Re-Presenting Taxidermy: Contemporary Art Interventions in Natural History Museums.

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Abstract

Most natural history museums in Europe and North America were established during the late nineteenth century with the aim of preserving and developing a collection of botanical, geological and zoological specimens to facilitate research in the natural sciences and at the same time educate the general public. Museum curators made use of taxonomy to organise scientific collections, a method that suited remains of living organisms that did not easily decompose, such as dried leaves and animal skeletons. Animal displays often made use of taxidermy. Attempts at a more realistic display of animals in their natural habitat took the form of the diorama. While it was popular at the time, it is perceived as problematic today in its reference to the heroic hunter who collected 'big game' in the colonies. Moreover, today it also raises environmental and sustainability concerns as well as issues of animal welfare. Modern publics do not see such objects as mere specimens, but as once live animals that are often members of endangered species. Hence, the museums discussed opted to expose their displays to new interpretations by inviting contemporary artists to intervene in their permanent display, highlighting different perspectives on the problematic historical collections. In so doing they also made it possible for the public to re-engage with their collections and address contemporary debates differently. The thesis explores four institutions with Natural History collections which invited contemporary artists to respond to their collection: The Welcome Collection, London; the Manchester Museum, Manchester; the Natural History Museum, London; and the Horniman Museum, London. It argues that artists' interventions in each can be viewed as exposing, challenging, and questioning the ethical grounds on which museums have justified the use of animal bodies in their Natural History displays.

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conveyed to me the passionate engagement they had with their work and helped me to see past my initial misconceptions about the displays they had curated. I would not have been able to understand the importance of their respective curatorial roles in the construction of displays in their museums without their help, which included helping me to gain access to the archive collections at the Horniman and Manchester Museums. I would also like to thank David Green at the Research Office of UAL, who has been a great support to me throughout my course of study. I met David when I first enrolled at St. Martins and have been grateful for his support ever since. Lastly, I would like to thank my wife Elaine for not only putting up with the amount of time I have had to give to my studies, but also helping me sort out the ideas I have been working on. Her support has kept me going throughout the whole process.

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Introduction

Taxidermy is the practice of preserving the appearance of an animal's body by mounting its skin over an armature for the purpose of display or study. Taxidermists have at various times been employed to produce hunting trophies, decorative displays for domestic interiors and comic tableaux as well as specimens for museum displays (Eastoe 2012, Morris 2010). The taxidermy collections we see in museums often originated in private collections of trophies and curiosities which have been re-purposed to function as visual aids in displays that are aimed at providing scientific education to the general public. However, when taxidermy is used to represent a species of animal in a taxonomic display, it seldom matches the precise definition of a species as laid down in a taxonomic classification schedule because, unlike dried plant specimens, taxidermy specimens vary so much; only so-called 'type specimens' are acknowledged to be true representations of a particular species.

Until very recently, animals were shot for taxidermy displays. This fact caused little controversy in the 19th century, when great taxidermy collections were being assembled (Morris 2010), but increasingly, and especially since the mid 20th century, it has been seen as problematic because so many animal species are in sharp decline. Taxidermy displays in museums contain both hunting trophies and taxonomic specimens, a confusion that is complicated by the fact that both forms of taxidermy use realism as a mode of presentation to reveal the 'truth' about Nature. Realism has been used to obscure the fact that taxidermy is made out of skins that were taken from dead animals shot by hunters. Dioramas have shifted attention from taxidermy specimens to the context in which they are displayed, but the fact that each animal had been shot in order to add to the display was never far below the surface. This thesis explores some of the ways in which contemporary artists

have made use of taxidermy to construct art interventions in natural history museums and by so doing have provoked different interpretations of historical taxidermy displays. Their interventions have opened historical displays to critical re-interpretation and addressed contemporary debates about the damaged relationships between humans and other species of animal. By inviting artists to display taxidermy works, museums have presented their historical displays to a wider public within critical frames that resonate with contemporary concerns about the threats to biodiversity. My analyses of how each art intervention engages with museums policies on wider participation and with ecological and other contemporary concerns such as animal welfare and the sustainability of the environment. In so doing I show how each also encouraged the re-interpretation of historical displays in public museums of natural history. This is my contribution to knowledge.

The Context of the Natural History Museum

Museums have been subject to political pressures to widen participation and to make their exhibitions and services more attractive to social groups who have been underrepresented in the museum-going public. A key government document that advocated widening public participation was *Museums for the Many* (Great Britain, DCMS, 1999). This report made it clear that publicly funded museums were expected to offer their services to all sectors of society and gave advice on how this might be achieved. It was partly in response to these pressures that curators devised display strategies using new forms of taxidermy in order to encourage public debate on how animals have been, or should be, represented in their collections (Smith, 2012:34). However, whilst taxidermy is a popular form of display that can appeal to a wide audience, it also brings with it ethical problems that have to be sensitively addressed.

An important element in contemporary debates over the display of taxidermy concerns the threats facing populations of wild animals. By the late 20th century, there were so many species facing extinction that the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES, 1973) adopted a resolution that came into force in 1975 restricting the trade in animal (and plant) specimens, including the animal skins that taxidermists used to make museum specimens. Consequently, old specimens of exotic species of animal in museum taxidermy collections can no longer be replaced with newer ones, unless zoo specimens that have died of natural causes can be obtained[1]. One consequence of this situation is that Curators of Natural History collections at the start of the 21st century are faced with the

[1] The body of a 'Tigon' (a cross between a lion and a tiger) was donated by Belle Vue Zoo to Manchester Museum in 1950. The bodies of *Guy the gorilla* (1978) and *Chi Chi the panda* (1972) were both donated by the London Zoo to the Natural History Museum when they died.

problem of how best to engage with public debates on the extinction crisis whilst at the same time retaining historical taxidermy collections consisting of specimens of animals that were shot for display.

One of the main ways that museums have used to organise their taxidermy collections has been taxonomy. Taxonomic taxidermy displays were introduced in the late 19th century. They gave members of the public the opportunity to see exotic species of animal that they would not normally encounter and learn about the way in which scientists organize biodiversity.

The Natural History Museum in London led the way in the field of public education in the late 19th century:

> "The South Kensington Museum … marked a significant turning-point in the development of British museum policy in cIearly enunciating the principles of the modern museum conceived as an instrument of public education. It provided the axis around which London's museum complex was to develop throughout the rest of the century and exerted a strong influence on the development of museums in the provincial cities and towns " (Bennett 1995: 71-72)

The principle behind the system of organisation adopted by Richard Owen (1804-1892), first director of the Natural History Museum in South Kensington, was that of taxonomy. He organized his specimen collection according to a "systematic description of external features then anatomical description of internal features" (British Museum Natural History 1882:4). Diverse plants and animals were organized according to anatomical and morphological similarities and differences. As Bennett has suggested, Owen's systematic arrangement in the Natural History Museum spread to other museums and was later adopted by Alfred Cort Haddon, the scientific curator brought in to re-organise the taxidermy collection at the Horniman museum in 1902. Taxidermy was used to represent the multiplicity of animal species in systematic displays, in which each species was assigned a position

according to its specific anatomical and morphological characteristics. *How* taxidermy came to be in a museum's collection was not considered an important issue in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Once acquired it was accepted as a scientific specimen, whereas today, the ethical problems that surround killing animals for museum displays has become a widespread concern amongst taxidermists, museum curators and the general public (Poliquin 2008:158). The appearance of 'ethical' taxidermists who will only work with animal bodies that have died of natural causes or as a result of road accidents is an indication of changing attitudes towards to killing of animals for museum displays (Semicoct 2016, Hatton 2015). Because there has been a growing awareness of the connection between the existence of huge taxidermy collections and the decline in animal populations, it is hard today to ignore the hunter's presence behind the old taxidermy specimens in museum displays, many of which - like the Horniman walrus[2] and the Manchester Museum's Bengal tiger[3] - were shot by hunters for sport rather than for scientific study.

All the animal skins used for taxidermy in the diorama displays at the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH) came from animals that were hunted and shot specially for the taxidermy displays for which they were used. Carl Akeley, who was in charge of the AMNH collecting expeditions to Africa, wrote about his heroic exploits when hunting dangerous wild animals, that included narrowly evading death beneath the feet of a charging elephant and later throttling a wounded leopard to death with his bare hands, thus promoting an image of himself as a quick-witted and fearless hunter (Akeley 1924) – an image that was taken up by the popular press of his day and still circulates in the Hall of African Mammals at the AMNH. Another AMNH taxidermist, Robert

[2] The Walrus was shot by James Henry Hubbard, a professional hunter around 1886. (Horniman Public Museum & Public Gardens Trust. (1934?).
[3] The Bengal tiger was shot by Mr Quas-Cohen around 1975 (Manchester Museum 1975-76)

Rockwell, wrote a memoir in the same vein in which he boasted of his prowess as a hunter. He also stated his view that conservationist alarm over species extinction was "puerile bosh" (Rockwell, 1956:173). What mattered most to Rockwell and Akeley were the thrill of the chase and the moment of triumph when the hunter finally overcame his elusive quarry. The animal skins they brought back to the museum were by-products of their manly activities. In the century since Akeley wrote his memoir, attitudes toward the hunting other species of animal for sport - or for museum displays - have shifted considerably. A trophy head mounted on a shield that once symbolized human superiority over another species, now connotes the contested belief that humans have 'license' to exploit Nature (Poliquin 2012:147). Trophy specimens have come to be seen as a negative indicator of power relations between hunter and hunted and also as evidence of the exploitative relations between Imperial powers and their colonies, where most of the animals used for the taxidermy that fills the Natural History galleries of our museums were shot in the 19th and early 20th centuries (Andrews 2013:90). Akeley, for instance, collected all his African specimens in British or Belgian colonies[4] (Haraway 1985:32).

Taxidermy display policies began to change in the late 20th century in response to shifts in the way scientists were studying the natural world, and also, as we have seen, because museums were seeking to engage contemporary visitors more actively with their collections. At the Manchester Museum, which holds a huge collection of taxidermy, display policy shifted in the 1970's from providing static taxonomic displays to producing entertaining, informative exhibitions with an environmental message (Alberti 2008:79) whilst at about the same time, the newly appointed director of the Natural History Museum, Frank Claringbull, planned a series of permanent exhibitions focusing on contemporary themes including "ecosystems and energy cycles, and

[4] He visited British East Africa (1909-11) and the Belgian Congo (1921 - 1926).

… man's role in the living world" (Natural History Museum 1974:3). Claringbull spoke ironically about old displays, describing them as "what the public has always found to be the most entertaining aspect of the museum: halls of monsters and a stuffed zoo". (Natural History Museum 1974:78). His new displays were organized around narratives that could easily be understood by lay visitors, conveying concepts rather than illustrating systems of classification (Miles, R F and Alt M B M J. 1979:158-62). Ethical and political problems associated with taxidermy, such as whether it is justifiable to hunt animals for museum displays, were left unexamined in this period because taxidermy was used to suggest "cognitive associations" (Asma 2001:261) between the specimen and stories about the natural world, such as 'man's place in evolution' or 'whales and their relatives' (Natural History Museum 1986).

During most of the 20th century, taxonomic taxidermy displays remained in wide usage in public museums with natural history collections, for instance, it was used to organize the large taxidermy collections at the Natural History Museums in South Kensington and at Tring (Jones 2016:731). Other modes of taxidermy display - such as those that represent different animal adaptations to their habitats in the Horniman Museum – often appeared alongside taxonomic displays. Some larger public museums, like the Natural History Museum[5] and Manchester Museum[6], began to exhibit dioramas in the latter part of the 20th century but the popularity of these dioramas never matched that of those produced by museums in the USA, particularly those produced by Carl Akeley and his successors at the American Museum of Natural History. These dioramas gave visitors a 'hunter's eye view' of wild animals in their natural habitats - a glimpse of a scene in which animal and habitat seem to merge into a single organic entity (Haraway

[5] A set of three Rowland Ward dioramas were installed in the Natural History Museum in 1960 (Edwards 1959)
[6] A bison diorama was added to the Mammal Hall at Manchester Museum in 1973 (Manchester Museum 1974)

2004:168). Akeley's dioramas closely resembled the anthropological dioramas produced by Franz Boas for the AMNH, reflecting Akeley's belief that animals could best be understood within their own habitat, just as Boas had believed that objects "could only be understood within their individual cultural context and not abstracted from it" (Harrison 2012:27). Dioramas used taxidermy as part of a theatrical reconstruction of the African wilderness. The different forms of museum display used taxidermy to represent different views of the animal – through the eyes of a scientist, an evolutionist or a hunter - but all of them used the animal as a symbolic presence and ignored the ethical problems associated with taxidermy.

In the present century, as Deidre Smith has pointed out, critical animal studies have raised awareness of "the shared threats to all animal life posed by climate change, and the role that human exploitation of animal others has in exacerbating these threats" (Smith, D. 2021:2). Her observation poses a problem for museums with large taxidermy collections. How should the curators of these Natural History collections respond to the current crisis that has brought the problematic relations between humans and other species into sharp relief and raised question about the legitimacy of using unethically sourced taxidermy in museum displays at a time when animal populations are under intense pressure due to human exploitation of the natural environment? (Morton 2018:119-121).

Ethical debates about human impact on the natural world pose a challenge to conventional Natural History displays, as a group of curators recently noted:

> For natural history museums … to become more relevant as public institutions as interpreters of science in society, they must confront issues around difficult subjects such as the human impact on the natural world, the ethics of collection, biological conservation and extinction. One way to do this is to break with

> the traditional empirical, authoritative and apolitical conventions of museum interpretation.
> (Carnell, Ashby and Ross, 2013: 123–144).

When contemporary artists began to use taxidermy in the 1990's, they introduced speculative visions of the animal that were not deemed to be acceptable in public museums. Giovanni Aloi has defined speculative taxidermy as:

> A category of actual taxidermy objects ... that poses questions about what taxidermy may be or do in order to unravel complex interlinks between humans, animals, environments, discourses and practices.
> (Aloi 2018:24)

My four case studies explore the critical implications of contemporary artist's interventions in three museums that have extensive taxidermy collections - the Natural History Museum in South Kensington, the Horniman Museum in South London, the Manchester Museum and a scientific institution - the Wellcome Collection in Central London. Some notable contemporary artists including Abbas Akhavan, Polly Morgan, Tessa Farmer, Claire Morgan, Jazmine Miles-Long, Mark Dion and Emilio Russo (who worked with curator Henry McGhie), have brought ecologically focused and/or ethically charged animal works into these museums and by doing so, have contributed to debates on the damage that has been done to animal lives (Aloi, 2018:25) and the ethical issues associated with using taxidermy in museum displays. For example, Claire Morgan's taxidermy tableaux (at the Horniman Museum) dealt directly with the effects of pollution on urban animals. Both Jazmine Miles-Long (at the Horniman Museum) and Tessa Farmer (at the Natural History Museum) used damaged taxidermy to suggest the harm that animals suffer both from natural causes and from the effects of human actions, whilst Mark Dion's installation (at the Manchester Museum), that used old, abandoned animal specimens discovered in the museum store, questioned the museum's rationale for displaying some forms of taxidermy whilst rejecting others. Emilio Russo and Henry

McGhie's installations (at the Manchester Museum) reused old taxidermy to tell new stories about the way people can interact with Nature, and Abbas Akhavan's installation at the Wellcome Collection brought attention to the way museums use animal bodies to represent their own narratives whilst ignoring the obvious fact that the skins used for taxidermy are necessarily linked with the death of an animal. Akhavan's installation brought the problematic relationship between taxidermy and museum displays into sharp focus. His display of 'dead' animals highlighted the dual nature of taxidermy - as both the skin of a dead animal and a symbolic animal form that has been used by museums in narratives that overwrite the ethical problematics of using a dead animal to represent a living one.

My interest in this topic began when I visited the Polly Morgan *Psychopomps* exhibition at the Haunch of Venison Gallery in 2010. It was evident that although her taxidermy was well crafted[7] it was not intended to exemplify a species of animal (as in a natural history museum display for example) but to construct a narrative about animal lives and deaths. In each of her tableaux, such as *Dead Ringer*, in which a taxidermy magpie lies across a Bakelite telephone in place of the handset (fig 1), taxidermy was used to illustrate stories in which animal specimens acted as metaphors.

Fig. 1. Polly Morgan. *Dead Ringer*. 2009 ©Polly Morgan

[7] Polly Morgan was taught taxidermy in Edinburgh by George Jamieson

Seeing the works in this exhibition reminded me that taxidermy did not have to be exclusively connected with the animal as represented by scientific displays. Polly Morgan took stuffed animals out of the museum and away from displays where they represented a species of animal (or sometimes an individual animal such as *Chi-Chi* the panda in the Natural History Museum). Museum taxidermy has acquired an established purpose as a technology for representing the *appearance* of an animal, whereas in Polly Morgan's work it was used to represent *ideas* about the animal (The New Art Gallery Walsall (2013). By questioning the fixed function of taxidermy, Morgan's taxidermy art provided a way to reflect upon the way we think about the natural world and, by extension, to question the way it is represented in museums.

In 2015 this question came to the fore when I saw a selection of Polly Morgan's taxidermy tableaux exhibited at the Horniman Museum in South London. I was able to appreciate, at first hand, how her story-telling tableaux compared with other taxidermy displays in the museum that included a taxonomic series of specimens and a set of six cases illustrating evolutionary principles, most notably, the adaptation of animals to their environments. Polly Morgan's surreal assemblages used 'dead' or 'trapped' taxidermy specimens to represent the plight of animals caught in a hostile environment. By comparison, the taxidermy displays in the museum appeared to endorse a particular idea of realism that equates the decontextualized taxidermy specimen with a real animal – a conflation of ideas with things that Haraway has called the 'positivist fallacy' (Haraway, 2004:166). The experience of comparing Polly Morgan's taxidermy tableaux with the taxidermy displays in the Horniman Museum, set me thinking about the ways in which artist's taxidermy could be used to question the veridicality and ethical legitimacy heritage displays. Morgan's specimens seemed to attract a more engaged, affective response to animal bodies than those in the heritage displays. The narrative context in which she set her taxidermy made them seem more vulnerable to harm. The appearance of

vulnerability became a 'punctum' (Barthes 2000:26), the point that engaged my personal feelings for the animal.

A short while later, at a seminar held at the Horniman Museum entitled *Museums, Artists and Universities working in partnership* (March 2016), the Curator of Natural History at the Horniman Museum, Joanne Hatton, revealed that three quarters of visitors surveyed by the museum thought that Polly Morgan's taxidermy had "opened up the historic collection in a surprising way" (Hatton, 2016a). In other words, she had found that taxidermy made by contemporary artists could serve as a critical intervention in a museum with heritage taxidermy displays, confirming my view that when new and old taxidermy representations are put together, they provoke questions about the way animals have been represented in the past. I began to search for other examples of this critical curatorial practice and, after some preliminary research, I found that Bergit Arends had curated several artist's interventions at the Natural History Museum in South Kensington and that Henry McGhie had collaborated with Mark Dion, and later with Etienne Russo, on radical redisplays of taxidermy at the Manchester Museum.

I selected these three museums; the Horniman Museum, the Natural History Museum and the Manchester Museum for my case studies because they had all used artist's interventions to critique ideas of the animal represented in their extensive taxidermy archive. Each of the curators in these museums had taken the opportunity to bring art and science together in natural history displays. Birgit Arends, Curator of Contemporary Art at the Natural History Museum, had had experience of planning Art/Science exhibitions when she worked as the coordinator of the Art/Science programme at the Wellcome Collection. Bryony Bond, the *Alchemy* Curator at The Manchester Museum brought artists, including Mark Dion, into the Museum to stimulate inter-disciplinary debates (Manchester Museum Staff Net 2007). Joanne Hatton, Curator of Natural History at the Horniman Museum set up a

dedicated exhibition space to show work made by artists "in response to our natural history collections" (Hatton pers com. 12/8/2018). I later included a study of a further exhibition at the Wellcome Collection entitled *Making Nature; how we see animals*, curated by Honor Beddard, who also produced exhibitions that set up a "two-way relationship between science and art" (Beddard 2017). I did so for a number of different reasons. Firstly, because it surveyed the different ways that Nature had been conceived in Western culture (see chapter 3), secondly, because it included a section on museum displays in which taxidermy featured prominently, and thirdly because Honor Beddard invited a contemporary artist, Abbas Akhavan, to show his taxidermy in the exhibition as a way to question former modes of taxidermy display.

While researching the historical origins of the use of taxidermy to represent a scientific view of animals, I came across the spectacular diorama displays that Carl Akeley had produced for the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH) in New York in the 1920's. Akeley, who was a hunter, an artist and a taxidermist, had been sent by the AMNH to Africa to collect specimens for the museum in the 1920's. He and his hunting party shot the animals needed for a Hall of diorama displays he was planning to construct at the museum, each of which would feature taxidermy specimens of African mammals in their native habitat. Akeley was admired as a fearless hunter, and the taxidermy trophies he prepared brought out the musculature and proud bearing of the animals he had shot, including a female leopard that had tried to kill him. Akeley faced considerable danger on his exhibitions and was badly injured on two occasions before he set out on his final expedition to collect gorilla specimens. He played out the role of the fearless hunter who shot dangerous animals for the sake of science, but his dioramas used taxidermy to re-create a theatre of Nature as an organic whole. His dioramas were presented as a true picture of Nature, but as Donna Haraway has commented, Akeley perfected an "organised craft" for eliciting unambiguous experience of organic perfection (Haraway

2004:166) as seen through the hunter's eyes; the magnificent specimens, the charming family groups, the peaceful settings in which he came across his quarry. All are lovingly reassembled in his taxidermy dioramas.

The wealthy men who assembled taxidermy collections that were passed on to museums, like Sir Hans Sloane (1660-1753) who sold his biological and botanical collection to the nation, thus establishing the core collection of the British Museum, and Frederick Horniman (1835-1906) who gave his collection to the people of London which formed the core collection of the Horniman Museum, collected widely and eclectically, assembling collections of 'curiosities' that they organized according to personal preference. The taxidermy they passed onto museums was not therefore entirely suitable for the purposes it was put to, and taxidermy displays have remained problematic for this reason. It is also problematic for another reason: taxidermy has been used in museums to represent the classificationist idea that all natural organisms can be organized by species into taxonomic displays, or the organicist idea that animals are inseparable from their habitats in diorama displays, but it also carries with it the idea of a hunting trophy.

This thesis examines different forms of intervention, different museum contexts and different types of contemporary artists' interventions in four case study museums. I note that contemporary art today is often exhibited outside Art galleries and explore some of the ways that ways curators have opened up their museum collections to new ideas about the animal articulated by contemporary artists, whilst retaining their historic displays. The case studies focus attention on the way that damaged animal bodies have been used to articulate concerns (both rational and ethical) about the existential threats to animals and their habitats in the 21st century. My contribution to knowledge is my analysis of how each art intervention engaged with museums policy of wider participation and at the same time engaged with ecological and

other contemporary concerns such as environmental issues, colonialism and animal welfare and sustainability of the environment. In so doing I show how each also encouraged the re-interpretation of historical displays in public museums of natural history.

Chapter Summary

The first chapter provides an overview of the literature on the use of taxidermy in museums, a consideration of some of the ontological aspects of taxidermy and a discussion of discourse analysis in the context of museum displays. This survey reviews current thinking about the way taxidermy has been used to represent ideas of the animal. There follows a historical overview of the use of taxidermy as a technology for representing the natural world in displays of different kinds produced for different audiences from the 17the century to the present day, This chapter also provides background on how, from the 1990s, museums in England responded to government demands to widen participation by devising forms of taxidermy display with more popular appeal. As part of this process, ethical guidelines for the use of taxidermy were brought forward, new connections between art and science forged, and artists brought into museums to display their work, thereby encouraging a critical re-examination of historical taxidermy in museum displays.

In Chapter 2, the diorama displays that Carl Akerley produced for the American Museum of Natural History in the early 20th Century are examined. Akeley displayed his trophy taxidermy in theatrical diorama displays in which the animals he had shot were assembled in simulations of their natural habitat inside a specially designed *Hall of African Mammals'* at the museum. His dioramas gave visitors a 'big game' hunter's view of African mammals that valorised the heroic hunter. They highlighted one of the problems associated with using taxidermy in museum displays. Whilst Akeley made every effort to make his taxidermy look realistic, the dioramas carried within them the

history of their origins. Every animal in the Hall of African Mammals had been killed to make the diorama displays 'come to life'.

Chapter 3 focuses on *Making Nature,* an exhibition held at the Wellcome Collection (2016-17) which presented a survey of how Western societies have thought about Nature and represented animals historically. Taxidermy is shown to have has played an important role in the representation of animals, particularly since the 19th century, not only in taxonomic displays but also in taxidermy tableaux and dioramas. The curator of *Making Nature,* Honor Beddard, invited contemporary installation artist Abbas Akhavan to place 'dead' animals on the floor of the exhibition to deliberately disrupt normal expectations of museum taxidermy displays. His taxidermy recalled the animals killed on our roads by motor traffic and drew attention to the fact that museum taxidermy dissembles the death of the animal and ignores the current biodiversity crisis.

Chapter 4 focuses on two exhibitions at the Manchester Museum in which old museum taxidermy was repurposed to create new displays. Firstly, by the artist Mark Dion in his *Bureau of the Centre for the Study of Surrealism and its Legacy* installation, which was exhibited at the museum in 2005, and secondly by Henry McGhie and Emilio Russo's exhibition *Living Worlds* (2011) which re-used old taxidermy in new installations. These displays explored different ethical and environmental themes: Dion's installation used the material properties of old taxidermy specimens to suggest the damage we do to animal bodies, whilst McGhie and Russo's installations used old taxidermy specimens to represent the ways people can relate more positively to the Nature.

Chapter 5 considers an intervention by contemporary artist Tessa Farmer at the Natural History Museum in South Kensington in 2007. Farmer exhibited *Little Savages,* a taxidermy tableau depicting the

struggle between a hoard of parasitic fairies and a cowering fox, in the Central Hall of the museum, in close proximity to more traditional specimen displays. The damaged body of the fox conveyed the misery it was suffering from the parasite attack and alerted the viewer to the vulnerability of animals in a way that the scientific specimen displays did not.

Chapter 6 explores three artists' interventions at the Horniman museum that took place between 2015 and 2019, each of which used taxidermy to focus attention on ethical aspects of human relationships with other species. Polly Morgan's narrative tableaux told stories about animal lives and deaths. Jazmine Miles-Long's taxidermy cases used animal bodies as a memorial to their lost lives, and Claire Morgan's choking urban animals bore witness to the effects of plastic pollution. Their interventions acknowledged the fragility of animal lives and contrasted with older taxidermy displays in the museum in which the animal was used principally as a symbolic presence.

The Conclusion draws out some of the key issues that have emerged through the analysis of artists' taxidermy interventions in case study museums and at the Wellcome Collection, highlighting the ways in which each intervention had encouraged a critical re-examination of historical taxidermy in museum displays.

Methodology

My methodological approach is based on the exploration of the ways museum curators have used interventions by contemporary artists strategically in museums in order to pose questions about representations of the animal. At the same time, contemporary artists have welcomed the collaborations of the museum as a venue to develop their contemporary art practice. The analytical approach I have used in considering taxidermy displays in museums draws on constructivist epistemology and argues that the concept of "Nature" has no meta-historical meaning but is distributed through many different articulations that are historically located. Robert Stecker has provided a definition of the way in which the concept of constructivism can be used to understand historical processes:

> Historical constructivism claims that the meaning of an object changes in the course of its history as it encounters new contexts, new conventions, new intentions, or any other relevant new developments
> (Stecker 2003:25)

In my case studies I describe how taxidermy has been used to represent different ideas about the animal at different times during the history of a museum. Taxidermy specimens can be considered to be objects that have had their meanings historically constructed in different museum contexts in the light of prevailing ideas about Nature, or more specifically, Natural History. To understand how the meaning of taxidermy displays have changed over time in a particular museum, therefore, requires a close examination of the policies and display practices of a specific museum over a period of time, as well as ideas about Nature that were in circulation at particular periods. These in turn are affected by the broader socio-economic context in which the museum was operating. A constructivist analysis of taxidermy such as this demands that attention is paid to the institutional 'discourse of Nature' and to the ways in which ideas about Nature belonging to this discourse were represented to the public. Michel Foucault has proposed a method for conducting a

constructivist analysis of changing discourses of Nature in institutional settings, that he has called an 'archaeological method' (Foucault, 2002) to distinguish it from more evaluate methods of analysis. Archaeological analysis, as formulated by Foucault, sets out to *describe* discursive formations: "the relations that may legitimately be described between statements that have been left in their provisional, visible groupings" (Foucault, 2002:34). For example, ideas about human-animal relations that circulate through museums constitutes a discursive formation, which is visible, provisional and subject to change over time. Discursive formations in museums are made up of a "multiplicity of discursive elements that can come into play in various strategies" (Howarth, 2000:78). In a museum, for example, the discourse of Nature is constructed not only by what is stated in policy documents but also by what is produced by display practices that can change and bring new ideas about Nature into vision to enrich (or disrupt) an institutional discourse. Taxidermy, used as an articulation of ideas of the animal, plays an active role in discourse formation by making visible concepts of Nature in Natural History museums, confirming or challenging existing discursive formations.

In *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (2002 first published 1972), Foucault asked questions about "networks of concepts and their rules of formation" (Foucault, 2002:72) in specific institutions, noting that in a museum context, concepts can take the form of visual displays as well as written texts or verbal discussions. The connections between these separate elements are not fixed and must be looked at within the particular institutional setting in which they occur and which gives them continuity. An analysis of an institutional discourse must *establish* connections between separate articulations of a concept over time, rather than assume them.

> There is no statement in general, no free, neutral, independent statement; but a statement always belongs to a series or a whole, always plays a role amongst other statements, deriving support

> from them and distinguishing itself from them. It is always part of a network of statements (Foucault 2002:111)

In *The Order of Things; an archaeology of the human sciences* (2002 first published 1989), Foucault carried out a careful analysis of successive historical articulations of the concept Nature from archive sources, in order to find out what ideas and values were present in addition to the empirically verifiable 'facts' they purported to represent. In 19th century natural history museums, for example, he noted that a rationalised vision of biodiversity was articulated in which every natural organism was given a place in an exhaustive series, the order of which was empirically determined according to the anatomical and morphological similarities and differences between organisms (Foucault 2002:149). Specimens were incorporated into an organised classification that suggested to the public that the relationships created between species, based on appearances, were beyond question, and that reason, in the form of taxonomic tables, could reveal inherent links between different species of animal (Foucault 2002:150).

Drawing on Foucault and using his idea that representations of the animal are an articulation of an institutional discourse, a study of successive historical articulations of Nature must establish how different concepts of Nature and representations of the animal have been linked over time. To do this, it is necessary to analyse each visual articulation of the animal in its specificity before attempting to identify connections and differences between them. As Foucault has stated, archaeological analysis "defines discourses in their specificity" and looks at "the set of rules they put into operation" (Foucault 2002:155). Foucault's archaeological analysis can therefore help to distinguish different forms of animal display in a natural history museum, each of which articulates a different construction of the concept of Nature, framed by historically specific rules of formation.

The archaeological approach to understanding how a taxidermy display can articulate an institutional discourse of nature was adopted by Donna

Haraway in her pioneering study of the diorama displays at the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH); *Teddy Bear Patriarchy: taxidermy in the garden of Eden, New York City 1908-1930* (1984). Haraway's analysis of the *Akeley Hall of African Mammals* looked at a range of factors that were involved in the production of the diorama displays, including the museum's policies, the political climate (that included an environmental movement), the new display technologies, and the individual interests of those involved in the conception, financing and construction of the dioramas. Her analysis revealed the role that each of these factors had in writing the 'rules of formation' that determined how museum displays would look in the 1920s and 1930s, the time the Akeley Hall displays were being planned and produced (Cain, 2011). For example, in discussing displays produced at the AMNH, Haraway exposed the patriarchal ideology that lay behind the valorisation of male specimens over female specimens and the normalisation of arranging taxidermy specimens in family groups (regardless of species) in which the female takes the nurturing role while the male is free to roam (Haraway, 1984:37). In commenting on Donna Haraway's analysis, Wonders noted that "perfection was portrayed as a form of masculinity, high on the evolutionary ladder, epitomised by the full grown male gorilla" (Wonders, 1993:223). According to Haraway, Akeley's dioramas were promoted to the public as a truthful picture of organic harmony (Haraway, 2004:166) but were in practice used to reinforce ideological assumptions about gender in society. By using Foucault's archaeological method to "dig up" the contingent factors - such as the attitudes that museum director Harold Osborne and his board of male trustees held about gender (Haraway, 2004:171) - Haraway was able to expose their collective influence over the form in which Nature was presented to museum visitors.

Beth Lord concurs that a museum is "an institution that puts on a display the ways that objects are conceptually understood" (Lord, 2006:5). Haraway's study of the Akeley dioramas at the AMNH demonstrates that the archaeological method of analysis can be used to reveal institutional

concepts and values that have influenced the organisation and form of natural history displays. Once such an analysis has been carried out on historic taxidermy displays in a particular museum, the differences between institutional representations of the animal and contemporary artists' taxidermy representations, brought in from outside the museum, can be discerned more clearly. This study uses archaeological analysis to understand how knowledge about nature has been produced and represented in historic displays in the natural history museums I have researched. In each case study, therefore, I have examined the ways in which concepts of Nature have been presented and the associated rules of formation, in order to situate recent art interventions in the context of 'heritage' taxidermy displays in the discursive field of a natural history museum.

In contrast to the natural history museum displays of the 19th century that were analysed by Foucault (Foucault, 2002:84), Hooper Greenhill has noted that in contemporary museums, natural organisms can no longer simply be placed next to one another according to anatomy and morphology, because the relationships between them are known to depended on "deeper, more intimate, and more fundamental relationships" (Hooper-Greenhill, 1992:18) that science has uncovered. Different species may be thought of as related in any number of ways that do not depend on morphological similarity - such as through evolutionary lines of descent, through their genetic characteristics or their position in complex ecological webs. Changing the way that museums describe relationships between species can open up a discursive space for questioning the "ontology of the human-animal distinction" (Calarco, 2015:11).

An archaeological analysis can focus on the relationships between humans and other-than-human species by bringing to light the elements of each separate discursive formation of the animal and show how these have changed in different periods (Foucault, 2002:175). Taxonomy is an

example of one such discursive formation, but there are many different ways that concepts of Nature have been brought into systematic arrangements in the field of Natural History, including, for example, the 'Great Chain of Being' and the 'Ladder of Life' (Beddard, 2019:16). The relationship between different articulations of the Order of Nature depends upon the historic discourse of the particular museum in which the ideas guiding the displays were formed and the objects used to represent them. The institutional context is therefore of key importance in an archaeological analysis - for instance the structure of the building, the internal architectural spaces, the institutional rules that constrain the forms that displays are allowed to take, curatorial attitudes and approaches, government regulations that must be observed, scientific theories in circulation inside the museum and visitor expectations (Rose, 2001:166). All these contingent factors and the ways in which they are linked can affect the way that concepts of nature are framed and articulated in a particular museum.

Social forces beyond the museum also influence the production of displays. Mark Dion, when writing about the ways in which nature is represented in museums, has argued that the production of knowledge in public institutions can be seen in terms of a regime of political control[8]:

> Any close examination of the changes in museum method clearly chart shifts in the construction of the social category of nature and how that category has been employed in the realization of a dominant social order
> (Dion, 1997:138).

Dion places social categories at the forefront of his analysis of museum displays, but his perspective tends to undervalue the differences between articulations of Nature that are actually found in most natural history

[8] "Foucault's analysis from *Discipline and Punish* applied to museums as institutions of state control. Museums are sites of circulation for new disciplines and their discursive formations" (Bennett, 1988:73)

collections. While accounts of Museum display policies document how establishment figures such as political leaders, museum directors and scientific authorities make important decisions about what the public is allowed to see as Nature (Haraway, 1984. Machin, 2008. Cain, 2011), the many forms in which nature has been represented in different institutions (some of which are explored in this thesis), suggest that an overarching influence of a dominant social order is not always present and that museum displays have been used to ask questions as well as assert forms of authority. They may reveal particular personal or ethical visions of the animal, the wishes of a patron, funder or donor, or even general currents of opinion published in the press. Museums are under pressure to keep their displays up to date in order to maintain relevance to the public that visits them, but this does not mean that every museum has followed the same pathway when planning its exhibitions. One of the aims of this study is to document some instances of interventions that disrupt mainstream views, including those that confirm an outmoded discursive formation of 'the animal'.

Each institution has its own its own socio-scientific milieu, and this thesis considers the way particular museums have articulated ideas of nature and human relations with the natural world. In long-established institutions such as the Natural History Museum London, in which displays dating from the 19th century co-exist with those from the 20th and 21st century. There is no single framing idea of Nature on display, but many different ones that are in conversation. This thesis examines the way past articulations of nature have been re-conceived in relation to artists' taxidermy interventions that have opened up discussions about new ontologies of the animal.

Foucault has argued that although there may be any number of different ways in which ideas about Nature can be articulated, they all contain certain "enunciative regularities" (Foucault, 2002:163). Hence, each enunciation of Nature in a museum context, for instance, will relate to a material object such as a museum exhibit and to institutional rules that

govern the appearance of the exhibit. It will also form part of an institutional strategy for presenting ideas to the public, such as ideas about human-animal relations that can be presented using taxidermy. By considering each of these three aspects when examining taxidermy displays in a particular museum, the extent to which a given form of display was contingent to the rules of formation that were prevalent at the time of its production, can be more clearly identified.

This thesis focuses on contemporary artists' interventions of taxidermy displays in natural history museums. Foucault did not look in any detail at the critical role art can play in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, focussing on its power to instantiate an idea. He stated that art practices are concerned with a "surface of appearance" (Foucault, 2002:45) and that by creating new appearances (of animals for example), artists can make discursive differences emerge into vision. Artist's taxidermy can therefore instantiate new ideas about Nature and thus augment an institutional discourse when it is introduced into a natural history museum. This study analyses the particular modes of visual representation adopted by selected contemporary artists in the 21st century and considers ways in which museum curators have used artists' taxidermy to provoke new readings of the animal, or of our relationships with other species different from those articulated elsewhere in each museum. The ways in which individual artists instantiated the concept of the animal using taxidermy, thus giving it "the status of an object … therefore making it manifest, nameable and describable" (Foucault, 2002:46) will be discussed in chapters 3 to 6.

By undertaking an archaeological analysis of museum taxidermy, I aim to better understand at the role artists' have played in making new ideas about the animal manifest and explore how each particular artist's intervention disturbed the enunciative field of the museum in which it was located. Drawing on Foucault's methodology enables an exploration the ways in which artists' interventions have adhered to or challenged the rules of formation in the institutional contexts of natural history museums.

The relevance of these interventions to contemporary concerns about the ethical problem of human-animal relations and concerns about the threats to biodiversity in the Anthropocene, that characterise our own period, provides the context for my study. In the next section I outline the methods used in conducting this study.

Methods for conducting the study

I sent an initial appeal to all the members of the Natural Sciences Collections Association (NatSCA) in 2013, asking if they knew of any recent taxidermy displays. From the replies I received, I chose Manchester Museum and the Natural History Museum to be two of my case study museums because each museum had a large taxidermy collection and had held a recent exhibition of artist's taxidermy. I already knew about the contemporary artist's taxidermy exhibitions at the Horniman Museum, which also had a large collection of historic taxidermy, from a personal visit. I decided to include *Making Nature* at the Wellcome Collection as a case study after a visit to see the exhibition in 2017, because it also contained both artist's taxidermy and several examples of historical taxidermy displays. I visited the American Museum of Natural History to see Carl Akeley's dioramas in 2016, which I included as the opening chapter of my thesis because Akeley's 'trophy' taxidermy is considered to have achieved the kind of taxidermy realism that contemporary artists have challenged.

My study consists of detailed descriptions of artists' taxidermy interventions in the Wellcome Collection exhibition *Making Nature: how we see animals* and in three museums in the United Kingdom with large collections of historic taxidermy: The Natural History Museum in central London[9], the Horniman Museum in South London[10] and the Manchester Museum[11]. A chapter on Carl Akeley's dioramas at the American Museum

[9] www.nhm.ac.uk
[10] www.horniman.ac.uk
[11] www.museum.manchester.ac.uk

of Natural History is included as a historical example of museum taxidermy that exemplify a form of realism from which contemporary artists' taxidermy has moved away from. It was not possible to examine every museum that had invited contemporary artists to exhibit their work in the early 21st century - some of which have been documented in *Antennae: the journal of nature in visual culture* (founded in 2007[12]). I chose to undertake case study research in three contrasting museums with historic natural history collections and in the Wellcome collection exhibition because in each of these public institutions, art interventions had been brought in to challenge established the forms of taxidermy display that had been used to represent animals. One of the most noticeable differences between the museums selected for close examination was the different publics they served, at whom their displays were aimed. At the Wellcome Collection, and at each of the museums, the perceived needs of the public they served provided the rationale for producing more popular and accessible displays, particularly in the present century.

The Wellcome Collection building on the Euston Road in London was opened in 2007 as a place where people could "think deeply about the connections between science, medicine, life and art". (Wellcome Collection 2017b). To achieve this goal, the Collection puts on a programme of temporary exhibitions that focus on specific themes, such as the *Making Nature: How we Look at Animals* exhibition that was held between December 2016 and May 2017. Unlike the case study museums in my study, the Wellcome museum does not have a historic taxidermy collection.

The Natural History Museum in Central London (opened in 1881) serves both a scientific research community and non-specialist visitors from

[12] For instance, Andrea Roe's animatronic taxidermy blackbird 'Blackbird Menagerie' (2007) was exhibited at the end of her 12-month residency with the National Museum of Scotland (Roe, 2008).

around the world. For around a century, the exhibitions of specimens on view throughout the building were considered more suitable for scientists than for the lay public, but this balance was reversed in the 1980s when a new exhibition programme was introduced by the then director, Frank Claringbull, who considered the taxidermy displays to be out of date and aimed to make the displays more attractive to a wider audience (Hedley 1981). Despite the introduction of new, more popular exhibitions, some of the displays on view today still look as if they were designed with scientists in mind rather than the general public, for example, the display of *Carnivores – Felix* specimens lined up in systematic order in the Mammal Gallery.

The Manchester Museum (opened in 1888) serves the needs of students and staff of Manchester University as well as the general public from the Manchester region. Since the University biology department moved away from the museum building in the 1950's, the public displays have been increasingly aimed at non-specialist visitors (Alberti, 2009). However, the scholarly community is still seen as an important user group. The display policies of Manchester Museum are always linked to the aims of the University of which it forms a part, unlike those at the Natural History Museum which is under the control of the Government Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and managed by a board of trustees who ultimately determine what displays it presents to the public.

The Horniman Museum was established in 1901 as an educational resource for the local population in South London and has since this date maintained its policy of producing popular displays that nonetheless maintain scientific authority[13]. It serves a mainly local visitor community aiming to include many family groups.

[13] For example, the exhibition on Glaciers entitled *Meltdown*, held in 2020 emphasised "the importance of glaciers in an artistic and scientific way …" (Horniman Public Museum and Public Park Trust. 2019:5).

To find out how each museum constructed and represented ideas of Nature in the past and in the present, I undertook personal visits to gather data at the Natural History Museum, Horniman Museum and the Manchester Museum between June 2014 and January 2020. I conducted archive research, made detailed notes and took photographs at each museum. I was also able to conduct informal interviews with curators at Natural History Museum, the Horniman Museum and the Manchester Museum, and with the Curator of Contemporary Art at the Natural History Museum, to discuss the role that artist's taxidermy interventions played in their curatorial practice. For each museum I examined secondary sources of information including websites, books about the museum, annual reports and journal articles containing information on the museums' natural history displays (Grix 2010:133).

I have followed the comparative case study method used by Ebony Andrews (2013) who adopted this method as a way of assessing the relationship between display practices in three natural history museums in the North of England that were founded in the late 19th century and shared an "epistemological lineage" (Andrews, 2013:39). Andrew's comparative case study entailed an examination of the ways that taxidermy displays had changed in the museums she studied over the first decade of the 21st century. My aim in comparing different museums is not only to uncover continuities and discontinuities in the historic narratives of Nature in each museum but also to understand the way that historic displays are seen and understood more generally in the light of artists' taxidermy interventions.

In each of my case study museums, I examine the taxidermy that has been used in the historic displays to present ideas about the animal, the environment and human-animal relations to the public (Bennett, 1988:73). Understanding the institutional discourse in each museum (Rose 2001:167) has been central to my analysis of how particular ideas of the animal have shaped the strategies associated with museum taxidermy

displays and artists' taxidermy interventions. The museum discourse provided the context for the production of particular representations of the animal and sets the 'rules of formation' (Foucault 2002:82) that produced material forms of display at a particular moment in history. These rules set an agenda for whatever representations of nature were produced, but *external* factors also impacted on the institutional discourse (Rose 2001:166) such as the funding arrangements, government regulations, scientific frameworks for understanding the natural world and current debates about the threats facing many species of animals.

Archive research.

Research into past taxidermy displays was carried out at archive collections held at each of my three selected public case study museums. The material I examined included annual reports, files of material on particular exhibitions and individual taxidermy specimens, and photographic records of taxidermy displays. Using the archaeological approach when analyzing these documents led me to explore both internal and external factors that had shaped the rules of formation that regulated taxidermy displays in each museum. Archive research including a close reading of annual reports published over the last 50 years, revealed internal and external factors that hade influenced display policies and enabled comparison to be made between the different narratives represented by each display selected for in-depth analysis.

The Natural History Museum, South Kensington.

The archive of the Natural History Museum is vast, but very well organized and therefore accessible. The archive contains items that date back to before the opening of the South Kensington building in 1881. The library and archives collection contains more than one million items, including almost 400,000 books, 22,000 on-going journal titles, 350,000 artworks and over 100,000 catalogued archival items (Natural History Museum, Library and Archives Collection n.d.). The on-line catalogue was essential

for accessing particular items. The most valuable archive for my study was the complete set of annual/biennial reports and departmental reports. Consulting reports and looking closely at those published in the last 50 years gave me an overview of the policies and practices of the museum since the 1970s when a radical programme of updating the public displays was put into operation.

The archive holds files of information on particular exhibitions with photographs, reviews, press cuttings, and planning documents[14]. These were useful for ascertaining what ideas about nature curators planned to present to the public, the form of particular displays, and what these displays represented with regard to prevailing museum policies and practice. Files on artist's exhibitions in the museum were also consulted. Exhibitions arranged by Bergit Arends, Curator of Contemporary Art from 2005 to 2013, were useful source material for my exploration of Tessa Farmer's intervention in 2007, which I discuss in depth in relation to the Natural History Museum displays in Chapter 4. The 'Tessa Farmer' file included press cuttings and a catalogue about the *Little Savages* exhibition.

The Horniman Museum

The Horniman Museum archive is kept off-site, in a separate building to the museum. It has not been comprehensibly catalogued but I was able to consult annual reports issued by the Horniman Public Museum and Public Park Trust (HPMPPT) from 1990 to 2018. For reports on the Horniman Museum before this date, I had to consult the archives at the London Metropolitan archives in Clerkenwell, which held material issued by the museum during the period when it was administered by the ILEA - from 1965 to 1990. These reports gave me a view of the activities, policy priorities and display practices of the museum since the mid 1960's. Further historical information was available in the form of articles contributed by Horniman Museum curators to the proceedings of a

[14] These are listed in the bibliography

conference hosted by the museum entitled *Contributions in Critical Museology and Material Culture* (Shelton, A. 2001). Most of the secondary material I consulted on Polly Morgan's, Jazmine Miles-Long's and Claire Morgan's taxidermy interventions at the Horniman Museum were found on-line, particularly on the Horniman Museum's website (www.horniman.ac.uk).

The Manchester Museum

Manchester Museum archives are kept in a back room at the Museum. They include the surviving records of the Manchester Natural History Society (MNHS), as well as those of the Manchester Museum (Manchester Museum n.d.). I was able to consult the annual reports of the Museum from 1940 to 2002 but found that there was a serious gap in the collection, from 1985 to 1997. I attempted to remedy this situation by visiting the main Manchester University archive in the Rylands Library but was still unable to source all the missing reports. Fortunately, I was able to fill in much of the missing material from Sam Alberti's history of Manchester Museum entitled *Nature and Culture* (Alberti, 2009). Further historical details were supplied by Henry McGhie, Curator of Natural History at the museum, with whom I corresponded in 2020. I met Henry McGhie, who kindly showed me around the *Living Worlds* exhibition in June 2015, The exhibition had received a great deal of attention in the museum press and further afield. Most of this published information was available via Internet sources[15]

Through archive research, visits to museums, attendance at meetings and conferences, and informal interviews with curators - Joanne Hatton at the

[15] (https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-manchester-13065802 accessed 15th March 2020, https://www.culture24.org.uk/science-and-nature/art354323 accessed 27 April 2019, https://www.designweek.co.uk/issues/may-2012/exhibition-design-shortlist/ accessed 32 July 2019)

Horniman Museum (5th February 2015), Henry McGhie at the Manchester Museum (16th June 2015), Gavin Broad Curator of Entomology at the Natural History Museum (5th June 2020) and Birgit Arends ex-Curator of Contemporary Art at the Natural History Museum (8th December 2015) - I was able to identify the ways that taxidermy had been used in the three long-established public museums. Some parallels became apparent. Each museum I had selected for detailed study had opened in the late Victorian period. The origin of their collections was rooted in the 19th century, or even earlier in the case of the Natural History Museum, which originated with Sir Hans Sloane's (1660-1753) bequest to the nation of his huge collection of plant and animal specimens in 1753. All three museums were engaged in public education and used their taxidermy collections to represent ideas about the natural world through displays. Two major theoretical frameworks had been used in all three museums: taxonomy and the evolution. It was largely in the context of these two organizing frameworks and the narratives they articulated (or suppressed[16]) that contemporary art interventions could be seen as presenting different or even contradictory constructions of the animal.

At the Wellcome collection, Honor Beddard, curator of the *Making Nature* exhibition included valuable archive material, for example, an engraving of Adam the naming of creatures in the Biblical Creation story by Gérard Jean Baptiste Scotin (1743), a copy of Linnaeaus's *Systema Naturae* (1735), and some antique taxidermy displays, including the *Nondescript* by Charles Waterton (1825), a taxidermy foxes diorama, by Peter Spicer (1876) and a taxidermy diorama of squirrels playing cards, by Walter Potter (1900–10). Each of these exhibits revealed a particular historical vision of the animal.

[16] Stella Sandford has uncovered narratives of race and sex in Linnaean taxonomies. Stella Sandford. 12 March 2021 Linnaeus, Race and Sex Webinar**.** Linnaean Society with Kingston CCCP

Chapter 1: Contextual review.

The analysis presented in this thesis belongs to a field of scholarship on museum and gallery interpretation that explores the different ways in which contemporary artists have opened up museum displays to new interpretations. Some of the seminal contributions to this literature include Giovanni Aloi, *Art and Animals* (2012) and *Speculative Taxidermy; Natural History, Animal surfaces and Art in the Anthropocene* (2018), Bergit Arends and Davina Thackera, *Experiment: conversations in art and science* (2003), Bergit Arends and Verity Slater, *Talking back to Science; Art Science and the personal* (2004), and Claire Robins, *Curious lessons in the museum* (2013). These texts provide the context for my own case studies.

The curators in the case study museums, discussed in upcoming chapters, used artist's taxidermy as a way to question what Morra has called the "normative interpretative and ideological function" (Morra 2015:12) of existing taxidermy displays by performing a form of 'institutional criticality'. (Smith, 2012:31). Since the 1990's, as Nicholas Thomas (2016) has pointed out, curators have taken a more actively critical stance towards the knowledge that museums produce through object displays:

> Debates about the politics of exhibitions and the negotiation of representation ... have preoccupied commentators, curators and activists over the last 30 years or so.
> (Thomas, 2016:65)

The politics of representation have become a pressing issue in natural history museums since the Millennium because it is now widely accepted that we face a global environmental crisis. As a consequence, natural history curators have looked at their collections in order to unravel "the various cultural, political and ideological forces" (Poliquin 2008:157) that have shaped how nature has been interpreted within

museums. 19th and early 20th century visions of a stable and permanent Nature no longer convince those who believe it is the job of museums to reflect the contemporary realities of species loss and the immediate threats to populations of wild animals. Museums, as Aloi has argued, are now expected to address "the eco-political crisis that characterise the current phase of the Anthropocene" (Aloi, 2018:22). His observation underlines the importance of updating taxidermy displays in museums so they can contribute to contemporary debates on the environmental crisis.

Some curators have used artist's taxidermy interventions as a way to introduce a more complex discourse that comprehends both old and new visions of the animal. Artists' interventions are seen as a way to challenge established taxidermy displays that produce the "rational relationships with the non-human" (Aloi, 2018:11) required by scientists. A willingness to critique past forms of taxidermy display exemplifies what Van Saaze has called an "increasing institutional reflexivity" (Van Saaze, 2013:19) within the museum profession that has opened the way for new, more eco-centric/ less anthro-pocentric visions of human-animal relations. There have been a few studies that consider this process in depth, for instance, Bergit Arends and Sarah Wade; *Decolonise! Ecologise! Contemporary artists' strategies to intervene in Natural History Museum Collection displays* (2020), and the descriptions of artist's taxidermy interventions in natural history collections in *Antennae: the journal of Nature in visual culture* edited by Giovanni Aloi - especially Issue 3 v1 (Autumn 2007) that has an article on Tessa Farmer's insect-sized fairies, Issue 6 v2 (Summer 2008) on Rogue Taxidermy (including articles on Polly Morgan and Claire Morgan), Issue 7 v2 (Autumn 2008) on Botched Taxidermy (including articles on Angela Singer and Chloe Brown), Issue 49 v9 (Autumn 2019) on the *Making Nature* exhibition at the Wellcome Collection, and Issue 50 (Spring 2020) on *Re-making Nature*, a follow-on exhibition to *Making*

Nature. Each of these texts explores the difference between artist's taxidermy and traditional museum taxidermy.

The rise and fall of taxidermy

Every taxidermy collection has a history that reflects "the contingencies of history" (Yanni, 2005:157). Bergit Arends has argued that this has made it difficult for historic taxidermy collections to represent the animal from a present day perspective (Arends and Wade, 2020). Her remark points to a curatorial problem: how can today's curators make best use of their vast 19th century taxidermy collections in the 21st century, when there is growing public alarm about the triple crisis facing the natural world: climate change, biodiversity decline and environmental pollution. The precarious state of the natural world has been brought home by *the Living Planet Report* (World Wildlife Fund 2022), which revealed that there has been a shocking 69% decline in the world's wildlife since 1970.

Concerns about the decline of biodiversity have affected public attitudes to taxidermy, according to Pat Morris. In *A History of Taxidermy: Art, Science and Bad Taste* (2010), Morris traced the rise and fall in the popularity of taxidermy displays. He notes that around the mid-twentieth century there was a marked decline in public approval of taxidermy that he put down to "anti-fur trade/ animal welfare" (Morris, 2010:4) activism connected to the environmental movement of the 1970s which, he claims, made taxidermy socially unacceptable. Eco-political sentiments found expression in the ban on the trade in animals and animal parts brought about by the CITES (the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora) treaty (1973) which protects endangered species from the threats of unregulated exploitation. Other factors may also have affected the popularity of taxidermy, particularly the wear and tear that became apparent in older specimens around the mid 20th century, turning some

older specimens into abject objects that, while performing a part in displays of natural history, no longer represented the authentic appearance of the animal that it stood in for (Foster, 2015:17). Many local museums, like the Horniman Museum, preferred to keep their taxidermy archive in store rather than discard it 'en mass', but this policy simply shelved the problem of finding a way to make their archive collections relevant to the public, many of whom saw old taxidermy as "a distasteful travesty of living creatures that should be removed from sight" (Morris, 2010:354). Some museums discarded damaged taxidermy only for it to be picked up later by artists. As Petra Lange-Berndt has observed: "It was precisely because taxidermy had become the bankrupt estate of scientific research that these objects entered the field of artistic reflection" (Lange- Berndt 2014:273). But, as the artists in my case studies demonstrate, old taxidermy could be repurposed to represent contemporary visions of damaged animal bodies.

As Pat Morris has suggested, visitors to museums in the 21st century are more environmentally aware than those in the 19th and early 20th centuries and therefore more critical of the use of taxidermy specimens to represent animals, especially those belonging to species that are threatened with extinction. Taxidermy, Morris argues, is now seen as a poignant reminder of the threats facing other species of animal.

> As wildlife came to be appreciated through new eyes, particularly its declining abundance, taxidermy appeared to be an inappropriate way of treating the world's natural heritage and an unwarranted assault on dumb creatures".
> (Morris, 2010:354)

But although Morris acknowledges the force of environmentalist arguments for removing inappropriate taxidermy from museum displays, he argues that museum taxidermy archives should be retained because they have heritage value as "legitimate reminders of the past" (Morris 2010:354). Morris warns critics of antique taxidermy that they

“should beware of falling into the trap of judging the past by present day norms and standards” (Morris 2010:354). Old taxidermy, he claims, stands as a material witness to historic ideas about animals; snapshots of past ways of thinking, that were never intended to represent contemporary human-animal relations and Rachel Poliquin agrees with him that "these animals from a previous generation form part of our heritage of how we came to know the natural world" (Poliquin 2012:223). However, their conservative point of view does not address the question of exactly *how* the past can speak to the present and leaves open the question of what museums should do with their heritage taxidermy collections. The case studies in this thesis explore some of the ways in which curators can bring past taxidermy into dialogue with contemporary ideas about the animal.

Under pressure to reach a wider audience, contemporary curators of natural history have had to re-examine what ideas about human-animal relationships are represented in their taxidermy archives and to compare these with the way we see the natural world today (Arends in Farmer, 2007, Smith, T. 2012, Robins, 2013, O'Neil and Wilson, 2015). By bringing past and present representations of the animal together they have complicated the museum discourse, acknowledging that different constructions of the animal can co-exist. Chapters 3 to 6 of this thesis examine the curatorial strategy, adopted by three museums and an educational institution, of using contemporary artist’s work to critique older taxidermy displays.

<u>Looking at the past in the light of the present.</u>

Pat Morris’s argument, that we should avoid judging past representations by contemporary norms and standards, closes collections of old taxidermy off from re-interpretation and consigns them to a frozen existence outside public discourse. An alternative way to interpret the relationship between past and present representations

of the animal is to bring the past into the present and allow the re-examination of different discourses of taxidermy, museums and the animal. Contemporaneity, as Terry Smith has observed, “includes the saturation of the present with many kinds of pasts, both as memories and expectations" (Smith T. 2012:144). Contemporary natural history displays usually contain different forms of taxidermy representing ideas of the animal produced at different times. Smith has advanced the idea that curators should be aware of "the historicity and the temporal complexity of contemporaneity” (Smith T. 2012:145-6). This suggestion allows for a more complex view of human-animal relationships that could include both old and new representations as alternative models with alternative ethical orientations.

Terry Smith’s idea of contemporaneity, in which both past and present constructions of Nature are included in museum displays, resonates with Michel Foucault’s idea of the museum discourse, as “a well-determined *set of discursive formations* that have a number of describable relations between them” (Foucault, 2002:175 emphasis added). In the case of a natural history museum, the discursive formations that articulate a museum’s discourse of natural history are often represented by taxidermy displays, whilst the relations between different representations is seen as the province of curatorial display policies and practices. According to Foucauldian analysis, the discourse of nature enunciated within the regime of natural history is dispersed amongst “a succession of conceptual systems, each possessing its own organization” (Foucault, 2002:62). Each conceptual system, articulated through particular forms of taxidermy display, produces narratives of the animal that convey the institutions values as well as offering visitors a conceptual framework for understanding the natural world. The first curator of Natural History at the Horniman Museum, Alfred Cort Haddon, for example, wanted to exclude all taxidermy that did not fit into what he considered to be a ‘scientific’ arrangement of specimens (Haddon 1901, in Levell 2001:254).

However, as the case studies demonstrate, when curators introduce contemporary taxidermy displays into their museums alongside historic examples they can expose past articulations of the animal to critical re-examination. As Hal Foster has argued, contemporary discourses can deliberately re-incorporate historical moments into the present (Foster, 2015:32). Museums make critical choices about which ideas and values from past representations of the animal should be re-incorporated and given visibility in contemporary natural history displays. Paul O'Neill and Mick Wilson have argued that the expansion of curatorial work to include such critical practices began in the 1990's when "expanded curatorial work enters into social and political discourses ... to understand or even change parts of the world around us" (O'Neill and Wilson. 2015:237-238). As the case studies show, in the present century, natural history curators have exercised a more dynamic influence on the institutional discourse by adopting curatorial practices that include artist's interventions in museums that "make manifest the exploitation" (Smith, T. 2012:125) of animals on which museum taxidermy collections were based.

Honor Beddard has made a commitment to curating displays that address contemporary concerns about the exploitation of animals. She has stated that her exhibition, *Making Nature*, provided:

> … examples of displays that have responded to public concerns about the threats to nature, conservation, sustainability, scientific perspectives on what constitutes 'knowledge' of nature and to ethical issues around human exploitation of animal. (Beddard 2017)

Sam Alberti, a curator at Manchester Museum, observed that Natural History collections became "key sites for public engagement with environmental issues and biodiversity" (Alberti 2009:193) in the 1990's. Around this time, curators experienced mounting public pressure to re-focus their taxidermy collections in order to represent

themes of “human history and environmental change" (Thomas, N. 2016:9): two key topics in current debates on the environmental crisis. Two curators from the *Musée de la Chasse et de la Nature* in Paris, Joshua de Paiva and Anne de Malleray, have described their approach to curating in similar terms. Their museum has a collection of historical taxidermy, paintings and artefacts connected with hunting, but instead of simply presenting these objects as historical records of hunting, they have introduced artist’s works into the museum to critique the institutional discourse that framed their taxidermy collection. For example, on an upper floor of the *Musée de la Chasse et de la Nature*, they located an installation by Mark Dion of a hunting lodge owned by the Sommer family, who had founded the museum in 1967 (fig 2). Through judicious choice and arrangement of objects from the museum collection, Dion’s installation revealed that the Sommer family enjoyed not only hunting animals but also photographing them and collecting antique objects, thus throwing light on the rationale behind the establishment of the museum collection that contained photographs, taxidermy and antique objects connected with hunting:

> The objects of art amongst which may be seen zoomorphic pre-Columbian pottery testify to the passion of eclectic collectors which led them to create the Hunting and Nature Museum. (Noticeboard in the Musée de la Chasse et de la Nature. Visited 2014),

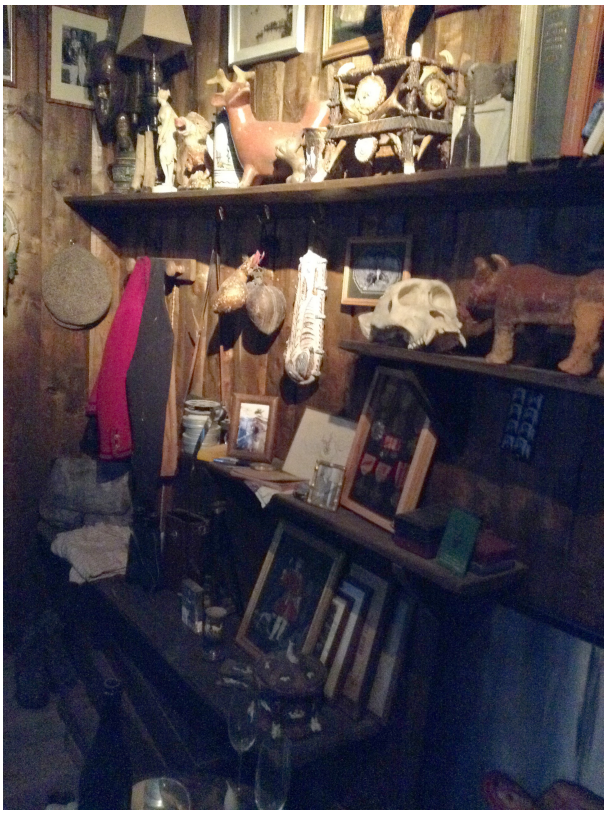

Fig. 2. Mark Dion. (2006) Cabane Sommer. Musée de la Chasse et de la Nature, Paris. ©Richard Crawford

De Paiva and de Malleray used Dion's artwork as an intervention because it made visible some of the cultural currents circulating throughout the collection, embodying a dynamic curatorial practice of "criticism, commentary and interpretation of previously formulated statements" (Foucault, M. 2002 first pub 1972:66). When talking about the Museum, they described it as a "naturalcultural contact zone" (de Paiva and de Malleray 2020:28):

> … Instead of mitigating the complications imbedded in its identity, the museum chose to address those issues, albeit by museographical and curatorial design, rather than through direct or didactic statement, becoming what we propose to describe as a naturalcultural contact zone (using Donna Haraway's concept) which offers an anthropozoological perspective on hunting that obliges us to stay with the trouble and explore a-moral stories that allow for renewed explorations of our representations of nature.
> (de Paiva and de Malleray 2020:28)

In this thesis, I examine the work of curators in three English museums and a scientific institute who have adopted a similar critical approach to de Paiva and de Malleray. My case studies examine the way in which recent exhibitions of taxidermy have compared the material form and narrative content of past and present taxidermy displays. As Poliquin reminds us, the interpretation of a specimen gains its significance from wider narratives into which it is interpolated as a subject; for instance, as a trophy, as a lost loved one, as a monster, as a scientific specimen etc. (Poliquin, 2008:127). Thus, an analysis of the discursive form that historical taxidermy has taken in a museum display is not the only way that it can be approached. Other interpretive frames can be brought to bear on taxidermy specimens that can provoke different readings, for instance, that of the relationship of the dead animal to the taxidermist, or to the institution in which it is displayed:

> … when we look at a piece of taxidermy we often just see the animal, rather than acknowledging what it is now, and the relationship between it and its maker. We might wonder what the animal's life was like, and how it died, but we often ignore the fact so much work and care has gone into creating what it has become after death
> (Babbs, 2017).

Clare Robins has pointed out that older taxidermy displays convey narratives about humans/animal relations that were popular in the 19th century - such as the story found in the book of Genesis, that God put humans stewardship over his creation, or the Romantic notion that animals belong to a world of Nature separate and distinct from human culture. Critical curatorial practices can expose and question these narratives by collaborating with artists in order to perform an 'institutional critique' of their historic taxidermy. For the artist, this entails a switch in artistic practice, from producing artworks that locate meaning within an 'autonomous' art object, to producing work where meaning is formed in the relationship between an art intervention and the "contingencies of context" (Robins, 2013:20), a practice that can be

used to bring past and present representations of the animal into dialogue.

Contemporary artists began to show works involving taxidermy in art galleries in the 1970s, and by the 1990s they were being invited to show their work in museums outside the Art world (Arends, and Thackera, 2003, Arends, and Slater, 2004, Arends, 2009, Robins, 2013, Kalshoven 2018). There has been much discussion on why the animal appeared as a subject in contemporary art when it did (Aloi, 2012, Baker, 2013, Robins, 2013). Aloi has suggested that taxidermy was introduced into contemporary art with the aim of "establishing an aesthetics of interaction and connection" between humans and other species of animals that was not defined by "the empiricism of scientific thought" (Aloi 2012:241). In Baker's view, appropriating taxidermy from museum displays was a way to critique the anthropocentric use of animal bodies as symbols for human interests, such as specimen collecting, hunting or scientific investigation. Baker has argued that, *un*like scientists, artists could "treat animals as creatures who actively share the more-than-human world with humans rather than as symbols or metaphors …" (Baker, 2013:3-4). His views resonate with growing public unease about the consequences of the destruction of the natural environment by human interventions noted earlier. Robins has drawn attention to the epistemological questions that are brought to the surface when artists' taxidermy is exhibited in natural history museums. She has suggested that artist's taxidermy can "critique museological practices" (Robins, 2013:8) that produce knowledge about Nature. For example, it has been common practice for Natural History museums to use animal specimens as a resource for scientific study. When an installation that deliberately mixes broken animal specimens with other curious objects from the museum stores is brought into the museum-such as Mark Dion's *the Bureau of the centre for the study of Surrealism and its Legacy* (2015), it poses questions about the effects that scientific displays have on the way visitors see and respond to taxidermy. Dion's

installation at the Manchester Museum critiqued the institutional practice of representing animals in the form of de-contextualised objects that gain their 'truth' from a classification scheme (Rose, 2001:176). Beddard agrees with Dion on this point:

> The Linnaean classification system is a human construct imposed upon the natural world … [but] other ways of organising nature have been proposed by artists writers and scientists. Their work challenges the fixed position of each species in the great chain of being … and exposes its arbitrary divisions
> (Beddard, 2019:16)

Curators in the 21st century began to stage confrontations between artist's taxidermy and existing taxidermy representations of the animal in order to open up new interpretive possibilities to museum visitors. As Aloi has pointed out, a piece of contemporary taxidermy can have political power when it attracts alternative interpretations of the animal (Aloi, 2018). In the interventions mentioned in this thesis, for example, taxidermy has been used to leverage greater critical engagement with historical representations of the animal in what de Paiva and de Malleray have called the field of museum 'nature/culture' (De Paiva and de Malleray 2020:28). They framed taxidermy as a "historical and cultural object" (Poliquin, 2008:57) rather than as a scientific specimen. The same approach was adopted by Honor Beddard at the Wellcome Collection. Although scientists had not ceased to use specimen collections for taxonomic research altogether by the late 20th century, some curators decided that the public should no longer be expected to follow their example. Instead, they were encouraged to experience taxidermy through social and political frames and to "reflect upon the order of things" (Lord, 2006:6) they represent. In the post-war period, when biological research had largely moved into laboratories, institutions with large taxidermy collections like the Manchester Museum or the Horniman Museum, "struggled for status and funding" (Alberti, 2009:43) because there was less demand for static taxidermy

specimens which, as Alberti has pointed out, had been essential for taxonomy displays (Alberti, 2009:43).

Critical curatorial practices, such as the introduction of artists' taxidermy in museums, have encouraged the public to re-engage with historic taxidermy collections and to reverse the trend towards dis-engagement that overtook museum taxidermy collections in the post-war period. Artists have highlighted what Robins has called, the "context dependent nature of meaning" (Robins 2013:124) by intervening in museums with historical taxidermy collections. In the case study museums examined in this thesis, for instance, artist's interventions have complicated the way that animals were represented and understood. This deliberate challenge to institutional hegemony was sometimes focused in a single specimen that 'asked questions' of the institutional discourse of Nature, such as Abbas Akhavan's road-kill badger discussed by Beddard (2019), Tessa Farmer's beleaguered fox discussed by Arnaud in Tessa Farmer (2007), Jazmine Miles-Long's memorialised hare in a porcelain sarcophagus discussed by the artist (Horniman Museum, 2017), Claire Morgan's fox choking on black plastic discussed by Hatton (Horniman Museum, 2019) and Mark Dion's guinea pig with four hind legs surrounded by "assorted freaks and monsters" discussed by Lomas (2005:7). Each of these key pieces of taxidermy represented different visions of the animal from those represented in heritage taxidermy displays. Giovanni Aloi has characterised them as "specific examples in which taxidermy is adopted by artists as a deliberate destabiliser of anthropocentrism rather than a tool of affirmation of man's superiority over nature" (Aloi, 2018:16). Artists can represent animals as vulnerable and individual, in contrast to the animal trophies put on public display, for instance at the AMNH or the Horniman Museum, that represent a hunter's vision of his victim as a 'worthy adversary'.

Ontological questions

The area of museum practice I am exploring in this thesis engages with scholarship on taxidermy. The idea of 'speculative' taxidermy emerged in the late 20th century in the writings of Giovanni Aloi who defined it as:

> … a category of actual taxidermy objects ... that poses questions about what taxidermy may be or do in order to unravel complex interlinks between humans, animals, environments, discourses and practices
> (Aloi, 2018:24)

Speculative taxidermy is a form of questioning object that can challenge previous concepts of the animal as articulated, for example, in natural history museum taxidermy archives. Aloi has explored the possibility that new forms of taxidermy can serve as a means to question normalised interpretations that have been rendered familiar over time (Aloi, 2018:25). He argues that taxidermy can be 'agential': it can actively derail "animal/object categories" (Aloi, 2018:139), and he attributes the agency of taxidermy to its material character rather than to the narratives it can convey when used as a symbol for an animal. Merle Patchett agrees with Aloi that material objects can form relationships with people in which meanings are made (Patchett, 2006:17). Timothy Morton also endorses Aloi's view that objects have the agency to affect human consciousness. He has argued that material things "have some kind of power over us" (Morton, 2018a:127). Rachel Poliquin concurs that the material presence of taxidermy can affect the viewer directly: "audiences still respond to the embodied thingness of the animal - as if these images were living animals" (Poliquin 2008:158). She argues that the dead animal haunts the skin of a taxidermy specimen as a troubling presence that can unsettle normative frames of interpretation that separate the living animal from the taxidermy representation.

In contrast to the materialist ontological argument of Aloi, some curators, including Sam Alberti from Manchester Museum, have maintained that objects in museums are just conduits for meanings constructed by human agents. Speaking about object displays in Manchester Museum, Alberti claimed that:

> Objects did not act in their own right but rather material culture was acted upon, and was a conduit for human intention … people imbued things with value and significance, manipulating and contesting their meaning over time. Objects promoted, changed and channelled relationships but were nonetheless inanimate. Even when looking from the standpoint of the specimen we are looking at people, their practices and institutions (Alberti, 2009:189)

Henry McGhie, also a curator at the Manchester Museum, agreed with Alberti's view that objects do not have agency, stating that: "I don't believe that objects have resonance" (McGhie, 2015b). He argues that objects must be given institutional narratives to articulate in order to "connect with people through stories" (McGhie, 2015b). To prove his point, McGhie juxtaposed selected taxidermy specimens in glass cases together with associated images and objects to construct narratives about the way humans relate to the natural world in his re-display of the Mammal galleries at Manchester Museum. His displays did not depend on the agency of the object in the way that Mark Dion's earlier installation of his *Bureau of the Centre for the Study of Surrealism and its Legacy* (2005) at the Manchester Museum had done.

I engage with the debate on the nature of taxidermy in my case studies in which I look in detail at specific artist's interventions that resonate with public concerns about current threats to animal populations. Some artists used the physical state of taxidermy to express ideas of the damage that animals are suffering, whilst others have used the animal body as a symbolic form that is written into narratives about human-animal relations, such as *Living Worlds*.

There is also a semiological argument, that regards museum taxidermy as a complex phenomenon that includes ontological agency but is also able to convey institutional discourses of Nature when used as a symbolic form. Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914), the American philosopher, pointed out that symbolic forms (such as taxidermy) can signify both real *and* imagined realities; a characteristic that puts a question mark over the idea that taxidermy can function simply as a 'Mirror of Nature'. Pierce proposed a distinction between the iconic and indexical aspects of a sign (such as a piece of taxidermy). Icons are signs that resemble the referent, in the way that a taxidermy cow would resemble the appearance of a real cow, whilst indices are by nature connected to the referent, such as the animal skin that originally covered a living animal. A museum discourse, that produces the rules of formation for taxidermy, could therefore influence the iconic character of a taxidermy specimen, but not the indexical character of the animal skin, which is fixed and always adds to the meanings that taxidermy conveys, because it was once a part of the animal that is represented. Fact and fiction, living and dead matter, nature and culture meet in taxidermy to produce unsettling, engaging but unstable objects. Taxidermy is haunted by the animal presence, but always presents someone's interpretation of what an animal is and how we, as humans, should see it.

Whilst contemporary animal artists have exploited the unstable quality of taxidermy to question the idea that there can be only one 'true' representation of an animal, conventional curatorial practices have suppressed the unsettling material agency of taxidermy in order to interpolate specimens into a stable institutional discourse. Poliquin noted this tension between unstable object and stable narrative when she commented that narratives can "manipulate, transform and even subvert their objects" (Poliquin, 2008:157). Looking at it from the opposite point of view, Aloi has argued that objects can unsettle thought by evading existing linguistic structures that attempt to interpolate

them into known formations (Aloi, 2008:11). Some contemporary curators have become more aware of the ontological ambiguity of taxidermy and have operationalized it strategically to question the discursive content of taxidermy displays by revealing the material construction process of taxidermy and exposing the people, practices and institutions whose presence remains implicated in the taxidermy form. At Derby Museum, for instance, Jazmine Miles-Long placed a taxidermy thrush beside the bind-up for a similar specimen, thus demonstrating the technology of her taxidermy practice.

Historical Background

In this section, the historical context of museum taxidermy is explored from three different angles. Firstly, the implications of moving taxidermy from private collections to public museums is examined, then the questions that have arisen from displaying historic taxidermy in public museums are explored - including the ethical problems associated with displaying dead animals and the value of displaying historic taxidermy collections to the general public. In the final section, efforts to widen access to taxidermy collections are examined and connections between Art, Science and artist's work in natural history museums explored in the light of current concerns over widespread threats to animal lives.

From cabinets of curiosity to museums

The aim of this section is to explore the changing uses of taxidermy, from the an object of curiosity that adorned a private collection of objects of the 17th century, to an object of scientific study in a public museum in the 19th century. It charts the growing importance assumed by realism as a technique that has allowed scientific museums to claim taxidermy specimens to be authentic representations of living animals.

In the 17th century, taxidermy found its way into 'cabinets of curiosities'. Pat Morris has characterised these cabinets as "an attraction that brought souvenirs of travels to distant and exotic places to a wider audience" (Morris, 2015). The Ashmolean Museum in Oxford, for example, was founded in 1683 with a collection of objects assembled by John Tradescant (father and son), two men who had travelled extensively and collected botanical, geological and zoological items on their voyages. They showed their treasures in a private museum known as the 'Ark'. A contemporary visitor spoke of seeing "a salamander, a chameleon, a pelican, a flying squirrel, an ape's head, a bat as large as a pigeon and a mermaid's hand" (Turner, 2013:32) in the 'Ark'. By including taxidermy specimens of exotic creatures in a Cabinet of Curiosity, the owner demonstrated their erudition and enhanced their prestige as connoisseurs (Milgrom, 2010, Morris, 2010, Madden, 2011, Poliquin, 2012, Turner, 2013, Marbury, 2014). Accuracy of appearance was less important than the fact of acquisition of such rare and exotic specimens. An example of a piece of taxidermy that conferred prestige on its owner can be seen in the Grand Gallerie d' Evolution in Paris, where a taxidermy mount of a rhinoceros (produced around 1770) is on display. The living rhinoceros had been a gift to Louis XV from French governor of Chandannagar in West Bengal and served to symbolise the king's sovereignty over distant lands. When it died, its symbolic power was retained in the form of the mounted skin which was stretched over a square wooden armature to resemble a rhinoceros-shaped piece of furniture;

> … the taxidermist in charge of its restoration in 1992 reported the presence of a wooden frame with one beam for each leg, two half barrels for the pelvic and shoulder girdles that are connected by a central beam between the pelvis and the head. The skin was varnished and stretched on this frame made of oak and hazel-wood hoops
> (Péquignot, 2013:219)

The rhinoceros' armature was a piece of skilled joinery and 'empailler'; a term used in the 18th century to describe the craft of stuffing sofas or skins with straw. Due to its mode of manufacture, it did not achieve a high degree of realism and would not have been suitable as a study specimen.

In the same century, the English naturalist, Sir Hans Sloane (1660 – 1753) accumulated a collection of 4500 taxidermy birds (and some animals) that was purchased for the nation after his death and which later formed the basis of the British Museum's natural history collection (Turner, 2013:35). Poliquin has noted that by 1733 (the date of Sir Hans Sloane's death) cabinets of curiosity had "definitely ceased to appeal to more scientific audiences" (Poliquin, 2012:37). Although skilfully mounted, Sloane's taxidermy collection was not proof against insect attack and many specimens were lost or cremated during the nineteenth century as a result of their poor condition (Poliquin, 2012:37). When Sloane's collection passed into a public ownership, the taxidermy was put to a new purpose. The British Museum was dedicated to public education, and taxidermy specimens were used to represent the emerging field of Natural History, an increasingly scientific discipline that put specimens into a meaningful order (Hooper Greenhill, 2000:2) and, by so doing, obscured their previous associations with curiosity cabinets..

Not all independent collections of taxidermy found their way into museums. Also in the 19th century, English amateur naturalists, such as Vauncey Harpur-Crewe (1846-1924) and Edward Booth (1840-1890) amassed large private taxidermy collections. The quality of the taxidermy in Harpur-Crewe's collection was extremely variable, according to Pat Morris (Morris, 2015). It contained specimens of mainly local species, providing visible evidence of his ownership, not only of his estate, but also of the birds and animals that lived on his land. His collection of taxidermy specimens was displayed under glass or as

trophies mounted on the walls throughout his country mansion, Calke Abbey in Derbyshire (Turner, 2013:73)[17]. Edward Booth housed his (almost) exhaustive collection of British bird species in a purpose-built museum in Brighton, which he opened in 1874. Each species was displayed in a small diorama case that recreated the habitat in which that species lived (Turner, 2013:34), although these displays were far from convincing.

Private taxidermy collections were given a new purpose when they were handed over to public museums (Hooper Greenhill, 2000:2). Frederick Horniman's (1835 –1906) taxidermy collection was donated to the London County Council in 1901 for the "recreation, instruction and enjoyment" of the public (Levell, 2001:253). Once in the public realm, they were regulated by scientific discourses that set standards for the "material practice of the discipline" of Natural History (Aloi 2018:53). Stuffed animals that had served to signify the prestige of a king, the possessions of a landowner, or the erudition of a learned gentleman were given a new function in 19th century museums: to educate the general public.

In museums, descriptive accounts based on direct observation of animals were attached to taxidermy specimens, replacing those given to them in private collections, that were often inaccurate or misleading (Foucault, 2002:143). Scientific curators considered imaginative speculations about the natural world to be an unreliable form of interpretation (Ashworth, 2004:153) and as a result, local or anecdotal interpretations lost ground to empirically based accounts of animals in the 19th century. As a result of this shift in interpretation, taxidermy came to be associated with a more distanced, objective view of animals (Foucault, 2002:82) while more personal ways of presenting a view of

[17] "Calke Abbey, Derbyshire has of cases of birds and mammals in every room ... Audley End in Essex has a spectacular collection of stuffed birds and mammals amassed by the 4th Lord Braybrooke". (Turner, 2013:74)

an animal were increasingly obscured. In 19th century scientific taxidermy collections, the mythical, allegorical and symbolic meanings that had been attributed to animals by earlier authorities were replaced by 'scientific' descriptions of the observable features of an animal, and these formed the basis on which a specimen could be included in the Linnaean classification of all living creatures, and subsequently determined its designation as a particular type of species (Foucault, 2002:143).

Linnaean classification did not entirely displace previous associations of ideas that had become attached to animals, many of which had their origins in the 17th century. Popular ideas about animals continued to circulate in taxidermy collections outside museums, and the "speculations about the natural world … remained tied to mythology, poetics and metaphysics, celestial influences and the raw power of the human imagination" (Poliquin2012:32) were not entirely obscured. For example the *Vale of Kashmir* diorama (1896) in the Powell Cotton Museum in Kent can be read as an allegory representing the tensions between Russia and England at the end of the 19th century rather than a realistic habitat diorama (fig 6).

> The ram represents Aires, the god of war; it stands for Kashmir. The stag advancing towards it represents the British, who had an interest in Kashmir. The black bear on a branch above the ram represents Russia, who also had an interest in Kashmir. (Poliquin 2012:18).

When the advance of scientific thinking turned natural history from an amateur pursuit into a rational discipline characterised by systematic observations and rational classification, other methods of presenting taxidermy, for instance in allegorical dioramas, were moved to the margins of the museum (Corrin. Kwon and Bryson, 1997:138). Rational science "purported to be a knowledge of nature itself" (Foucault, 2002:

82) and as a consequence, natural history curators demanded animal representations that could show the public what nature *really* looked like. In the 19th century, taxidermy technology shifted away from the doubtful veracity and perishable quality that characterised 18th century mounts, towards new heights of permanence and realism. From the early phase of "clumsy and haphazard stuffing of animal skins ", taxidermy technology developed towards the achievement of "pure realism in natural history dioramas". (Aloi, 2018:44). Nowhere is this trend better illustrated than in the dioramas at the AMNH *Hall of African Mammals* (see Chapter 2).

Victorian and Edwardian museums incorporated taxidermy into a rationalist epistemology (Aloi, 2012:27). Museum curators such as Richard Owen at the Natural History Museum, Alfred Cort Haddon at the Horniman Museum and William Boyle Dawkins at the Manchester Museum, arranged taxidermy and other natural history specimens into systematic orders that both informed and regulated the understanding of the public (Yanni, 1996:289, Levell, 2001:260, Merriman 2014:39). The great public museums established during Queen Victoria's reign were seen as a means of civilising and educating the general public (Barrett, 2011:3). Taxidermy, as a ready-made representational technology for making biodiversity visible, could, it was believed, support both aims, but it also normalised unequal power relations between Britain and its colonies, and legitimated the seizure of land, people and objects for museums in Britain. So many exotic specimens were collected in the British colonies that 19th-century museum collections have been branded 'imperial archives' (Poliquin, 2008:6, Yanni, 1996:278). This political frame has been overwritten by a scientific discourse of Nature at the Natural History Museum, the Horniman Museum and the Manchester Museum, all of which have used

animal specimens collected in the British colonies for their taxidermy displays[18].

The move to 'scientific' interpretation that frames taxidermy as specimen integrated into a strict scientific classification scheme had an unforeseen consequence. By removing the subjective element of human-animal relations that had found expression in narratives and allegories, and replacing it with statements based on empirical fact, scientific museums obscured the ethically problematic aspects of human-animal relations embodied in taxidermy displays.

Taxidermy, realism and scientific education.

Giovanni Aloi has argued that Natural History museums in the 19th century were "places of encounter between culturally encoded and rationalised notions of nature and the audience" (Aloi. 2018:18)[19]. In a rationalised scientifically organised museum, the public was presented with a coherent vision of the animal kingdom. Taxidermy, that had flourished as a visual technology for pleasing the eye and satisfying the curiosity of the naturalist or specimen collector in the 17th and 18th centuries, was given a new role in 19th century museums: to represent each species of animal that Linnaean taxonomy defined as the building blocks of biodiversity. The idea of the 'type specimen' – an accurate approximation to the appearance of a particular species of animal – was born, whilst the symbolic and material properties of taxidermy that were not suitable for the representation of 'types', were rejected or overlooked. Museum taxidermy came to represent an objective, 'scientific' view of 'Nature' rather than an imaginative construct of the natural world that expressed ideas about human-animal relations.

[18] The Horniman Walrus was purchased from the Colonial and Indian Exhibition (1886) by Frederick Horniman.
[19] For example, the classified order that Richard Owen imposed upon the 'encyclopaedic' national specimen collection at the Natural History Museum in 1881 (Yanni, 1966).

Taxidermy specimens played a very particular role in scientific museums. They were required to look like the living animal types they represented whereas other forms of natural history specimen – so-called 'wet' specimens, dried specimens and osteology specimens could be misshapen, desiccated and look completely lifeless. Only taxidermy could produce a convincing representation of a living animal. In due course, 'realism' became the holy grail of museum taxidermy and became confused with the Real. Speaking of the diorama displays at the American Museum of Natural History in 1998, Donna Haraway observed that museum scientists used realism to convince the public of the truth of their constructions of Nature:

> By using realism, the author is effaced … the phenomenon produces knowledge because the phenomenon exactly mirrors the real. Artistic realism was allied to biological science at AMNH. Both are based on visual discovery - discovery of the real in the image, discovery of the facts in the real. This is the positivist fallacy: it is real so it must be true.
> (Haraway, 2004:166)

The confusion of realism with the Real led to an expansion of the use of realistic taxidermy. As science was considered the most reliable method for holding up a mirror to nature, so taxidermy was employed to represent this truth to the public. The problems that beset early collections of taxidermy (such as Sir Hans Sloane's) were impermanence and inaccuracy. Taxidermy mounts were subject to insect attacks and inevitably fell quickly into dilapidation (Poliquin, 2012:37). Many were also less than accurate, as Poliquin has noted: "the animals that have survived from the 18th Century are typically wooden, taut and pitiful" (Poliquin, 2012:60). Lumpy, dishevelled taxidermy is difficult to fit into a representation of 'true nature'. One has only to think of the ruined animal bodies exhibited in run-down collections such as those illustrated in Kat Su's *Crap Taxidermy* (2014) to see the gap between the

taxidermist's aspiration to representational fidelity to nature and the reality of old, poorly mounted or deteriorating taxidermy (fig 3).[20]

Fig. 3. A poorly mounted taxidermy specimen ©Kat Su

Taxidermy specimens became more permanent when reliable methods of

taxidermy preservation became available in the mid 18th century. Becoeur's discovery of arsenical soap in the 1750's made taxidermy mounts more resistant to insect attack and by the 1820's it was used as the standard preservative for animal skins. This innovation reduced the deleterious effects of infestation and, in consequence, led to an expansion in demand for taxidermy in the mid 19th century (Morris, 2010a:56). A further factor that helped taxidermists to produce more realistic mounts was the enhanced availability of live animals that could serve as exemplars for representations of a particular species, particularly if it came from far-off lands. The importance that seeing a live animal can make to the production of accurate specimens is brought

[20] *Crap taxidermy* has a following. The main attraction seems to be the comic effect of representing animals in a clumsy, ill-constructed manner.

out in examples of taxidermy that were based on uncertain knowledge of an animal's appearance. For example, the over-sized walrus in the Horniman collection produced in the 1880's by taxidermists who were unfamiliar with the natural appearance of a live walrus, is unnaturally bloated, because they filled the skin - that is normally slack - to bursting (Horniman Museum n.d.) (fig 4).

Fig. 4. An Overstuffed Walrus. ©Horniman museum

Museum visitors, who took systematic taxidermy displays as a representation of a scientific – and therefore 'true' - view of the animal, were supposedly empowered by their knowledge (Bennett, 1995:66). But although taxidermy realism appeared to be both factual and accurate, this effect was a deception. Taxidermy displays have to be constructed by skilled hands and framed by institutional discourses to produce the visual appearance of an animal, and the apparently straightforward realism of taxidermy diverts attention away from debates on the relationship between the institution, animal bodies, individual humans and the wider ecology. The way that taxidermy has been presented in natural history museums may have aspired to a self-evident realism, but it was in fact a "rhetorical … representation of otherness" (Bennett, 1995:67) that relied heavily on the tropes of visual realism to convince the public of its 'truth' (Quinn 2006). Some contemporary critics, such as Aloi and Haraway, have critiqued the

rhetoric of taxidermy realism. Haraway has described taxidermy as an "organised craft" for eliciting unambiguous experience of organic perfection using "the epistemological and aesthetic stance of realism" (Haraway, 2004:166) whilst Aloi has gone further, claiming that the purpose of a taxidermy specimen was to turn the animal into the bearer of "a prescribed and formulated discursive truth" (Aloi, 2018:129). In other words, taxidermy realism constructs a mode of appearance that confirms the animal as different from, and separate from, ourselves.

The curatorial challenge of heritage taxidermy.

Museums that were founded in the late 19th or early 20th centuries, such as the Natural History Museum, the Horniman Museum and the Manchester Museum, inherited large collections of old taxidermy specimens and the curatorial problems associated with them. This section explores some of the factors that affect the way curators have chosen to use their heritage collections.

In England, historical taxidermy collections are a part of our cultural heritage
(Andrews, 2013:39). They bear witness to a bygone era when the skins of exotic birds and animals were brought back to England in huge numbers from the far-flung corners of Empire; a time when - partly because of this influx of skins - the demand for taxidermy grew steadily, and taxidermists grew more skilful at their craft[21]. Taxidermists achieved a pinnacle of realism in the diorama displays of the 19th and early 20th centuries, and example of which, the 'fox cub diorama' by Peter Spicer (1876), was included in the *Making Nature* Exhibition (fig 18).

[21] Rowland Ward made his reputation by producing over 100 taxidermy mounts for the Colonial and Indian Exhibition in 1886 (Poliquin 2012:91)

A report prepared for ICOM (International Committee for Museums and Collections of Natural History) report reminds us that museums have always had to choose which aspects of taxidermy to highlight:

> It is very difficult to draw a line between those items which are purely of natural history interest, and those of cultural interest, cultural history interest, historical or artistic interest, when we deal with taxidermy in museums. The same object or group of specimens may fall into several of these categories and thus care should be taken over categorising what, to some, are of little interest but to others are very valuable treasures.
> (ICOM, 2005)

Because 19th and early 20th century taxidermy is both a material archive and a collection of representations of specific historical constructions of the animal, there are questions about the way in which it should be displayed. There is no necessity to focus attention on the difference between historical constructions of the animal and those of contemporary artists if the aim of exhibiting it is simply to place an archive before the public. In this case, the question of challenging past interpretations of the animal becomes less relevant. The move to bring artist's works into museums, as discussed in the case studies in this thesis, therefore, represents a strategic choice that some curators have made in order to bring certain interpretational perspectives to the attention of contemporary museum visitors by foregrounding, for example, the colonial constructions of race and gender embodied in historical collections in displays of 'big game' trophy specimens (Bennett, 1995, Hooper-Greenhill, 2000, Adams, 2007, Machin, 2008).

Writers, including Honor Beddard (2016) and Giovanni Aloi (2018), have drawn attention to fact that older taxidermy nearly always embodies the exploitation of one species of animal by another – ourselves. Taxidermy displays write the animal into a 'discourse of domination' which is at odds with contemporary concerns about the declining numbers of wild animals and the destruction of natural habitats. Critics have posed fundamental questions about the function of

taxidermy - arguing that taxidermy should be seen as a practice that exploits other species of animal in order to articulate anthropocentric visions of nature. For example, Carl Akeley's diorama displays in the H*all of African Mammals* at the American Museum of Natural History, which opened in 1936, won widespread acclaim for the painstaking realism of both taxidermy and habitat details, and have been presented as "Windows on Nature" (Quinn, 2006); "a unique glimpse of the diverse topography of Africa and its wildlife" (American Museum of Natural History, n.d.). Visitors have been encouraged to accept Akeley's brand of taxidermy realism at face value, as an objective vision of 'unspoiled Nature'. But an alternative view of these dioramas recognises their historical specificity: Karen Jones, for instance, has argued that they represent "the global prowess of the hunter-hero and the exotic worlds he (and sometimes she) inhabited" (Jones 2016:711). In other words, Akeley's dioramas represent a white hunter's view of his quarry: prime specimens of their species, waiting to be shot for museum displays. Members of the public, who, like Jones, are sceptical of the institutional framing of Akeley's taxidermy and aware of the imminent threat of extinction to the very species represented in diorama displays, might question the relevance of a white hunter's view of African wildlife to contemporary understandings of the natural world.

The use of realism to construct a vision of 'unspoiled Nature' was considered unproblematic by Henry Fairfield Osborn, president of the AMNH from 1908–1933, because it provided the museum with effective heuristic displays:

> In the development of our halls there is a constant effort to shut out the human artificial element, to bring visitors directly under the spell of Nature as under a great and infinitely gifted teacher by making every case, every exhibit, tell some clear and simple story which appeals at once to the imagination, to the reasoning, instinct and to the heart.
> (Griffiths, A. 2002:9-10)

In the United Kingdom, attitudes to taxidermy began to change in the second half of the twentieth century, underlining the inherent tensions between taxidermy displays that represented Nature as a fixed spectacle, and environmentalists' visions of the animal kingdom as vulnerable to change[22]. Pat Morris registered this trend:

> As wildlife came to be appreciated through new eyes, particularly its declining abundance, taxidermy appeared to be an inappropriate way of treating the world's natural heritage and an unwarranted assault on dumb creatures (Morris, 2010:354).

The wave of Environmental activism in the United Kingdom that took place in the early 1970s and gave rise to the Green and Animal Rights movements, led to widespread debate about human responsibilities towards other animal species (Andrews, 2013:146). It became clear that taxidermy displays, including dioramas, were not able to represent the problematic relations between humans and animals (Aloi, 2018:129). Questions were asked about constructions of 'unspoiled' nature represented in diorama displays, for instance, and these began to trouble UK based curators of Museums that contained dioramas[23], such as the Manchester Museum. Curators had to decide whether to keep their dioramas on display or produce new natural history displays with a conservation theme:

> … dioramas were added when the gallery was last redisplayed in the 1980s. This approach had become problematic for us as it offered limited scope for visitors - and us - to explore contemporary topics relating to the natural environment such as

[22] Artists can question "histories of representation that have cemented man's exceptionalism" by addressing "the eco-political crisis that characterise the current phase of the Anthropocene". (Aloi, 2018:22)
[23] These include the Natural History Museum, that exhibited three large Rowland Ward dioramas from 1960 to 2004, the Horniman Museum that acquired a set of smaller Rowland Ward dioramas in the 1930's (that are still on view), and the Manchester Museum that acquired dioramas in the 1960's and 1970's.

> biodiversity and its conservation, climate change and human relations and interactions with the environment.
> (McGhee 2015a).

It was through discussions such as these that museum curators in the late 20th century developed new ways of thinking about the relationship between environmental politics, Science, Art and taxidermy in their museums (Arends and Thackera, 2003, Arends, and Slater, 2004, Arends, 2009).

The Present Day

Regulations have placed restrictions on the display of taxidermy in museums. This section looks at some of the professional guidelines, international agreements and government policies that have impacted on museum displays since the 1970's.

Ethical guidelines

Constraints were placed on museums taxidermy acquisitions by the Museums Association Code of Ethics (2008), which stated that museums should acquire only specimens that have "expired due to natural causes" (Museums Association 2008). This recommendation had the effect of completing, as one author has noted, a movement against prolific specimen collecting that began when links "between the hunter and the taxidermist largely dissolved following the fall of the British Empire" (Andrews, 2013:158). Prior to this, hunters and collectors from the great Imperial powers of Britain and France had felt entitled to kill great numbers of animals in their colonies in order to build specimen collections in their home countries (Jones, 2016:714). Today these specimens are considered "icons of imperial travel" (Jones 2016:713). The supply of exotic animal and bird skins to museums has largely dried up thanks to a ban on the trade in animals and animal parts brought about by the 1975 CITES treaty which was set up to protect endangered

species (both plants and animals) from the threats of unregulated international trade (CITES 1973). Only scientists or other people with a special permit can now collect protected species that are under direct or indirect threat of extinction.

Widening Access to collections

A further factor that has driven change in curatorial strategies with regard to the display of historic taxidermy in public museums, has been the increased pressure from successive Governments to widen access to museum collections. In 1999, the New Labour government produced a white paper entitled *Museums for the Many* (Great Britain. DCMS, 1999). This report set out minimum standards on widening access to museum collections and made specific recommendations on how museums could attract a more culturally diverse audience. Museums were required to actively plan ways in which they could promote "the widest possible access to the knowledge and expertise of their staff" (Great Britain. DCMS 1999:6). They were offered financial support from the *Heritage Lottery Museums and Galleries Access Fund* and urged to address the "inadequate display and interpretation of collections" (Great Britain DCMS 1999:6) that could act as a barrier to public access to knowledge. Amongst the strategies suggested for improving access to collections were:

> … the imaginative interpretation of collections … 'meet the artist/craftsperson/ scientist' [events]… working with people or organisations who have experience of building audiences in the cultural sector.
> (Great Britain. DCMS 1999:67).

Progress towards the achievement of wider access was measured. Targets were set for visitor numbers and careful note taken of the proportion of visitors from under-represented groups. Museums funded by DCMS were required to monitor who visited their museum and to report on "how they are widening access to a broad cross section of the

public for example by age, social class and ethnicity" (Great Britain. DCMS 1999:6).

Museums for the Many formalised and directed a process of public engagement that was already a prominent feature of museum practice in the early 21st century (Robins, 2013:5). It added a sense of urgency to the development of museums' public facing policies and practices and encouraged a renewed sense of social inclusiveness that could repair the damage done by the previous government that had introduced museum charges thus creating a financial barrier to access for the less well-off (Kendall, 2013:15). In 2001, museum charges were finally abolished and public museums were freely accessible to everybody. In an era of 'widening access', public museums have sought to attract a broader public by producing more attractive, exciting and popular exhibitions, including the exhibition of works by contemporary artists – following one of the strategies suggested in the *Museums for the Many* white paper (Great Britain. DCMS, 1999:7). The museological context to these developments was one of increasing critical reflexivity amongst curators and a resurgence of debates about the politics of exhibitions (Thomas, 2016:65). Curatorial questions about the function of heritage taxidermy in museums centred on finding ways to bring old taxidermy into meaningful dialogue with contemporary views about the damaged environment. In Smith's words, museums had find ways to "enable the public to engage with *and question* the cultural-historical specificity of museum collections." (Smith, 2012:47, italics added)

New connections between Art, Science and taxidermy in the museum.

In response to the problem of how best to bring historical taxidermy into dialogue with contemporary ideas about Nature, some curators invited contemporary artists to act as interlocutors between the visitor and the museum's discourse (Robins, 2013:16). Each of the case studies that follow (Chapters 4 - 8) explores the critical implications of inviting

contemporary art into a museum or an educational institution to facilitate the re-interpretation of museum specimens and displays. In these case studies, art served as a means to expose historical concepts hidden from sight in taxidermy displays that represented institutionally valorised constructions of the animal. Artist's interventions in Natural History collections performed, as Mel Ramsden has suggested, an 'institutional critique' of museum practices and orthodoxies (Ramsden 21975 quoted in Smith, 2012:126, Frazer, 2005).

What did artists critique? In each of the case study museums, taxidermy had been employed historically as a means to articulate constructions of the animal as a scientific phenomenon; either by using Linnaean taxonomy to organise taxidermy specimens into a strict, classified sequence of species or by constructing habitat dioramas that presented the animal in its 'natural' surroundings. However, by the late 20th century, curators had begun to look for alternative ways to use taxidermy that could engage with the environmental concerns of the contemporary public and help museum visitors to re-think their relationship with animals the environment (Aloi, 2018:18). Artists' interventions that brought socio-political themes to the fore provoked further reflection on the ways in which cultural, political and ideological forces have shaped how animals has been represented within museums (Poliquin, 2008:157). Artists' interventions highlighted the fact that even the most realistic taxidermy is constructed - what Syperek has described as "a scopophilic rendering of wildlife" (Syperek, 2020) - and cannot therefore represent an unproblematic picture of nature. Artists' taxidermy has given curators a way to extend debates about the relationships between taxidermy and the narratives of science, society and culture (Arends & Slater, 2004:5) that have framed representations of the animal in museums, for example, by bringing ethical perspectives on the animal into dialogue with a field of scientific knowledge in order to make exhibitions more relevant to contemporary audiences; a point that Elwes has stressed:

> It is imperative that the sciences remain in dialogue not only with aesthetics but also the ethics and political critique underlying counter-cultural elements in contemporary art. (Elwes, 2004:13).

Artists can address contemporary ethical questions such as 'How should we feel about the loss of animal lives?' 'How can we think about nature without thinking also about the effect human technologies and their waste products are having on animals and their habitats?' and 'What can we do to protect other species?' The curators in the case study museums described in this thesis found effective strategies for raising questions such as these by bringing the aesthetic, narrative and scientific functions of taxidermy into museum discourse (Andrews, 2012:59).

Contemporary artists' residencies, exhibitions and interventions in non-art museums[24] were facilitated in the United Kingdom by the 'Art/Science' programmes initiated in the early 21st century. (Rock and Adler, 2019). The aim of these programmes was to explore the complementarity of two fields of enquiry: Art and Science - that differed from one another in terms of their aims and methods. Although Art and Science are different fields of practice, they share some common ground. Rock and Adler (2019), for example, have suggested, that scientists are now becoming more aware of the historicity of truth systems and of the "narrativisation of natural phenomena that goes beyond metrics" (Rock & Adler, 2019:17). The way in which facts about Nature are presented is historically determined, as can be seen from the various attempts to describe the animal kingdom that were set out in *Making Nature* at the Wellcome Collection (see chapter 3).

Official support for arts/science research was given by the Arts & Science Research Council for the United Kingdom (ASRC), which

[24] The opening of the Tate Modern Gallery in 2000 had demonstrated that contemporary art could be a visitor attraction.

together with the Arts Council England introduced an 'Art and Science' research fellowship programme from 1998 to 2008. The aim of this programme was to "communicate scientific research and ideas to the public" (Rock and Adler, 2019:15) via the Arts. In 2004, the Arts and Humanities Research Council for the United Kingdom (AHRC) created Arts and Science research fellowships, that "integrated arts practice within a scientific environment", but, (according to Rock and Adler) artists and scientists initially stayed within their disciplinary boundaries. (Rock and Adler, 2019:15). The first integrated Art/Science programme was introduced at the Wellcome Trust in 2006. Bergit Arends - who later became Curator of Contemporary Art at the Natural History Museum - was appointed to lead the Arts/Science programme at the Wellcome Trust in 1999. Her stated aim was to find novel ways to unite "personal narrative, artistic practice and scientific expertise" (Arends and Slater, 2004:5) through a programme of temporary exhibitions. Artists were asked to produce "Hybrid works containing art tropes and scientific data" (Arends and Slater, 2004:9). Arends hoped that their affective (as opposed to simply informative) forms of display would engage the interest of visitors. By working outside the scientific frame, artists could open up the interpretive possibilities of taxidermy that taxonomies and scientific methods of study had curtailed in the 19th century. The curatorial task was to ensure that the new narratives of nature were not empty rhetoric, but persuasive articulations of cultural and scientific knowledge in new forms that held relevance for contemporary audiences. As Wilson, Hawkins and Sim have argued (in the context of their own Arts/Science project):

> By making previous disciplinary boundaries more permeable, art and science can become a much more effective force for addressing major global challenges facing society today, such as energy and food sustainability and climate change…
> (Wilson, Brett; Hawkins, Barbara; Sim, Stuart 2013)

Ethical debates fall decisively within the scope of Art/Science projects arising, for example, out of environmental narratives of habitat loss and

species decline brought about by human agency. Contemporary artists have been instrumental in introducing ethical and environmental perspectives into the museum that have been absent from natural history displays, and in bringing different perspectives to prevailing narratives of the threats to animals (Smith, G. 2019). Art/Science projects have addressed such topics as the on-going human destruction of the environment as well as the more positive idea of a shared ecological future, by combining ethical arguments with scientific facts in aesthetic form (Arends and Thackera 2003). Artist's interventions in Natural History museums with historic taxidermy on display (such as those I examine in my case study chapters) can provoke a critique of the way animals have been represented in the past by making visible the values and assumptions implicit in historic displays (Smith T. 2012:191); for example, the idea that nature is unchanging that is articulated in diorama displays, or idea that male specimens represent the most perfect examples of a species, articulated in the taxidermy displays at the Manchester Museum (Machin 2008). Arends and Wade have also supported the idea that artist's taxidermy can articulate emerging forms of human-animal relations, support contemporary concepts of a global ecology, and speculate on ways that eco-catastrophe might be averted (Arends and Wade 2020). Artists can give visual form to new concepts of the animal, as Smith has pointed out (Smith, T, 2012:129) and bring out the complexities and contradictions of museum discourse by drawing attention to differences between past and present forms of taxidermy.

Artists' taxidermy

The artists who exhibited taxidermy in the case study museums I have examined in this thesis are all 'contemporary'. In an obvious sense, this title can be applied to them because they are all working now, in the present time, and are thus 'contemporary' at the time of writing, but they can also be called contemporary because their practices emerged

at a time when the Art World had shifted away from the idea that avant garde artists should visibly dissent from mainstream ideas and values and had moved towards the idea that artists could engage more productively with the very discourses that were once considered only fit to serve as targets. Through engagement, contemporary artists have been able to explore new ways of considering the historic ideas and values that circulate in our society. As Hal Foster has argued, after the 1990's, the avant garde no longer broke with the old symbolic order absolutely, but rather revealed it in crisis and registered where new possibilities could be opened up (Foster 2015). Many of the leading artists in the 21st century, such as Cindy Sherman, Thomas Hirshhorn, Isa Genzken and Tacita Dean (Foster 2015), adopted practices that engage with historical questions, bringing them into the present and allowing the contradictions they articulate to come to the surface where they can be recognised and re-appraised. The artists in my study were contemporary in this sense: their taxidermy was strategically exhibited in museums to reveal that the previous representations of the 'Natural Order' were not adequate to represent current ideas of Nature in crisis. Their taxidermy works pointed to new possibilities for reforming ideas of Nature using new forms of taxidermy that invited the viewer to collaborate in the active re-interpretation of the concepts of the animal. Artists who adopted this strategy for activating the viewer to complete the meaning of their work were engaged in a form of 'relational' art practice (Bourriaud, 2002). Their interventions were given critical leverage because they were exhibited in a Natural History context.

The contemporary artists I have chosen to examine are Tessa Farmer, Polly Morgan, Claire Morgan, Abbas Akhavan and Mark Dion, and I have also included taxidermist Jazmine Miles-Long, whose exhibition *Memorial. A Tribute to Taxidermy* at the Horniman Museum (2017) was designed to encourage visitors to look more critically at previous taxidermy representations of the animal. Miles-Long's practice of reworking antique taxidermy cases in order to identify contradictions in

socially constructed rules and systems that produced them, is an example of what Hal Foster has called 'imminent critique' (Foster 2015b). Each of the contemporary artist 's interventions I have included in my study took the form of an imminent critique of the rules that have historically regulated taxidermy displays in museums with Natural History collections. Each artist, and Jazmine Miles-Long, constructed new visions of the animal that challenged historic representations in museum displays and juxtaposed historic formations of Nature with visions of the animal in own era in which biodiversity is in crisis.

Contemporary artists began to show taxidermy in art galleries in the UK around 2000. Tessa Farmer came to prominence with her installation of tiny skeletal fairies attacking common garden insects entitled *Swarm* that was exhibited at the Saatchi Gallery in 2004. A year later, Polly Morgan exhibited a taxidermy white rat curled-up in a champagne glass at the Zoo Art Fair in London. Both were later invited to show their work in Natural History museums (Arends, 2005, Hatton 2016). There has been much discussion on why animals appeared as a subject in contemporary art when they did (Aloi, 2012, Baker, 2013, Robins, 2013). Aloi has suggested that taxidermy was introduced into contemporary art with the purpose of "establishing an aesthetics of interaction and connection" (Aloi 2012:241) between humans and other species of animals that was not defined by science. In Steve Baker's view, appropriating taxidermy - a form of animal-object most often encountered in museum displays - was a way to critique the anthropocentric use of animals to represent human activities such as collecting, hunting or scientific research. Unlike scientists, he argued, artists are able to "treat animals as creatures who actively share the more-than-human world with humans rather than as symbols or metaphors …"(Baker, 2013:3-4). These authors acknowledged the fact that museum displays can exacerbate a growing sense of alienation from the natural world.

Claire Robins has drawn attention to the epistemological implications of artists' taxidermy when it is exhibited in natural history museums, arguing that artists' representations of animals can "critique museological practice" (Robins, 2013:8) such as the use of taxidermy as an object of scientific study. For example, the installation produced by Mark Dion at the Manchester Museum (2005) was intended to critique the visual culture of science that presents the animal as a de-contextualised object awaiting scientific interpretation and classification (Corrin 1997:138). In Chapter 5, I discuss Dion's *Bureau of the Centre for the Study of Surrealism and its Legacy* at the Manchester Museum (2005). Dion adopted the surrealist technique of assemblage in his installations in order to highlight the 'unheimlich' quality of taxidermy specimens. Other commentators have seen scientific specimen displays as a way to hide the animal subject rather than to reveal it. Giovanni Aloi, for instance, has characterised taxidermy realism as a mode of representation that "numbs out thinking ability" (Aloi, 2015:23). By contrast, the narrative tableaux of Tessa Farmer, Polly Morgan and Claire Morgan, discussed in chapters 4 and 6, contest the realist rules of formation that sustain the scientific discourse of their respective museums.

Conclusion

Once taxidermy entered the realm of public education in the 19th century, it was widely used to represent different species of animal, and put into an order defined by Linnaean taxonomy to illustrate the 'Book of Nature' according to principles of similarity and differences based on empirical observation. This worked effectively until the 1970's, when the CITES treaty (1975) placed a ban on the trade in animals and animal parts and cut off the supply of exotic specimens. In 2008, ethical guidelines were issued by the Museum's Association prohibiting the use of taxidermy specimens that had not died of natural causes or by accident. With supplies of new specimens severely curtailed, old

taxidermy was given the job of representing many exotic species of animal. Curators were aware that tired displays were unlikely to attract new visitors, let alone encourage the wider participation in museums that the Government required, and as a consequence, they sought new ways to display old taxidermy. An important strategic aim was to redisplay old specimens in ways that would resonate with contemporary concerns about the threats facing the natural world. In response to these pressures, a reconsideration of the interlinked roles of art and science came about, and initiatives took place in which artist's taxidermy was brought into museums to act as an 'agent provocateur' amongst permanent taxidermy collections.

In order to understand these recent developments, I have explored three examples of artist's interventions in museums with large heritage taxidermy collections, and one in an educational institution, that have provoked comparisons between different constructions of the animal in old and new taxidermy displays.

The following chapter explores the taxidermy dioramas that Carl Akeley produced for the American Museum of Natural History in the early 20th century, that contained what many consider to be the most realistic re-creations of animals in their natural habitats ever produced. Although they set a highest standard for taxidermy realism, the diorama displays used this realism to overwrite the fact that the taxidermy specimens were all Akeley's hunting trophies. The chapter on Akeley's *African Hall of Mammals* dioramas highlights the associations of taxidermy with hunting culture, and raises questions about the ethical and ecological problems associated with using taxidermy in 'scientific' museum displays.

Chapter 2: Carl Akeley's dioramas at the American Museum of Natural History.

In this chapter, I explore a group of dioramas in the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH) that presented taxidermy in realistic habitat displays that were also known as 'Windows on Nature' (Quinn 2006). I examine the way in which taxidermist and hunter Carl Akeley framed his hunting trophies as part of a scientific 'field experience'.

The American Museum of Natural History (AMNH) was established in New York in 1896 to dispense "scientific rationality and enlightenment to the city's new industrial and immigrant working classes" (Griffiths 2002:5). In 1911, the director of the AMNH, Henry Fairfield Osborn, claimed that the museum strove to "bring visitors directly under the spell of Nature as under a great and infinitely gifted teacher by making every case, every exhibit, tell some clear and simple story which appeals at once to the imagination, to the reasoning, instinct and to the heart" (Osborn quoted in Griffiths 2002: 9-10). With this goal in mind, Osborn promoted the construction of diorama displays that represented the appearance of the natural world so faithfully that they would give the viewer a glimpse of nature itself (Quinn 2006:6). The Diorama displays in the *African Mammal Hall* at the AMNH were opened to the public in 1936. These displays were constructed according to plans made by Carl Akeley, an American taxidermist, naturalist and explorer. This chapter explores the importance placed by the museum on a form of pictorial realism as a means to represent a vision of African mammals at home in their natural habitats, and the underlying problem of using taxidermy made from the skins of animals shot by Akeley and his party for museum displays.

The AMNH is a private organization that raises funds through admission charges and a wide range of sponsorship schemes. It is a centre for scientific research and education about the natural world. The diorama

displays that were introduced in the 1930's proved to be very popular both with the public and with sponsors, who were keen to see their names attached to such attractive displays[25]. The financial success of diorama displays played a significant part in their rapid spread throughout the museum (Cain 2011). Henry Fairfield Osborn was appointed president of the AMNH in 1908, and it was through his support that Akeley' was able to pursue his ambitious plan to build 40 dioramas around the sides of a large hall. Osborn was able to convince the Trustees of the museum to support Akeley's project rather than a rival plan, to fill the hall with taxidermy elephants. Daniel Pomeroy, one of the trustees who was also a partner in JP Morgan Bank, was given the task of fundraising for the Hall of African Mammals. Pomeroy, and some others on the board of trustees actually accompanied Akeley on his collecting expeditions in return for their financial backing. The moral pretext for hunting a large number of wild animals, was the belief that taxidermy displays of African mammals in the museum would lead members of the public to support efforts to conserve threatened African wildlife once they had seen for themselves how beautiful they looked (Quinn 2006:23).

The group of wealthy American environmentalists who served as trustees of the AMNH, believed the need for conservation of wildlife in Africa was pressing. Their concerns were largely based on the American experience of the Westward expansion of United States territory that took place in the mid 19th century, bringing with it large-scale annexation of land for farming and the exploitation of natural resources by settlers. The great wilderness areas that the settlers encountered, including the Rocky Mountains, became the subject of American Sublime landscape painting (Hull 2002) practiced by artists such as Alfred Bierstadt (1830-1902). These natural wonders kindled a desire in some leading politicians to protect the rugged mountainous areas of the American continent, and a conservation movement grew up between the 1890's and 1920's

[25] Each diorama in the Hall of African Mammals bears the name of a donor.

(Chapman, 2020) led by President Teddy Roosevelt (1858-1919) that aimed to regulate the use of natural resources and protect these natural wilderness areas from exploitation by timber and mining companies as well as hunters. Museum dioramas, such as those in the *Hall of African Mammals* were associated with conservationism, and have been described as "a conservationist response to the vanishing wildlife and wilderness" (Wonders, 1993:224).

The AMNH president Henry Fairfield Osborn was supportive of the environmental movement in the United States. Haraway has characterized Henry Fairfield Osborn as an 'organicist' who believed in "an organic hierarchy conceived as nature's principle of organisation" (Haraway 2004:168). Osborn recognized that it was necessary for industrial cultures like the United States to work in harmony with Nature because Nature supplied the resources needed to sustain both industry and wider society. Osborn could see the dangers that faced African wildlife because he had witnessed the extermination of the huge herds of buffalo in North America that had been hunted until the species was on the verge of extinction (Jones 2010:146). The panoramic vistas in the *Hall of African Mammals* dioramas reflected the huge scale of the African landscape in which herds of game animals roamed in abundance, but to the rich Trustees of the AMNH, some of whom hunted for sport[26], they raised the spectre of the mass extinction of the animals living there which, like the buffalo, offered an easy target for the hunter.

Akeley's taxidermy technique was innovative. He took great pains to model the surface appearance of the animal he was re-creating as accurately as possible, which gave his taxidermy mounts a more realistic appearance. The diorama displays in which he arranged his taxidermy animals were considered to be so realistic that the AMNH promoted them to the public as *Windows on Nature* (Quinn, 2006:6), but as Madden has

[26] Daniel Pomeroy accompanied Akeley on his hunting expedition to Africa in 1926-7

commented, although Akeley captured the appearance of reality, "it's fake and you know it's fake ... every diorama is an illusion" (Madden 2011:260). Realism was a style of representation that suited the Osborn's purpose, which was to construct idyllic visions of animals living in harmony with their natural habitats (fig 5). The realistic depiction of African mammals in their unspoiled habitats was simply an illusion created by Akeley and his team of 'preparators' in order to engage public sympathy for African mammals threatened by human encroachment into their natural territories (Jones 2010:142). They recall idealised Nature Paintings that have valorised a 'magnificent' animal in its natural setting, such as Landseer's *Monarch of the Glen* (1851).

Fig. 5. American Museum of Natural History. *Giant Sable Antelope diorama.* © Richard Crawford.

After Akeley's death in 1924 the dioramas in the *Hall of African Mammals* were completed by James L Clarke, Robert Rockwell and John Hope (Saunders 1952:162) all of whom retained the format adopted by Akeley: a foreground in which taxidermy specimens were arranged, a middle ground with realistic simulacra of trees and bushes, and a painted

landscape background. The later dioramas matched the high standard of natural realism of the earlier displays and the addition of further diorama halls in the AMNH - of Asian (1930) and North American mammals (1942) - turned the AMNH into what Quinn has called "the Louvre of diorama art" (Quinn, 2006:p12). Today, these dioramas are treated like precious works of art and have been carefully restored many times by artists, taxidermists, conservators and designers, most recently in 2012 (Mason, 2012). Perhaps because of its heritage status, contemporary artists have not been invited into the museum in a critical capacity.

Dioramas were also produced in the United Kingdom during the early 20th century, but they have tended to be less panoramic and less realistic than those at the AMNH. For example, the dioramas produced by Rowland Ward for the Powell Cotton Museum at Quex Park between 1896 and 1939 contain stiff specimens crowded together in unrealistic habitat settings (fig 6), although Rachel Jennings, Curator of Natural History at the Powell-Cotton Museum, has stated that:

> The taxidermy is of very high quality and anatomical accuracy, and was produced by the eminent London firm of Rowland Ward Ltd using notes and photographs by Percy Powell-Cotton based on his observations of the animals in the wild.
> (Jennings. n.d.)

Fig 6. Rowland Ward. The Vale of Kashmir Diorama. (1896) Photo ©Richard Crawford

However, compared with the taxidermy at the AMNH, they give “no illusion of life” (Akeley, 1924:263). Ward was later commissioned to create a set of dioramas of African mammals for the Natural History Museum in London (fig 7), which opened in 1960. The chief exhibitions officer of the time, Mona Edwards, wrote to Ward, stating her view that "Although there are large dioramas in American museums nothing on this scale has been attempted here before" (Edwards, 1959), suggesting that she had seen some American dioramas. Ward’s later dioramas rivalled those at the AMNH for scale and for the liveliness of their taxidermy specimens. They were an improvement on those at Quex Park, but not everyone agreed on the standard of workmanship that went into making the habitat details. For example, S. l. Stammwitz, who worked as a preparator at the Natural History Museum, thought that the dioramas only gave “a fair impression of the type of country they represent" and that further work was needed to bring them up to standard (Natural History

Museum 1959). Ward's dioramas were a success with the public (Natural History Museum, 1974) but were dismantled in 2004 to make way for new displays (Andrews, 2013:157).

Fig 7. Rowland Ward. Ituri Forest diorama at the NHM (1960) image ©Natural History Museum

Dioramas took taxidermy away from strictly taxonomic and morphological displays, but although the theatrical spectacles they presented to the public was intended to serve as a reminder of the value of conserving animals in their native habitats, they remained trophy displays.

Carl Akeley's taxidermy dioramas.

Carl Ethan Akeley (1864-1926) was an American taxidermist, artist, hunter and naturalist who worked at the Field Museum in Chicago (1896-1909) and the AMNH in New York (1909-1926). Akeley's made his manikins out of clay built up over a mainly wooden armature, a method that enabled him to add a high degree of realistic detail to the surface of

the animal form he was creating (Akeley, 1924:11/12). He described the modelling process he used whilst working at the Field Museum in Chicago. Each manikin was,

> … a clay model made for casting in bronze except that to facilitate accuracy the skull and leg bones of the animal were used. This model was checked by measurements made of the dead animal in the field, by photographs, and frequently by anatomical casts made in the field. The final result was a model not only of the species but of the actual animal whose skin we were going to use. (Akeley, 1924:11/12).

Measurements, photographs, bones and plaster casts were required to ensure the authentic accuracy of the taxidermy mounts that were intended for use as realistic exhibits in a natural history museum. Akeley's sculptural talents were held in check by the demand for scientific objectivity. There was little room for personal interpretation in the construction of taxidermy displays adhering to "fixed constant qualities" (Aloi, 2018:24) that were valorised by scientific museums. Akeley improved manikin construction by faithfully copying all the bodily details of the animal from which the skin had been taken. Consequently, each taxidermy specimen he prepared was a measured replica of a particular animal. Stephen Quinn has described the "Akeley method", as one that makes the specimen look like "a real animal and not a work of art" (Quinn, 2006:161). However, Carl Akeley often dramatized his taxidermy animals by making them appear strong, agile, and dangerous with horns and sharp teeth.

Akeley came up with the idea of a *Hall of African Mammals* in 1911 (Akeley, 1924:252):

> Akeley sketched out the plan for Osborn: an enormous open hall with a balcony and over 40 animal groupings positioned before painted dioramas. The groups, or scenes, would also be appointed with artificial vegetation that would characterize the animal's natural environment. A visitor, as he [sic] passes from group to group, may have the illusion, at worst, of passing a series of

> pictures of primeval Africa, and at best, may think for a moment that he has stepped five thousand miles across the sea into Africa itself.
> (Anderson, 2014:Ch5)

Akeley envisaged each diorama as an exact replica of a specific location, correct in every physical detail. Not only the animal specimens, but the grass, rocks, trees and landscapes all had to correspond in the minutest detail to his own experience of being in the African wilderness. The appearance of Nature was at issue. It had to look so real that a visitor could "lose himself [sic] in communion with nature" (Quinn 2006:18). Akeley and the museum staff who worked with him, had to overcome formidable technical problems to recreate the experience of being outdoors in an artificial display (Haraway, 2004:168). The AMNH already had a small number of diorama displays containing life-sized models of Inuit and First Nation people engaged in daily activities. These had been created by the anthropologist, Franz Boas, who believed that, "objects could only be understood within their individual cultural context" (Harrison 2012:27). Akeley adopted the same principle for his dioramas, by putting taxidermy animals into simulations of their natural habitats.

Akeley went on several hunting expeditions to Africa between 1909 and 1926, to select the locations he would depict in each diorama (Alvey, 2007:28). Whilst on these expeditions, he shot many of the specimens that can now be seen in the *Hall of African Mammals*. According to Jones, being out in the wilderness re-ignited his passion for Nature (Jones, 2010:137) but it was dangerous and uncomfortable. Nature was not always a passive spectacle and he was nearly killed by the animals he was stalking on two occasions (Jones, 2010:146). Akeley was well aware that living animals had agency and could fight back. He shot and killed dozens of mature animals as well as young ones that were needed to complete family groups. It is, as Haraway has noted, ironic that someone who believed in conservation should have killed so many animals for his diorama displays (Haraway 1984:45). Akeley hunted for sport, pitting his superior skills and

weaponry against what he saw as 'worthy opponents'. It was a test of manhood to overcome another mammal in its own territory[27] (Haraway 1984:23).

The *Hall of African Mammals* gave Akeley a visual means to convey his experience of hunting in Africa to a wider public - although he omitted to represent his encounters with dangerous animals. Nonetheless, the stories of his life-threatening encounters with animals were circulated in popular adventure magazines (*Two-Fisted Tales* March 1955, *Safari* magazine c.1950, *Real Heroes* June 1946) and have become attached to some of the displays he produced, such as the *Leopard Diorama*[28]. Each diorama encapsulated the essential features of the locations in which Akeley's killed animals for his taxidermy. He, like his mentor Teddy Roosevelt believed that hunting 'big game' conferred manhood on the hunter (Haraway 1984:22). Theodore (Teddy) Roosevelt (1858-1919) supported Akeley's plans for the *Hall of African Mammals* as a way to promote his policies for environmental conservation amongst the American public[29]. Whilst serving as the President (1904-1909), Roosevelt led the conservation movement in the United States in the face of opposition from commercial and industrial interests and established national parks, nature reserves and forests throughout the United States (Cutright, 1985:236). He supported conservation efforts in Africa because, like the museum trustees, he believed that "as civilisation advances in Africa, the extinction of the elephant is being accompanied slowly but quite as surely as the American buffalo" (Jones, 2010:146). However, Roosevelt also shot big

[27] Akeley admired the 'Nandi' men he met, who surrounded and killed a lion with their spears. They were the only native Africans he called 'Men'. He called the men who worked for him 'Boys', whom, Haraway has argued, he saw as "perpetual children or even as wildlife" (Haraway 1984:50).

[28] Akeley killed a female leopard by forcing his arm down the throat of the animal until it choked. This gained him the reputation of a fearless hunter.

[29] The Westward movement of settlers that Roosevelt encouraged threatened not only animal populations. Land that had belonged to indigenous American peoples for generations was also appropriated.

game animals, including two elephants that Akeley later prepared for display in the *Hall of African Mammals* (Roosevelt, 1910).

Akeley's field knowledge of animal behaviour helped him to decide how the animal specimens in his dioramas should be presented:

> Every group in Roosevelt Hall must be made by the men who make the studies in Africa so that the selection of the environment, the background, and the story to be told shall be typical and so that every detail of accessory or background shall be scientifically accurate.
> (Akeley, 1924:263)

Family groups predominate in the *Akeley Hall of African Mammals,* with a male, female and one or more young animals placed closely together. In addition to constructing a vision of unspoiled Nature, the dioramas served as a means to articulate the museum's president's idea of a normal family with "mannequins arranged in nuclear families" (Griffiths, 2002:18). According to Donna Haraway, this arrangement was not an aesthetic or a scientific decision but an ideological one (Haraway, 1984:37). She has argued that the museum president, Henry Fairfield Osborn, sought to naturalise conservative ideas of the nuclear family by displaying animals in family groups (Haraway 1984:29).

The twenty-eight dioramas that line the walls of the Akeley Hall of African Mammals articulate a conservationist's vision of African wildlife in their natural environments (Jones, 2010:135). In each diorama, taxidermy specimens of indigenous animals and birds are arranged in naturalistic poses among realistic-looking trees and plants, as if glimpsed in their natural habitat (fig 14). The taxidermy animals seem to have been frozen at a moment in time, fixed forever in mid-stride; a memorial to an unchanging Natural Order of which they are a part. These dioramas were intended to convey a powerful message to the New Yorkers who visited the museum, admonishing them to preserve Nature just as it was – unspoiled (Jones, 2010:135). Akeley used realistic taxidermy to idealise

African mammals and turn them into symbols[30] of what he called "the Age of Mammals" (Akeley, 1924:254). This idea, as Haraway has argued, indicates that Akeley was constructing a vision of life on earth *before* humans entered the picture and put populations of wild animals and the habitats they lived in under pressure. (Haraway, 1984:31). The very fact that he shot so many animals to make the dioramas makes this idealised vision of Nature-before-humans problematic.

When I visited the American Museum of Natural History in New York in 2017, I was immediately struck by the illusionistic appearance of the diorama displays in the Akeley Hall of African Mammals. The athletic bodies of African Mammals were posed in life-like positions in the foreground of each display, many with huge horns or bared teeth, whilst behind them distant views of views of purple hills and mountains could be glimpsed between the foliage of trees and bushes. Other dioramas were on display in the museum, filling most of the public exhibition spaces in the natural history galleries, but some taxonomic and morphological specimen display could still be seen tucked away in odd corners of the museum. In the Primate's Gallery (fig 8), for example, cases filled with skeletons and taxidermy specimens were arranged to show the similarities and differences between families of primates, as the museum guide explains:

> The hall is divided into families, with displays of skeletons, mounted specimens, and artwork that trace both shared characteristics and those unique to each group.
> (American Museum of Natural History nd)

[30] Akeley followed the tradition, epitomized by Sir Edwin Landseer's 'Monarch of the Glen' (1851), of presenting a hunter's trophy animal as a 'noble beast'.

Fig. 8. American Museum of Natural History. The *Primate's Gallery.* © Richard Crawford.

The Hall of New York State Mammals contained a display of taxidermy specimens lined up in neat rows arranged by species (fig 9). The Museum Guide explains the reason for this arrangement:

> The Hall of New York State Mammals introduces visitors to the diversity of local wildlife. Arranged in cased displays of discrete specimens, the hall presents a range of more than 50 land mammals—from shrews to bats, beavers to bobcats—and invites comparisons of their distinctive external features, such as fur, claws, ears, body shape, and size
> (American Museum of Natural History, nd).

Fig. 9. American Museum of Natural History. *The Hall of New York State Mammals*. © maandpafamily

The obvious difference between diorama displays and the displays in the two taxidermy galleries is the way in which specimens were presented to the viewer. Taxonomic and morphological displays remove the animal from its natural context in order to emphasise that it is an object of study whereas diorama displays present the animal at home in its natural habitat. The museum promoted diorama realism as a re-creation of the appearance of Nature itself, supposedly "free" from human interpretation, but each diorama took museum staff years of hard work to construct working largely from photographic sources (Alvey, 2007:40). Photos that Akeley had taken on his field trips were laboriously converted into theatrical dioramas by teams of 'preparators', taxidermists and artists, each of whom employed a version of realism in keeping with the expectations of their practice (Akeley, 1924:265). For example, William Leigh was amongst the artists that Akeley employed to paint the backdrops to his dioramas. He had undergone academic training in Germany where he learned to paint "panoramas and murals, portraits and illustrations" (Leigh, 1939:16). Leigh acquired his realistic landscape style from painters like Alfred Bierstadt (1830-1902), a popular painter of rugged mountain landscapes. Bierstadt painted enormous canvases of the American wilderness, such as *A Storm in the Rocky Mountains, Mt. Rosalie* (1866) which featured dramatic skies and gigantic mountains with some tiny figures in the foreground who are dwarfed by the sublime landscape. The scale of Nature in this painting is awe-inspiring. Bierstadt "… exaggerated the scale of the mountains, introduced dramatic weather to thrill audiences" (Information panel at the Brooklyn Museum, 2016). Leigh, like Bierstedt, strove to represent the landscape in the 'American Sublime' style by amplifying the grandeur and scale of the mountainous landscape to suggest the "overwhelming power of nature" (Hull, 2002:12). By the time Leigh painted his panoramic backdrops for Akeley, the American Sublime style had been overtaken by the work of urban realists (Baigell, 1971:175), but it remained an influential style which could be used to convey an 'uncontaminated' idea of Nature: a vision of Nature that offered "solace to those confused by the encroachment of science" (Baigell,

1971:109). Scenes that were astonishing, overwhelming and frightening in real life - like a huge mountain - could be experienced in a painting as pleasurable, because, as Edmund Burke (1729-1797) noted, we can have the idea of danger, without putting ourselves in any actual risk (Burke, 1757). Akeley's dioramas performed the same function as Sublime landscape paintings. They made the African wilderness safe for the urban visitors to witness at first hand. Akeley wanted to dispel the myths of 'Darkest Africa' that circulated in popular culture, and believed that "popular images of Darkest Africa could foremost be challenged and dismissed by a hall where exhibits of wildlife would occupy centre stage". (Jones, 2010:151).

Although the new theatrical displays looked more realistic than taxonomic displays, they were not straightforward representations of the real world. At Akeley's request, Leigh had translated his depictions of distant hills and skies into sublime spectacles that lent the dioramas grandeur of scale and provided the animals he placed in the diorama with a spectacular natural setting. The landscape paintings provided a backdrop for the animals whilst rendering the human presence all but invisible (Aloi, 2018:106). Humans were not a part of Akeley's vision of pristine Nature. Their absence from the dioramas was as important to their meaning as their overt subject: the African mammals Akeley had hunted and killed on his expeditions to Africa. Akeley and Osborn wanted to erase the hunter's presence and present the public with an idealised animal kingdom (Cain, 2017:298); a Garden of Eden populated only by animals (fig 10). The dioramas were a vision of a world in which wild animals roamed freely, as they had once done in the United States, before settlers occupied the 'Wild' West of the country and all but exterminated native species such as the buffalo. It was a carefully constructed picture of Nature before human encroachment. Indeed, Akeley saw human civilization as the enemy of nature and claimed that, "as civilisation advances in Africa, the extinction of the elephant is being accompanied slowly but quite as surely as the

American buffalo" (Jones, 2010:146). He overlooked his own, very evident, contribution to the extinction of African mammal species.

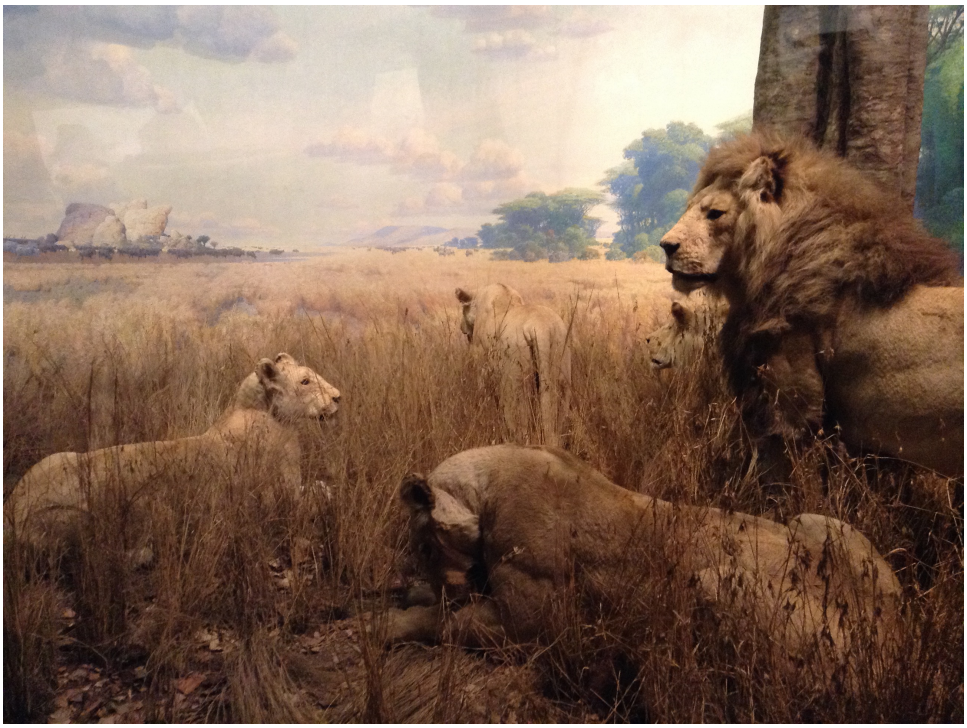

Fig. 10. American Museum of Natural History. *The Lion Diorama in the Akeley Hall of African Mammals*. © Richard Crawford.

Although the AMNH trustees and staff saw it as their duty to save African animals from human encroachment, Akeley's hunting party slaughtered many hundreds of mature, breeding animals in the name of wildlife conservation (Jones, 2010:140). Akeley concealed the real, exploitative relationship he had with the animals he had collected by giving them the starring role in his theatrical displays. But when he realised the negative impact that hunting (including his own) was having on animal populations, particularly that of the scarce mountain gorilla, he began to campaign politically for the creation of a gorilla sanctuary in Virunga, the location in which his gorilla diorama is set[31] (Akeley, 1922:533).

[31] Akeley's campaigning resulted in the creation of the Virunga National Park in 1925 in what is now Democratic Republic of the Congo.

The Gorilla Diorama

The gorilla diorama was planned as a family group, so Akeley's party shot enough gorillas in Virunga to make up a family: an old male, two females and a young gorilla (Akeley, 1922:318). In fact, as Haraway has noted, Akeley "killed or attempted to kill every ape" (Haraway 1984:27) he saw on the first few days of his expedition to Virunga. Akeley had their bodies skinned (some by local people), photographed and measured and even had their faces cast in plaster so that he could re-create their expressions in his museum workshop (Alvey 2007:34). He gave William Leigh instructions about which landscape to paint for the diorama backdrop. He considered that the line of Volcanoes that form the backdrop to the gorilla diorama at the AMNH were the perfect image of sublime natural beauty:

> The background - and it is a beautiful scene - must be painted by as great an artist as we can get and he must go to Karisimbi to make his studies. … otherwise the exhibit is a lie and it would be nothing short of a crime to place it in one of the leading educational institutions of the country.
> (Akeley, 1924:265-266).

Akeley hoped the public would respond to the sublime beauty of the volcanic landscape that stretched before him, but scientific accuracy was also an important consideration for the museum that had paid for his expedition. Samples of local vegetation were collected and a photographic record made of the site that would be recreated in the dioramas display. Akeley demanded that, "every detail of accessory or background shall be scientifically accurate". (Akeley, 1924:263). This however did not stop him from constructing what Jones has called a "well crafted fiction" (Jones 2010:165). William Leigh, the artist who painted the volcanic landscape, added his own interpretation to the scene. Leigh believed that scientists needed artists to make knowledge of the natural world "more understandable, more nearly complete, more human" (Leigh, 1938:xi). Artist's involvement in the dioramas also made animal displays more popular and therefore more attractive to funding bodies such as the New York State who provided funds to the museum specifically for public

education (Cain, 2011:215-238). Akeley made sure that aesthetic decisions were put in the hands of trained artists like Leigh. The diorama represented a Romantic vision of an exotic world of nature cut off from human society.

Fig. 11. American Museum of Natural History. The *Gorilla Diorama*. The "Giant of Karisimbi' greets the visitor. © Richard Crawford

In the Gorilla Diorama (fig 11), a range of active volcanoes provides a backdrop for the family of gorillas who sit quietly feeding in the foreground. Smoke pours out of the tops of two volcanoes that rise high above the clouds in the valley, adding to the sense that immense natural forces are working beyond our vision. The volcanic landscape is framed by carefully placed vines and tree trunks to mark out a stage for the gorillas, who perform their parts Akeley's 'Theatre of African Mammals'. An upright male gorilla at the centre of the diorama is posed in the act of pounding his chest with his fists, as if issuing a warning to the visitor, who is made to feel like an intruder who has somehow stumbled into the

gorilla's home territory. The simulated vegetation and the taxidermy specimens of gorillas were all accurately modelled on the originals that Akeley encountered on his expedition, but as with the other diorama displays, much was altered to give the display the dramatic qualities that were needed to engage his audience and to convey a conservationist message. This was Akeley's taxidermy triumph. He had shot the gorillas, only to bring them back to life as eternal emblems of his Western conservationist gaze.

Having accomplished what he had set out to do, Akeley's mind turned to the implications of what he had done, expressing his concern that: "[the gorilla] is on his way to extinction … he is an easy highly prized prey to the 'sporting' instinct" (Akeley, 1922:532). In the last years of his life, Akeley had ethical qualms about shooting primates, and mocked the idea of the 'fearless hunter' that he, himself had helped to construct through his well-publicized exploits in Africa. He confessed himself to be a reformed person who, having killed so many gorillas, now realised that shooting them was a culpable act that should be prevented by law, as this press report of 1926 published under the heading *Gorilla defended by famous hunter* reveals:

> …the 'sport' of hunting to which 'brave' and 'fearless' hunters aspire, he declared to be as much a 'sport' as "to kill blind and crippled women".
> (Providence Journal Tuesday 12 (?) 1926)

It is hard to believe Akeley's sincerity in this passage. As Haraway has commented, "once domination is complete, conservation is urgent" (Haraway 1984:28). Taxidermy made from the skins of hunted animals inevitably connotes the domination of animal species by Humans unless the taxidermist (like Jazmine Miles-Long), expressly refuse to work with animal bodies unless they have died naturally, or as a result of an accident. Ethical taxidermists like Miles-Long point to the unethical provenance of older displays, like those in Akeley's dioramas, and invite

the public to re-assess the idea that it is acceptable for animals to be killed to make taxidermy displays for museums.

Chapter 3: *Making Nature: how we see Animals.* An exhibition at the Wellcome Collection (2017).

In this chapter I examine the different portrayals of Nature in *Making Nature; How we see animals*, an exhibition held at the Wellcome Collection Gallery that I visited on the 28 April 2017. These portrayals articulated different concepts of Nature that have framed animal displays in zoos and natural history museums. *Making Nature: How we see animals* was curated by Honor Beddard and funded by the Wellcome Trust. It provided a comprehensive overview of the different ways the concept of "Nature" has been conceived and represented in Europe and the United States from the 16th century to the present day and included the work of nine contemporary artists who were invited to exhibit in order to contrast their representations of Nature with historical portrayals in the exhibition. As the curator, Honor Beddard, emphasised in an interview with Giovanni Aloi, she wished to provoke debates between the two fields of practice:

> I felt that the contemporary art featured in Making Nature was crucial in helping visitors pick apart some of the [unconscious] structures and challenge preconceptions
> (Beddard 2019:21)

The Wellcome Collection is part of the Wellcome Trust, an independent charitable foundation committed to promoting research in the natural sciences. The collection was created by Sir Henry Wellcome (1852-1936), an American pharmaceutical entrepreneur who amassed a huge number of artefacts connected with medicine in its broadest sense from around the globe. When Henry Wellcome died in 1936, the Wellcome Trust was formed to preserve his collection and to fund medical research. The present building in Euston Road, London, was opened in 2007 as a free museum and library where the public could explore the links between health and wider human experience. Three exhibition

spaces were included in which various approaches to health and wellbeing could be explored. The exhibitions that have been held in these spaces have adopted the eclectic approach epitomised by Wellcome's collection, typically mixing up "scientific technology, modern art and cultural artefacts" (Larson 2009:281). '*Making Nature: how we see animals'* was part of a programme of temporary exhibitions that explored different aspects of a medical of health related theme. It revealed some of the many ways in which we have constructed a view of other animal species.

Constructions of Nature, past and present.

The *Making Nature: How we see animals* exhibition brought together one hundred exhibits to represent different historical narratives of "Nature", demonstrating how the concept of nature had been distributed amongst different texts, images and objects since the 16th century (Aloi, 2019:11). By juxtaposing these exhibits and contrasting portrayals, the exhibition highlighted agreements and contradictions implicit in the different forms of representations of the natural world on view (Beddard, 2020). In this section I discuss the different constructions of Nature represented in the exhibition, and note how Beddard's curatorial approach, founded on her belief that "natural history museums, zoos and wildlife documentaries create representations of nature that frame our ideas about other animals" (Beddard 2019:16), corresponded closely with Foucault's epistemological argument that there are no meta-historical ideas but only "a complex network of conceptual compatibility and incompatibility" (Foucault, 2002:69) in a field of concepts.

What we see in a museum may represent diverse ways of understanding animals. Mark Dion has defined Natural History museums as "didactic institutions mandated to collect, *define* and represent the natural world" (Dion,1997:134 emphasis added). As Foucault has observed, the

field of Natural History embraces a family of concepts within "a continuity of tradition" (Foucault, 2002:62). Nature is a concept that has been historically defined and represented many times in museums, zoos and scientific laboratories (Foucault, 2002:62). How museums have articulated concepts of Nature depends on their historical context. Beddard chose the themes of 'defining' and 'representing' Nature as organising themes of the first two rooms of her *Making Nature* exhibition (Beddard, 2017). The third room of the exhibition contained material on the different ways that animals had been 'Observed' in Zoos and Museums. Beddard stated that the first three rooms of *Making Nature* were intended as her way of exploring "how humans have constructed a particular narrative about nature" (Beddard, 2019:19).

Room one of the exhibition focussed on the ways that concepts of nature have been defined and articulated from the 16th century to the mid 20th century. While the second room focussed on how concepts of Nature have been represented in material form. It becomes clear, looking at the variety of historical exhibits in these rooms, that the concept of "Nature" has been constructed in many different forms in different periods, by different institutions, particularly museums, that produce authoritative knowledge for public education. Beddard warned visitors not to be seduced by the authority of museums: "We didn't want the visitors to be so seduced by the museum environment that they stopped being aware of the role institutions play in constructing nature" (Beddard, 2019:21).

Different accounts of what nature is, and what it looks like, have provided, she notes, "the historical roots of our beliefs about other animals" (Beddard, 2019:16), but because these accounts are distinct and varied, they remain in tension with each other and with the idea that the idea of Nature is fixed and objective (Lord, 2006:2). The exhibition questioned the idea that there is a 'natural' order of species.

The Natural Order.

The exhibits in the first room of *Making Nature'* represent ideas of a 'natural order' in Nature, which, Beddard explained,

> … has become embedded in our society. The "Great Chain of Being" began with the ancient Greek philosophers. Later, religious scriptures reinforced this hierarchical structure with divine explanation.
> (Wellcome Collection 2017).

Museums have adopted the idea that humans are somehow separate from other species, an idea originally proposed in The *Book of Genesis*, the first book of the Bible in which the creation of the world is described. Adam, the first human, was granted the power to name all other species by God; "So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds in the sky and all the wild animals" (English Standard version Bible. Genesis, 2:20). By naming other species of animal, Adam brought order to the enormous diversity of living creatures. The vision of a world created by God and named by Adam, acting as God's steward on earth, placed Man (the species) as separate from, and superior to, all other species of animal. Naming became a key device for establishing human control over the rest of nature. In later systems devised for organising biodiversity, naming is a major feature. For example, in the classification system of Linnaeus (1707-1779), who, as the exhibition points out, was a devout Christian, the process of naming is central. Linneaus continued the job started by Adam by naming every species that had been discovered at the time he was working on his encyclopaedic classification system that could literally encompass the whole of the living world in a single table, the *Systema Naturae* (1735). Linnaeus (as Foucault points out) seemed to have revealed the existence of a Natural Order through his examination of the physical properties of living things (Foucault, 2002b:63). A copy of *Systema Naturae* was on display in the exhibition together with a quote from Linnaeus: "If you do not know the names of things, the knowledge of them is lost too" (Philosophia Botanica (1751), quoted in Wellcome Collection, 2017). The

idea that biodiversity, caught in the net of language, can be organised into a logical sequence, persists in museum display practices into the present century.

For Linnaeus, human superiority was an axiomatic assumption in his taxonomic classification, although, he knew from his empirical studies that humans were just one member of the primate family on the basis of physiology and morphology (Agamben 2004:25). Linnaeus had to invoke non-physiological criteria for separating humans from other primates. He named humans "homo sapiens" (wise man), because they had the ability to recognise themselves as humans, whereas, in his time, it was believed that no other species possessed self-awareness (Agamben 2004:26). In her interpretive notes on *the Systema Naturae* in the *Making Nature* exhibition, Beddard described Linnaeus' classification system as "a human construct imposed on the natural world" (Beddard, 2019:16) rather than the articulation of a Natural Order. But because it has been adopted by so many museums around the world as an organizing principle for their natural history collections, she notes, it has conditioned the way we see the natural world, and sometimes obscured other ways to think about human-animal relationships. For Beddard, the essential problem with taxonomy is that it makes us "more disconnected from living things" (Beddard 2019:29).

Linnaeus' *Systema Naturae* grouped animals together according to their physical similarities to create the separate animal species "by means of identity and difference with other animals" (Foucault 2002b:144). Separate species were grouped into general classes of animals such as mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians and fish. His system for organising biodiversity into classes has been widely adopted by museums and has passed into public consciousness (Parker 2010:183). The organisation of the taxidermy galleries in the Natural History Museum in London, for example, reveals the persistent influence of this division of the natural

world into a few general classes, with mammals, birds, reptiles amphibians, and fish each accorded their own galleries.

Beddard, in curating *Making Nature*, noted that the concept of a fixed order of Nature of nature is problematic because, although it appears to reflect a Natural Order, it was constructed at a particular historical moment when certain ideas of Nature were in circulation:

> We [have to] examine the historical origins of our ideas about other animals, and to take a step back and see how those ideas have really become embedded into our society. We don't look at them very critically because we think of them as being 'natural'. So we don't see that meddling hand of human influence.
> (Beddard quoted in Banham, 2017).

Alongside Linnaeus's *Systema Naturae*, the exhibition presents other systematic classification schemes for natural phenomena that have been consigned to history, such as Charles Bonnet's (1720 –1793) classification system. Bonnet created a different order of species to that of Linnaeus (see below). He adopted the idea that the rank order of species is not fixed and that species could evolve from a lower to a higher position. Bonnet was a Genevan naturalist and philosopher who published his *Idea of the Ladder of Natural Beings* in 1783, around fifty years after the Leiden edition of Linnaeus' *Systema Naturae* was published. Bonnet's hierarchy of species was exhibited in the first room of *Making Nature*. Beneath it, an accompanying text explained that Bonnet considered the position of each species in the *Ladder of Natural Beings* to be changeable, unlike the order of species in the Linnaean system which was fixed. According to Bonnet, species could move up the ladder so that "simpler animals could become intelligent, primates develop into humans and humans grow into angels" (Beddard, 2017). He is credited with being the first naturalist to describe the process of progressive change in a species of animal as "evolution", an idea that gained traction amongst the scientific community in the 19th century, particularly after Darwin's *Origin of the Species* was published (1859) (Yanni 2014:227). However, Man again sits on the top of Bonnet's

ladder of Nature, followed by Orangutan, Monkey, Quadrupeds, Flying squirrel, Bat and Ostrich.

Bonnet's *Ladder of Natural Beings* is shown below:

MAN
Orangutan Monkey QUADRUPEDS Flying squirrel Bat
Ostrich
BIRDS
Acquatic birds Amphibious birds Flying fish
FISH
Crawling fish
Eels
Water snakes SERPENTS
Slugs
Snails
SHELLFISH Tubular worms Tinea (Ringworm) INSECTS
Gallflies Tape-worm Polyps Sea-anemone
Sensitive PLANTS
Lichens
Molds
Mushrooms, Agarics Truffles
Corals, Coraloids Lithophyte
Asbestos, Amianthus Talc, Gypsum, Selenites Slates
STONES Formed Stones Crystallizations SALTS
Vitriols
METALS SEMI-METALS SULPHURS Bitumens EARTHS
Pure Earth WATER
AIR
FIRE
Ethereal matter

Fig. 12. Charles Bonnet's *Ladder of Natural Beings* (1859) (Source: Wellcome Collection)

A third attempt at organizing biodiversity into a single sequence on display in the first room of the *Making Nature* exhibition, was a system attributed to ancient Greek philosophers, who linked all organisms into a

linear sequence known as the "Great Chain of Being" (Beddard 2019:16). In this chain, "at each point of contact there begins and ends a link that resembles the one before it and the one after it" (Foucault 2002 first pub 1989:21). This chain of natural organisms started off with the simplest life forms and ended with the most complex. Humans were accorded the final place in the series, at the end of the Great Chain of Being (Kalof & Fitzgerald 2007:61).

These three examples, which were chosen to illustrate historic debates about the existence of a Natural Order, present a trio of concepts which have been used to organise natural history displays museums - taxonomy, human exceptionalism and evolution. These concepts can still be discerned in the taxidermy displays in contemporary Museums, such as the Natural History Museum, the Horniman Museum and the Manchester Museum, and serve to reinforce ideas of human superiority over other species (Agamben 2004:38). However, as the case studies in this study show, they have not gone unchallenged.

In Room 2 of the exhibition, the idea of de-linking of Humans from other primate species is questioned by the *Non-descript*, a piece of satirical taxidermy by Charles Waterton (1782-1865). Waterton took issue with the idea of human exceptionalism that was becoming institutionalised through the adoption of Linnaean taxonomy in 19th century biology. He re-shaped the face of a Saki monkey to appear more human (fig 13) in order to blur the dividing line between humans and apes[32]. Waterton called his human/monkey head a *Non-Descript: "*an undescribed species and satirised the shortcomings of Linnaeus's categorising system" (Wellcome Collection 2017). His *Non-descript* questioned the idea of "the political sovereignty of humanity over the world" (Turner, 2013:106) using a form of satirical taxidermy.

[32] Waterton's manipulation of the Saki monkey's face precedes Carl Akeley's reshaping of the face on his male gorilla at the AMNH (See chapter 5)

Fig. 13. The *Non-descript* (1825) by Charles Waterton. © Wakefield Museum.

Bringing Art and Science together

The Wellcome Collection does not have a permanent collection of animal specimens on display in its galleries unlike the museums discussed in the following chapters, but it is home to a collection of items on the history of world medicine that was collected by Sir Henry Wellcome (1853-1936). Temporary exhibitions are a feature of the public programme, aimed at encouraging people to "think and talk about health, medicine and medical science and to explore their connections with art and life" (Robins 2013:200). In 1996, a Sci-Art[33] programme was started to facilitate cross-disciplinary research and encourage artists and scientists to work together, often focusing their

[33] The 'Sci/Art programme regarded art as a practice that could give visual form to alternative concepts of the natural world to those produced by scientific practices alone.

joint efforts on ethical issues in medicine or science. Bergit Arends coordinated this programme (Arends and Thackera 2003) before moving to the post of Curator of Contemporary Art at the Natural History Museum in 2005. Arends' curatorial view of 'Art and Science' projects was that they were not a way to "deliver answers on the relationship between art and science, but rather to intrigue and captivate through narratives that combine method and rigor with quirkiness and poetry" (Arends and Thackera 2003:11). The creative partnerships between artists and scientists that she helped to organise were designed to ask questions rather than to offer ready-made answers.

Honor Beddard, curator of *Making Nature* adopted the same questioning approach to her exhibition (Beddard, 2019:16). The question she posed was in the title of her exhibition: "*how do we see other animals*? The exhibition was conceived as a space in which visitors could discover a variety of ways to answers to this question. Beddard constructed her exhibition around the idea that how we see animals depends largely on the way the idea of the animal is represented in natural history museums, zoos and wildlife documentaries (Beddard, 2019:16). She stated that she "wanted the [*Making Nature*] exhibition to take into consideration the relationship between humans and animals from a broad set of perspectives; moral, philosophical, phenomenological and cultural" (Beddard, 2019:19).

Beddard's exhibition at the Wellcome Collection had all the hallmarks of an Arts/Science collaboration, mixing material from scientific archives with contemporary artworks. In *Making Nature*: *how we see animals*, the concept of the animal is widely disbursed through different articulations of the idea including mythological, scientific, animal-centric, anthropocentric, historical and contemporary representations of animals. The different narratives that have been constructed are not always compatible, and Beddard has expressed her hope that "through

the show's narratives, doubts and questions will hopefully start to build up in visitor's minds" (Beddard in Smith, G. 2019).

Making Nature was conceived from the outset as a multidisciplinary exhibition that brought together a range of historic material associated with natural history, including, "... scientific specimens and research from the 17th century to the present day … literature, archival material and artefacts, as well as objects from popular culture, such as toys and games" (Beddard, 2020:14) each of which articulated "human-animal relations through the practices and institutions of natural history" (Beddard, 2020:14). It gave visitors the opportunity to explore conceptual compatibilities and incompatibilities between the different ways that animals have been represented and understood. Beddard introduced a further element to the exhibition that challenged the idea that the 'Animal' is (or has ever been), a meta-historical concept. She invited a contemporary installation artist, Abbas Akhavan, to show three taxidermy works in the exhibition, because, in her view, "different types of taxidermy [can]… offer a clear history of our changing relationship with and attitudes to animals" (Beddard, 2019:33).

Akhavan's practice is site specific. His installations involve placing objects in a particular setting where they do not belong. In 2012 he produced another work exploring the intrusion of nature into an interior space. He chose a disused building in East London to explore the effects that natural things, like plants, have when they invade spaces occupied by humans. In one of his works for the *Study for a Garden* project at the Delphina Foundation, he brought ivy into a carpeted room, creating an uncomfortable situation in which something associated with outdoors has been brought indoors where it does not belong (fig 16).

Fig. 14. Abbas Akhavan. *Study for a garden at the Delphina Foundation London* (2012) © Delphina Foundation.

Akhavan's interest in exploring the disturbing effect created by seeing the unwanted intrusion of nature into socially populated spaces led him to produce an earlier version of *Fatigues* in 2014 for the Museum of Contemporary Art in Montreal - a much bigger exhibition space than the Wellcome Collection gallery – in which he scattered animals killed in road accidents around the public spaces of the museum (fig 17). Abbas Akhavan exhibited lifeless taxidermy birds and animals at La Biennale de Montréal (2014), calling his installation *Fatigues*. He deliberately chose to place his animal bodies in dimly lit corners, without labels, to provoke viewers to engage with, and empathise with the animals (which had died from natural causes). The theme of the Biennale was L'avenir (looking forward) and Fatigues just one of dozens of works on view that looked at the present and the possible futures it might produce. Akhavan's dead animal bodies pointed to a grim future for wildlife. His installation at the Wellcome Collection exhibition *Making Nature* carried the same message, but when seen amongst other forms of taxidermy display, the dead animal bodies also served to critique of former taxidermists for representing dead animals as alive at a time when global animal populations are collapsing.

Fig. 15. Abbas Akhavan. *Dead fox under a bench in Fatigues at the Biennale de Montréal* (2014), Musée d'Art Contemporain, Montreal, Canada © catrionajeffries .com

Akhavan has used taxidermy installations to question the fact that most museum taxidermy displays take no account of the impact that humans have on the lives and deaths of other species (Akhavan 2019:2). He has stressed his commitment to ethical taxidermy:

> … the animals in the installation were not sourced from the fur trade nor were they trapped as game. The mammals died of natural causes or in car accidents and all of the birds died in collisions with buildings.
> (Jeffries, 2014).

Akhavan exhibited a taxidermy installation, entitled *Fatigues*, which consisted of three specimens representing dead animals lying on the floor of the *Making Nature* exhibition. His taxidermy specimens of a fox, badger and tawny owl resembled the corpses of "road kill" animals often encountered along the roadsides of rural Britain where they have been left after a traffic accident (fig 14). By scattering these "dead" specimens on the floor of the exhibition, visitors were forced to acknowledge their immediate presence, to walk around them or risk damaging them (fig 15). Akhavan wanted his installation to be "a work where the animal was not representational nor a representative but simply present" (Akhavan, 2019:75). Rather than representing an idea

of the animal, like the other taxidermy used in the exihibition, his dead animals were just what they appeared to be – dead animals.

Fig. 16. Abbas Akhavan. *Dead fox installed under a display case at the Wellcome Collection* (2016-17) © Wellcome Collection

Fig. 17. Abbas Akhavan. *A 'dead' badger on the floor of Making Nature* © Michael Bowles.

The way that Akhavan presented his 'dead' animals suggested the uneasy relationship that people have with other species. Akhavan's taxidermy lies unattended, in no special order, outside the organising taxonomies of the

museum. His 'tragic realism' can be read as a critique of the romantic realism epitomised by diorama displays, such as the small *Fox diorama* by Peter Spicer (1876) in Room Two of the Wellcome exhibition, which contains a taxidermy tableau of fox cubs playing outside their den (fig. 18). Spicer must have used considerable skill to give his specimens the appearance of vitality. His fox cubs have active poses and alert expressions whereas Akavan, who wanted to make a work about the impact of humans on Nature, specified that his dead fox, curled up under a display case in Room one, should appear lifeless (Akhavan 2019:72).

Spicer's taxidermy, preserved inside a glass case, presented young fox specimens as a charming picture of Nature, to be aesthetically appreciated. It could be read, as Beddard noted, as a response to growing concerns about Nature conservation in the late 19th century:

> These lifelike recreations of animals in their natural habitats responded to growing scientific interest in animal behaviour and ecology. Their theatricality appealed to visitors' emotions, reflecting the agenda of a growing conservationist movement and concern about the extinction of species. The playfulness of these fox cubs perfectly encapsulates the charm of these new displays. (Beddard, 2017)

Fig. 18. Peter Spicer. *Fox diorama* (1876) ©Horniman Museum.

Like Akeley's dioramas, Spicer's Fox diorama was produced at a time when conservation organisations were voicing concern over threats to wildlife, including the Open Spaces Society (founded in 1865) and the Society for the Protection of Birds (founded in 1889) (Wellcome Collection 2017). These organisations called for the curtailment of unregulated exploitation of the natural world - such as the trade in bird plumes, that nearly drove the great crested grebe to extinction in the United Kingdom (Beddard 2017). Diorama displays carried an environmentalist message about the need to preserve animals in their habitats by constructing a kind of 'ecological theatre' (Wonders, 1993:192); idealised visions of 'unspoiled' and 'harmonious' Nature. The representational tropes seen in the *Fox diorama* – backdrop painting, taxidermy animal specimens in active poses and the use of realistic details of the natural habitat of the animal - became the standard elements of subsequent dioramas that were made to "instill into the urban people a respect for the truth and beauty of nature" (Wonders, 1993:170).

Conclusions

This chapter on *Making Nature; how we see animals* has explored some of the ways that the concept of Nature has been constructed since antiquity and the ways that these historical concepts have framed representations of animals in museums. Those that most influenced 19th century taxidermy displays in museums include the idea that natural organisms can be organized into a systematic classification of species, and that humans are somehow outside, or above, a so-called 'Natural Order'. From the late 19th century, this static view of Nature was transformed by the theory of evolution, which asserted that species could evolve and adapt to their environments. This idea gained widespread acceptance throughout the 20th century and led to displays of 'animal adaptation', for instance, at the Horniman Museum[34]. Also in the 20th century, successive environmental

[34] "The natural history section, which focused on zoology, was organised to illustrate the 'structural adaptations of animals to the chief

movements both in England and America have stressed the importance of recognizing the dependence of animals on their natural environment, giving rise to dioramas in which animals are depicted in their natural habitats. Taxidermy has served as a means to represent each of these conceptual frameworks but Abbas Akhavan's intervention highlighted the obvious fact that interpolating taxidermy into a conceptual schema has obscured the fact that taxidermy displays have cost millions of animals their lives.

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modes of progression … under various conditions of life' (Gomme 1910:9)

Chapter 4. Tessa Farmer at the Natural History Museum.

Fig. 19. Tessa Farmer. *The Little Savages* installation at the Natural History Museum. © Tessa Farmer

In this chapter I examine *Little Savages,* an art installation by Tessa Farmer that was exhibited at the Natural History Museum (NHM) in 2007 (fig 19).

I begin this chapter by examining the 'Order of Nature' in the Natural History Museum that was established by Richard Owen, the first director of the museum in the late 19th century. I then consider the respective roles played by the Curator of Contemporary Art at the NHM, Bergit Arends, and by the institutional policies of the museum that set the conditions governing Farmer's intervention that questioned Owen's order and subsequent articulations of Darwinist theories. This requires an examination of the rules of display at the museum, particularly those that pertained to articulations of Darwinian theories of evolution, natural selection and the struggle for survival.

I then discuss Tessa Farmer's taxidermy tableau; what it looked like, what it was about, and how it came to be exhibited in the Hintze Hall – the most important gallery of the museum located in the nave of Waterhouse's 'cathedral to nature' (Parker, 2010:11). Lastly, I examine the critical significance of introducing fairies into a museum established by Victorian scientists to educate the public through systematic specimen displays and exhibitions about the evolution of species. This requires an examination of the way the museum has represented 'Natural Selection' and 'Evolution'. I argue that by introducing fairies into a Victorian scientific museum, Farmer displayed an aspect of Victorian culture hidden from sight by Richard Owen and subsequent curators. Her fairies blur the boundary between art and science.

The Order of Nature in the Natural History Museum

The Natural History Museum became independent of the British Museum, with its own director and board of trustees, in 1963. The main aim of the museum is to promote the understanding of Natural History through the interpretation of its collection, but other subsidiary aims have existed, such as the aim to "educate the public about the pressing concerns of the day" that appeared in the triennial review for 1990-1993 (Natural History Museum 1993). The Natural History Museum is largely financed by the Department of Culture, Media and Sports but it also raises income from merchandising, from charges to special exhibitions and from grants and charitable donations. As a public museum, it is "dedicated to making natural history as accessible as possible to a wide range of people" (Natural History Museum 2007:6). It is also a research facility. Behind the scenes, museum scientists conduct original research of great practical value using the specimen collection as source material. Because it is a scientific research centre, the public displays have always been essentially scientific in character. The Corporate Plan for 2003-7 stated that; "South Kensington permanent exhibitions [should] … reflect better current scientific knowledge" (Natural History Museum 2007:9). When Michael

Dixon was appointed Museum director in 2003, his ambition was to produce "exhibitions [that] celebrate the natural world" Natural History Museum 2007:9). It was axiomatic that these exhibitions would be scientific in character. The scientific ethos provided the institutional context in which Tessa Farmer's installation *Little Savages* was displayed. *Little Savages* had three parts: a stop-frame animation projected on to a screen, a vitrine in which a set of pencil drawings were displayed and a taxidermy tableau in a glass case mounted flush with the front of a white panel. An information panel beside the taxidermy tableau gave visitors details about the lives of Farmer's imaginary fairies. The three parts of Farmer's display featured aspects of the life of an imaginary 'species' of fairies. Like other artists who exhibited taxidermy in natural history museums in the 21st century, Farmer's installation raised questions about the way that Nature was represented in the museum.

The Natural History Museum holds the national collection of specimens (numbering some 70 million in 2010) that is maintained and developed "to promote the discovery, understanding, responsible use and enjoyment of the natural world" (Parker, 2010:1). To the scientific staff, the specimen collection is a resource for their research[35]. For example, the Zoology department annual report for 2006/7 stated that: "The zoology department … is a world class resource underpinning the biological sciences with unique value in taxonomy and as a biodiversity information resource" (Natural History Museum Zoology annual reports, 2007:3).

Not all contemporary artists have been asked to present works that are critical of the collection. Mark Dion, for example, was asked to exhibit an installation based on the scientific work that goes on behind the scenes at the Museum (Farmer, 2007:4). Dion's installation, entitled *Systema Metropolis* (2007) celebrated the taxonomic research work carried out at

[35] In 2007, the year in which *Little Savages* was exhibited, a total of 571 peer-reviewed papers were published by the scientific staff of the museum (Natural History Museum Annual Report and Accounts 2007-2008).

the museum (Natural History Museum, 2006-08:17). Dion used field work methods and museum protocols for identifying and arranging botanical, invertebrate and fish specimens collected within the Greater London area to produce an exhibition commemorating the tercentenary of the birth of Swedish botanist, zoologist and taxonomist, Carl Linnaeus (1707-1778). His installation consisted of systematic displays of invertebrates collected at Victorian cemeteries, plants collected on the banks of the river Lee in East London, insects collected along the A40 road and fish caught in the river Thames by Lots Road Power Station. Each set of specimens was carefully classified and arranged according to the Linnaean taxonomy. In the Biennial Report for 2006-8, Dion's *Systema Metropolis* was called "a vibrant visitor attraction" in which "Art meets taxonomy" (Natural History Museum, biennial Report 2006-98:17). In the same year that Dion's *Systema Metropolis* went on view in the *Jerwood Gallery*, Bergit Arends arranged Tessa Farmer's *Little Savages* exhibition, an intervention that challenged the linkage between museum displays and its scientific research culture.

Little Savages was exhibited in one of the alcoves that line the two sides of the Central Hall (now known as the Hintze Hall) of the South Kensington building. These alcoves had once served as the display areas for Richard Owen's Index Collection (Yanni, 2014:252), an exhibition of selected specimens that served as a guide to the arrangement of displays in the other galleries of the museum. By choosing this location, Bergit Arends ensured that most visitors would encounter Farmer's installation on their way into the museum to see the other galleries. The encounter with her installation was thus intended to set them thinking about the way ideas about animals were presented in displays throughout the rest of the museum.

The siting of displays within each gallery space had always been an important part of the way the NHM constructed its relationship with the public. In the late 19th century, under the directorship of William Henry

Flower (1831-1899), the Natural History Museum separated its research collection from the specimens on display in the public galleries[36] (Flower, 1898:15), but the public galleries were full of scientific displays right up to the mid-20th century. As an Annual Report from the 1970's confirms, public displays "consisted largely of systematic series of specimens sometimes with little or no accompanying information" (Natural History Museum Annual Report 1970/71:369). From the 1970's onward, taxonomic exhibitions were progressively replaced by thematic exhibitions as curators responded to public demands for more attractive and accessible forms of display (Miles and Alt, 1979:159).

A Department of Public Services was established at the Natural History Museum in 1975 (Wilkinson, 2014:191) to coordinate the planning and production of public displays decades before a government report on widening participation in museums was published in 1999, entitled *Museums for the Many*. From 1975, Roger Miles led the new Department of Public Services, which was organisationally separate from the museum's curatorial structures. Miles was given the authority to co-opt curators and other specialists to the department as needed. Thus from the mid-1970s onwards exhibitions were planned by multidisciplinary teams. For instance, displays for the Hall of Human Biology (1977) were developed by "scientists, exhibit and graphic designers, educational technologists, writers and others working together as a team" (Wilkinson, 2014:658). This meant that science-trained curators were no longer in charge of the production of public displays. Instead, the Public Services department enlisted practitioners with specific skills to work on particular exhibitions. New displays were designed to attract the attention of the general public rather than to address the research needs of the scientific community, as the museum tried to "find ways to present natural history in an appropriately up-to-date way … [and] … consider afresh the whole

[36] Although today the public can catch a glimpse of the research collection in the Darwin Centre.

concept and presentation of natural history in the museum" (Natural History Museum; triennial Report 1969-1971:6).

Unfortunately, the move to attract wider audiences by representing Nature in more accessible ways met with a setback in the form of museum charges. When they were introduced in 1987, visitor numbers fell from 2,676,000 in 1986 to 1,600,000 in 1987 (Natural History Museum; triennial Report 1987-89). As a consequence of government withdrawal of a substantial amount of their subsidy, museums were forced to establish business plans in order to generate more income (Kendall, 2013:15).[37] Sponsors stepped in to fund exhibitions such as the *Ecology* exhibition, which was sponsored by BP (1990-92) and *Dinosaurs,* sponsored by the Ronson Foundation (1992) (NHM reports 1987-89, 1990-93, 19893-96, 1996-97). Temporary exhibitions produced around this time, including *Myths and Monsters'* (1999) and *Animatronic dinosaurs* (2000) charged admission fees. In 2000, admission figures remained at 1,600,000 per annum (Natural History Museum; annual Report 2000). They jumped to 2,196,000 in the following year, when admission charges were abolished (Natural History Museum; annual Report 2001).

In 1999, the New Labour government published a white paper *Museums for the Many* (Great Britain. DCMS 1999) in which they set out policies to broaden the public appeal of museums. The strategies they recommended for widening access include: "the imaginative interpretation of collections" (Great Britain. DCMS 1999:7), events, such as "meet the artist/craftsperson/ scientist" (Great Britain. DCMS 1999:7) and, working with people or organisations who have experience of building audiences in the cultural sector (Great Britain. DCMS 1999:7). The exhibitions of contemporary art that Bergit Arends was to curate in the following decade can be seen as one of a series of measures that the Natural History

[37] At the natural history Museum, this meant the establishment of more café s and "enlarged shops with a wide range of gifts and souvenirs related to natural history" (Natural History Museum 1978-80:1)

Museum put in place in response to Government pressures to increase visitor numbers[38]. Two new scientific centres were planned that would house the museum's specimen collection. These specimen stores were named after Charles Darwin, who's theories resonate throughout the museum and were intended to be places where the public could to see "around 75% of the life sciences collection" (Natural History museum; annual report 2000:3) thus breaking down the barriers between the scientific work of the museum and it's public facing services. And, in a separate move to give the public new ways to understand the Natural World, artists were invited into the Museum to share their personal responses to the collection (Natural History Museum; annual report 2000:7). This was to be directed by Bergit Arends, who was appointed to the post of Curator of Contemporary Art in 2005.

Artists had shown their work in the museum before Bergit Arend's appointment, but the demarcation line between art and science was always strictly upheld. Art works were displayed in the Jerwood Gallery that had opened in 1999 as "a home for contemporary art and sculpture as well as a showcase for some of the museum's 500,000 original natural history drawings, paintings and prints" (Natural History Museum; annual report 1999:12). The rest of the museum's display galleries were given over to scientific displays[39].

Bergit Arends came to the Natural History Museum via the Wellcome Collection, where she had been in charge of the Sci/Art programme. In her introduction to *Talking back to Science; Art Science and the personal*

[38] Arends was given no budget for artists' residencies and had to find funding for Tessa Farmer's installation from the Parabola Arts Trust (Arends 2009:1).

[39] An exception to this rule was the exhibition of Ollie and Suzi's works that were displayed throughout the museum from July 2001 to May 2002. They "worked with museum scientists to create new works reflecting their fascination with predators in the wild". (Natural History Museum; annual report 2001-2:18). Their works were co-produced by animals and the artists themselves.

(2004*)* she stated her belief that artists could contribute to debates about "the relationship between science, society and culture" (Arends & Slater, 2004:5). The artists she invited to exhibit in the Natural History Museum were mostly established art practitioners but she described Tessa Farmer as "an artist at the early stages of her career" (Arends 2009). She introduced Farmer to Gavin Broad, curator of entomology at the museum, who gave her access to the museum's collections and discussed his curatorial methods with her (Arends, 2009:1).

Arends had previously invited contemporary artists to work alongside scientists at the Wellcome Collection. By introducing Tessa Farmer to Gavin Broad, she hoped that an exchange of disciplinary practices would take place: Gavin Broad would give Farmer a better understanding of the insect world and encourage her to augment her personal construct of nature with scientific facts, whilst Tessa Farmer would introduce an element of fantasy to the way nature was represented in the museum. As an art curator working in a scientific museum, Arends could see benefits for artists, who could gain inspiration and content for their own work, and also for the museum, which could benefit from having established modes of knowledge production challenged by artist's works that could reveal new ways to represent the natural world (Farmer, 2007:4).

The Natural History Museum, like many older Natural History museums, including the Horniman Museum and the Manchester Museum, was connected to the past by their historic specimen collections and by the corpus of scientific research that informed their view of the natural world, two aspects which were joined together in the 19th century through taxonomy (Whitehead, 1970:50). Arends felt that it was important to bring contemporary and more personal accounts of nature into the museum as a way of confronting established ways of representing nature. She believed that artists could create a new synthesis between "personal narrative, artistic practice and scientific expertise" (Arends & Slater, 2004:5) by producing alternative or ambiguous interpretations of their

topic, rather than repeatedly articulating narratives underwritten by scientific methods of knowledge production. Artists (like Tessa Farmer) could achieve a synthesis of fact and fiction by representing scientific topics using forms of display that could "combine method and rigor with quirkiness and poetry" (Arends & Thakera, 2003:11). Farmer's taxidermy tableau was a deliberate challenge to the scientific rules of formation that had produced the taxonomic animal displays found elsewhere in the museum.

Arends believed that the museums should employ artists to reflect critically on the function of historical displays in order to stay in touch with contemporary ideas about the environmental crisis circulating in art and politics:

> It is imperative that the sciences remain in dialogue not only with aesthetics but also the ethics and political critique underlying counter-cultural elements in contemporary art.
> (Arends & Slater, 2004:13).

As Reynolds has noted, critical art interventions located in a scientific natural history museum can be used to bring the ethical and political ideas implicated in existing animal displays to the foreground where they can be seen and re-examined (Reynolds, 2020). In the light of widespread concerns about threats to the global ecology, the Natural History Museum acknowledged that the public was entitled to something more than descriptive displays about the natural world. In 2001, the Museum director, Neil Chalmers stated that:

> In the Ten-year vision we promise to engage more publicly on topical issues in the natural sciences. Although individual Museum scientists often comment on such issues, the Museum itself has tended to steer clear of scientific controversy.
> (Natural History Museum, 2001:6).

Farmer's installation brought one such controversy into visibility. Not only did she refuse the conventional tropes of realism in her taxidermy display,

she used her installation to construct a narrative of the conflictual relations between species very different from previous representations of Darwin's theory of Natural Selection that had been shown in the museum.

Tessa Farmer

Tessa Farmer gained her reputation as an artist in the early years of the 21st century after graduating from the Ruskin School of Art in 2003 where she had begun using insects in her work alongside tiny fairies constructed from roots and insect wings (Farmer 2015b). Around this period, a number of artists were using animal parts in their practice, the best known of whom, Damien Hirst, established an international reputation for his animal artworks (Aloi, 2012:1). Tessa Farmer's use of animal and insect specimens can be seen as a contribution to contemporary debates on the way we see and respond to animals (Calarco, 2015). The animal became a subject of theoretical analysis at roughly the same time that animal parts were being distributed in contemporary art practices (Aloi, 2012:xix). Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (2007) have argued that the way animals are understood depends on the contextual frame in which they are placed, be it mythological or scientific (Kalof and Fitzgerald, 2007:39). Each framework suggests different relationships between humans and animals although these, as Honor Beddard demonstrated in Making Nature (see Chapter 4), tend to place humans as superior to other species. In response to this tendency towards human exceptionalism, Calarco has argued that "we must update our ontology of the human-animal distinction" (Calarco, 2015:11)

By the 2000's, displays of taxidermy specimens arranged in taxonomic order were increasingly seen as an outmoded method for presenting the complex relationships between animals and human culture (Calarco, 2015:36). Critics of systematic displays, such as Deleuze, pointed out that there are a "multiplicity of differences" (Deleuze and Guattari 2007:43) between species and therefore many ways to understand human-animal

relations. Also around the turn of the millennium, the ideas of Animal Rights advocates such as Peter Singer (Kalof and Fitgerald 2007:14) were impacting on contemporary art practices (Aloi, 2018b), leading some artists to address ethical issue around human-animal relations through their works. Artists, such as Claire Morgan (see Chapter 8) employed modes of expression designed to engender feelings of concern, horror or sympathy for the animal in the viewer and Abbas Akhevan's dead fox (2016), as suggested, also expresses his ethical concern with animal welfare (see chapter 4).

Farmer's practice had affinities with a number of other artists who appropriated animal parts or taxidermy in their work in the early 21st century, such as Polly Morgan, Clare Morgan, Kate McGwire, Kelly McCallum, Charles Avery and Samantha Sweeting (McAra, 2016:xii). Both Tessa Farmer and Kelly McCallum explored inter-species relations in their work, but the visual form in which they chose to represent this idea differed in some important respects. The golden insects that infest the taxidermy specimens in McCallum's work resembled the real insects on which they were based (fig 20) whereas Farmer gave her insect sized fairies skeletal forms crafted from roots and insect parts.

Fig. 20. Kelly McCallum. Do you hear what I hear? (2007) ©Kelly McCallum

Her fairies unsettle the idea of a strict division between insect and non-insect life forms. They did not fit into a materialist, scientific epistemology that excluded imaginary hybrid species. They have their origins of Tessa Farmer's fairies in the Victorian era, (Anderson, 2016:47) when the existence of fairies was hotly debated amongst the intelligentsia of the day , who included the evolutionary biologist Alfred Russel Wallace who once asserted that fairies were a species of "preterhuman discarnate beings" (Silver, 1986:153) and therefore a suitable subject for scientific research. To Wallace, therefore, a display about the parasitic attack of a hoard of fairies on a fox could have been the representation of a natural phenomenon and therefore suitable for display in a scientific museum.

Edward Gardner, a Victorian theosophist, also believed that fairies existed. He thought that they were a kind of insect:

> … allied to the Lepidoptera or butterfly genus … rather than to the mammalian line … they are as important as we are and perform functions in connection with plant life of an important character (Silver, 1986:153).

Realists, like the anthropologist and biologist Alfred Cort Haddon[40] (1855-1940) believed fairies originated in folklore:

> …fairy tales … [were] stories told by the men of the Iron Age of events that happened to men of the Bronze Age in their conflicts with men of the Neolithic age"
> (Silver, 1986:150).

Whilst spiritualists, supported by renowned author Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, upheld the belief that fairies were "sub-human nature spirits of pygmy stature" (Silver, 1986:148). Conan Doyle was willing to believe that two children who claimed to have photographed fairies in the village of Cottingley, near Bradford, in 1917, had witnessed a genuine apparition of beings from another plane of existence.

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[40] Haddon who was employed by the Horniman Museum in 1902 to organize their specimen collection according to scientific principles.

Farmer's fairies borrowed from each of these origin stories about fairies. Her fairies adopted the behaviour of real insects, but rather than representing a battle between cultures (as Haddon had surmised), in the Natural History Museum installation they have become associated with the battle for survival - better known through the writings of Charles Darwin as 'Natural Selection'[41]. They act out a Darwinist theatre of cruelty.

Fairies, wasps and evolution

Tessa Farmer's fairies first attracted attention whilst on display at the Saatchi Gallery in London in 2004. The owner of the gallery, Charles Saatchi, did much to popularise contemporary art[42] in the late 20th and early 21st centuries (Hatton and Walker, 2000). His collection gained notoriety when part of it went on show at the Royal Academy *Sensation* exhibition in 1997[43]. Thanks to the exposure her work received at the Saatchi Gallery, Tessa Farmer's fairy works were lauded in the press as curious and original (Male, 2011).

Farmer was not a taxidermist, nor did she wish to be one, claiming that she had "bought some taxidermy on line and used it in a piece where I wanted an animated animal. But I never wanted to do it myself because I am quite squeamish about it" (Lange-Berndt, 2015). Furthermore, she was forbidden from using any of the taxidermy in the museum storerooms. However, through her residency at the Natural History Museum in 2007, Farmer found a way to use taxidermy to add a narrative drawn from the scientific study of insect behaviour to her fairy works. When she met Curator of Entomology, Gavin Broad, a leading expert on parasitic wasps,

[41] Darwin, Charles. (2008 first pub 1859) *On the Origin of Species, Edited with an introduction and Notes by Gilliam Beer.* Oxford. Oxford University Press.
[42] Saatchi has been called a 'neophiliac' because he had an obsession with the new and original. (Hatton and Walker, 2000:102)
[43] Polly Morgan also visited this exhibition and was impressed by the works by Damien Hirst and Ron Mueck.

she saw the parallels between the behaviour of her imaginary fairies and that of parasitic wasps. This was so striking that she once described herself as "a Victorian naturalist who has discovered the fairies as natural beings and who engages in the practice of classifying them" (Aloi, G. 2012:34). She was even reported to be considering “scientifically describing them” with the help of Gavin Broad (Arends, 2009:1) although, because her fairies were the products of her creative imagination, they could never fit into a scientific taxonomy of insect species.

Farmer’s fairies originated in the world of the Victorian imagination, beyond the remit of Linnaean taxonomy that scientists use to categorise actual specimens of organic life (although Gavin Broad felt that “Tessa’s fairies seemed just as real as ‘my’ wasps” (Martin, 2007). Most commentators who saw her fairies regarded them as metaphors for insects, not as a real species. Petra Lange-Burndt for example, saw them as: “anthropomorphic metaphors as individuals, but insect metaphors as a swarm. But like all metaphors they are open to interpretation” (Lang-Burndt, 2016:79).

Farmer’s interest in fairies was aroused by reading the works by her great grandfather, Arthur Machen (1863-1947), a writer of supernatural fantasy and horror fiction stories (Sears 2016:7). The tiny winged fairies in the illustrations of Arthur Rackham and Cicely Mary Barker had put a visual form to the idea of the “fairy folk” her great grandfather wrote about (McAra, 2016:ix). She also found inspiration in the work of the Richard Doyle (1884-1883), a Victorian illustrator of fairy stories, whose illustration of *The Triumphal March of the Elf King* (1870) (fig 21) depicts a troupe of fairies leading enslaved insects, birds and rodents in a triumphal procession (Anderson, 2016:44). The fairies in Doyle’s illustration may have served as models for the aggressive fairies she created for *Little Savages*.

The belief that fairies could cross over from the supernatural world into our own created the imaginary space for Victorian painters to populate

their paintings with fairies cavorting with woodland creatures in the 19th century, and opened the door to fairyland for Tessa Farmer in the 21st century.

Figure 21. Richard Doyle. *The Triumphal March of the Elf King* (1870)

19th century fairy paintings can be read as a reaction to the sterile rationality of science that had robbed nature of its magic (Silver, 1986:148). The 19th century empirical biologist Thomas Huxley (who played an influential role in persuading those in charge of the Natural History Museum to accept Darwin's theory of natural selection), reduced natures complexity to 5 basic morphological types (Huxley, 1970:206). Huxley's empirically based knowledge of the regularities of animal structure, was given further support by Darwin's theory of evolution, and became an important part of the scientific framework through which the world of nature was understood at the Natural History Museum from the late 19th century onwards. Fantastic forms, such as Farmer's skeletal fairies were precluded from Huxley's systematic morphology.

Science and fiction

Farmer's *Little Savages* play their role in a dramatic representation of Natural Selection. By making her fairies compete with another species of animal, Farmer brought together two ideas of nature that had previously been kept apart. The scientific picture of nature based upon material evidence that Victorian biologists like Charles Darwin had advocated, and a supernatural picture of nature based on fairy folklore and literature that Victorian painters, like Joseph Noel Paton (1821-1901), had depicted, thus breaking the barrier between Art and Science. Farmer's tableau brought fairies into a scientific museum, and, at the same time, brought Darwin's theory of Natural Selection into fairyland.

Darwin's account of the struggle for survival was unpopular with many of his contemporaries because it represented nature in terms of discord and suffering and thus contradicted the Biblical vision of natural harmony. Darwin had argued that each organic being must "struggle for life and … suffer great destruction" (Darwin, 2003:79). This vision of Nature upset the aesthetic sensibilities of eminent Victorians, like John Ruskin (1819-1900) who conceived nature as a place untainted by the concept of a "struggle for existence". (Knoepflmacher, 1977:248). For such aesthetes, the world of the Victorian fairy painting provided an imaginary safe haven from the cruelty of nature whereas Farmer's fairies remind the viewer that; "nature is savage …" (Lange-Burndt 2013). They have joined in the struggle for survival with enthusiasm.

An earlier display of Farmer's fairies had attracted a Darwinian interpretation. *Swarm* was exhibited at the Saatchi Gallery in 2004 (Saatchi Gallery 2004?). It contained a hoard of skeletal fairies that, on this occasion, attacked common garden insects.

Fig. 22. Tessa Farmer. *Fairies attacking garden insects in Swarm* (2004) © Saatchi Gallery.

Fig. 23. Farmer's fairies attack, or hitch a ride on, garden insects, in *Swarm* (2004) © the Saatchi Gallery

In *Swarm,* (figs 22, 23) a wasp is being tugged and kicked whilst another flying insect is pulled down by its wings by aggressive fairies working together. Other flying insects, such as a butterfly and a demoiselle fly, are

being captured so they can serve as vehicles on which the fairies can ride (fig 30). The fairies appear to select which insects to attack and those to enslave. Their minute scale and the wings on their backs give the fairies an appearance not dissimilar to flying ants. The Saatchi collection web site describes them as

> … an actual species, as animalistic and Darwinian as any other. Exchanging Victorian romanticism for the darker pragmatism of science, Farmer evidences her specimens as fearsome skeletal fiends, plausible "hell's angels" of a microscopic apocalypse. (Saatchi Gallery n.d. b)

This swarm of tiny warrior fairies was exhibited in a white-walled gallery amongst other works of contemporary Art. The battle between Farmer's fairies and the garden insects was therefore meant to be viewed as a visual spectacle, cut off from broader social or cultural contexts that could have suggested additional meanings. When Farmer exhibited another fairy swarm in the Central Hall the Natural History Museum, it became possible to interpret the fairies as a kind of predatory insect species intent on propagating its species, because in the context of the museum, inter-species attacks were interpreted through Darwin's theory of Natural Selection. In the enchanted world of the glass case, Farmer's fairies have found an evolutionary niche, but even in Farmer's parallel universe their survival is not guaranteed because they have to compete with other species of insect.

> The social wasps are the long term enemies of the fairies; they compete for food ... Bumble bees are used as transport, like motor bikes ... The fairies are learning how to control swarms of bees and gangs of ants as weapons.
> (Farmer, 2015b).

Farmer's fairies occupy a world in which nature is mixed up with culture, where science facts are mixed up with science fantasy. As McCara has noted "You have to move beyond the scientific/ fantasy boundary … to explore Farmers work" (McCara, 2016:xiii). Her fairies resemble tiny

human skeletons, downsized to micro-scale, but behave like parasitic wasps. They carry weapons in their hands, not stings their tails (fig 70). They use hedgehog spines to attack the soft parts of the fox's body and force wasps to sting their victim. They gather together in a swarm like sociable wasps, but attack their prey individually like solitary, parasitic wasps. Farmer mixed some scientific facts into her fantasy world to produce a "phantasmagorical" tableau (Arends, 2009:1).

Little Savages

Fig. 24. Tessa Farmer. The damaged taxidermy fox in *Little Savages* © Tessa Farmer.

The central element of Farmer's *Little Savages* installation in the Hintze Hall was a taxidermy tableau. It depicted a dramatic moment in the parasitic infestation of a fox. According to Michel Serres (2013), parasites are "an insidious infection that weakens without killing … seldom if ever larger than the size of an insect" (Serres, 2013, quoted in Lange-Burndt, 2016: 82). What look like a swarm of insects (but which on closer inspection turns out to be a swarm of tiny insect-sized fairies), is shown in the act of attacking a fox, settling on the soft parts of its body then prodding it with sharp spines or insect stings to subdue their victim and

find suitable places to lay their eggs (fig 24). The taxidermy fox specimen that was already in poor repair when Farmer acquired it at second-hand, has been further degraded by insects' nests, that clog its fur. An unusual bony structure hangs from the jaw of the fox and a sinister crab-like creature sits on its back. These unexpected additions disturb the sense of order normally found in museum displays (Farmer, 2007:29).

Fig. 25. Tessa Farmer. *A fairy uses a wasp to sting the fox in Little Savages* © Tessa Farmer.

Tessa Farmer's installation at the Natural History Museum was a small display, a scale that was appropriate for the tiny fairies she was showcasing. Each element of her installation depicted an episode in the life of her malicious fairies. Besides the 'fox tableau' she displayed a stop-frame animation showing a band of fairies dismembering a long-legged insect, and a set of careful pencil studies showing young fairy parasites emerging from the body of a caterpillar. Farmer based her fairy's life stories on the natural behaviour of parasitic wasps, that she had learned about from Gavin Broad, Curator of Entomology at the Natural History Museum (Broad, 2007:13). Farmer once described the world of insects as

a “parallel universe” (Farmer, 2015c) about which most people know very little. Her installation brought this unknown universe into vision, revealing a type of insect behaviour that is both shocking and fascinating - parasitism.

The *Little Savages* tableau was displayed in a recess behind a flat panel, making it appear more like a three-dimensional tableau than a specimen display, but it was essentially a glass case containing taxidermy specimens, a form of display that has had a long history at the museum. Glass case displays such as those used in the fish gallery (fig 26) were typical of the public specimen displays until the 1970’s when a major re-organisation and redisplay of the museum’s specimen collection was put into operation (Natural History Museum ,1972-4:3).

Fig. 26. Natural History Museum. *The Fish Gallery in 1935*. © Natural History Museum.

Farmer used the glass display case that contained *Little Savages* as a means to produce an effective surprise (Bruner, 1966:14). Glass cases allow close inspection of a taxidermy specimen whilst protecting delicate

the material from which it is constructed from damage. But the visitor who drew closer to the glass case containing *Little Savage* would receive a surprise - what looked like insects at a distance would turn out, on closer inspection, to be tiny fairies just one centimetre high (fig 22).

Fig. 27. Tessa Farmer. *Fairies attacking the fox in Little Savages* ©Tessa Farmer.

The discomfort of the fox is signalled by its crouching posture, tongue lolling, and tail dragging on the ground. Tessa Farmer's tableau in not a dispassionate representation of parasitism but a vision of animal suffering that invites sympathy (Creed, 2017:126). Barbara Creed has described the appearance of a shabby fox as abject; "hopeless, wretched, contemptible, despicable, servile, cast aside, … degraded, without dignity … " (Creed, 2017:21). She adds that such an animal "emanates vulnerability" (Creed, 2017:127). *Little Savages* presented a fox as a suffering subject, fairies as parasitic insects and natural selection as cruel. This was not the way that glass case displays at the Natural History Museum had previously presented ideas about animals. Little Savages was a form of narrative taxidermy tableau.

Narrative taxidermy tableaux had enjoyed popularity in the 19th and early 20th centuries (Poliquin, 2012:171) but were generally to be found in private collections rather than in scientific museums. The German taxidermist Herman Ploucquet (1816-1878) is credited with the invention

of narrative taxidermy tableaux. He produced a series of comic taxidermy tableaux telling the story of *Reinke the fox* for the Great Exhibition of 1851 (Morning Chronicle. Monday September 1st 1851). Ploucquet who worked as a taxidermist to the Royal Museum of Natural History in Stuttgart, influenced many 19th century English taxidermists including Walter Potter (1835-1918) who produced comic tableaux of his own (fig 27). Potter set up a private museum at Bramber in Sussex (Henning 2007) where he exhibited curious anthropomorphic taxidermy tableaux from 1861 until its closure in the early 1970s[44] (Eastoe, 2012:37). Like Potter's taxidermy tableaux, Farmer's "figurative diorama" (McAra, 2016:ix) told a story using natural history specimens as characters.

Fig 28. Walter Potter. *The death and Burial of Cock Robin.* (1861) Antique Trades Gazette.

Changing the Rules of Formation at the Natural History Museum

To understand the significance of Farmer's installation at the NHM, I draw on insights from Foucault's work about the organisation of knowledge. Foucault has pointed out that institutions, such as museums, establish

[44] At an auction of Potter's tableaux, in 2003, Damien Hirst offered one million pounds for the entire collection, but his bid was unsuccessful (Turner 2013:28).

'rules of formation' (Foucault 2002a:82) that govern the production of displays. At the Natural History Museum these rules have changed as ideas in wider society about human-animal relations have evolved and influenced the museum discourse (Foucault 2002a:143).

Richard Owen gave taxidermy displays at the Natural History Museum their original rules of formation when he used animal specimens to bring Linnaeus's system of classification to life. This had a long-term effect on the way that the Order of Nature was understood in the Natural History Museum:

> With mammals arranged closest to the centre of the museum and the less complex organisms towards the edges, the arrangement naturalized the artificial systems of taxonomy.
> (Beddard, 2017)

Owen's rules of formation were already being questioned by the end of the nineteenth century, by which time, as Carla Yanni has argued, "most biologists considered their science to be the study of the behaviour of organisms, not merely the study of form" (Yanni, 1996:296), and they have since been further modified to reflect the changing demands of both the scientific community and the public. Public pressure for more accessible and engaging displays led the museum to change the rules of formation for animal displays in the second half of the 20th century as museum visitors became more sophisticated and less interested in static forms of display (Andrews, 2013:151). Hence, Taxidermy became just one technology of display amongst many others in the exhibitions produced by the Department of Public Services in the post-1979 period when the museum began to shift from taxonomic to theme-based displays. The *Discovering Mammals* display in 1986, for example, went "beyond merely displaying specimens" because the aim was "to tell visitors about the natural history of mammals in its broadest sense, explaining about life in the natural habitats, distribution, conservation status and adaptations to habitat" (Natural History Museum 1986).

Some taxidermy specimens were incorporated in the *Discovering Mammals* exhibition, but were complemented by "films, sound recordings, interactive displays, photographs, graphics and computer games" (Natural History Museum, 1986). The taxidermy specimens that remained on display in the late 20th and early 21st centuries were increasingly exhibited as heritage objects with a warning attached to them stating that they were from the museum's "historical collection" and were "faded or show other signs of age" (Information label at NHM 2015[45]). Specimens showing obvious signs of age do not afford a convincing representation of a living animal, because, as Hauser has commented in the context of his article on taxidermy realism: "stitches, seams, a discoloured beak or foot, a mouldy ear, thinning fur, sagging skin or an awkwardly placed limb all testify against the illusion of life" (Hauser, 1999:11).

In the 1990's a new climate of "audience-awareness and reflexivity:" (Ross 2004 p100) amongst museum curators, sometimes known as the 'New Museology' (Vergo, 1989), led to the questioning of the authority of traditional museum approaches (Van Saaze, 2013:19). O'Neill and Wilson have argued that this development brought about a more actively critical approach to the curating of objects and artefacts (such as taxidermy) and encouraged experimental curatorial practices that respond to changing cultural attitudes and political demands (O'Neill and Wilson, 2015:155). Wider social considerations, such as the colonial origin of many of the specimens in museum collections, became part of museum discourse (see for instance: Hooper-Greenfield, 2000) and led some curators to look more closely at the historical associations of the taxidermy specimens they presented to the public (Ross, 2004:85). For example, Bergit Arends, Curator of Contemporary Art at the Natural History Museum, turned to contemporary artists such as Mark Dion and Tessa Farmer to provide critical interventions that could highlight some of the wider social issues

[45] This notice was attached to the specimen cases in the Mammals gallery when I visited the NHM in 2015.

associated with the display of 19th century specimens in the 21st century. These artists were given the opportunity to uncouple specimen displays from the scientific research culture of the museum and to use taxidermy to engage with social and ethical themes directly.

In 2000, the Natural History Museum launched an Arts–Science program aimed at to encouraging the exhibition of contemporary art in the museum. The Director, Neil Chalmers, saw art as a way to bring contemporary visions of nature into the museum that would engage a wider public:

> … art is also helping us to reach out to new adult audiences in innovative and exciting ways … We are striving to engage more and more people in the natural sciences.
> (Natural History Museum; annual report 2000:7).

By the millennium, the Art-Science programme at the Natural History Museum was arranging exhibitions designed to entertain and inspire visitors, rather than simply communicate scientific knowledge to a passive public (Natural History Museum; 2000). For example, Jan Fabre dressed curators in insect costumes for his performance work; *A consilience* (2000) and four years later, Mark Fairnington exhibited microscopically detailed paintings of insects in an exhibition entitled *Fabulous Beasts* which invited visitors to look at insects depicted at an enormously enlarged scale. (Natural History Museum, 2005)

It is significant that in 2000 - the same year that Neil Chalmers launched the Art-Science programme - the Tate Modern Gallery opened, attracting record numbers of visitors. Chris Smith, Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1997-2001), believed that shared participation in the arts would build a stronger sense of community in the wake of the damage done to social cohesion by the policies of the previous government (Wallinger and Warnock, 2000:172), and his belief seemed to be justified

when the Tate Modern's visitor figures[46] exceeded those of the Natural History Museum in its first year of opening. As the visitor numbers to the Tate Modern demonstrated, contemporary art works had the potential to draw large numbers of new visitors into public museums in ways that scientific displays could rarely achieve because, as Guattari has argued, scientific displays 'bracket out' subjective affects (Guattari, 1995:100). A contemporary artist like Tessa Farmer, for instance, could use a hoard of malicious fairies to provoke a more affective response than a taxonomic specimen display.

Art/science projects such as *A Consilience*, *Fabulous Beasts* and *Little Savages* fed into the regular cycle of temporary exhibitions upon which so much depended when it came to attracting new visitors into the Natural History Museum. The 'visitor offer strategy' for 2003 stated that the Museum aimed to improve "the visitor experience … by refreshing our permanent displays and developing imaginative special exhibitions that attract new and more diverse audiences" (Natural History Museum 2003:2). Temporary Art/science exhibitions were one way the museum could challenge visitors "to think about the world in fresh ways" (Natural History Museum; annual report and review 2004-5:26).

Little Savages and Darwin.

Little Savages re-presented and re-interpreted the idea of 'Natural Selection' in a way that brought out the cruelty inflicted by parasitic attacks on their victims and in so doing, it brought an aspect of natural selection that had troubled Darwin back into vision. Farmer's fairy tableau was an example of what Michel Foucault has called a "point of diffraction" (Foucault 2002a:73), that is, the representation of an established concept in a new form. The title of Farmer's tableau references the "savage" behaviour of her fairies, recalling the terminology of late 19th century

[46] Visitors to the NMM in 2005-6 were 3,281,810. In the same year 3,900,000 people visited the Tate Modern (Tate Gallery, 2006).

anthropologists who classified the behaviour of certain cultures as 'savage', i.e. violent, uncivilized and out of control; in short, closer to the behaviour of predatory animals than to civilized humans. (Knauft, 2018). The juxtaposition of ideas of "savage" behaviour with tiny "fairy" beings created a conceptual dissonance. How could the enchanting fairies of English folklore that Shakespeare had given wide popular appeal in his play *a Midsummer Night's Dream*, be savage?

Tessa Farmer's *Little Savages* challenged rules of formation for taxidermy displays that had been put in place at the Natural History Museum in the late 19th century, when the debate about the origin of species was beginning to tip in favour of Darwin's secular evolution theory (Yanni, 2014:253). According to Stearn, the second director of the Natural History Museum, William Henry Flower (1831-1899), who took over from Richard Owen in 1883, broadly accepted Darwin's theory of natural selection (Stearn, 1980:76). His predecessor, Richard Owen, had seen natural history as "primarily about collecting and classifying" (Beckett and Watkins, 2011:62) and in keeping with his creationist beliefs, he had separated the fossil collection that represented extinct species from specimens of living species in order to demonstrate that they were unconnected (Yanni, 1996:289). William Flower saw fit to bring specimens of extinct animals together with those of living species, in order to demonstrate evolutionary connections between them (Flower, 1898:12). By simply re-arranging the location of fossil remains in the galleries, Flower was able to produce displays suggesting that extinct species had evolved into living ones. He did not have to change the physical space in the galleries, acquire new specimens, or radically alter curatorial practices to achieve the transformation of his displays. Flower produced maximum effect with a minimum of means. Henceforth, Darwin's theory of the evolution of species became a leading narrative in the Museum's discourse, valorized above Lamarck's rival evolution

theory[47], and decisively overwriting the theological narrative of Divine Creation (Smith, R. 1977:226). To stamp Darwin's authority on the museum, Flower installed a statue of Charles Darwin on the main staircase of Central Hall in 1889 where it stands today, looking down the nave of Owen's "cathedral to nature" (Stearn, 1980:76) like a patron saint.

In the mid 20th century, the conjunction of genetic mutation science with evolution theory became a part of a "Neo-Darwinian synthesis" (Asma, 2001: 201) that brought new conceptual formations into the museum[48]. Darwin's ideas about the origin of species that have circulated in the Natural History Museum since Flower's time as Museum Director in the late 19th century, have provided the theme of many exhibitions during the 20th century, such as the *Darwin Centenary* exhibition (1956), the *Darwin and Wallace* exhibition (1958), the *Origin of Species* exhibition (1981), the *Nature of History* exhibition (1995), and the *Darwin* exhibition (2008).

The *Origin of Species* exhibition (1981) which marked the centenary of Darwin's death, focused on the key points of Darwin's theory of natural selection (Natural History Museum, 1980). In this exhibition, visual displays of taxidermy specimens were accompanied by text panels, on which the four principles behind Darwin's theory were enunciated (the first of which provided the theme for Farmer's *Little Savages*):

> - All organisms face a struggle to survive and reproduce;
> - There must be more than enough offspring to replace the adults.
> - Individual differences predispose some individuals to survive better than others;
> - Well-adapted individuals will breed more successfully.
>
> (British Museum (Natural History) 1981:116)

[47] The opposite is the case at the 'Grand Gallerie d'Evolution' in Paris where Lamarck's theories are valorized over Darwin's. The museum invites visitors to: "share the knowledge initiated by Lamarck, established by Darwin and enriched for two centuries by the scientific community" (La Grande Gallerie de l'Evolution 2012:5).

[48] The art/science exhibition 'T*he Nature of History'* (1999) presented a vision of nature in flux and transformation, based on the neo-Darwinist concepts of genetic mutation and evolution.

The *Origin of the Species* exhibition demonstrated that Darwin's book, which had been published over a century before, was recognised as a foundational contribution to the biological sciences, and that the theories it contained were still valorised by the museum. Darwin's four principles replaced the theory of "types" advocated by Owen that held that the essential "type" of an animal was unchanging (Stearn, 1980:31). The *Origin of the Species* exhibition articulated Darwin's theory that species adapt and change over a protracted period of time, during which tiny variations taking place at a genetic level can become established in a breeding population of animals. It also underlined the first principle of his theory - that every organism has to struggle to survive in order to reproduce.

Farmer's fairies and Natural History Museum's rules of formation.

Farmer's taxidermy tableau differed in appearance from other glass case displays in the Hintze Hall - and throughout in the Museum - although the theme it illustrated, the struggle for survival, was already circulating in the museum, framed historically by Darwin's theory of Natural Selection. Gorman has suggested that Tessa Farmer "embraced natural history almost as a playful archaeological excavation of a forgotten and arcane system of knowledge of the world" (Gorman, 2020:59). The cruel behavior of parasitic wasps, for example, was well known in the 18th century, when the naturalist Edward Donovan described their behavior in terms of cruelty and conquest:

> [They] exist by rapine and plunder, and support their infant offspring on the vitals of larger insects … it is now in vain that the unwieldy animal attempts resistance as all its efforts are but the sport of a savage conqueror.
> (Donovan (1793) in Broad 2016:23)

Tessa Farmer's *Little Savages* are Donovan's 'savage conquerors'. Their motive for attacking the fox was that of all parasites, to lay their eggs on

(or inside) its body to ensure the survival of their species. Her 'figurative diorama' enacted a dramatic moment in the eternal struggle for survival.

Darwin himself had considered parasitic wasps to be so completely fixated on the propagation of their own species that their behaviour fell outside any moral system that could be attributed to a benevolent God:

> I cannot persuade myself that a beneficent and omnipotent God would have designedly created the Ichneumonidea (a family of small flies) with the express intention of their feeding within the living bodies of caterpillars.
> (Charles Darwin quoted in Smith 1977:226).

By substituting skeletal warriors for wasps, Tessa Farmer created a metaphor for the cruel and unequal conflicts at the heart of the process of Natural Selection which had upset Darwin's moral sensibilities. In an interview with Petra Lange Berndt, Farmer stated that the tableau was intended to represent the idea that "nature is red in tooth and claw" (Lange-Berndt, 2014) – a phrase taken from a poem by Victorian poet laureate, Alfred Lord Tennyson, and widely adopted to describe the pitiless process of natural selection in which the strong overcome the weak.

> Who trusted God was love indeed
> And love Creation's final law
> Tho' Nature, red in tooth and claw
> With ravine, shriek'd against his creed"
> (Tennyson *In Memoriam A. H. H*. 1849).

Yanni has characterized natural selection as "a process of trial and error based on massive wastage and death of vast numbers of unfit creatures" (Yanni, 2004:227). Darwin was aware that his theory of natural selection presented a challenge to the moral systems of his time because evolution as he conceived it had no moral purpose and did not recognise the idea of progress (Smith, 1977:226). If survival is the guiding principle of evolution

and humans are bound by the same natural laws as parasites, then his theory had serious implications for public morality. Until *Little Savages* was exhibited, the moral implications of evolution theory had remained buried behind representations of abstract principles.

When Claringbull's new programme of thematic displays was put into effect in the 1980's, scientific content became more important than spectacle in public displays, as these notes on the new *Discovering mammals* permanent exhibition record:

> The scientific content of the exhibition makes a point of going beyond merely displaying specimens. There are a large number of specimens in the gallery, but the aim has been to tell visitors about the natural history of mammals in its broadest sense, explaining about life in the natural habitats, distribution, conservation status and adaptations to habitat.
> (Natural History Museum, 1986)

Taxidermy was useful for illustrating the evolutionary concept of animal adaptation to their natural habitats, but not so useful for articulating more abstract concepts like cladistics or genetics. The new exhibitions about *Natural Selection*, for example, used new display technologies like photography and scale models of animals. The taxidermy fox in *Little Savages* stood out from neighbouring displays not only because it was a shabby specimen, but also because it had been selected as the centrepiece of a contemporary display in the first place.

The presence of Farmer's 'swarm' of fairies in a scientific collection caused some consternation in the scientific press, where articles were published under shock headlines like: "*You Little Beasts!"* (Stacey, 2008,) and "*Demonic Deeds in Symbolic Art*" (Martin 2007). David Stacey noted that *Little Savages* stood apart from surrounding displays of paleontology specimens, commenting that "perhaps the museum's staff wants to keep it this way." (Stacey, 2008), dropping a hint that the scientific establishment of the museum might not welcome a narrative display in a scientific

museum. *Little Savages* attracted several other press reviews. Matt Price writing in *Fused Magazine* Nov/Dec 2007, saw it as "allegorical for man's destruction of the natural world" and called her "nasty little fairies"; "no Tinkerbells", "malevolent fairies", "miniscule monsters", (Price, 2007:34). He also wondered if her installation could be "a warning to mankind on behalf of extremist epidemiologists" (Price, 2007:34) an interpretation that played upon contemporary fears about the spread of infection. A more scientific reviewer thought her tableau "focused on how insect communities interact ecologically" (Martin, 2007), bringing an ecological rather than evolutionary interpretation to bear on the tableau. Another commentator suggested that her fairies represented "decay, death and evolution" (Lange-Berndt 2014:267); three themes that rarely occur together in museum displays that more usually focus on different forms of life, rather than death. *'Little Savages'* was open to multiple interpretations, but parasitism, as conveyed by Gavin Broad to Farmer during her residency at the Natural History Museum, was one of the most important narrative elements in her tableau. Farmer also admitted that the idea of fairies attacking a taxidermy specimen had come from a trip to see the taxidermy specimens in the museum's storerooms where she observed the damaged that had been caused by insect attacks (Neal, 2007:19).

Little Savages transgressed the institutional rule that an actual specimen should represent a species, or failing that, an accurate model of the creature it is supposed to represent. As Haraway has commented, this rule is underpinned by the "belief that a realistic animal specimen can contain some evident truth about the animal it represents because, like Akeley's dioramas, it can 'hold a mirror up to nature'" (Haraway, 2004: 166). Many thousands of parasitic wasps are kept in the vast specimen store of the museum as a resource for taxonomic research. They form part of an insect collection that numbers at least 25 million, nearly all of which is kept in storage (Parker, 2010:106). In accordance with the scientific research ethos of the museum, these tiny specimens are generally mounted flat and

displayed systematically in drawers or on vertical Perspex panels mounted on walls (for instance in the Darwin Centre) that enable visual comparisons to be made easily. In contrast to these lifeless arrangements, *Little Savages* gave parasitic wasps personality and agency. Farmer's vision of parasitism was one that acknowledged the individual agency of the insects, but which also recognised that their individual actions were ultimately circumscribed by the impersonal logic of evolution [49].

Natural selection, Cruelty and the struggle for survival.

Bergit Arends brought Farmer's artworks into the Natural History Museum to "present biology in a different way" (Arends 2020) from previous natural history displays. Farmer's small installation was located in what Arends called "the iconic Central Hall" where it " sat alongside major scientific specimens" (Arends, 2009:1). Unlike these impressive specimen displays, *Little Savages* tableau was a modest intervention that represented the artist's ethico-aesthetic engagement with her subject (Guattari, 1995:10). Her personal narrative avoided the pitfalls of being too "dryly academic and patronising" or too "decoratively obfuscating" (Elwes, 2004:9). Farmer's tableaux are generally small-scale[50]. The smallness of the tableau can be seen as appropriate for a display of tiny fairies that require close-up viewing, but although modest in scale, Farmer's intervention exposed the ethical implications of evolution theory that had been pushed into the background of the many articulations of Darwin's theories previously shown in the museum. Her damaged taxidermy fox brought animal suffering to the notice of visitors.

[49] Mary Midgley has argued that animal behaviour is "determined by real motives and complex drives, not merely mechanical causes and imperatives". She, like Darwin, places both human and animal behaviour "on the same continuum, rather than treating animals as wholly different phenomena" (Gooding 1978)

[50] Foe example, her 'The Infected Museum' installation at the Last Tuesday Society (2015)

Farmer's intervention was exhibited at a time when the Natural History Museum had become more aware of its need to update the offer for its visitors (Natural History Museum. 2008b:9). The establishment of an Art - Science programme in 1999 had created a new display culture at the Natural History Museum which enabled contemporary art to be brought into the public galleries to explore "the intersection of science, technology and art" (Arends & Slater, 2004:12) next to more traditional heritage displays. Tessa Farmer's fairy parasites started a dialogue about the way taxidermy had been historically used to represent animals by the museum.

It is left to the viewer to decide whether Farmer's fairies were guided by wilful intention or animal instinct. Their actions were destructive and cruel but entirely in keeping with Darwin's theory of Natural Selection. They can be read in two registers: as insects acting out an ineluctable evolutionary process of natural selection, or as tiny humans consciously setting out to harm other living creatures using weapons and force of numbers to overcome the (futile) resistance of their victims. The idea of morality only occurs in the second case. Nature has no need for morality (we talk about the law of the jungle as essentially lawless) and the Natural History Museum has largely kept away from the topic, partly because since the late 19th century, they have subscribed to the view that scientific biology is a field of empirical research that has no room for debates on the ethical dimensions of human-animal relations[51]. Because *Little Savages* raised questions about the way we should relate to other species of animal, Aloi has suggested it can be seen as a "morality play on the stage of nature" (Aloi, 2019:101).

When artists are given the opportunity to "define what the museum is talking about" (Foucault 2002a:45), as in the case of Tessa Farmer's intervention at the Natural History Museum, they can challenge the

[51] See Stearn (1980) Chapters 6 & 7 for an account of the scientific ideas of the first two directors of the Natural History Museum.

rules of formation of a museum by suggesting different ways of defining what it is being talked about and make a concept, like natural selection, "visible, nameable and describable" (Foucault 2002a:45-46) in a new way.

Tessa Farmer's exhibition *Little Savages* came about as a result of external and internal pressures for change to public displays at the Natural History Museum. Her fairy tableau challenged the science-based rules of formation followed in taxidermy displays elsewhere in the museum in four ways. Firstly, her taxidermy fox did not act a placeholder for a species in a taxonomic series - as it would have done in Richard Owen's 19th century display. Secondly, the taxidermy fox was in such poor condition it fell foul of museum norms that valorised taxidermy realism as a mode of representation in diorama displays. Thirdly, her fairies had no place in the museum's scientific regime of knowledge, and Fourthly, the mode of display she chose – a taxidermy tableau – belonged to popular culture rather than to the research culture of a scientific museum. *Little Savages* articulated a new vision of "Nature" in a different form to the displays already present in the museum and, as Bergit Arends commented, it offered a new interpretation to visitors:

> By inviting artists to work with objects in the collection and soliciting artist's responses to the collection, yet another layer of meaning is created and objects and their classification within a research and display context are interpreted afresh (Farmer 2007:4).

Little Savages was a small installation in a big museum. The Natural History Museum Annual Report barely mentioned Farmer's installation (Natural History Museum; triennial review 2006-2008, 2008:5). Tessa Farmer's fairy tableau entered into a brief dialogue with other animal displays nearby but it did not herald a move to bring fairy tales into the museum. When it was removed, the Natural History Museum remained essentially what it had been before it was exhibited, an enormous specimen collection that was used to support taxonomic research and to

educate the public about the scientific study of animals. The ethical issues around human-animal relations that *Little Savages* had raised became more important in Museum policies and practices in the following decade, as threats to global biodiversity increased (Natural History Museum 2022).

Chapter 5. Mark Dion, Henry McGhie and Etienne Russo at the Manchester Museum.

In this chapter I discuss two exhibitions at the Manchester Museum in which taxidermy played an important part. The first is Mark Dion's installation *The Bureau for the Centre for the Study of Surrealism and its Legacy* (2005): a locked office filled with antique furniture, taxidermy specimens and other unusual objects (fig 28), and the second is *Living Worlds* (2011), an exhibition that replaced existing displays in the museum's *Mammal Hall* with 13 themed installations, produced jointly by curator Henry McGhie and artist-designer Etienne Russo.

Fig. 29. Mark Dion. '*The Bureau for the Centre for the Study of Surrealism and its Legacy* (2005) © Manchester Museum/ University of Manchester

I begin by discussing the taxidermy displays in the Mammal Hall of the museum at the time of Mark Dion's display. This entails an examination of the role played by *Alchemy* - a joint Manchester University and Manchester

Museum project that arranged contemporary artists' residencies and exhibitions at the museum ('Alchemy', n.d.). I then discuss the contents of the *Bureau* and explore interpretations of what his assemblage might mean in the context of a University Museum. I move on to discuss the rules of formation that have governed the production of taxidermy displays at the Manchester Museum since it opened to the public in 1888 in order to understand the critical role that the *Living Worlds* exhibition played in the Museum. Finally I consider how these two exhibitions that used taxidermy challenged established taxidermy display practices.

Manchester Museum

Manchester Museum is a part of a major British University. It receives funding from the University, but, in recognition for its public services, it also receives State funding. For example, in 2000/2001, the government provided 55% of its funding, while the University provided the remaining 45%. (Manchester Museum 2001:4). When developments are planned, such as building works or a major re-display, grants have been sought from bodies such as Heritage Lottery, the European Regional Development Fund and the Wolfson Foundation. The museum's priorities have been constituted historically from a mixture of elements including academic ideas about the scope and limits of the biological sciences and the acceptance of scientific principles of classification, alongside an aspiration to provide the general public with displays that can "provoke debate and reflection about the past, present and future of the earth and its inhabitants" (Manchester Museum 2018:6). Like many Victorian museums, the Manchester Museum has retained its original Gothic building, and has a huge collection of taxidermy.

Manchester Museum is unusual amongst public museums because it does not simply serve the public: it is also a university museum. The work of the museum has been constantly informed and transformed by the academic mission of the University of Manchester. One of the principal functions of the Manchester Museum has been to support University teaching and

research, but since it moved to its current building in the late 19th century, it has produced increasing numbers of displays and exhibitions for the general public. As Nick Merriman, Director of the Manchester Museum stated in 2014, both aspects of its work are educational:

> Fundamentally, the Manchester Museum is a University Museum and so it continues to play a crucial role in teaching students and the facilitation of educational and inspirational experience to a wider audience in the region and beyond.
> (Merriman, 2014:43).

The way in which these two strands of the museum's activities have been balanced, and which has been given priority, has varied over the course of the museum's history. The displays produced in the early part of the 20th century were aligned with the teaching requirements of Manchester University. The public-facing activities of the museum - its displays and wider educational work - were considered a part of the "public programme" of the university in which the museum acted as an "interface between the university and the wider community" (Merriman, 2005). Until the 1960's, the Museum's collections were used as a resource for academic teaching, and the displays it produced were primarily intended to support academic courses in zoology and the life sciences (Alberti, 2009).

Mark Dion has put forward the view that museums founded in the Victorian era, such as the Manchester Museum, are a "site of ruling class values" (Corrin, Kwon and Bryson, 1997:17). Such institutions were established with the aim of improving the minds of a public in the belief that they were in need of education and moral guidance. (Barrett, 2011:166). However, in the case of the Manchester Museum, not all those who advocated public scientific education belonged to the ruling class. Thomas Huxley (1825-1895) who advised the museum on the natural history displays at the Manchester Museum was not a member of a ruling elite and his advice, particularly regarding the acceptance of evolution theory, ran counter to the conservative values of the time (Yanni,

2014:252). The rules of formation that were adopted by late 19th century public museums such as the Manchester Museum, the Natural History Museum and the Horniman Museum were constructed by a coterie of learned scientists and propagated by a well-meaning Victorian establishment bent on the display of object collections "for the education and entertainment" (Barrett, 2011:172) of the public.

Taxidermy collections became associated with the paternalistic view that the general public were in need of scientific education, and this view set limits on the forms that displays of nature could take in a public museum, such as Manchester Museum. The introduction of Dion's surrealist *Bureau* installation therefore challenged the historical rules of formation at the Manchester Museum. His refusal to follow the scientific rules of formation that had historically pertained in the Manchester Museum could also be construed as a refusal to accept the paternalistic system that had brought about the taxonomic ordering of natural history displays in the Mammal Hall of the Museum as a heuristic to communicate the idea that nature had a fixed order to the general public.

Representations of Nature at the Manchester Museum.

At the time of Mark Dion's residency, the Natural History galleries at the Manchester Museum were full of historic specimen displays, many of which were arranged taxonomically. Rebecca Machin, a curator at the Manchester Museum, described the arrangement of the Natural History galleries in the 1970s:

> … the galleries consist of the mammal gallery on the first floor, from which the visitor can look up to the suspended sperm whale skeleton, and to the bird gallery on the second floor. Small cases lining the balcony of the bird gallery also contain invertebrate material. Each gallery contains cases exploring the diversity of life with the mammals arranged taxonomically, the birds geographically. The majority of the specimens on display are taxidermy mounts and osteological material.
> (Machin, 2008:61).

Her description left out a number of individual displays that were present in the 1970s mammal gallery, and were still there 20 years later, according to the account of a later curator, in Henry McGhie's words,

> … the Mammal Gallery was a combination of taxonomic groups and biological function (and what the museum had a lot of!):
> so primates, odd and even toed ungulates (a case each), antelopes, Carnivores, the big tiger and a wildcat, marsupials and insectivores, rodents, a British woodland diorama, Mr Potter's Cow, a British riverside, Maharajah's skeleton, sirenians, sensing (explained via models), reproduction, growth and development … (McGhie, 2020).

The antelopes, tiger and carnivore cases that were on display in the museum in 2005, all dated from the 1960s and 70s. Henry McGhie's personal account gives an impression of what the mammal gallery displays must have looked like in the late 20th century, before Dion's residency took place. The range of different forms of display were seen by the Manchester Museum as representations of what Machin called "the diversity of life" (Machin, 2008:61). The proliferation of different narratives, visual representations and interpretive frames came about because, by the 1960's, the museum collection was no longer central to the work of the University life sciences department which had moved to another building. With a looser connection to both academic research and undergraduate courses, the museum had to provide a resource for both "academic and the popular" (Merriman, 2014:43) audiences. This task demanded new thinking about the way nature was represented in the museum.

Two immediate, and in some way contradictory, factors influenced this process. On the one hand, the policy priorities of the University including its strategic aims, were still of importance to the way that Nature was represented in the museum. On the other, the political priorities of the New Labour Government[52] placed pressure on all museums to widen

[52] New Labour held office from 1997 to 2010

access to the general public. Manchester Museum was perhaps unique amongst museums in the UK in having to balance these two demands. By the late 1990's the museum had decided to give greater priority to public facing services and as a consequence, the policy of instituting piecemeal change through the addition of more popular exhibits in the otherwise 'vaguely evolutionary' Natural History Galleries was put under review by the end of the century. However, realistic taxidermy displays were still the main element in the Mammal Gallery when Henry McGhie joined the Manchester Museum in 2002. (McGhie, interviewed 6th Jan 2020)

In the year 2000, the majority of the museum's funding derived from public sources, with the Arts and Humanities Research Council responsible for 55% of cost of running the museum and Manchester University responsible for 45%. (Manchester Museum. Report of the keeper for the year 2000/2001). In order to justify the amount of public subsidy that it was receiving, the museum was under pressure to produce effective displays aimed at the general public. Tristram Besterman, the Museum Director, summed this situation up in an Annual Report:

> The days when museum visitors were expected to lap up unquestioningly whatever was dished up for them by curators have long gone. We are now not only more accountable to our users for what we do but we also invite them to help us determine why and how we do it.
> (Manchester Museum 2001)

The next museum director, Nick Merriman, who joined Manchester Museum in 2006, actively encouraged collaborations with contemporary artists (Merriman 2014:42). He was supported by the 'Alchemy' project that was established to:

> … re-invigorate museum displays, encourage diverse approaches and present alternative voices on the museum's collections through an exciting programme of exhibitions, talks and events developed through the artists' continuing research.
> (Alchemy, 2006)

Bryony Bond, 'Alchemy' Curator at The Manchester Museum, invited contemporary artists Mark Dion, Spring Hurlbut, Pavel Büchler, Antony Hall, Louise Brookes and Kevin Malone to exhibit works in the museum between 2003 and 2006, and arranged a further four artist fellowships for the period 2006 – 2008, that brought works by Ilana Halperin, Jordan Baseman, Nick Jordan, Jacob Cartwright and Jamie Shovlin into the museum. Bond facilitated Mark Dion's residency that took place between 2003 and 2005, and curated the exhibition of his *Bureau* installation that was the culmination of his residency. Dion's *Bureau*, like Spring Hurlbut's 2004 installation *Beloved and Forsaken* that assembled museum objects that signified loss, raised questions about what objects were used to represent in museum displays. Endt Jones saw the *Bureau* as a timely critique of a modernising tendency in the museum that was leading to the replacement of old "object rich" displays with push-button displays and the use of new media (Endt Jones, 2018:147). Dion has confessed his dislike of this tendency, arguing that object displays can evoke stronger emotional responses than images on a screen:

> … the development of temporary thematic exhibitions which utilize sophisticated electronic technology … often become obsolete faster than older exhibits … the museum experience is only powerful when it is different from television and computer game play. (Corrin, L.G. 1997:137).

Referring to his installation: *The Life of a Dead Tree* at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Toronto (2019), Dion acknowledged that an object-based display could be seen as either Science or Art. He felt it was up to viewers to "disentangle" these two aspects of his own exhibition (Dion, 2019). The *Bureau* installation can be seen as a 'hybrid' exhibition that involves the use of scientific specimens to create a Surrealist assemblage, a form of display that has Art Historical resonances.

The *Bureau for the Centre for the Study of Surrealism and its Legacy*.

In 2005, the American contemporary artist Mark Dion exhibited an installation at the Manchester Museum (fig 29). Dion's reputation as an installation artist had been growing steadily since 1990, when he exhibited *Biodiversity, an installation for the Wexler Centre* in Ohio. Dion's installations have often resembled museum displays in which objects have been carefully arranged in wooden display cases or set out on tables to draw attention to the way they have been organized (Corrin, Kwon and Bryson, 1997:6-35). His art practice thus engages critically with debates about the way museum displays are understood, for example, he questions "how images ... construct cultural concepts" (Corrin, Kwon and Bryson, 1997:38). When his installations are sited in a specific museum, they can perform an 'institutional critique', that is, they can challenge the way knowledge is constructed in a specific institution by the "ideological structures underpinning systems of power" (Corrin, Kwon and Bryson, 1997:38/9). Dion's installation at the Manchester Museum took the form of a locked room in which objects were assembled on and around some pieces of solid-looking furniture: a wooden mantelpiece, a library table with four chairs, several glass-fronted display cabinets and an open roll-topped bureau upon which rested a bookshelf containing old books, including *Doubt and Certainty in Science*. There was also a small wooden cabinet and a glass-cased specimen of an egret on the bureau. This installation re-created the somber mood of a collector's or curator's office in the early part of the twentieth century. It recalled, for example, Sigmund Freud's consulting room in Hampstead, where Freud kept a collection of antiquities in display cases between bookcases laden with psychoanalytic textbooks (fig 30). Esoteric objects, like the figurines Freud called his "old and grubby gods", (Morra, 2018a:81), inspired his reflections on alternative ways of finding meaning in life that existed in remote cultures as yet not fully understood (Morra, 2018b).

The objects strewn around Dion's *Bureau* served a similar purpose. They set the viewer a puzzle: what meanings did they embody and what value did they hold, if any? The *Bureau* was a room where speculation could run riot about the meanings and value of objects.

Fig 30. Books and archaeological oddments in Freud's personal study in the Freud Museum ©Freud Museum London

Dion's object displays left the viewer's imagination free to wander. The *Bureau* contained specimens from the natural history collection of the museum and ethnographic artifacts, including a row of funeral urns and small wooden figurines, scattered around the room in no apparent order. The key that unlocked the principle behind the arrangement of the objects in the *Bureau* was its intended function: it was supposed to serve as the office of the *Centre for the Study of Surrealism and its Legacy,* a research centre that was located in Manchester University. By using metaphor, humour and suggestions of absurdity in his arrangements of objects in the *Bureau*, Dion questioned systems of organisation (such as taxonomies) that reduced the meaning of objects to the empirical truths of science and challenged the idea that scientific displays could produce "knowledge of nature itself" (Foucault 2002 first pub 1989:82). Like the Surrealists, whose valorisation of the irrational Dion sought to emulate (Endt-Jones 2018:148), the *Bureau* was intended to unsettle the viewer's expectations

by destabilising the “established divisions and categories” (Fer, 1993:224) that were normally used to organise museum objects.

Mark Dion’s residency was hosted by Manchester University and facilitated by Manchester Museum’s ‘Alchemy’ project that brought contemporary artists into the museum to produce artworks “in response to the collections” (Merriman, 2014: 42). Dion’s residency took this strategic aim literally. He instructed museum staff to look around the museum’s storerooms to find objects that would “make you smile, laugh, shake your head in shock and condemnation, or gasp”. (Dion, 2018:147) (fig 31).

Fig. 31. Mark Dion. Some of the objects that made curators ‘smile, laugh or shake their heads in shock’ © artfund.org

Dion arranged the collection of unusual and forgotten objects that the curatorial staff (including Henry McGhie, who was at that time the Keeper of Natural History) had retrieved from the Manchester Museum’s storerooms to recreate the sort of office that might have been used by an eccentric curator in the 1920’s (fig 33). He regarded his method of assembling objects as a kind of “archaeology” (Dion, 2018:7) because the

Manchester Museum curators had 'dug out' discarded objects from the museum stores and brought back into public view to reveal their surprising, sometimes unsettling qualities. In the *Bureau*, Dion accentuated the capacity of unusual objects to surprise and astonish, by arranging them in unfamiliar juxtapositions with other objects using 'assemblage'[53], a technique developed by Surrealist artists, such as Meret Oppenheimer (1913-1985), who famously covered a cup and saucer with fur to upset the viewer's expectations that a tea cup should something you drink tea from (Fer 1993:174). Because they appeal directly to unconscious modes of engaging with experience, assemblages such as Oppenheimer's *Object – Breakfast in Fur* (1936) blur the boundaries between the familiar connotations of things and the subjective values we ascribe to them (Racz, I. 2014). Surrealist assemblages "defy the logic of the rational mind and … express a deeper sort of logic, that of the unconscious" (Fer, Batchelor and Wood 1993:174). Dion's use of Surrealist assemblage in a science-orientated museum was therefore a deliberately provocative act.

Dion's collection of objects resembled the collection of *objets trouvées* in surrealist André Bréton's Paris flat (Endt-Jones 2018:148). André Breton (1896-1966) was a leading figure in the Surrealist movement who, like Sigmund Freud, valued the irrational appeal of certain objects such as figurines and specimens in bell jars (fig 31).

[53] Assemblage is art that is made by assembling disparate elements – often everyday objects – scavenged by the artist or bought specially. (Tate Gallery n.d.)

Fig. 32. *André Breton's apartment in Paris*, source unknown

Dion emulated the Paris Surrealist's strategy for spreading ideas about the value of *un*-reason by distributing cards bearing short aphorisms that were based on the *papillons* produced by the original 'Bureau' the Surrealists had established in Paris in 1924. One of these cards read: 'Those of you with lead in your heads, melt it into surrealist gold" (Dion, 2018:156). These messages underlined the connection between his *Bureau* and the French Surrealists' original Bureau, questioning what Dion has called the "ideology of pure scientific objectivity" (Kasner, 2012:159) that, he argued, gave unwarranted authority to scientific displays of natural history specimens. By separating objects from the scientific labels and classified sequences that museum curators imposed upon the objects in their collection, Dion's assemblages released them from a rational system of organization that used material objects to represent scientific concepts. In the *Bureau of the Centre for the Study of Surrealism and its Legacy* there is a sense that the liberated objects are all "ripe for symbolic decoding" (Dion, 2018:10). As Marion Endt observed:

> … as soon as objects are freed from factuality and functionality, from their role as commodities, they are charged with the subjective, imaginative powers of dream and desire and assume a new, subversive value.
>
> (Endt, 2007:59).

Dion's practice - which he describes as "something like a hybrid" (Dion, 2019) - exploits aspects of both art and science. Both the visual appearance of his installation, and the conceptual implications of the objects it contains, contribute to its intended effect on the viewer. Dion stated that he was not obliged to "produce logical equations that add up in an entirely rational manner" (Dion, 2012:159). Like the Surrealists whom he acknowledged in the title of his *Bureau,* Dion regarded the objects in his *Bureau* as more than symbolic forms conveying conventional meanings. He employed objects, as the surrealists had done, as visual 'triggers' that could provoke irrational responses in the viewer. Surrealist artists in the 1920's and 1930's had valued visual art for its ability to provide sort of concrete poetry, which they understood as "unbound, imaginative thought" (Shingler 2011). Dion's installation to put pressure on the assumption that museums are only places of rational understanding (Endt Jones, 2017).

Fig. 33. Mark Dion. *A case of Storm Petrels, a hyena's head and a row of funeral urns in the Bureau of the Centre for the Study of Surrealism and its Legacy at the Whitechapel Art Gallery* (2018) Photo © Richard Crawford

Dion also included taxidermy specimens in his *Bureau* (Fig 33). A glass case containing a group of storm petrels (small sea birds) stiffly arranged in a fluttering line against a background painting of a seascape was placed on a shelf above the fireplace, underneath a grinning hyena's head mounted on a shield. A line of funeral urns balanced on the taxidermy case suggested the deaths of the animals on display. Each object suggests a form of disjuncture: the hyena's head had been removed from its body, the storm petrels have been separated from the sea, and the funeral urns bear witness to the absence of a living body. However, the expressive face of the hyena and the active poses of the petrels remind the viewer that these animal fragments had once had a life of their own, evoking unease at their present incompleteness. Other uneasy taxidermy specimens shared the office space with miscellaneous objects, such as a guinea pig with four hind legs (Dion, 2018:151) (fig 34).

Fig. 34. Mark Dion. *A guinea pig with four hind legs in the Bureau* (2005) © Bryony Bond, Richard Weltman.

The mounted taxidermy specimen of a freak six-legged guinea pig in the *Bureau* was not a 'typical' specimen that would normally find a place in a scientific museum. Taxonomic displays reject specimens that are odd or unusual (fig 76) because they do not conform to the ideal form of an animal species– the so-called 'type specimen':

> A species is described and named for the first time using just one specimen. This then becomes the definitive example of that species – the type specimen. As organisms continue to be discovered, comparisons with existing type specimens allow scientists to see whether they have found a new species.
> (Wellcome Collection, 2017)

The taxidermy guinea pig found a place in Dion's cabinet of curiosities *because* of its highly unusual appearance, which Dion hoped would attract viewers who were more interested in looking at bizarre and unusual objects than in acquiring scientific knowledge (Aloi, 2019:21). Dion drew upon his own experiences of conducting scientific fieldwork to re-create a

disorderly office in which objects lie around in piles awaiting attention (Corrin, 1997:25).

In a previous exhibition at the *American Fine Arts Co*. in New York, Dion recreated the offices belonging to the *Department of Marine Animal Identification of the City of New York (Chinatown division)* (1992) (fig.35), containing (in the original display), specimen jars, crates of fish, cardboard boxes, textbooks, charts and maps loosely arranged around a desk at which a scientist would sit, ready to examine each marine specimen to identify its species. A magnifying glass was located next to the desk to assist a scientist with the work of identifying and classifying the specimens. This office-installation revealed the process whereby taxonomic order is imposed upon creatures found living in Nature.

Fig. 35. Mark Dion. Department of Marine Animal Identification of the City of New York (Chinatown division) (1992) ©Mark Dion

Both Dion's re-creation of a marine scientist's office and his *Bureau* installation were Art installations that invited the viewer to consider of the role that scientists play in constructing an orderly view of nature. Manchester Museum curator, Henry McGhie, who was involved in the

'Alchemy' project, later suggested that he, like Dion, was aware that museum taxonomies can imposed too rigid an order on the "disorderly" natural world and voiced his support for the idea that: "museums are set up to be as ordered as the world is dis-ordered" (McGhie, 2013).

Dion's *Bureau* was a contemporary cabinet of curiosities or *Wunderkammer:* a collection of natural wonders kept locked up inside a special room or cabinet originally established by dilettante collectors from the 16th to the 18th centuries before the establishment of scientific museums (Poliquin, 2012:18). In the 19th century, when curiosity about the natural world was overtaken by the rationalist quest for knowledge, *Wunderkammers* were largely superseded by scientific collections (Poliquin, 2012:20). The *Bureau* resembled a pre-scientific display of curious objects that looked out of place in a University Museum wedded to the advancement of knowledge in which "the boundaries of nature and culture are constructed … with objects and galleries". (Alberti, 2008:83). By locating his *Bureau* inside a University Museum, Dion deliberately employed "the anti-classificatory impulse" (Endt-Jones, 2017:183) of the Wunderkammer to question the authority of the prevailing classified order in the Manchester Museum. His surrealist *Bureau* challenged the institutional rules of formation based upon what he identified as an "ideology of pure scientific objectivity" (Kassner 2012:159).

Dion also drew inspiration from the museum, and from contemporary artists such as Marcel Broudthaers, Robert Smithson, Joseph Beuys, Joseph Cornell and Gordon Matta-Clarke; figures whom he considered to have "expanded the definition of art and enriched the field by looking outside of it" (Corrin, 1997:19). He has stated that his main interest as an artist lies in questioning the modes of representation used in museums, which he has defined more broadly as; "the conventions and assumptions of what gets to stand for nature at a particular time and for a particular group of people" (Kassner, 2012:158). Dion believes that it is the job of the artist "to go against the grain of dominant culture to challenge perception and

convention" (Dion, 2019:54) and his interventions in natural history museums have generally been critical of what Endt-Jones has called the "institutional ideologies and frameworks that inform ideas about and representations of nature" (Endt-Jones, 2017:184). His intervention did not question the ethics of using animal bodies for museum displays, although the taxidermy he used enabled the viewer to engage affectively with damaged animal bodies.

Frameworks and other factors that have influenced the production of taxidermy displays at the Manchester Museum.

In his history of the Manchester Museum, *Nature and Culture* (2009), Sam Alberti has argued that the way nature has been presented at Manchester Museum was the result of a dialogue between the objects in its collection and the academic disciplines used to frame the object displays (Alberti, 2009:189). As a consequence of this relationship, the specimen displays have 'naturalised' certain scientific ideas about nature (Alberti, 2008:83). Alberti has also noted that the displays at the Manchester Museum have historically represented different ideas about Nature. In the 19th and early 20th centuries, they were framed by ideas from the biological sciences, but in the late 20th century, new displays were produced that represented less strictly biological themes. These included diorama displays and displays of unusual specimens that were included for their curiosity value. Referring to this trend, Alberti noted that, "in 1890 a museum specimen represented nature. In 1990 it represented culture" (Alberti, 2009:82).

Changes in the relationship of the museum to the university have brought about changes in the way that museum displays have represented Nature. When developments in the field of the biological sciences led scientific research away from the museum and into the laboratory, Manchester Museum was left with a huge collection of taxidermy specimens that had less and less research value. A collection of "static type specimens" (Alberti, 2009:43) was no longer relevant to the current concerns of

experimental biologists. Accordingly, when the life sciences department moved away from the museum, the museum began to search for ways to use its taxidermy collection for displays that would appeal more to the general public. This change of orientation was highly significant in terms of the way in which the collection was organized, displayed and arranged in the gallery spaces of the Waterhouse building. It was a 'watershed moment' that changed the policies and practices of the museum with regard to the educational resources and services it provided for the public. Alberti has asserted the importance of this moment of change:

> The Manchester Museum, once an integral part of the University's teaching and research with an auxiliary public display function, had experienced a century-long volte-face from teaching collection to civic museum.
> (Alberti, 2009:51).

Once the University biology department had re-located, the museum began to re-orient its educational services more towards non-specialist visitors. Display policies shifted towards the use of the collections for public education and as a consequence of this change of direction, the aesthetic appeal, social relevance and topicality of displays began to assume greater importance (Alberti, 2009:51). Part of Henry McGhie's job as Keeper of Natural History was to find ways to make the natural history collection more relevant to the interests and concerns of contemporary visitors.

In the 19th century, Natural History specimens were systematically arranged to present a unified picture of Nature. The Natural History exhibition began on the ground floor with a display of paleontology. This was followed on the floor above by displays of ethnology, primates, large mammals, marine and smaller mammals and lower vertebrates (fish, reptiles and amphibians). Birds were displayed on the second floor, apart from the main order. On the third floor, displays of invertebrates and botany were located (Alberti, 2009:39). These displays followed a "vaguely evolutionary" (Merriman 2014:39) order that began with extinct

species, and continued with living species, arranged taxonomically from the most complex organisms (primates) to the simplest. It should be noted that the renowned Victorian biologist, Thomas Huxley, advised the museum that it should "tell the story of evolution" (McGhie, 2011a). In the early stages of the museum's history, this advice was translated into taxonomic displays of specimens.

The arrangement of the specimen collection chosen by the first curator, William Boyle Dawkins (1837-1929), began with displays of the relics of extinct species in the basement galleries, while the first and subsequent floors contained displays of living species in systematic order. In 1928 the first-floor gallery in the Waterhouse building became the Mammal Gallery in which all 13 bays were occupied by mammal displays, "eleven … occupied by the general collection of mammal and the twelfth by a selection of British mammals" (The Manchester Museum Owen's College, 1929:8-9). In the coming decades, Dawkins' systematic arrangement of specimen cases was joined by other displays using different principles of arrangement that can broadly be characterized as 'evolutionary', 'spectacular' and 'eclectic'.

By the 1940s, the exhibition of cases of mammal and bird specimens, most of which dated back to the 19th century, were looking worn and out of date. According to Alberti, at this time the part of the museum in which natural history displays were on view was "one of the most antiquated museums in the whole country … a museum piece" (Alberti, 2009:45). Although constrained by the limited possibilities for physical re-organisation by the fixed cases in the Natural History galleries, the contents of the cases were in serious need of renovation after the Second World War. During his short period as Keeper of Zoology from 1945 to 1947, Dr. P M Butler set out plans to re-organise the specimen displays around the concept that animals have evolved different forms that fit them for survival in their particular habitat:

> Emphasis will be laid on the adaptive features of animals which fit them for living the life they do; the relation between structure and function will be brought out as clearly as possible … to increase the educational value of the exhibitions.
> (The Manchester Museum Owen's College, 1946:9)

Butler's plan to represent aspects of animal adaptation brought further themes within the narrative of evolution into view. It provided visible evidence to support Darwin's theory of "natural selection", that upheld the idea that organisms must adapt to their natural environment or perish (Darwin 2008:63-100). Butler's "animal adaptation" displays gave clearer expression to the museum's evolutionary narrative, but he was reliant upon the museum's specimen collection to represent his 'structure' and 'function' displays, and the specimens were not always in the best condition. In the following decade, the condition of taxidermy specimens became a major issue for natural history curators (Alberti, 2009:45).

Good quality taxidermy specimens were acquired in the post-war period, but they were not used immediately for further evolutionary displays. For example, a group of antelopes from the Egerton collection was displayed in the large case standing at one end of the Mammal Gallery, because the specimens were "well mounted" and "look more natural" (Manchester Museum Owen's College 1958-59:7), whilst an 'Animals with Backbones' case was arranged primarily as "an eye catcher … to draw visitors into the zoological galleries" (The Manchester Museum Owen's College, 1959:7). These examples suggest that the museum did not only produce taxonomic and evolutionary displays. Spectacular specimen displays were given a place in the natural history galleries because their visual impact might appeal to the public. Taxonomic displays were improved to make the specimens in them appear more naturalistic. In the 1960's, the visual appeal of the mammal gallery displays was strengthened with the addition of "a series of habitat groups [of British carnivores] along one side of the bay, while rodents, lagomorphs and bats are shown in formal exhibits opposite them" (The Manchester Museum Owen's College, 1962:8).

Dioramas became popular attractions for the increasing number of people who were visiting the museum[54].

In the same year that habitat groups were added to the Mammal Gallery, a large display representing the evolutionary tree of the animal kingdom was placed at the entrance of the gallery to catch the visitor's eye (The Manchester Museum Owen's College, 1962:7), and a realistic diorama display with a snowy landscape setting "skillfully constructed" by D. Wilson for a polar bear and an arctic wolf "under spotlighting" was added the next year (The Manchester Museum Owen's College, 1963). These spectacular new displays were designed to attract the gaze of the general public, in line with museum policy to develop "more attractive display of the extensive collection" (The Manchester Museum Owen's College, 1964). During the 1960s the mammal display cases were progressively renovated and older displays replaced with new ones that presented spectacular visions of nature. These included re-displays of Primates and other great apes, elephants, hyenas and sea cows, carnivore skeletons and specimens (The Manchester Museum Owen's College, 1964). The redisplay of specimens was declared to be "virtually completed" by 1966 (The Manchester Museum Owen's College, 1966), and it is noticeable from Annual Reports that from the 1960's, the visual appearance of mammal gallery displays was given a high priority.

A tendency towards the production of a more eclectic range of displays began in the 1960's and continued in the 1970's, during which period unusual individual specimens were added along with more diorama displays. They included the "celebrity skeleton" of "Old Billy", a horse who had lived to the greatest recorded age for any horse in the UK (it was aged 62 when it died), and the "Bison Diorama" that showed "a bison grazing on a dry plain stretching away to distant hills" completed in 1971 (Manchester Museum 1973). Four years later, a "superb" Bengal tiger on

[54] In 1961/2 a record number of 120, 000 visitors were recorded.

loan from K. Quas-Cohen was "beautifully mounted … and now leaps out towards the public in the central part of the entrance to the Zoological gallery" (Manchester Museum, 1976:21). When a hunting trophy is exhibited alongside realistic diorama displays, eye-catching cases and formal displays of animal structure and function, it adds to an already complicated proliferation of narratives and visualisations of nature and signals the end of the strict imposition of a unifying theme. In the period following the Second World War, the museum's representations of Nature no longer articulated a strictly evolutionist narrative and had diversified, admitting other conceptual and material formulations of animal life representing the broad category of things that collectively constitute Nature. This development was brought about largely because of the physical separation of the University from the Museum in the 1970s, and the consequent search for new forms of display that could engage the interest of non-specialist visitors.

In the early 21st century there were calls for a change in policy to address the gender imbalance that was found to be evident in the displays in the Mammal Galleries. In 2005, Rebecca Machin, who, like Sam Alberti, worked as a curator at the museum, noted the gender bias in animal displays. Machin argued that,

> … by presenting the natural history of other species through the apparent realities of science and taxidermy, it is possible that the aspects of biology which humans share with them may be misrepresented.
> (Machin, 2008:55).

Machin's critique (like Haraway's - see Ch 5), was informed by feminist epistemology. By looking at the "gendered stories" told through exhibitions of animals (Machin, 2008:55). Machin uncovered a gender bias in the Manchester Museum Natural History displays. She challenged the "patriarchal messages [that] retain the unchallenged tone of authority"

(Machin, 2008:62)[55]. Her research raised an important question about the degree to which scientific displays always 'tell the truth'. As Machin stated: "not only does the museum … represent actual biodiversity, it should be aware of the potentially political nature of biology and the way it is communicated" (Machin, 2008:64). She described the displays in the Natural History galleries as "articulations of institutional power" (Rose 2001:168), recalling Haraway's critique of the Akeley diorama displays at the AMNH. Her critique exposed the agency of hidden ideological determinants in seemingly neutral scientific displays and exposed assumptions underpinning displays that Alberti, for example, had seen as unproblematic representations of disciplinary knowledge. Machin's research revealed the gendered nature of natural history displays and brought about a temporary change to the presentation of animal specimens that uncovered an inherent bias. Her temporary re-display offered the public a gender-balanced view of nature different from those that had previously been institutionally valorised.

In the critical climate of the twenty first century cultural debates including those on gender and environmental sustainability entered the museum. One topic in particular - the relationship between people and their natural environment – became a key debate at both Manchester University and Manchester Museum and provided the over-arching theme of McGhie and Russo's 'Living Worlds' exhibition. The displays in 'Living Worlds' were intended to promote well being amongst visitors by encouraging them to form healthier relations with the natural environment, whilst alerting them key topics in the environmental debate. McGhie's agenda was remarkably similar to that of Henry Fairfield Osborn at the AMNH (see Chapter 5). In an article on *Promoting people's connection with nature through natural history displays*, McGhie wrote:

[55] At her suggestion, Manchester Museum covered up all the male specimens during International Women's Week in March 2006, leaving only around 30 per cent of the natural history specimens visible.

> In order to address the on going loss of biodiversity and degradation of the natural environment, there is a need to engage people effectively in biodiversity and other environmental sustainability issues. There is also a need to engage people effectively in nature for their health, wellbeing and fulfilment, and to promote strong neighbourhoods and communities. These parallel agendas can be brought together and addressed through natural history displays and related activities in museums, provided these are mindful of messages and activities that promote people's connections with nature.
> (McGhie, 2019:149).

This could have been Henry Fairfield Osborn speaking. Wellbeing and fulfilment can best be obtained by bringing people into a healthier relationship with nature. The theme and purpose of 'Living Worlds' were clearly defined, but the form of representation McGhie chose was very different from the diorama displays Osborn had favoured at the AMNH. Rather than employ the veridical realism of diorama displays, McGhie re-used taxidermy specimens from earlier displays to articulate his narratives of Nature.

When he formed his creative partnership with Villa Eugenie, McGhie accepted Emilio Russo's advice that his new exhibition must not adopt the object-with-label format, "if it was to avoid becoming a museum piece itself" (BBC, 2011). Russo, like Dion, advocated the use of object arrangements that could inspire wonder and curiosity in the visitor, but instead of relying solely on objects, McGhie chose to provide visitors with a smartphone app. that gave them commentaries on each display case. However, most of the cases in *Living Worlds* used the associative qualities of objects and images to construct new narratives about human relations to the natural world; a decision that can be seen as a response to Mark Dion's *Bureau* installation at the Manchester Museum some six years earlier.

'Inclusivity' was a further factor that influenced display policy post 2000. In the 21st century, Manchester Museum embraced the New Labour policy of social inclusion and in so doing, acknowledged the

necessity of re-framing the museum's display policies and practices in order to attract a wider public. The key document that set out the terms of a new inclusivity was *Museums for the Many* (Great Britain DCMS 1999). This white paper promoted the idea of "social inclusion; economic regeneration; lifelong learning" (Manchester Museum 2001), aspirations that were not altogether different from the museum's founding values. In the Manchester Museum annual report for 1896-7, the Keeper stated his belief that "the good things in life should be shared by all" and that museums should help to produce a society filled with "instructed, happy and appreciative citizens" (Manchester Museum Owen's College, 1896-7:17[56]). One of the problems the museum faced in the late 20th century was finding ways to articulate concepts of Nature relevant to a public who were no longer content to "lap up unquestioningly whatever was dished up for them by curators" (Manchester Museum, 2001) - a similar problem to that which confronted curators at the Natural History Museum and Horniman Museum at that time.

The relevance of existing displays in the Manchester Museum Mammal Gallery to contemporary concerns about human relations with nature was one of the problems that attracted the attention of Henry McGhie, who joined the museum in August 2002 as Assistant Keeper of Zoology. McGhie decided to replace the displays in the Mammal Gallery with a completely new exhibition that had "an environmental message" (Alberti, 2008:79). The new displays were designed to reflect the University's core goals and thereby retain academic relevance, whilst articulating a message about Nature that could relate directly to the lives and interests of the wider public (Manchester Museum, 2011:9). McGhie's interest in environmental issues was closely aligned with one of Manchester University's core goals in the early 2000's: "promoting the development of a sustainable world" (McGhie, 2015). In McGhie's

[56] this quote was taken from Museums Association meeting Glasgow 21st July - 24th July 1897

view, sustainable relationships with the natural world could best be achieved if the idea of Nature was transformed from something remote to something personal and affecting (McGhie, 2013). An exhibition that articulated the idea of sustainable relations with Nature needed to engage visitors affectively, and so McGhie decided to use a form of display that he had encountered when he collaborated with Mark Dion on the *Bureau,* – a set of installations containing assemblages of objects, images and specimens. He also considered the spatial and architectural context in which the themed cases were placed to be an important element of the visitor experience.

Etienne Russo's and Henry McGhie's *Living Worlds* Exhibition (2011)

A range of different kinds of taxidermy display was on view in the Manchester Museum's mammal gallery in the early 21st century. However, when it came to choosing the form of display for the *Living Worlds* exhibition, the installation format that Dion used for the *Bureau* was preferred to the more familiar taxonomic or diorama displays.

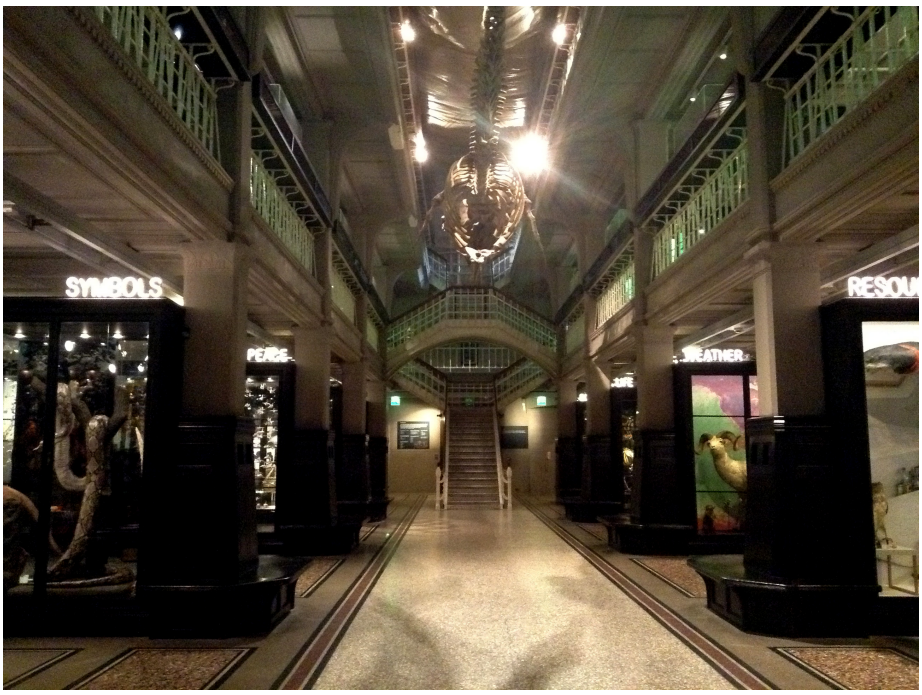

Fig. 36. Manchester Museum. *Living Worlds* (2015) © Richard Crawford.

The *Living Worlds* exhibition, which opened in 2011, was a collaboration between Emilio Russo, a fashion events designer, and Henry McGhie, Head of Collections & Curator of Zoology at the Manchester Museum (fig 36). *Living Worlds* was a permanent re-display of the Mammal Gallery at the museum that completely replaced previous taxidermy displays. Previous articulations of Nature in the Mammal Gallery had adopted two organising frameworks: taxonomy and evolution. However, the representations of Nature in the Mammal Gallery had become increasingly varied and confused, particularly since the 1970's (McGhie 2011a). Henry McGhie and Emilio Russo's new exhibition replaced the existing Mammal Gallery displays with installations on the theme of 'Environmental Sustainability' but their installations did not, as Dion's *Bureau* had done, use odd or unusual specimens to question the idea of the type specimen.

McGhie and his curatorial team decided which themes to articulate in each case (see fig 55 for a full list of themes) using old taxidermy specimens from the museum's huge archive of specimens, advised by Etienne Russo. They jointly produced an "artistic reinvention of the old Animal Life gallery" (McGhie 2011a) to replace the old science-based taxidermy displays. Taxidermy specimens became props in spectacular and visually intriguing arrangements of objects and images that told stories about the way that people can relate to Nature.

Two installations featured only osteology specimens: *Bodies* - a case representing ideas of the body through skeletons - and *Humans* that represented human evolution, again using skeleton material. Most of the other glass cases in the Mammal Gallery were filled with objects and images representing the theme of the display. For example, the theme of *Experience* was represented by carefully organized collections of shells, insects and botanical specimens together with a collection of lanternslides of natural forms. This installation represented the idea that collecting and organizing natural specimens is one of the ways in which people have traditionally made sense of their experience of Nature (Kellert, 1997:3).

The careful organisation of objects in this case echoed the systematic arrangement of other specimen displays in the museum, whereas the objects in *Resources*, a case containing taxidermy specimens of animals used by humans as a material resource, contained witty juxtapositions of objects to produce narratives of animal exploitation - for instance a taxidermy Angora goat was dressed in a knitted angora sweater.

The different modes of arrangement of the objects in each of the display cases suggested stories about the different ways that humans can relate to the natural world. By reading these narratives, McGhie hoped that visitors would re-consider different aspects of their own relationship with the natural world (Craven, 2011).

Fig. 37. Manchester Museum. The *Peace* case in 'Living Worlds'. Photo © Richard Crawford.

For example, the objects in the *Peace* installation case constructed a narrative about human suffering and hope (fig 37). A lump of fused debris

collected in Hiroshima after the atomic bomb explosion in 1947 was accompanied by a taxidermy specimen of a crane, a 'flock' of origami cranes and the story of Sadako Sasaki, a girl whose health had been affected by the Hiroshima atomic bomb as a child. The story reveled that Sasaki and her friends folded a thousand paper cranes, symbolizing "peace", to speed her recovery. The taxidermy and the objects served as symbols, in a story about a group of young people who had used the healing properties of Nature to deal with personal difficulties (McGhie 2011a).

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Fig. 38. Manchester Museum. The *Domination and Connect* cases in 'Living Worlds'. © Manchester Museum.

The objects arranged in the *Connect* case were intended to suggest the connection that humans feel with other species of animal. It contained three animal displays recycled from previous exhibitions: a polar bear diorama, a habitat display of apes and monkeys, and a display of bird and mammal predators (fig 38). The taxidermy animals in this case were placed in basic dioramas. For example, the polar bear was presented in a snowy landscape while the apes and monkeys were gathered together

amongst leaves and branches. The theme 'Connect' suggested that diorama displays can connect people with Nature if they are willing to accept them as representations of real animals in real habitats - an assumption that recalls the "positivist fallacy" that Haraway revealed as the effective principle behind the AMNH diorama displays (Haraway, 2004:66). In contrast with the *Peace* narrative that used narrative devices including the metonymic associations of paper cranes with real birds and the metaphorical association of cranes with 'Peace', the *Connect* installation presented taxidermy as the literal representation of a living animal. (Alberti, 2008:82). Although Dion's *Bureau* had demonstrated the agency that unusual objects or unexpected combinations of objects have to arouse curiosity, some of the cases in *Living Worlds* (such as *Connect*) used taxidermy as stand-ins for species. Other cases included osteology specimens with no symbolic meanings implied or intended - the skeletons were there to provide factual knowledge about the anatomical structure of primate bodies. In contrast, the *Life* installation contained curious objects, such as toy hummingbirds and grinning plastic teeth that were suspended from the ceiling of the case. These objects were more open to interpretation. As Dion has suggested, the viewer has to "disentangle" the various narrative strands suggested by the objects in a display (Dion, 2019), and their personal experience of the *Life* installation may lead them away from the intended reading of the case that "life is amazing" (McGhie, n.d.).

In a blog entitled *Nature in museums: curiosity and wonder* (2014) McGhie stated his opinion that museums like Manchester were "filled with amazing things" that drew "hundreds of thousands of people … to wonder at them each year" (McGhie, 2014). He was therefore aware that objects could attract visitor's attention, such as the taxidermy tiger in the *Domination* case, leaping out at the viewer with fangs bared that had previously been a long-term exhibit in the Mammal Hall[57]. Next to the

[57] The "superb" Bengal tiger on loan from Mr K Quas-Cohen … beautifully mounted, was shot quite recently, and now leaps out

tiger, McGhie placed photographs of white hunters standing proudly with the bodies of the animals they had shot to suggest (amongst other things) that the unequal relationship between the hunters and their prey was one of 'domination'. The leaping tiger specimen evoked the dangerous presence of a powerful predator, but was displayed next to mounted antelope's heads, an elephant's tusk and photographs of big game hunters in order to suggest that the tiger should be read as a trophy; a symbolic *thing* not the remains of a once living animal (fig 41).

To reinforce the expected reading of each installation, a neon sign bearing the thematic heading of the display was located on top of each case to signpost the theme of the display and start the visitor's personal engagement with the installation moving in the right direction. The Installations lacked other forms of labeling, and as a result the visual aesthetics and symbolic properties of the objects in his displays made other readings possible (Museum Journal 2011:41-42). One exhibition reviewer considered that the preference for neon signs over conventional labels gave the exhibition "the feel of a modern art show" (Manchester Museum; Living Worlds 2011:43). However, the objects in the *Living Worlds* installations, unlike those in Dion's surrealist *Bureau*, were not organized in unexpected ways to disrupt expected readings of other object displays in the museum. In each case, the objects and images were artfully arranged to convey a specific narrative of Nature, written by museum curators to engage visitors with the Manchester Museum's Natural History collection.

New narratives of nature

The narratives of nature articulated in the *Living Worlds* installations were different to the ideas of nature represented by historic taxidermy displays at the Manchester Museum.

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towards the public in the central part of the entrance to the Zoological gallery" (Manchester Museum 1976:21)

Fig. 39. Manchester Museum. The *Life* case in 'Living Worlds' Photo © Richard Crawford.

Many of the original Victorian showcases in the *Living Worlds* exhibition contained a display representing one of the 'biophilic' categories suggested by Steven Kellert's taxonomy of ways that people can relate to nature (Kellert, 1997). The assemblage of objects and images in the *Domination* display (fig 38), for example, represented the human desire to hunt dangerous or exotic animals. Those in the *Peace* (fig 37) and *Life* (fig 39) cases articulated different views of human-animal relationships - the former representing the solace that nature can bring to someone who is ill, and the latter representing the essential features of life that humans share with all other creatures such as growth, eating, movement and death.

Fig. 40. Manchester Museum. The *Humans* case in 'Living Worlds'. Photo © Richard Crawford

Fig. 41. Manchester Museum. The *Connect* case in 'Living Worlds' Photo © Richard Crawford

Some strictly scientific displays stood alongside those articulating contemporary cultural narratives in the Mammal Hall. The *Connect* case recycled old diorama displays and reiterated the familiar environmentalist message that animals are connected with their habitats (fig 41). A series of primate skulls in *Humans* demonstrated the close anatomical connection between humans with other primate species, in accordance with evolution theory (fig 39). Living Worlds was a mixture of old stories and new narratives of Nature.

One important idea that McGhie wished to articulate in *Living Worlds* was that Nature is not only shaped by the slow process of evolution but is also 'shaped' by the way people, individually and collectively, behaved towards it. His exhibition reminded visitors that they had the power of choice over the way they related to the natural world. (McGhie, 2013). Steven Kellert's taxonomy of ways that people relate to nature gave further support to an exhibition intended to encourage visitors to consider the effects of their behavior for environmental sustainability, one of Manchester University's top policy priorities. Amanda White has defined the "Biophilia hypothesis", first put forward by Edward Wilson in 1984 as the idea that "we are all drawn to the non-human world through an innate genetic pre-disposition" (White 2017:12). Steven Kellert (1997) listed the different types of human relations with "Nature":

1) a selfish acquisitiveness; treating nature as a source of material exploitation.
2) a sense of physical beauty
3) a wish to gain of empirical knowledge and understanding
4) as an aid to communication: animals as metaphors
5) as the goal of exploration and discovery
6) offering them comfort of companionship
7) the exultation of mastery over nature
8) the sense of being a part of nature; a spiritual sense.
9) the fear of nature (Kellert 1997:3)

McGhie adopted many of Steven Kellert's categories as a bridge between museum taxidermy displays and the University policy priority of working towards sustainable relations with the natural environment, with a view to promoting "a positive connected relationship with nature … linked to pro-environmental attitudes" (McGhie, 2019:381). Each of the themes included in the 'Living Worlds' exhibition offered a different perspective on the way humans relate to, or simply use, nature. For example, people can connect with Nature, dominate Nature, symbolise Nature by using animals as metaphors, gain comfort from Nature, fall victim to natural disasters, experience natural beauty, learn more about Nature, use Nature as a material resource, or feel a spiritual connection with Nature. Henry McGhie expressed his belief that people needed to be connected with nature in some of these ways for their own wellbeing. By stressing the positive advantages of forming a better relationship with nature, he hoped that 'Living Worlds' could encourage more "pro-environmental' attitudes":

> … nature conservation is not making enough progress to halt biodiversity losses … so it is important to engage people with 'biodiversity and nature' … a positive connected relationship with nature is linked to pro-environmental attitudes.
> (McGhie, 2019:381).

Not all the cases in *Living Worlds* represented themes from Kellert's taxonomy. Some cases represented themes carried over from the previous exhibition, such as *British Wildlife* and *Variety of Life* (biodiversity) and *Bodies* (animal adaptation). One display case entitled *Weather* represented the previously overlooked narrative of 'climate change', a topic that Henry McGhie considered of central importance in the debate over environmental sustainability (McGhie, 2015b). A full list of the titles of the installations, the topics/stories they produced, the contents of each case and the authors of any text panels that accompanied each display is given in below (Fig 42)

Installation title	Topic/story	Contents	Text panel author
Connect	See the connections in the world, between ourselves, our choices and the natural world.	Three dioramas, of mounted British predators, jungle animals and a Polar Bear (presented against images of habitats)	Museum
Domination	Control of nature through fear and admiration	Mounted trophy heads and Tiger, Elephant tusks (presented with trophy photographs)	Museum
Symbols	Importance of nature in our lives as symbolising things	Mounted Eagle, Lion, Snake, Swan, Story and Bees, accompanied by images and objects showing them as symbols	University of Manchester (of M) social anthropologist Sharon Macdonald
Peace	Importance of nature in helping people deal with personal difficulty	Mounted Crane and piece of rubble from Hiroshima (presented with a thousand origami[58] Cranes)	Sadako Sasaki, victim of th Hiroshima atomic bomb
Disasters	Nature can be threatening, and people can cause disasters	Plaster casts of woman and dog killed by volcano at Pompeii (presented against backdrop of image of lava)	U of M geographer, Richard Huggett
Experience	Some animals are thought to be beautiful, childish or scary	Mounted Peacock, Sun Bear, 'baby' Elephant, Wolf, Spider, Rat and Skunk (presented wit images of cultural association	Museum
Experience (2)	People have observed the natural world	Collections of insects, minerals, display of mounted garden birds, glass lantern slides	Museum
British Wildlife	British wildlife has changed over time, for good and bad	Mounted animals and plants reflecting conservation successes, effects of farming, introductions, and the importance of UK wildlife (presented against images representing each topic)	Manchester City Council biodiversity manager, Dave Barlow
Humans	We are connected to nature by shared ancestry	Skeletons of a Human, Gorilla, Chimpanzee, skulls of Primates and fossil Humans	Museum

Bodies	Animals' bodies are shaped by adaptation	Skeletons of birds and mammals	U of M animal physiologist, Holly Shiels
Life	Life is amazing	Specimens representing life (giant egg), growth (slice of wood), eating (shark jaw), movement (Hummingbirds), death (Dodo head)	U of M evolutionary biolog Matthew Cobb
Weather	The climate has changed and is changing because of people	Coal, fossils of tropical and cold climate animals from Britain, species undergoing changes at present (presented against giant map and with LED displays with facts about climate change)	U of M atmospheric scienti Lorenzo Labrador
Resources	Everything we use comes from nature	Species we used and affect by our uses, eg. mounted sheep wearing a woolly jumper (showcase fitted out as inside of an apartment)	U of M sustainability researcher, Joanne Tippett
Variety of Life	There is a wonderful variety of life	Species that have become extinct; species that are being conserved, and species whose future is uncertain	Museum

Fig 42. Henry McGhie. *The themes and contents of each display case in Living Worlds.* (McGhie, H. 2011c)

Etienne Russo

Etienne Russo, a fashion events designer, collaborated with Henry McGhie on the design of the Mammal Gallery redisplays[59]. Russo began his career as the manager of a nightclub in Belgium where he became aware of the importance of combining music with lighting effects to construct a

[59] McGhie and Russo's plans for a redisplay of the mammal gallery offered a way to meet the conditions of the grant that the Manchester Museum had received from the North West Development Agency for £400,000 that specified that the museum should use the makeover money to "do something innovative" (McGhie, 2011a). In McGhie's opinion, his collaboration with Villa Eugenie was innovative in the context of the Manchester Museum's historical rules of formation.

powerful mood (Pelloux 2019). In 1991 Russo founded a fashion events design company entitled 'Villa Eugenie'. His designs for fashion events have typically been staged in a striking architectural setting, such as the Grand Palais in Paris. They combine loud music with atmospheric lighting to create a powerfully upbeat mood for a fashion parade (Villa Eugenie n.d.). Russo has stated that he wishes his events to transmit "emotion and surprise" (Manchester Museum Annual Performance Review 2011/12:55) to his audience. The fashion shows he has staged have been designed to seize the attention of viewers and draw them into an affective engagement with a "full-blown theatrical" display (Villa Eugenie nd.) (fig 43).

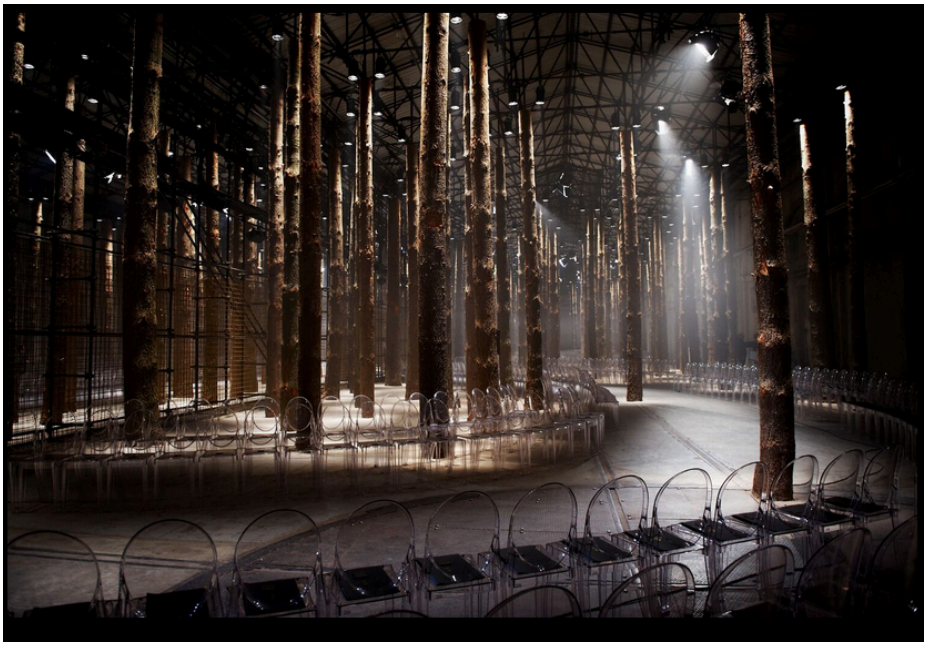

Fig. 43. Villa Eugenie. *Corneliani catwalk, Florence* (2010-11) ©. Villa Eugenie.

For the Corneliani fashion show (2010), Russo recreated a forest inside an auditorium with rows of tree trunks, through which the fashion models walked through mists of dry ice wearing the latest Corneliani clothes. Russo borrowed theatrical effects to add drama to the fashion parade, but he had to modify his usual practices when he designed *Living Worlds* because the interior of Manchester Museum could not be so freely adapted as a large auditorium. As a result, *Living Worlds* is a much less theatrical experience. *Living Worlds* was the first museum exhibition design Villa

Eugenie had undertaken. Locating the exhibition in the atrium of the Waterhouse building at Manchester Museum presented a challenge because he had to work within the "precise demands of museum scenography" (Villa Eugenie, nd). However, the atrium of the Waterhouse building provided a suitably spectacular architectural context for a 'make over'. Russo transformed the mood of the space by dimming the ambient lighting in order to draw attention to the brightly lit cases that filled the ground floor. To signal the theme of each display, he placed a neon sign on top of each case. The skillful lighting design added an element of theatricality to the exhibition without sacrificing the overall spatial coherence of the space and Russo's 'Living Worlds' design was shortlisted for the Design week awards for 2012 in the *Exhibition Design* category (Montgomery 2012).

Russo also gave advice on the design of the display cases. He suggested to Henry McGhie that visitors should be given the chance to interpret the displays without the aid of labels (McGhie 2011a). He conceived of the cases as 'installations' not as conventional museum displays. McGhie concurred with his views and surmised that visitors would "look at each case as an installation, then … go away and find out what it's all about" (McGhie 2011a), suggesting that the arrangement of objects could effectively provoke visitor's engagement without the addition of further interpretive material. When it came to organizing the objects in each display, McGhie used each installation to tell a specific stories about the different ways people can relate to the natural world, but refrained from the use of labels. To help visitors reflect on the contents of each case, the museum provided a smartphone app. that contained a commentary on each case (Manchester Museum 2012:9) further blurring the boundary between scientific interpretation and artistic display.

Concluding thoughts: *Living Worlds* displays and Mark Dion's *Bureau of the Centre for the Study of Surrealism and its Legacy.*

The visual similarities between the *Bureau* and *Living Worlds* installations are striking. Both displayed objects in locked glass cases. Both mixed taxidermy with other kinds of objects, juxtaposing them in unfamiliar ways to provoke surprising and curious combinations. Both rejected the organising principles of taxonomy in order to encourage visitors to engage directly with the objects *sui generis* and, to a greater or lesser extent, form their own interpretation of what they represented. The critical difference between the two installations was in the role that objects played in their installations. Dion's strategic objective was to generate curiosity, disbelief or unease through objects stripped of supporting externally imposed interpretive frameworks. McGhie, as the Curator of Natural History in a University museum, did not support the surrealist's aim of releasing the imagination from the constraints of rationality that Dion had endorsed. He assembled objects into narrative tableaux – a form that Tessa Farmer and Polly Morgan also used (see chapter 8) – in order to construct new narratives about human-animal relations in the Mammal Gallery. In fact, McGhie stated his disagreement with Dion about the agency of objects when he argued "I don't believe that objects have resonance. We have to find ways to connect with people through stories" (McGhie, 2015b).

Fig. 44. Manchester Museum. *Domination case in Living Worlds.* Photo © Richard Crawford

McGhie and Russo adopted the rules of formation that had given rise to eclectic and spectacular displays like *Old Billy the Horse* and the *Egerton Antelope* case; popular forms that would encourage wider public interest. They included some of these old taxidermy displays in *Living Worlds*, such as the polar bear diorama in the *Connect* case and the trophy tiger that had been shot by Quas-Cohen in the *Domination* case, (fig 44) as visual props in narrative assemblages. The ethical issues raised by displaying Quas-Cohen's tiger were incorporated into the display in the *Domination* case, but other taxidermy was used without further comment on its origins. Russo was contracted to design the lighting and set the mood of the exhibition space, rather than to organise the contents of each display case. Despite some similarities in the appearance of the new installations with Dion's *Bureau*, the taxidermy in each display was given meaning in relation to the stories told about them (Agamben, 2004:22). Such narrative displays, Agamben has argued, are way of "*mastering* the relations between nature and humanity" (Agamben, 2004:83). McGhie's stated rationale for replacing all the previous displays in the Mammal Gallery was to bring it 'up to date' because, as he stated, "the gallery had become so cluttered over the 20th Century … the whole thing had become confused, it was out of date and it was time for a very serious change"

(McGhie, 2011a). The change of narrative did not challenge the way we see individual animal*s*, only the way we relate to them as different species.

In an interview in 2011, McGhie justified his decision to replace the displays that had articulated evolutionary themes on the grounds that Thomas Huxley, who had advised to the museum to "tell the story of evolution" (McGhie, 2011a), had also advocated the presentation of the truths of natural history rather than speculations, and according to McGhie, the truth about nature in the 21st Century is "that people are impacting on the environment" (McGhie, 2011a). His new displays articulated the contemporary concept of 'biophilia', thus replacing, rather than critiquing, narratives of evolution in Manchester Museum. McGhie's installations, like Dion's, included animal specimens and unusual juxtaposition of objects. Both his displays and Dion's employed techniques of visual presentation associated with surrealist assemblage rather than with scientific displays and dispensed with informative labelling. To the visitor, both displays would have appeared to be art installations (as they did to me).

However, the two installations served different functions and consequently took a different stance towards normalised rules of formation in the museum. Mark Dion took a radical stance against the rational organisation of object collections by producing a surrealist cabinet of curiosities, in which he combined disused and discarded objects from the Manchester Museum storerooms into unusual and sometimes disturbing, assemblages. His *Bureau* installation was later exhibited at a retrospective exhibition of Dion's work at the Whitechapel Art Gallery in 2018 entitled *Mark Dion: Theatre of Nature* (where I realised that by locking the door, he had made his office into a cabinet of curiosities). At the Whitechapel Art Gallery, the *Bureau* was exhibited as a work of art surrounded by other works by the same artist, including other installations, drawings and photographs. In this context, the theme of Dion's wider art practice became evident. Dion's main concern is with the

different ways that Nature has been conceived and represented - from the trophies that hunters might keep in their lodge, to the specimens a curator might store in their office. In *Mark Dion: Theatre of Nature*, the *Bureau* was framed by the artist's other artworks, whereas at the Manchester Museum, the *Bureau* (and the objects it contained), was placed in an established museum where it could enter into a dialogue with the current displays, and, because of its surrealist character, be perceived as an "alternative museum within a museum" (Jones 2018:147). Encountering a taxidermy guinea pig with six legs in the *Bureau* might have encouraged the visitor to engage affectively with a damaged animal body, whilst the arrangement of a line of funeral urns next to trophy taxidermy might have encouraged them to consider the reality of the animals that died to produce taxidermy.

By contrast, *Living Worlds* was a permanent exhibition that replaced previous displays in the Manchester Museum Mammal Gallery. It is still on view (2022) and represents the current institutional discourse on human relations with the natural world. By reusing old taxidermy (and osteology) specimens, McGhie adopted the idea that the meaning of the animal is constructed through narratives of Nature, an idea that has guided the Museum's rules of formation since its foundation. He did not use taxidermy as a means to rethink human-animal relations as; for example, Abbas Akhavan had done at the Wellcome Collection exhibition *Making Nature*, or to encourage visitors to consider the suffering of animals, as the *Bureau* had done.

A major difference between the two displays was the relationship they constructed with the existing taxidermy collection. Whilst Dion's Bureau participated in a visual and conceptual dialogue with the rational system by which other museum displays were organised, McGhie and Russo's Living Worlds simply replaced all the existing displays in the Mammal Galleries. When two other natural history galleries were redesigned shortly after *Living Worlds* was opened - *Nature's Library* exhibition in 2013 (University of Manchester Annual Performance review 2012/13)

and the *Nature Discovery* gallery in 2014 (Manchester Museum, 2014) McGhie again re-used old taxidermy in narrative displays, passing over an opportunity to use new of forms of taxidermy to provoke a critically reconsideration of the way that ideas of the animal had been constructed from animal bodies in earlier taxidermy displays.

His approach to representing ethical relations between humans and animals was through art installations that encouraged the viewer to engage with narratives, rather than to engage affectively with damaged animal bodies.

Chapter 6. Polly Morgan, Jazmine Miles-Long and Claire Morgan at the Horniman Museum.

The Horniman Museum in South London has an important heritage collection of taxidermy, the best examples of which are on permanent display in the North Hall of the Museum. This chapter focuses on three art interventions that were arranged by Joanne Hatton, Keeper of Natural History at the Horniman Museum, between 2015 and 2019: Polly Morgan's *Taxidermy is Dead. Long live Taxidermy* (2015), Jazmine Miles-Long's *Memorial: a Tribute to Taxidermy* (2016-17) and Claire Morgan's *As I live and Breathe (2019)*. These three artists exhibited their work in a newly created exhibition space entitled 'Inspired by Nature' situated at the entrance to North Hall, the gallery that contained permanent displays of natural history specimens.

The aim of this chapter is to look at how these three exhibitions at the Horniman Museum presented a particular kind of challenge to ideas about human-animal relations as represented in the heritage taxidermy collection. In the first section of this chapter I reflect on the systematic order imposed by Alfred Cort Haddon on the specimen collection in the early years of the 20th century, and consider more recent orders of nature that have constituted the historical context to the three contemporary artist's interventions in the North Hall. I explore the effect that institutional policies have had on the form of public displays and examine the circumstances that led to the decision to exhibit contemporary taxidermy in the museum. I also discuss the role of the curator, Joanne Hatton, who arranged both exhibitions.

In the second section of this chapter I examine Polly Morgan's contemporary art and explore the ideas about animal vulnerability and mortality they represent and the particular forms of 'realism' she uses in her work. I then examine the exhibition of taxidermy by Jazmine Miles-Long in which she explored the fragility and beauty of the individual

animal and discuss a later exhibition of animal art by Claire Morgan that raised questions about the effects of plastic pollution on the lives of urban animals. I argue that each of these artists' interventions constituted a challenge to ideas about the animal as an exploited body articulated by historic taxidermy displays because they represented the animal as an ethical subject. Claire Morgan's*s* choking animals, in particular, implicate human agency in the harm that is being done to Nature.

The original Order of Nature at the Horniman Museum.

The Horniman Museum opened to the public in the building it still occupies in Forest Hill, South London, in 1901. The founding collection of Natural History specimens and anthropological objects belonged to Frederick Horniman, a wealthy tea merchant, who also donated his library of books to the museum. Frederick Horniman not only gave his entire object collection to the London County Council as a "free gift to the people" (Horniman Museum, 2020) but also paid for a new museum building in Forest Hill, designed by Charles Harrison Townsend in the Art Nouveau style. Frederick Horniman established the museum as a resource for the education and cultural enrichment of the local community (Horniman Museum, 2020). It does not have to cater for the needs of a scientific research community, as the Natural History museum does, or a University, as the Manchester Museum does. As early as 1907 - six years after it was opened to the public - the education of 'casual' visitors was accorded a high priority:

> …the whole contents of the museum may be so displayed and described that instruction may be imparted even to the most casual visitor. The student may pass from observation of the specimen and the method of arrangement to the study of the descriptive labels, thence to the handbooks in which references are made to larger treatises which he may consult in the Library.
> (Gomme, 1907 quoted in Levell, 2001:268).

A similar message is represented in a mosaic mural on the façade of the

Forest Gate building. The central figure in *Humanity in the house of circumstance* (1901) designed by Robert Anning Bell (Fig 44), represents the untutored person, who, by accident of birth, education and surroundings, had not been able to reap the rewards of wider cultural and spiritual realms of experience. The Horniman Museum was designed for just such a self-improving person seeking enlightenment at the local museum.

Fig 45. *Humanity in the house of circumstance* (1901) mosaic designed by Robert Anning Bell © Horniman Museum

In 1990 the Horniman Museum became an independent trust that receives the majority of its funding directly from the government. Large-scale developments, such as the creation of a new exhibition in the entrance to the Natural History Hall, have been funded by grants from the Heritage Lottery Fund and the Wolfson Foundation. The fact that the Horniman is an independent local museum gives the collection a particular character. Many of the exhibits in the Natural History Hall are historic but the way they have recently been displayed is critically reflective, in line with contemporary ideas about reflexive curatorial practices (Smith T. 2012)

The first Natural History displays in the Forest Hill building were organised by Richard Quick, a curator who had previously worked at Horniman's private museum in Surrey House (Horniman Museum 2020). According to Alfred Cort Haddon (1855-1940), who was appointed to succeed Richard Quick as curator, the initial arrangement lacked any guiding principle for the organization of specimens.

> I visited the Horniman Museum on 10th (1901) and was greatly impressed with the value and interest of the collections and the suitability of the buildings and fittings …(but) there is insufficient guiding principle running through the museum … one fully realizes that a private collector collects in what manner he pleases … when a collection is administered by a public body the question must be asked in all seriousness - what is the object of a museum, and how can it be carried on most effectively without undue expenditure? The day has passed when we can consider a collection of 'curios' as a museum. If properly arranged a museum is an educational institution of the greatest value, as information is conveyed visually with accuracy and great rapidity.
> (Haddon (1901) quoted in Levell, 2001:254).

Alfred Cort Haddon accepted the task of turning Horniman's collection of curios into an organized collection fit for an "educational institution" (Horniman Museum. 1903:10). Haddon was the first in a succession of scientific curators who helped to shape the public displays of specimens in the North Hall as a resource for public education (Levell 2001:254.). He was not only a biologist, but also a highly respected anthropologist and, importantly for the way he conceived the organization of the Natural History collection, he was a committed evolutionist[60]. True to his belief in the heuristic efficacy of systematic organization, he began his curatorial duties by sorting the specimen collection into species according to the order laid out in Linnaeas' *Systema Naturae* – the taxonomic order of genus-species that is widely used to organize scientific natural history collections. Linnaeus' method divided the natural world into ever more specific groupings of animals: "at the top, the Animal Kingdom encompasses all animals, then as you go down through the categories, you get ever more specific until you reach species". (Nicholls, 2018). This move brought the museum in line with other scientific institutions such as the Natural History Museum in South Kensington, presenting not so much

[60] In 1902 "Haddon gave public lectures on The Natural History of Animals, the Natural history of Man … on Saturday mornings financed by Technical Education Board." (Levell, 2001:269). This led to a programme of free lectures related to the collection including Proofs of Evolution, Darwin and his Successors, Man and his Relations.

an order of nature itself, but "a display [of] the ways that objects are conceptually understood" (Lord, 2006:5) by the scientific establishment of the time. Linnaeus' taxonomy was a rational order that anyone with enough interest in animal morphology could understand, and it did away with the confused arrangement of Richard Quick's collection of 'curios'.

Haddon shaped the collection around Linnaeus's classification. He discarded redundant specimens and began to acquire specimens missing from the taxonomic order he had established (Levell, 2001:259). He believed that the order of the collection was of prime importance if the museum was to function effectively as an educational resource (Levell, 2001:259) and above all, he wanted the public to adopt his rational view of nature,

> … the curator of a modern museum must not only take care of the objects entrusted to his charge but he must teach the public by the logical arrangements of the specimens and the descriptive labels and other educational devices.
> (Haddon quoted in Levell, 2001:254).

The rational vision of early 20th century science became the guiding principle behind the organization of the museum's Natural History collection (Yanni, 2005:156). The displays that Haddon produced gave visual expression to Linnaeus's taxonomy of species, in the form of a classified sequence of taxidermy and other natural specimens, but he had a problem fitting in some of Horniman's larger taxidermy specimens. For example, the large trophy specimens that Frederick Horniman had purchased from the *Colonial and Indian Exhibition* in 1886, including an enormous walrus, a polar bear and a case full of mountain goats were simply too big to be incorporated into the sequence of cases he had devised and had to remain out of sequence, in the centre of the North Hall (fig 46).

Fig. 46. Horniman Museum. *The Natural History displays in 1904, with the largest specimen cases in the middle of the hall* © Horniman Museum.

Once Haddon had organized the taxonomic displays, he appointed Herbert Spencer Harrison, "a science trained man who 'maintained a strong evolutionary outlook'" (Levell, 2001:261) to the post of curator of the Horniman Museum. Harrison held his post from 1904 to 1937 and when he retired he was succeeded by another evolutionist, Mr. L. W. G. Malcolm, who continued to work on the production of evolution displays until 1946 (Levell, 2001:261). The first three curators of the Horniman Museum ensured that evolution remained the dominant theoretical construction of speciation at the museum from its opening in 1901 until just after the Second World War (Levell, 2001:261).

In the first half of the 20th century, Haddon and subsequent curators constructed displays of representing two major constructions of Nature - biodiversity and evolution - giving the displays in the Natural History Hall a sense of continuity and stability. These overarching themes were used to frame the majority of displays in the North Hall galleries until 2015, when

they were joined by Entrance Gallery exhibitions that represented other, more contemporary, themes, including the relationship between colonialism and specimen collecting, animal conservation, and the history of Natural History collections such as the Horniman's. (Horniman Museum, n.d:b).

Haddon's successors produced a series of evolutionary displays on topics including 'heredity', 'variation' and 'sexual selection'. The Horniman Museum website describes these displays as follow:

> On the ground floor, you will find displays covering evolution and adaptation in the natural world, including cases looking specifically at the evolution of the horse and elephant species. Collections of domestic dog and pigeon breeds look at the effects of domestication and selective breeding. Many of the gallery themes have changed little in 100 years.
> (Horniman Museum, n.d:b)

With space at a premium, the evolution and adaptation displays gradually replaced Haddon's original systematic specimen cases. By the late 20th century, displays on *Aspects of Evolution* ran along one side of the North Hall while displays on *Animal Adaptation* ran along the other. In 1969, a new systematic display was created when the new *Survey of the Animal Kingdom* exhibition was installed around the balcony of the North Hall (Horniman Museum, 1969). This exhibition organized specimens by phyla, the most general category of the Linnaean system[61]. Specimens representing each of the phyla were arranged in order of complexity; from the simplest organisms to the most complex (Horniman Museum, 1969). The exhibition began with protozoa and progressed along a scale of complexity to mammals in a single linear sequence that started on the mezzanine floor and continued on the ground floor, where the primate

[61] Linnaean classification groups organisms from most general to most specific: Phylum - class - order - family - genus – species.

specimens were located[62]. From the 1970s, the balcony displays presented a taxonomic view of biodiversity, whilst most of the cases on the ground floor illustrated aspects of evolution and adaptation (Horniman Museum n.d:b). By the end of the 20th Century the majority of the museum's specimen displays had been arranged according to one or other of these two systems for organizing the natural world.

Some minor themes also emerged during the 20th century as more specimens were added to the collection. A set of small Rowland Ward mammal dioramas was acquired in the 1930s (Hatton interviewed 5th February 2015). Amongst them, a delightful diorama that depicted a family of foxes – father, mother and playful cubs beside the opening of their leafy den – gave visible form to an idealised view of unspoiled Nature that Akeley had tried to achieve in his AMNH dioramas (see chapter 5). Like the animals represented in Akeley's dioramas, Ward's foxes live in an enchanted world of Nature detached from human interference. Diorama displays, as Beddard has commented, reflected "a growing conservationist movement and concern about the extinction of species" (Beddard, 2017) in the both the United States and the United Kingdom. Those at the Horniman Museum were scattered between the taxonomic and evolutionary displays in the North Hall.

Horniman's huge walrus specimen also remained on display in 2015 (Horniman Museum n.d:b). It stood as a monument to Horniman's legacy to the people of Forest Hill and was valued as a symbolic specimen rather than as a scientific one.

In 1996, the key operational objective of the Museum was to "provide

[62] "On the first floor, you will find … the start of a display about classification in the animal kingdom. Moving anti-clockwise around the balcony, you can discover the different groups of animals which have evolved over time, and how they are organised by taxonomy. This display continues downstairs among the larger cases". (Horniman Museum, 2014?)

equality of opportunity in terms of physical and intellectual access for people with a wide range of ages, abilities and backgrounds" (Horniman Public Museum and Public Garden's Trust, 1996:10). When the government report, *Museums for the Many* (Great Britain. DCMS, 1999), was published, stipulating that public museums should demonstrate "how they are widening access to a broad cross section of the public for example by age, social class and ethnicity" (Great Britain. DCMS, 1999:6), the Horniman Museum was ready to meet these demands. The services it offers are directed mainly at the general public, unlike those at the Natural History Museum that must also provide a service for its scientific research community, or those at the Manchester Museum that must serve a University as well as the public. For example, the Horniman Museum has stated its commitment to mounting "high quality temporary exhibitions which engage diverse audiences and attract new audiences" (Horniman Public Museum and Public Garden's Trust, 2009:10).

In the early 21st century, as museums grappled with government pressure to produce more popular exhibitions, curators at the Horniman Museum looked for new forms of animal display that would be more relevant to contemporary concerns about the state of nature than either taxonomic or evolutionary displays (Horniman Public Museum and Public Garden's Trust, 2007:6). As Hooper-Greenhill has noted, it was acknowledged that the meanings rooted in past animal displays might "clash with contemporary interpretations that challenge their continued validity" (Hooper Greenhill, 2000:1)[63]. When Joanne Hatton was appointed to the post of Keeper of the Natural History Collection at the Horniman Museum in 2007, she made plans to bring contemporary artists into the museum as a way to introduce contemporary interpretations of Nature into the North

[63] Both animal theorists and contemporary art practitioners were exploring new possibilities for thinking about, and articulating new visions of other animal species in the early 21st century. For example, the theorists Derrida (2008), Fudge (2002), Agamben (2004) and the artists, Mark Dion, Thomas Grunfelt, Damien Hirst and Maurizio Catalan all of whom exhibited animal works in the early 2000's.

Hall displays. Hatton's decision accorded with Museum director Janet Vitmayer's, view that the Horniman Museum should provide its services "in the context of the 21st century audience and its expectations" (Horniman Public Museum and Public Garden's Trust, 1999:4).

In 2007, the Horniman Museum made an unsuccessful bid for Heritage Lottery funding for a redisplay of the entire natural history collection "through the broad prism of biodiversity" (Horniman Public Museum and Public Garden's Trust, 2008:7). However, a revised bid succeeded two years later, enabling the Museum to plan a new gallery at the entrance to the North Hall that would present themes of more relevance to contemporary audiences than those represented by the museum's historic displays (Horniman Public Museum and Public Garden's Trust, 2011:6). The Entrance Gallery was envisaged to be a multi-purpose space in which new avenues of interpretation could be explored through Natural History displays, treasured specimens could be showcased, and contemporary art "inspired by nature" could be exhibited (panel at the Horniman Museum 22nd Nov 2018). Valuable and/or historically important specimens that had been extracted from the museum archive by a team of experts, (including a specimen of a Dodo made from turkey feathers), and examples of the work of past taxidermists (such as the habitat cases of British birds produced by Edward Hart), were brought out of store and put on display, while older and less accurate specimens were consigned to the archive (Horniman Public Museum and Public Garden's Trust, 2014:6). The 'Inspired by Nature' artist's space was in some ways the most innovative element of the entrance gallery as it allowed artists to bring their own interpretations of Nature into the museum where they could be compared with other taxidermy on display. Polly Morgan was the first artist to be offered an exhibition in the 'Inspired by Nature' space.

Polly Morgan is a contemporary artist who became widely known for her Surrealist assemblages, in which she juxtaposed taxidermy with everyday objects to suggest unsettling narratives (Aloi, 2019:21). By working with

taxidermy specimens in an Art rather than a museum context, Polly Morgan had been able to "contemporise the practice of taxidermy" (Horniman Public Museum and Public Garden's Trust, 2015:4) by using animal bodies as sculpting material. Another contemporary artist, Mark Fairnington, was invited to exhibit his paintings of taxidermy in a downstairs gallery from November 2015 to January 2016. Fairnington's highly detailed paintings provided a vision of taxidermy as an object of desire, often collected for its unusual appearance and historical associations rather than for its scientific value. His exhibition *Collected and Possessed* dealt with the relationship between "human beings [and] the history of thinking about the natural world" (Fairnington, 2008:65).

Polly Morgan's taxidermy interpretations of the animal at the Horniman Museum.

Like Tessa Farmer, Polly Morgan uses animal specimens to tell stories. The way she presents her specimens in the form of a tableau, has been borrowed from more popular forms of taxidermy display generally encountered outside the museum. For her exhibition at the Horniman Museum, *Taxidermy is Dead. Long Live Taxidermy*, Polly Morgan displayed tableaux that reflected on "the cycle of life and death and the removal of nature from its original context" (Caption in the Horniman Museum visited 17 April 2015). Each tableau challenged the viewer to reflect upon the predicament of an animal. When Polly Morgan exhibited her taxidermy in *Psychopomps* at the Haunch of Venison Gallery (2010), her works were displayed in a white walled gallery and spot lit to isolate each one from its context. The narratives of animal lives and deaths that were a feature of the work she exhibited at the Horniman Museum in 2015 were absent from the *Psychopomps* exhibition, that placed most emphasis on the spectacular visual quality of her taxidermy. Some of her tableaux did tell stories, such as the flying machine to which Morgan tethered 20 taxidermy specimens of flying finches, but they told anthropocentric literary rather than animal-centric, stories. When Polly Morgan exhibited a set of

different, less anthropocentric, works at the Horniman Museum, they set up a dialogue with the other taxidermy displays on show.

Polly Morgan's animal art.

One of the striking aspects of *Taxidermy is Dead, Long Live Taxidermy* exhibition, was the diversity of modes of presentation and representation Polly Morgan used to articulate ideas about animal lives and deaths. Morgan's practice drew on different artistic tropes, including surrealist assemblage, comic tableaux and symbolism in order to interpolate animal bodies into a narrative framework. Taking taxidermy away from traditional realist modes of representation was an important element of her practice, as Polly Morgan herself stated:

> For me, it is important to recognise that taxidermy has mostly been a traditional art form, with animals mounted in cases that mimic their natural environment. I want to evolve taxidermy as an art form; it can be more versatile than it has been. (Morgan, 2015).

All the taxidermy in *Taxidermy is Dead. Long live Taxidermy* was done by Polly Morgan herself, who (as the title of the exhibition suggests), belonged to a group of contemporary artists who were staging a revival of the use of taxidermy in art. Her career as a gallery artist dated from the early 21st century, a period when taxidermy was undergoing an unexpected resurgence of popularity in galleries and smart restaurant interiors. Polly Morgan first exhibited taxidermy in a fashionable restaurant – the *Bistrotheque* in Bethnal Green, in 2003/4 - where another contemporary artist, Banksy, spotted her work (Morgan, 2010:10). Her taxidermy works became more widely recognized by the art world when she exhibited at the 'Zoo Art Fair' in 2005 (Morgan 2010:10). From this point on, her work has continued to attract attention in the Art World for its originality and marketability.

When Polly Morgan began making animal tableaux in the early 2000s, taxidermy was falling out of fashion as a mode of display in museums (Morris, 2010:4-6). Some museums had discarded faded specimens in the 1960s and 1970s believing that their useful lives had come to an end. Saffron Walden Museum, for example, had discarded hundreds of old taxidermy specimens in 1960 including an elephant that ended its days in an artist's back garden[64], but many other museums held on to the taxidermy collections in their storerooms knowing that once gone, old specimens were hard to replace as conservation laws prohibited the collection of new specimens of protected species for museum displays (CITES, 1973). The partial purge of redundant museum taxidermy gave artists and designers a supply of specimens to work with in the latter years of the 20th century. Lange-Burndt, has suggested that it was "precisely because taxidermy had become the bankrupt estate of scientific research that these objects entered the field of artistic reflection" (Lange-Berndt, 2014:273).

Polly Morgan did not recycle old taxidermy as Tessa Farmer had done at the Natural History Museum. She learned taxidermy craft from George Jamieson, a professional taxidermist who taught her how to mount a pigeon in 2004 (Morgan, 2010:9). From this initial experience, Morgan continued to refine her practice and built a reputation in the early years of the twenty first century by producing witty and sometimes surreal works in which she arranged taxidermy
animals in narrative tableaux (The New Art Gallery Walsall, 2013). When Joanne Hatton invited her to show her work in the *Inspired by Nature* exhibition space at the Horniman Museum in 2015, she had already established an international reputation as a contemporary artist who had exhibited in Washington and Berlin as well as the United Kingdom[65]. Perhaps because of her reputation in the world of

[64] The artist was Anthony Fry.
[65] 'Organic Matters – Women to Watch' at the National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington DC (2015); 'Gallery of Wonder – Arts in

contemporary art, Hatton invited her to show existing works with the proviso that what she chose should fit the *Inspired by Nature* space (Hatton interview 12th August 2018).

Polly Morgan's influences

Polly Morgan exploits the narrative possibilities of arranging lifeless animal bodies in her works - an aspect of her practice that sets her taxidermy apart from the taxonomic displays that present specimens in poses that suggest they are still alive. She became aware of the potential for using taxidermy animals to articulate ideas of death when she saw Damien Hirst's installation *A Thousand Years* (1991) (Aloi, 2012:116), which contained a decaying cow's head[66] crawling with flies. This work "made her see it was possible to do these things and show them without embarrassment" (Morgan, 2016). Death makes an appearance in works such as *Gannet* (2014) (fig 55); a taxidermy seabird draped over the corner of a picture frame containing an illustration of a nest drawn with the bird's cremated remains. The posture of the 'dead' bird provides the aesthetic rationale for this tableau: Morgan said that she found the dead bird's body "so elegant" (Morgan, 2015). Taxidermy realism of the kind used by scientific displays does not always exploit the aesthetic possibilities of taxidermy. In fact, it can reduce the elegant body of a gannet to a single signifier of the bird's species – such as a gannet's head with its characteristic eye mask and long, powerful beak (fig 47).

Heritage' touring Britain (2015); 'Ngorongoro' at Lehderstrasse 34, Berlin, 13086 (2015)

[66] It was actually a taxidermy head produced by Emily Meyer (Milgrom, 2010:136)

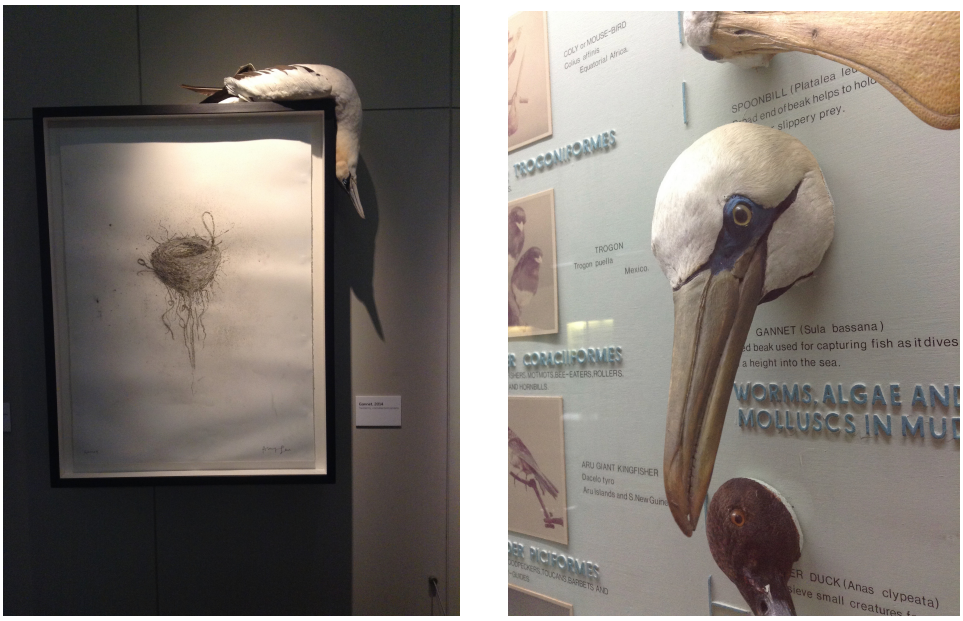

Fig. 47. Horniman Museum. Gannets: Polly Morgan's *Gannet (2014)* and the Horniman's *gannet head*. Photos © Richard Crawford

At an earlier stage in her career, Morgan also used bell jars, a form of display associated with the Victorian domestic interior rather than with museum displays.

Fig 48. Polly Morgan. *Vestage* (2009) © pollymorgan.co. uk

In *Vestage* (2009), a taxidermy kingfisher is surrounded by ritual objects (fig 48). The dead bird lies on a prayer book under a small chandelier, both suggesting a domestic interior setting. This tableau represents not only the end of the life cycle of the bird, but also references cultural customs employed to give death meaning. The glass bell jar she has used to preserve the arrangement of objects suggests that this tableau is a memento mori – a visual reminder of mortality. Polly Morgan placed her taxidermy bird into a particular material context to give it a cultural, as well as a natural, significance, acknowledging that animal bodies are framed according to the different socio-historical conditions in which they are preserved and displayed. She later stated that she had "got a bit sick of the Victorian aesthetic" (Morgan, 2010:91) and had removed the bell jars from her specimens in order to free them from the associations they had with the 19th century memento mori displays. Her later works, such as *Gannet* (2014) and *Cormorant* (2014) present the body of the birds without culturally loaded objects such as prayer books, suggesting that death should be seen as part of a natural life cycle rather than incorporated into cultural rituals. According to Joanne Hatton, taxidermy tableaux like *Gannet* and *Cormorant*, break "the taboo about displaying death" (Hatton, 2015). Polly Morgan's dead animals look dead.

Throughout her career, Polly Morgan has looked for new ways to use taxidermy in her work and has acknowledged that she has been influenced by other artists. She admires Surrealist artist Salvador Dali for his ability to "take something from everyday life and imbue it with a completely different meaning" (Morgan, 2016). His influence can be detected in her taxidermy tableau *Receiver* (2009) in which she placed a bunch of tiny chick's heads with their beaks agape in the earpiece of a black Bakelite telephone handset (fig 48), thus creating an unsettling combination of elements that upsets the viewer's expectations - as Dali had done in his Lobster Telephone assemblage (1938) in which he substituted the model of a lobster for the handset of a telephone receiver. By adopting the Surrealist method of 'assemblage', Morgan was able to produce unfamiliar

juxtapositions of objects that could provoke discomfort in the viewer. Her use of wit and irony in such works questioned the previous exclusion of all forms of taxidermy except scientific realism in the Horniman Museum[67].

Fig 49. Polly Morgan. *Receiver* (2009). Photo ©Richard Crawford

Morgan also acknowledged that Ron Mueck's miniature sculpture of his father's naked body, entitled *Dead Dad* [1996-97], had influenced her when she saw it at the *Sensations* exhibition in 1997 aged 17. She later stated that she loved this realistic sculpture for its "smallness and detail" (Morgan, 2010:86). Mueck's father's naked corpse expressed the vulnerability of the body after death and may have given Morgan the idea to include vulnerable taxidermy quail chicks in her Horniman Museum tableaux.

[67] The exception to this rule was the Walrus. It remained apart from the formal exhibitions of Natural History in the North Hall.

Fig 50. Polly Morgan. *Semblance of Sanity* (2014). Photo © Richard Crawford

A further avenue of development that Morgan has explored in her art practice has been the production of sculptures that exploit the formal qualities of taxidermy. Once again, her taxidermy practice moved away from the idea of the literal 'type specimen'. In *Semblance of Sanity* (2014), for example, Morgan explored the formal qualities of a python's supple body (fig 50). There are no props or contextual details to provide clues as to the narrative meaning of this knotted python, which appears to be intended as a formal statement. Joanne Hatton has argued that in works such as *Semblance of Sanity*, Morgan uses taxidermy as "just another material" (Hatton 2015) to produce the aesthetic effect she is searching for.

Taxidermy as Art

Morgan did not want the public to look at her taxidermy in the same way that they looked at museum displays, but to see them as works of Art:

> I've never shown in an environment like the Horniman before. For me, it is important to recognise that taxidermy has mostly been a traditional art form, with animals mounted in cases that mimic their natural environment. I want to evolve taxidermy as an art form; it can be more versatile than it has been.
> (Morgan, 2015).

The works she chose for *Taxidermy is Dead. Long Live Taxidermy* were all taxidermy tableaux, except for one work entitled *Semblance of Sanity* - a taxidermy python twisted into in a tight knot. As a graduate in English Literature rather than Fine Art, Morgan found herself using tableaux to tell stories about the lives of animals using taxidermy (Morgan, 2016) just as Tessa Farmer had used her fox and fairies to tell a story of parasitism and the struggle for survival. But whereas Farmer's fairies referred metonymically to real insects, Morgan used her bird and animal specimens as symbols to represent her ideas about mortality and vulnerability. The Surreal tendency that had established her reputation was represented by *Harbour* (2012), an unsettling work consisting of a fox with tentacles growing out of its body, but the majority of works on show in the Horniman exhibition used realistic taxidermy in narrative displays rather than as a way to present 'unheimlich' bodies - especially the ones completed in 2013 – 2014.

Polly Morgan's tableaux at the Horniman Museum were produced by an artist who rejected the normalised associations of taxidermy with a particular species of animal that was articulated in the animal displays exhibited elsewhere in the Museum. Freed from taxonomies and evolutionary trees, the taxidermy specimens in Polly Morgan's tableaux invited the viewer to read animals as characters in a story, harking back to Herman Ploucquet's animal tableaux illustrating stories of *Reinecke the Fox* at the Great Exhibition in 1851 (Poliquin, 2012:179). The

Victorian taxidermy authority, Montagu Browne, would have been horrified. He considered that narrative taxidermy (such as Ploucquet's), were "not artistic taxidermy and they are only allowable now and then as a relaxation" (Morris, 2010: 340). Polly Morgan brought her story-telling tableaux into a place from which such taxidermy had previously been banned on the grounds that it was neither artistic nor scientifically accurate.

Taxidermy realism, that Carl Akeley brought to the peak of perfection at the AMNH (see chapter 2) is now seen as problematic (Aloi, 2018:10). However, in the 19th and early 20th centuries, it was an approved method of animal representation in Natural History museums. Realism could be employed to differentiate different species from one another on the basis of the anatomy and morphology (Huxley, 1970 first pub 1894:208) in taxonomic displays which constructed an "ordered succession of different forms of life" (Bennett, 1988:90) and so brought order to the seemingly endless varieties of living organisms. Realistic specimens were needed to exemplify each of the different species in a taxonomic display. Taxidermy specimens represented a type of animal in a Natural History display that had a 'typical' appearance (Foucault 2002b:160). Odd or unusual looking specimens were unsuited for this job. So too were poorly produced taxidermy mounts that did not look sufficiently like the type of animal they represented. The narrative on show in a taxonomic display was that of a world of different organisms, classified according to their structural and morphological similarities and differences. As Foucault has remarked, dividing the animal kingdom into different species is "purely nominal". It represents the need to organise rather than need to represent the nature of the thing that is organised. (Foucault 2002b:160). When diorama displays came into fashion around the beginning of the twentieth century the animal's habitat came to assume greater importance in museum displays and a wider range of animal appearances were allowed in scientific museums such as the Horniman Museum (Wonders, 1993:192-193).

Polly Morgan's taxidermy tableaux construct different narratives about animal lives to those in Ward's (or Akeley's) dioramas. She removed her animals from their natural habitats and placed them in alien situations. *Sandcastles* (2013) for example, contains a quail chick that teeters on top of a tall stack of coins, staring down at a bent nail resembling a worm, is completely alienated from its surroundings (fig 51). Objects that are unthreatening in our own world, such as foam board, bent nails and coins, are turned into ugly threats when introduced into the world of a vulnerable quail chick. This tableau strongly suggests the unsettling effect that human technologies can have on the lives of small animals. Morgan's quail chick is realistic in appearance – but not in the same way that taxonomic specimens are required to be. It is not a type specimen, but a representation of a vulnerable young animal. Morgan is more concerned to convey the impression of fragility than to represent a 'typical' quail chick. Her taxidermy works articulate ideas about animal lives and deaths, and do not concern themselves with the place occupied by an animal in a taxonomy of species.

Fig. 51. Polly Morgan. *Sandcastles* (2013) Photo ©Richard Crawfo

Fig. 52. Polly Morgan. *In there Somewhere* (2014) photo © Richard Crawford

Fig. 53. Polly Morgan. *Coming into nothing* (2014) photo © Richard Crawford

Two of her taxidermy tableaux show the earth itself turning against birds that depend upon it for their existence. A swallow in *In there Somewhere* (2014) is depicted swooping down to collect mud for its nest, but as its beak touches the clay, it sticks fast and is trapped (fig 52). Denied flight, it will perish. The natural appearance of her taxidermy specimens is essential for the effect of her narratives to work as intended. The bird is a very skillfully prepared and looks like an live swallow in flight, but it is the bird's relationship with the clay that is significant, not its conformity to the idea of a typical swallow. Morgan's flying swallow contrasts to the stiffly posed taxonomic specimens of birds perched in identical poses on identical wooden supports elsewhere in the North Hall (fig. 54).

In another narrative tableau, *Coming into nothing* (2014), Morgan placed a fluffy chick on top of a crudely formed hoop of glistening grey clay (fig 53). The soft, feather-light bird appears to be stuck to the surface of the sticky material. Like the swallow it has been trapped. Morgan's attention to the soft downy feathers that cover her taxidermy chick gives this tableau its affective power. It makes the tableau into an uncomfortable reminder that animal lives are fragile and easily damaged. Morgan's use of taxidermy chicks also serves to set her work apart from the other taxidermy displays in the North Hall, which overwhelmingly represent adult birds and animals.

Fig. 54. Horniman Museum. *The Hawk and Duck displays* © Richard Crawford.

Most of the works on show in *Taxidermy is Dead. Long Live Taxidermy* employed literary tropes such as irony, allegory, punning or metaphor in the articulation of stories about animals. Such literary devices were not permitted in the scientific displays of taxidermy arranged by Haddon and his successors at the Horniman Museum. The narrative intention of each of Polly Morgan's works is signposted by its title. *Passing Clouds* (2014), for example, depicts a squirrel slumped against an upright post gazing at a yellow balloon stuck near the top of the pole (fig 55). The title encourages the viewer to read this tableau as a story about a squirrel caught up in the contemplation of a stray balloon, gazing up at it as if watching the clouds pass overhead. It appears to offer the viewer an allegory about the value of taking time to look at the world around you.

Fig. 55. Polly Morgan. *Passing Clouds* (2014) © pollymorgan.co.uk

A darker allegory is signalled by the title of *Hanging in the Balance* (2013), a tableau depicting a dead quail chick lying draped limply along a pencil balanced over an egg (fig 56). There is no attempt to hide the fact that the chick is dead. *Hanging in the Balance* can be read as a reference to factory farming practices, where male chicks are routinely "written off" because they cannot lay eggs, and are therefore regarded to be of no commercial value by the egg industry[68]. Allegories about animal exploitation speak to contemporary concerns over the ethics of modern mechanized farming methods that turn birds into units of production. Unlike the 'typical' realism required by taxonomic displays, Morgan's realism encompasses the social milieu in which animals find themselves in contemporary society. *Hanging in the Balance* brings taxidermy out of the scientific frame and into the world of contemporary commercial culture.

[68] https://kb.rspca.org.au/knowledge-base/what-happens-with-male-chicks-in-the-egg-industry/ (accessed January 2023).

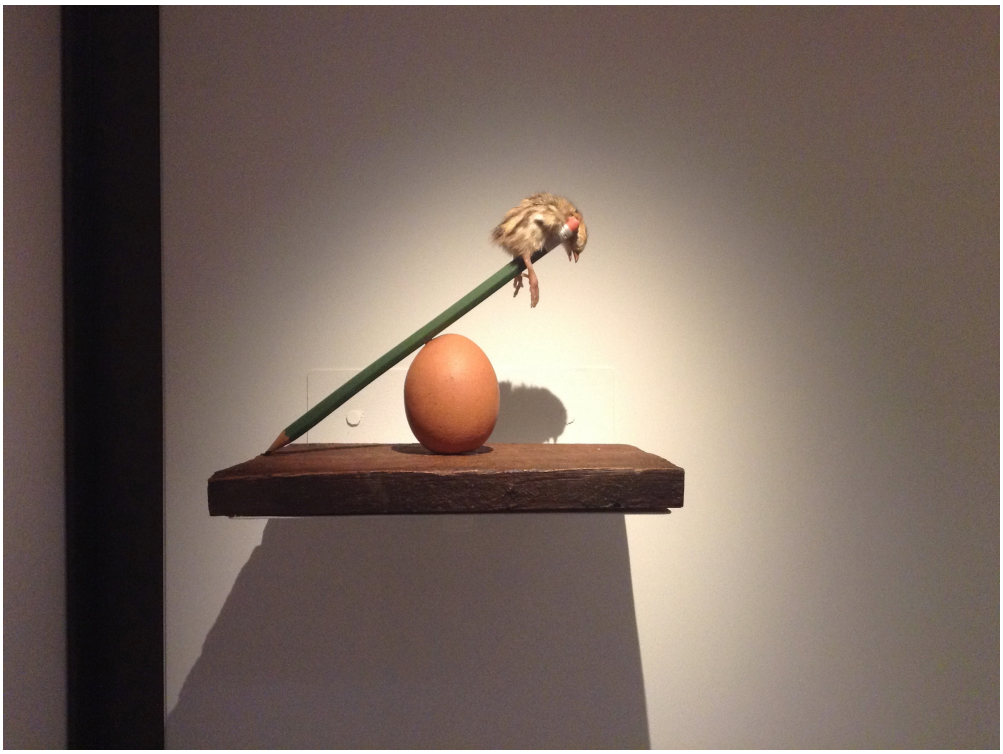

Fig. 56. Polly Morgan. *Hanging in the Balance* (2013). Photo © Richard Crawford

Fig. 57. Polly Morgan. *For No Other Reason* (2014). Photo © Richard Crawford.

The objects in *For No other Reason* (2014) (fig 57) construct a narrative involving three taxidermy thrushes, a zig-zag lightning bolt made of pencils and a crushed paper cloud. These symbolic objects suggests that a weather event is taking place, but the wider narrative is left obscure. The up-turned bell jar on which the three thrushes stand references the memento mori displays Morgan had previously produced but the arrangement of elements in *For No other Reason* point to the use of allegory. It is left to the viewer to puzzle out the connections between the different symbols of nature and culture in this work, and to arrive at their own interpretation.

Figure 58. Polly Morgan. *Harbour* (2012). Photo © Richard Crawford

The same could be said of *Harbour* (2012) that depicts three groping pink tentacles emerging from the inert body of a fox (fig 58). Like Mueck's *Dead Dad,* the fox lies prone on the floor, but like the cow's head in Damien Hirst's *A Thousand Years* (which Morgan also saw at the *Sensation* exhibition) the animal's body is implicated in a process of growth and regeneration. New life emerges from the corpse, and as it does so, the tentacles themselves become a meal for three wrens that flutter around them. In this presentation, the cycle of life is depicted in a dystopian vision of parasitism, mutation and predation.

Polly Morgan's representations of vulnerability challenge the scientific rules of formation that pertained at the Horniman Museum in the first half of the 20th century in several ways. Firstly, she presents the dead animal as dead rather than as alive. Secondly, she uses taxidermy specimens to tell a story rather than to represent a species, and thirdly, she uses parts from more than one species of animal to create hybrid monsters rather than utilizing the skin of a single species. By transgressing the norms of museum taxidermy displays in these ways, Polly Morgan was able to give visibility to the idea that familiar animals, such as a fox, might turn into frightening mutations.

The artworks that Polly Morgan selected to show at the Horniman Museum were all highly individual. The contemporary Art world's fixation on originality which, as contemporary art curator Iwona Blazwick has commented, can be understood as 'something you've never encountered before although you can recognise its genealogy' (Blazwick 2014) - allowed her the scope to experiment with many different modes of representation in her taxidermy works. This experimental approach is evident in the constant play between the visual and literary tropes that is a feature of her work. Morgan's practice reflects a range of contemporary and historic influences and cannot be neatly pigeonholed as realist, symbolist or surrealist. She has retained the Victorian interest in preserving the image of death in her work but has presented dead animals within more contemporary contexts, as illustrated in such works as *Hanging in the Balance* (2013) in which a quail chick is balanced on a pencil. The influence of works by other artists, such as Ron Mueck's hyper-realistic sculpture of his father, or Dali's lobster telephone, are brought into her practice to suit the theme she is working on.

In the context of a Natural History collection, her use of the 'death pose' subverts the original function of taxidermy which was to preserve the semblance of life in a dead animal skin (Aloi, 2012:34). Her 'dead' animals

highlight the un-naturalness of reinvesting dead animal skins with an artificial sense of vitality. An information panel placed next to her exhibition stated that her practice involved taking "the discarded bodies of animals [and] … freeing them of their inherent associations" (caption at the Horniman Museum, 17 April 2015). This statement registers the fact that her exhibition was used as a means by which the museum could introduce new representations of nature in forms not previously seen in their Natural History displays. By moving away from a strictly regulated interpretive frame, Morgan was able to play with the semiotics of her taxidermy in ways that would have been impossible had she stayed within scientific rules of formation. No longer enmeshed in taxonomies or hung on evolutionary trees, her taxidermy specimens could be used to represent wider narratives. Released from the 'scientific' context of a museum display cabinet or a diorama display, Morgan's animals were put in danger by everyday objects, like a telephone set or a pencil – familiar objects that signaled the unwelcome intrusion of human technology into animal lives. Her tableaux represented the antagonisms between nature and culture in ways that scientific taxidermy displays have excluded from vision – ironically, as the production of taxidermy is itself a form of animal exploitation. The freedom Morgan was given to articulate her own narratives of nature brought her animal art into a critical dialogue with previous modes of representing nature at the Horniman Museum. Her constructed encounters between taxidermy and human artifacts highlighted the differences between natural and unnatural death (Arends and Wade, 2020), producing an alternative vision of Nature to that of 'orderly' Nature articulated in the Horniman Museum's other displays.

Jazmine Miles-Long and the 'Artistic Taxidermy' tradition

Jazmine Miles-Long's taxidermy exhibition at the Horniman Museum was entitled *Memorial; a Tribute to Taxidermy* (2016-17). It differed considerably in appearance from Polly Morgan's exhibition *Taxidermy is Dead. Long live Taxidermy.* Miles-Long exhibited a set of taxidermy cases

based on antique specimens from the Horniman Museum's storerooms.

Jazmine Miles-Long studied sculpture at the University of Brighton and subsequently volunteered at the *Booth Museum of Natural History* in Brighton, a small museum that contains a famous collection of antique cased bird specimens. Her experiences at the Booth Museum inspired her to take up taxidermy as a career (Babbs, 2017). Her route to taxidermy was therefore different from Polly Morgan's, whose practice developed within in the world of contemporary art rather than in the field of museum taxidermy.

Up until the date of her exhibition, Miles-Long had preferred to be known as a taxidermist rather than as an artist but, as I shall argue, the boundary between the two practices is not a sharp one. Because she uses only animals that have died of natural causes or been found dead (from road kill, for example), she calls herself an "ethical taxidermist" to distinguish her work from that of other taxidermists who work on the bodies of animals that have been deliberately killed in order to be preserved and displayed in museums (Babbs, 2017). Miles-Long's taxidermy has mainly been exhibited in Natural History museums, including the Derby Museum and the Booth Museum in Brighton. But it does not always represent an animal in a straightforward way. For the Derby Museum, for example, she produced *A Study of Two Song Thrushes*. *Understanding Life Through Death* (2015) (fig 59) in which she placed a taxidermy thrush next to an armature which provides the inner form of a taxidermy specimen. She stated that her aim in displaying a finished taxidermy mount next to a maquette was to show that, no matter how life-like a piece of taxidermy is, underneath it is just "a craft object that's been made by a person" (Babbs, 2017). Placing her finished taxidermy thrush next to the maquette also set up a dialogue between the finished and the unfinished thrush mounts that highlighted the uncanny realism of her finished taxidermy representing a bird that once "flew and sang and lived" (Miles-Long, 2015).

Fig 59. Jazmine Miles-Long. *A Study of Two Song Thrushes*. *Understanding Life Through Death* (2015). © Jazmine Miles-Long

The relationship between taxidermy as a material craft and taxidermy as a means to achieve a form of veridical realism that *conceals* the fact that it has been constructed from wire and wood-wool, was a theme of *Memorial; a Tribute to Taxidermy* in which Miles-Long both constructed realistic taxidermy and revealed realism to be an illusion.

For her Horniman Museum exhibition, Miles-Long produced new versions of three old taxidermy cases that she had retrieved from the museum's storerooms. Each heritage case contained a taxidermy specimen mounted in front of a crude representation of its natural habitat, constructed out of dried grass, rocks, soil, and a painted background (figs 59 and 60). The old cases were 'pictorial displays', of the kind described by Montague Brown in his handbook on practical taxidermy:

> … birds are represented on trees or on 'rockwork', many of them are swimming, or flying, or eating surrounded by mosses and the few dried plants available for such purposes ... represented in as natural a manner as possible.
> (Browne, 1884:334)

Each of the old habitat cases made use of natural elements typical of the bird's or animal's habitat, a style of presentation that Edward Booth's taxidermist, George Saville, had used for the bird cases at the Booth Museum[69] where Miles-Long had previously worked. The crafts workers responsible for the manufacture of the habitat cases in the Horniman Museum had made a minimal attempt to achieve credible naturalism (compared with the accuracy of Carl Akeley's habitat displays, for example - see Chapter 5), and, due to their age, the grasses in the old cases appeared desiccated and lifeless. The taxidermy specimens inside the old cases were also worn and misshapen, revealing, in some cases, the inadequacy of their inner structure. Before starting to make her own version of each case, Miles-Long conducted a critical examination of each of the antique specimens, noting in particular the way the taxidermist had constructed the eyes and feet. The skill of the taxidermist was at issue because any inaccuracies that were apparent in these details reduced the authenticity of the animal's appearance.

[69] A painting of the bird would be made and cut out, then placed on the landscape painting, moved around until the desired composition was achieved, and glued into place. [George] Saville would mount the birds and replicate Booth's painting in the form of a display case. (www.brighton-hove-rpml.org.uk. Accessed March2013)

Fig. 60. Jazmine Miles-Long. *An antique taxidermy specimen case (left) next to Miles-Long's reworked case (right)* © Jazmine Miles-Long.

Fig. 61. Jazmine Miles-Long. *An antique taxidermy specimen case (left) next to Miles-Long's reworked case (right)* © Jazmine Miles-Long.

According to the rules of taxidermy realism as practiced by Carl Akeley, for example, the taxidermist had to conceal their involvement altogether if they were to convince the viewer that a taxidermy specimen can represent a living creature with complete veracity - a point at which the specimen can "dissolve into pure symbol" (Aloi, 2018:109), a moment when it is glimpsed not as a representation, but as an actual animal. Miles-Long employed her taxidermist's skills to produce something more than type specimens. She, like Akeley, aimed to re-incarnate an individual animal.

She believed that when it has been skillfully executed, a taxidermy case can become, in her own phrase, a "ghostly monument" that commemorates the "beauty and fragility" of the animal's body (information panel Horniman Museum, 23rd October 2016).

A short film of Miles-Long working on taxidermy specimens of a stoat and great tit was shown alongside her exhibition of taxidermy in the *Memorial* exhibition, revealing the technical processes she had used to achieve the high degree of realism she was aiming for. Each stage of the taxidermy process is shown in the film: the careful skinning of a dead bird or animal followed by the construction of an accurate armature of exactly the same proportions as the body over which the skin is to be fitted. And finally, the skin, which has been washed, is mounted over a bind up armature, and the fur or feathers blow-dried. To emphasize the importance of the technology of taxidermy that must remain hidden if her specimens are to look convincingly naturalistic, Miles-Long's placed the armatures of some of her taxidermy mounts on view in the exhibition alongside finished specimens (fig 62). They demonstrate the laborious work that is necessary to produce a form of representation that effaces its production.

Fig. 62. Jazmine Miles-Long. *A 'bind up' of a mink specimen next to a finished mount*. ©Jazmine Miles-Long

Like Polly Morgan, Miles-Long became fascinated with animal bodies through her taxidermy practice. A growing understanding of animal anatomy enabled her to make work in which the structure of the animal body was respected, but which also highlighted its beauty (Maddeaux, 2016), giving equal weight to the aesthetic qualities of the taxidermy mount as to the anatomical accuracy of the representation. Miles-Long follows a tradition of what Montague Browne called 'Artistic Taxidermy', which he defined as "taxidermy that recreates and conveys a poetic appreciation of an animal's essence - what makes a dove a dove and a lion a lion" (Browne (1896) quoted in Poliquin, R. 2012:178). For Browne, taxidermy was an art of re-creation that went beyond the replication of an animal's morphology (Morris, 2010:340). The aim of *artistic* taxidermy was to produce a record of the natural beauty of a living animal, an aim that Miles-Long also shared (Miles-Long, 2016b). Browne argued that only artistic taxidermy, could "give the public glimpses of living creatures as they really appear" (Browne, 1884:240). In an extension of his doctrine of fidelity to natural appearance, Browne advised artistic taxidermists to put taxidermy specimens in pictorial displays by placing them "in surroundings with appropriate accessories" (Browne, 1896:72 in Wonders, 2010:45), a piece of advice that may well have influenced the design of the antique habitat cases Miles-Long used as a basis for her new taxidermy versions.

However, Miles-Long's aim was not simply to produce a 'glimpse of nature', as Akeley's dioramas were intended to do (see Chapter 5), but to produce a 'memorial' to a dead animal. In each of her three habitat cases, Miles-Long arranged a new taxidermy specimen of the animal she was re-presenting in a clean white box, replacing the faded grass of the original cases with delicate white porcelain foliage.

Miles-Long's artistic finesse made it possible to recognize the once-living animal in her taxidermy mounts and to feel regret at the passing of the beautiful wild creatures she recreated, a sentiment echoed by McKibben,

who has asked; "how should I cope with the sadness of watching nature end in our lifetimes and with the guilt of knowing that each of us is in some measure responsible?" (McKibben, B. 2003:xix). Like Morgan's bell jar kingfisher tableaux, (fig 56) her 'memorials' were memento mori for a lost animal. They prompted the guilty reflection that until the advent of 'ethical taxidermy' in the 21st century, the animals we see preserved in museums were killed just so that their skins could be mounted on an armature for public display and raised the question; "what gives humans the right to kill other animals for display?" (Aloi, 2012:6). By bringing an animal back from the dead as a posthumous memorial rather than as a public curiosity, scientific specimen or hunting trophy, Miles-Long hopes to encourage visitors to experience the taxidermy animal as an ethically justifiable presence, an articulation of an animal life beyond "the confines of the merely biological" (Hynes, 2013).

Miles-Long drew inspiration from the taxidermy cases of Edward Hart (1847-1928), a keen ornithologist and bird taxidermist from Christchurch in Dorset, whose habitat cases were bought by the Horniman Museum in the 1980's and put on display in the Entrance Hall gallery in 2016-17. Miles-Long admired Edward Hart's habitat cases of British birds because she detected a story hidden in his taxidermy displays (Miles-Long, 2016a).

For example, when looking at the *Two Robins* case Hart had constructed in the late 19th century (fig 63), Miles Long noticed that,

> One of the robins is singing or possibly calling a warning, as the other looks inside of the brick bird trap that he is perched upon. The story within the case pulls you into a seemingly quaint scenario, either the robins know what this trap is or everything is about to go wrong.
> (Miles-Long, 2016a)

Fig. 63. Edward Hart. *Robin case with a 'brick trap' in the foreground.* (19th/ early 20thC) © Horniman Museum

Miles-Long admired Hart's use of pictorial qualities, like this snowy scene that makes the robin's red breasts stand out. This case may even have influenced her decision to use white porcelain foliage in her taxidermy cases instead of desiccated leaves. *Two Robins* can be read as a fable about the need for birds and animals to take care when humans are about. Miles-Long does not, like Edward Hart or Polly Morgan, construct narratives to carry her message of concern about human-animal relationships, but she does use a form of "tragic realism" (Aloi, 2018:214) to convey a sense of the individual animal presence that is lost in the process of taxidermy production, particularly when the aim is to produce a type specimen. Her cased specimens stood outside the Orders of Nature on display at the Horniman Museum. Her taxidermy animals were not intended to illustrate a species or represent the way an animal has adapted to its habitat. They are not 'things' but lost presences.

Claire Morgan's exhibition: *As I Live and Breathe* at the Horniman Museum.

Claire Morgan is another contemporary artist who, like Polly Morgan (no relation) came to prominence in the early years of the 21st century when Art galleries began showing new forms of animal art. Claire Morgan has incorporated taxidermy into her art practice since 2004, when she began her career as a sculptor. Typically, she places her taxidermy birds and animals inside a network of tiny fragments of material that define the space around them. Unlike Polly Morgan, she is also known for her site-specific work such as *Chasing Rainbows* (2008), a collaboration between Selfridges and ROLLO Contemporary Art that was displayed in the window of the famous department store in central London (Claire Morgan 2022b). This installation was created out of scraps of plastic and dead butterflies. Claire Morgan was invited to produce works for the *Inspired by Nature* space in the entrance gallery to the North Hall of the Horniman Museum and was also commissioned to create a site-specific installation for the foyer area known as 'Gallery Square'. Both parts of her exhibition were linked by the material theme of the waste plastic, a pollutant that has infiltrated natural environments on both land and sea.

The dimensions and shape of her installations vary according to the place in which they are exhibited. In the long, thin corridor of a French Chateau (the Chateau d'Oiron), she suspended nets of dandelion seeds arranged in a cubic formation along one wall. The taxidermy barn owl that Morgan placed at the centre of one of these insubstantial cubes attracted the eye mainly because it is unusual to see a wild bird inside a building - although Morgan believed that she had found evidence that a barn owl was using the chateau as its home (Morgan, 2019). In the context of the Horniman Natural history Hall, her taxidermy birds and animals looked more at home amongst the other specimen displays that surrounded them.

Her installation *As I Live and Breathe* (2019) was exhibited in the 'Inspired by Nature' space at the Horniman Museum nearby other taxidermy displays. It contained a set of works featuring taxidermy specimens of urban animals including a grey squirrel, a red fox, a carrion crow and a rose-ringed parakeet. Each of these animal specimens was presented with a cone of black plastic fragments entering into (or possibly issuing from) their open mouths (fig 64). Her exhibition in the Horniman Museum put the death of the animal on display, but unlike Miles-Long's 'memorial' cases, her displays suggested the cause of their death.

Like her namesake Polly Morgan, Claire Morgan learned taxidermy as a way to get to know animal bodies:

> I wanted to be able to manipulate the specific positions of animals, and to control them visually, and to halt their decay. I found that in order to do that I needed taxidermy, and as I started to learn the various processes, my understanding of it changed entirely, and the process of touching and exploring the dead beings has become a central part of my practice.
> (Morgan, C. 2019)

Fig. 64. Claire Morgan. *As I Live and Breathe installation at the Horniman Museum* (2019). © Horniman Museum.

In each of Claire Morgan's taxidermy works the animal specimen was separated from museum Orders of Nature and given new symbolic significance. This separation, which was also a feature of Polly Morgan's taxidermy exhibition, gave the artist the freedom to construct new narratives about animal lives using an assemblage of objects not normally associated with animal displays, such as multiple fragments of black plastic. One of the works in the exhibition, for instance, depicted a taxidermy crow tumbling out of a broken field of plastic fragments (fig 69).

The plastic scraps that Claire Morgan incorporates into her works have a particular significance in our own age, in which plastic pollution has left its mark on the geological record of the earth to such an extent that their presence has led to the naming of a new geological era – the Anthropocene, a period in which natural and human histories have been brought together into an "integrated narrative". (Arends, 2019:49). Claire Morgan has developed a technique for configuring fragile scraps of plastic "to create the illusion of precise geometric structures" (Morgan, 2021) such as cones, cubes and spheres. She re-orders the unruly, polluting pieces of plastic that people throw away, and gives them new forms. Her artworks can be read as a call for urgent consideration of the effects that plastics are having on the natural world

Fig. 65. Claire Morgan. *By the Skin of the Teeth (II)* (2019) © Clare Morgan.

Each of the animals that share the main case of Claire Morgan's exhibition is suspended beneath a cone of black plastic scraps, mouths fixed to the base of the cone as if breathing the fragments into its lungs (fig 65). The distressing configuration of the animal with a cloud of plastic fragments resonates with the contemporary realities that urban animals face. The fox, a familiar animal in urban settings, scavenges its food from rubbish bins and encounters black bin bags on a daily basis. What human society throws away, the fox consumes, exposing it to the unhealthy products of the food industry as well as the packaging that so much food comes wrapped up in.

When compared to a nearby diorama display of rural foxes in a diorama produced by Rowland Ward in 1939 (fig 66) in which the taxidermy specimens of foxes have been mounted in active positions with alert expressions to give the appearance of lively, animated animals, Claire Morgan's inert fox appears dead.

Fig. 66. Horniman Museum. *The Rowland Ward fox diorama* © Horniman Museum

Ward's picture of unspoiled rural Nature contrasts with Claire Morgan's picture of a poisonous urban environment. His diorama employs the realist style that Akeley brought to the peak of perfection in the 1920s and 1930's, using authentic details of the foxes natural surroundings including leaves, rocks and branches, to create a theatrical, idealised vision of foxes in their own habitat. The effects of human waste products on the natural environment are not visible - probably because when this display was produced before the Second World War, farming was still a relatively local and organically based industry.

Claire Morgan used taxidermy to represent animals caught out by environmental destruction:

> My environmental concerns have always been reflected in my work, particularly the passive role we have chosen to assume within our environment, and our reluctance to fully accept our own culpability in its destruction. The waste plastic in my work is like a contemporary artefact that embodies our lazy, indulgent,

> throwaway culture, and it provides a very clear and literal example of the impact we have on our surroundings.
> (Morgan, C. 2022)

In her previous work, Claire Morgan has represented a bird or animal trapped inside, or falling through a geometric structure made up of fragile material such as plastic scraps, dandelion seeds, leaves or even dead flies carefully suspended on nylon wires held in position by weights. The open texture of her cubes, spheres and cones allows her to position taxidermy birds and animals inside or outside them, or simply to pass through them, leaving a trail of fragments that have been pushed out of position by the animal's body. The nylon threads that support the plastic scraps may also play a part in her tableaux, suggesting vertical movement, or they may be rendered invisible by the careful use of spotlighting (fig 67).

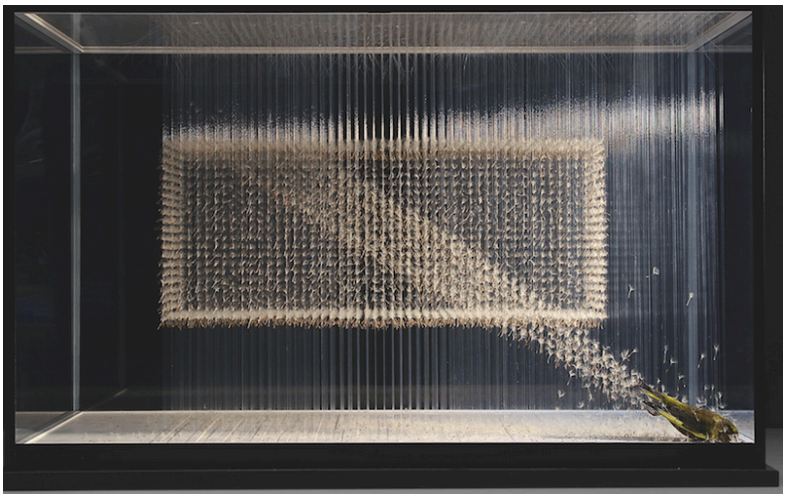

Fig. 67. Claire Morgan. (2013) *Life Span. Greenfinch* (taxidermy), dandelion seeds, nylon, in vitrine. © Claire Morgan

Many of Claire Morgan's smaller works have been displayed in glass cabinets that protect her fragile constructions from harm like museum specimen display cases. Like Tessa Farmer's fairy tableaux, Morgan's works demand close inspection that enables the viewer to appreciate the fine detail of the assemblages she painstakingly constructs out of tiny, fragile elements. Claire Morgan has stated that the fragility of her works provides an important aesthetic element: "Any event might destroy these

structures. As the potential for destruction seems closer, the senses of frailty and futility become more powerful, and there is a particular beauty in that moment" (Morgan, C. 2022).

In her Horniman Museum exhibition, the small, shimmering scraps of plastic that made up the open forms of previous works have solidified into dark cones of dense material that threaten animal lives, raising alarm over the potential harm that plastic waste can cause animals. They reflect Claire Morgan's own concerns about the damage that human indifference to the effects that pollution is having on wider Nature:

> My environmental concerns have always been reflected in my work, particularly the passive role we have chosen to assume within our environment, and our reluctance to fully accept our own culpability in its destruction.
> (Morgan, C. 2022).

Joanne Hatton has stated that she exhibited Claire Morgan's taxidermy work in the 'Inspired by Nature' space to articulate contemporary concerns about human relations with nature:

> *As I Live and Breathe* asks questions of us all - our purpose in life, our choices, our relationship with nature, our futures and ultimately, our very survival.
> (Hatton, 2010).

Claire Morgan's choking animals bring environmental pollution into visibility as a new and unstable element in the urban habitat. Urban foxes, in particular have fallen foul of the rubbish that human's discard, as the ingestion of plastic can prove fatal (Baxter, 2008). *As I Live and Breath* turned the air around the taxidermy specimens into a signifying element of the display. Whereas Rowland Ward had constructed a representation of the rural location in which he had collected his specimens, Morgan used her plastic scraps symbolically, to represent the pollutants in the animals' environment. Like Polly Morgan, she introduced ideas about death through her use of 'lifeless' taxidermy but in contrast to her namesake her

installations do not use literary tropes such as plot and character to suggest an on-going story. Her tableaux capture a moment frozen in time in which a single event in an animal's life is represented. As one commentator has suggested, her works "convey a tension between motion and stillness, life and decay, permanent and ephemeral" (Marbury, 2014:97). These antonymic qualities animate the display of objects and provoke both and ethical and an aesthetic response to the taxidermy specimen that does not depend on animal morphology alone. Claire Morgan has claimed that the ideas that inform her works have come from "observations and concerns about what I see around me … of reality, and the physical world" (Morgan, C. 2019). The same could be said of Akeley, Farmer, Polly Morgan and Jazmine Miles-Long, but the materials that Claire Morgan uses distinguish her work from that of these other animal artists.

Although the work in *As I live and Breathe*, seem to reference the quite specific theme of plastic pollution, Claire Morgan's critique of the ideas articulated in traditional taxidermy displays runs deeper. She resists the Colonialism that provided a rationale for the acquisition and display of exotic species of animal in 19th century museums such as the Horniman Museum, which contains a huge collection of taxidermy specimens assembled from overseas, most notably from countries that were once part of the British Empire. Like Jazmine Miles-Long, Claire Morgan uses only specimens of birds and animals that have been ethically sourced in her practice (Say Who 2019). Her animal art does not valorise the exotic or exaggerate the size of the specimen, like the inflated Horniman Walrus[70] that stands at the centre of the North Hall. Instead of mounting her taxidermy in striking poses, she chose to mount her fox, parakeet crow and squirrel in poses suggesting vulnerability, a characteristic that is not

[70] The walrus was shot by a professional hunter, Mr. J H Hubbard, (nicknamed 'the Canadian Nimrod') for the *Colonial and Indian Exhibition* where it was put on show to encourage rich European game hunters to forsake India for Canada (Trendacosta, K. 2014). Edward Horniman purchased the walrus from this exhibition.

typically found in the stiff taxidermy specimens on view in the historic displays at the Horniman Museum. What distinguishes her work from that of the masculine cult of trophy display is the way her taxidermy brings out the fragility of animal bodies. Her work points to the fact that all animals including humans are irrevocably involved in an "unstoppable cycle of life and death" (Morgan, C. 2021). Her depictions of animal suffering represent a contribution to the debate on pollution and on the way in which people impact on Nature with their "careless disposal of unnatural' materials" (Baxter 2008).

Challenging old ways of looking at animals.

When Joanne Hatton was appointed Keeper of Natural History at the Horniman Museum in 2007, one of her top priorities was to find more effective methods for interpreting the Natural History collection to the general public (Horniman Public Museum & Public Gardens Trust, 2007). A broad concept for the re-organisation of the North Hall already existed when she arrived. It consisted of "looking at the gallery through the broad prism of biodiversity" (Horniman Public Museum & Public Gardens Trust, 2007:6). Sub-topics of biodiversity included, " … the diversity of life, strategies for survival, evolution, changes to biodiversity, understanding biodiversity and the issues and themes that "impact on biodiversity today" (Horniman Public Museum & Public Gardens Trust, 2007:6). The same Report also noted that: "there is a basic lack of interpretation to the gallery for our mainly family audience" (Horniman Public Museum & Public Gardens Trust 2007:7).

Funding was sought for a redisplay of the taxidermy collection that would bring the displays up to date and improve the interpretation of displays for contemporary visitors. Part of Hatton's task as Keeper of Natural History was to find new ways to interpret the collections that would interest visitors and attract a wider public into the museum. When a funding application to the DCMS and Wolfson Museums and Galleries

Improvement Fund for £70,000 was successful in 2014 [71], it allowed Hatton to plan new displays in the entrance area of the Natural History Hall that was eventually completed in 2015. Hatton had researched Natural History galleries in UK museums and organised a NatSCA (Natural Science Collections Association) conference at the World Museum in Liverpool on *Developing ideas and concepts for natural history re-displays* (2006). The new entrance gallery she planned was conceived as a multi-display space in which new avenues of interpretation could be explored through Natural History specimen displays. These would include treasured specimens displays and exhibitions of contemporary art inspired by Nature (panel at the Horniman Museum, 22nd Nov 2018).

Jo Hatton wanted the new Entrance Gallery to provide "a coherent and accessible introduction to the gallery and our historic collection" (Horniman Public Museum & Public Gardens Trust, 2015:4). The link between overseas trade and the collection of animal specimens in the 18th and 19th centuries, for instance, was the subject of a display that contributed to the debate on the colonial origins of the Horniman collection. A new display demonstrated how the ideologies of science and colonialism had worked together to set the conditions that had produced Horniman's collection in the 19th century by focussing attention on the connection between a growing trade in animal skins and the contemporaneous drive to amass encyclopaedic collections of animal specimens[72]. Frederick Horniman's passion for beetle collecting was the

[71] Funding was awarded subject to conditions. The museum had to aim to produce one or more of the following outcomes: Excellent interpretation of permanent collections of national significance. Better public engagement with and understanding of collections. Increased numbers of visitors to museums and galleries. Improved future sustainability of the organisation. Conservation of architectural heritage. (Wolfson Foundation funding for museums and galleries, nd.)

[72] The walrus specimen, for example, that is still located in the centre of the North Hall, was purchased by Frederick Horniman from the *Colonial and Indian Exhibition* in 1886. It stands out from the other exhibits because of its size and grossly inflated appearance and, because it

theme of another of the new displays (2015), which portrayed him as a serious amateur naturalist. An 'animal exploitation' display containing specimens that illustrated the different ways in which birds and animals have been killed for their skins or feathers provided the broad theme that brought together old pieces of taxidermy that had previously been excluded from the public galleries, including taxidermy trophies, decorative arrangements of hummingbirds and some pigmy taxidermy dogs arranged under a bell jar. These specimens extended the range of taxidermy forms on view in the museum and further dispersed the idea of the animal (which is one of the reasons they had been kept away from the systematic arrangements in the public galleries in the past). Artists' taxidermy provided additional opportunities for visitors to engage in a critical re-appraisal of the museum's historic taxidermy displays.

Joanne Hatton used artists' taxidermy as critical interventions that could shift the museum's curatorial practices further towards reflexivity and the re-interpretation of the ways knowledge had been constructed through taxidermy displays in the past. By placing contemporary articulations of the animal alongside older displays of nature in the museum's "field of memory" (Foucault, 2002a:65), the three exhibitions of artist's taxidermy presented "different ways of thinking about and visualising museum natural history collections and nature" (notice at the Horniman Museum, 22nd Nov 2018) and thus highlighted some of the social, scientific and institutional values that had informed the museum's historic displays. All three female artists refused the framing values of machismo and colonial acquisition that had influenced the rules of formation of earlier taxidermy displays and represented animal lives as both finite and fragile.

Joanne Hatton saw the critical potential of artist's taxidermy:

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looked so different from surrounding taxidermy displays, stood in need of a contextualizing display.

> I think it allows you to open your eyes to these collections and you realise … the wonder that such specimens evoked in those early days when the Horniman Museum would have been an institution that brought the 'world to Forest Hill' for visitors hungry for knowledge.
> (TinctureofMuseum 2015).

Hatton believed that contemporary art exhibitions could "open up the collection in a surprising way" to visitors (Horniman Museum, 2016a) by providing visual comparisons between historic taxidermy displays and recent taxidermy, and claimed that Polly Morgan's exhibition had demonstrated that "taxidermy is not a 'dying art' but an evolving art form" (Horniman Museum, 2016b). The use of specimens as stand-ins for their species belonged to the early 20th century whereas Polly Morgan's art belonged to a 21st century field of critical art practices that appropriated and repurposed museum techniques for preserving animal remains to create new visions of human-animal relations.

Polly Morgan's assemblages, Miles-Long's taxidermy cases and Claire Morgan's installations articulated "different ways of thinking about and visualising museum natural history collections and nature" (information panel at Horniman Museum, 22 Nov 2018). Their presence questioned the relevance of older specimen displays to current ideas about Nature. All three of the artists' exhibitions looked beyond the boundaries imposed by earlier rules of scientific nomenclature and classification schemes and encouraged visitors to engage in wider questions such as: 'How should we feel about the loss of animal lives?' 'How can we think of nature without thinking also about the effect human technologies and their waste products are having on animals and their habitats?' 'What is the reality of being an animal?' 'What can we do to protect other species?'

Conclusions

My analysis of Polly Morgan's *Taxidermy is Dead, Long Live Taxidermy,* Jazmine Miles-Long's *Memorial: a Tribute to taxidermy* and Claire Morgan's *As I Live and Breathe* at the Horniman Museum has focused on the

different ways in which these three artists' exhibitions challenged institutional rules of formation stretching back to the very early 20th century. As in my previous case studies, artist's exhibitions were turned into to critical interventions by a curator - in this case Joanne Hatton.

The three exhibitions produced creative confrontations between old and new articulations of nature in the Horniman Museum. Polly Morgan's narrative tableaux addressed contemporary ethical questions about the lives of animals. Her quail chick suspended over an egg, for example, raised questions about factory farming and the suffering of animals at the hands of humans, whilst the dead fox sprouting tentacles from its insides resonated with public anxieties about the power of biotechnology to create not only benign clones like Dolly the sheep, but hideous monsters. Her most effective tableaux could be read as fables that suggest a moral lesson. Polly Morgan's expanded idea of taxidermy realism included not only the representation of living animals, but of dead ones as well. This enabled her to use taxidermy tableaux to represent ideas about the life cycle of animals, both natural, as in the *Gannet* assemblage (fig 53), or un-natural, as in *Hanging in the Balance* (fig 58). These animal bodies express helpless vulnerability, unlike some of the older, more abject taxidermy specimens in the museum that occupy an uncertain zone between animal and object.

The ethical questions provoked by Polly Morgan's and Claire Morgan's taxidermy extended debates about rights into the non-human world (Baker, 2000:190) and resonated with animal rights theories such as those of Peter Singer, who has argued that:

> Once non-human animals are recognised as coming within the sphere of equal consideration of interests, it is immediately clear that we must stop treating hens as machines for turning grain into eggs …
> (Kalof & Fitzgerald 2007:43)

Jazmine Miles-Long's exhibition explored the differences between old, faded taxidermy specimens and her own sensitively produced taxidermy in which, she sought to preserve the fragile appearance of a living animal. The new specimens she prepared for her exhibition did not enter the ordered specimen displays already in the Museum, as a taxidermy fox she prepared for the Derby Museum did. Instead. Her taxidermy gained critical effect by being shown side-by-side with the antique cases on which they were based. Miles-Long's cased specimens captured the transient beauty of a bird or an animal whereas the antique specimens upon which they were modelled no longer preserved the subtleties of animal form they had originally sought to recreate. Her new cases revealed a deficit of realism in the older cases that rendered their animal subjects abject, and therefore beyond ethical consideration.

Claire Morgan's depiction of choking urban animals provoked questions about human responsibilities towards other species of animal. Her display showed the effects that plastic pollution can have on the animals that share our cities. She has stated her misgivings about prevailing attitudes towards Nature:

> I am terrified by the aggressively selfish attitude we as a society have towards everything around us. We just keep consuming and consuming, and even now do little more than pay lip service to actually dealing with the mess we have made of the planet and the disastrous direction we are moving in.
> (Morgan, C. 2019)

Her tableaux represented the animal habitat in a radically different form to previous habitat displays by giving the polluted air that animals breathed a tangible presence. Her decision to use species that were familiar in our cities further distanced her taxidermy display from the exotic specimens in the heritage collection and brought the message of environmental pollution into the urban context of the Horniman museum. Her installation represented an alternative vision of the animal in Nature both symbolically and materially, through the manipulation of extremely

delicate materials, including scraps of plastic and animal bodies. Her exhibition posed questions about the relevance of heritage displays to current concerns over the threat of pollution to the natural world.

Joanne Hatton used artist's taxidermy to facilitate a shift in the museum's heuristic orientation; from offering the public purely scientific displays to offering them a choice of articulations of the animal including those produced by artists that had originated outside the museum. As a consequence, visitors were given more opportunity to compare, and critically assess the different constructions of the animal on view and to form their own understanding rather than having to accept institutional interpretations on view as authoritative[73]. The interventions created what Hooper-Greenhill has called a "new ensemble of oppositions" (Hooper-Greenhill, 1992:192). Frankly dead specimens were exhibited next to those resurrected through taxidermy to appear alive. A picture of animal lives threatened by their environment was opposed to a vision of nature in eternal equilibrium. Stories of animal lives and deaths and memorials to dead animals confronted stiff, impersonal specimens representing animal 'types'. Ethical taxidermy was placed besides hunting trophies. Joanne Hatton, like Bergit Arends, sought to open up the museum's "field of enunciation" (Foucault 2002a:63) by expanding the number and type of articulations of the Nature concept on display, rather than attempting to reuse old taxidermy to tell new narratives. The Horniman Museum became a 'heterotopia' – a space with many different representations of the animal (Lord 2006:5) in which contemporary questions about human-animal relations could be asked.

[73] For example, three-quarters of the respondents to a visitor survey conducted by the Museum on how they viewed Polly Morgan's exhibition thought it "opened up the historic collection in a surprising way" (Hatton, 2016a).

Conclusion

At the beginning of the 21st century contemporary art was brought into museums in England by curators looking for ways to increase public interest in their collections. This thesis has looked at *how* curators at the Wellcome Collection, the Natural History Museum, the Horniman Museum and the Manchester Museum used artists' taxidermy to encourage contemporary visitors to look more critically at their historical taxidermy collections and to question past representations of the animal. It has also explored how the artists' taxidermy conveyed new narratives of Nature that contrasted with those already circulating in these case study museums and drew out concerns about the way we treat other animals. Each museum took a different approach to organizing their exhibition space and juxtaposing contemporary with historic representations of the animal, thus inviting visitors to see animals in different ways.

In each case study, artist's interventions were located in close proximity to a historic taxidermy displays with the exception of *Living Worlds*, a curator-artist collaboration at Manchester Museum which replaced a previous taxidermy display. In the other instances, it was easy for visitors to compare new taxidermy displays with old by virtue of their proximity. Each of the three museum taxidermy collections discussed in this thesis was housed in a historic building, which imposed restrictions on the amount of internal adaptation permissible for the staging of a new display.

This study has looked at the ways in which the artists have challenge older representations of the animal contained in the museums, and specifically, how their work has raised ethical issues about human-animal relations that were overlooked or overwritten in past taxidermy displays. When the contemporary artists discussed in this thesis showed their works next to historic taxidermy collections, they facilitated new readings that questioned existing orders (Robins, 2013:17). The artist's interventions described in this thesis can therefore be described 'critical' in the context of the museums they showed in because their work gained meaning from

"the contingencies of context" (Robins, 2013:20). The displays by Mark Dion, Polly Morgan Jazmine Miles-Long, Claire Morgan and Tessa Farmer took on additional significance when seen next to the heritage displays of taxidermy in the case study museums. They made it possible to compare, for instance, taxidermy displays that re-created a sense of animation in the animal body with depictions of motionless specimens - such as Polly Morgan's 'dead' quail chicks at the Horniman Museum. They also made it possible to compare faded condition of some of the older specimens in the Horniman heritage collection with Jazmine Miles-Long's 'Artistic', highly naturalistic taxidermy. Claire Morgan's choking fox installation contrasted with Rowland Ward's diorama display of foxes playing in their rural habitat, highlighting the contemporary issue of pollution that is harming the natural environment. By choosing only local species of animal, each of these artists challenged the valorization of the exotic specimen that rested on colonial relationships between the United Kingdom and other nations.

Locating artists' interventions beside older taxidermy displays opened up the possibility of dialogue between two representations of the animal (Robins, 2013:21) and therefore brought the visitor into the process of interpreting what was meant by the different taxidermy displays - a questioning process that the *Making Nature* exhibition encouraged by adopting a discursive form of exhibition rather than a didactic format (Beddard 2020:14 -24). The different artist's taxidermy interventions in the case study museums invited more active higher visitor engagement with the permanent collections of taxidermy and therefore played a part in curatorial strategies to increase the number and range of visitors to the museums.

This approach seems to have been successful, judging by the increase in visitor numbers at all three museums. The Horniman Museum Natural History Hall entrance re-displays, that included Polly Morgan's *Taxidermy is Dead. Long Live Taxidermy* exhibition, opened on 11th March 2015. Visitor numbers increased in the year 2015 – 2016 by 40,000 over the previous year (HMPGT Annual Reports 2015, 2016). The two exhibitions

by Mark Dion and Tessa Farmer at the Natural History Museum were held during 2007. Visitor numbers increased in the year 2006-2007 by 611,000 over the previous year (Natural History Museum Annual Report and Accounts 2007-2008. 2008). Mark Dion's installation *The Bureau for the Centre for the Study of Surrealism and its Legacy* was on display at the Manchester Museum during 2005. Visitor numbers went up in the year 2005-2006 by 47,000 over the previous year (Manchester Museum 2007). The taxidermy displays discussed in this thesis were thus not only a means of presenting different portrayals of the animal, but they were able to increase the number of museum visitors.

This thesis has examined the way in which contemporary artists have raised issues that could be called 'ethico-ecological'. In the artists' taxidermy interventions at the Horniman Museum and the Natural History Museum, the animal was presented as a threatened or exploited creature under pressure to escape the attentions of predators, parasites or pollution. As Kalshoven has pointed out, "taxidermy is … increasingly mobilized to address ecological concerns, by artists, museums, and by many professional taxidermists. (Kalshoven, 2018:34-37). In some cases, such as Claire Morgan's choking creatures and Polly Morgan's helpless chicks, human agency is implicated in the animal's perilous position. Polly Morgan's, Clare Morgan's and Tessa Farmer's tableaux all tell stories about the animal. They do not communicate 'truths' about nature to the wider public through taxidermy realism as Akeley's "windows on nature" were supposed to do, but rather represented animals facing danger. Their works resonated with wider debates about human relations with the natural world in circulation at the time of their interventions (for instance, Berger, 2009. Aloi, 2012. Baker, 2013. Calarco, 2015. Morton 2018b).

The introduction of contemporary animal artworks in museums with Natural History collections in the first two decades of the 21st century offered curators a way to introduce animal displays that were more relevant to contemporary audiences than previous taxonomic and evolutionary displays (Van Saaze, 2013:187). The artist's interventions

discussed in this thesis have reflected new attitudes towards the natural world that are dissonant with older concepts of the animal such as those represented in the early arrangements of Alfred Cort Haddon at the Horniman Museum, Richard Owen at the Natural History Museum and William Boyle Dawkins at the Manchester Museum. Henry McGhie and Etienne Russo's *Living Worlds* installations at Manchester Museum, for example, overwrote the evolutionary displays that the 19th century scientist, Thomas Huxley, had advised the museum to exhibit.

Recent taxidermy displays have demanded more engaged viewing because, as Kalshoven has argued, taxidermy has been "increasingly mobilized to address ecological concerns, by artists, museums, and by many professional taxidermists" (Kalshoven, 2018:34-47). Farmer's *Little Savages* at the Natural History Museum exposed the limitations of previous museum displays on the topic of natural selection which had failed to bring a vision of animal suffering, inherent in the theory, out into the open for closer examination. Her depiction of a damaged fox resonated with fears about threats to animal populations that had been widely circulated (CITES, 1973). Claire Morgan's installation brought the eco-political topic of pollution and the effect of plastic waste on animal lives into sharp focus. Henry McGhie and Etienne Russo, Tessa Farmer and Claire Morgan all adopted a critical attitude to past taxidermy displays in order to write new narratives about how humans relate to animals. Their interventions brought troubling ethical questions into the Natural History museums in which their taxidermy was displayed. But whereas the abject bodies of foxes in Tessa Farmer's and Claire Morgan's works could evoke immediate sympathy for the suffering inflicted on animals, the taxidermy in McGhie and Russo's cases were used metaphorically to represent ideas: the taxidermy crane in the *Peace* case, for instance, is seen as a symbol for 'luck' and 'longevity' in Japanese culture (The Japanese Crane 2022).

One question that has troubled debates about representations of Nature concerns the place that humans occupy within the Natural Order (Kellert,

1997, Beddard 2017, 2019, 2020). Underlying past Orders of Nature was the idea that while humans belonged to the same biological realm as other animals, their subjectivity - which was initially signaled by their power to name other species of animal in Biblical accounts of the Creation - placed them apart from the rest of nature (Agamben, 2004:36). The troubled relationship between humans and other species has resurfaced as a theme in many of the artists' interventions discussed in this thesis. Some artist's taxidermy suggests the possibility of more positive relationships between human and animal subjectivities. For example, Jazmine Miles-Long's memorial cases at the Horniman Museum suggest that we might mourn for lost animal lives. Her specimens acquired a sense of individual identity through her meticulous preparation in contrast to the less skillfully mounted specimens in the heritage collection that lost their individuality when were used as representatives of their species.

Other displays emphasized the negative relations humans have with other species. The 'Domination' case in the *Living Worlds* exhibition at Manchester Museum, contained Quas-Cohen's leaping tiger together with photographs of white hunters to tell a story about big game hunting. Animal exploitation was also the theme of Polly Morgan's tableaux featuring dead quail chicks, victims of an economic system that cut their lives tragically short. The results of thoughtlessly discarded waste products were graphically brought home in Claire Morgan's installation of the animal victims of a throw-away society in *As I Live and Breath* at the Horniman Museum, whilst Abbas Akhavan's *Fatigues* at the Wellcome Collection pointed to human indifference to the lives of wild animals killed on the roads every year by motor traffic (Mark Brown. Guardian 30th Nov 2016). Each of these taxidermy works suggested the damaged relationships between human and animal subjects, suggesting the importance of re-establishing ethical relations with the "more than human" (Buck, 2014:376).

Contemporary debates have developed ethical approaches to human-animal relations which have been adopted, and at times questioned, by

museums through their display of contemporary art interventions. Polly Morgan used limp bodies, such as the gannet draped around a frame in which a drawing of a bird's nest is displayed, to bring the death of the animal into visibility. Mark Dion's *Bureau* contained a case of taxidermy birds and a mounted hyena's head juxtaposed with funeral urns to suggest the connection between taxidermy and death through the association of objects. Jazmine Miles-Long made cases into sarcophagi for her taxidermy specimens to honour the death of the animal whose skin she had prepared for display. Artist's taxidermy, for example, Tessa Farmer's abject fox, Polly Morgan's bewildered chicks, Claire Morgan's asphyxiated urban animals, Jazmine Miles-Longs nervous rabbit and Abbas Akhavan's prone fox's body, has been used to convey the fragility of animal lives and, by implication, draw attention to the vulnerability that humans share with other animal species.

Artist's taxidermy interventions have brought contemporary ethico-ecological debates into museums and prompted questions about their own historic narratives. New perspectives on human-animal relations can interrupt and modify old narratives into a "new systematic whole" (Foucault 2002a:66) in which the animal is enunciated in a different relationship to human society. Dion, McGhie and Russo chose to avoid or critique systematic arrangements of specimens in their new displays for different reasons. Dion wanted to re-establish the agency of the objects he had rescued from the Manchester Museum storeroom, while McGhie and Russo wished to use taxidermy to tell stories about the world we live in. Their installations extended the enunciative field of Natural History in each museum, adding new representations of the animal to the systematic arrangements of taxidermy already in situ. These case studies provide evidence of "reflexive re-curation" (Smith, T. 2012:217) by means of artist interventions in a natural history museum context. The analysis made in this thesis extends the literature on this topic by giving specific examples

of artist's taxidermy interventions in three natural history museums and an educational institution.

The relationship between art and science – where the former is perceived as 'fiction' and the latter as 'truth' - is still problematic. While the art interventions discussed in this thesis have exposed this relationship through contemporary art interventions, more research is required to explore the larger field of the role of natural history museums and their historical collections in exploring the art-science relationship. In the context of museums of natural history, should the distinction between science and art be maintained? What might be the consequences of blurring the distinction between the two?

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