use of roadkill as materials for artists. Among the photographic examples of rogue taxidermy art, he included a photo of Brewdog's taxidermied squirrel and stoat koozies unaware that this photograph was part of Brewdog's marketing for their specialty beer, 'The End of History.' Unlike traditional taxidermy that stages mammals in realist positions that resemble what these animals looked like when they were alive, the advertisement materials for Brewdog's specialty beer represents each stoat and squirrel, positioned upright, having a beer

bottle lodged inside their bodies, in order to pour out the liquid contained inside (Fig. 4.3).<sup>179</sup> Familiar with these pieces from my experiences at Brewdog Edinburgh, I was surprised that the taxidermied beer ‘koozies’ would be considered an *example* of rogue taxidermy art. The inclusion of Brewdog’s taxidermy in Marbury’s presentation had shattered my personal taxonomy of what had previously defined rogue taxidermy art: its ethical and political roots. Because I believed that rogue taxidermy was somehow different from the violent



Figure 4.3: Brewdog’s advertisement photographs used for 2010 release of 55% ABV of the ‘The End of History.’

objectification of animals found in other forms of taxidermy, I was shocked by the indifference toward Brewdog’s koozies by both the presenter and audience. Marbury’s criticisms were mainly focused on the art of Enrique Gomez De Molina – a Miami artist that received jail time in a federal prison for his ‘hybrid’ taxidermy pieces that were made from trafficked endangered and

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<sup>179</sup> The ‘End of History’ photograph was also used in the 2016 opening of Brewdog Columbus, Ohio, US -- the first Brewdog microbrewery to expand to the US. The Columbus release included the resurrection of ‘The End’ exclusive beer is given to investors who invest more than \$20,000 into the brewery. Image used with permission from Brewdog.

protected wildlife,<sup>180</sup> while little to no attention was paid to the taxidermy beer products throughout the Q&A period.<sup>181</sup>

In Marbury's defense, he stated in response to my inquiry that he was unaware at the time that the stoat and squirrel bodies, clad in Scottish outfits<sup>182</sup> (Fig. 4.4), were used to sell the microbrewery's beer nor that the pieces were, at no time, part of an art exhibit. Rather, these sculptures were always meant for the selling, packaging, and marketing of Brewdog's consumer products. Intrigued by this initial inclusion of an advertisement that Marbury had partnered with other examples of rogue taxidermy art, I question what lines, if any, separate rogue taxidermy art from other taxidermy commodities. If, for instance, unconventional forms of taxidermy art are used to sell merchandise and consumer products, then is the political potential of alternative types of taxidermy in art galleries diminished or less convincing to critical audiences? Is it possible for art to be separated from the practices of commodification, especially when monetary

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<sup>180</sup> Enrique Gomez De Molina pleaded guilty in 2012 and received 20 months in a federal prison for illegally importing animal bodies that were under protected wildlife restrictions. His taxidermied 'chimeras' were sold for up to (US\$) 80,000; see Leslie Tane's article, "Exotic Taxidermied Creatures Land their Creator in Jail" <<http://beautifuldecay.com/2014/09/02/exotic-taxidermied-creatures-land-creator-jail/>>

<sup>181</sup> Many North American taxidermy artists do partake in the selling of their art pieces, and some sell their labour by way of taxidermy workshops offered to the public. Access to dead animal materials is certainly desirable to artists who lack the resources and privileges to partake in art without the pre-established class position that gives entry to the spaces such as galleries and institutions of training and fine arts education. Brewer states, however, that rogue taxidermy limits both the choice of materials she can work with and the luxuries of entering an art store to obtain artistic materials (PBS Film, "Sarina Brewer: Rogue Taxidermy Sculptor"). Indeed, artists are part of a complicated class network that prompts the distribution of art objects and cannot be separated from the liberties and disadvantages of contemporary capital. So too are animal bodies, as artistic materials, deemed in demand for many artists, as dead animal bodies on display do, in various ways, attract a viewership; however, access to raw dead materials, while legally complicated, is desirable because bodies are not normally purchased.

Spurred on by Marbury's incorporation of Brewdog's koozies in his presentation, I asked the panel of speakers at the Rhode Island symposium what they had thought about the divisive relationship between art and the selling of animal bodies as 'art' commodities. I framed the question around the cuts to the arts in Canada under the Harper government; however, this question was met with resistance. For the majority of the artists on stage, selling animal art is not their objective, as their use of taxidermy is but one part of a larger installation. Even while some artists do not sell their sculptures outright, indeed, many do capitalize on the display of their art in galleries. Systems of capital do not stop at the gallery door, nor does art get produced with zero profit – monetary or otherwise. Responding in kind to my question, artist and author Mark Wilson stated that the art created was selling the "idea, not the specimens," of taxidermy art, as he went on to state that the "specimens don't belong to us, they don't belong to anyone." In the case of Bryndis Snæbjörnsdóttir and Mark Wilson's project, photographs stand in for material and tangible taxidermy pieces. Unlike other artists who partake in selling their taxidermy art, Snæbjörnsdóttir and Wilson's art project *Nanoq: Flat Out and Bluesome* involved borrowing taxidermied polar bears from across England to be placed on display together in one gallery.

<sup>182</sup> The anthropomorphized aesthetic of dressing up taxidermied specimens into human clothing is aligned with Victorian taxidermist Walter Potter's aesthetic and the upright positions and mimicry of human actions is also seen in the work of Hermann Ploucquet (see § 1 From Botched to Rogue).

values are used to uphold the survival of art spaces and to support artists' many creations? What of the taxidermy artists who *do* sell (and make a living by selling) their art?



Figure 4.4: Brewdog advertisement of 'The End' specialty beer, including Scottish outfits. Image used with permission from Brewdog.

I am in agreeance with Giovanni Aloï who states that “[l]ets be clear: taxidermy produces objects—no misunderstanding there. The matter is not so much whether these objects vacillate between the ontological status of natural or man-made, but that they essentially are commodities that can enable the retrieval of discursive formations, cultural conditions, practices, and power/knowledge relationships between humans and animals” (*Speculative* 53). Indeed, in the case of Brewdog, unconventional taxidermy is used to display and market their beer products in order to enhance their beer as a fashionable and desirable ‘artsy’ commodity. Beer, alone, is a commodity of and for the ‘masses,’ whereas the incorporation of social class markers (such as high art in art galleries) are issued to entice groups through specific types of cultural capital. The elite cultural aesthetic found in the gifts shops inside art museums is, as Deborah Root argues in *Cannibal Culture: Art, Appropriation, and the Commodification of Difference*, “the most cherished ideal of Western culture” (Root 121). Further, the commodification of museum objects and mainstream beer sales are connected by the narratives of commodity fetishism. Root states the following,

[t]he task for people trying to sell products is how to make a particular object shine brighter than all the other objects competing for the attention of the consumer. The *particular luster associated with art museums* can be transferred to particular objects and mediated through a fascination with notables or through colonial fantasies. The commodity becomes attractive to the consumer precisely because it stands for different assemblages of ideas. (121, emphasis added)

Brewdog capitalizes on the aesthetic of both ‘highbrow’ and ‘lowbrow’ culture, much like the taxidermy found in their marketing. Unlike twentieth-century art museums that were, according to Root, *abattoirs* of culture, pubs and bars are considered spaces of ‘lower’ cultural standard and the taxidermy therein, according to Bryant and Shoemaker, is primarily “décor” or part of the fashionable trends in “organic look” (1025). Brewdog has blurred the lines of cultural capital by incorporating the aesthetic status of art galleries or museums into their microbrewery spaces and the advertisements of their products. This shift in Brewdog’s space from bar to gallery is understood through the movement from mass distribution of mainstream beer production into current trends in specialized craft beer production that treat beer making as an artistic creation. Brewdog co-owner James Watt states that he “absolutely love[s] the beautiful, yet disturbing nature of taxidermy, so packaging [Brewdog’s] most evocative beer in such an unconventional, Brewdog way made sense.” Following this statement, Watt argues that “Beer is art. Art is also art” (Gander, “Brewdog Serves World’s Strongest Beer out of Dead Squirrels”). Placing beer alongside what has been described as ‘art’ heightens Brewdog’s cultural capital and standard. From this framework, Brewdog’s pieces that are created through the frames of rogue taxidermy’s unconventional aesthetic can be seen to highlight the many ways that humans (including rogue taxidermy artists) are complicit in the violence of representation involving postmortem animal bodies. In equal value, however, Brewdog’s pieces can be received differently, dependent on the audience, similar to rogue taxidermy art sculptures. For instance, I argue below that Brewdog’s taxidermy koozies represent the environmental impact of mass consumerism through plastics consumed (and found inside) animal bodies. I also acknowledge the various ways that animals are consumed through consumer products. According to Chloe Taylor, acknowledging the animal that is sacrificed for human consumable products would mean that humans “acknowledge the practices on which so much of our consumption depends” (65). While Brewdog’s taxidermy pieces, like rogue taxidermy art, may have the potential to disrupt, provoke, and unsettle simple

sensibilities and encounters with realist taxidermy, a level of animal sacrifice always underlays these processes.

The complex desire to stage animal bodies is attractive to businesses who see taxidermy's appeal to provoke attention and draw in a viewership. The relationship that taxidermy has with contemporary subcultures – subcultures that are distinctive in terms of class, racial, sexual, and gendered privileges – blurs the lines of ethical intentions in using animal bodies for 'art.' According to Marbury, the subculture of rogue taxidermy was born from people who collectively seek to be self-sustainable – groups that also seek to reject mass production of consumer goods. He states that “[t]axidermy joins yarn bombing, bookbinding, and pickling as expressions of this handwork revolution, and an alternative economy has developed to handle the influx of handmade goods (as seen on sites like Etsy, Pinterest, Behance, and Instagram)”; *“Handwork begets artwork”* (Taxidermy Art 13, original emphasis). In a similar vein, Brewdog's choice to source their company through crowdfunding projects can be compared to the 'alternative economy' mentioned by Marbury. Taxidermy, however, is unlike yarn art or pickled produce, given that the production of taxidermy art involves materials from dead animal bodies. In the pages that follow, I flesh out the complicated relations between art and the retail of animal bodies and the devastation and consumption of the real and symbolic animals.

### § 4.3 Brewdog's Taxidermy

Brewdog's first taxidermy marketing stunt was their release of the specialty beer, 'The End of History,' in 2010. Brewdog released this 55% ABV (alcohol by volume) specialty beer to the public at a percentage that exceeded all other beers. This specialty beer was packaged in limited edition taxidermy bottles, sold at £500 per bottle. These bottles were covered with real animal hides – totaling a limit of eleven bottles made of seven taxidermied stoat bodies and four grey squirrels (and rumor of one hare) (Brewdog blog, “The End of History”). These squirrel and stoat koozies were meant to ‘push the boundaries’ and ‘upset conventions’ and are symbolic of the microbrewery's own decision to create a 55% ABV beer, overturning the public record at the time. As the ABV boundary can no longer be pushed, according to Brewdog, the *death* of beer is the result [equating both beer and taxidermy art to Francis Fukuyama's book, *The End of History*] (Brewdog blog, “The End”).

Brewdog's proclamation that their taxidermy pieces are, indeed, art is found through their advertisement pages and blog. Brewdog writes on their blog that their specialty beer 'The End of History' "is a perfect conceptual marriage between *art*, taxidermy and craft brewing." Elsewhere on the webpage they state that "[t]his beer is an audacious blend of eccentricity, *artistry* and rebellion; changing the general perception of beer one stuffed animal at a time" (Brewdog blog, "The End," emphasis added). In other examples, Brewdog also claims that their marketing is 'art,' such as the taxidermy deer 'head tap' that was released alongside Brewdog's specialty beer, 'Ghost Deer' (discussed in more detail below). Brewdog writes that their 'Ghost Deer' beer is an "idiosyncratic ale [that] combines the 3 things that we [Brewdog] are most passionate about: craft beer, *art* and taxidermy. This is a *revolution in brewing and in beer dispense*. The impact is at once beautiful and disturbing – it *disrupts conventions* and *breaks taboos*, just like the beer it pours" (Brewdog blog, "Ghost Deer," emphasis added). Claiming that their marketing strategies are 'revolutionary' in promoting impact in unconventional beer dispensary feeds into the self-applauding attitude and narrative that Brewdog often portrays about their business. So too is there a boisterous tone found in Brewdog's representation of other stunts found emphasized on their blog, such as the release of the 'Taxidermy Taxi.' Brewdog states that their decision to use a taxidermied donkey on a skateboard to transport their patrons to their bar in Brighton is associated with their other taxidermy marketing stunts. Brewdog's blog states: "[w]ith a long history of combining taxidermy and craft beer, the humorous take on the tourist staple from the Scottish brewery is the latest in a series of stunts, which has seen fat cats thrown from helicopters over the city of London, beer poured out of a stuffed deer's head and bottles of the world's strongest beer secreted inside squirrel corpses" (Brewdog blog, "Taxidermy Taxi").

According to Watt, the creation of these specialty beers with taxidermy koozies was a strategy to give their brand an edge that could compete with multi-national and mainstream beer companies. He states that "[w]e [Brewdog] were making such a tiny amount that we wanted to do something epic"; "We wanted to challenge people's perceptions about how beer can be packaged; taxidermy helps open people's *eyes* to the fact that beer doesn't have to be made by a multi-national organization" (Johnston, "It's 55 percent and Wrapped in Roadkill," emphasis added). In other words, by using a commodity spectacle (*specere*, to look) to enhance their brand, consumers started to pay attention and respond in either outrage or curiosity, resulting in enhanced momentum in Brewdog's sales. The 2010 release of 'The End' beer was bestowed

with this absurd act of taxidermy packaging of each bottle and, additionally, the scales were tipped in the historical tradition of beer production and presentation. Each stoat and squirrel body died of “natural causes,” states Brewdog owners in their marketing video, and roadkill is the main culprit of these ‘natural’ deaths (Brewdog blog, “The End”). Each specialty beer koozie comes with its own “certificate of *authenticity*”<sup>183</sup> and was produced by a “*master* taxidermist from Doncaster” (Brewdog blog, “The End,” emphasis added), only known as “Simon the Stuffer” (Morris, “The 20,000 Rare Craft Beer”).

Like Brewdog’s claims that their taxidermist masters the practice of taxidermy, Marbury’s rhetoric is also influenced by Enlightenment norms (and also commodity fetishism) when he constructs objects as ‘singular,’ ‘authentic,’ or ‘exceptional.’ He writes in *Taxidermy Art* that “[n]o matter what you’re collecting, the rarer it is, the more it is valued. This makes taxidermy a particularly alluring prospect—by its very nature, no two pieces can be exactly alike, and thus each piece is endowed with an unmatched aura of authenticity” (13). Brewdog’s claims of ‘mastery’ and Marbury’s claims of ‘authenticity’ are words coined by the discourses of Enlightenment norms used to codify the object as exceptional. Marbury’s use of authenticity employs commodity fetishism, which places the collecting of taxidermy art as separate and as a refined practice for groups in the present day. From the Marxist tradition, Michael Taussig defines commodity fetishism as “the veiling of the material circumstance under which commodities are produced and consumed”; “In conveying both the allure of the commodity (through mystification) and the illusion of the severance of the finished work from its process of production, commodity fetishism links up with earlier forms of exoticist representation, arguably becoming the postmodern version of exoticist mystique” (18). In unison with Taussig’s description, Dennis Soron adds that commodity fetishism also “encompasses colonial domination, environmental destruction, gender oppression, animal suffering and other forms of exploitation that commodified social reality simultaneously incorporates and disavows” (110). In its spectral singularity, the fetish specimen is haunted by the multiplicity of material differences that are concealed through the practice of traditional taxidermy. Narratives of ‘authenticity,’ ‘singularity,’ and ‘truth’ establish the grounds of twentieth-century museum displays, writes Deborah Root, who argues that the authenticity of an object is the “most cherished convictions of

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<sup>183</sup> Though it is unclear what exactly Brewdog means by a ‘certificate of *authenticity*,’ it is presumably information on who the taxidermist from Doncaster is that produces the taxidermy for the company.



high culture” (110); she writes that the object “provide[s] an experience that a reproduction cannot” (Root 110). Brewdog’s use of the word ‘mastery’ in their marketing reflects the historical displays of taxidermy (alongside ethnographic exhibits) that have imposed narratives of (white) male cultural mastery over the alterity of what was deemed as ‘profane’ humans and ‘wild’ animal nature (see § 2 **Autopsic Gaze**). Such terminology contradicts and further complicates Brewdog’s claims that they ethically source their taxidermy materials.

Brewdog’s success is presumably among the burgeoning middle-class millennial or ‘hipster’ socialites that enjoy craft beer and treat the creation of beers as an artistic endeavor. ‘Equity for punks’ “is about community,” states Watt in his TedX Glasgow Talk. Brewdog’s business philosophy is founded on the rejection of mainstream beer companies and, in contrast, they propose a competitive alternative that appears grounded in ethical relations with closer ties between business owners and their patrons. Through their use of ‘punk,’ Brewdog attempts to play on the exoticization of class struggles. The appropriation of ‘punk’ or ‘post-punk’ rhetoric taken up by Brewdog, alongside their excitable, uncensored, and bold language, is used as a selling feature. Their unapologetic attitude and performances are compelling and give them a competitive edge in the face of mainstream beer companies. Brewdog’s blog states that “[i]n true BrewDog fashion, we’ve torn up convention, blurred distinctions and pushed brewing and beer packaging to its absolute limits” (Brewdog blog, “The End”). The concept of *limits* here is worth noting. For instance, Brewdog has overcome the limit of ABV percentage in beers produced to date. Likewise, Brewdog’s taxidermy reaches new limits of absurdity through their product packaging. It is the use of spectacle that unmask the depths of Brewdog’s egoism, as they are the ones who are deciding where limits reside and claiming ownership of these limits. Likewise, Brewdog self-purports their own innovation in crowdfunding, beer packaging, and creative design.

Brewdog’s business model via punk philosophy is also rooted in the commodification of liberal democracies and leftist moral codes. Brewdog’s notion of punk portrays the exoticization of class struggles in order to be perceived as an attractive and relatable company to their patrons. Further, Brewdog utilizes class scholarship and revolutionary rhetoric to establish their position against systems of inequality (such as large-scale beer conglomerates). As Watt states in his TedX Talk, *culture* is a company’s “DNA,” “connected code,” and “moral compass”; “Community is the holy grail” (Watt, TedX Talk). In this vein, the shared dejection of the

systems of capitalism (in what Brewdog would call their ‘punk’ persona) is used to manipulate patrons through a marketing scheme that takes on this narrative. Posing as the ‘anti-business,’ the ‘anti-monopoly,’ and the ‘anti-mainstream’ attracts a group of people influenced by (the commodified) Marxist or anarchist revolutionary philosophies. Such arguments propose fantastical alternatives against the system that is capitalism; however, as many theorists have shown, the system cannot be dismantled. In response to these arguments, Rosi Braidotti argues in an interview with Heather Davis that there is *no outside of capitalism*; rather, capitalism is a “monistic system” (“The Amoderns: Thinking with Zoe”). In a similar vein, Giorgio Agamben writes that “[i]n its extreme form, the capitalist religion realizes the pure form of separation, to the point that there is nothing left to separate” (“In Praise of Profanations” 28-29). Likened to previous arguments made in this project that the ethical mandate for rogue taxidermy art uses closed loop recycling, environmentalism, and other ‘green’ ethics to further support their decisions for using animal bodies (see **§ 1 From Botched to Rogue**), it is important to highlight how objectification of animal bodies in marketing further channels the arguments that capitalism is all-consuming. Given Watt’s statement that culture is key to sales, what does this say about the cultural normalizing of using taxidermy specifically? Rachel Poliquin writes that all taxidermy is a “choreographed spectacle of what nature means to particular audiences at particular historical moments” (95).

According to Watt, “audience and brand” are not “mutually exclusive”; The most important strategy is to be “relevant” and “embedded in your audience’s culture” (Watt, TedX Glasgow). A simple example of this argument is the current trend in housing décor that markets and sells synthetic animal heads that are symbolic of preserved taxidermy mounts diffused throughout North American consumer culture and department stores. Because of taxidermy’s resurgence in the commercial sphere (and taking into consideration that rogue taxidermy art is practiced and displayed on an international scale) Brewdog’s choice to use taxidermy differently in their marketing and packaging is *timely*. Just as beer has become a rarified commodity in the twenty-first century (due to the plethora of microbreweries and microbrewers producing specialty beers worldwide), so too are taxidermy objects made unique (again). It is perhaps through the rhetorics of recycling that taxidermy as a new (yet old) art medium has continued to be circulated among cultures; however, up until recently, in terms of the macro scale of the art

industry and mainstream beer conglomerates, craft beer and taxidermy art are micro scale phenomena.

The upcycle of ‘lowbrow’ practices such as taxidermy that is repurposed in ‘highbrow’ art spaces such as the gallery point to capitalism’s system of return, where the production of beer and dead animal materials is resold under a rhetoric of new (or *different*) creative projects and the rhetoric of recycling materials for art is a trendy response to the threats of climate change and overconsumption of garbage that pollutes the earth’s lands and oceans. Oversaturation of the symbolism of taxidermy abounds the everyday; for instance, popular trends include vintage (or ‘dead’) bicycle parts that have been repurposed into taxidermy mounts and antlers<sup>184</sup> or crocheted animal heads<sup>185</sup> that are marketed for walls in toddler’s bedrooms. Children’s toys are also commonly referred to as ‘stuffed animals’ in North America, alluding to the past stuffing of dead animal bodies. The incorporation of taxidermy in advertising is far from a new idea and the use of realist taxidermy in high-end fashion brands (over the last thirty years) highlight that the aesthetic and practice of taxidermy has long adapted to the changes in consumption and exchange. While animal byproducts are everywhere and are used in many all-purposeful products, identifiable commodities that are likened to the symbolic idea of taxidermied species and mounted trophy heads perpetuate a very specific type of obedience to, and apathetic attitude towards, the display of dead animals.<sup>186</sup>

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<sup>184</sup> For examples of bicycle taxidermy, see Christopher Jobson’s article, “Hunting Trophies: Repurposed Vintage Bike Parts Converted into Functional Taxidermy Racks.” *Colossal*, 17 Feb., 2014. Web.

< <http://www.thisiscolossal.com/2014/02/hunting-trophies/> >

For flower trophies, see Jobson’s article, “Elkebana: Symmetrical Flower Wall Trophies Inspired by Japanese ‘Ikebana’ Flower Arrangements.” *Colossal*, 3 Feb., 2015. Web. < <http://www.thisiscolossal.com/2015/02/elkebana-symmetrical-flower-arrangements/> >

<sup>185</sup> See Taylor Hart’s book, *Crochet Taxidermy: 30 Quirky Animal Projects, From Mouse to Moose*, Louise Walker’s book, *Faux Taxidermy Knits: 15 Wild Animal Knitting Patterns*, and Vanessa Mooncie’s book, *Animal Heads: Trophy Heads to Crochet*.

<sup>186</sup> Different from synthetic taxidermy, realist taxidermy is commonly used in advertisements to sell products. In his book *Taxidermy*, Alexis Turner discusses the many ways in which taxidermy is commercialized for product consumption. He writes “[f]rom Tommy Hilfiger, to Ted Baker, and Ralph Lauren to Hackett” (174); “artists, designers, fashion designers, shop window displays and interiors, magazine photoshoots, used [taxidermy] to promote luxury commodities such as jewelry, watches and designer clothing”; “in advertising taxidermy is used to enhance the sets, promoting products as diverse as sofas, drinks, mobile phones, cars and even lingerie” (174). In turn, the current trends of taxidermy (as seen in Brewdogs appropriation of alternative taxidermy displays) involve the commodification of the ‘unconventional,’ the ‘anti-establishment,’ and the ‘artistic’ tied to the conventionality of rogue taxidermy aesthetic.

## § 4.4 ‘The End of History,’ Taxidermied Koozies

Due to the thriving production, distribution, and display of taxidermy found on the global scale within galleries, stores, and bars, it can be presumed that consumption and exchange of taxidermied animal bodies, in various forms, is a normalized practice. The death of the animal is at times imperceptible by the human viewer who encounters the realist taxidermy piece, something that has become a culturally normalized and a highly predictable phenomenon.

As I have argued in previous chapters, unconventional stagings by rogue taxidermy artists contrast realist displays and also have the potential to break the gaze that constructs the animal as an object by exposing the violence inflicted on their bodies in the act of display. Indeed, rogue taxidermy also risks redoubling the exploitation of postmortem animals and rogue aesthetics is not free from the underlying colonial bedrock of taxidermy production or disembodiment through capitalist reproduction. Because of these risks, it is essential to mediate Brewdog’s politics in order to show the subversive potential and ethical setbacks of their taxidermy pieces in relation to the rogue taxidermy movement. Brewdog’s taxidermy stagings are arguably abhorrent and further trivialize the once-living animal. Brewdog has provoked criticisms from animal rights advocacy groups, as well as other anti-oppression groups that have found their “post-punk apocalyptic mother fu\*ker of a craft brewery”<sup>187</sup> advertisements to be offensive, troubling and at the expense of many disenfranchised groups who closely align with punk identity. Animal rights agencies, such as the charity *Advocates for Animals* have criticized Brewdog for their “perverse” and “out-of-date shock tactics” in using taxidermy in their marketing (Henley, “The Aggressive”).

In response to criticisms by animal rights activists that Brewdog’s boundary pushing has gone too far, Watt responded that “[i]t was all roadkill we got from a taxidermist. They are all animals that were *dead anyway*. We think to use dead animals in this way is much better than for them to be left to rot on the roadside” (Johnston, “It’s 55 percent,” emphasis added). The response by Watt is similar to the statements made by rogue taxidermy artists who stress the importance of practicing environmental sustainability through their art. The claim that bodily

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<sup>187</sup> “A post-punk apocalyptic mother fu\*ker of a craft brewery” was a phrase used to describe Brewdog in the early phases of their company. Brewdog also used phrases such as, “rip you straight to the tits” and “drill the bastards,” which attracted attention from “Advertising Standards Authority” who co-owner James Watt subsequently criticized as “killjoy, self-important pen pushers at the ASA” (IOD&B blog, “Brewdog: inside out design and branding?”).

decay is undesirable when these animal bodies can be used for alternative (artistic) means is, surely, reminiscent of the statements that roadkill deaths are an adequate reason for artists to use postmortem animal bodies as artistic materials. In contrast to ethical mandate practiced by rogue taxidermists, Brewdog's political stance on animal rights remains ambiguous. While Brewdog has not said outright what their position is on animal rights, there is a contradictory narrative at play with their marketing, fundraising, and product packaging. Pointing out that Brewdog has periodically incorporated taxidermy into their marketing goes to show that taxidermy is an insidious practice, drawing less attention from animal rights groups than criticisms over meat eating or hunting. This is understandable, given that taxidermists are not always involved in the slaughter or killing of animals; rather, they only produce sculpted objects from animal remains. Taxidermy, thus, is not the cause of death, but the creation of a fetishistic 'second life' (discussed in more detail in § 5 **Apocalyptic Time**). As mentioned above, Brewdog did not respond to the charge that their taxidermy went against a fundamental right of postmortem animal bodies; instead, their response detailed only the source of their animal materials (roadkill) that they found ethically suitable for their use. The animals were, to reiterate Brewdog, *dead anyway*.<sup>188</sup>

Brewdog's taxidermied beer koozies are arguably the most critically affective pieces of all their taxidermied creations. The squirrel and stoat bodies, manipulated to look as though they are forced to consume the plastic or beer bottle, display that *real* animals ingest discarded human consumer products that they encounter, such as glass and plastics (oftentimes against their will) because of cumulative garbage on the planet. So too do the koozies point to the dual act of consumption; they embody the physical act of consuming a bottle of beer, while also being consumed (as animal byproduct) by the patron who has claimed ownership over the specialty beer product. The act of consuming the bottled contents also involves a face-to-face encounter with the taxidermied body and this is emphasized through Brewdog's advertisement of taxidermied koozies shot from a birds-eye-view position (Fig. 4.5).

Unlike gallery exhibitions or natural history displays that encase taxidermy separate from the grasp of the patron, Brewdog gave me permission to tactically connect with their taxidermied

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<sup>188</sup> In Christy Desmith's article "Body of Work," Sarina Brewer has stated that "[s]till, a sizable number of activists interpret her work as disrespectful to animals, and Brewer spends an inordinate amount of time answering their angry emails. 'I think their time would be better spent picketing McDonald's,' she says. 'These animals are *already dead*'" (emphasis added).

stoat koozie. As I previously mentioned, I was welcomed to touch the stiff animal body made into a beer bottle koozie at their Edinburgh bar. My previous relationship to taxidermy that was solely constructed by a visual relationship was shattered when I physically held the Brewdog koozie. The liveliness of the taxidermy sculpture was instantly lost when I engaged in a closer (tactile) encounter with the lifeless stoat. Didier Maleuvre stresses that realist taxidermy



Figure 4.5: Brewdog's birds-eye-view shot of the taxidermy squirrel koozie. A shot that places the taxidermic animal in a face-to-face encounter with the patron who drinks from the beer bottle. Image used with permission from Brewdog.

successfully encapsulates a Kantian aesthetic, which follows that the taxidermied animal be “an image whose perfection lies in the successful concealment of human activity” (214). The tactile relationship with taxidermy breaks the Kantian aesthetic of concealment; tactile encounters break the aura of taxidermy’s animacy, left unhinged when flesh on flesh is kept separate. As Mel Y. Chen writes in *Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect*, “[a]nimacy is a craft of the senses; it endows our surroundings with life, death, and things in between” (55). The affective relation shifts from a visual relation to a tactile one, wherein one can feel the consequences of systems that turn living animals into dead objects. In turn, Brewdog’s taxidermied objects are sold as commodified sculptures paired with the specialty release of a new beer. Patrons who can afford to purchase the koozies are able to touch, hold, and possess the taxidermied bottles.

Brewdog’s taxidermy pieces stand as depictions of the *very tools of undistorted consumption*, while they also offer up a criticisms of cruelty and brutality of contemporary

technological processes that torture and destroy masses of animal beings across the planet. In contrast to realist taxidermy that sanitizes the destructive acts of humans inflicted on nonhuman animals, Brewdog's pieces, like rogue taxidermy, expose grotesque types of violence; however, Brewdog's depictions fall short in critically engaging taxidermy *for* animal rights. Brewdog's displays of violence inflicted on animals are specific to human exploitation of animals through the technologies of consumerism that are forced onto (and inside) animal life.<sup>189</sup> In a doubled reading of Brewdog's taxidermy pieces, boundaries are indeed pushed and encounters, even confrontations, are potentially provoked by the alternative aesthetic posed by the microbrewery. Brewdog's marketing choices to turn their taxidermy pieces into the tools of mass consumer consumption and commodities are sold to, and collected by, patrons and investors of the Brewdog franchise. In the next section, I will discuss Brewdog's choice to install beer taps into the heads of trophy taxidermy.

## § 4.5 'Ghost Deer' and 'Holy Moose,' Taxidermied Head Taps

The production, distribution, and selling of animal heads is etymologically linked. The word 'capital' holds roots in the historical trade and ownership of animals; it is born from *caput*, the Latin expression for the head (of livestock). Capital is related to animal heads and moveable animal property, whereas 'decapitation' translates to the removal of the head (such as mounted taxidermy trophies).<sup>190</sup> Brewdog's taxidermied head taps embody the normative display of

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<sup>189</sup> Brewdog's taxidermy squirrel and stoats inform a cycle which includes the use of animal byproducts in consumer food products that are then redistributed into the environment. In 2016, Brewdog came under fire again by vegans, for re-releasing their 'The End' specialty beer (and its taxidermy koozies) to investors who donate over (US\$) 20,000 to their crowdfunding campaign to open a microbrewery in Columbus, Ohio. As Brewdog's products display postmortem animal bodies, their company products are primarily vegan. Normally, beer companies use animal byproducts such as isinglass, gelatin, and casein finings in the processes of their brewing. According to the vegan website *Barnivore: Our Vegan Beer, Wine and Liquor Guide*, Brewdog's beers are vegan, with the exception of "Dogma," "Jet Black Heart," "Electric India," and "Lumberjack Breakfast Stout" beers. Currently Brewdog is stamped with the Vegan Society Trade Mark, an approval that is up for debate given the current backlash to the taxidermy koozies, having over 30,000 people sign a petition asking Brewdog to remove the vegan label from their beers (Learmonth, "Brewdog Under Fire from Vegans over New 'Roadkill' Beer Stunt").

<sup>190</sup> The unconventional use of taxidermy to sell alcoholic beverages is not unique to Brewdog's advertisement. Mike's Hard Lemonade released their Mike's Hard Lemonade House Ads in 2012, which included three scenarios of a man encountering something strange at his doorstep. In one of the ads, the man answers the door to a headless deer searching for its lost head. The mounted deer head on the wall inside the house asks the man who is at the door, unable to turn its head far enough to see the decapitated body. The tagline of the commercial is "Mike's Hard Lemonade: *Always different*, always refreshing" (Arnzen, "Trophy Talks Back: Mike's Hard Lemonade 'House' Ads," emphasis added). This tagline is reminiscent of Brewdog's claims of unconventional and disruptive styles that are used to shock viewers through the trivialization of animal material and decapitated images of animal heads.

mounted heads on walls made popular through American trophy hunting culture. Released after the taxidermied beer koozies, Brewdog's second taxidermy marketing stunt included the introduction of 28% ABV beer labelled 'Ghost Deer' in 2011. The 'Ghost Deer' release involved a beer tap implanted inside the head of a taxidermied stag, which was available only at the Edinburgh location (Fig. 4.6). The stag's head was available at the Edinburgh bar for a month with the limited release of the specialty beer.<sup>191</sup> Similar to the unconventional philosophy expressed by Brewdog with the release of their taxidermy beer koozies, the 'Ghost Deer' release was meant to "smash UK perceptions of beer"; "to fuse craft beer, art and taxidermy";



*Figure 4.6: Brewdog's advertisement for "Ghost Deer," including the taxidermy head tap that was stationed at the Edinburgh location in 2011 for only a month, part of the new beer's release. Image used with permission from Brewdog.*

<sup>191</sup> A video of the 'Ghost Deer' event can be viewed on youtube, < <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5XzSNnYLL00> >



"revolutionize brewing and its dispensaries; and lastly, but importantly, produce "impact" that is both "beautiful and disturbing" (Brewdog blog, "Brewdog Launches 28% ABV Beer"). The use of 'impact' in their advertisement rhetoric stresses the use of spectacles to market their products.

The objective of producing rogue taxidermy art, in its numerous forms, attempts to kindle thoughtful self-critique of the ways in which humans inflict violence on nonhuman animals. A number of taxidermy art pieces call into question both the production and repurposing of taxidermy as a practice that is different from Brewdog's head taps. These criticisms of human violence inflicted on animals is seen through Angela Singer's neologism 'de-taxidermy.' Singer's concept of 'de-taxidermy' is most important in dialogue with Brewdog's head taps. As seen in the art examples discussed in the previous chapter, Singer describes her work as 'de-taxidermy,' an aesthetic that exposes the *origin* or 'event' of the taxidermied animal's death. Singer's critical unmasking of animal death, by the hands of hunters, seeks to affectively engage patrons by exposing violent wounds on the taxidermied body.

Unlike Singer's art that seeks to disrupt conventions in order to critically reflect on violence, Brewdog's rhetoric takes on the language of Enlightenment constructions of and masculine dominance over nonhuman animals in order to fold them within the interests of gaining capital. Appropriating the trophy head of a stag to serve their beer, Brewdog's blog states that the beer they are selling is "only ever served from a *single* handcrafted and *authentic* deer's head" (Brewdog blog, "Ghost Deer," emphasis added). This suggestion of a singular species and an authentic taxidermy piece (similarly seen in the description of the taxidermy koozies) speaks more readily to the belief that taxidermy mounts can encapsulate the sole image of an entire species. Pieces such as hybrid creatures displayed by rogue taxidermy artists attempt to disrupt taxonomy and the rhetoric of singularity and authenticity (as was discussed in § 2 **Autopsic Gaze**). By using these discourses of traditional preservation, Brewdog treats its products and commodities as exceptional and unique, limited in time, access, and display. In other words, Brewdog creates desire for their 'special' products when they place them under a time limit that they are made available to the public.

When analyzing the 'Ghost Deer' taxidermy head tap, it is clear that the appropriation of taxidermy exposes both the violent colonial impulse to dominate animals and produces them as trophies, despite rogue taxidermy artists' resolve to pose an alternative. Many rogue taxidermy artists have repurposed animal heads in order to expose the violent acts involved in the

decapitation of stags (and their subsequent mounted heads). Maneesha Deckha writes that “[a]s a symbol of virility, the ability to exert power over the deer is understood as a confirmation of hegemonic masculinity”; “Writings emerging from the early conservation movements and current hunting magazines overflow with assertions that hunting is the ultimate expression of full naturalistic humanity and masculinity” (“Salience” 34-45). In response to American hunting culture, Singer has recreated a number of taxidermied stag head displays, exposing the anthropocentric desire to make an animal into a trophy (an argument that was briefly discussed through Singer’s artwork *Deer-atize* in § 3 **Dead Gazes**). In response to the objectifying production of buck head mounts, Singer has sought to produce rogue taxidermy art that places the remains of the animal body back into the conversation. In her 2015 work *Spurts*,<sup>192</sup> Singer poses taxidermied deer bodies without heads – only a spurt of pink liquid jumps from the area where the head previously sat.



Figure 4.7: Angela Singer, *Recovered*, 2004. Recycled taxidermy and mixed media. Image used with permission from artist, © Angela Singer.

<sup>192</sup> An image of Singer’s piece *Spurts* can be found on the David Winton Bell Gallery website from the exhibition, *Dead Animals or the Curious Occurrence of Taxidermy in Contemporary Art*, see < <https://www.brown.edu/campus-life/arts/bell-gallery/exhibitions/selected-works/9162> >

Singer's pieces *Recovered* (2004), *Sore 1* and *Sore 2* (2001-2)<sup>193</sup> are a few pieces among the many that respond to the mounting of stag heads. For example, *Recovered* (Fig. 4.7) attempts to reattach the deer's head to the body that was lost in the taxidermy process. The stag's head is separated through the wood panel that is normally attached to the wall. The deer's head exposes the gunshot wound that was previously concealed when made into a realist taxidermy object. The animating blood that is spurting from the deer's head is wielded as a reminder that this animal was once alive and suffered in order to be decapitated and posed in its static taxidermic pose. Likewise, 'Sore 1,' a widely known piece by Singer, depicts the process whereby a buck's antlers are severed from its head through the de-antlering process. Red wax pours down the buck's head to depict the bleeding processes that happen through the violent practice of antler removal for trophy display. In contrast, 'Sore 2' attempts to re-apply the skin of the animal through the practice of taxidermy that hides the inside flesh that is removed and replaced by an artificial cast of an animal's body. The sections of skin graphed onto flesh exposes the absence of flesh and blood that are symbolically rinsed from the realist piece – exposing the violence involved in taxidermy preservation.

In contrast, and released after the 2011 'Ghost Deer' head tap, Brewdog's second head tap innovation entitled, 'Holy Moose,' was incorporated inside the head of a taxidermied moose (Fig. 4.8). In 2015, the 'Holy Moose' beer was released at the Brewdog Stockholm, Helsinki, and Oslo locations (Brewdog blog, "Brewdog invites Scandinavia to Join the Craft Beer Revolution"). The mounting of deer and moose heads fit the traditional narrative of trophy hunting and concomitant stuffing of animal bodies. Realist taxidermy mounted heads or trophies appear as nothing more than a background fixture. Unlike rogue pieces, the 'Ghost Deer' and 'Holy Moose' taps are repurposed to give new meaning to taxidermy mounts – that of distribution of consumable products. While these head taps can be read as a nod to the fetishistic essence of commodities used in packaging and selling consumer products, animals are never simply consumed; rather, they are also the tools to produce consumerism.

Impaling stoats and squirrels with bottles or installing taps inside the heads of moose and deer imposes an image of violence by human technologies, including the violent technologies of

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<sup>193</sup> Images of *Sore 1* and *Sore 2* can be found at the following website,  
< <http://www.criminalanimal.org/people/writings/singer> >



*Figure 4.8: Brewdog advertisement for release of specialty beer, 'Holy Moose.'  
Head tap was installed at the Stockholm, Helsinki, and Oslo locations in 2015.  
Image used with permission from Brewdog*

realist taxidermy. Brewdog's taxidermy head taps take on the role of wall décor, but also utility, similar to nineteenth-century pieces of animal furniture. In the 1896 article "'Animal' Furniture," William Fitzgerald catalogs the many examples of animal bodies used in Victorian houses as furniture and tools. Framing the trend of animal ornaments and décor as having a "craze" in the 1860s when "ladies adopted the hideous fashion of wearing as hats *whole* grouse and pheasants" (273), Fitzgerald considers commodity practices, such as animal jewelry as "modish abominations" (273). Calling into question what makes these inanimate furniture objects 'animal' (in spite of their lack of animality) Fitzgerald unravels the differences between object and animal. He writes that "in the home of one of our greatest big game hunters there may be seen a superb tiger set up as a dumb – very dumb [sic] – waiter. That same tiger, however, wasn't always so obliging, and he once nearly tore to pieces the very man he now stiffly supplies with a glass of grog and a cigar" (273). Other Victorian objects included in his article included a taxidermied 'bear dumbwaiter' that serves alcoholic drinks and a taxidermied 'elephant's foot as liquor stand' made by Rowland Ward (Fig. 4.9). Brewdog's taxidermy head taps work to serve alcohol to their patrons and are the arbiters of consumption. Realist displays only simulate an imaginary depiction of what animal life perhaps looks like before transformation into a



Figure 4.9: James Rowland Ward, *Elephant's Foot as Liquor Stand*. The photograph is an image of Ward's transformation of a hunted Indian elephant shot by Duke of Edinburgh. Image from the 1896 article, "'Animal' Furniture" by William G. Fitzgerald.

taxidermied or furnished object. Brewdog's taxidermy continues to reproduce this system of objectification by making postmortem animals the beasts of burden in serving drinks to the public. In contrast, Singer's pieces eagerly show the precarity of existence under a perceived threat, whereas Brewdog's head taps trivialize and utilize animal

death. The next section discusses the taxidermy taxi, a taxidermied donkey on wheels used for the grand opening of Brewdog's Brighton bar location.

## § 4.6 The 'Taxidermy Taxi,' Dead Pony Club

The most recent taxidermy marketing scheme, apart from the 'Holy Moose' head tap, was Brewdog's 'Taxidermy Taxi.' For the August 28, 2015 grand opening of their bar in Brighton, Brewdog 'commemorated' this seaside town in England (known for its donkey rides along the beach) with the 'Taxidermy Taxi.' This 'taxi' transported patrons to the new bar on the back of a taxidermied donkey placed on a trolley on wheels, pulled by the brewery's staff (Fig. 4.10). Patrons could hail a cab on the taxidermied donkey, known as 'Dave,' by using twitter's #Taxidermytaxi. Photographs of the donkey include a Brewdog staff member feeding the taxidermied donkey a Brewdog "Dead Pony Club" beer (Fig. 4.11). Like the 'Ghost Deer' and 'Holy Moose' head taps, the 'Taxidermy Taxi' is the vehicle for human service. Like plastic toy horse rides, the taxidermy taxi stands as a symbol for animal labour. Brewdog blog writes that the taxidermy taxi is a "new twist on old traditions" and is part of the "craft beer revolution"; "tradition is great, but not as good as something with an extra kick of eccentricity" ("Taxidermy Taxi: Dead Donkey Delivers Craft Beer Lovers"). From these Brewdog statements, tradition involves the historical use of donkeys for transportation in the city of Brighton. Suitably, Watt writes in the promotional announcement that Brewdog "always like[s] to fit in with the culture of



our latest venue's city with suitable Brewdog *irreverence*" (Brewdog blog, "Taxidermy Taxi"). The 'burden' of entrenched forms of animal exploitation is lost through the triviality of the animal labour in the twitter taxi slogan and also by the staff member who is photographed struggling to pull the patron and donkey on wheels.



*Figure 4.10: Brewdog employee pulling a patron to the Brighton bar on 'Dave,' the Taxidermy Taxi, Brewdog's taxidermied donkey for the 2015 grand opening of the Brewdog Brighton Bar. #Taxidermytaxi. Image used with permission from Brewdog.*

As the previous examples have shown, the taxidermy taxi is yet another example of capitalism's reinvention of animal forms of service and labour. Juxtaposing the taxidermy skin of a dead animal, emblematic of leather vehicle interiors, the taxidermy taxi is another type of inanimate furniture that is utilized against the backdrop (or backseat) of human action. Human made technologies such as wheels reinvent the ways in which taxidermy is traditionally displayed. While taxidermy is perceived as static, Brewdog's taxi gives motion to the dead animal – but for the purposes of human interests (discussed further in § 5 **Apocalyptic Time**). The afterlife of the taxidermy taxi invokes labour of the dead 'beast of burden,' except the labour also involves the human who carries the weight of the recreational donkey.



Figure 4.11: Brewdog employee feeding 'Dave,' the taxidermied taxi, a 'Dead Pony Club' Brewdog beer. Image used with permission from Brewdog.

Not only are donkeys represented as 'beasts of burdens,' they are also a vulnerable subgroup *for their skins*. As of 2017, African donkeys are at risk of extinction because of the mass economic trade of donkey skins (a trade that is rumored to have replaced the trade of ivory in China). Such calls to crisis of donkey endangerment make 'Dave' an exceptional creature for his skin. In "Chinese Medicine Fuelling Rise in Donkey Slaughter for Global Skin Trade," Katherine Purvis writes that the "[d]emand for donkey hide, which is boiled to produce gelatin – the key ingredient in a medicine called *ejiao* – has raised the price and the rate of slaughter of the animals, threatening the livelihoods of poor communities who rely on them."<sup>194</sup> Kimon de Greef writes that *ejiao* was rebranded as a consumer item in the 1990s, which began to stir up the demand for donkeys skins ("Rush"). The mass slaughter for skins has involved various forms of horrible violence inflicted on donkeys, such as theft, forced starvation (resulting in female donkeys miscarrying their pregnancies from stress), mass slaughter (some donkeys are

<sup>194</sup> For more information on the history of donkeys, see Jill Bough's book, *Donkey*. London: Reaktion Books, 2012.

bludgeoned by hammers and skinned alive), while the devastation of the donkey population has created a “humanitarian crisis” to the poor communities that use donkeys “to take goods to the market, cultivate land, and fetch water” (Purvis, “Chinese”; BBC “South African Police Seize”; de Greef, “Rush for Donkey Skins”). Jill Bough writes that in the nineteenth century, donkeys were important for agriculture and transport in South Africa (99); in Ethiopia they were used by poor communities to transport firewood (100); and used to transport the poor in Victorian Britain (55). The use of donkeys as transportation allowed rural African farmers to trade goods at markets. By the twentieth century, there were about one million donkeys employed in Africa (Bough 99). According to a news report in 2017, “donkey theft, slaughter and animal skin sales have been rising in South Africa since 2015” (BBC, “South African Police Seize”). To prevent the mass export of donkey skins, in 2016 six African governments banned the trade<sup>195</sup> and closed six donkey slaughterhouses. This move has increased the illegal and unregulated export of donkey skins<sup>196</sup> (de Greef, “Rush”). In 2017, the Chinese government reduced import tax on donkey skins from 5% to 2% (BBC, “China Reduces Tax on Donkey Skin”) and it has been reported that China increased their number of donkey breeding centers<sup>197</sup> to ease the demand for donkeys from African countries (Gupta, “China Plans Donkey Breeding”).

Skins are used as desirable export and also as a tool for consumer products. Dave, who is a member of Brewdog’s ‘Dead Pony Club,’ comes into tension with the realities of a colonial past that involved various complex relationships between both animals and humans. For instance, Purvis states that “in the UK it is illegal for herbal practitioners to prescribe animal products”; “We condemn the use of any substance that endangers any animal population” (“Chinese Medicine Fuelling”). Such sentiments are interesting in the face of colonial legacies

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<sup>195</sup> Purvis writes that “[f]ive countries have banned exports of donkey hide – Pakistan, Senegal, Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger – but the Donkey Sanctuary warns that more countries need to ban the slaughter and export of donkeys for their skins” (“Chinese Medicine Fuelling”).

<sup>196</sup> Kimon de Greef writes in “Rush for Donkey Skins in China Draws Wildlife Traffickers” that “At present it’s legal to export up to 7,300 donkey skins a year from South Africa. Meat safety regulations require donkeys to be slaughtered in approved equine abattoirs, and only one such slaughterhouse is now operating, with a license to process 20 donkeys a day. (Authorities recently shut down two other slaughterhouses for failing to comply with regulations.) And yet a single export firm, Anatic Trading, investigated by police in Johannesburg this year, traded more than 15,000 donkey skins in an eight-month period from July 2016 to May 2017, exceeding the entire country’s annual legal limit at the time by some 5,000 skins.”

<sup>197</sup> Purvis writes that “[f]armers have attempted to meet the increased demand for ejiao products by farming donkeys, but this has largely been unsuccessful due to donkeys’ low fertility” (“Chinese Medicine Fuelling”).



that have used and transported animals cross-continently for colonial purposes. Shukin writes in *Animal Capital* that the “normative chain of associations triggered by the symbol of the Canadian beaver—moth-eaten stereotypes of the fur trade nostalgically evok[e] a bygone era of colonial contact and commerce, an era of imagined authenticity and fullness of nature prior to the ostensible ‘vanishing’ of aboriginal and animal populations” (4). According to Laurence Simmons and Philip Armstrong, zoographers “use the term ‘colonist’ to describe species that take up residence in a new ecosystem of their own accord” (9). While species may appropriate and ‘colonize’ the space of a new ecosystem, the migrations of these species are part of colonial travel. Simmons and Armstrong give examples of nonhuman species that played an agential role in colonizing lands. For example, the longhorn cattle were brought to the Great Plains of North America in order to drive out the buffalo and the Indigenous populations that relied on them for survival. In the Great Plains of North America, cattle and sheep migrated to these spaces and ‘colonized’ and destroyed the natural ecosystems of both Australia and New Zealand (9). In the case of the donkey, Bough writes that

Although donkeys originated in Africa, they were not indigenous to South Africa and were slow to penetrate the south. Donkeys arrived with European colonists, with the Dutch occupation of the Cape: the first landed in 1656, from where they spread northwards. They were later brought by the London Missionary Society as pack animals to carry the post in 1858. Although there is little information available about the origins of donkeys in South Africa, there is little doubt that they arrived with all the European cultural baggage on their backs. Slowness and smallness were interpreted as inferiority, and willfulness as stupidity: few of the donkey’s positive qualities were recognized. At first, donkeys were not much used apart from asbestos mining by Whites. Perhaps because Whites had little use for donkeys, they became cheaper and started to appear on Black reserves and proved practical as transport and haulage animals for poorer members of society. (99)

Donkeys are intertwined with a complex history that have associated their existence alongside groups of impoverished humans. From these realities, donkeys have taken on the stereotype of the ‘ass’ from the word *asinine* – meaning ‘stupid.’ The stereotype (and ableist language) of human ‘stupidity’ is among the many examples of anthropocentric norms that use animals to legitimize social class disparities and other inequalities.

## § 4.7      Stuffed ‘Fat Cats’ and Punk Equality

The complicated relationship of business marketing and the use of iconic forms of taxidermy thicken when Watt and Dickie announced that their ‘Equity for Punks’ crowdfunding project had been a success, raising five million within twenty days. In the 2015 stunt, Brewdog owners dropped dozens of taxidermied ‘guerilla felines’ out of a helicopter onto the streets of London.<sup>198</sup> These ‘fat cat’ taxidermied bodies were a form of “guerilla marketing” and “anti-propaganda propaganda” --2 adorned with tailored suits, hats, and parachutes, as they carried the company’s “Equity for Punks IV – Share Offer Information.” Brewdog’s blog states that the taxidermy felines were meant to “mock the fat cat banker caricature, donning waistcoats, monocles, and handmade velvet top hats” (Brewdog blog, “It’s Raining Fat Cats and Brewdogs”), personifying fat cat bankers controlling the majority of global wealth (Fig. 4.12).<sup>199</sup>



*Figure 4.12: Brewdog ‘Equity for Punks IV’ advertisement and crowdfunding launch video. Part of the ‘Death to Fat Cats’ promotional video. Image used with permission from Brewdog.*

<sup>198</sup> To watch the full video of the “Equity for Punks IV – Death to the Fat Cats”; see, < <https://vimeo.com/126817996> >

<sup>199</sup> Brewdog’s owners Watt (left) and Dickie (right) flew a helicopter over London, UK, as a “propaganda outreach” program where they dropped ‘fat cats’ (taxidermy cats in petticoats) with information about their Equity of Punks share; reaching £5 million milestone in the first 20 days of record-breaking crowdfunding. Image from JD Alois’s article, “Brewdog Crowdfunds £5 Million in 20 Days. Drops ‘Fat Cats Bankers’ from Helicopters Over the City (Video).” *Crowdfund Insider*, 12 May, 2015. Web. < <https://www.crowdfundinsider.com/2015/05/67673-brewdog-crowdfunds-5-million-in-20-days-drops-fat-cat-bankers-carrying-share-prospectus-from-helicopters-over-the-city-video/> >

This stunt, once again, likens the use of taxidermy to art, where Watt states that Brewdog has gone “behind enemy lines to conduct a symbolic gesture that heralds the extinction of the city fat cat”; this gesture is a “glorious combination of art, guerrilla warfare, taxidermy and feline sartorial elegance” (Brinded, “Brewdog just crowdfunded £5 million”). Wanting to make “*extinct*” the city fat cat through the “symbolic gesture” of dropping taxidermy cats from a helicopter, Brewdog’s goals were to “showcase” the successfully proven alternatives they have used in contrast to more common types of financing (Brewdog blog, “It’s Raining,” emphasis added).

The conversation in tow is not separate from the growing fascination with alternative aesthetics applied to the traditional trade of taxidermy, as many ‘alternative’ taxidermy pieces have sprung up internationally in urban spaces, not only in the white cube of the gallery. Largely occupied on the walls and shelves in bars and saloons, taxidermy has historically been associated with alcohol consumption and, more specifically, hegemonic masculine behavior. Cats have historically been considered “complex symbols, associated with witchcraft and devilry, female sexuality, cuckholding, and fertility, and they figured as ingredients in folk medicine” in the Victorian period (Amato 22). In Victorian Britain, cats were symbols for “women and sexuality” argues Sarah Amato; she states that it was not until later in the Victorian period that cats became “associated with bourgeois propriety” (220). Amato explains that cats “were considered difficult pets and [were] too independent to submit to human management” (220). Taxidermied cats are part of the larger picture that Brewdog’s franchise is about: Brewdog’s business indoctrinates the axiom that dogs are *man*’s best friend.<sup>200</sup> Moreover, Brewdog’s critics most often exclude the

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<sup>200</sup> In contrast to their *love* of taxidermy, Brewdog co-hosted a “Dog Party” fundraiser in the summer of 2016 in response to the Yulin Festival in China. Paired with Modernista, Brewdog hosted a rooftop terrace party to raise funds for volunteers working with the dogs rescued from the Yulin Festival (Schreurs, “A Dog Party”). This fundraiser, however, points to the western hypocrisy at play in regards to meat eating in North America and Europe. Meat eating is culturally relative and is informed by traditions, histories, and geographies. As Deckha points out, “[i]t is not simply the food practices of ‘other’ cultures that come under great scrutiny” (“Towards 538”); rather, it is racial and cultural differences evoked by a westernized, colonial lens. For Brewdog, the opening of their 2015 Hotdog Hideout or the use of sausages as weapons in their ‘Ghost Deer’ advertisements show a problematic and hierarchal relationship that they have to animal bodies. Sausage throwing, accordingly, points to Carol Adam’s neologism of the absent referent of animal death that is replaced with the meat on our plates. As such, there lies a contradictory position in regards to deep seated (and culturally relative) positions on what animals are deemed grievable or protectable. While Brewdog might be commended for sourcing their meat through local suppliers, their position on meat eating and taxidermy show a complex hierarchy-- valuing dogs over other animals such as pigs, chickens, cattle, or sheep. It should be noted that Brewdog has used taxidermied cats, squirrels, stoats, deer, moose, and a donkey in their marketing; however, to date, no dogs have been taxidermied. For Brewdog, dogs’ lives appear to be more precious, likely due to the close ties to pet owning and gendered relations between men and dogs. Let us not forget that Brewdog offers their employees gender-neutral paid *puppy parental leave*.

complicated animal rights issues whereby Brewdog might be deemed, to a greater extent, contentious. Perhaps it is Brewdog's disclaimer that their taxidermy pieces are 'art' that foils the underlying reasons for staging unconventional taxidermy. The discussion about the ethics and bodily rights of animals (after death) is ignored by the attention that is paid to Brewdog for being an (anti-)establishment and (anti-)capitalist company – reforming itself under the guise of crowdsourcing trends. Even though Brewdog's model and political philosophies hold subversive potential and even while Brewdog owners' Watt and Dickie use alternative means to fund their company, their practices (at times) reflect tired ideologies. In strict contrast to the microbrewery's 'punk philosophy,' the 'limited' release of stoat and squirrel bottles more closely align with a corporate elitism whereby a select group of consumers are eligible to purchase the specialty taxidermy bottles. Unlike mainstream beer companies, however, Brewdog allots shares to the public and also attempts to turn their beer into a communal product that is shared through their 'DIY beer catalogue' (of all their recipes), which anyone can access online.

More recently, Brewdog has initiated a 2016 crowdfunding project to expand their franchise to the U.S. building their first microbrewery factory in Columbus, Ohio. Brewdog's new initiative is to raise 50 million dollars to open the microbrewery (and hotel). Through crowdfunding raised funds, Brewdog has promised to gift a squirrel taxidermy koozie, encasing 'The End' specialty beer, to the "high-value" shareholders that invest more than \$20,000 to their expansion (Beerbound, "To Celebrate House Bill 37"; Eaton, "Brewdog's 55% ABV Beer"). The move towards craft beer is likened to gallery spaces, as brewing beer has become its own type of artistic endeavor. The narrative of sharing and shareholding, as well as the allure to purchase these specialty beers and their bottles, is paired with the seduction of a limited supply (such as 'high' art) and this results in heightened consumer demand. In this sense, competition to claim ownership over 'limited' and 'specialty' products is not divorced from forms of (fat cat) class privilege, whereby it is a cultural belief that one can exceed their class structure and prestige through the possession of specialty goods and objects. Likewise, the ability to be a member of the Brewdog 'team' is open for a limited time and such limited terms and supplies suggest that entering this inclusive investment group (with its invitation to events and spaces) is a form of gatekeeping. Perhaps Watt's argument for internal = external business is taxed by the perceived limitations based on the company's 'equity for punks' philosophy, whereby you can

become a shareholder by submitting within a time restriction and a recommended minimum amount.

In dropping ‘fat cats’ or the ‘fat cat’ model, Brewdog produces a theatrical diversion from their own position as fat cats in the microbrewery industry. In “The Homogenisation of the British Craft Beer Industry,” Jack Peat writes his dismay for Brewdog’s failures at democratization, which have looked much closer to homogenization. He writes that “I wanted [the craft beer industry] to be about micro not macro, local not country-wide, good beer not branding gimmicks [...] as craft beer becomes increasingly popular, we should be looking at ways of promoting smaller brewers rather than feasting on large-scale producers.” To conclude, the following section turns the gaze back onto human mortality in relation to encounters with taxidermied animal bodies.

## § 4.8 Conclusion--Born to Die: Capitalizing on Dead (Non)Humans

Brewdog released their beer ‘Born to Die 04.07.2015’ in 2015, a beer that must be drunk within forty-five days before the flavor of the beer will lose its intensity. The commodification of death is utilized in marketing, beyond the ghostly head taps or ‘dead pony’ rides on the Taxidermy Taxi. Like the limited supply of the ‘End of History’ beer packaged in taxidermy koozies, Brewdog’s ‘Born to Die’ beers are available in limited supply and limited amount – refining the elite and limited edition narrative of unique and specialty craft beers. The commodification of death is reproduced through the symbolism of *limited time*, emblematic of the limits of human existence through mortality. ‘Born to Die 27.11.2015’ was released and later ‘resurrected’ on ‘14.05.2016.’ Each beer was advertised by its temporal limit (Brewdog blog, “Born to Die ... Again”; “Born to Die and Dog E”). The rebirth of “Born to Die 18.08.2016” is the most relevant advertisement of the ‘Born to Die’ beers. Strikingly, the Imperial IPA was released with organ donor registry cards with every beer that was purchased. Patrons of craft beer were not simply encouraged to buy the beer, but were also persuaded to sign their organs away to the NHS Organ Donor Register. Brewdog’s ‘Born to Die’ blog states that “[t]here are no fountains of youth, no time machines exist to whirr back and do it all again. Celebrate the here and now with the most ephemeral beer you can get your hands on” (Brewdog blog, “Born to Die 18.08.2016”). ‘Born to

Die’ was advertised with a “predestined date” of 18.08.2016 and would be released “on Earth” for only thirty-five days. The advertisement included a photograph of a skeleton, partially buried, grasping onto the ‘Born to Die’ beer bottle (Fig. 4.13).<sup>201</sup>



Figure 4.13: Brewdog’s ‘Born to Die 18.08.2016’ marketing release, including organ donor card with purchase of the limited supply specialty beer. Image used with permission from Brewdog.

The ‘Born to Die’ advertisement displays a human skeleton clenching onto the Brewdog beer, personifying death as skeletal remains. The skeleton is surrounded by dirt and leaves, suggestive of the processes that eat away and decay skin and flesh, but also that the human body is considered *worthy* of burial. The human body is not made ‘recyclable’ and turned into an object; rather, humans are given the right to decay. Unlike the animals used in Brewdog’s product packaging, the human body is considered ‘sacred.’ The skeleton’s absence of skin in the advertisement further highlights that skin [*pellis*], which removed from the body, is tied to the profane animal. Echoing the arguments made in § 2 **Autopsic Gaze**, I reiterate Judith Butler’s argument in *Precarious Life* that a life is *ungrievable* when it is *unburiable*, when it is not worth a note (34). The underlying message of Brewdog’s ‘Born to Die’ is that humans give written consent over what happens to their bodies after death -- whereas animals are withheld the same considerations. At the shores of these examples is flagrant anthropocentrism, wherein lies a rigid demarcation separating animal from human. Animals are withheld consent and are refused the

<sup>201</sup> Image from Brewdog blog, “Born to Die 18.08.2016.” 13 Aug., 2016. © Brewdog 2015-2018. Web. < <https://www.brewdog.com/usa/lowdown/blog/born-to-die-18082016> >

rituals of death allotted to human beings. Repeating Martin Heidegger's (anthropocentric) words, humans die and animals *cease to exist* in part because exploitation replaces grievability and mourning.

## Chapter 5

### 5 Apocalyptic Time: Vegan Taxidermy, Bio-engineered Art(ificiality), and the Nonexistent Animal

#### § 5.1 What Animal in Art?

For numerous reasons, humans have been enthralled by the visual aesthetics of nonhuman animal bodies. Human artists have displayed and represented animals through symbolism, animal materials, and the unique and diverse conceptual forms of various types of animal bodies. Nonhuman animal others are, in varying degrees, the subjects, inspiration, and products of human art. John Berger outlined the significance of nonhuman animals in photography in his essay “Why Look at Animals?” where he encountered animal spectacles in zoos and felt nostalgia for disappearing wildlife made extinct by the expansion of urbanization and industrialization. Animals, argues Berger, were replaced with the oversaturation of animal imagery for the purposes of capitalist profits. In his essay, Berger writes that “the first subject matter for painting was animal,” just as nonhuman animals’ blood may have been the “first paint” (7). Not only were animals both “the ‘medium’ [paint] and the ‘message’ [subject] of representation” (Driscoll 289), so too were animals utilized as labour in producing artistic materials, such as horse-powered paint mills (that crushed colours) in eighteenth-century England. Likewise, animals continue to be used to test toxic products (including art materials) before these products reach the hands of human consumers. To give nonhuman animals much due credit, Elizabeth Grosz writes in “Art and the Animal” that animals teach humans about colour, different textures, and artistic taste; they provide lessons in beauty, desire, and existence. She states that “[w]hat is most artistic in us is also the most bestial” (Grosz, “Art” 3). The ‘bestial’ does not signify real animal existences; rather, it is the impression of animality (as creative opening) that is shaped by dominant human ideologies. In a similar vein, Claire Colebrook states that art is animalistic. She writes that “[a]rt is not that which elevates humanity above the animal; art occurs when the human animal attacks its own war on animals” (“Suicide for Animals” 136); “[w]hereas the human as a self-maintaining organism is seduced by the image of its own bodily borders into thinking of itself as an integrated being, the animal is pack-



like, contagious and offers a release of predicates from a grounding body [...] Animality in a certain sense *is art*" (Colebrook, "Suicide" 137).

These arguments on *animality* or the human inception of animal abstraction (separate from the living and breathing beings that exist on the planet) produces art as an unrestricted aesthetic. Given this continual *oversaturation of animal imagery* in the human perceptual worldview, my arguments are in dialogue with Timothy Morton's analyses about 'nature' in *Ecology without Nature* and Claire Colebrook's analyses on extinction. For Morton, the concept of nature is conceived through various human-made rhetorical conventions. His position to discuss ecology *without* nature is part of his project to expose (and closely read) the all-consuming catalogue and ungraspable concept of what is commonly referred to as 'nature' or the 'natural' (14; 24). Following Morton's position that "[a]rt gives what is nonconceptual an illusive appearance of form" (24), I argue in this chapter that rogue taxidermy offers a critical unthinking of the animal through various human biotechnologies.

Through "fabulism, fantasy, and deconstruction" (Madden 209), rogue taxidermists play with visual and rhetorical constructs of temporality, such as hybrid species that evoke mythology, 'freak' show advertisements, and extinction (sometimes simultaneously) in their attempts to undo human exceptionalism. Rogue taxidermists construct sculptures from various bodies and stage a plethora of intersecting temporalities. Moreover, I explore the ways in which rogue taxidermy can be used to theorize and think through the apocalyptic. I place Dolly the sheep's taxidermied remains in dialogue with Robert Marbury's 'vegan taxidermy' in order to challenge artificial narratives of both origins and ends. In doing so, I analyze biotechnologies, such as 'nuclear transfer' (cloning), in relation to human conceived anxieties over human death through contemporary threats of mass species extinction events and what is more recently discussed as the 'Anthropocene.' Through this blurring of boundaries – the real from the fake, the authentic from the gaff – I explore limits of human knowledge.

## § 5.2 The *Anthropos* of the 'Anthropocene'

The 'Anthropocene'<sup>202</sup> was coined by ecologist Eugene F. Stoermer in the 1980s and Nobel prize winning atmospheric chemist Paul Crutzen in 2002. The term describes a new geological

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<sup>202</sup> The 'Anthropocene' is a speculative term and is still heavily debated across disciplines. Whether or not the term successfully demarcates an epoch is still under discussion.

epoch that marks the effects of humans on the planet [and also refers to a time of escalating CO<sub>2</sub> levels, rising sea levels, global warming, species extinctions] (Squire 211; Grusin vii).<sup>203</sup> In contrast to the scientific record, Simon Lewis and Mark Maslin argue that the ‘Anthropocene’ is not a recent enterprise, but started in the sixteenth century when Europeans began to colonize what they saw as the ‘New World.’ They write that “[t]he Anthropocene began with widespread colonialism and slavery; it is a story of how people treat the environment and how people treat other people” (Lewis and Maslin in Mckie, “How our Colonist Past Altered the Ecobalance”). Lewis and Maslin also mark the transportation of pathogens, plants, and animals as primary triggers to the ‘Anthropocene’ event that has since transformed into a single global economic system. As a result of these changes, “society in America collapsed and subsistence farming there was wiped out” (Maslin in Mckie, “How”). Additionally, Maslin states that “[f]orests returned to land that had been abandoned by humans. We can detect this in Antarctic ice cores” (Mckie, “How”).

Moreover, Jamie Lorimer writes that “[the ‘Anthropocene’] term has begun to gain traction among high-profile commentators advocating for the reorientation of environmentalism. Although we might contest its epochal diagnosis, this claim is significant as it represents a very public challenge to the modern understanding of Nature as a pure, singular and stable domain removed from and defined in relation to urban, industrial society” (293). Lorimer further states that “[l]ife without Nature is proving confusing and there is a widely shared recognition of the need for new ways of thinking” (293). Likewise, Daniel Chernilo writes that “the Anthropocene challenges conventional understandings of culture, society and nature as self-contained ontological domains”; “If the Anthropocene can empirically demonstrate that humans have altered those physical properties of our planet whose origin is non-human, then the very notion of different ontological domains seems to require a serious reappraisal” (Chernilo 45). Despite the urgency of scientific research over the past two decades, Richard Grusin points out that the problems highlighted by the concept of the ‘Anthropocene’ have been widely discussed by feminist scholars from previous decades, including (though not limited to) Donna Haraway’s

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<sup>203</sup> In “Anthropocene Feminism: An Experiment in Collaborative Theorizing,” Richard Grusin writes that the ‘Anthropocene’ is also defined by a “new epoch for the earth’s lithosphere, its crust and upper mantle”; he writes that “[m]uch of the initial evidence for this new lithosphere epoch came from geomorphology, particularly the recognition that large-scale impacts on the earth’s surface from such human activities as mining, construction, and deforestation had come to surpass the effects of nonhuman forces” (vii-viii).

‘Manifesto for Cyborgs’ – an essay that stressed the entangled relationships between humans, nonhumans, culture, and nature (viii).

The push to think in *new* ways and to reappraise our thoughts about human existence on the planet has been challenged by Colebrook who writes that the current state of humans under the threat of extinction resulting from the ‘Anthropocene’ is foundational to deconstructive analysis. In “Feminist Extinction,” Colebrook writes that the moment that the survival of humans (in the inhospitable world that humans have created for themselves) is called into question, critical theory shifts towards the ‘posthuman’ and no longer thinks of ‘man’ as a Cartesian or humanist subject; rather, the philosophy of man (now posthuman) describes humans as vitalistic, affective, ecologically, and materially interconnected. This shift towards the posthuman no longer gives credit to earlier feminist theories and criticisms (what Colebrook calls an ‘ultra-humanism’) that discussed hegemonic masculinity and its hostile forces against the planet. Through what she terms “post-theoretical turns” (defined as critical theory’s turns toward affect theory, posthumanism,<sup>204</sup> new materialisms,<sup>205</sup> and ‘vitalism’<sup>206</sup>), Colebrook critiques the conceptualization that traditional philosophy and its illusion of ‘man’ can be rid of its past mistakes on the planet by living on through feminist critique and taking up as a “post-feminist

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<sup>204</sup> Contextualizing posthumanism, Cary Wolfe writes that “[t]he term ‘posthumanism’ itself seems to have worked its way into contemporary critical discourse in the humanities and social sciences during the mid-1990s” (Wolfe xii). Following Foucault, Wolfe understands posthumanism as a response to the dogma of humanism (xiv). In other words, posthumanism attempts to think outside the norms and structures of what was previously understood as the ‘human.’ Pramod Nayar writes that posthumanism moves “beyond the traditional humanist ways of thinking about the autonomous, self-willed individual agent in order to treat the human itself as an assemblage, co-evolving with other forms of life, enmeshed with the environment and technology” (4). For more information, see Cary Wolfe’s book, *What is Posthumanism?* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010; Rosi Braidotti’s book, *The Posthuman*. Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2013; and Pramod Nayar’s book, *Posthumanism*. Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2014.

<sup>205</sup> New materialism(s) is a line of thought that responds to Cartesian-Newtonian understanding of matter and the “eclipse” of matter in contemporary theory (Coole and Frost 3; 4; 8-9). Diana Coole and Samantha Frost write that “materiality is always something more than ‘mere’ matter: an excess, force, vitality, relationality, or difference that renders matter active, self-creative, productive, unpredictable” (9). For more information on ‘new materialisms,’ see Diana Coole and Samantha Frost’s edited collection, *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2010.

<sup>206</sup> Describing vitalism through Gilles Deleuze’s philosophy, Julian Bourg writes that “[v]italism is the doctrine that life is driven by a vital principle or force that is not explainable by scientific analysis alone. Nietzsche’s doctrine of the will to power and Bergson’s *élan vital* are both examples of vitalist formations. Not surprisingly perhaps, vitalism in Deleuze’s hands lends itself to no such tidy definition. In 1990 he wrote: ‘What is essential for me [is] this ‘vitalism’ or a conception of life as a *non-organic power*’”; “Deleuze’s vitalism can be seen to be organic, non-organic, or somewhere in between” (154). For more information, see Julian Bourg’s book, *From Revolution to Ethics*. Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2017.

self” (*Sex After Life* 15-16). Further, she writes that “[f]eminism, today, facing the extinction of the human, should turn neither to man nor to woman: both of these figures remain human, all too human, as does the concept of the environment that has always allowed man to live on through a vitalist ethic” (*Sex* 16); “What needs to be thought today is that which cannot be thought, lived, retrieved, or revitalized as the saving grace of man or woman” (*Sex* 17).

Further nuancing the affective turn in critical theory, Judith Butler offers an approach to current engagements with affect in her readings of Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy of the body in *Senses*. Butler writes that “[t]he very description of the extralinguistic body allegorizes the problem of the chiasmic relation between language and the body and so fails to supply the distinction it seeks to articulate” (*Senses* 21). Butler does not deny that bodies are affected, acted on or animated by unmeasurable and non-descriptive forces or sensations, though she is careful to caution her readers against all forms of language that attempt to explain (via mastery through knowing) these instances or ‘events,’ interplaying them as paradoxical from the outset. The ‘I,’ she argues, is already affected prior to self-reference, though it is through any linguistic attempt to express or measure affectation that one fails (*Senses* 2).<sup>207</sup> Describing this condition is currently impossible; Butler argues, however, this does not mean that humans will always be excluded from this knowledge (*Senses* 4). While one can clearly argue that there are material bodies in the world, the linguistic formations that attempt to speak of a body in full fail to grasp the various formations, affectations, and parameters of bodily relations – inside and outside what we perceive to be as skin.<sup>208</sup>

Indeed, affect theory and new materialism bring an interesting outlook in the wake of the crises of human extinction. These post-theoretical turns provide alternatives to understanding the planet, but to what end and to what purpose? Colebrook writes that

Today’s post-theoretical turns to life, affect, vitality, embodiment or living systems occur as *apparent* counter-Cartesian and counter-humanist gestures; but this is a denial of the two faces of the Anthropocene era – both the irrevocable infraction of the bounds of the earth by ‘man’, and the ongoing myopia of the human species’ inability to think its

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<sup>207</sup> Just as experiences are lost to language, so too bodies slip outside of narrative constructions, despite the fact that they are tangentially part of this process. Butler makes this clear when she writes that “[a]lthough the body depends on language to be known, the body also exceeds every possible linguistic effort of capture” (*Senses* 20-21).

<sup>208</sup> In a reparative reading, Jasbir Puar writes that the affective turn has led to several thought streams and theoretical offshoots that are perhaps “more significant than what affect is or what it means” (18). Included in these categories are critical animal studies and posthumanism, as well as a rethinking of trauma against psychoanalytic streams and epistemology reduced through the fields of ontology (Puar 18).

detachment, disconnectedness, malevolence and stupidity in relation to a planet that it continues to imagine as environment, *oikos*, cosmos or *Gaia*. (“No Symbiosis” 199)

Put simply, Colebrook states that from this cultural rhetoric in the face of mass human extinction, patriarchal thought streams that imagine a unified ‘nature’ also use the tools of posthumanist futures to escape taking responsibility for what has been done to the planet (*Sex* 20). Furthermore, Colebrook states that “[p]recisely at the moment of its own loss the human animal becomes aware of what makes it human—meaning, empathy, *art*, morality—but can only recognize those capacities that distinguish humanity at the moment that they are threatened with extinction” (*Death of the PostHuman* 12, emphasis added). In the pages that follow, I describe the ways that artists address the current crisis in meaning, desire, and existence resulting from the threats of mass species extinctions and the ‘Anthropocene.’

### § 5.3 Mass Extinction Events

Though Rauschenberg is most famous for his *Monogram* art piece, his combine *Canyon*,<sup>209</sup> a hybrid work, highlights the complexity of animal bodies in art when animal species’ status is ‘at risk’ or ‘extinct.’ *Canyon* was released in 1959 and included a stuffed bald eagle, which created controversy because of the implementation of the 1940 Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act and the 1918 Migratory Bird Treaty Act. These two acts mandated that it was a “crime to possess, sell, purchase, barter, transport, import or export any bald eagle—alive or dead” (Cohen, “Art’s Sale Value?”). Rauschenberg had to “send a notarized statement attesting that the eagle had been killed and stuffed by one of Teddy Roosevelt’s Rough Riders long before the 1940 law went into effect” (Cohen, “Art’s”).<sup>210</sup> Twentieth-century art involving animals has often brushed up against narratives of extinction. On the one hand, the inclination to commemorate the dead animal may have more to do with the collective mourning of the current state of affairs for animals on the planet. Scientists and biodiversity experts began in the 1990s to

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<sup>209</sup> An image of Robert Rauschenberg’s combine *Canyon* can be found on the New York Museum of Modern Art website, see < <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/165011> >

<sup>210</sup> Due to federal protection acts, any heir of Rauschenberg’s artwork would be committing a felony if they chose to sell the *Canyon* work (Cohen, “Art’s Sale Value?”). For more information on Rauschenberg’s *Canyon*, see Patricia Cohen’s article “Art’s Sale Value? Zero. The Tax Bill? 29 Million.” *The New York Times* 22 Jul., 2012. Web. < <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/22/arts/design/a-catch-22-of-art-and-taxes-starring-a-stuffed-eagle.html> >

discuss how the planet is going through a ‘sixth mass extinction event.’<sup>211</sup> In 1992 paleoanthropologist Richard Leakey and science writer Roger Lewin coined the name for the ‘sixth mass extinction’ and scientists have since recorded (and constructed) the heightened rate of species extinction across the planet [in opposition to what has been read on fossil records] (Pievani 259). According to reports written in the twenty-first century, the planet is losing 11,000-58,000 species a year and one species is being lost every twenty minutes (Pievani 259). Genese Marie Sodikoff writes that “the sixth extinction is neither abrupt nor spectacular”; it is the result of “slow, cumulative effects of greenhouse gases, rain forest depletion, and a brand of imperialism that extols the virtues of high mass consumption” (2). While fears of extinction have been situated by human interests, Ursula Heise writes that

Such cataclysmic portrayals of past and future species extinctions are common currency in biodiversity discourse. The less catastrophic consequences, such as increases in local biodiversity, range expansion for certain species, hybridization, and the emergence of new species, are rarely mentioned, presumably because biologists and environmental advocates fear that they might make the crisis appear less serious to a public that does not usually delve into scientific detail. (22)

Additionally, she writes that “[t]he story template according to which nature in general and biodiversity in particular has done nothing but deteriorate under the impact of modern societies is mostly taken for granted, and details [such as the increases in biodiversity] that do not unambiguously fit into this narrative tend to be underemphasized or left out” (Heise 22).

Anxiety over the planet’s threatening loss of biodiversity is not fueled by the fact that extinction exists; rather, the current severity of observations and publications on mass extinction are intensified by the *accelerated* temporal rate of species extinctions (which include animals, plants, insects, and essential microorganisms). The face of extinction is often made recognizable through popular representations of ‘at risk’ mammal species used to affectively provoke human observers’ attention. Heise writes that

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<sup>211</sup> Telmo Pievani writes that “[e]minent evolutionists and experts of biodiversity – such as Edward O. Wilson, Niles Eldredge, Peter Ward, and Norman Myers – wrote it 20 years ago: considering the dizzying rate of extinction of species caused by human activities in recent centuries, the biosphere is going through a ‘mass extinction.’ That is, a rapid loss of biodiversity on a global scale. To be precise, they added the sixth mass extinction, as in the distant geological past, the paleontologists registered at least five catastrophes caused by volcanic eruptions, ocean acidification, climatic fluctuations, changes in atmosphere composition, impacts of asteroids on Earth, or a mixture of these factors. The last of these was the massive event that 66-65 Ma wiped out most of the dinosaurs (except a small branching group evolving into birds) and almost two thirds of all other organisms. As for the speed of impact and mortality, Wilson and colleagues argued that the ongoing extinction produced by *Homo Sapiens* today is nothing less than the previous five” (259)

The species or groups of species that are portrayed are almost always animals, while plants, which are equally affected by extinction, receive almost no attention. Among the animals, large mammals such as gorillas, tigers, bears, pandas, whales, and white rhinos, and birds, particularly beautiful ones such as raptors, parrots, and colorful songbirds, are the preferred objects of coverage, while reptilians, amphibians, and fish are mentioned far less frequently. Among invertebrates, only photogenic butterflies—particularly, in recent years, the monarch butterfly, which has generated a whole advocacy movement of its own—occasionally come into view; taxa such as worms, crabs, fungi, and bacteria usually remain invisible. (23)

Adding to the list of potentially desirable and recognizable animal bodies, the polar bear epitomizes the image of ‘at risk’ species and of global warming. Having surveyed all the taxidermied polar bears that they could locate in the UK, Bryndis Snæbjörnsdóttir and Mark Wilson’s project, *Nanoq: flat out and bluesome*, displayed taxidermied polar bears at their art show. The project included individual photographs and stories for each of the polar bears they found. These stories comprised the locations in which the taxidermied bears currently reside, as well as any information uncovered pertaining to the hunt of each bear. The staging of polar bear bodies (symbolic of animal endangerment), placed alongside the narratives of hunting as a colonial act, affectively provoked viewers.

The resurgence of taxidermy in the rogue art movement thus shows how taxidermied remains can be utilized to retell stories from old objects and by staging objects in ways that are different from the *expected* narrative. Rogue taxidermy is an assemblage of cultural and symbolic codes that are produced with, and read upon, nonhuman animal skins (and other synthetic materials). Providing a multiplicity of various discourses, narratives, and constructions of animality through visual form, rogue taxidermy thus produces animals “out of space” (Desmond, *Displaying Death* 33) and “out of time” (Coleman and Danforth 1). The rogue taxidermy sculptures I discuss in this chapter inform a general anxiety about the threats of mortal time and impending death and a fear of death without legacy, imprint, or remembrance. In other words, the fear that individual self-existence is meaningless under the lens of human value and historical archive. Human anxiety over species extinction involves the fear of how the loss of controlled biodiversity will both affect and threaten human life; however, as Heise reminds her readers, mass extinctions allowed human existence to evolve to its current state. She writes that “after each of the previous mass extinctions, biodiversity did eventually return to or even exceed precataclysmic numbers of species, though the species involved changed” (Heise 28 n13). In

addition to her critiques of this anthropocentric bias, Heise states that “it is not clear why current humans’ horizon of expectation should invariably function as the absolute yardstick by which to measure biodiversity and its future” (29 n13). Similarly, Colebrook writes that “extinction is not the opposite of life but is part of life’s *possibility*” (“We Have” 12, emphasis added).

## § 5.4 Taxidermy as Immortality Desire: Dolly

On July 5, 1996, a female Finn Dorset domestic sheep named ‘Dolly’ was born at the Roslin Institute, a research institute at of the University of Edinburgh in Scotland. Dolly was unlike other sheep, as she was born through a cloning process known as “nuclear transfer” by British embryologist Ian Wilmut (now Sir Ian Wilmut), and Keith Campbell (with other colleagues working at the institute). Dolly was not the first successful clone to be created.<sup>212</sup> In the 1980s, scientists cloned mice, otherwise known as ‘super mice,’ through transgenesis, described as “the process of introducing an external gene, called a transgene, into a living organism so that the organism will display a new trait, which it may then pass on to the offspring” (National Museum of Scotland, “Dolly the Sheep”). Ian Sample writes that “[f]rom more than 250 embryos that survived the cloning manipulation, only Dolly, made from an adult sheep’s mammary cell, went on to a successful birth” (“Dolly the Sheep”). Because Dolly was a large mammal, her birth was perceived by the public as more exceptional and interesting than earlier experiments that cloned smaller mammals (mice) and amphibians (frogs) [Panno xi]. Born through the mammary gland cell of an adult sheep, Dolly was named after country singer Dolly Parton. The objectification of Parton’s body – meant to be a tongue-in-cheek joke – reinforces that scientific rhetoric is heavily founded on principles of sexism. In her death, as in her life, Dolly was confined within the institutions of knowledge and produced solely for the advancement of science. While alive, Dolly spent her life at the research institute and kept indoors for ‘security’ reasons. She was bred with a Welsh Mountain ram and had produced six lambs.

Dolly’s origins are complicated at best, as she was created by the cells of three mothers: one provided an egg, another DNA and the third carried the cloned embryo to term. As I have shown through scholarship on monstrosity in § 2 **Autopsic Gaze**, monsters produce an anxiety about origins and relationships to the mother’s body (Shildrick, *Embodying* 29). Clones, if

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<sup>212</sup> For more information on the history of cloning animals, see Joseph Panno’s book, *Animal Cloning: The Science of Nuclear Transfer*. New York: Facts on File, Inc., 2005.



considered monstrous are, then, threatening “where normative embodiment has hitherto seemed to guarantee individual autonomous selfhood” (Shildrick, *Embodying* 2). In other words, clones threaten the boundary between individual self and potential self-mimesis. In *Dolly Mixtures*, Sarah Franklin writes that “Dolly is syntactically noncompliant with the normative arboreal grammars of reproduction and descent; her queer genealogy haunts the very basis of the formal biological categories that once affirmed the stability of a known sexual and reproductive order” (28). Moreover, Kelly Oliver critiques the assumption that one can distinguish “nature from culture, the grown from the made, the original from the copy” (*Technologies* 3). As a method, Oliver points out that “deconstruction has always been about cloning”; “It has always been about the relationship between the so-called original and the copy” (*Technologies* 4). While we may read Dolly’s origins as queering a genealogical order<sup>213</sup> or as a deconstructive principle, Dolly’s existence (and her taxidermied remains) should not be reduced solely to a theoretical concept. As Haraway reminds her readers in *The Companion Species Manifesto*, “[animals] are not surrogates for theory; they are not here just to think with” (5).

As ethically questionable as Dolly’s origins were at the time (that is, the anthropocentrism tied to *using* animals for scientific experiments), Dolly’s death and the subsequent taxidermy of her remains are equally problematic. After contracting a progressive lung disease common to sheep kept indoors as well as severe arthritis, Dolly was euthanized on February 14, 2003 and she was taxidermied at the University of Edinburgh.<sup>214</sup> Little information is provided on who taxidermied Dolly’s body, though some websites mention that the process involved more than one taxidermist. Franklin writes that “[Dolly] now stands in Scotland’s Royal Museum as a taxidermied tribute to her national and international importance. Assembled by one of the world’s foremost departments of taxidermy, she has been eviscerated, cured, recast, and reassembled to acquire the desired appearance of animation, mid-gesture—in this case turning her head slightly to the side in the manner characteristic of how she greeted her guests” (194). Very little attention is paid to Dolly’s taxidermied remains that were gifted to the National Museum of Scotland from the Roslin Institute and are currently referenced under “Z.2003.40.”

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<sup>213</sup> For an analysis on the queer politics of rogue taxidermy art see my 2015 article, “Animal Magic: Sculpting Queer Encounters through Rogue Taxidermy Art.” *Gender Forum* 55 (2015): 14-38.

<sup>214</sup> Sarah Kramer writes that “genetic testing revealed that [Dolly’s] DNA showed signs of aging at just one year old, and at 5, she was diagnosed with arthritis”; though, it was not “clear whether Dolly’s problems were because she was a clone” (“Scientists Made”).

(National Museum of Scotland, “Dolly”). Dolly’s legacy, Franklin writes, “will be the opportunity to reexamine her life as an important window into the changing relationalities connecting humans and other animals through newfound technologies of reproduction binding them together into new assisted genealogies that are partially connected and potentially remixed” (194). A spokesman for the taxidermied Dolly release stated that Dolly’s body will “reside in Scotland for *prosperity*” (Cramb, “Dolly the Sheep”). In reference to this statement, Franklin reminds her readers that “[i]t is no coincidence that Dolly is a sheep, and it is equally significant that she is British, or more specifically Scottish, for she embodies the combination of medical, agricultural, and industrial values that gave rise to many other noteworthy Scottish inventions, including penicillin, the steam engine, the cotton reel, nude mice,<sup>215</sup> and interferon, and the syringe” (74). Indeed, decisions to taxidermy Dolly’s body were informed by nationalist beliefs, but her body as a ‘successful experiment’ marks an underlying human anxiety of phantasmatic mortality (discussed in more detail throughout this chapter).

The artificiality of animal life (Dolly’s origins) and the artificiality used in taxidermy (as manipulated death) are products of the same – indistinguishable from each other. In other words, human impact on animal life and death intercepts any authentic or ‘natural’ form of life. To echo Morton, nature is “a transcendental term in a material mask, [which] stands at the end of a potentially infinite series of other terms that collapse into it” (14). Conceptions of a ‘natural’ form of life only exoticize an ‘outside’ space that is not already catalyzed, affected, or shocked by technologies or technological acts. As Jean-François Lyotard states, “technology wasn’t invented by us humans”; he writes,

As anthropologists and biologists admit, even the simplest life forms, infusoria (tiny algae synthesized by light at the edges of tidepools a few million years ago) are already technical devices. Any material system is technological if it edits information useful to its survival, if it memorizes and processes that information and makes inferences based on the regulating effect of behaviour, that is, if it intervenes on and impacts its environment so as to at a minimum assure its perpetuation. (12)

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<sup>215</sup> Nude mice are another example of the animals used (as raw matter) for scientific research to prolong the life of humans. First discovered by Dr. Norman R. Grist at Ruchill Hospital’s Brownlee virology laboratory in Glasgow, Scotland, ‘nude’ mice are used in scientific research for cancerous tumors. Because these mice were born with a genetic mutation that lacks a competent immune system (lacking a thymus that helps create disease-fighting T cells), their bodies are tested to accept human tissue grafts. For more information, see Jorgen Fogh’s book, *The Nude Mouse in Experimental and Clinical Research*. New York: Elsevier, 2014.

Arresting bodily decay was part of the older technological advancements related to taxidermy preservation. Present day taxidermy projects expand beyond the stagnant display in the museum or the art gallery – such as motorized taxidermy that take flight in the air or under water. For instance, Dutch artist Bart Jansen, in collaboration with Arjan Beltman, created a taxidermied cat helicopter in 2012 with the remains of Jansen’s deceased cat ‘Orville’ after it was hit by a car. The motorized taxidermy sculpture was labeled *Orvillecopter*. Jansen writes the following on his artist website: “My cats, Orville and Wilbur, were named after the famous aviators the Wright Brothers. When Orville was killed by a car, I decided to *pay tribute to his lost life by giving him a new one*. Electronic life. How he loved birds” (Jansen, “Orvillecopter,” emphasis added).<sup>216</sup> Discussing Jansen’s *Orvillecopter*, Christina Colvin writes that “through Orville’s outstretched body we glimpse a jarring disjunction between life and death, that is, between the cat who stalked the ground in life and the body of the animal who hovers above in death”; “Orvillecopter exposes how our perception of an animal’s humanlike qualities directly influences what we think can acceptably be done to their bodies” (Colvin 69). Since the inception of the cat-helicopter, Jansen’s collaborator, Arjan Beltman, has gone on to make various forms of taxidermied-animal-motorized-cyborgs, such as an ostrich helicopter (*Ostrichcopter* 2013), a rat helicopter (*Ratcopter* 2014), a shark jet (*Sharkjet* 2014), and a badger submarine (*Das Boot* 2015). Acts to make postmortem animals into machines (*Orvillecopter*) or throwing taxidermied cat bodies from helicopters for the purposes of marketing beer (§ 4 **Taxidermied Commodities**) show the variation of taxidermy art in the present day as they apply to technological acts.

The display of Dolly’s taxidermied remains point to the interrelation between cloning and taxidermy technologies that make copies of bodies and expand animal ‘life.’ The use of mimesis (in cloning and taxidermy) complicates where origins begin and finitudes end. Just as taxidermy is another tool of mimesis, cloning has become the new advancement of preservation -- overshadowing the role and interest in taxidermy. Similarly, taxidermied automatons surpass taxidermy’s fixed position within the museum or gallery. Cloning technologies and taxidermied automatons further western culture’s yearning for immortality and make the previously innovative technology of traditional taxidermy preservation and representation seem antique.

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<sup>216</sup> Footage of the *Orvillecopter* and other taxidermied-animal-motorized-cyborgs by Bart Jansen and Arjan Beltman can be found on the artists websites. See Bart Jansen’s artist webpage, *Orvillecopter* < <http://bartjansen.tv/orvillecopter> > and Arjan Beltman’s webpage, ‘Copter Company’ < <http://bartjansen.tv/copter-company> >

In addition to these technologies, rogue taxidermy artists play with rhetorical, constructed, and historical temporalities through fabulation and fantasy and innovate contemporary taxidermy through artificial skins. Robert Marbury makes new species out of discarded plush toy skins through what he has called ‘vegan taxidermy’<sup>217</sup> -- a practice of taxidermy that does not involve real animal skins or other body parts. Jane Desmond writes that “[o]ften referred to as ‘stuffed animals,’ taxidermy specimens were originally stuffed skins, filled with sawdust and straw beaten into shape with wooden clubs. Our toys today – stuffed animals – are somewhat analogous, consisting of miniaturized versions of (fake) fur filled with soft material” (“Postmortem Exhibitions” 350). Speaking about his art practice, Marbury has stated that “I got obsessed with stuffed animals tied to the grills of trucks, and got really into this idea of soft, fabric, public art. I began wondering what would happen when stuffed animals went feral. This is when I started making these ‘Urban Beasts.’ I would take stuffed animals and cut them up, and re sew them onto a taxidermy form, and make a *new animal* out of it” (Laubner, “Robert Marbury,” emphasis added).

Marbury’s *Urban Beasts*, made from “recycled skins of thrown out stuffed animals taxidermied to create feral relatives” (Marbury, “Urban Beast Project”), take on a similar story to recycling the dead, found, and donated animals practiced by rogue artists. Marbury’s reasoning for creating the *Urban Beast Project* was to draw attention to the complexity of animal existence and the current threats to biodiversity; he states that the project

attempt[s] to document and exhibit the almost extinct plight of wild and feral animals living in the midst of our urban areas. Using adaptive skills, these beasts carved out a new ‘natural’ system of living from the peripheries of buildings, roads and parks. While most of the Urban Beasts described within have met the end of their species, it is our hope that with exposure and attention many other Beasts will be saved. (Marbury, “Urban Beast Project”)

Marbury’s work is similar to the monstrous hybrid animals in Brewer’s aesthetic; however, what separates these animals are the ways in which Marbury stages, frames, and creates his creatures through fabulated stories. Marbury has stated that his inspiration came from “Jorge Luis Borges’ ‘The Book of Imaginary Beings’, (which is a reference collection of animals from literature ranging from Poe to the Qur’an), as well as Steven Garber’s ‘the Urban Naturalist’ (illustrating

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<sup>217</sup> Beyond the name ‘vegan taxidermy,’ Marbury has stated that he does not self-identify as a vegan. The artworks do not include animal body parts or skins of any kind and take on a cruelty-free mandate.

the city as a beneficial habitat for a diversity of flora and fauna)” (Marbury, “Urban Beast Project”). From these books, Marbury “wrote stories that highlighted the importance of preserving imagination within the structure of civilization” (Marbury, “Urban Beast Project”). His art is used to stress the importance of recognizing unencountered monsters or ‘cryptids’ from the narratives of cryptozoology. Such creatures for Marbury – labelled and currently known as “impossibilities” – are the foundation to human “awe and wonderment” (Marbury, “Urban Beast Project”). In relation to the unknown existence of animals on the planet, Heise states that humans are only aware of a “fraction” of the species that exist. This reality – she writes – makes it difficult if not impossible to conceptualize the number of species going extinct on the planet (26).

Further Heise writes that “[i]t is possible to argue, of course, that the total number of species is irrelevant for the problem of mass extinction. If a large enough number of species is threatened that entire ecosystems are at risk, it may seem pointless to ask for knowledge that is in practice extremely hard to come by” (Heise 27). In this vein, Marbury’s *Urban Beasts* are partnered with artificial stories of existence in urban landscapes, as well as the potential threat or risk of their extinction. These narratives add to the beasts’ symbolism as they are considered previously unencountered monstrous bodies. For example, Marbury’s sculpture, *Nardog* (*canis monoceros*) (Fig. 5.1), is presented as having existed since antiquity and as almost impossible to ‘capture’ (Marbury, “Preserved Project”). *Nardog*’s human companion is ‘Unzie,’ a sideshow gaff and performer who was portrayed as an ‘Albino Aborigine’ (known as the ‘Hirsute Wonder,’ for his excessive hair) in P.T. Barnum’s travelling circus. Unzie was displayed as an Australian Aboriginal, whereas, sources show that he was believed to be of European-American descent. Lynette Russell writes that “[a]n elaborate (and untrue) story emerged of Unzie’s life. This narrative, sold as a pamphlet at the sideshow, contained information of Unzie’s tribal family (he was the son of a ‘chief’) and his rescue by an Englishman from a certain death sentence. Unzie was in fact a European-American believed to have been born in New Jersey, who never travelled to Australia” (59). Unzie’s gaff, similar to the representations of the Feejee Mermaid (see § 2 **Autopsic Gaze**), involves the narratives of exception and exoticism that frame the ways in which bodies are interpreted when on display. The vegan taxidermy sculpture *Nardog*, portrayed as its own type of hoax, mimics and plays with gaff narratives and this is hinted at through Marbury’s mentioning of Unzie’s story in the circus. The narratives of origins are

complicated by representations, although gaffs were meant to deceive an audience who had very little knowledge of the world beyond the scope of a local community.

As interests in cryptozoology increase – perhaps in part because of large-scale curiosity about the biodiversity yet to be discovered – so too increases the acknowledgement that humans do not fully grasp the multiplicity of existences on the planet. By contemporary standards, taxonomy is outdated and disdained in the field of biology; however, as Heise points out,



Figure 5.1: Robert Marbury, Nardog (*Canis monoceros*) 2007. Plush toy and mixed media. Image used with permission from artist, © Robert Marbury.

taxonomy has reemerged in research due to the crisis of biodiversity (26). The resurgence of taxonomy in current debates continues to “highlight the lack of consensus regarding species definitions” (Heise 26) and as I show in § 2 **Autopsic Gaze**, taxonomy has roots in sexual, gendered, and racial biases and discriminations that historically factor into (and have continued to shape) the typology of plant, animal, and human life. The structural norms of scientific taxonomies and typologies that act as archives to vanished biodiversity also shape habitat dioramas that will, like taxidermy, become shrines to how humans perceived ‘nature’ as the

planet continues to be exploited by humans, for humans. The mimetic technologies of artificiality have always and already been part of what makes nature function as an object of thought; however, the mimetic realism found in habitat displays and realist taxidermy (as stagnant objects) are more impervious to decay than wildlife affected by environmental change.

The prolonging of life (like cloning) is seen in Marbury's recycling of plush toys that are the symbolic caricatures of *real* animals. Marbury's arguments for ethical uses in human waste are another example of MART's arguments for 'closed loop' recycling discussed in the introduction of this project. Marbury states that "[t]he idea, at the time that [he] was taking stuffed animals and reusing them, was that art's a pretty wasteful medium. When you can kind of take as much of that waste as you can and *create something new*, that feels pretty good" (Labrise, "Robert Marbury"). Marbury's vegan taxidermy animals construct new forms from discarded objects; however, these plush toy objects continually exist as objects of human circulation. Humans breathe life into these animal objects and, in their various typologies, plush toys and taxidermied animals receive symbolic second lives through their recreation by the hands of artists.

The transformation of the plush animal toy into the monstrous taxidermied figure in Marbury's work further plays with the notion of artificiality. Marbury's transformation of *Sassafras* (Fig. 5.2) from a dressed toy gorilla into the monstrous hybrid animal with horns,



Figure 5.2: Robert Marbury, *Sassafras* (before and after), 2012. Plush toy and mixed media. Image used with permission from artist, © Robert Marbury.

further plays with realism, as the copy is arguably more reminiscent of wildlife (albeit indistinguishable wildlife or a cryptid) than the caricature of the gorilla. From this process, the ‘before’ animal in vegan taxidermy is less animal-like than the taxidermied figure. In other words, the made gorilla caricature is changed into a realist beast, even though the taxonomy of the animal remains unknown (nondescript, cryptid). Such representations further blur origin and end, imaginary or authentic, and the artificial from the real. Conceptions of the *artificial* and the *natural* (as they relate to animals) are complicated further in the linguistic formation of synthetic vegetarian meat. For instance, France’s 2018 ban on vegetarian food products using ‘meat and dairy terms’ to describe, label, or market their products highlights the linguistic weight surrounding *real* from *artificial* (animal) byproducts. Implementation of the ban was founded on the argument that vegetarian and vegan products ‘mislead’ consumers when they use the terminology of ‘sausage,’ ‘steak,’ ‘fillet,’ ‘bacon,’ or ‘milk’ to describe their products. Businesses’ refusal to comply to the 2018 ban will result in fines up to €300,000 (Paris Staff, “French MPs”; *BBC*, “France to Ban Use”; Case, “France to Ban”). The lines between artificial and real are further blurred by food production technologies that create lab-grown meats and lab-grown veggie alternatives to meat, genetically modified foods, and gene-edited livestock -- all part of the conglomerate that is now the industrial food industry.<sup>218</sup>

## § 5.5 Dolly’s Future: Difficulty of Thinking the End

Despite her remains being placed on display in Edinburgh, Dolly’s legacy as a taxidermied specimen has been brought back to life through a short story comic created as part of the celebrations for the National Museum of Scotland’s grand opening of ten new galleries in the museum. The comic created by Henry Cruickshank, entitled *The Adventures of Dolly the Sheep*, depicts Dolly coming to life and leaving her glass crypt when the museum closes and she no longer has to pretend to be a frozen tableau. In the comic, Dolly laments, “three mothers, six children and a father knighted just for making me”; “Yet here I am, all alone” (Cruikshank, “The

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<sup>218</sup> In Canada, many scientific studies – through what is labeled “DNA barcode testing” – have shown that one in five sausages contain “undeclared” types of meat (Mulholland, “1 in 5 Sausages”); *CBC Marketplace* found various food institutions selling meat products that were not 100% animal product when tested. For instance, the study that Canadian franchise Subway served only 50% tested chicken (other part soy) in their food products (Evans and Szetco, “What’s in Your Chicken Sandwich?”). In other words, our food sources fall outside of ‘authenticity’ as it relates to animal byproducts.



Adventures”) before a scene of interspecies meeting happens between her and a kangaroo. Dolly and the Kangaroo are chased by the skeletal remains of a tyrannosaurus rex throughout the museum. Human conceptions of time are morphed throughout the story where Dolly runs from the fate of the past: the prehistoric (and pre-human) dinosaur. Dolly as the techno-future, in other words, is running (and outwitting) extinction and mortality (through scientific transgenesis).

As the techno-future, Dolly uses the phone, rides a bike, and turns her glass crypt into a magical clone-making machine where she recreates more sheep to defeat the stalking dinosaur. In one part of the story, the kangaroo asks Dolly how it will know which of the clones are her and Dolly responds: “What! I’m nothing like them, I’m *unique*” (Cruikshank, “The Adventures,” emphasis added). Dolly’s origins are considered *remarkable* and her ability to reproduce lambs (and extend her legacy) is an extension of her status as an *exceptional* feat for scientists at the Roslin Institute. Interestingly, in 2007 Dolly’s DNA was used to create more clones, otherwise known as the “Nottingham Dollies.” In 2016, it was recorded that four of the ten Dolly clones were alive and healthy, each at the age of nine (Kramer, “Scientists Made”); however, scientists euthanized all of the Nottingham Dollies on the twentieth anniversary of Dolly’s birth, stating that there was “no scientific merit” in keeping them alive (Borkhataria, “On the 20th Anniversary of Dolly’s Birth”). The Nottingham Dollies were born in order to study of the “long term effects of cloning” and, having surpassed the age of Dolly (despite their relatively ‘good health’), the Nottingham Dollies were no longer *useful* to the scientific community or to the University of Nottingham (Borkhataria, “On”). Reaching the age of 10, the Nottingham Dollies were stated to have reached an “*appropriate experimental endpoint*” (Borkhataria, “On,” emphasis added). Dolly’s cultural legacy and the subsequent taxidermy of her remains further complicate her story. To some, Dolly is fetishized as the *first* mammal cloned and to others, her cloned remains are encountered in a glass crypt at the National Museum of Scotland, sometimes transferred to the University of Edinburgh. Dolly’s remains stand as a monument to a time where biotechnologies were only starting to bear fruit. Just as Martha fetishistically remains the *last* of the passenger pigeons, Dolly was the *first* successfully cloned mammal, marking a point of advancement in animal biotechnologies and bioengineering.

The biotechnology of cloning has expanded to now create artificial wombs (otherwise known as ‘ectogenesis’)<sup>219</sup> that can successfully grow foetal lambs and also the collection of ‘biobanks’ for endangered and extinct species. In 2016, Dolly’s creator, Sir Ian Wilmut, stated in an interview that building what he has called a modern day “ark” that holds tissues of endangered animals could be an “insurance policy to save species from extinction” (Sample, “Dolly the Sheep Creator”). Biobanks continue to expand as major research facilities, such as the Natural History Museum of London which has collaborated with the Zoological Society of London and the Institute of Genetics at the University of Nottingham in 2004 to create what is called the ‘Frozen Ark’ (Heatherington 39-40). The studies include preserving animal matter of living and extinct species. In biobanks, or ‘cryobanks,’ material preserves of “sperm, eggs and other material from at-risk animals would ensure that scientists had the biological tissues at hand to resurrect extinct creatures once the means to do so exists” (Sample, “Dolly”). Another option proposed by Wilmut was to gradually manipulate the genome of living animal populations into the endangered species (Sample, “Dolly”). Unlike the disposable Dollys that were euthanized because they no longer provide *scientific merit*, the preserved dead tissues of species in cryobanks are treated as valuable materials in preserving extinct (and at risk) species.

Resurrection biology, otherwise known as ‘de-extinction’ or ‘species revivalism,’ is the process of bringing back to life an extinct animal species through reproductive cloning technologies, selective breeding, and genetics (Rogers 99). Beth Shapiro writes that the two most famous de-extinction projects involve the resurrection of the pyrenean ibex and the Lazarus frog. In 2009, Spanish and French scientists announced that they had successfully cloned an extinct pyrenean ibex (a wild mountain goat). The cloned pyrenean ibex only lived a few seconds after it was born, dying from a lung defect. The technologies used to resurrect the pyrenean ibex were the same used to clone Dolly in 1996 (Shapiro 7-8). Cells were taken from the species before they went extinct and cryogenically frozen to be used in these experiments. Of the 208 embryos

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<sup>219</sup> Scott Gelfand and John Shook write that “[s]ignificantly, four months after the birth of Dolly, Dr. Kyoshinori Kuwabara, a researcher at Juntendo University in Tokyo, announced that his research team had successfully utilized an artificial womb to bring to full term a number of goats’ fetuses that his team had removed from their mother’s womb. Kuwabara’s artificial womb consisted of a plastic box filled with artificial amniotic fluid into which the goat fetuses were placed. Kuwabara developed machinery, which was connected to the goat fetuses, that performed the functions of the placenta. The development of the goat fetuses at the time they were removed was, according to Kuwabara, equivalent to the development of a human fetus in its 20<sup>th</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> week of gestation. In 1997, Kuwabara believed that it would take about ten years to develop an artificial womb that could be used to bring a sixteen-week human fetus to full term” (2).

implanted to create the pyrenean ibex, only one survived to be born (Shapiro 8). Like the de-extinction projects that temporarily resurrected the pyrenean ibex, Australian scientists announced in 2013 that they had successfully made embryos of the extinct Lazarus frog; however, the embryos survived only a few minutes after birth (Shapiro 8). The Lazarus frog experiment included “injecting nuclei from Lazarus frog cells that had been stored in a freezer for forty years into a donor cell from a different frog species” (Shapiro 8). Shapiro states that “[o]ther de-extinction projects, including the mammoth and passenger pigeon de-extinction, face more daunting challenges, of which finding well-preserved materials is only one” (8).

In *Cloning Wildlife*, Carrie Friese discusses the biotechnologies used to reproduce endangered animals through surrogacy in order to place cloned endangered animals on display at the San Diego Zoo (1). Friese introduces her book with the example of ‘Noah,’ a cloned, endangered bovine born on a farm in Iowa in 2000 that was created through the same processes of somatic cell nuclear transfer that produced Dolly. Noah, who died only days after he was born, was created through what Friese calls “interspecies cloning” using a surrogate mother of a different species. Through this experiment, Friese writes, “forty-four of these novel embryos were shipped to Trans Ova Genetics, a company in Iowa that uses assisted reproductive technologies to selectively breed cattle as part of the beef and dairy industries” (1). She further states that somatic cell nuclear transfer has been used to birth five different endangered species worldwide and that a cloned banteng currently resides at the San Diego Zoo (3). The narrative of interspecies cloning complicates the boundaries between species and taxonomies. Friese states that “the incorporation of domestic animal eggs cells and surrogates into the reproductive processes of endangered species raised questions about the classificatory status of cloned animals” (Friese 2). So too are examples such as these, that include the captivity of animals for the purposes of scientific research, complicated for various reasons. Many reproductive biotechnologies are framed by the efforts to gain profit through the animal agriculture industries (Friese 4). Likewise, efforts to display ‘cloned’ animals (in zoos) are also heavily tied to nationalist efforts to rival other countries through competitive innovation and exceptionalism. Much can also be said of the arguably violent processes of experimenting on female animals that are forced to carry and bear witness to newborn animals that are ultimately treated and observed as objects, profitless, and ‘failed’ dead matter. As Franklin writes about Dolly’s birthing process, “[f]ollowing this trail of scientific production from two cells, their merger, their transfer to

surrogates, and their gestation to become Dolly, *we move in and out of sheep's bodies*, making sense of their novel interiors, while they are normalized by their perfectly ordinary external appearances" (45, emphasis added). The level of objectivity that places human contact and emotion away from the animals experimented on continues to support an anthropocentric worldview that treats animals as pure (future-dead) matter.

Perhaps the most striking and romantic projects of de-extinction involve research to resurrect the woolly mammoth, an extinct elephantidae from the Pleistocene period. The desire to resurrect extinct species, writes Shapiro, is shaped by enthusiasm to "see and touch" [or gain knowledgeable purchase (*prise*) of] a woolly mammoth (xi). The unimaginable or unfathomable chance to experience or witness the living dead tantalizes the human spectator. Through Marbury's work, stories of romantic types of extinction are blended with the conceptualization of nuisance or 'trash' animals through his sculpture *Miniature Trash Mammoth* (Fig. 5.3), a small



Figure 5.3: Robert Marbury, *Miniature Trash Mammoth*, 2004. Plush toy and mixed media. Image used with permission from artist, © Robert Marbury.

scale (vegan) taxidermied mammoth. Through species blending and juxtaposing expected behaviours (and sizes), Marbury disrupts easy translation of animal bodies as a means to unthink (and restrict access to) the animal. The eggs staged with the miniature mammoth are symbolic of Marbury's play with interspecies blendings. His sculpture is staged to mock scientifically implied expectations of animal births. Mammoths' progeny, for example, are researched and recorded as having carried their young until birth (like other mammals) and not laid eggs. The blending of imaginary animal existences with animals that are commonly encountered (and

disposable) is another way that Marbury plays with animality. In other words, Marbury's construction of the mammoth makes clear that romantic conceptions of extinct animals are untouchable, ungraspable, and unconjurable. Even if cloned de-extinct mammoths do take place, mammoth, *proper*, as illusory conception cannot be encountered.

Unlike living animals that temporally and spatially exist in multiple forms, relations, and encounters, taxidermy is a human-made construct – a remolding of dead animal matter (or animal symbolism) through human artistic acts. According to Marbury, “traditional mounts tell an archetypal story of an animal, [and] an artistic mount is meant to represent a subjective narrative” (*Taxidermy Art* 12). Likewise, Alberti argues that taxidermied animals are not simply thoughtless objects of the natural history museum, but sculptures that convey the cultural shifts of what animals meant to humans at a particular historical time (1). He states that “[e]lsewhere in the serried ranks of other natural history museums, there are many animals that similarly refuse to be constrained by their zoological classification. Their fame in life and their iconic status in death defy taxonomy. They are not only specimens, but also personalities; not only data, but also historical documents” (Alberti 1). In other words, rogue taxidermy sculptures are archives of the present, shaping human and animal contacts through narrative conventions and human-shaped perceptions.

Rogue taxidermy sculptures also highlight the temporal anxieties involving species loss and the desire to return something that has already temporally passed. In her 2016 sculpture *Ewe Time: Lamb-enting the Loss of Childhood Delight(s)* (Fig. 5.4), Sarina Brewer stages a florescent pink lamb on a grave pedestal with “R.I.P.” labeled on the tombstone. The lamb, clad with a collar with a dangling clock and a body clock placed in the center of its mid-area (figured as, also, the doomsday clock), points to the external and internal temporal changes that shift between the matrices of life and death. The homonymic ‘ewe’ / you (as in *you time*) in the title suggests an interpellation to viewers in the presence of looking. The lamb, symbolic of a child's pet, has long passed; however, the lamb's body also symbolizes a temporal framework of self. The lamb is symbolic of an existentialist crisis, shaped through a longing for childhood innocence before the realities of age, death, and the passing of time are fully realised (if such privileges are permitted). This innocence is shaped in contrast to the disfigured time of the present with its realities of the current material world; a temporal understanding of environmental disasters, wholesale expansion of infrastructure, and agribusiness, and the various forms of toxic pollution

resulting from mass consumer consumption, military amplification, and resource extraction that cannot be undone.

As the aforementioned scientific experiments have shown, conservation efforts that are tasked to count and control the number of species going extinct in the world are produced by a perceived urgency and anxiety of accelerated species and habitat loss. Janet Chernela writes that knowledge created to conserve the world's species is driven to serve the “needs and pleasures of humankind” (29). She writes, “[k]nowledge is but the first step in facing the challenges of extinction. The second step is harvesting this diversity of species for *human use*” (29, emphasis



Figure 5.4: Sarina Brewer, *Ewe Time: Lamb-enting the Loss of Childhood Delight(s)*, 2016. Taxidermy and mixed media. Image used with permission from artist, © Sarina Brewer.

added). The anxieties surrounding mass human death (without legacy) are highlighted in Lyotard's essay "Can Thought go on Without a Body?" In this essay, Lyotard states that in the event that the sun comes to a catastrophic end, there is unattainability (beyond the bounds of current possibility) of thinking an 'end' to all thought/philosophy and also difficulty in imagining ways that human thought can be prolonged beyond the terrestrial existences of matter. He writes that the "problem of the technological sciences can be stated as: how to provide this software with a hardware that is independent of the conditions of life on earth" (13); "[t]hought without a body is the prerequisite for thinking of death of all bodies, solar or terrestrial, and of the death of thoughts that are inseparable from those bodies" (14). Through imagining and conceiving of the means to prolong legacy and contact beyond the grave (or beyond the sun), science and philosophy lay bare their fears and anxieties in death without remnant or trace.

Moreover, Colebrook points to deconstruction's purpose within the 'Anthropocene' when she writes that "Derrida's two major reflections on the figure of the apocalypse demonstrated that a sense of annihilating revelation was already installed in western metaphysics, and in the structure of experience" ("No Symbiosis" 204). She states that "[a]ny version of critique, however, tends towards the apocalyptic: towards an overcoming of error, ambiguity and dispersal of sense to arrive at revelation"; "The post apocalyptic landscapes that are mesmerising us at present seem to confirm Derrida's arguments that we cannot avoid thinking apocalyptically" (Colebrook, "No Symbiosis" 204). Further, Colebrook posits that "[i]t is also the case that what passes today for an apocalypse imaginary is genuinely *post-apocalyptic* insofar as the thought of an actual end is unthinkable" ("No Symbiosis" 204). In other words, the 'post' of the apocalypse – found throughout literature, art, and popular culture, as well as philosophy – points to the human inability to conceive when thought ends. This (post)apocalyptic thought is further nuanced and questioned by Lyotard when he writes that "it's impossible to think an end, pure and simple, of anything at all, since the end's a limit and to think it you have to be on both sides of that limit" (9). Furthermore, Giovanni Alois writes that taxidermy is a "bio-product of this socio-historical scenario capturing the utopian positivistic visions of the time. Most taxidermy has come to symbolise the intense thirst for knowledge and stability in a world that was changing too fast, too soon, as well as uncannily portraying the deep socio-cultural anxieties that also marked the development of this period" (*Art and Animals* 27).

## § 5.6 Conclusion--Thinking Ends

For artists Robert Rauschenberg and Petah Coyne who incorporated the use of taxidermied animals in mid-twentieth-century art, their choices to include taxidermy was informed by their inability to think an end. Rauschenberg was working with stuffed animals at the same time he encountered a goat in a shop window in downtown New York in the 1950s. Rauschenberg believed that his combines with stuffed animals had more to do with a *continuation* of their life. He states in an interview: “I was working with stuffed animals and it was more to, like, continue their life, because I always thought, it’s too bad they’re dead, and so I thought I can do something about that” (Rauschenberg, “Among Friends”). The use of a taxidermied goat body in *Monogram* was to continue the life of the dead animal, similar to what Samuel Alberti has argued is most valuable about museums – that they extend each animal’s historical biography (1). The symbolic life of taxidermy is similarly described by Sarah Amato who writes that taxidermy “extend[ed] the biographies of animals and granted [the taxidermied animals] diverse afterlives as dead things” (183). In concert with Rauschenberg’s inclination to do *something* with discarded taxidermy, Cammarata-Seale states that Coyne encountered taxidermy left in the trash in the streets of Brooklyn, New York, in 1977 and sought to “remedy” the situation. Coyne “exhumed the stuffed animals from their dumpster graves and placed them in her artwork, giving them a *proper* burial and a *new life*” (Cammarata-Seale 11, emphasis added). Like earlier artists that saw taxidermy as a way to keep symbolic animal existence alive, rogue taxidermy artists also fall prey to the narratives of immortality. For instance, Brewer, too, has stated that her art is “giving them [the animals] a *second life*” (Hodges, “Custom Creatures,” emphasis added).

Placed into neat categories, traditional taxidermy in museums contributed to the processes of collecting and producing indexical taxonomies. The taxonomies, terminologies, and categories of species never truly encapsulate the complexity of that which we call ‘animals’ (*l’animot* as the ‘living multiplicity of mortals’). Peter Dendle has argued that increased contemporary interests in the field of cryptozoology are informed by the anxieties of species extinction in the late-twentieth century (198). Unlike traditional taxidermy, rogue taxidermy presents the world with a plethora of other animal options, lives, deaths, and realities. In doing so, rogue taxidermists question human exceptionalism and the anthropocentrism at the heart of the species divide. Echoing Heise, “[d]ifficulties surrounding the definition of species are



compounded by the fact that the number of species currently inhabiting Earth is *unknown*” (26, emphasis added). She states that at the time that animal species are going extinct, humans are also discovering more new species (Heise 27). Likewise, twenty-first-century anxieties have increased further due to representations of climate change, vast changes to biodiversity, and other threats to animal and human life on the planet.

## Concluding Remarks

Throughout this dissertation, my objective has been to analyze the messages conveyed by rogue taxidermy artists to disentangle the constructed narratives of human exceptionalism. Writing alongside feminist theorists, animal studies scholars, and other cultural critics, I have critically analyzed the rogue taxidermy art movement from an intersectional feminist lens to include postmortem animal rights within the broader foray of anti-oppression studies. I highlight the histories of dehumanization and the various ways that animals were used to further oppress marginalized human groups-- an insight that is sometimes lost within the broader discussion of power and oppression. Though humans continue to transact taxidermied animal bodies across the world, I have stressed throughout this project that many humans, like animals, were historically (and violently) displayed for the pleasure and entertainment of white Europeans and Americans. Because of these past realities, I argue that we, humans, have an ethical responsibility to acknowledge how our actions continue to harm others in the present and also reflect on the ways in which our intersecting mobilities with other beings are always at risk of causing harm, as we share, with animals, vulnerable (yet chiasmic) skins. Since anthropocentrism always lurks in the shadows, I have sought to carefully remedy the tensions and erasures found throughout scholarly fields that see the incorporation of studying animals in academia as unimportant or as a dangerous move that potentially risks the further dehumanization of oppressed groups of humans. Rather than ignore the realities of nonhuman, I strived to unpack the complex web humans have created to continually justify their separation from animals.

In this project, I have shown the transformation of taxidermy as a lowbrow hobby resurrected and repurposed into a fine art in the contemporary art gallery. I revisited the work of famous traditional and realist taxidermists, as well as twentieth-century artists, in order to situate rogue taxidermy within its cultural history. Since its inception, taxidermy has been used to validate human social norms and ideals. Taxidermy produces an artificiality of animality by its forcible effort at realism and its efforts as meta-preservation to encapsulate a human-sustained 'real' that is always already the unnatural. In **§ 1 From Botched to Rogue**, I argued that the rogue taxidermy art movement is not constitutive of postmodern questioning in the ways that botched taxidermy sculptures have been staged to disrupt the distinction between animals and humans. Centered on an animal rights discourse, rogue taxidermists criticize speciesist acts inflicted on animals, by and for humans, and mourn animal deaths through artists' critical

stagings (even if these artists are, indeed, at risk of continually exploiting animals after death). In this vein, even when rogue taxidermists disrupt species markers through their unconventional form, these artists never lose sight of the animal in question. For rogue taxidermists, the animal is the other who they each, in their own unique style, feel ethically responsible to represent, mourn, and acknowledge.

In the chapters that followed, I continued to show how rogue taxidermists utilize pre-existing norms of species taxonomies, display, preservation, and taxidermic liveliness in order to disrupt anthropocentric violence. Rogue taxidermists do this through strategical inversions, mimicry, repetitions, and fabulated exaggerations. I discussed how dead animals are temporally situated, such as Martha, the taxidermied passenger pigeon constructed as the *last* of her kind. Martha, like many other extinct species, haunt the techno-future where Dolly, as the *first* of her kind, conceives a future of artificial biotechnologies to come (technologies that treat animals as raw, useable matter). Breaking the spectrum between life and dead, origins and ends, real and artificial, rogue taxidermy art pieces are staged to haunt through their *rogue*, *nondescript*, *repurposed*, and *blended* status; these reconstructed creatures forge new horizons through various forms, temporalities, spatialities, and histories. Through monsters, cryptids, zombies, and ‘freak’ show curiosities, I have shown the various cultural symbols that have come to encapsulate animality in its un/dead form. From these artificialities of animal existence, in its various forms, rogue taxidermy art displays (de)construct the conventions of animal life, artistic creation, and taxidermy display. Among these multi-interpretative art sculptures, countless conclusions can be drawn, but what continues to be clear is that human thought is continually grappling with what animals are, what they mean to us in the present, and what they will mean to us in the future.

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