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Patchett, Merle M. (2010) *Putting animals on display: geographies of taxidermy practice*. PhD thesis.

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Putting Animals on Display: Geographies of Taxidermy Practice

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**Submitted in the fulfilment of the requirements for the
Degree of PhD**

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Abstract

Taxidermy specimens and displays have become increasingly liminal features in contemporary society. Viewed variously as historical curios, obsolete relics or more malignantly as ‘monstrosities’, they can be a source of discomfort for many. Taxidermy objects have become uncomfortable reminders of past scientific and colonial practices which have sought to capture, order and control animated life and as such have become increasingly problematic items for their owners. As a result many taxidermy displays have been dismantled and mounts relegated to ‘backstores’ to gather dust. The paradox is that taxidermy as a practice is a quest for ‘liveness’, to impute life back into the dead. Much like the taxidermist, my goal in this thesis is to revive and restore: to renew interest in and reassert the value of taxidermy collections by recovering what I shall term as the ‘biogeographies’ of their making and continued maintenance.

Considerable academic attention has been paid to the ‘finished’ form and display of taxidermy specimens inside cabinets, behind glass – in other words, to their representation. By way of contrast, this thesis recovers the relationships, practices and geographies that brought specimens to their state of enclosure, inertness and seeming fixity. These efforts are aligned with work in cultural geography seeking to counteract ‘deadening effects’ in an active world through a prioritisation of practice (Dewsbury and Thrift 2000), and elsewhere draw on research arguments and approaches originating in historical geography, and the history of science.

The thesis firstly investigates historical developments in the scientific and craft practice of taxidermy through the close study of period manuals, combined with ethnographic observations of a practicing taxidermist. Critical attention to practice then facilitates the recovery of the lifeworlds of past taxidermy workshops and the globally sited biogeographies behind the making of individual specimens and collections. The thesis required the purposeful assemblage and rehabilitation of diffuse zoological and historical remains to form unconventional archives, enabling a series of critical reflections on the scientific, creative and political potentials of taxidermy.

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Acknowledgements

First, and most formally, I would like to thank the Arts and Humanities Research Council, award number 05/116126, for financially supporting this research.

In many ways the research undertaken for my thesis can be thought of as a collaborative endeavour as I have been helped and assisted by many people along the way. I consider it a real privilege to have been welcomed into the workshop of master taxidermist Peter Summers to observe his excellent practice. I would like to thank Peter for permitting me to observe and record him at work and for teaching me so much about what constitutes good craftwork. I would also like to thank the other staff at the 'Natural Sciences' department of the National Museums Scotland, Edinburgh for granting me access to the taxidermy workshop and natural history collections, and helping me with my enquiries. In particular I would like to thank Andrea Roe (artist-in-residence in the department) who first introduced me to Peter and generously shared her experiences of the craft with me. I would also like to thank Andrea for permitting me to use some of her still images of Peter's craftwork and workshop.

Peter and Andrea are also to be thanked for introducing me to the work and conferences of The Guild of Taxidermists. I would like to thank Guild members for encouraging me in my research and exposing me to different taxidermy techniques and methods. In particular I would like to thank Pat Morris, Guild member and historian of taxidermy, for assisting me with my research efforts and for inviting me to make use of his extensive research on, and knowledge of, the history of taxidermy and taxidermists. It was a pleasure to stay with Pat and wife Mary when researching Pat's personal archive and taxidermy collection and I would like to thank them for their hospitality. Without Pat's salvage efforts much of history of taxidermy would be lost or dispersed and the fact that this thesis was able to be made owes a great deal to his graft of bringing the fragments together. I would also like to thank Pat for allowing me to reproduce his photographs of the Van Ingen taxidermy firm.

Other archives and collections have also been a great resource, as have their archivists. In particular I would like to thank Keith Jones of Dunrobin Castle Estates, Sandra Olm curator at Hopetoun House, Richard Sutcliffe, Head of Natural History at the Kelvingrove Museum, Catherine Taylor, Head of Reference and Local Studies at Aberdeen Central library, staff at the library of the Royal Scottish Museum and the Head of Special Collections at the University of Aberdeen. I would particularly like to thank Dick Hendry (formerly of the Kelvingrove) for

loaning me his amazing collection of taxidermy manuals for the duration of my thesis and for assisting me with my research into Glasgow-based taxidermists. Similarly, Maggie Reilly, curator at the Hunterian Zoology Museum is due special thanks for supporting my research and its outputs.

I would also like to sincerely thank my supervisors Dr Hayden Lorimer and Professor Chris Philo for their support, insightful comments and constructive critique. More specifically I would like to thank Hayden for helping me to secure funding for this thesis and for always encouraging me ‘to do things differently’, and Chris for always getting what I was trying to do (even if I didn’t know myself!) and for approaching my work in the spirit of interlocutor. Heart-felt thanks go to Kate Foster, in many ways a third supervisor, for her generosity throughout the period of my thesis: accompanying me on visits to Peter’s workshop, inviting me to contribute to her artist’s project *BioGeoGraphies* and generally being an amazing collaborator to develop ideas and produce work with. Most of all I would like to thank Kate and her husband Michael for their endless hospitality – I am eternally grateful for the many inspiring times spent in their company and their continuing friendship. Thanks also to Dr Eric Laurier, Dr Carl Griffin, Dr Sam Alberti and Dr Leah Gibbs for their encouragement and useful feedback on my work.

I want to thank my fellow post-grads Cheryl McGeachan, David Beel, Isla Forsyth, Will Hasty and Tom Smith for their support and offers of escape. Particular thanks must go to Dave for helping me to convert the thesis into a Master Document and also to my office-mate Geraldine Perriam who has been a wonderful support throughout and whose friendship has meant a great deal – she also deserves a medal for putting up with my ‘creative chaos’!

Thanks must also go to some wonderful friends and family members. Alison Roxburgh has been the best pal a girl could wish for and I really could not have got through the writing-up without her unwavering support and belief in my abilities – Alison ah luv you! Thanks also to Nicola, Martha, Mira and Fran for fun times and understanding that every party should be a dressing-up one. Special thanks must also go to my dear sister and flat-mate Gemma for putting up with my moods (you really did get the worst of it – sorry!) and for being so supportive and kind to me for the past four years. My sweetheart Duncan deserves special mention for bringing sunshine into my life and for simply being the most wonderfully supportive and understanding boyfriend I could wish for – the thought of beginning our new life together in Canada is what got me through! Thanks also to my Gran for always being supportive and for pushing me to explain what I was doing. Finally, I am not sure it is possible to thank my Mum and Dad enough for all their support, both emotionally and financially,

throughout the PhD. Mostly I want to thank them for encouraging me to do to whatever makes me happy and for their blind faith in me. This thesis is dedicated to them.

Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, that this dissertation is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institution.

Signature:

Printed name: Merle M Patchett

Introduction

‘Apparently this section had been devoted to natural history, but everything had long since passed out of recognition. A few shrivelled and blackened vestiges of what had once been stuffed animals, dessicated mummies in jars that had once held spirit, a brown dust of departed plants; that was all! I was sorry for that, because I should have been glad to trace the patient readjustments by which the conquest of animated nature had been attained.’ (*The Time Machine*, H. G. Wells)

‘... their existence in themselves reverberates with a menacing excess allowing for potential monstrosities to be enacted.’ (Dewsbury 2000: 491)

Taxidermy specimens and displays have become increasingly liminal features in contemporary society. Viewed variously as historical curios, obsolete relics or more malignantly as ‘monstrosities’, they can be a source of discomfort for many. Taxidermy objects have become uncomfortable reminders of past scientific and colonial practices which have sought to capture, order and control animated life and as such have become increasingly problematic items for their owners. As a result many taxidermy displays have been dismantled and mounts relegated to ‘backstores’ to gather dust, while those left on display often linger as fetid relics of the ‘heyday of natural history’ (Barber 1980). The paradox is that taxidermy as a practice is a quest for ‘liveness’, to impute life back into the dead. Much like the taxidermist, my goal in this thesis is to revive and restore: to renew interest in and reassert the value of taxidermy collections by recovering what I shall come to term the ‘biogeographies’ of their making and continued maintenance.



Fig. 1.1 'Behind Glass' © Julie Dermansky

To date, considerable attention has been paid to the 'finished' form and display of taxidermy specimens inside cabinets, behind glass – in other words to their representation (see for example Haraway 1989; Griesemer 1990; Wonders 1993, 2003; Ryan 2000; Shell 2004). By way of contrast, this thesis seeks to recover the relationships, practices and geographies that brought specimens and collections to their state of enclosure, inertness and seeming fixity. While academic studies have exposed some of the hidden labour (e.g. Griesemer 1990; Wonders 1993) and political architecture (e.g. Haraway 1989; Shell 2004) behind the making of taxidermy displays and dioramas, in the main they have tended to present taxidermy as an organised craft for elucidating an 'unambiguous experience of organic perfection' and as such have figured the actual specimens as static representational props fixed in form and meaning (Haraway 1989: 38). Described variously as 'frozen temporal sections' (Ibid: 42), 'transparent windows on the world' (Wonders 1993: 25) or as 'recreations of nature as apparently authentic yet utterly docile' (Ryan 2000:206), taxidermy displays have been cast as the ossified relics of an outmoded and problematic representational practice and therefore as practically redundant.



Fig. 1.2 'Docile' diorama display © Eirik Granqvist

However, it is the very ambiguity of taxidermy specimens that has inspired more recent reflections on taxidermy (e.g. Star 1992; Hauser 1998; Baker 2000; Desmond 2002; Broglio 2005; Snaebjörnsdóttir and Wilson 2006). Such work has shown that the inertness of taxidermic representations assumed by previous commentaries is in reality as much an 'illusion' as the visions of nature that they supposedly capture. While the craft of taxidermy could be considered an attempt to create unambiguous visions of nature, the very strategies which work to fix taxidermy mounts as typical examples of natural orders also work to destabilise their identity. Crucially, the use of actual animal skin (and often other matter originating with the animal) combined with the crafts of mimetic reproduction ensure that a taxidermy specimen is simultaneously representative of itself as an object but also of itself as a former living animal and that, as such, taxidermy specimens will always appear as 'something other than an object enframed by human desires' (Baker 2000: 152 quoting Borgolio 2005; for similar arguments see Desmond 2002; Marvin 2006). In this manner, although displays in museums can direct our understanding of, and responses to, taxidermy, specimen animals are excessive material entities which resist complete containment and retain both aesthetic and ontological ambiguity. Furthermore, the likelihood of encountering examples of pristine taxidermy (visions of organic perfection) is becoming increasingly unlikely as the current fashion for removing taxidermy displays from behind their protective glass surrounds, combined with the lack of trained taxidermists for repairing and replacing decaying specimens,

means that even those specimens that were once expertly mounted can be literally ‘coming apart at the seams’ (Hauser 1998: 10-11).



Fig. 1.3 ‘Coming apart at the seams’

Yet, it is precisely this sense of entropy and resultant promiscuity of presence that has inspired contemporary artists (and art critics) to engage with taxidermy practice and thereby re-use taxidermy specimens and representations. As Steve Baker has commented in a review of artists making use of taxidermy in contemporary art, ‘if tattiness, imperfection and botched form count for anything, it is that they render the animal abrasively visible’. (Baker 2000: 62 – my emphasis). Most contemporary artists using taxidermy specimens and parts draw upon the enlivening effect of bodily presence variously to inspire shock, poignancy and/or melancholia. Most visible among these is Damien Hirst and his formaldehyde works. Lesser known are Thomas Grunfeld’s *Misfit* series of ‘new’ species compositely created from various animal parts (see Fig. 1.4), and a Dutch trio known as the Idiots who transform regular creatures – rabbits, hedgehogs, swans, birds, mice – into the tragic heroes of contemporary fairytales (see Poliquin 2008).



Fig. 1.4 *Misfit(cow)* 1997 © Thomas Grunfeld

In a more considered work, Snaebjörnsdóttir and Wilson have harnessed the contradictory physicality of polar bear specimens in their project *Nanoq: flatout and bluesome* (2006), a quest to find and photograph every mounted polar bear in the UK. The first aim of the project was to photograph each of the polar bears in situ where they found them (from museums, private homes and even pubs) and then to document the individual histories of each of the 34 polar bears they managed to unearth. The artists developed a database on the bears (see www.snaebjornsdottirwilson.com), detailing (if the information was available) where and when the bears were caught or shot and the legacies of the hunters who shot them, the skills and expertise of the taxidermists who mounted them, and finally the places where they had been displayed. The second aspect of the project involved transporting all the bears (in stable enough condition) to the gallery space at Spike Island, Bristol and displaying them en masse. Poliquin (2008: 132) writes in review of the show, which displayed the polar bear specimens along side their photographs and detailed biographies, ‘together they implicitly convey an anxious narrative about global warming and the threat to arctic species, a narrative which simultaneously critiques past collecting practices and acknowledges their intrinsic worth’ (see Fig. 1.5). For Snaebjörnsdóttir and Wilson and their collaborators on the *Nanoq* project (see Baker 2006; Henning 2006; Marvin 2006), then, it was the imperfections of the polar bear taxidermy specimens that they collected and reassembled, the obvious marks of human manipulation, that made them so protean. Thus unlike many other artists re-presenting taxidermy specimens, they drew attention to the fragility of the enlivening presence performed

by the dermis of the bears. As Baker highlights in his essay accompanying the artwork, *What can dead bodies do?*, for the artists, at least, it was important to get beyond a consideration of the surface of the bears to suggest something of the complex historical practices that had brought them into being: ‘the spectacle of the bears presented a beautiful veneer beneath which lay a conundrum oscillating backwards and forwards between nature and culture, taking in all manner of aspects of human achievement, endeavour, cruelty and folly along the way’ (Snaebjörnsdóttir and Wilson quoted by Baker 2006: 154).



Fig. 1.5 ‘*Nanoq: Flatout and bluesome*’ exhibition 2006 Spike Island, Bristol © Snaebjörnsdóttir and Wilson

Following Snaebjörnsdóttir and Wilson my thesis aims more explicitly to ‘challenge the priority given to the representational surface’ than writings on, and artistic appropriations of, taxidermy specimens and zoological collections have managed so far (Dubow 2004: 268). To do so, in Chapter Two – *Animal/Object* – I first map-out the conceptual co-ordinates which inform my chosen theoretical frame and my decision to focus on practice. The chapter reviews literatures dealing with the status of ‘the animal’, and literatures that deal with the status of ‘the object’ in contemporary social theory. This arrangement is for structural reasons and is not meant to support or strengthen the animal/object divide in social theory. As I later argue, I am interested in exploring the ‘biogeographies’ of taxidermy practice rather than fixing the status of a taxidermy mount as either animal or object. The review develops a re-orientated conception of ‘biogeography’ where, in terms of the ‘bio’ I am persuaded by Sarah Whatmore to follow a ‘more-than-human’ mode of enquiry in order to attend to ‘the rich array of senses, dispositions, capabilities and potentialities of all manner of social objects,

forces [and] assemblages' (Whatmore 2006: 604.) In terms of the 'geo', I am persuaded by John Wylie, among others, to merge topological and topographical sensibilities to attend to the ways in which worlds are co-fabricated in practice, but importantly also to attend to the fabric (texture) of those worlds. Attending to the 'fabric of the world' (Merleau-Ponty 1969: 256), or to the 'graphies' in my case, draws on a conception of materiality which is not based on an assumption of plenitude yet is also not dependent on permanence and presence. This move away from matter as physical permanence is a particularly valuable contribution to my conceptualisation of biogeography, since my study will be attempting to recover *past* biogeographies of taxidermy practice.

Attempting to attend to past practice holds serious methodological implications. However, rather than offer a traditional 'methodology' chapter as an overarching frame from which my empirical work can be said to follow, I instead offer a 'method statement' at the end of Chapter Two that outlines my preference for more 'modest' forms of theory/methodology (as found in STS and NRT, to be defined later) – where theories/methods are employed as tools that work *together* with empirical materials and information to generate new insights. In this way I seek to close the gap that can exist between theory/methodology and practice in certain currents of geographical work. I do so by engaging in methodological debate/critique in the empirical chapters themselves, allowing methods to be employed and developed in direct correspondence with my empirical materials.

Three empirical chapters follow. Chapter Three – **Practice** – focuses on recovering historical developments in the craft practice of taxidermy, exploring the establishment of corporeal routines and specialised devices through the of close study of period taxidermy manuals combined with an ethnographic study of a practitioner working today. The chapter commences with a framing methodological discussion on the possibility of doing non-representational historical geographies. While an apparent contrast between non-representational theory as an ethics for harnessing life, and history, as the study of the dead emerges, I argue that rather than being paralysed by the impossibility of retrieving non-representational aspects of the past, the imperative is to work *at* and *on* the limits of life and death, time and history, movement and stasis. Accordingly I place myself in the position of apprentice to a practicing taxidermist to gain a deeper appreciation for the practice, recognising that the position of learner is a highly instructive context in which not only to enquire into the craft techniques of taxidermy and its associated material culture, but also to reflect on how present-day practice relates to a representational culture charting the development of the practice in historical 'how-to' manuals. In this way the body of a practising taxidermist can be understood as an 'archival vector' of past practice; indeed when

juxtaposing contemporary ethnographies of taxidermy practice with descriptions of practice in historical ‘how-to’ manuals, past and present practice can be shown to *resonate* (Griffin and Evans 2008).

Chapter Four – **Site** – experiments with the recuperation of the historical-geographical particulars of two taxidermists, and their working spaces and working practice. The chapter develops the possibilities of a supple approach to life-writing/life-studies whilst also engaging with a range of methodological issues associated with the recuperation of past lives and lifeworlds. Following an argument that ‘potential awakenings’ reside in objects and materials that people gather around them and eventually discard in the course of their lives, I purposefully assemble and rehabilitate the taxidermists’ ‘leftovers’ (their tools, products, correspondences, business records, pictorial and photographic representations etc) to form ‘unorthodox archives’ that tell of the lifeworlds of practice they constructed. In ‘making-do’ with what remains, I craft a form of historiography that is alive to the ultimate alterity of past lives (human or otherwise), events and places, recognising that what remains of them is always partial, provisional, incomplete, and what is presented is always already under erasure.

In Chapter Five – **Movement** – I consider the movements of a group of mounted tiger heads and the related ‘mobile practices’ which brought them into being. Rather than offer a linear ‘commodity story’ where objects are understood as inert, I promote an understanding of the specimens as active assemblages of movements, materials and practices which brought them into existence. Furthermore, by developing a methodology which incorporates specimen artefacts as object-based archive, I show how an attention to the deteriorating materials of taxidermy specimens not only reveals the secrets of their assembly, but exposes the clever artifice and ambiguity of representation. As substances and specimens start to unravel, so do the biogeographical stories of their making, showing up tangles of beings, practices and places. By design and by choice, then, the chapter becomes less about movement *per se* than about tracing the diverse sites distributed globally through which the specimens pass. This said, I consider my ‘biogeographical’ sketches to offer a taste of what might still be a more fully detailed ‘movement’ study.

The concluding chapter – **Still Life** – reviews the ways in which the thesis can be considered as a study of life after death both conceptually and empirically through the three main empirical chapters. This is followed by a more explicit attempt to understand the rise and fall of taxidermy as both a museum and a commercial practice than is already offered in the empirical chapters. By way of conclusion the thesis then considers strategies currently used by creative arts practitioners (like Snaebjörnsdóttir and Wilson) to renew interest in and reassert

the value of taxidermy specimens and collections through collaborative exchange with museum curators and remaining taxidermists. While taxidermy specimens and displays pose difficult questions for museums and scientific collections in an era of interactive display and communication, paradoxically, they remain a source of wonder for many visitors, and a favourite museum exhibit among children. I therefore put forth an argument to revalue taxidermy, viewing its material objects as a *resource* for telling complex histories of human-animal encounters. Finally, in charting the revival of the crafts of taxidermy through the work of creative arts practitioners the last section of the thesis also seeks to re-draw an ethic of apprenticeship as a means for academics to respond more openly to the world.

Animal/Object

The purpose of this chapter is to map-out the conceptual co-ordinates which have led to my chosen theoretical frame. As noted in the introduction, the practice of taxidermy, defined by James Ryan (1997: 117) as ‘the representation of residues of animals to produce the illusion of live presence’, ensures that taxidermy specimens, even when presented as natural history objects in the museum setting, retain a certain mystery as material presences. The indeterminacy of taxidermy mounts, somewhere between animal and material presence, affords them a level of ontological insecurity begging the question: are they animals or are the objects? Their ambiguity as material presences poses problems for anyone wishing to engage with them, therefore, as it is common scholarly and scientific practice to identify or classify the subject or material with which you are working. However, fixing the status of a taxidermy mount proves especially difficult when what counts as ‘animal’ and ‘object’ has been called into question (e.g. Baker 2000; Pels et al 2002). The main aim of this review is to examine arguments in contemporary social theory which consider the status of ‘the animal’ and ‘the object’. While the chapter shall review, by turns, literatures that can be broadly considered to deal with the status of ‘the animal’ and then those literatures that can be broadly considered to be dealing with the status of ‘the object’, this is for structural reasons – a means of arranging a mass of literature – and is not meant to support or strengthen the animal/object divide in social theory.¹ For, as I will come to argue, rather than fixing the identity of a taxidermy mount as either animal or object, I want to work with an approach that allows the more ambiguous aspects of material presence to be worked with rather than explained away. The review will therefore move on to examine literatures that differently consider ‘materiality’ as they offer more effective means for taking seriously the slippery combinations of life and

¹ It must be acknowledged that at one meta-epistemic level, to say that an animal (just as a plant, a human, anything) is an ‘object’ is unremarkable; but the crux of the matter here becomes a certain distinction, often assumed between animal (as animate, living object) and ‘object’ (as inanimate, dead thing), explaining why ‘animal’ and ‘object’ might be seen as opposed categories.

matter which are constituted in taxidermy practice. To close, I will outline my theoretical framework. Here I shall combine new conceptualisations of the ‘bio’ – life – with updated conceptualisations of the ‘geo’ – earth – and put forward an argument for recovering the ‘biogeographies’ of taxidermy practice.

The status of ‘the animal’

Leading theorists and researchers across the humanities and social sciences have devoted considerable attention to the question of the animal from a variety of conceptual positions and for diverse purposes. This section reviews recent work considering the status of ‘the animal’ in contemporary social theory and research. Initially it will survey how the question of animal status has been approached theoretically and indicate how certain contemporary theorists have challenged the ontological/metaphysical boundaries which have traditionally inhibited serious questioning of the category of animal. This will be followed by a more in-depth review of geographical work which has sought to (re)engage with the question of the animal and reconfigure the geographies of animal-human, or rather human/non-human relations. This section will conclude by introducing new conceptualisations of ‘biogeography’ and shall make a case for considering the biogeographies of taxidermy practice.

The question of the animal (and posthuman futures)

Before going on to review how geographers have sought to ‘bring the animal back in’ to geographical enquiry, I will firstly focus on reviewing broader literatures in the social sciences and the humanities that have used ‘the question of the animal’ as a means of questioning the status of ‘the human’. As noted above, the question of the animal has been considered from a variety of conceptual positions and for diverse purposes. Yet, as Cary Wolfe observes in the edited collection *Zoontologies*, such work ‘remains scattered among disparate and often hard-to-locate discussions embedded in a wide range of texts’ (Wolfe 2003: ix). Jacques Derrida, for example, has considered the question of the animal in a host of his texts and essays (see in particular *Of Spirit* (1989) and the essay *Eating well* (1991), but this consideration has been scattered in amongst a range of other theoretical concerns and themes until relatively recently (see Derrida 2003). Similarly, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s discussion of ‘becoming animal’ is folded within the dense, wide-ranging and complex prose of *A Thousand Plateaus*

(1987).² Also, others have used the question of animal to interrogate more explicitly the status of ‘the human’, in order to examine how the ‘discourse of animality has historically served as a crucial strategy in the oppression of *humans* by other humans - a strategy whose legitimacy and force depend, however, upon on the prior taking for granted of the traditional ontological distinction, and consequent ethical divide between human and non-human animals’ (Wolfe 2003: xx).³ Before I go on to consider these arguments in more depth, a simpler starting point into such discussions is offered by John Berger’s question *Why look at animals?*

Berger’s (1980) provocatively titled essay *Why look at animals?* is a powerfully expressed critique of the marginalisation of animals through the mechanisms/machinery of nineteenth-century capitalism. Central to Berger’s critique is the notion that ‘the animal’ as a live embodied creature has disappeared from ordinary experience – i.e. that it has been both physically and culturally marginalised through developments in industrialisation and modern capitalism. In the essay Berger offers a specific history which postulates a rupture between a ‘time of unity’ and a ‘time of alienation’ between human and animals, emphasising animal disappearance and their replacement by signs in the nineteenth-century (see also Burt 2005: 206). Yet while the essay presents a critical take on the place of animals in contemporary western society (i.e. increasingly relegated to symbolic domains like the zoo), Berger has been criticised for his romanticisation of non-capitalist relations in the past over those of the capitalist present (e.g. see Marvin 2000; Burt 2005; Rothfels 2005). Additionally, Berger’s promotion of the modern animal as ‘symbolic’ or ‘sentimental’ has prompted Jonathon Burt to question where this left ‘the practical, experiential and institutional dimensions of human-animal relations?’ (Burt 2005: 205). Berger’s emphasis on the alienation of the animal makes his opening question redundant according to Burt, as the situation presented by his essay suggests ‘animals and humans are now too alienated for the look to register anything of consequence... beyond exemplifying their degree of alienation’ (Ibid: 206). Here ‘looking’ is modelled on an idea of linguistic exchange (i.e. where in order to be looking you must be looked at in return⁴), and according to Berger such an exchange between human and animals has been ruled out by

² For a condensation of Deleuze and Guattari’s ‘becoming-animal’ argument see essays by Lingus (2003) and Baker (2002).

³ For examples of critical stances on the discourse of Animality, see Wolfe 2003; Kristeva 1982; Haraway 1991, 1999).

⁴ The idea of ‘looking’ that emerges from Berger’s essay resonates with the dialectics of ‘The Gaze’ found in the work of Sartre, Levinas and Lacan. In their writings one cannot have the idea of looking without being looked at in return (see Burt 2005: 207).

modern capitalism as the symbolic, representational animal is rendered so passive that it cannot look back. Looking, in Berger's essay, therefore becomes a matter of objectification.⁵

Berger's thesis on the disappearance of the 'embodied' animal and the rise of forms of substitution like the zoo or cinema has been taken up by numerous scholars in order to acknowledge 'the extent to which human understanding of animals is shaped by representation rather than direct experience of them' (Baker 1993: 190). Lippit's book (2000) *Electric Animal* follows this line of thought and argues that, through cinema, animals become spectres or phantasms as the animal 'shifts from a body to an image; from living voice to technical echo' (Lippit 2000: 21, for similar see Davies 2000). According to Lippit, the spectral cinematic animal is emblematic of the animal's status in wider society, arguing that the modern animal exists textually, haunting the world through imagery: it is a figure that 'moves undying from one corpus to the next, from one text to another' (Ibid: 54). The idea that the modern animal is a representational animal is also promoted in the work of Steve Baker, who, echoing Berger, states that 'the modern animal... is the nineteenth-century animal (symbolic, sentimental) which has been made to disappear' (Baker 2000: 38; see also Baker 1993). While animal disappearance is undoubtedly reflected materially through the extinction and serious depletion of certain animal species, Berger's privileging of a pre-modern peasant lifestyle for offering a more 'real' or 'authentic' experience of animals 'paradoxically reinforces the processes he is criticising' (Burt 2005: 203). Certainly, people's attitudes and living habits in the recent past have made it increasingly difficult for them to encounter animals, yet the idea that animals have 'disappeared' and can no longer be authentically experienced is an illusion. While Berger's claims about the 'subjection and manipulation of the lives of animal's' are certainly true, human and animal lives have been, and still are, complexly entangled in myriad practices (Burt 2005: 203).⁶ Therefore in the answer to Berger's question of why look at animals?, I am in agreement with Burt (2005: 206) that we need as academics to 'look at animals' to re-evaluate human-animal relations, the social and spatial contexts in which they take place, the sites of their making and the ways in which we have traditionally theorised such relations. Therefore, instead of focusing solely on animal disappearance and their substitution by representations, thought should be given to the historic and contemporary practices which ensure human and animal lives remain hopelessly (and occasionally hopefully) entangled.

⁵ The 2005 special issue of *Society and Animal* critiqued Berger's (1980) account of the visual encounter between humans and animals - 'as though it a mono-visual or one dimensional process between the subject and the object' - the essays instead set out to examine grounded practices 'of people engaging with animals for particular purposes and in specific contexts' to highlight how practices of looking can be understood as more-than-visual (Acampora 2005; Brower 2005; Cassidy 2005; Grasseni 2005; and Marvin 2005: 3).

⁶ Burt (2005: 206) criticises Berger's overly simplistic history of animal disappearance citing the following example: 'think of animal experimentation in the seventeenth-century, or the natural histories of the 18th centuries which represent a radical challenge in the observation of, and relation of humans to, animal bodies'.

In contrast to Berger's thesis, Wolfe's (2003) edited collection *Zoontologies* asserts that the question of animal has become increasingly salient in contemporary academic debates precisely *because* the comfortable distance assumed between humans and other animals has been radically challenged outside of social theory. New understandings of animal intelligence and their social complexity promoted by the life-sciences (see Barbieri 2003) and the increasingly complex entanglements of humans, animals and machines that have emerged through new bio-technologies (see Thrutle and Mitchell 2002; Dyens 2001), for example, have all opened up new theoretical spaces for taking the question of animal seriously, forcing a reassessment of how much 'we' (humans) are really disjoint from 'them'(animals). Wolfe laments that theorists have struggled to respond to the 'radical re-evaluation' of the status of non-human animals outside of the humanities and social sciences, arguing that their foundational humanism has often made it difficult for theorists to deal adequately with such developments (2003: xi). As such, Wolfe's 2003 collection of essays is part of a wider attempt to re-route contemporary theory away from the central figure of the human in order to address 'a social, technological and cultural context that is now in some inescapable sense posthuman' (Ibid: ix, see especially contributions by Wolfe, Lingus and Derrida in the volume).

The 'crisis of humanism' and the shift to new 'posthuman' registers in contemporary theory and practice across the humanities and social sciences was instigated in part by 'poststructuralism and its interrogation of the figure of the human as the constitutive (rather than technically, materially and discursively constituted) stuff of history and the social' (Wolfe 2003: x). Derrida's post-structuralist writings, for example, demonstrate the inadequacy of the signifier 'human', and attend to the ways in which a whole host of binary oppositions upon which humanist discourse is dependent – human/inhuman, nature/culture, self/other, subject/object etc – are not as certain as they seem (see, for example Derrida 1978, 1989). Derrida has more recently argued how 'humanism' – where the figure of 'man' stands at the centre of things distinct from all that makes up the non-human world, as is the seeming origin and meaning of history – is founded on a 'fundamental anthropology' that anxiously differentiates the human from the animal, showing this humanism at work across the spectrum of western philosophy in the writings of Descartes, Freud, Heidegger, Levinas and Lacan (Derrida 2003). Derrida uses the neologism '*animol*' to underline this point. The word, according to Bruce Braun (2004: 1352-3), 'phonetically singularises the plural of animal (*animaux*) and combines it with the word for 'word' (*mots*), thereby calling attention to the habit of rolling all animal species into one, producing an undifferentiated 'other' against which the 'human' can be juxtaposed and defined'. Here Derrida articulates an argument made by

other theorists: that the centrality and stability of the figure of the human has been historically dependent on the establishment and stability of this oppositional undifferentiated *animot* figure – the habit of speaking of all animal species as if they were one (e.g. Fudge 2002; Agamben 2004).⁷ However the fragility of this *animot* figure has been made increasingly apparent as the founding issues traditionally said to differentiate between humans and animals have been proven unstable (e.g. intentionality and language). Consequently, the artifice upon which this ‘fundamental anthropology’ has been based has been exposed and, as Derrida explains, it therefore deconstructs itself:

‘... its fragility renders fragile all the solid oppositions we are in the process of tracking down [dé-pister], beginning with that between symbolic and imaginary which underwrites finally this whole anthropocentric reinstatement of the superiority of the human order over the animal order, of the law over the living, and so on...’ (Derrida 2003: 138).

Derrida’s ‘deconstructive impulse’ has been reflected in other writings which adopt a ‘posthuman’ or ‘post-humanist’ intellectualist position (for mappings of such a position see Wolfe 2003; Castree and Nash 2004, 2006).⁸ Neil Badminton’s book entitled *Posthumanism* (2000; see also *Alien Chic* 2004a) follows a ‘deconstructive responsibility’, drawing on Jean-François Lyotard’s concept of ‘differend’ to emphasise the violence inherent in normalising or ‘essentialising’ the human; warning that, although there is increased recognition of the instability of ‘the human’, there are continued claims of its certainty and centrality. A ‘neo-humanist’ backlash has emerged, for example, which has sought to ‘fix’ the human, that is, to preserve the human’s absolute and hierarchical difference from all that is ‘inhuman’ in the face of an envisioned apocalyptic ‘posthuman’ future. This ‘neo-humanist’ argument is most forcibly made in Francis Fukuyama’s (2002) book *Our Post Human Future*. The book paints a picture of immanent bio-catastrophe, where the increasingly promiscuous and ‘monstrous’ forms of ‘life’ emerging from innovations in bioinformatics and through biotechnologies threaten the very essence of the ‘human’. Fukuyama contends that such contaminations of the human should be defended against at all costs, and he sets out to establish the human as norm, where human nature ‘is the sum of the behaviour and characteristics that are typical of the human species, arising from genetic rather than environmental factors’ (Badminton 2004b:

⁷ Agamben (2004) has similarly questioned the fundamental anthropology of western thought, or what he terms as the ‘anthropological machine’ of sovereign power.

⁸ The term ‘posthuman’ has both been used to reflect a historical condition (e.g. Fukuyama 2002) and to denote intellectualist positions which question the centrality and stability of the ‘human’ and humanism in western scholarship (e.g. Badminton 2000, 2004; Wolfe 2003; Castree and Nash 2004, 2006). As such tensions have emerged between ‘posthuman’ periodisations and ‘posthumanist’ intellectual imperatives (Whatmore 2004: 1360).

1347).⁹ Badminton has sought to counter such a ‘normalising’ argument, however, emphasising the value of a ‘critical posthumanism’ which is vigilant of the persistent ontological hygiene that informs everyday decisions, assumptions and activities and underpins much of western scholarship (see Badminton 2004a, 2004b).

In contrast to Fukuyama, the ‘posthuman condition’ has been celebrated by other theorists. Donna Haraway, for example, has famously celebrated the emancipatory possibilities offered by a posthuman ‘cyborg’ figure (Haraway 1991). Haraway’s ‘cyborg ontology’ attempts to blur the boundaries between things through her notion that beings are ‘hybrids’. Others have worried that implicit in such a thesis is an assumption that things were not always this way: ‘that at an earlier moment the boundaries really did exist and the human was purely “itself”’ (Braun 2004: 1354). Geographers Bruce Braun and Sarah Whatmore both object that by historicising the ‘posthuman’, whether in celebratory (Haraway 1991) or reactionary sense (Fukuyama 2002), theorists can end up re-centring the human as ‘the human being that once was, but which has been ‘eclipsed’ or ‘transcended’ (Braun 2004: 1354; Whatmore 2004). Whatmore hence prefers the signature ‘more-than’ over ‘post’ to suggest that it is ‘what exceeds rather than what comes after the human’ which should be the more pressing concern for theorists and research (Whatmore 2004: 1361; see also Whatmore 2006). Both she and Braun draw on ontological stances which attend to excess in order to counter the limitations that emerge from some *posthuman* writings appearing to historicise the ‘evolving’ human. This said, it is my belief that the ‘posthuman’ is a conceptual device allowing a continuing focus on the human (the human plus...) and still refuses a full encounter with the *non*-human (where humans may have no relevance).

To avoid an unintentional return to the human, Whatmore and Braun (and others) have borrowed from theorists such as Spinoza, Bergson, Deleuze and Serres to present a different ‘onto-story’ which is neither a politics of recovery nor a celebration of transcendence, but instead ‘a politics attuned to humans as always in the middle of multiple becomings, always as an effect of politics, rather than that which grounds politics’ (Braun 2004: 1345 – for examples of attempts to present a different kind of ‘onto-story’, see Bennet 2001; Whatmore 2002). This idea of ‘groundlessness’ has been most obviously articulated through the Deleuzian insistence on ‘becoming’ over ‘being’, which offers ‘an understanding of bodies, including human bodies, as always already an effect of their composition in and through their relations with the world’ (Braun 2004: 1354; see also Deleuze 1983, 1998; Deleuze and Guattari 1986, 1987). Deleuze and Guattari’s thesis of ‘becoming’ in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987) works to destabilise identity

⁹ Other theorists have defended humanism without seeking to normalise, so as not to lose sight of the differences of the human (see Malik 2000; Murdoch 2004).

and unity, and instead opens the human to heterogeneity and multiplicity by following their earlier assertion that all form must be ‘undone’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1986: 13). Baker, for example, explains that the radicalism of Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of ‘becoming animal’ ‘lies not in its reframing of the question of living subjects and their identities, but rather in its charting the possibilities for experiencing an uncompromising sweeping away of identities, whether human or animal’ (Baker 2002: 67).¹⁰ Such an insistence necessarily avoids the ‘periodisation’ problematic inherent in some ‘posthuman’ writings because, rather than being concerned with beginnings and endings, it instead attends to the middle: ‘that place where everything happens’ (Braun 2004: 1354). The emphasis on spatiality over temporality and on ‘life’ over ‘human’ in Deleuze and Guattari’s and other bio-philosophical writing has struck a chord with geographers wishing to attend to the ‘more-than-human’ aspects of our worlds. I will consider these geographical writings in due course, but first I will examine how geographers have attempted to re-engage with the ‘category’ of the animal.

Animal geographies/ more-than-human worlds

Rather than attending to the ‘question of animal’, geographers have more explicitly focused on ‘bringing the animals back in’ (Philo and Wolch 1998) to diverse geographical researches. Chris Philo and Jennifer Wolch, writing in a special issue of *Society and Animals* entitled ‘Animals and geography’, voiced their concern that for a discipline which had traditionally considered human-animal relations (see for example Newbigin 1913; Sauer 1969; Tuan 1984), geography had become strangely peripheral to the growing confluence of interest in society-animal relations emerging across the social sciences and humanities in the 1990’s. They argued that geography should have been the discipline best placed to address the emerging ‘animal moment’¹¹ with the discipline’s traditional concern for the relationship between ‘human society’ and the ‘natural environment’. However, the deepening division between ‘human’ and ‘physical/natural’ geographies had seen animal life subsumed into the ‘blackbox’ of nature (Wolch and Emel 1998: xv). Their aim in the 1995 special issue and subsequent related titles, *Animal geographies* (Wolch and Emel 1998) and *Animal spaces, beastly places* (Philo and Wilbert 2000), was to reinforce the value of a geographical perspective on human-animal relations, and

¹⁰ Deleuze and Guattari have consistently opposed the ‘individuated subject’ and present ‘becoming animal’ as the ‘experimental’ alternative to this construct, one where ‘all forms come undone’ (1986: 7, 13).

¹¹ Whatmore (2000: 342) defines the ‘animal moment’ as ‘the interrogation of the humanist legacy of modern political and epistemological frameworks and its effective erasure of the animal from mainstream critical social theory’.

to emphasise the importance of attending to issues of space and place when researching configurations of human-animal interactions.

The two subsequent separate ventures were also, more broadly, a challenge to the anthropocentrism that dominated social science and humanities research, and in particular argued against closing 'human geography' exclusively around the figure of the human (Wolch and Emel 1998; Philo and Wilbert 2000). Rather, Philo and Wilbert, for example, argue that human geography should take seriously all of the beings/things with which human agency/survival is hopelessly entangled, recognising 'the possibilities for, and indeed the socio-ecological importance of, a revived animal geography which would focus squarely on the complex entanglings of human-animal relations with space, place, location, environment and landscape' (Philo and Wilbert 2000: 4). *Animal spaces, beastly places* (2000) therefore concentrates on the spatialization of animal-human relations, and the various essays in the volume focus on the cultural formation of animals in site and place (e.g. Howell 2000; Davies 2000). While Wolch and Emel's volume mirrors Philo and Wilbert's commitment to emphasising the spatialization of human-animal relations, their volume is more intently focused on forming an ethics of encounter/interaction with non-human animals (e.g. Michel 1998; Proctor 1998; Lynn 1998). The ethical imperative of Wolch and Emel's volume led Whatmore to comment in a review that 'it is most refreshing in its commitment to animal life - not just as a category to be deconstructed nor as an economic and cultural resource but as a notion of radically different kinds of subject whose kinship we deny at their expense and our own' (Whatmore 2000:343). Moreover, while both volumes had different rationales for 'bringing the animals back in' to geographic research agendas, their interventions generated the impetus for other geographers to consider animal life and their diverse geographies (see for example: Whatmore and Thorne 1998, 2000; Braun 2002; Whatmore 2002; Lulka 2004; Hinchliffe et al 2005; Matless 2000; Matless et al 2005; Risan 2005; Lorimer 2000; 2006).¹²

Of the two volumes, the arguments posited in Philo and Wilbert's introduction to *Animal spaces, beastly places* have perhaps the most to offer a study of past taxidermy practice, and are therefore worth considering in more depth. Not only do they urge geographers to challenge the humanist epistemological frameworks which have traditionally informed social theory, they also want to reassess the binary terms whereby society and nature have been framed in discourses both within and outwith the discipline which have effectively erased animal life from geographic research. They argue that geographers should be better able to reflect 'animal

¹² There was opposition to this (re)turn to animal life in geographic research. Smith and Jackson (2001) argued that such a move was a politically mundane to the extent that Jackson asserted that animals could not have an identity and therefore could not have a politics.

geographies' in their multitude and variety, yet helpfully offer the frames of 'animal spaces' and 'beastly places' to differentiate between human socio-spatial constructions of 'the animal' and spatial configurations of animal life (the essays in the volume could also be ordered according to these frames). The essays concerned with 'Animal spaces' largely interrogate human classification protocols which have attempted to order animal life, opening up such questions of how animals have and should be defined, and where different animals should be positioned ('spaced') relative to centres of human life (e.g. Ryan 2000; Davies 2000). The essays which then could be said to consider 'Beastly places' – beastly being the unmistakably otherness (or beyondness) of animal experience which humans struggle to apprehend – largely investigate, by comparison, some of the spaces where animals have been contained by humans and from which they sometimes escape (e.g. Howell 2000; Griffiths et al 2000; Matless 2000). The emphasis on animal resistance to human containment which runs through the selected essays redistributes agency back to animals in a western paradigm which has traditionally limited agency to humans for their capacity for introspection. Yet rather than 'ontologically flattening' humans and animals by making them equivalents, the insistence on attending to the 'beastliness' of animals ensures that the inescapable gap between humans and different forms of animal life remains. This notion of 'beastliness' therefore highlights the inescapable anthropocentrism that informs human interaction with and understanding of animals and, more importantly, stresses that academic engagements are not immune to this.¹³

Yet perhaps the most significant move Philo and Wilbert make is to challenge the representational focus of many of the newly emerging studies on animals and 'nature' (e.g. Berger 1980; Baker 1993, 2000). Here they argue that:

'If we concentrate solely on how animals are represented, the impression is that animals are merely passive surfaces on to which human groups inscribe imaginings and orderings of all kinds. In our view, it is also vital to give credence to the practices that are folded into the making of representations, and – at the core of the matter – to ask how animals themselves may figure in these practices.'
(Philo and Wilbert 2000: 5)

Implicit in this statement is a concern over scholarship which supposedly seeks to interrogate human-animal relations, yet by concentrating on how humans represent animals, actual animal life has ended up being subsumed by the symbolic (see my arguments made earlier for Berger 1980). Philo and Wilbert here echo a similar argument made by the 'historian of animals',

¹³ It is worth noting that some geographers defend a cautious 'anthropomorphism' (as a resource for imaginatively thinking about animal/beastly worlds) but critique 'anthropocentrism' (where everything as it were, returns to the human). This resonates with Laurier and Philo's (1998) emphasis on the value of Latour's 'x-morphising' – the use of metaphor drawn from one domain of 'life' to inform our understandings of some other domains of 'life'.

Erica Fudge. Instead of concentrating on how humans have represented animals throughout history, Fudge insists that we consider the use of animals by humans, concentrating on humans' material relations with animals. She argues that:

'It is in the use – in the material relation with the animals – that representations must be grounded. Concentration on pure representation (if such a thing were possible) would miss this, and it is the job – perhaps even the duty – of the historian of animals to understand and analyze the uses to which animals were put. If we ignore the very real impact of human dominion – whether in meat-eating, sport, work, or any other form – we are ignoring the fundamental role animals have played in the past. A symbolic animal is only a symbol (and therefore to be understood within the study of iconography, poetics) unless it is related to the real.' (Fudge 2002: 7)

Fudge draws on Walter Benjamin's historical materialist agenda to argue further that recovering the history of animals is to 'brush history against the grain', as such a re-examination of the past challenges the anthropocentrism upon which historical accounts have traditionally been founded (Fudge 2002: 14). Fudge's aim in working against anthropocentrism is to make the idea that the only history is human history untenable: 'to question the anthropocentric view of the world... is to challenge the status of the human, which in turn is to throw all sorts of assumptions into question' (Ibid). Fudge concedes that such a mandate – recovering human material relations with animals – is problematic as animals do not leave any record behind of such interactions and those left by human are most likely to be textual or representational in form. Yet she argues that a recovery of the material relations between human and animal lives is possible through a creative use of such sources and through an attention to the practices within which such relations are indelibly enmeshed in.

The animal in taxidermy practice

Philo and Wilbert's and Fudge's calls to attend to practice will be met by study of taxidermy. By opening out the study of human-animal relations into the realm of practice through an investigation into the practices of taxidermy, my work will not only inform, but also extend, current academic understanding of the representation and display of taxidermy animals (e.g. Berger 1980; Haraway 1989; Griesemer 1990; Baker 1993, 2000; Wonders 1993, 2003; Desmond 2002; Shell 2004). To date, literature has tended to focus on the 'finished' form and display of taxidermy specimens inside cabinets, behind glass – in other words, to their representation. Donna Haraway famously unpacks the political and gendered meanings of gorillas on display in Carl Akeley's Africa Hall at the American Museum in her essay

(1984[1989]) *Teddy Bear Patriarchy: Taxidermy in the Garden of Eden*. She challenges Akeley's claims that he was presenting 'the unified truth of natural history' (Haraway 1984: 21) and that visitors were looking through 'peepholes into the jungle'. Rather, as Alberti identifies (2008), she argues that he was reflecting the 'Teddy Bear patriarchy' of early twentieth-century United States. While Haraway's critique of Akeley's African Hall remains a foundational work in the cultural analysis of taxidermy and natural history collections, her representational analysis of taxidermy has been subject to considerable challenge and revision (e.g. Wonders 1993; Andrei 2006). In particular, and without necessarily agreeing with her conclusions, other scholars have since developed Haraway's emphasis on the 'techniques of effected meanings' (Haraway 1984: 29) – that is, the extensive *work* involved in making taxidermy dioramas (e.g. Star 1992; Wonders 1993, 2003; Morris 2006). Wonders (especially 1993), for example, exposes the teams of taxidermists and artists involved in the creation of illusionistic diorama displays in Sweden in the late nineteenth century. By 'getting behind-the-scenes', such work has helped to expose aspects of the hidden labour involved in the making of taxidermy displays and dioramas. Yet, because such studies have largely presented taxidermy as an organised craft for elucidating an 'unambiguous experience of organic perfection', they consequently present taxidermy displays and specimens as the ossified and antiquated representational props of a particular historical way of seeing/presenting nature (Haraway 1989: 38).

More recent work has helped to show that the inertness of taxidermic representations, assumed by previous commentaries, is in reality as much an illusion as the visions of nature that they supposedly capture (Hauser 1998; Baker 2000; Desmond 2002; Borgolio 2005; Snaebjörnsdóttir and Wilson 2006; Poliquin 2008). While representational critiques, like those of Haraway (1989) and Wonders (1993), have emphasised that taxidermy displays are human constructions of nature, the actual animals and complex human-animal encounters involved in taxidermy practice remain overlooked, as taxidermy is cast as being simply symbolic of human mastery over the natural world. Moreover, although taxidermy specimens are intended to be unambiguous representations of natural form, for many they are far more redolent of death (e.g. Desmond 2002; Nyhart 2004; Marvin 2006). Crucially, the use of actual animal skin, and often other matter originating with the animal, combined with the crafts of mimetic reproduction ensure that a taxidermy specimen is simultaneously representative of itself as a present object but also of itself as a former living animal. As such, taxidermy specimens will always appear as 'something other than an object enframed by human desires' (Baker 2000: 152 quoting Borgolio 2005; for similar arguments, see Desmond 2002; Marvin 2006). Recognising this, Snaebjörnsdóttir and Wilson feel it important to shift the focus away from representation (and therefore move beyond conversations over whether the polar bears that

they hunted down and assembled were ‘real’ or not) to a relational focus on the human/animal encounters involved in the killing and making of polar bear taxidermy specimens and collections in their *Nanoq* project. Moreover, Garry Marvin (2006), in response to the artists’ work, underscores the potential of investigating the individual ‘cultural lives’ of taxidermy specimens for highlighting the circumstances of encounters between humans and animals in the taxidermic process.

Following Snaebjörnsdóttir and Wilson, it is my aim more explicitly to ‘challenge the priority given to the representational surface’ than writings on, and artistic appropriations of, taxidermy specimens and zoological collections have done so far (Dubow 2004: 268). Therefore, rather than dwell exclusively on the form and meaning of taxidermy specimens – the static representational end-points – I am similarly committed to uncovering the processes and practices that have enabled, produced and driven taxidermy practice and display in the UK, whilst at the same time being sensitive to their materiality in site and situation across various animal-human landscapes. Furthermore, recovering the beings, practices, and places enrolled in the making of taxidermy displays opens up new spaces of enquiry that bridge both living and dead animal geographies (although see Ryan 2000; Matless 2005; Animal Studies Group 2006). My anxiety with concentrating on the recovery of animal life (in its various fleshy, embodied and disembodied states) through the taxidermy practices of collection, preservation and display is that the other beings, agents and things enrolled in such practices will become dangerously secondary. My criticism therefore of the arguments made by Philo and Wilbert (2000) and Fudge (2002) – to re-place the animal back at the centre of academic concerns – is that, paradoxically, this re-establishment of the animal could reaffirm it as an oppositional category to the human. While of course their reasons for focusing on the recovery of animal life and agency is to unsettle the idea of an *animot* figure, and to disrupt the anthropocentric foundations of western scholarship, this could imply, to quote Fudge, that ‘the history of animals can only happen at the expense of the human’ (Fudge 2002: 15).

While I wholeheartedly agree that the centrality of the human should be undermined through a serious consideration of animal life, I do not agree that this should happen at the expense of other forms of life, including human beings. Here I follow Derrida’s insistence that philosophical enquiry should address the ‘entire field of the living’ and Whatmore’s insistence that geographers should attend to the ‘more-than-human’ worlds in which we live (Derrida 2001; Whatmore 2004; 2006). Whatmore argues that it is life in all its excess that should be recognised, and that ‘all manner of suppressed “things”, including animals, ‘which force their way into the company of the social’ should be acknowledged as they disturb the assumed relations between humans and non-humans (Whatmore 2004: 1360). As such, Whatmore’s

steadily accumulating body of work can be read as an attempt to recuperate 'life' in its myriad forms, rather than to recover particular forms of life, whether human, animal, plant or technological (Whatmore 1997, 2002, 2004, 2006; Whatmore and Thorne 1998; Spencer and Whatmore 2001). In her attempts to *revitalise* geographical enquiry, she has drawn on theoretical currents which focus on 'relations' over any particular order like 'animal', 'human' or 'object' (e.g. Callon 1986; Latour 1987, 1988, 1993; Law 1991, 1992) and on biophilosophies that place life rather than the human being at the centre (e.g. Whitehead 1978; Bergson 1983; Deleuze 1994). Whatmore's 'vitalist' aims therefore deserve further examination as they offer possible ways of attending to the various forms of life entangled within practices of taxidermy. As stated at the outset, the intention of my thesis is to recover the practices and relationships behind taxidermic representations; and, while this necessarily entails recovering past human-animal relations, these are not the only relations and lives that figure in such practices and, therefore, such a study demands a theoretical framework that allows for an engagement with 'life' in its multiplicity and connectivity but one that is also attentive to the 'more-than-representational' aspects of life (Lorimer 2005). The next section shall engage with the work of Whatmore in more depth to assess whether the theoretical currents upon which she draws, and then re-formulates, can inform my journey into the past practices of taxidermy.

New biogeographies

Tom Spencer and Sarah Whatmore's (2001) paper 'Putting life back into the discipline' comments on the state of geography's sub-discipline 'biogeography', suggesting how 'a revitalised biogeography might provide a stimulating meeting ground for renewing the place of life – its multiplicity of human and non-human forms, processes and connectivities – in the discipline within and between physical and human geographies' (2001: 140). Spencer and Whatmore argue that biogeography should move away from its traditional 'Hartshornian project of mapping patterns of spatial distribution and areal differentiation' of the 'bio' and instead shift attention to 'rather different assemblages of phenomena and modes of enquiry' (Ibid). They offer the biophilosophies of Whitehead (1978), Bergson (1983) and Deleuze (1994) who work at the 'turbid confluence' of philosophy and science, as possible resources for attuning biogeography to the increasingly promiscuous forms of life – and the anxieties associated with them – that populate today's world in mundane and monstrous ways. While I am sympathetic with their concern to 'up-date' biogeographical concerns, I am concerned that the specific focus, as suggested by Whatmore and Spencer, on the challenge posed by bio-

technology to existing understandings of nature/cultures will result merely in a move to ‘geographies of bio-technologies’ (for such geographies, see Castree and Braun 1998; Whatmore 1999; Thrift 2005; Greenhough and Roe 2006). Of course examples of such work (see Greenhough and Roe in particular) are to be commended for their scrambling of conventional categories and distinctions, and for developing new politics of encounter with hybrid forms of life by disturbing the accepted terms of engagement between science and politics. Yet, the ‘presentism’ implied by such a focus makes applying a biogeographical perspective to my work on *past* taxidermy practice problematic. I am nonetheless of the opinion that the notion of ‘biogeography’, albeit with further elaboration and refinement, has much to offer my study. Whatmore’s individual work (especially 2002; 2006: 604) presents a biogeographical perspective that attends to the ‘potentialities of all manner of social objects, forces, assemblages through and involved in the co-fabrication of [both past and present] socio-material worlds’, and hence offers a possible framework for my study (2006: 604). Her *Hybrid geographies* (2002) project, for example, with its attempt ‘to push hybridity back in time’, offers resources for overcoming the ‘presentism’ of some of the newly emerging biogeographies; and it is to that project I now turn (Whatmore 2004: 1361).

Whatmore has described her book *Hybrid geographies* as an experiment in ‘writing more-than-human geographies’ (Whatmore 2005: 844). It can also be more broadly understood as an attempt at a theoretical shift from an actor-network-theory (ANT) informed approach to a concern with more ‘corporeal’ and ‘vitalist’ ontologies. Whatmore acknowledges this attempt to shift registers in her introduction, stating one of her aims as:

‘to explore some of the tensions between [the] technical inflection in the ways in which non-human agency has been taken up in ANT, as a distribution of socio-material competences and effects through actant-networks..., and the more visceral preoccupations of feminist analysis with the corporeal configuration of energies and elements particularised in the experimental fabric of diverse living being’ (Whatmore 2002: 36).¹⁴

Before I go on to detail Whatmore’s attempts to move beyond or to ‘revitalise’ the ‘technical inflection’ of actor-network-theory, the theory warrants explanation. ANT is best known in geography for its relational approach to issues of agency that does not recognise the distinction between humans and non-humans, and for its ‘Foucauldian-like acknowledgement that agency is an effect distributed through a heterogeneous arrangement of materials’ (Hetherington and Law 2000: 127). The notion of a ‘network’ was developed and employed by

¹⁴ It is worth qualifying that elements of ANT, particularly the *detailed* research of Latour in a book like *Aramis or the Love of Technology* (1996), is actually ‘full of life’ (even when dealing with socio-material-technical assemblages) and that in certain respects Whatmore’s highly theoretical approach is itself a risk to a certain ‘liveliness’ of the world.

researchers in science and technology studies (STS) to explain how agency is distributed relationally *between* the many interconnected participants (agents) in an activity, be they person or thing, human or non-human (on the development of ANT, see Callon 1986; Latour 1987, 1988, 1993; Law 1991; 1992). As such, agency comes to be distributed across a network, inhering in the associations and relationship between entities, rather than in the entities themselves. This suggests that agency does not reside in one substrate, but is instead scattered spatially and temporarily (Knappet 2002). The ‘network’ metaphor has held particular appeal for geographers who have long been concerned with relational spatial thinking (e.g. Gregory 1993; Massey 1994, 1999; Harvey 1996; Thrift 1996), where space is understood to be made through sets of relation constituted in social action. Therefore, the notion of networks as ‘complex arrangements of space with no clear centre or dependence upon hierarchical relations of difference’ is understood to fit well with a relational approach to space that similarly stresses ‘a non-hierarchical way of thinking about difference and the space that that it constitutes as seemingly fluid, complex and unfinished in character’ (Hetherington and Law 2000: 127).¹⁵

However, while ANT has been championed by some for its shift away from categorical thinking and hierarchical grand narratives, others have criticised it for ‘flattening’ difference. Nick Lee and Steve Brown (1994), for example, argue that, instead of replacing grand narratives, the network metaphor actually reproduces a grand narrative as there is no room for difference in a network where everything is in relation and where those relations are all equal. As such, ANT is suggested to be ‘colonial in its pretensions to inclusion, and creates a new grand-narrative around issues of relation and difference – and the cost was the exclusion of ‘Otherness’ and its less certain and equally important spatiality’ (Hetherington and Law 2000: 128). Feminist scholars like Haraway (1994) and Strathern (1997) voice similar criticisms of the network metaphor’s ‘flattening’ and ‘centring’ tendencies, and argue that scholars should avoid attaching themselves to seductive metaphors which emphasise similarity and continuity over difference and discontinuity. Hetherington and Law (2000) entitle their special issue on the associations between ANT and geography ‘*After networks*’ to imply that there is perhaps something not quite right with network terminology. They suggest that ‘we need to look for other metaphors that avoid ontological and spatial fixity – we need an understanding of relationality that takes into account the possibility of alterity within the relations that concern us; an alterity furthermore that should not be reinscribed as yet another form of difference’ (Hetherington and Law 2000: 128). More recently ANT has introduced notions of alterity to

¹⁵ On the reception of ANT in geography, see Bingham 1996; Hinchcliffe 1996, 1997; Thrift 1996; Murdoch 1997; 1998 and Whatmore 1997. And for an overview of the main principles of ANT, see Murdoch 1997.

overcome the somewhat ‘flattening’ earlier accounts which overly stressed the methodological symmetry between things, both human and non-human. Bruno Latour, the main architect of ANT, has even rejected the ‘network’ metaphor in favour of the term ‘actant-rhizome theory’ which is emblematic of a wider search in social theory for more fluid and rhizomatic ways of attending to the spatiality of relations (Latour 1999). Eric Laurier and Chris Philo (1999), who also critique the two-dimensionality of the network, explain that the move to more organic metaphors like the rhizome can be seen as an attempt to recover three-dimensionality and to do away with a flattening ontology that ends up, curiously, in *indifference*.

Returning to Whatmore, her book *Hybrid geographies* has taken a critical stance on the ‘flattening’ tendencies of ANT and attempts to revitalise relational spatial thinking. *Hybrid geographies*, as mentioned above, offers resource for my study as it ‘moves on debates about how to take seriously spatialities of nature-culture hybrids’ (Philo 2005: 824). Rather than focusing on recovering any one particular order of being, like both Philo and Wilbert’s and Wolch and Emel’s animal geographies, her focus is on what exceeds; to embrace the inbetween spaces, moments of uncertainty, complication and crossings in the fault-lines of which histories and geographies are made by more-than-human subjects. To embrace ‘excess’, Whatmore promotes an alternative spatial vernacular over the grid-like geometries of ANT:

‘In place of the geometric habits that reiterate the world as a single grid-like surface open to the inscription of theoretical claims or universal designs, hybrid mappings are necessarily topological emphasising the multiplicity of space-times generated in/by the movements and rhythms of heterogeneous association. The spatial vernacular of such geographies is fluid, not flat, unsettling the co-ordinates of distance and proximity; local and global; inside and outside’ (Whatmore 2002: 6).¹⁶

To counter the ‘deadening’ technical inflections of ANT, she draws on the spatial imaginaries present in the biophilosophical writings of Deleuze and Guattari (see especially 1987), preferring their ‘vital topology’ over the ‘flat topology’ of ANT (Whatmore 2002: 5). And while she harnesses ANT’s promotion of a greater analytical symmetry between humans and non-humans, she is concerned by the missing lively and fleshy presences in all the discussions of the human and nonhuman in both STS and geography. Arguing that ‘life seems to have been sucked out of the worlds that geography has come to inhabit’ (Ibid: 2), she draws on feminist concerns with corporeality (e.g. Haraway 1985, 1997; Diprose 2002; Dyens 2001), new phenomenologies of embodiment and non-representational theories of performance and communication (e.g. Thrift 1997, 2000a) in a bid to ‘map the lively *commotion* of the world’

¹⁶ STS researchers have also worked on the conception of ‘fluid relations’ and have attended to notions of complexity (see in particular Mol and Law 1994; Law and Hetherington 2000; Law and Mol 2001)

(Ibid: 3 my emphasis). She seeks to uncover, in her empirical examples, how the world is fabricated through myriad practices which enrol various forms of life. There are two consequences of her 'vitalist' aims. First agency is distributed to the non-human, and one chapter, examines 'the determination to fix the wild in the geographical bodies and spaces of animals untouched by history', to demonstrate how this is 'intellectually and practically unsustainable' (Ibid: 33). She cites the example of Duchess, the elephant at Paignton Zoo, to show how things assumed to be passive can 'strike back' and refuse to fit smoothly, silently and submissively into the spaces traditionally carved out for them in anthropocentric thought:

'Taxonomically, she certainly belongs to *Loxodonta Africana*, but the elephant she has become through her life at Paignton Zoo bears only distant relation to those of her kind at home in the African bush, even as such living spaces are themselves being increasingly reconfigured in the same patterning of foresight in which she is caught up' (Whatmore 2002: 47).

Through this example and others in the chapter, Whatmore effectively deterritorialises notions of 'the wild', showing how they emerge as apparent 'properties' of species (like elephants) or spaces (like wilderness) only as 'network effects' to the extent that these non-human entities play an active role in making history and geography. While her term 'hybrid'¹⁷ is problematic – in that it suggests that previously pure things have not been mixed together – she has since insisted that, through her attempt to 'push hybridity back in time', she sought to demonstrate that things are and always have been impure: 'whether one works through the long practised intimacies between human and plant communities or the skills configured between bodies and tools, one never arrives at a time/place when the human (nor the animal) was not a work in progress' (Whatmore 2004: 1361). This links to the second consequence of her vitalist aims; that by grounding being in practice she promotes an understanding of bodies, machines and knowledges as 'always precarious achievements, although no less consequential for being so' (Braun 2005: 835). As such, Whatmore's vitalist ontology (following Deleuze and Guattari 1987) argues that the world is fabricated through diverse practices and that the relations between things are 'fluid' rather than rigidly 'networked'. Yet, she also stresses that not everything is flux, motion and unfixity and, according to Braun, she therefore 'avoids the temptation to revel in the world's potentiality by attending to ways life is continuously organised' (Braun 2005: 836). Here she invokes the Deleuzian notion of 'territorialisations' to suggest that not everything exists as a groundless becoming, that things and forces can persist and impede perpetual immanence.

¹⁷ She has since replaced it with 'more-than-human' (see Whatmore 2004; 2005; 2006).

Although her aim in *Hybrid geographies* is to ‘revitalise’ the spatialities of nature-culture hybrids, Philo argues in his review of the book that ‘the spatialities of her book arguably remain closer to the network geographies of actor-network theory’ (Philo 2005: 827). Philo argues that, rather than mapping the lively commotion of the world, some of her examples appear strangely lifeless. Philo underlines this point by contending that the animals in her account, like Duchess the elephant, are less fleshy and more ‘shadowy’ presences due to her focus on ‘becoming’ over ‘being’ and ‘making’ over ‘made’ to the extent that her accounts miss ‘the grain of lived animal worlds’ (Ibid: 30).¹⁸ Braun makes a similar argument in his review, stating that her ‘mappings of networks seem at times remarkably detached and objective’, and that therefore in practice Whatmore’s accounts have a greater ANT technical inflection than she would perhaps have liked (Braun 2005: 836). David Matless *et al* (2005) similarly criticise her for presenting ‘flat’ rather than ‘vital’ topologies. In their consideration of the historical geography of otter hunting and wildfowling in England between 1945 and 1970, they develop the idea of ‘animal landscapes’ over hybrid spaces. To do so, Matless *et al* build on Whatmore’s ‘hybrid geographical language networks and topologies through an emphasis on animal landscapes’ to move away from a ‘sense of flat movement across animal networks’ which results from her topological commitments (Matless *et al* 2005: 192 and 193). While they acknowledge that Whatmore’s hybrid geographies approach produces rich analyse in her studies of the historical construction of wildlife, her fidelity to ANT lends a sense of ‘flatness’ to her empirical accounts to the extent that there are curious indifferences between the different ‘qualities’ and ‘textures’ of the different things enrolled in such networks. To retain these qualities and textures, Matless *et al* seek to ‘highlight different sensual modes of encounter between animal and human bodies’ (2005: 202). They contend that their working of landscape – inspired by Braun’s ‘insistent materiality’ – goes beyond flat representations of ‘topologies of wildlife’ (Braun 2002: 258; Matless *et al* 2005: 192). Through their ‘geoaesthetic of landscape’, their emphasis is on the practices performed *in* the animal-human landscapes of otter and wildfowl hunting rather than on the practices that make them. In doing so, they cite a wider concern that in ‘topological’ accounts like Whatmore’s hybrid geographies, which conceive of ‘space and spatial relations primarily in terms of connective properties rather than distance and position’; there is no room for topography, leaving ‘a surface without relief, contour, or morphology’ (Rose and Wylie 2006: 477).

As I stated at the outset of this section, I believe that the notion of ‘biogeography’ – ‘the biogeographies of taxidermy’ – could work as a useful theoretical frame for my study. While

¹⁸ The essays in Philo and Wilbert’s (2000) volume, by contrast, do get at the lived grain of animal lives; and by attending to ‘beastliness’ are able to redistribute agency to animals without flattening the differences between humans and other animals.

Whatmore's hybrid mappings certainly go some way towards attending to 'the messy heterogeneity' of the world, the topological and connectivist ontology informing her and other emerging biogeographies of entangled nature cultures risks ending up reiterating the world as 'a flat grid-like surface' (Whatmore 2002: 147; 6: for new biogeographies, see Castree and Braun 1998; Pile *et al* 2004; Greenhough and Roe 2006). Mitch Rose and John Wylie, in a special issue dedicated to 're-animating landscape', have recently described such biogeographical work:

'Evolving at the juncture of actor-network-theory, science and technology studies, and the vitalist biophilosophy of Deleuze, a key concern of this literature is, of course, the scrambling of conventional categories, distinctions and geographies. And the vitalist ethos here further implies not a stable set of connections but rather a burgeoning, proliferating, even wondrous topology in which uncanny and hybrid foldings of near and far, past and present become crucial'. (Rose and Wylie 2006: 475).

Rose and Wylie still worry that the founding relational or 'connectivist' ontology of such work exists in a state of tension to landscape studies which have traditionally emphasised the topographical. They explain that these 'new biogeographies' have to some extent supplanted landscape as a medium of thinking through culture-nature relations, as they have problematised older notions of landscape showing them to be solely cultural 'constructions' of nature (see especially Whatmore (2002) on 'wilderness'). It is precisely 'the conceptions of space, measurement, distance, surface, and perspective' of traditional landscape studies that topological geographies 'want to make strange' (Rose and Wylie 2006: 476). Yet, Rose and Wylie want to reinstate notions of 'landscape' and the 'topographical' into topological and vitalist geographies. Here they argue that, 'in prioritising vectors, trajectories, and connections, topological and vitalist geographies present a curiously flat and depthless picture – and it is here that notions of landscape [the topographical], perception and subjectivity potentially reemerge' (Ibid). While traditional notions of landscape as static and 'sedentary' sit uneasily with the fluid, heterogeneous, entanglements of topological accounts, Rose and Wylie (and the four other papers in their special issue: Lorimer 2006; Rose 2006; Scott 2006; Wylie 2006) present landscape as texture:

'Collectively, in one sense, these four papers present landscape in terms of a materiality whose textured topographical presence expresses movements, syntheses, sensibilities, and attachment from which it cannot be removed. And yet, in each, landscape is also a matter of distance... this means acknowledging not only the world's intimacy, vitality, and relatedness, but also horizon, the view that recedes and precedes the image' (Rose and Wylie 2006: 479)

In this sense they present landscape as tension: ‘between presence and absence, and of performing, creating, and perceiving presence’ (Ibid: 475). The authors therefore attempt to anchor and retexture topological accounts which seem curiously groundless due to the remorseless pressure on ‘becoming’ over ‘being’ in vitalist ontologies. Rose and Wylie argue that the ‘topological imagination’ is consequently ontologically over-flattening as it has ‘no middle terms or synthetics’, leaving ‘a surface without relief, contour, or morphology’ (Ibid: 477). However, in terms of equating landscape or topography with texture, tension and material, they do not want to reiterate landscape as static and solid. Wylie, in his individual paper, for example, develops a ‘geopoetics’ of landscape that is both attentive to surface and relief – to the solid – and to the elemental and ephemeral (Wylie 2006: 533). This claim has obvious parallels with Matless *et al’s* ‘geoaesthetic’ of landscape, and it is my argument that these revisionings of landscape can reinvigorate and retexture the notion of ‘biogeography’. As such, I would argue in tune with Rose and Wylie, that topological and topographical imaginaries can work together. For example, vitalist ontologies (the topological) attend to the ways in which worlds are co-fabricated in practice, whereas an attention to the topographical attends to the detailed fabric (texture) of those worlds; or, as Rose and Wylie put it, ‘reintroduces perspective and contour; texture and feeling; perception and imagination’ to topological imaginaries (Rose and Wylie 2006: 477). Therefore a notion of ‘biogeography’ where not only the ‘vital nexus’ of the ‘bio’ and ‘geo’ are recognised but also where the ‘graphy’ – the texture of those earth-life nexuses – is also emphasised holds much potential (Whatmore 2006: 601). Hayden Lorimer presents such a conceptualisation of biogeography in his paper in Rose and Wylie’s special issue. I will engage with his approach to landscape in more depth at a later stage, as it specifically attempts to animate past landscapes and places, grappling directly with the tensions between presence and absence inherent in such landscapes.

To return to Whatmore once again, she too has also recently spoken of ‘reanimating the missing matter of landscape’, suggesting varied philosophical resources to ‘get at’ what she terms the ‘livingness’ of the world (Whatmore 2006: 603). Her suggestions on how to reanimate landscape differ subtly yet substantially from Rose and Wylie’s, as she draws on corporeal and relational materialisms that equate matter (or landscape) with the ‘bodily co-fabrication between more-than-human subjects and lively earth’, and accordingly ‘livingness’ is understood as a modality of connection between bodies and geo-physical worlds. In this sense, then, her conception of landscape is still predominantly topological as she wants to get at how they are ‘co-fabricated’ (made) through bodily practices. While I prefer Rose and Wylie’s conception of landscape for emphasising the ‘graphy’ or fabric of biogeographies,

both their and Whatmore's call to attend to the missing 'matter' of landscapes reminds me that, in the biogeographies of taxidermy, it is not just humans and animal bodies that feature. Many other presences, material and ephemeral, figure in past biogeographies of taxidermy; and it therefore pertinent at this juncture to turn to literatures which have traditionally focused on attending to such 'matters'/presences to develop further my notion of 'biogeography'.

The status of 'the object'

The above section, reviewing the status of the animal, could largely be summarised as attempts to extend the focus on 'life' beyond the human/social/cultural in contemporary social theory, and to incorporate, employing Whatmore's apposite phrase, 'more-than-human' geographies. Recent efforts to question the status of 'the object' in contemporary social theory have sought to extend 'life' still further by attributing 'liveness' to inanimate and inorganic matter. This section shall therefore review such approaches as they have much to offer a study seeking to bring 'life' to taxidermy objects by recovering the biogeographies of their making. In the first instance, the review will focus on how the status of the object has figured in traditional debates. This will be followed by an investigation of both recent attempts to 'rematerialise' human geography and the new 'materialisms' which have emerged. Finally, I shall integrate aspects of these new 'materialisms' into my conception of biogeography, offering a more detailed sketch of that theoretical framework and the implications for my study of taxidermy.

Questioning the status of the object

Various disciplines from philosophy, sociology, geography, psychology, history to archaeology, including diverse approaches both within and spanning across these disciplines, have recently reinvigorated the terms by which the status of the object is understood in contemporary social theory. One of the main outcomes of debating the status of the object is an increasing recognition of the multiple ways in which social and material relations are tangled together. Much like literatures questioning the status of the animal, such work has blurred the traditional hierarchies and boundaries that have separated things into discrete ontological categories. Pels *et al* (2002), for example, in their review of the status of the object in contemporary social theory, note that:

'Increasingly we have come to appreciate the fluidity and instability of the (multiple) ontological boundaries which separate thinglike from non-thinglike

entities (persons, animals, relations, concepts), in a growing discomfort about the traditional hierarchies which separated subjects from objects, cultures from natures, and humans from non-humans' (Pels *et al* 2002: 3).

Following from this growing discomfort, it is perhaps pertinent to follow Pels *et al* and get rid of the impossible question: what are things? what counts as an object? Or, in my case, what kind of object is a taxidermy specimen? When viewed in its finished form behind glass, the taxidermy specimen could be considered simply an object of natural history. Yet, in the making of a specimen the taxidermists works with and brings together both organic matter – skin, hair, sinew and wood – and inorganic craft materials – wire, polystyrene, modelling compound, glass eyes and paints. Although much effort is expended to conceal this work, the use of actual animal skin (and often other matter originating with the animal) combined with the taxidermist's strategies of mimetic reproduction ensure that the journey and transformation of a taxidermy mount from live embodied animal to static museum prop or wall mount is always indexed. In this manner, although museum curators can direct our understanding of, and responses to, taxidermy, specimen animals are excessive material entities which resist complete 'containment' and retain both aesthetic and ontological ambiguity. The indeterminacy of taxidermy mounts, somewhere between animal and material presence, therefore affords them a level of ontological insecurity: are they animals or are the objects? And even then, what class of animal or object would they be? Fixing the status of a taxidermy mount proves especially difficult when what counts as 'animal' and 'object,' as I have already outlined, has been called into question. Their ambiguity as material presences poses problems for anyone wishing to engage with them, therefore, as it is common scholarly practice to identify or classify the subject or material with which you are working. Rather than stabilising the identity of a taxidermy mount, though, I want to work with an approach to material culture that allows the more ambiguous aspects of material presence to be worked with rather than explained away. As I have already outlined, rather than focus on the finished form and display of taxidermy specimens – their representation – my research seeks to recover the biogeographies of their making. I shall therefore draw on approaches to material culture that take seriously the excessiveness of material entities, thus allowing me to focus on recovering the entangled natural and cultural histories that bring taxidermy objects into existence. But, first, back to the main focus of this section, that of reviewing classical frameworks for understanding the interplay between materiality and sociality.

The two most notable frameworks for traditionally considering the interplay between sociality and materiality are reification and fetishism. Reification denotes the symbolic framing of a material object whereas fetishism is largely understood as the material framing of social relations (Pels *et al* 2002). The two approaches have come to be considered oppositional as

one largely follows the idealism of Hegel and the other the materialism of Marxism. Reification, following Hegelian idealist principles, is understood as the unwarranted transposition of human relations, processes, actions and concepts on to impersonal, non-human objects (for more detail, see Vandenberghe 2001). However this approach has been criticised, particularly by Marxian theorists, for privileging mind over body and subject over object. Fetishism by contrast is commonly thought of as ‘the reverse process of the personification and ‘agentification’ of material objects, which are thought to be possessed by spiritual, even supernatural forces, and command a unique reverence as a result of this magical attribution’ (Pels *et al* 2002: 4). Karl Marx’s famous study of the commodity fetish was an attempt to disrupt the power of commodities (their unique reverence), to ‘lift the veil of the fetish’, by focusing on production of commodities over strategies which reify them (for reviews, see Pietz 1985, 1987, 1988; Hetherington 2007). Marx’s focus on production sought to challenge the alienating materiality of commodity exchange in capitalist markets by uncovering the alienating practices of material production. Through his focus on the physical production of things, and on the social relations of production, Marx was able to demonstrate that object and subject were not as alienated from one another as would first appear, but were rather ‘indelibly conjoined in a dialectical relationship’ (Tilley 2006: 60).

While much has been made of the differences between the two positions of reification and fetishism, Pels *et al* argue that both positions at base ‘strive to ‘unmask’ these seemingly inherent powers of agency as alienated and phantasmagoric representations of human definitions and performance, reducing what appear to be natural characteristics which emanate from the object itself as delegated actions and properties of humans’ (Pels *et al* 2002: 4). Pietz (1989, 1993) nonetheless argues that, with the advent of post-structuralist scholarship, there is a move back to less critical idealist notions of the material. He bemoans that the overt critical politics of Marxist materialism is being diluted by what he conceives to be ‘post-structuralist’¹⁹ positions that present objects as texts which can be ‘read’ to ascertain meaning and social significance. Pietz (1993) specifically critiqued the move away from Marxian materiality in the social theory of Baudrillard, Barthes, Lacan and Laclau, arguing that they present semiological readings of fetishism: ‘the gist of the poststructuralist position was effectively to restate the Hegelian idealist view of material reality as the ‘necessary mediating otherness’ through which subjective concepts asserted themselves in their process of reflexive historical self-recognition’ (Pels *et al* 2002: 5-6; Pietz 1993: 127). Through such a view, the

¹⁹ Pietz’s suggestion that ‘post-structuralists’ are little more than semioticians strikes the author as ill-judged. For example, Latour, Deleuze and Guattari are often positioned as post-structuralists and these theorists consistently insist upon the liveliness of material worlds. Furthermore, those works in geography explicitly carrying the ‘post-structuralist’ label – think of Doel or J. P. Jones III – are light years away from hermeneutics/semiology.

material world is apparently redefined as symbolic order and the object becomes a ‘symbol’ or ‘sign’ and, as such, objects only become visible ‘in the contexts of systems of meaning (e.g. categories, discourse, communicative action)’ (Reckwitz 2002: 196). However, there is an emerging counter-movement attempting to revive a Marxian focus on the materiality of the fetish when textualist post-structuralist readings of materiality dominated contemporary social theory.

Arjun Appadurai’s (1986) edited collection *The social life of things* is agenda-setting in this counter-movement. Appadurai’s own essay in the volume, which addressed the politics of commodity exchange, is critical of the semiotic frameworks of (a certain breed of) ‘post-structuralism’ which posits material entities as merely ‘envelopes of meaning’ limited to linguistic and discursive interpretation. He challenges such a limiting view of material culture by inverting such approaches to consider empirically the sociality of material entities (see also Miller 1987; Thomas 1991; Carrier 1995; Hoskins 1998). Appadurai, along with the other essays in the collection, developed the notion that things, or objects, have ‘social lives’, drawing attention to the ways in which seemingly passive objects when moved about and recontextualised take on different meanings and significances (Hoskins 2006). Appadurai, in his introduction to the volume, justifies such a (at the time) controversial position:

‘It is only through the analysis of these trajectories [object ‘paths’ and life histories] that we can interpret the human transactions and calculation that enliven things. Thus, even though from a theoretical point of view human actors encode things with significance, from a methodological point of view it is the things-in-motion that illuminate their human and social context’. (Appadurai 1986: 5)

The point made here is to turn to the ‘things themselves’: that by methodologically tracing the use of objects through the social practices of production, exchange and consumption, the roles that they play in the constitution of social reality can be illuminated. As such, Appadurai argues that material things should be viewed as processual or relational, and that to ‘trace’ objects’ shifting meanings throughout their ‘life-paths’ was to recognise the ‘mutability of things’ in recontextualisation (Ibid; see also Thomas 1989). Igor Kopytoff’s essay ‘The cultural biography of things’, from Appadurai’s volume, develops Appadurai’s notion of following an object’s ‘life-path’, as things are afforded a metaphorical ‘life’ or ‘career’ which can be approached and recorded much like a person’s biography. Kopytoff maintained that scholars could therefore get at the ‘politics of things’ by following their social and political biographies:

‘there are events in the biography of objects that convey more subtle meanings... the tangled mass of aesthetic, historical, and even political judgements, and of

convictions and values that shape our attitude to objects labelled “art”.
Biographies of things can make salient what might otherwise remain obscure.’
(Kopytoff 1986: 67)

Here Kopytoff echoes the Marxian argument for ‘lifting the veil of the commodity fetish’: that, in tracing how commodities are produced, used and consumed, they come to be seen less as passive containers of human meaning and instead are recognised as politically active in the alienating mechanisms of capitalism. Appadurai and Kopytoff’s appeal for a consideration of the sociality of material entities thus marks an attempt to refocus analytical attention upon the material embodiment and concrete historicity of social objects in order to reassert the political power of social objects (Pels *et al* 2002). Yet Appadurai and Kopytoff stopped short of ascribing agency to material things themselves by having the proviso that ‘things did not acquire meaning apart from those that human transactions, attributions and motivations endow them with’; rather ‘the imperative [is] to ‘follow the things themselves’ in order to show how such meanings [are] actually inscribed in their forms, uses and trajectories’ (Ibid: 5).

Since Appadurai’s intervention, much has been made of his observation that things have ‘social lives’, particularly in museum and material culture studies. The idea that ‘things’ can be afforded a metaphorical ‘life’ or ‘career’ has been very seductive to scholars seeking to find a vehicle to explore the mutual imbrication of people and things (Bradley 1990; Mackenzie 1991; Tilley 1996; Keane 1997; Meskell 2004; Alberti 2005). Things are said to have biographies (Gosden and Marshall 1999; Alberti 2005) or to help tell people’s biographies (Hoskins 1998), yet little further attention has been paid to what kind of adhesive connectivity this actually entails. While the notion that things have social lives has hence become practically axiomatic, others have argued that the statement has not received the full and direct attention that it deserves (Gosden and Knowles 2001; Steiner 2001; Knappet 2002) Christopher Steiner (2001), for example, has argued that scholars have misinterpreted Kopytoff’s seminal idea in his essay on the cultural biography of things. Steiner claims that scholars have used Kopytoff’s claims to focus on the agentive elements of objects and have consequently attributed too much power to the things themselves, and that ‘in so doing have diminished the significance of human agency and the role of individuals and systems that construct and imbue things with value, significance and meaning... the point is not that ‘things’ are more animated than we used to believe, but rather that they are infinitely malleable to the shifting and contested meanings constructed for them through human agency’ (Steiner 2001: 210). Gosden and Knowles also warn that the implications of such metaphors have not been properly worked through, arguing that: ‘we have not quite found the right language to express the mutual imbrication of people and things. On the one hand we are wary of making things too active: things are not agents in their own right, and the material world is only given force and

significance through human activity. On the other, things are not a passive stage setting to human action' (Gosden and Knowles 2001: 22). But even in acknowledging that objects can be agents and agents can be objects, a dualism between objects and agents remains. Archaeologist Carl Knappet asks why is it even necessary to identify any particular entity as agent or object anyway? Following this line of thought, he usefully states that:

'Agency clearly needs rethinking, if no useful distinction can be made between a 'pure' human mind and body (subject) within which agency resides, and an external world of objects onto which agency is projected. ... An alternative perspective is emerging in which mind, body and world are seen as codependent. That is to say, an idea 'in mind' is rarely fully understood without some form of tangible expression (cultural representations brought forth from 'concealment') and, vice-versa, an object cannot be properly grasped independently of how it relates to the body and indeed to its underlying idea.' (Knappet 2002: 98-99).

STS scholar Bruno Latour – as already discussed – has been particularly critical of the narrow distinction between people and things (or what he terms humans and non-humans) and has been seen as the main instigator of an 'agnostic turn' in the study of material culture (Latour 2000; 2005). Latour and other actor-network theorists have radically rethought the relationship between materiality and sociality, promoting the ontological symmetry of people and things, and using the notion of the 'network' to explain how agency is distributed across a network, inhering in the associations and relationship between entities, rather than in the entities themselves (see Callon 1986; Latour 1993; Law 1991, 1999; Haraway 1991). Early ANT ethnographic accounts largely focused on the practices of science to emphasise the hybrid character of socio-technical collectives and in order to confuse modernist categories which separate society from technology and culture from nature – think here of Latour's ethnographic work on laboratory life (Latour 1987, 1988). Tenets of ANT have been taken up more widely by other disciplines to demonstrate how the networked practices of association, enrolment and translation between humans and non-humans stabilise diverse social, cultural and political practices. ANT has been attractive to scholars because it prioritises a distributed theory of practice which revalues 'things' as active mediators in the engineering of such networks, suggesting that 'social networks are unable to cohere without the delegated intentionality and agency of things' (Pels *et al* 2002: 8). Importantly, according to the ANT position, things are not only active in terms of their manipulation by humans. Latour's ethnographic injunction to 'closely follow the actants' reveals how 'things strike back', and can object to social enrolment and are therefore consequently understood actively to participate in the making (and un-making) and holding together of social relations (Latour 1993, 1996 2000). As I have previously outlined, ANT has been particularly appealing to geographers as it does not reify space as a natural, pre-existing container of the social and material, but rather is itself a

performance of 'heterogeneous engineering' (on the reception of ANT in geography, see Bingham 1996; Hinchliffe 1996; Murdoch 1997; Whatmore 1997; Laurier and Philo 1999). As also outlined before, however, ANT-inflected work has received criticism for presenting a flat and disembodied conception of space: 'network spaces, it appears, are just as rigid in their ontological and epistemological assumptions as Euclidean containers and Cartesian grids' (Hetherington and Law 2000: 131).

This critique has instigated what Pels *et al* (2002) call a 'practical turn' in approaches to the material across the social sciences and humanities. Alternative spatial ontologies have since been promoted which 'step beyond the Euclidean modernist grid' to explore the performativity, fluidity and virtuality of objects (Ibid: 8). The idea of 'fluidity', as I have already noted, has emerged out of STS scholarship which attempts to introduce notions of alterity to ANT in order to engage with the performativity of 'networked' practices (e.g. Mol and Law 1994; Law and Mol 2001). Laet (2000), for example, has taken up the idea of 'fluid' objects to critique Latour's (1990) notion of the 'immutable mobile' – an immutable mobile according to Latour is 'an inscription device that moves within the network and its nodal points of passage but stays the same in different contexts' (Hetherington and Law 2000: 130). Using an ethnographic take on objects-in-motion, she demonstrates how a seemingly immutable device like a patent becomes a different object in different places, revealing that relations are fluid and contextual within objects as well as between them. However, others have drawn more readily on performance studies to show how objects are 'performed' in various ways (e.g. Schatzki *et al* 2001). The idea that objects are 'performed' can be traced through the work of Danny Miller (1987, 1998a/b, 2001) who, greatly influenced by Pierre Bourdieu's 'theory of practice' (see Bourdieu 1977), insists that it is through making, using, exchanging, consuming, interacting and living with things that people make themselves. Following Miller, others have sought to enclose their study of material things 'within practical, bodily handlings and performances' (Pels *et al* 2002: 14; see also Hetherington 2002; Cetina and Brugger 2002). Drawing on more recent work on the sociology of the body (Shilling 1993, 1997; Burkitt 1999; Crossley 2001), such practice-orientated work has sought to distance itself from rationalist discursive models which present space and action as flat and undifferentiated, and to shift instead towards more corporeally-inspired conceptions of space and experience which emphasise 'a more immediate 'libidinal' apprehension of both persons and things' (Pels *et al* 2002: 14). Pels *et al* conclude that, while the 'practical turn' in material culture theory has been productive in that it has reaffirmed the intimacy between sociality and materiality, they also warn that their relationality should remain fluid:

‘Human bodies and the artefacts they are attached to form an intricate tangle of performances, mediations and techniques which no longer support traditional critical distinctions between the social and the material world. But this does not reduce the critical (political) task of keeping fluid the many fixtures and reifications which these performances, mediations and techniques necessarily engender’ (Pels *et al* 2002: 18).

Others have also expressed concern over corporeal materialisms as they seem to equate matter with a realm of co-present artefacts which effectively denies any incorporeal dimensions of matter and materials (e.g. Anderson 2004). Recent scholarship in geography, for example, has sought to engage with the ‘excessiveness’ of matter and the world to overcome the ‘embalming obsession with form and meaning’ that dominate representational logics (Dewsbury *et al* 2002: 437). Before I engage directly with non-representational understandings of matter promoted in geography, I shall review recent attempts to ‘rematerialise’ geography.

Rematerialising geographies

Calls to ‘rematerialise’ human geography grew out of concerns over the ‘new’ cultural geography’s reliance on contemporary theories of representation. The argument made was that the analysis of culture had been ‘confined to a hermeneutic consideration of cultural, textual and discursive meaning’, thereby obscuring the material manifestation of culture (Kearns 2003: 140). Don Mitchell (1995, 1996) and Neil Badcock (1996) argue that new cultural geography’s lack of grounding in material reality meant that it lacked interpretive significance. According to Mitchell and Badcock, cultural geography is disconnected from material and empirical reality and therefore does not ‘matter’. Kearns has since highlighted this rhetorical deployment of ‘matter’: i.e. that for geographic research to ‘matter’, it must be grounded in material/physical reality (Kearns 2003). Jackson (2000), Philo (2000) and Lee’s (2002) subsequent calls to ‘rematerialise’ social and cultural geography after Mitchell and Badcock’s interventions also respond to the dominance of textual and discursive methodologies in cultural geography, and argue for a fuller analysis of the materiality of contemporary culture. Philo (2000: 33), for example, makes clear his concerns over cultural geography’s reliance on semiotic methodologies:

‘Yet, what I wish to signpost now are some concerns that I (and others) have about this dematerialising of human geography: the preoccupation with immaterial cultural processes, with the constitution of intersubjective meaning systems, with the play of identity politics through the less-than-tangible, often-fleeting spaces of texts, signs, symbols, psyches, desires fears, and imaginings. I am concerned that, in the rush to elevate such spaces in our geographical studies,

we have ended up being less attentive to the more ‘thingy’, bump-into-able, stubbornly there-in-the-world kinds of ‘matter’ (the material) with which earlier geographers tended to be more familiar’.

The argument Philo makes here is that the physicality of material forms and artefacts should be taken seriously, and that geographic research should be grounded in the physical manifestation of culture. Kearns has argued that Philo’s intervention was ‘driven by a Latourian desire to expressly revalorise the irreducible materiality of the objects of geographic research’ (Kearns 2003 140). Jackson (2000) and Lee (2002), by contrast propose that materialist analysis should refocus attention on the relationship between people and things. Jackson suggests that the best way to focus on that relationship and to re-politicise cultural geography is to focus on the material processes of consumption. Echoing Appadurai’s call to ‘follow the things themselves’, he goes on to suggest that practices of consumption should be interrogated methodologically through ethnographic considerations of how physical objects are consumed, and the ways in which they are materially incorporated into the embodied life-world of the consumer. This mandate is based on his belief that ‘the meaning of material objects is embedded in specific cultural contexts as people use things’ (Jackson 2000: 10).

New geographies of consumption have since emerged in answer to Jackson’s suggestion which have constructed ‘commodity stories’ by ethnographically ‘tracking’ the consumption of commodities to show how they are constituents in social relations through their circulation, exchange and use (e.g. for such ‘commodity stories’, see Mansfield 2003; Hughes and Reimer 2003; Elias and Carney 2004; Cook 2004; Hill 2006a/b, 2007). Jude Hill’s work is worthy of exploration here as she has studied ‘objects on the move’ in the historical past (Hill 2006/b, 2007). Specifically, she has traced the movements of some of the objects contained within the Henry Wellcome medical collection – e.g. anthropological art-objects, medicines chests and amulets. Specifically, she develops a spatially sensitive study of the collection by charting the spaces of acquisition, supply, and display through which the objects have moved, and also the changes in meaning that such movements have enacted upon them. Yet, while Hill presents the ‘people-object-place’ relationships of the collection, she also frames these within wider ‘historico-geographical networks’ (Hill 2006: 368). She follows here broader conventions in museum and material culture studies where collections are understood to gain significance through both their contextual settings and the people with whom they are associated (see Mackenzie 1991; Hoskins 1998; Barringer and Fynn 1998; Gosden and Knowles 2001). Sam Alberti, for example, has instructed museum curators and academics to consider ‘the movement of things’, to approach the study of collections through the trajectories of specific items from their manufacture and collection to their display and use within the museum, in

order to explore the relationships that they form with people and other objects, as well as the accompanying shifts in status that these movements and relations can enact (Alberti 2005).

While Alberti considers the importance of the contexts that an object might move through, his focus is also on the networks of relationships that constitute the career of a thing. Here Alberti, like Hill, does not want to attribute too much power to the things themselves, as he argues that to do so would ‘diminish the agency of the humans in the story’ (Alberti 2005: 561). It is Alberti’s contention that objects prompt, change and act as a medium for relationships, but are nonetheless ‘inanimate’, and concludes that ‘we are looking from the standpoint of the object, but we are looking at *people*’ (Ibid: 561 my emphasis). I have chosen to reject this stance as the main way to approach my study of taxidermy, since my focus is on recovering the biogeographies which brought taxidermy collections into existence, rather than principally on the objects and collections themselves. While tracing the biographical trajectories of specific specimens and collections offers a way of exploring their ‘after-lives’ and the wider historical contexts framing their collection, manufacture and display – and there are elements of this orientation in what follows, notably in the *Movement* chapter – I would contend that such an approach to the study of material culture (whether taking the form of Appadurai-inspired ‘commodity stories’ or Latourian hybrid networks), where the focus is on ‘the things themselves’ or, rather, their particular relational networks, can render the versions of ‘life’ and space presented by such approaches as anaemic and flat in quality. Rather than entirely reject the possible gains in attempting to trace the trajectories of specific taxidermy items, however, my biogeographical framework is committed to building up a sense of the past embodied sites of taxidermy practice first, *before* attempting to reconstruct the more intimate trajectories of specific items within, between and beyond them. In doing so, I hope to avoid both ‘flattening’ or ‘deadening’ the historical context in which the practices that transformed live animals into static taxidermy specimens took place.

Similarly, while ‘commodity stories’ in geography constitute more than a simple ‘tracing’ of commodities to reveal their *physical* flows and connections as they seek to defetishise ‘exotic things’, they, in the main, only afford significance to material things in terms of the roles played in mediating social relations (Bakker and Bridge 2006: 13). As such, ‘commodity stories’, following Jackson’s mandate present matter itself as inert and ineffective, according to Kearns, as ‘not only does the implicit periodization and linearity of this scheme assume matter as a fundamental *a priori* but matter remains inert and inexpressive throughout its formation’ (Kearns 2003: 148). Kearns asserts that in fact all three calls to rematerialise social and cultural geography – Jackson (2000), Philo (2000) and Lees (2002) – through their rhetorical deployment of matter present a conception of matter as *a priori* or pre-existent, and that

consequently ‘the expressive waywardness of matter – the possibility of active forms of materiality outside the dialectics of subject-object is expressly forbidden through this reductionism’ (Kearns 2003: 149). The conclusion drawn by Kearns is that there must be ‘a valorisation of the ways in which matter *acts* independently of and upon the subject’ and, moreover, that ‘there is a need to abandon the notion that empirical methods are necessarily about the capturing of the external world as data, inasmuch as there is a need to discard notions of geographical practice as necessarily producing knowledge and representations of an external (and sometimes material) world’ (Ibid).

The expressiveness and excessiveness of matter

More sophisticated, less essentialist conceptions of matter have emerged since the original calls to rematerialise social and cultural geography by Jackson (2000), Philo (2000) and Lees (2002).²⁰ More recent moves towards an articulation of the material, the natural and the bodily in geography have been informed by a considered critique of the existing dualisms of body-mind, matter-language and nature-culture (Groz 1994; Kirby 1997; Whatmore 1997; 2002; Parr and Butler 1999). Whatmore (1997), in particular, has highlighted how the ‘returns’ to the material, the bodily and the natural are potentially fraught with a resurgence of the essentialism of the ‘real’. However, work on ‘hybridity’ (e.g. see Braun and Castree 1998; Whatmore 1997, 1999, 2002) has emphasised how the social and the material are intertwined in increasingly promiscuous combinations and have criticised ‘analytical accounts which present the world as a set of discrete, pure categories’ for blinding us to the ‘messy heterogeneity of materiality’ (Bakker and Bridge 2006: 16). Murdoch (1997), Whatmore (2002) and Castree (2002) have all critiqued geography’s ‘asymmetrical’ treatment of nature, engaging with Latour’s conception of materiality to transcend the nature-culture dualism and the poverty of conventional geographical treatments of nature. Bakker and Bridge have argued that the significance of the work on hybridity:

‘lies not in the figure of the hybrid or the quasi-object, which ultimately are rather blunt analytical devices [as they suggest pure origins]. It lies, rather, in the relational and distributed view of materiality that provides a way to unpack apparent permanencies and stabilities, and to show how these competencies and capacities of ‘things’ are not intrinsic but derive from association.’ (Bakker and Bridge 2006: 16)

²⁰ This is not to say Jackson, Philo and Lees presented wholly unsophisticated conceptions of the material. Rather, it was their aim to refocus geographic energies on ‘the material’, and in that sense they have been very successful.

This therefore stands in contrast to those approaches simply redistributing agency to a broader class of subjects, as it offers a significant ontological reworking of agency. As such, hybrid materialisms have attempted to sever agency from the subject-object binary by understanding agency in relational terms, and as such agency becomes an ‘emergent property of network associations rather than a property inherent in discrete entities’ (Ibid: 19). As I have already underlined, for an approach criticising geography’s previous ‘asymmetrical’ treatment of nature, its emphasis on connection over differentiation still risks presenting a decidedly ‘depthless’ and undifferentiated picture of the material world. Lorimer has argued, for example, that ‘care must be taken that, in pointing up diverse assemblages of objects, technologies and practices, what emerges is not simply a smear of equivalence’ (Lorimer 2005: 88). And while some have attempted to uncover historical geographies of hybridisation to reinstate a critical politics to such work, their underlying faithfulness to the radical symmetrical ontologies of ANT ensures that the heterogeneity of ‘hybrid materialisms’ is flattened (Castree and Braun 1998; Castree 2002; Whatmore 2002).²¹

So called ‘corporeal materialisms’, by contrast, which have drawn upon a rich variety of analytical impulses such as postcolonial, feminist and performance studies, have presented materiality (in various ways) as embodiment. Recent work on ‘bodily geographies’, for example, has drawn predominantly on feminist scholars who analyse the ways in which subjectivity and cognition are formed through bodily inhabitations of the physical world (e.g. Butler 1993; Groz 1994; Kirby 1997; Longhurst 1997). Such work has attempted to overcome the mind/body dualism to express the causal role of ‘the material’ without straying into object fetishism or without attributing intrinsic qualities to entities whose boundaries are ‘extrinsic’ (Bakker and Bridge 2006: 15). To do so, ‘bodily geographies’ often deploy the concept of embodiment to hint at our physically enframed nature of existence (e.g. Callard 1998; Harvey 1998; Matless 2001; Imrie 2003; Little and Leyshon 2003). Bakker and Bridge have written that ‘bodily geographies’ as such ‘examine the way in which subjectivity and identity emerge not from disembodied consciousness, but through the experience of acting through – and on – the physical, visceral and mortal vehicle of the body’ (Bakker and Bridge 2006: 15). Physicality, according to this notion of embodiment, is socially constructed through material and discursive practices (see especially Butler 1993; Valentine 1999). Efforts to understand corporeality in terms of a ‘materially situated self’ extend earlier notions of ‘situated knowledges’ – where ‘situatedness’ is how one was situated within a web of social constructs

²¹ This is ironic considering that these approaches have critiqued geography’s traditional ‘asymmetrical’ treatment of nature. Swyngedouw (1996, 1999) has coupled Latourian notions of networked reconstruction with Lefebvre’s (1991) concept of historical and geographical production of space to show how hybridisation is the historical-geographical ‘process of production, of becoming, of perpetual transgression’ (Swyngedouw 1996: 73).

such as gender, race and class. Such work has attempted to temper the social constructivism of any approach which ‘effectively effaced the body’ and in contrast seeks to focus on ‘the ‘situatedness’ of living in and through the physical body, through which lived experience – both social and material – is embodied’ (Bakker and Bridge 2006: 15; for work on the ‘materiality of social life’, see Nast and Pile 1998; Harrison 2000; Longhurst 2001; Parr 2001; Bondi *et al* 2002).

However, while embodiment has been valorised as a strategy of liberation by many, in that it has destabilised assumed natural categories such as ‘race’, ‘gender’ and ‘culture’, Nigel Thrift and J-D Dewsbury have judged it insufficient. While they acknowledge the merits of new ‘bodily geographies’, they argue that some of them present a limited conception of embodiment because they have largely drawn on Judith Butler’s notion of embodiment – where physicality is constructed through material and discursive practices (see Butler 1993). They contend that Butler’s conception of embodiment is ‘often narrowly linguistic in scope’ because she is a theorist of the ‘symbolic register’ and consequently focuses on discourse over practice, therefore leaving little room for attention to space (Thrift and Dewsbury 2000).²² They quote McNay to underline their point: ‘because of her unwillingness to stray beyond a primarily linguistic model of identity formation, issues relating to value conflict, how new forms of identity emerge and how they may or may not relate to wider institutional change are foreclosed’ (McNay 1999: 189-190, in Thrift and Dewsbury 2000: 414). Thrift and Dewsbury instead present a new invocation of ‘embodiment’ or, rather, ‘performance’ in an attempt to ‘animate new potentialities... in order above all to make space livelier’ (Ibid: 411-2). This shift in thought can be attributed to Thrift’s inception of non-representational theory (NRT) (Thrift 1996; 1997; 2000a: for commentaries on the development of NRT in geography, see Lorimer 2005, 2007, 2008). Here Thrift urges geographers to turn their focus away from representational logics to consider the ‘radical otherness of the ‘event’” or, in other words, to pay close attention to how events are shaped as and where they happen (Thrift 2000: 217). This is to insist that much conduct – even human conduct – just happens, just unfolds in its happening; and that human ‘rationalisations’ of what happened cannot but turn up *after* the event.²³ While Thrift has insisted that NRT should resist traditional definition, he has stated that:

²² Rose similarly critiques Butler’s approach to performativity as too symbolic, too predicated on inscriptions given to bodies, in a word on ‘discourses’ – preferring other more psychoanalytically inflected approaches like Luce Irigaray’s (see Rose 1999).

²³ The problem with this understanding, one that will be addressed in full in the first empirical chapter, is that much *human* creation surely does depend upon carefully thought-out plans, constructed in advance, where a representational moment (or the importance of representational work) cannot be easily disputed.

‘in embryo it can be said to depend upon an argument which relies on dispelling analogical imaginings of a diagnostic kind, so beloved of certain kinds of intellectuals, in favour of the direct significances of practices. Most importantly it means the world is a making (Threadgold 1997): it is processual; it is action; it is ‘all that is present and moving’ (Williams 1972: 128)’ (Thrift 2000a: 217).

Thrift offers NRT as a way of counteracting the ‘deadening effects’ of representational modes of thinking that have long dominated geography (Thrift and Dewsbury 2000). Drawing on distributed theories of practice from the work of Wittgenstein, Heidegger, Bourdieu and de Certeau, and also on the biophilosophical writings of Deleuze and Serres, Thrift and Dewsbury seek to draw attention to ‘the flow and practice of everyday life as embodied, as caught up with and committed to the creation of affect²⁴, as contextual, and as inevitably technologised through language and objects’ (Thrift and Dewsbury 2000: 415). They draw on the work of Deleuze to escape human-centred understandings of embodied practice to connect with the impersonal flows and forces of the world in order to recognise ‘life in all its sticky and slack human/nonhuman, inorganic/incorporeal, phenomenal/epiphenomenal and banal/intense everydayness’ (Thrift 2004a: 90, quoting Seigworth 2000: 246).

The NRT manifesto, with its emphasis on ‘bodies-in-information’, has spawned studies attending to geographies of embodied practice based around the ideas, and ideals, of performance (e.g. Dewsbury et al 2002; McCormack 2002; Wylie 2002). ‘Performativity’ here, according to Cadman (forthcoming), is ‘not an act in time rather it is the spacing which allows the next moment... [T]his sense of performativity allows non-representational theory to articulate embodied practice yet retain its inherent openness amid the flow of the world’. This has led to work which has (strictly) followed the NRT line in two main directions. First, there are those who have sought to get at the minutiae of embodied practices (e.g. Harrison 2000; Wylie 2002; Anderson 2004); and secondly, there are those who have sought to engage with conditions for the production of the new (e.g. Dewsbury 2000; Harrison 2000). However, the tenets of NRT have proved valuable to other scholars seeking ‘to accommodate versions of sociomaterial or socionatural assemblage’ which ‘exceed purely human versions of subjectivity and spatiality’ (Lorimer 2007: 96). Recognising ‘excess’ has more widely been promoted as a counter-move against:

‘a curious vampirism, in which events are drained for the sake of the ‘orders, mechanisms, structures, and processes’ posited by the analyst; an ontological

²⁴ Thrift, drawing on a combination of Spinoza, Freud, Tomkins, Ekman, Massumi, and a host of feminist theorists, promotes an understanding of affect ‘as the way in which each ‘thing’ in acting, living, and striving to preserve its own being is ‘nothing but the actual essence of the thing’ (Spinoza *et al* 1997)’ (Thrift 2008: 13). In this way, there ‘is no longer a subject, but only individuating affective states of an anonymous force’ (Spinoza, cited in Alliez 2004b: 27).

freezing in which the excessive is recuperated for the sake of theoretical certainty, the flourish of generalisation, a well formed opinion and a resounding conclusion’ – so-called ‘dead geographies’ (Dewsbury et al 2002: 437).

To overcome geography’s traditional ‘embalming obsession with form and meaning’, Dewsbury *et al* (2002: 438) propose instead a ‘serial logic of the unfinished... an attentiveness to things taking place rather than such a logic which seeks to contain and deny movement’. This logic, they continue, does not dispel representation as an illusion, but rather holds that ‘representations are to be apprehended as performative in themselves; as doings’ – hence Lorimer has offered the useful term ‘more-than-representational’ (Dewsbury et al 2002: 438; Lorimer 2005). As such, they draw upon a Deleuzian vitalism where ‘performativity’ and consequently ‘materiality’ speaks of irretrievability, indeterminacy and excess.

Ben Anderson has observed that this appreciation of the world’s capacity for all manner of ‘becomings’ has presented a new form of materialism ‘that remember[s] the liveliness of matter rather than reduce[s] the capacity for liveness back down to a set of human faculties’ (Anderson 2004: 745). Matter is duly presented as excessive: ‘rather than reduce the matter of the world to a network effect the aim is to take seriously the injunction to ‘let matter be matter’... in irreducible specificity and infinite connection’ (Anderson 2004: 746, quoting Massumi 2002b: 39). Anderson notes how this vitalist materialism was a response to the ‘dead geographies’ presented by representational logics (including ANT). Echoing Whatmore’s vitalist aims (Whatmore 2002; 2006), this new materialism, according to Anderson, has been couched in the quasi-vitalist re-affirmation of the figure of ‘life’ as ‘a mutant, undisciplined, creativity that is worked out through the properties of existence’ (Anderson 2004: 745, quoting Amin and Thrift 2002: 437).²⁵ Anderson still has worries that a materialism equating matter with ‘excess’, ‘abundance’, ‘surplus’ and ‘plenitude’ may overlook the ‘diminishment or lessening of life’ (Anderson 2004: 746). He explains that the ‘excessive’ and ‘vitalist’ materialisms that non-representational styles of work promote have similar problems to the ‘relational materialism’ underpinning Whatmore’s vitalist agenda. Rose and Wylie, for example, critique the ‘vitalist’ and ‘connectivist’ ontologies that underpin relational materialisms as their ‘presumption of incessant relatedness’ overlooks issues of withdrawal and passivity (Rose and Wylie 2006: 475; see also Harrison 2007a). As such, they argue that the vitalist geographies of non-representational theory, much like ‘new’ biogeographies, promote a topological sensibility and therefore ‘present a curiously flat and depthless picture’ of the world ‘where there is much amusement and surprise, but little mystery or depth’ (Ibid: 477). We therefore arrive at the same problem as we did at the end of ‘the status of the animal’ section – that newly emerging

²⁵ Whatmore’s vitalist aim sought to attune to ‘the more corporeal configuration of energies and elements particularised in the experimental diverse living being’ (Whatmore 2002: 36).

approaches which seek to attend to the liveliness and excesses of the world risk presenting the world as groundless, and therefore fall prey to the same criticism: i.e. that in privileging the utopian notion of perpetual becoming, they ‘reject the territorial in [their] haste to equate nomadic mobility with the powers of a subversive critical capacity’ (Dubow 2004a: 218-9).

However, while NRT presents space as a groundless, *intensive* and formless multiplicity, this differs subtly from relational accounts of space presenting space as an *extensive* multiplicity, through the depthless and timeless extension of relations. The key here is that NRT is interested in the *intensities* of the world and as such offers a different conceptualisation of the making of space (e.g. Thrift 2000a). As such, NRT is interested in getting at ‘the troubling impasses and breakthroughs, the trajectories and intensities of events’ (Thrift 2000a: 214). Hence, rather than casting life as a series of infinite possibilities, some NRT theorists have adopted a quasi-Deleuzian notion of virtuality to suggest that ‘things can lessen in intensity’ (Anderson 2004: 746). As Cadman (forthcoming) explains, ‘virtualities are different from possibilities in that they are in every sense real but not always actualised’. Anderson develops this notion in his conceptualisation of matter as ‘not-yet-become’. This conception of matter as ‘not-yet-become’ is important, according to Anderson, as it indicates that matter has ‘still not become’, ‘indicating failed arrival, deferral, loss’ (Anderson 2004: 746). It therefore stands in opposition to a conception of matter as ‘excess’, ‘abundance’, ‘plenitude’ because it ‘includes an understanding that life can be, in Bloch’s (1986) words, ‘in hazard’ without centring a quasi-humanist notion of the finitude of existence’ (Ibid). Therefore, through an understanding of matter as ‘not-yet’, matter is at once ‘intuitive *and* abstract, mundane *and* phantasmagorical, real *and* unreal’ (Anderson 2004: 752).

Anderson’s conception of matter ties in with Wylie’s geopoetic conception of landscapes as materialities. As noted previously, Wylie develops a ‘geopoetics’ of landscape that is both attentive to surface and relief – to the solid – and to the elemental and ephemeral (Wylie 2006: 533; see also Wylie 2002, 2005, 2007). Wylie strives to merge both topographical and topological sensibilities in a revitalised conception of landscape as tension. An understanding of the matter of ‘landscapes’, ‘spaces’ and ‘sites’ as ‘not-yet’ helps further to ‘get at’ the tension between presence and absence within these spaces. And it is precisely this sort of materialism that I want to inflect my developing notion of *biogeographies*. In closing now, I would like to state more expressly the theoretical trajectory that brought me to this conceptualisation. This takes the form of a three-point manifesto which will be enacted and developed in later chapters:

- Following Derrida's (2001) insistence that philosophy should address the 'entire field of the living' and Whatmore's (2002; 2006) insistence that geographers should attend to the 'more-than-human' worlds in which we live in, I seek to present and frame the thesis within an 'onto-story' that places life in its *multiplicity* and *connectivity* at the centre. This said, I have concerns with the smear of equivalence, or what Thrift has elsewhere called a 'flattening cohabitation of all things' (Thrift 2000a: 215), which seems to characterise 'new' biogeographies of entangled nature-cultures.
- To counter the flattening tendencies of vitalist accounts of life and corresponding topological accounts of space, which are curiously groundless due to the remorseless pressure placed on 'becoming' over 'being', I am in agreement with Rose and Wylie (2006) that notions of landscape, or the topographical, can remerge to reanimate the missing matter of topological geographies. I therefore propose a re-worked notion of 'biogeography' where not only the 'vital nexus' of the 'bio' and 'geo' are recognised, but where the 'graphy' – the texture of those earth-life entanglements - is also emphasised holds much potential.
- In terms of the material, I seek to align my conception of *biogeography* with non-representational concerns to emphasise the expressiveness and excessiveness of matter. More specifically, by working with an understanding of matter as 'not yet' (Anderson 2004), I wanted to anchor and retexture topological accounts of earth-life entanglements while also suggesting the tensions and ambiguities between presence and absence that are inherent to such biogeographies.

To reiterate then, in terms of the 'bio', I have been persuaded by Whatmore to follow a 'more-than-human' mode of enquiry in order to attend to 'the rich array of senses, dispositions, capabilities and potentialities of all manner of social objects, forces [and] assemblages' (Whatmore 2006: 604). In terms of the 'geo', I have been persuaded by Wylie to merge topological and topographical sensibilities to attend to the ways in which worlds are co-fabricated in practice, but importantly also to attend to the fabric (texture) of those worlds. Attending to the 'fabric of the world' (Merleau-Ponty 1969: 256), or to the '*graphies*' in my case, draws on a conception of the material which is not based on an assumption of plenitude yet is also not dependent on permanence and presence. Rather, matter in this sense can be both enduring and ephemeral, presence and absence, texture and tone. This move away from matter as physical permanence is a particularly valuable contribution to my conceptualisation

of biogeography, since my study will be attempting to recover the *past* biogeographies of taxidermy practice and the fading ‘afterlives’ of taxidermy specimens.

While this re-worked notion of biogeography conceptually frames the thesis, I would also like to outline how the empirical focus of the thesis has been re-visioned in terms of both Philo and Wilbert’s (2000) – flagged up earlier in the review – and the non-representational insistence to attend to *practice*. As mentioned at the outset of this chapter much attention has been paid to the ‘finished’ form and display of taxidermy specimens inside cabinets, behind glass – in other words to their representation (e.g. see Wonders 1993, 2004; Griesemer 1990). However, while attempts have been made to get at the ‘behind-the-scenes’ of taxidermy displays (Farber 1977; Haraway 1989; Star 1992; Ryan 2000; Shell 2004; Marvin 2006; Snaebjornsdottir and Wilson 2006) none have made a concentrated effort to explore taxidermy as a craft practice in its historical and spatial specificity – in other words the biogeographies of taxidermy practice. Non-representational theories argue that it is alertness to practice that offers the main challenge to representational modes of thought and doing, where practices, like taxidermy, are understood ‘as material bodies of work or styles that have gained enough stability over time, through, for example, the establishment of corporeal routines and specialised devices, to reproduce themselves’ (Thrift 2008: 8). This call to attend to practice has re-orientated my study and it energises, animates, haunts everything that follows as I work out the implications of my three-point manifesto in a critical historical-geographical montage of taxidermy.

Obviously my attention to practice and recovering the ‘biogeographies’ of past taxidermy practice has serious methodological implications. Yet rather than offer a traditional ‘methodology’ chapter as an overarching frame from which my empirical work can be said to then follow, I rather now offer a ‘method statement’ that will outline my preference for more ‘modest’ forms of theory/methodology – where theories/methods are employed as tools that work *together* with empirical materials and information to generate new insights. In this way I seek to close the gap that can exist between theory/methodology and practice in certain currents of geographical work.

After Method

[I]n recent years, there has been a ... tendency to argue that social science must be more practical, policy-orientated, and so on, a tendency which risks losing touch with *wild ideas* completely; it is the kind of social science that does not

understand the basic point that it is producing a form of intelligibility which ‘can only confirm the prevailing views within those institutions that generated the data’ (Rawls 2002: 54) and in fetishizing the values of methodological rigour seems to me to miss a large part of the point of social science by purposefully going about deadening itself (Law 2005) when that is both pointless and unnecessary.’ (Thrift 2008: 19 – my emphasis)

‘There is no use in trying’, said Alice; ‘one can’t believe impossible things.’ ‘I dare say you haven’t had much practice,’ said the Queen. ‘When I was your age, I always did it for half an hour a day. Why, sometimes I’ve believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast.’ (*Alice in Wonderland*, Lewis Carrol)

To overcome the strange gap between theory and empirical practice that seems still to plague social science and humanistic research, I favour more ‘modest’ forms of theory/methodology, of the kind found in Science and Technology Studies (STS) and Non-representational theory (NRT) (e.g. Law 2004; Thrift 2008). Here, theories/methods are understood as tools that work *together* with empirical materials and information to generate new insights, rather than as overarching frameworks into which empirical information can be made to fit. Thus, rather than offer the standard, and expected, ‘methodology chapter’, I want to set out a methodological perspective enabling me to engage in methodological debate/critique in the empirical chapters (3-5) and thereby employ and develop methods in direct correspondence with empirical materials. In what follows, I offer a short ‘method statement’ explaining my approach to method/ology, and detail the methods developed in response to the empirical materials to be examined in the three empirical chapters; *Practice*, *Site* and *Movement*.

Human geography, and cultural geography in particular, has been criticised in recent years for its ‘methodological conservatism’ (Latham 2003b: 1994). The problem with the ‘new cultural turn’ for Nigel Thrift, is that while researchers have:

‘allied themselves with a number of qualitative methods, ... most notably in-depth interviews and ethnographic ‘procedures’. ... what is surprising is how narrow this range of skills still is, how wedded [cultural geographers] still are to the notion of bringing back the ‘data’, and then re-presenting it (nicely packaged up as a few supposedly illustrative quotations), and the narrow range of sensate life they register.’ (Thrift 2000b: 3)

Although I would qualify these remarks by acknowledging that the early ‘cultural turn’ in geography was deeply tied up with methodological innovation, introducing all kinds of qualitative procedures and sensibilities seldom considered in the discipline hitherto (see Pred

1986, 1990a, 1990b, 1995; McDowell and Court 1994; McDowell 1995; 1997), like Thrift I recognise a need to reconsider and rework the ways in which human geographers (and cultural geographers, in particular) undertake research. For Thrift, (see also Whatmore 2002), the problem lies in the fact that cultural geography has built obsessively on the politics of representation where the symbolic is emphasised over and above the 'responsive and rhetorical', and practice is therefore downplayed (Thrift 2000a: 223). Thrift has sought to challenge the dominant mode of representational thinking and working within geography through the inception and cultivation of 'non-representational theory' (see in particular Thrift 1996, 200a; 2008). Non-representational theory (NRT) seeks to attend to embodied practices that exist prior to reflexive thought and, as such, it also seeks to reconfigure what it means to do research, as for academics to 'get at' the pre-discursive world, or practice, demands a radically refigured academic style. Non-representational thought therefore tends towards an academic style which seeks to 'describe and present rather than diagnose and represent' (Cadman forthcoming) and advances experimental ways of knowing that do not prescribe outcomes in advance (Thrift 2008). Instead of theoretically representing the world, those influenced by the non-representational project have deliberately sought to attend to 'things taking place'. Hence an empirical focus on embodied practices and dynamic processes (Dewsbury et al 2002: 428; see for example Harrison 2000; Wylie 2002, 2005; McCormack 2002, 2005; Dewsbury 2000, 2003).

While non-representational currents of thought in geography have questioned much of the methodological toolkit available for geographical fieldwork - in particular in-depth interviews, focus groups and participant observation which accentuate contemplative and interpretative modes of thought – a sustained engagement with how NRT can reconfigure the collection of fieldwork has as yet failed to fully materialise (although see Latham 2003; McCormack 2002, 2005; Doel and Clarke 2007). At best these are expressions to 'move beyond' linguistic forms of expression, by favouring adapted versions of deep ethnographic work offering the best way to 'get at' the more intangible aspects of practices. For Latham, those works show a 'willingness to experiment with established, indeed quite traditional, methods to create innovative, insightful methodological hybrids' (Latham 2003: 1993). Latham's use of montage (the juxtaposition of different research methods to produce methodological hybrids that inhabit different time-spaces) could therefore be said to characterise attempts to address the virtual multiplicity of the non-representational world. Doel and Clarke have gone as far to suggest that 'montage is the essential gesture of non-representational styles of thought and action' (Doel and Clarke 2007: 899).

Yet nor is methodological pluralism entirely new in geography. Feminist currents of thought in geography have long emphasised the need for creative and inclusive methods, arguing that the standardisation of methods is inappropriate (Kingdon 2003; Parr 2007). Feminism in geography, both in theory and practice, has long privileged relational modes of knowing, such as ‘non-hierarchical interaction, mutual learning and empathetic understanding’ (Jones 1997: xv). Similarly, those who can be thought of as developing ‘more-than-human’ modes of working have argued that researchers must supplement the familiar repertoire of humanist methods (which generate text and talk) ‘with experimental practices that amplify other sensory, bodily and affective registers and extend the company and modality of what constitutes a research subject’ (Whatmore 2004: 1362; see also Thrift 2005; Lorimer 2006, in press). Whatmore is notable for drawing inspiration from the research practices of science studies – as elaborated by Latour (1999), Stengers (1997) and Law (2004) – to commit to research as a co-fabrication or ‘working together’ with the worldly phenomena enjoined in the research process (Whatmore 2006; see also 2002). Importantly for my own project, and from an entirely different methodological place, Walter Benjamin’s (1999) ideas carry over the principles of montage into history, offering historical geographers a means to challenge the historian’s fidelity to conventional empirical and archival evidence. This approach prompted new forms of historical geography research, drawing creative resource from the purposeful assemblage and rehabilitation of diffuse historical fragments to form unorthodox archives (see Gagen *et al* 2008).

By these diverse kinds of influence I follow an experimental methodological imperative in the thesis, inspired by a recognition that academics need to be prepared to put ourselves and our theories ‘at risk’ in order to produce methods that creatively respond to the world (see Stengers 1997). In particular, I seek to develop an historical form of ‘craftwork’ where the amassing and rehabilitation of historical remainders in various forms (from the body of a practising taxidermist to tools and materials of those past) offers insight into past practice and enables the telling of unfashionable or marginalised pasts. This ‘make-do’ method also enables me to draw force from absence and incompleteness, and bridge the gap that can exist between theory and practice in traditional empirical historical work. My adoption of a form of historical ‘assemblage method’ (Law 2004) is to be read as a rejection of the conventions of the empirical historian, in that I will attempt to make the materials I have assembled herein count, precisely by *not* forcing them to fit within a pre-determined narrative, recognising instead that ‘materials [themselves can] create knowledge, or at least encourage open and imaginative thought’ (Baker 2000: 61). This much said, my historical recovery work is underpinned by an ethic of resourcefulness where more than being a collector (something for which Adorno

criticised Benjamin) I seek faithfully to recuperate the historical remains at my disposal to construct ‘useable histories’ for the present (Featherstone 2008).

Practice

Chapter Three – *Practice* – commences with a framing methodological discussion on the possibility of doing non-representational historical geographies. First I show how an apparent contrast between non-representational theory as an ethics for harnessing life, and history, as the study of the dead emerges, and will argue that rather than being paralysed by the impossibility of retrieving non-representational aspects of the past, the imperative is to work *at* and *on* the limits of life, and death, time and history, movement and stasis. I therefore put myself in the position of apprentice to a practicing taxidermist to gain a deeper appreciation of the practice, recognising that the position of learner is a highly instructive context in which to enquire into the craft techniques of taxidermy (and its associated unique material culture) and also reflect on how present-day practice relates to representations charting the development of the practice provided in historical ‘how-to-do’ manuals. In this way the body of a practising taxidermist can be understood as an ‘archival vector’ of past practice, as when juxtaposing contemporary ethnographies of taxidermy practice with descriptions of practice in historical ‘how-to-do’ manuals, past and present practice can be shown to *resonate* (Griffin and Evans 2008).

Site

Chapter Four – *Site* – experiments with the recuperation of the historical-geographical particulars of two taxidermists, and their working spaces and working practice. In so doing, the chapter seeks to develop the possibilities of a supple approach to life-writing/life-studies whilst also engaging with a range of methodological issues associated with the study and historical recuperation of past lives and lifeworlds. DeSilvey, following Benjamin’s theory of historical constellations, has pointed out that ‘potential awakenings’ reside in objects and materials that people gather around them and eventually discard in the course of their lives. She notes that encounters with such discarded items can ‘propose empathetic connection with the people who made and handled them’ (DeSilvey 2007a: 413, 417). By purposefully assembling and rehabilitating the taxidermists’ ‘leftovers’ (their tools, products, correspondences, business records, pictorial and photographic representations etc) to form ‘unorthodox archives’ I seek to tell of the lifeworlds of practice they once inhabited. In ‘making-do’ with what remains I also seek to craft a form of historiography that is alive the ultimate alterity of past lives (human or otherwise), events, and places, recognising that what

remains is always partial, provisional, incomplete and therefore what is presented is always already under erasure.

Movement

Chapter Five – *Movement* – charts those biogeographies that went into the making and movement of group of a distinctive series of tiger mounts. Following Ingold (2007), I consider the specimens as active assemblages of the movements, materials and practices which brought them into existence. By developing a methodology which incorporates specimen artefacts as object-based archive, I show how an attention to the deteriorating materials of taxidermy specimens reveals the secrets of their assembly, and exposes the clever artifice and ambiguity of representation. As substances and specimens start to unravel, so too do the stories of their making. In order to more fully recuperate the biogeographies of their making, I show how to assemble makeshift archives, and place trust in disparate elements coming together. By bringing seemingly unconnected materials into correspondence, requiring processes of manipulation on the part of the researcher, I follow an argument that the purposeful assemblage and rehabilitation of diffuse historical remains to form unconventional archives holds both serious creative and political potential. Commitment to piecing together evidence (in whatever form it takes) of past events means that histories, which may be obscured by conventional biographical and textual resources, remain to be told.

Following Thrift's insistence that it is 'of the greatest methodological importance to acknowledge that this is a world which we can only partially understand' and that 'many things are inherently unknowable' (Thrift 2008: 18-19) my Concluding Chapter – *Still Life* – constitutes an attempt to re-gather an ethic of *apprenticeship* in academia, and life more generally.

Practice

‘The skilled practitioner is like an accomplished story-teller whose tales are told in the practice of his craft rather than in words.’ (Ingold 2006b: 72).

‘When you skin an animal, you touch the truth about flesh.’ (Berger and Berger 1996: 14)



This chapter focuses on recovering and documenting the development of the craft practices of taxidermy. The chapter commences with a framing methodological discussion on the possibility of doing non-representational historical geographies. However, as the discussion progresses an apparent contrast emerges between non-representational theory as an ethics for harnessing life, and historical inquiry as the study of the dead. Put like this it would seem a ‘non-representational history’ would have to commit itself, much like the taxidermist, to resurrecting the dead. However, as I will argue, rather than be paralysed by the impossibility of

retrieving non-representational historical geographies of taxidermy practice, I have chosen rather to ‘simultaneously work through the limits of representation and the dynamics of what is beyond’ (Rycroft 2007: 629; Lorimer 2005). By this I mean accepting that there are limits to what can be recovered and recuperated when excavating forms of the non-representational from the past as historical research is often necessarily rooted in representational analyses of linguistic and symbolic forms of expression – hence why I prefer the idea of doing ‘more-than-representational’ histories (Lorimer 2005).

This framing discussion is then followed by a section which outlines the particular methodological strategies employed in *this* chapter to ‘get at’ developments in the craft practices of taxidermy. Following Laurier and Philo (2004) I take an ‘ethnoarchaeological’ route into past taxidermy practice. Rather than be paralysed by the fear of what can be recuperated or indeed what could be lost in my documentation of past taxidermy practice, I intend to work with the materials that I have managed to recover to show what *is* possible. I therefore take the decision to immerse myself in the life-world of a present-day practicing taxidermist to find a means to enliven the descriptions of practice and craft developments offered in recovered period taxidermy manuals.

Next, the analysis section charts developments in British museum taxidermy practice: from taxidermy as scientific tool for preservation, to it as an emerging artistic practice and finally moving into the ‘taxidermist as bricoleur’ in the contemporary context. While my descriptions of developments in the craft practices of taxidermy will inevitably fall short of retrieving the vitality of the craft as it was practiced in the past, my aim is to show ‘the ways in which certain sets of practices can achieve temporal duration and spatial extension (Griffin and Evans 2008). In juxtaposing descriptions of practice from the manuals with accounts of my observations of a taxidermist working in the present, I seek to document the development of British museum taxidermy whilst also shedding light on the embodied and intangible aspects of the craft practices which drove such developments. My stitching together of passages of past practice from the manuals with descriptions from my ethnographic study of a contemporary practicing taxidermist aims to show that, although separated by both time and space, past and present practice can be shown to *resonate*.

While taking seriously Paul Harrison’s claim that social and historical researchers will forever ‘fall short’ in their attempts to describe and re-present the ‘eventful, creative, excessive and distinctly uncertain realms of action’ (Harrison 2002: 487), my conclusion argues that that there is creative and emancipatory force to be drawn from working, to invoke Derrida, *sous rature* ‘under erasure’ – the idea that what is being attempted is impossible yet still feels

essential (Derrida 1976). By placing my goal of reviving the pasts of taxidermy practice ‘under erasure’, for example, I seek both to attempt it and to acknowledge its impossibility at the same time. Therefore, rather than allow a kind of petrification to set in, much like the taxidermist I propose to work *at* and *on* the limits of life and death, time and history, movement and stasis in the chapters that follow this one, namely, ‘Site’ and ‘Movement’.

Framing methodological discussion

On the possibilities for non-representational historical geographies

As outlined in my literature review, there is increasing interest in practice and performance in cultural geography. Attempts to move beyond issues of representation and re-focus cultural geographic concerns on performativity and bodily practices are linked to the inception of what Nigel Thrift describes as ‘non-representational theory or the theory of practices’ (Thrift 1996, 1997, 2000a, 200b). According to Thrift, the non-representational project is concerned with describing ‘practices, mundane everyday practices that shape the conduct of human beings towards others and themselves in particular sites’ (1997: 142). Rather than obsess over representation and meaning, Thrift contends that non-representational work is concerned with the performative ‘presentations’, ‘showings’ and ‘manifestations’ of everyday life (1997: 142). While Thrift has profitably drawn on theorists such as Benjamin, Deleuze and de Certeau in an attempt to shed light on the more embodied, intangible aspects of everyday life, broader moves in cultural geography to engage ‘more actively with the heterogeneous entanglements of practice’ have their antecedents in diverse intellectual currents (Latham and Conradson 2003: 1901). To recap from the literature review, these range from a heightened sensitivity to the fleshy realities of the human body and how taking the body seriously introduces phenomenological registers that exceed representation (e.g. Anderson and Smith 2001; Harrison 2000; Longhurst 1997; McCormack 2002; McDowell 1997; Rodaway 1994; Thrift and Dewsbury 2000; Valentine 1999), to work on nonhuman and ‘more-than-human’ geographies that has pushed for a reconsideration of how the social is emplaced within the materiality of the world (e.g. Hinchliffe 1999; Murdoch 1997, 1998, 2001; Thrift 1996, 2000a, 2000b, 2005; Whatmore 1997, 2002, 2004, 2006), and a rereading of poststructuralist theory which places much greater emphasis on the productive (and often disruptive) capacities of the

material (e.g. Amin and Thrift 2002; Hetherington and Lee 2000; Law 2000; Jackson 2000; Philo 2000; Pels et al 2002; Kearns 2003, Anderson 2004, Anderson and Wylie 2009). Non-representational theory has therefore become, according to Hayden Lorimer, 'an umbrella term for diverse work that seeks to better cope with our self-evidently more-than-human, more-than-textual, multisensual worlds' (Lorimer 2005: 83; see also 2007, 2008).

While the aims and parameters of the non-representational project have become increasingly difficult to pin down since its original inception – and even within those purporting to do NRT 'proper' there is much debate (e.g. Thrift and Dewsbury 2000; Harrison 2000; Gregson and Rose 2000; Dewsbury et al 2002; Whatmore 2002; Latham 2003; Anderson 2004; McCormack 2005; Anderson and Harrison 2006; Thrift 2008) – what unites these diverse research efforts is the argument for a more democratic relationship between conceptual and empirical work. Alan Latham, for example, argues that the turn towards the cultural in geography has had limited impact upon the ways in which 'geographers actually do empirical research', and that furthermore there was increasing dissatisfaction with the 'strange gap between theory and empirical practice' which seemed to characterise much of the work produced by the 'new' cultural geography project (2003: 1991). While I would qualify that the early 'cultural turn' (c. late 80's early-90s) was deeply tied up with methodological innovation, introducing all kinds of qualitative procedures and sensibilities only scantily present in the discipline hitherto (e.g. see Pred 1986, 1990a, 1990b, 1995; McDowell and Court 1994; McDowell 1995; 1997) the problem, for many, lay in the fact that the new cultural geography was obsessively built upon the politics of representation where, according to Thrift, the symbolic is emphasised over and above the 'responsive and rhetorical' and practice is therefore downplayed (Thrift 2000a: 223). The issue identified by Thrift and others (see for example Whatmore 2002), according to Paul Harrison (Harrison 2000: 499), 'is the inability of knowledge in social analysis to do anything other than hold onto, produce, represent, the fixed and the dead; a failure to apprehend the lived present as an *open-ended and generative process*; as practice'. To counter-act this 'embalming obsession' with representation and meaning in which 'events are drained for the sake of orders, mechanisms, structures and processes' (Dewsbury et al 2002: 438), calls were therefore made for methods that 'co-produce' the world (Thrift 2000b: 5; see also Dewsbury et al 2002, Whatmore 2002; 2006, Latham 2003). Therefore, rather than seek after explanations that claim to go beyond what is being described, the aim became, according to Latham (2003: 1903), 'simply to present descriptions that are infused with a certain fidelity to what they describe'. Dewsbury (2003: 1923) calls this stance a kind of 'witnessing', a stance that is orientated towards being 'in tune to the vitality of the world as it unfolds'.

The imperative to inject *life* into the ‘dead geographies’ of representation has asked difficult and provocative questions about what is intended by the conduct of research (Thrift and Dewsbury 2000). A particularly provocative question for my own research, for example, is that in stressing the need to pay attention to specific events and relationships – particularly those worked through the body – does thinking about practice and performance imply an interest only in the immediacy of the present? It is perhaps fair to say that the majority of geographers adopting this type of ‘performative’ approach have primarily focused their attention on the present (or recent past). Indeed, the logic of representational critic has meant that many researchers have implicitly distanced themselves from an ability to engage with past practices (as necessarily rooted in representational analyses of linguistic forms of expression – words, texts, archives) both by stating a desire to ‘move beyond’ linguistic forms of expression and by favouring adapted versions of deep ethnographic work as the best way to ‘get at’ the more intangible aspects of practices.²⁶ Catherine Nash explains:

‘Nonrepresentational theory moves away from a concern with representation and text since, it is argued, text only inadequately commemorates ordinary lives since it values what is written and spoken over multisensual practices and experiences...Thrift is advocating a new and demanding direction for cultural geography, away from the analyses of texts, images and discourses, and towards understanding the micro-geographies of habitual practices, departing from deconstructing representations to explore the non-representational’ (Nash 2000:655-6).

Instead of theoretically representing the world then, those involved in the non-representational project have deliberately sought to attend to ‘things taking place’ – hence their empirical focus on embodied practices and dynamic processes (Dewsbury et al 2002: 428; see for example Harrison 2000; Wylie 2002, 2005; McCormack 2002, 2005; Dewsbury 2000, 2003). However, many commentators have expressed a concern that ‘abstract accounts of body-practices’ (e.g. Dewsbury 2003) and the return to phenomenological accounts of ‘being-in-the-world’ (e.g. Wylie 2005) constitute a retreat from ‘exploring the intersections between representations, discourses, material things, spaces and practices’ (Nash 2000: 661). My specific concern with this move to the ‘somerwheres words can’t take you’ (Thrift 2004: 90) is that it poses specific challenges ‘when attention shifts from the contemporary scene to past practice’, as the immersive ethnographic methods favoured in non-representational research to shed light on the more intangible aspects of everyday life are not so easily transposed into historical modes of research which can be firmly dependent on the

²⁶ It is perhaps ironic that it was the so-called ‘cultural turn’ that introduced deep ethnographic practice to the discipline after Geertz (1983, 1988).

representational (Lorimer 2003a: 202). My question then, to reiterate, is this: is it possible do/write non-representational historical geographies?

How to 'get at' and re-present past practice?

Thrift's work may appear to be an unlikely starting point for considering the possibility of doing 'non-representational histories', as, much like his insistence that the world does not resolve or come to rest, his work seems to have something of a 'quicksilver quality' (e.g. Thrift 2003, 2004a, 2004b, 2004c, 2005a, 2005b, 2005c, 2006, 2008). I would still contend that his writings show that a non-representational approach need not be incompatible with historical enquiry (Lorimer 2007: 90). For example, Thrift's collaborative work with Paul Glennie on the history of clock time, where the repetitive ways bodies in which have been 'trained' to address the temporality of the world are subject to historical survey, systematically works through how embodied everyday practices of the past might be analysed and re-presented (Glennie and Thrift 1996, 2002, 2004, 2005 see also Thrift 2004b). Glennie and Thrift's study of clock time is a major revision of E P Thompson's (1967) work *Time, work-discipline and industrial capitalism*. Keen to set aside Thompson's grand-narratives of social-historical change 'with their pleasing narrative curve through history', Glennie and Thrift outline that theirs' is a *modest* approach to understanding the social which depends on 'a philosophy of epistemological detail' (Deleuze 1994: xix), the foregrounding of tacit knowledge (Rheinberger 1997), and 'knowing interestingly' through the development of rich and original articulations (Latour 2000)' (Glennie and Thrift 2002: 154, 170). Glennie and Thrift therefore seek to problematize definitive historical accounts of social change by considering the practices of clock time, and what interests them is accessing practices: how clocks were used in the everyday of the past (Ibid 170). The important shift here is that their emphasis is on recovering everyday practices of clock time rather than giving a definitive historical account, like Thompson. Yet in saying that they are interested in *everyday* practices, they mean that they are interested in 'the accumulation of small differences upon which larger events often hang' (Ibid: 152) Accordingly, Glennie and Thrift argue that studying everyday practices and skills of the past should become central because 'as one of the chief sources of renewal of social systems... everyday practices and skills are, in a sense, a motor of history' (Ibid).

However, Glennie and Thrift are quick to point out that it is difficult to access how clocks were used in past practices of everyday life, stating that clock time 'is all but extra archival.

Witnesses are silent. Records rarely exist' (Glennie and Thrift 2002: 154). Here Glennie and Thrift hit upon a problem common to historians attempting to access past everyday practice: that much of the everyday of the past is unspoken and unwritten and therefore goes unrecorded. To counter this problem, they mobilise the skills of the 'micro-historian' and wade through the details of 'probate inventories, court depositions, church wardens, parish and borough accounts, directories, diaries and journals, newspapers, and antiquarian compilations' in an attempt to sift out the everyday practices of clock time (Ibid). Yet they acknowledge that it is difficult to access everyday practices using documentary records, and thus argue that 'any study of everyday life in the past must be incomplete, both because of the object being studied, and the 'documentary' means by which it can be studied' (Ibid: 171). Rather than give up, however, they feel that in the face of this incompleteness 'the most fitting way to study the practices of the past is as a set of symptoms and clues whose reading requires a mixture of deduction and intuition' (Ibid: 171). Here they defer to the historian Carlo Ginzburg and find inspiration in his conception of 'elastic rigor' (Ginzburg 1980: 28). They read Ginzburg's concept as a call for faith in the historians' ability to generate 'conjectural knowledge' where evidence is partial or incomplete, a faith in the historian's craft-knowledge or, as Ginzburg himself puts it, 'intuition built up from experience' (Ibid).

As Glennie and Thrift nevertheless acknowledge, the notion of 'elastic rigor' is rather slippery and therefore difficult to describe or implement as a working method. My problem with their reliance on Ginzburg is that the type of 'New Historicism' practiced by Ginzburg, informing their conception of elastic rigor relies, heavily on narrative to "fill in the gaps", as it were, which Glennie and Thrift acknowledge: 'problems of inference are often overcome by sheer good writing' (Glennie and Thrift 2002: 153). Another quarrel is that they also seem to have overlooked work in historical geography that offers both theoretical insights and practical strategies for shedding light on the everyday embodied past. Indeed, while Thrift in his stricter NRT guise desires to journey to the 'somewheres words can't take you' in his joint historical work on clock time with Glennie, it seems that he is prepared to rely on conventional archival (i.e. representational) sources and the historian's craft of "reading between the lines". While I am in agreement about giving serious credibility to the historian's own craft/practice – his or her own 'embodied' doing of history – as a device for accessing aspects of the past hitherto hidden from view, I am of the opinion that this 'craftwork' should be made transparent. Recent work in historical geography, which has also attempted to break free from the constraints imposed by the realm of the written record to explore pre-discursive aspects of the past, highlights how the construction and narration of historical geographies are themselves performative processes. These reorientations arguably go further than Glennie and Thrift in

showing that recovering aspects of the non-representational need not be solely dependent on the written record. I turn to review such work now as it has much to offer not only Glennie and Thrift's, but also my own attempt to 'get at' past practice.

Performing the 'archive'

As Catherine Nash has pointed out, historical geographers have long been exploring the 'intersections between representations, discourses, material things, spaces and practices' (Nash 2000: 24). However historical geographers have expressed increasing frustration with the limitations of archival sources and archival practice as means to interrogate and understand such intersections. The nature of both 'the archive' (Withers 2002, Lorimer 2003a, 2003b, 2007b, Ogborn 2004) and archival practice has therefore been reconsidered (Rose 2000, 2002; Yusoff 2007; DeSilvey 2007b; Lorimer in press). Recent work which reconsiders the nature of the "archive" and archival practice does so by recognising that 'archives can exceed the darkened catacomb and civically-administered collection' (Lorimer in press). Where postcolonial researchers have shown it is possible to read civil or imperial archives "against the grain" to uncover "counter-histories" (e.g. see Duncan 1999), others have sought to extend, disaggregate or distribute the once-centred version of the archive, and so have found greater licence to salvage, assemble and rehabilitate diverse forms of historical fragments in an effort to recover pasts, and aspects of pasts, that may be veiled or suppressed by dominant and conventional forms of historical record (e.g. see Matless 2000b; Cameron 2001; Schien 2001; DeLyser 2003; DeLyser *et al* 2004; Lorimer 2003a, 2003b, 2007b, in press; Edensor 2005; Desilvey 2006, 2007a, 2007b, 2007c).²⁷ This new wave of creative historical research has challenged historical geography's fidelity to conventional empirical and archival evidence by developing expressive modes of researching that draw force from absence and incompleteness (for reviews of such work see Gagen et al 2007 and Lorimer in press).

Hayden Lorimer maintains such work has therefore reconsidered and redefined the 'limits and location of any set of materials determined as an 'archive'' (Lorimer in press). For example, when faced with absences in the conventional historical record historical geographers have creatively drawn resource from visual sources and records (Ryan 1997; Domosh 2001; Rose 2001; Schwartz and Ryan 2003; Schwartz 2004), oral history (Cameron 2001; Winders 2001; Lorimer 2006; DeSilvey 2007a), music and sound recordings (Reville 2004; Lorimer 2008),

²⁷ Foucault's *Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969/1972) can arguably be seen as an earlier recognition of the complexity and fragmentation of 'the archive'.

material artefacts and remainders (Till 2001; Featherstone 2004; Edensor 2005; DeSilvey 2006, 2008; Hill 2006a, 2006b, 2007) the materiality of historical ‘texts’ (Ogborn 2004, 2007; Livingstone 2005; Kieghren 2007; Mayhew 2007) and even physical landscapes (Edensor 2005; Lorimer 2006; Matless and Cameron 2006; DeLyser 2007; DeSilvey 2007a, 2007b). Such work has therefore creatively undermined the very notion of what an archive is, permitting the purposeful assemblage and rehabilitation of diffuse historical fragments to form unorthodox archives. While bringing seemingly unconnected materials into correspondence can require processes of ‘manipulation, description, displacement’ on the part of the researcher, I would argue this style of auto-archiving holds both serious creative and political potential (DeSilvey 2007a: 416). For example, as Lorimer argues, not only do such assemblages insist upon ‘more imaginative styles of composition and expression’, they can also assist in ‘the recovery and construction of an opposing view to challenge, and sometimes undermine, received wisdom about the events surrounding past geographies and histories’ (Lorimer in press). I will return to examining the emancipatory possibilities of ‘auto assemblage’ as a mode of historical recovery in more depth in the following chapter, presently I will concentrate on how this reconsideration of the archive has helped certain researchers to break free of the constraints imposed by the realm of the written and symbolic record (and therefore the tyranny of representation) to explore lived and visceral aspects of the past.

Historical geographies of practice

There are an increasing number of cultural-historical geographers showing interest in the *eventfulness* of historical embodiment and performance (e.g. see Lorimer 2003a, 2003b, 2006; Gagen 2004; Glennie and Thrift 2002, 2004; Cresswell 2006; Vasudevan 2006, 2007; Griffin and Evans 2008). Responding to the theoretical agenda set by NRT, researchers have sought to experiment with the possibility of recovering and re-presenting past (pre-discursive) practices. Finding favour with the more ‘modest’ form of theorising that NRT offers – where theories are employed as tools that work *together* with empirical materials and information to generate new insights rather than as overarching frameworks into which empirical information can be made to fit – they have sought to write geographies of the past while remaining faithful to representational critique. Yet as Griffin and Evans (2008: 6) express, it is difficult to write historical geographies of embodied practice without ‘falling into the representational epistemological void’, as historical geography has been necessarily rooted in representational analyses of linguistic forms of expression. However, as already demonstrated, historical geographers no longer limit themselves to the realm of the written and symbolic record.

Furthermore, work on historical geographies of science – which has attempted to ‘get at’ how science was practiced in the past - has already opened routes towards for recovering and representing historical geographies of practice (e.g. Dewsbury and Naylor 2002; Naylor 2002, 2005; Livingstone 2003; Lorimer and Spedding 2005; Mayhew 2005; Cant 2006). Historical geographies of science literature is now dominated by the idea that past scientific knowledge was generated by a series of place-specific bodily practices. For example, Sarah Cant has demonstrated that the profoundly physical engagement of potholing was key to the development of the ‘sporting’ science of speleology (Cant 2006). Similarly, Lorimer and Spedding (2005: 13) have explored how the presence of a family on a field-trip to investigate the Parallel Roads of Glen Roy changed how ‘the site of scientific investigation was experienced and understood’. Lorimer’s individual work, which cross-cuts the theoretical agenda set by non-representational theory, is worthy of further consideration as he offers a way to reanimate historical geographies without the worry of falling into the representational epistemological void.

Lorimer has crafted an experimental mode for writing and recovering something of the “lived” character of past events and places (Lorimer 2003a, 2003b, 2006, 2007b, in press; see also Lorimer and MacDonald 2002; Foster and Lorimer 2007). However, he explains that there are inherent difficulties in attempting to recover the embodied and multisensual nature of places, practices and experiences when they have already happened and are no longer ‘happening’ because their traces are not likely to exist in their original ‘haptic, sonic [or] kinaesthetic form’ (2003: 202). Much is contingent, therefore, on ‘the availability of ‘sources’ which capture (or at least take us closer to) the smells, sounds, sights and feelings of [past] embodied experience’ (Ibid). This does not mean that conventional archival and representational sources should be abandoned altogether, according to Lorimer, ‘as creative engagement with, and imaginative interpretation of’ such sources hold much potential for excavating forms of the non-representational (Ibid: 203). Here Lorimer hits upon an important point; that in attempting to witness the eventfulness of historical embodiment and experience, representation need not be dispensed with altogether. Even the most ardent devotees of NRT have stated that the project is to move beyond representations as the ‘*primary* epistemological vehicles’ through which we understand the world (Dewsbury et al 2002 – my emphasis). Rather than dispense with representations, then, Derek McCormack argues they need to be ‘reanimated as active and affective interventions in a world of relations and movements’ (McCormack 2005: 122). Furthermore, Simon Rycroft (2007) has shown that other historical attempts to get beyond the limits of representation (e.g. his study of the Californian countercultural movement of the 1960s) have always struggled to escape

representational frameworks. He outlines how the same is true for cultural geography's non-representational project, in that it relies upon conventional academic representational practices, something which Thrift and Dewsbury (2000: 427) have acknowledged: 'the challenge to the process of representation shall be working through the means of representation'. Moreover, and in line with McCormack, Rycroft suggests that representation is not a static concept, something 'unchanging in its capacity to deaden' (Rycroft 2007: 629). Instead, he argues that representational practices can be used to evoke 'a range of sensory, experiential, and subconscious responses... creating decidedly nonrepresentational representational moments' (Ibid). Rycroft states that the aim of representational critique should rather be to 'simultaneously work through both the limits of representation and the dynamics of what lies beyond' (Rycroft 2008: for similar arguments see also Matless 2000; Nash 2000; Revill 2004).

Lorimer attempts to do just this in his historical recovery work. Different tactics are suggested to get at the embodied and multisensual nature of historical experience. By developing an immersive ethology/ethnography, he has drawn creatively on both conventional and less-conventional sources to enliven historical narration (Lorimer 2006, Lorimer 2009). For example, in attempting to reanimate the 'lived culture' of a herd of reindeer, he 'made-do' with what existed on the ground in a restorative ethnography of lived acts and inhabited places' (Lorimer 2006: 512). This 'restorative ethnography' saw him 'keeping company' with the present reindeer herd and herders to find means to retell the relics and artefacts left behind by those who lived in the past (Ibid: 516). Tim Cresswell has similarly crafted a way of researching past bodily interactions that sits in 'sympathetic contrast' to NRT (Cresswell 2006). Cresswell uses the case of reforms made to English Ballroom dancing in the 1920s to show that representation and practice are held together (albeit sometimes in tension). He charts how various strategies of representation and standardisation were employed to enact the regulation of bodily movement on English dance-floors against the perceived intrusion from forms of 'American' dance considered to be 'degenerate and threatening' (Ibid: 55). Unlike some of the more transcendental approaches to bodily movement in cultural geography (e.g. see Dewsbury 2003), Cresswell uses this historical case to insist on the need to understand 'bodily mobility within larger social, cultural and geographical worlds that continue to ascribe meaning to mobility and to prescribe practice in particular ways' (Ibid: 59). Elizabeth Gagen has likewise been able to critique how some non-representational work presents the body as a universal source for ontological truths in her study of children's physical reform movements in early twentieth-century America (Gagen 2004; for similar critiques see Nash 2000; Reville 2004; Thien 2005; Saldanha 2005, 2006; Tolia-Kelly 2006;

Laurier and Philo 2006). According to Lorimer's most recent review of the state of non-representational research, then, we are left with a theory that 'works best as a background hum, asking questions of style, form, technique and method, and ushering in experimental kinds of response' (and hence why some find better fit with his alternative prefix of 'more-than-') (Lorimer 2008: 6).

Possible geographies

Eric Laurier and Chris Philo's 'undefined investigations' usher in another experimental response to the problem of doing 'more-than-representational' (historical) geographies (Laurier and Philo 2004, 2006). Their collaborative work is worthy of further scrutiny as their form of 'ethnoarchaeology' offers a framework for my intended recovery of past taxidermy practice (the main focus of this chapter). Laurier and Philo also offer strategies for encountering and presenting past practice without falling into the representational epistemological void. Drawing together the merits of ethnomethodology and Foucauldian historiography, they offer not so much as a different direction to NRT but rather 'another 'mood' from the impossible geographies of non-representation' (Laurier and Philo 2006: 355; see also Laurier and Philo 2004). While they sympathise with the tenets underwriting the non-representational project, they are troubled by Harrison's claim that in attempting to re-present the event of action through description an insurmountable impasse – what he terms as an 'aporia' – is reached (Harrison 2002, 2007a). Harrison's argument is that social research will forever 'fall short', in that there are limits to what can be 'recovered, recuperated and ultimately represented using [the] codes of linguistic processing which are generally observed in social research' (Lorimer 2008: 4). Laurier and Philo's concern is that in claiming social scientists can only ever fail in their attempts to communicate the 'eventful, creative, excessive and distinctly uncertain realms of action', Harrison may also encourage researchers to delay practical attempts to encounter and re-present action and events (Harrison 2002: 487). For example, while Harrison makes appeals to geographers to consider the 'rough ground' of practical life, his work tends to stay removed in the smoothlands of philosophical enquiry (Harrison 2000, 2002, 2007a, 2007b), allowing Laurier and Philo to object that non-representational theorists 'continually defer this moment of encounter' (Laurier and Philo 2006: 354).

To overcome the problem of how to retrieve witnessed events (both present and past) in both empirical and presentational terms, they suggest 'ethnoarchaeological' routes (Laurier and Philo 2004, 2006). Here they merge the relative merits of Foucauldian historiography and

ethnomethodology (EM) stating that ‘Foucault provides a historicism which EM lacks’, and that in return ‘ethnomethodology localises what otherwise risk becoming grand periodisations within Foucault’s histories’ (Laurier and Philo 2004: 423). They follow a ‘modest’ approach to theory (as promoted by ANT and NRT) and urge researchers to ‘think *with* the materials’ that are found in archives and in motion all around us (Laurier and Philo 2004: 434). Against the grand-narrative and meta-theories of history and sociology, they instead align ‘Foucault’s repeated claim to the effect that archaeology is a ‘descriptive enterprise’ with the insistently descriptive approach of ethnomethodology to language’, arguing for the supply of ‘descriptions of actual historical and social statements, phenomena, and activities that explode essentialised meanings of *see, know, reason, picture*, and so on’ (Ibid: 427-8). Here they promote their developed notion of ‘ethnoarchaeology’ as a commitment to what is encountered directly on the ground and in the act rather than as a proposal of ‘cross-cultural, a-historical, abstract laws’ that somehow operate ‘outside of, beyond, behind, or below the concrete, dispersed details of particular historical and geographical conjunctures’ (Ibid: 427). Basically, as Lorimer has summarised, it is ‘direct observation of practical encounters and the closest consideration of empirical materials’ that matters most.

Therefore rather than be paralysed by the impossible geographies of non-representation, Laurier and Philo’s alternative is to ‘accept representation as one of many possible expressive practices’ (Laurier and Philo 2006: 355). With this understanding they therefore seek to examine the ‘details-at-hand’. To avoid stipulative treatments of social and historical phenomena, they instead advocate the undertaking of ‘undefined investigations’: ‘investigations which do not begin by defining their phenomena, but seek instead to learn from the investigation’ (Ibid: 353). They therefore promote detailed empirical studies which are both faithful to the sources through which social and historical phenomena are encountered and ‘the places, events and occasions’ out of which these research encounters emerge (Laurier and Philo 2004: 434). This requires researchers to immerse themselves in the phenomena being studied (even if that encounter happens in an archive) to the point that they are ‘becoming the phenomena’ (Ibid: 433). This way, even if impasses are reached in the retrieval and documentation of events and phenomena, the commitment still remains to ‘document encounters in and of the places of and in such encounters, while at the same time examining the conditions that make such documentation intelligible, possible and reasonable’ (Philo and Laurier 2006: 358-9).

Following Laurier and Philo, I intend to take an ‘ethnoarchaeological’ route into past taxidermy practice. Accordingly, rather than fear what can be recuperated or indeed what could be lost in my documentation of past taxidermy practice, I intend to work with the

materials I have to-hand to show what *is* possible. In my investigation I hence immerse myself in the life-world of a practicing taxidermist to find a means to enliven the descriptions of practice offered in period taxidermy manuals that I have recovered. Here I follow Laurier and Philo's insistence that scholars of social life can 'learn much from taking seriously how an encounter may unfold without transcendental or structural guarantee in the immediacy of the life-worlds where it is made and re-made' (Laurier and Philo 2006: 353). The next section sets out in more detail the specific strategies that I intend to employ in this chapter to retrieve, and to revive, developments in the craft practices of taxidermy.

Excavating the detritus of the work

‘The tidiness of taxidermic dioramas, by contrast with the blood and guts of taxidermic work, is one more instance of scientific representation which deletes the “behind-the-scenes” work. ... [R]ecovering the material basis of science by looking very directly at the stuff it uses and the stuff it leaves behind is one way to begin restoring the links, and reclaiming the mess (Star 1992: 281-2).

On reclaiming the mess

As I have already stated my aim in this thesis is more explicitly to ‘challenge the priority given to the representational surface’ than has been true of literature on, and artistic appropriations of, taxidermy so far (Dubow 2004: 268). Therefore, rather than dwell exclusively on the form and meaning of taxidermy specimens – i.e. the static representational end-points – my investigation seeks to ‘surface the invisible work’ behind the making and maintenance of taxidermy specimens and zoological collections, and hence my prioritisation of practice (Star 1999: 385). In an attempt to reclaim the ‘blood and guts’, or rather the material basis, of taxidermy practice in the past, I initially consulted a collection of period taxidermy manuals²⁸. Laurier and Philo (2004) state that ethnoarchaeological routes can include the closest consideration or ‘excavation’ of textual and documentary sources. Here they follow Foucault’s

²⁸ These manuals were passed on to me by retired taxidermist Dick Hendry. Hendry has consulted and collected these manuals throughout his career as a taxidermist working at Glasgow’s Kelvingrove Museum. The manuals consulted included Captain Thomas Brown’s (1833) *The Taxidermist’s Manual: or the art of collecting, preparing and preserving objects of natural history*, Rowland Ward’s (1884) *The Sportsman’s Handbook to collecting, preserving, and setting up trophies and specimens*, Montague Browne’s (1878) *Practical Taxidermy: manual of instruction to the amateur in collecting, preserving, and setting up natural history collections of all kinds*, and his (1896) follow up *Artistic and Scientific Taxidermy and Modelling*, John Rowley’s (1898) *The Art of Taxidermy* and The British Museum’s (1904) *Handbook of Instructions for Collectors*.

insistence that documents need to be treated on their own terms, that there is no need to ‘read beneath’ the document as it has a much to reveal about ‘the ‘reality’ of the human agency and social practices involved in its formation’ when taken on its own terms (Foucault 1972). Taken on their own terms, then, I was able to excavate details about the various tools, materials and preparations used to practice taxidermy at particular times (from the mid 18th century to the early 20th century) and places (from the Muséum National d’Histoire Naturelle, Paris, to The British Museum, to the Rowland Ward Studio and The Muséum of Natural History, New York) through reading a collection of manuals. However, while the manuals were extremely revealing regarding the development of the practice of taxidermy over time and space, my aim was not just to document the development of craft practices but also to bear witness to them as *embodied* practices. This said, it is extremely difficult to gain a sense of the craft as an embodied practice from the manuals alone as they offer formalised (largely disembodied) instructional accounts of practice. The problem encountered was that, while the manuals presented the various tools, materials and preparations needed to practice taxidermy, the actual instructions failed to convey how these were ‘brought into use’ in practice (Ingold 2006b: 73). Of course the purpose of instructional writing is to break down a practice into a series of discrete steps to make up an operational sequence, or *chaîne opératoire*, so that the reader has a chain of replicable practical actions to follow (Lynch and Jordan 1995). The first manual I consulted, *The Taxidermist’s Manual* (1833), is illustrative of this phenomenon.

First published in 1833 by Captain Thomas Brown, the manual was the first full treatise on taxidermy method to be published in Britain and is basically a direct translation of an earlier 1820 French work by Louis Dufresne entitled *Taxidermie* (Rookmaaker *et al* 2006). Dufresne was the head preparator at the Muséum National d’Histoire Naturelle in Paris, the recognised centre of excellence for taxidermy practice at that time. Brown had visited the Muséum in 1831 under instructions from Edinburgh University to purchase Dufresne’s personal study-skin collection of great repute. Brown found the collection ‘to consist of many rare and valuable specimens, and, as a whole, in a high state of preservation, as might be expected, from the ability of the distinguished professor’, and so accordingly made the purchase (Brown 1933: v). Brown’s visit also afforded him the opportunity of witnessing the Muséum’s superior preservation and preparation methods, and so on his return he sought to make their methods available the British public by publishing Dufresne’s book almost verbatim (something which he had also procured on his trip). While it was interesting to learn how the more advanced French methods in taxidermy had ‘travelled’ to Britain and thus circulated, I found it difficult to follow, never mind to visualise or internalise, the processes upon which the manual instructs:

‘The bird is laid on a table, on its back, and the feet from you, with the head placed towards your left hand. The feathers of the breast and belly are then divided right and left with a pair of forceps, and the down which covers the belly is pulled off. An incision is then made in the skin with a scalpel, from the upper edge of the sternum, or breast-bone, until you reach the middle of the belly. The skin of one side is then lifted by forceps, and separated from the muscles of the breast, by the point and end of the scalpel, used alternately until you as near as possible the wings. Having accomplished this, a small quantity of cotton, dusted over with flour, or powdered whitening, is placed on the flesh, to prevent the skin from adhering to it. The thighs are then forced forward, and cut through between the femur and tibia; the femur is then replaced into its place in the skin. You then separate the skin from the rump, by the use of the scalpel and the fingers: this part being left to support the feathers of the tail. The part of the carcass which is now denuded of its skin, is taken into the left hand, and the skin separated from the side; in which operation small scissors are used for cutting any of the tendons to be met with.’ (Brown 1833: 28)

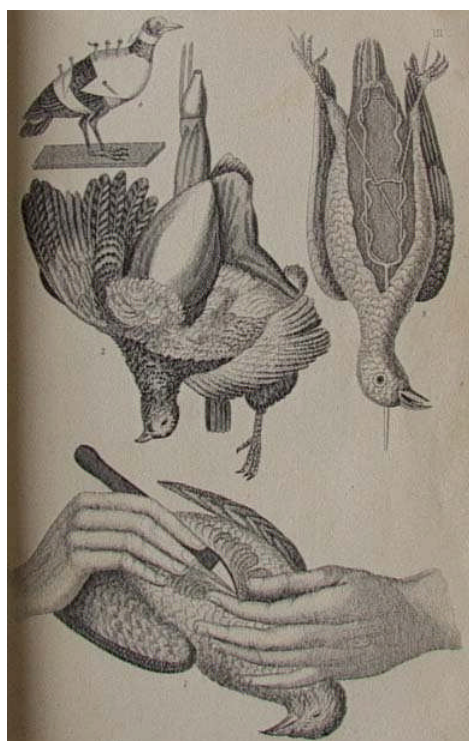


Fig. 3.1 Stylised illustrations of skinning a bird, from Brown (1833: II)

The difficulty is that I had no direct experience on which to draw on to make sense of or enliven the linear (anatomical) descriptions and stylised illustrations (see Fig. 3.1). My complaint is that the manual's representation of the process of skinning a bird deleted not just the 'blood and guts' but the skilful embodiments of the practicing taxidermist. This is because the instructional text, by formalising an action into a discrete series of steps, fails to account for the synergy between practitioner, tool and material that occurs in actual (taxidermy) practice. As Tim Ingold argues, in actual practice action is not successional (as it is presented by the instruction above) but rather is processional: 'every step is a development of the one

before and a preparation for the one following' (Ingold 2006b: 67). That is not to say that taxidermy practice does not have recognisable phases, it is just that these phases are not so sharply demarcated as they are in the instructional texts. Similarly, while the instructional texts describe how tools and materials interact, they do not convey how they are 'brought into use' by an actual practitioner (Ingold 2006b: 73).

The most important element for the practice to 'happen' – the practitioner's body – remains, moreover, a rather spectral figure in the manual's instructional accounts. For example, although Brown indicates that the practitioner's hands are guiding the procedure, they are figured as tools to be used just like the knife or scissors. In this formulation the body, or rather, in this instance, its appendages, are articulated as technical objects. Marcel Mauss, in his essay on techniques of the body, describes the body as 'man's first and most natural technical object, and at the same time technical means' (Mauss, 1979: 104). Ingold has questioned Mauss's reductionism:

'Should we, like Mauss, follow Plato in supposing that the entire body, and not just the tools that serve to extend the range and effectivity of its actions, is the instrument of an intelligence that is necessarily disembodied, and that stands aloof from the world in which it intervenes? Or should we rather find an alternative way of thinking about use that does not presuppose an initial separation between the user and the used, between subject and object?' (Ingold 2006: 73)

Shadowing Ingold, I intend to present an anti-reductionist analysis of taxidermy practice that does not presume an initial separation between user and used, subject and object. Therefore, rather than address or re-present both bodies and tools as 'things-in-themselves', I want my analysis to convey the synergy between practitioner, tools and materials that takes place in the actual practice of taxidermy. (Ingold 2006b: 73). For, as Ingold argues, it is only when tools are 'brought into use' by practitioners that their stories and, therefore, the story of a practice can be known. Or rather as Ingold himself puts it, while a tool 'embodies the history of past use, it remembers nothing of this history. ... For only the body remembers'. Thus, while 'extra-somatic tools have biographies, the body is both biographer and auto-biographer' (Ibid: 72-73). Following this thinking, Ingold concludes that the skilled practitioner is like an accomplished story-teller 'whose tales are told in the practice of his craft rather than words' (Ibid 72).²⁹ Therefore, in order to bring the manuals into use I made the decision to observe the practice of taxidermy taking place in the present.

²⁹ It is important to qualify at this point that the author is aware of the historical gendering of skill which assumes craftwork is a practice of men – hence the terms *craftsman* and *craftsmanship*. While this chapter shall employ these terms this is because throughout its history taxidermy has largely been practiced by men. However in

Yet in satisfying the ‘ethno’ prefix of ‘ethnoarchaeology’ by observing a taxidermist working in the present day, I not only seek to gain a deeper appreciation of the instructional accounts for my own benefit, but also to enliven my presentation of the development of taxidermy as a craft through the manuals. Basically by immersing myself within the professional ‘lifeworld’ of a practicing taxidermist, I seek to find a means to revive and retell the detritus of past practice that can be excavated from the instructional texts. While in later chapters I shall refer to my observations of practice to enliven the material remains of extant commercial workshops and a group of surviving tiger heads, in this chapter my aim is to bridge the inevitable gulf that exists between the flat and linear accounts of past practice in the manuals and the embodied practice of a taxidermist working in the present. Ingold argues that a skilled practitioner engaging in practice ‘picks the strands of past practice and carries them forward into current contexts’ (Ingold 2006b: 72). Accordingly, concentrated within the practitioner’s body are ‘capacities for movement and feeling that have been developed through a life-history of past practice’ (Ibid: 73). Following this thesis, the body of a taxidermist working in the present could therefore offer a means not only to render the manuals understandable, but also to offer a way of injecting life back into the practices described.

However, there is a danger that by drawing on an phenomenologically inclined account of the body it could constitute ‘a retreat from feminism and politics of the body in favour of the individualistic and universalizing sovereign subject’ (Nash 2000: 662). To elaborate, non-representational and phenomenological accounts of ‘being-in-the-world’ have been criticised for presenting the body less as a site for social struggle and more as an event or matter of temporality (see Thien 2005; Saldanha 2005; 2006; Cresswell 2006; Tolia-Kelly 2006; Laurier and Philo 2006). I would agree with Thrift’s pronouncement that to elevate the fleshy body to ‘some primordial distinction’, or indeed to suggest that body-practices are somehow transcendental and not anchored in particular times and places, is not the desired outcome (Thrift 2007: 10). As Steven Pierce and Anupama Roa have argued, the body is not a historically static entity, but rather ‘[i]ts political extensions and its social entailments have radically shifted over the past several centuries’ (Pierce and Rao: 2006; 5). Furthermore, while human actors can be central to historical change, they are not the sole agents of change and, indeed, while ‘bodies are often found enacting geographies ... they are just as frequently found to be passive and even totally overwhelmed by the rest of the world’ (Griffin and Evans 2008: 9). In this sense, according to Griffin and Evans (Ibid: 10), human actors should be understood as ‘archival vectors’ of the past, since to paraphrase Thrift, actors, whether human

order to avoid perpetuating the gendering of skill the conclusion shall endeavour to challenge this situation by offering an alternative ethic to that of craftsmanship.

or non-human, are but ‘ongoing rearrangement[s] of objects and symbols within a field involving the body’ (Thrift 2000a: 219). The body of taxidermist Peter Summers of the National Museum Scotland (NMS) shall be my archival vector to the past embodied practice of taxidermy. Or, to put it another way, by juxtaposing the descriptions of practice presented in period taxidermy manuals with ethnographic descriptions of Peter’s practice, I aim to ‘simultaneously work through the limits of representation and the dynamics of what is beyond’ (Rycroft 2007: 629).

The taxidermist’s workshop and overcoming aversion

Following Laurier and Philo’s preference for ‘undefined investigations’, I decided to put myself in the position of apprentice to taxidermist Peter Summers of the National Museum Scotland (NMS) to learn *more* about the practice, recognising that the position of learner would be a highly instructive context in which not only to understand the craft, but also to reflect on how Peter’s present-day practice relates to the representations provided in the manuals. By directly observing the practice of taxidermy, and even attempting aspects of the practice myself,, I aimed to recover not only the skilful embodiments required to remove a skin from a body and rearrange it into a life-like form, but also the ‘sensate’ – ‘that which is felt, experienced and sensed’ – aspects of taxidermy practice also missing from the manuals (Harrison 2000: 498).

The taxidermy workshop of the NMS is an intoxicating mix of sights, sounds and smells. The paraphernalia of workshop compels both a wash wonderment and closer studies inspection (see Fig. 3.2 – and we shall return to workshops geographies in Site).



Fig. 3.2 Paraphernalia littering Peter's work-bench, © Andrea Roe

Jane Bennett has written that to be enchanted is to be both 'charmed and disturbed' as, although one's senses are intensified, often as a result one's background sense of order and stability has 'flown out the door' (Bennett 2001: 34). I was certainly both charmed and disturbed when encountering the 'detritus' of taxidermy up close for the first time. The metamorphosing creatures and unintelligible matter to be found littered across Peter's workshop had the capacity both to fascinate and to repel as they crossed between orders of natural and cultural, artificial and real, live and dead. Being immersed in such a complex sensory geography was initially disorientating, and I found it difficult to distinguish sights, sounds and smells (see Fig. 3.3).



Fig. 3.3 Skins hung out to dry in Peter's workshop

However while the sights on offer were certainly challenging it was the smell that disturbed me most.

“L'eau de Taxiderme”, as Peter calls it, is an aspect of the practice that certainly cannot be retrieved from the sterile and anaemic manuals. The first time I entered Peter's workshop, for example, it was the smell that hit me first: a sweet sickly smell with a deep almost humid undertone of rotting flesh. While other theorists writing on disgust (e.g. Miller 1997) tend to emphasise taste and touch as the main senses for experiencing disgust, Aurel Kolnai emphasises smell (Kolnai 2004). Kolnai argues that, unlike those of vision or hearing, which can be quite remote, objects of smell are within sufficient proximity to threaten or revolt. Here, as Carolyn Korsmeyer and Barry Smith (2004: 15) explain, Kolnai ‘sees the intentionality of disgust as reaching out towards objects, and his descriptions of smell vividly picture a questing nose, searching out its objects, more intimate with them than is the case with objects of vision or hearing, and partaking in the immediate visceral response of the olfactory sense’. My immediate visceral response to the smell of Peter's workshop was one of aversion yet on deeper inhalation one of compulsion: I wanted to search out where the stench was coming from. The smell was strangely compelling to the point that it made my mouth-water. This could suggest that my body was in a Darwinian sense affecting a ‘disgust response’ to inhibit

the ingestion of what is foul. For example, psychologist's Paul Rozin and April Fallon (1987) follow the Darwinian perspective to argue that disgust is a fundamentally *rejecting* emotion. However, I did not feel I was fundamentally rejecting what I was sensing, in fact I felt drawn to it.

Kolnai, in contrast to Darwinian accounts of disgust, emphasises there is a spectrum of 'flavours' (sensed both olfactorily and orally) that move from the attractive to the disgusting, so that by moving along this spectrum aversion may tilt over into attraction or vice-versa. Kolnai uses the phenomenon of '*haut goût*' to explain the paradoxical nature of disgust. Here he uses the example of 'high' or gamey meat, which is deliberately left unprepared until decay sets in order to heighten taste (to achieve what gourmets call a state of *haut goût* or 'high flavour'), to show that what is putrefying can also be considered attractive (Kolnai 2004: 60).



Fig. 3.4 'Haut goût'

Korsmeyer and Smith (2004: 21) state that strong, ripe cheese has the same effect: 'the production of a sense experience that skirts the edge of the revolting but is thereby rendered – not marginally acceptable – but actually *better* than the substance would be in a less advanced state'. Kolnai's notion of '*haut goût*', according to Korsmeyer and Smith, thereby helps to explain the element of desire that can operate in tandem with aversion in the experience of disgust. Caitlin DeSilvey, drawing on arguments made by Bataille (1993) and Douglas (1966), has similarly commented that entropic materials can provoke 'simultaneous – and contradictory – sensations of repugnance and attraction' (DeSilvey 2006: 320). The pungent

and decaying flesh that I encountered when Peter was skinning specimens did not wholly revolt me; in fact at times it even whetted my appetite³⁰ (See Fig. 3.4).

My conflicting responses to flesh on the turn emphasises the borderline that taxidermy walks between life and death. Korsmeyer and Smith note that ‘disgust records the transition state where the integrity of an organism begins to fall apart... The disgusting is, as [Kolnai] puts it, “pregnant with death”’ (Korsmeyer and Smith 2004: 18). This also relates to Miller’s notion of ‘life-soup’:

‘What disgusts, startlingly, is the capacity for life, and not just because life implies its correlative death and decay: for it is decay that seems to engender life. Images of decay imperceptibly slide into images of fertility and out again. Death thus horrifies and disgusts not just because it smells revoltingly bad, but because it is not an end to the process of living but part of the cycle of eternal recurrence.’³¹ (Miller 1987: 40-41)

While the object of taxidermy is to halt decay, of course, an unsettling tension between life and death is held through out the taxidermic process (and as I will come to argue in the following chapters the threat of decay is never fully suspended). Yet as I have already suggested, proximity to putrefaction does not necessarily engender aversion. The revolting, as Kolnai argues, can thereby paradoxically exert a certain ‘macabre attraction’ over the subject (Korsmeyer and Smith 2004: 21). While Kolnai is a phenomenologist and rejects what he terms the ‘reductionism’ of psychoanalysis, he still appreciates the psychoanalytic recognition of what he calls the ‘eroticism of disgust’, a breed of aversion which is superimposed ‘upon the shadow of a desire for union with the object’ (Kolnai 2004: 60). The magnetism that I experienced when observing the dead animal bodies upon which Peter worked is illustrative of this phenomenon. Although aspects of taxidermy, like skinning and cleaning out the brain from the skull, can be thoroughly revolting to witness (by all the senses) up close, I also found them strangely compelling.

Close proximity to the disgusting can lead to the concern for ‘contamination’. While I certainly approached observing Peter skinning a bird for the first time with trepidation, the prospect also aroused a certain amount of excitement. There is something oddly erotic about the first incision cut, the parting of feathers and skin to reveal the delicate pink belly flesh underneath. The intimacy of encounter is unnerving to the point that it feels like something you should

³⁰ This compulsion was also experienced by artist-in-residence at the NMS Andrea Roe. Roe was resident in the taxidermy department to explore and capture the critical moments in taxidermy process. Previously a committed vegetarian, her experience of encountering the ‘high’ meat of the specimens being skinned drove her to being a carnivore once again.

³¹ This compares with Jacques Lacan’s comment that ‘life is putrefaction’

not be witnessing, which of course contradictorily adds to the exhilaration of the experience. Kolnai writes that humans can be aroused by disgusting things and experiences and, while I would not go as far as to say that I was aroused by the experience of witnessing Peter cutting open and parting the flesh of a dead bird, I would say that taxidermy heightens the senses and can be a strangely pleasing sensual experience (which can work to remind you of others). For example, when Peter asked if I wanted to strip the skin off the body of an eagle owl, I was amazed by how cleanly and quickly the skin could be stripped from the body and by how satisfying it felt. Similarly, when I made an ‘incision-cut’ for the first time - with heart aflutter and hands shaky - I was struck by velvety softness of the downy feathers as I parted them and then by the delicacy of the skin which only needed the slightest prick by the tip of the scalpel to slice open and reveal the ruby-red jewel of the belly beneath (see Fig. 3.5).



Fig. 3.5 ‘Incision cut’ © Andrea Roe

Getting under the skin in taxidermy practice could be considered as macabre and gruesome, yet through my time spent observing Peter’s practice, I recognised that there is something poetic if not beautiful about revealing what lies beneath. This said, as taxidermy practice spans different sensory modalities, observing and experiencing it up close can evoke a complex array of responses. For example, I found it was not just the unfamiliar that could unsettle and disturb. For the most part on my visits to the workshop, Peter worked on setting up bird specimens. However, when Peter worked on a mammal for the first (and only time) I found it,

in some ways, a more challenging experience. Although by that point I had come accustomed to the smell of ‘high’ flesh, the sight of oozing bodily fluids and the sound of crunching bone, it did not prepare me for how I would react to the dead body of a Tamarin monkey (see Fig. 3.6). Although Peter was mid-way through mounting the monkey when I arrived, I immediately recognised that he was working on a small monkey and, fascinated, picked it up to observe it more closely. When Peter informed me I was holding it like a baby, cupped by both arms and held to my chest, I felt suddenly disturbed that I had related to the Tamarin in such a maternal manner. While I had always held the bird bodies Peter worked on gently and with care, I held them as delicate *objects* and never held them close to my body. My reaction to the Tamarin reminded me that taxidermy has the power to unsettle precisely because specimen animals, throughout the taxidermic process, remain excessive material entities and therefore retain both aesthetic and ontological ambiguity.



Fig. 3.6 Tamarin monkey

As the literature review made clear, there is increasing academic recognition that the social and material are intertwined in increasingly promiscuous combinations (e.g. Latour 1999; Braun and Castree 1998; Whatmore 1999, 2002; Thrift and Dewsbury 2000; Thrift 2005; Dewsbury et al 2003). To accommodate, and to take account of, these complex versions of ‘sociomaterial or socationatural assemblage’ that ‘exceed purely human versions of subjectivity’ in taxidermy practice, I have employed a ‘more-than-human’ mode of working (Lorimer 2007: 96). To employ ‘more-than-human’ modes of working, Sarah Whatmore argues that the researcher

must follow an explicitly experimental imperative. The first aspect of this imperative, according to Whatmore, is to supplement the familiar repertoire of humanist methods (which generate text and talk) ‘with experimental practices that amplify other sensory, bodily and affective registers and extend the company and modality of what constitutes a research subject’ (Whatmore 2004: 1362; see also Thrift 2005; Lorimer 2006). Whatmore draws inspiration from the research practices of science studies – as elaborated by Latour (1999) and Stengers (1997) – to commit to research as a co-fabrication or ‘working together’ with the worldly phenomena enjoined in the research process (Whatmore 2006; see also 2002). My decision to observe, and to partake in, the practice of taxidermy demonstrates a willingness to commit to ‘working together’ with the non-human phenomena encountered when researching taxidermy. While in this instance it has meant overcoming my initial aversion to the aesthetic and ontological ambiguity of the specimens on which Peter worked, I believe that my following analysis of the development of taxidermy will be richer than had I just analysed the manuals.

The second aspect of following the experimental demands of ‘more-than-human’ styles of working is the onus placed on actively redistributing expertise, beyond engaging with other academic disciplines or research fields to engaging as well with knowledges, practices, vernaculars beyond the academy (Whatmore 2004, 2006).³² For example, I have not only been committed to ‘working together’ with the non-human and ‘slippery’ phenomena and materials of taxidermy practice, but also to allowing the expertise of a practicing taxidermist guide my excavation of the manuals and therefore the presentation of the development of its craft practices in this chapter. I have also drawn inspiration from NRT as its politics are for ‘appreciating, and valorising, the skills and knowledges which have been so consistently devalorised by contemplative forms of life’, which thus underlines ‘that their stake in the world is just as great as the stake of those who are paid to comment upon it’ (Nash 2000: 655). Laurier and Philo similarly assert that ethnoarchaeological investigations should treat the people (dead or alive) being consulted in the research process as ‘*serious* experts’ (Laurier and Philo 2004: 432). They state that the researcher ‘cannot treat the documented accounts or voiced experiences of these grounded experts as illusionary, mistaken, or ideological, but rather treat them as making certain problems – what we might call theoretical problems – particularly clear’ (Ibid). ‘Theory’ by these terms can therefore be something that emerges through consultations with such people.

³² I am thinking here of the ‘deliberate mapping’ exercise pioneered by Gail Davies and her collaborators in relation to xeno-transplantation (Davies et al 2004).



Fig. 3.7 Peter Summers – taxidermist extraordinaire

By immersing myself within the ‘life-world’ or ‘biogeography’ of a practising taxidermist, then, I have sought to find a means to reanimate the lifeless instructional accounts of past taxidermy practice presented in the manuals (see Fig. 3.7). Thus, just as the taxidermist promises skills and a magic touch to breath life back into the dead, I have attempted the same feat with the manuals. Yet, as non-representational theorists are keenly aware, there are inherent dangers when drawing on a vitalist ethos which emphasises the unlimited plenitude of life, as such onto-stories make it difficult to ‘undertake an account of the diminishment, or lessening, of life’ (Anderson 2004: 65; see also Bennet 2001, Harrison 2007a). Peter nonetheless instructed me, taxidermy is actually “about understanding what’s inside, what the feathers hide...”, that life is learnt through death. Therefore, rather than undertake a Messianic resurrection of the dead, I intend to work *at* and *on* the limits of life and death, time and history and movement and stasis much like, as will become apparent through my analysis, the taxidermist does.

Before I present my analysis of taxidermy practice a number of qualifications need to be made. As already outlined, it is my intention to present an anti-reductionist analysis of the development of taxidermy practice in this chapter by mobilising an Ingoldian perspective on the process of skill (Ingold 2006b). Ingold’s argument is that it is only when tools and materials are ‘brought into use’ by practitioners that their history and, therefore, the history of practice can be known. Following this thinking, the skilled practitioner is like an accomplished story-teller who ‘picks up the strands of past practice and carries them forward in current contexts.’ (Ingold 2006b: 72). I recognise Peter as just such a storyteller, and the sterile and

abstract descriptions of practice contained in the manuals were brought to life by observing Peter at work. To enliven my historical analysis of the development of taxidermy craft in Britain, I shall therefore present descriptions of materials and methods from the manuals in juxtaposition with thick descriptions of Peter demonstrating taxidermy *practice*. I shall here focus on presenting the development of *museum* taxidermy in Britain rather than commercial or trophy taxidermy because they are historically distinct practices, and because Peter's museum-based practice is my reference point for understanding and enlivening the manuals. For this reason I have also chosen to excavate details about the development of museum taxidermy from those period manuals that cover museum taxidermy practice, namely: Captain Thomas Brown's (1833) *The Taxidermist's Manual: or the art of collecting, preparing and preserving objects of natural history*, and Montague Brown's (1883) *Practical Taxidermy: manual of instruction to the amateur in collecting, preserving, and setting up natural history collections of all kinds* and his (1898) follow up *Artistic and Scientific Taxidermy and Modelling*. These manuals have been chosen because they contain the best information regarding the development of taxidermy practice in British museums and also because they were the most popular manuals in the 19th and early 20th century as is evidenced by the fact they all achieved at least a fifth edition (Morris 1993).³³

The following analysis section seeks to work on different levels. Explicitly, it aims to chart developments in the craft techniques of taxidermy, and the corresponding changes in how it was articulated and understood as a craft, through the close study of period manuals, combined with ethnographic observations of a practicing taxidermist. The first section examines taxidermy's emergence as preservation tool for the amassing of study-skin collections. The second section then explores the craft's development into an artistic practice for the realistic representation and display of animal forms. The third section explores the limitations that were placed on British taxidermist's which prevented them implementing the 'unambiguous perfectionism' strived for by American taxidermists. More broadly, all three sections chart the rise and decline of museum taxidermy (and the museum taxidermist) in Britain.

Stitches in time: the development of a craft

³³ I will refer to the other manuals from Hendry's collection – see footnote one - in later chapters that deal more explicitly with commercial and trophy taxidermy.

If a thing is worth doing, its worth doing well' (Rowley (1898: vi)

Taxidermy as preservation tool

A short word is first warranted on the emergence of taxidermy. While a literal translation may mean 'arrangement of skins', its development as a practice over time has ensured that its precise definition has remained somewhat ambiguous. Taxidermy, as an organised practice, emerged in response to one of the major technical problems confronting eighteenth century naturalists: that of how to preserve specimens for study. Paul Farber, for example, observes:

'During the eighteenth century European naturalists and collectors came to possess an enormous quantity of information and material sent back from Africa, Asia, and New World by explorers, colonists, and professional naturalist-collectors. The resultant expanded empirical base for natural history raised technical, theoretical, and philosophical problems' (Farber 1977: 551).

Preparations

One of the key technical problems identified at that time was how to preserve and transport bird specimens. Many naturalists were keen to assemble permanent collections of bird skins for study purposes and thus efforts were made towards establishing a satisfactory method of preservation. Réaumur, an eighteenth-century French naturalist, was the first to publish on the matter (Réaumur 1748), writing a small pamphlet describing all known methods for preserving dead birds. However, all the methods listed (which included embalming, pickling and simple stuffing) were inadequate for maintaining permanent collections as they all failed to tackle the problem of insect attack. Yet, as Farber notes, although the techniques described were identified as insufficient, 'they continued to be the major taxidermic procedures for many years' (Ibid: 553).

Although there were calls to address the problem of insect attack and to improve the presentation of specimens at the end of the century, from both French and British naturalists, development of the practice was stifled by a culture of secrecy motivated by a belief that any preservative developed to prevent insect attack could be made commercially viable (Morris

1993). This suppressed the transmission of knowledge about methods and techniques more generally, and thus in turn hindered development of the practice. One case is illustrative: an apothecary from Metz by the name of Jean-Batiste Bécoeur (1718-1777) had experimented with a variety of different chemicals to discover a way of preventing insect attack, and by around 1743 he had devised an arsenical soap to treat bird skins (Rookmaaker *et al* 2006). His preparation reportedly served as both a successful bird-skin preservative and an effective insecticide, as witnesses of his bird specimens were able to testify. For example, one Bernadin Pierron, after viewing Bécoeur's cabinets of well-preserved birds, commented:

‘Had Bécoeur lived in ages past, he would have been accused of witchcraft and enchantment. What wonders has this excellent naturalist not been able to unit in his cabinet. These are truly immortal animals.’ (Pierron 1779 quoted in Rookmaaker *et al* 2006)

Yet Bécoeur never published the secrets of his composition in his lifetime as it is thought that he wished to keep it secret until he had proved its effectiveness and turned it into a commercial product (Rookmaaker *et al* 2006). The use of arsenical soap was therefore not widely adopted until after his death in 1777; in fact, it was not until the 1800s that Bécoeur's recipe for arsenical soap became more widely known as an effective treatment for preserving skins. According to Farber (1977), the soap's use had initially been popularised by preparators at the Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle, Paris. Bécoeur had given the recipe to the Muséum in about 1743 in a bid to advertise the efficacy of his method to a much larger audience (Rookmaaker *et al* 2006). Yet it seems that on receipt the museum was not initially keen to divulge the secret of this successful preservative technique either, since it did not appear in public print until 1803 when Louis Dufresne (1752-1832), a taxidermist at the Muséum, published the recipe in an article on taxidermy in one of the scientific dictionaries popular at the time (Rookmaaker *et al*: 151):

Recette du Savon arsenical.

Camphre ----- 1 once 3 gros.
Oxide blanc d'Arse nic pulvérisé --- 8 onces.
Savon ----- 8 onces
Carbonate de Potasse ----- 3 onces.
Chaux en poudre ----- 1 once.

The Muséum's endorsement was important in terms of the popularisation of the use of arsenical soap because it then boasted one of the largest and important collections in Europe and, more importantly, its exhibits were known to be in an excellent state of preservation.

The adoption of Bécoeur's preservation solution in Britain was greatly inspired by the 1819 purchase of Louis Dufresne's (the head preparator at the Muséum) personal collection of great repute (Sweet 1970). The purchase of Dufresne's collection, by the University of Edinburgh, worked to popularise the use of Bécoeur's soap in Britain, because, in Farber's words, 'the fine state of the collection was added evidence of the lasting value of Bécoeur's arsenical soap' to a British audience (Ibid: 562). The purchase also inspired the publication of the first printed instruction in the craft of taxidermy in Britain by the man sent from Edinburgh to purchase Dufresne's collection, Captain Thomas Brown (F.L.S.). *The Taxidermists Manual* (1833) is therefore considered to be the first complete British treatise on taxidermy method, and in the preface Brown stresses that the issue of preservation was the main concern of the taxidermist at that time:

"To devise a means of preserving their effects is the business of the taxidermist, and upon his success the excellence of his art will depend. It will, therefore, easily be imagined how important and indeed indispensable to his art is a thorough knowledge of chemical science, for by experimenting on preservatives on established chemical principles, he may discover the best method of averting the progress of times destroying hand." (Brown 1835: 2).

Brown's intention when publishing on the subject was to advocate the Muséum's methods in Britain (Rookmaaker *et al* 2006), which he believed were not only better in terms of preservation, but also in terms of setting up birds for display purposes, compared to those currently used in Britain. Farber records that British ornithological collections at the time, including those at the British Museum, were in a poor state of preservation and 'totally failed to stimulate birds in their natural states' (Farber 1977: 555). Brown stated in the manual's introduction that when he went to purchase the collection, the trip 'also afforded [him] ample opportunity of inspecting and becoming acquainted with all the different processes employed in the preservation of animals' (Brown 1833: vi). So impressed was he with the state of the Muséum's collections preservation, he set out to present their methods for preserving and setting-up specimens in full. In fact, as Rookmaaker *et al* (2006: 153) point out, the manual is almost a verbatim translation of Dufresne's earlier manual published in 1820. This said, Brown's translation of the Muséum's methods was significant for the development of taxidermy in Britain as it presented the recipe for arsenical soap in full. Brown presented the following, slightly adjusted, recipe (1833: 116):

Arsenical Soap.

Invented by Bécoeur, Apothecary, Metz.

Arsenic, in powder, - - - 2 pounds,

Camphor, - - - - - 5 ounces,

White Soap, - - - - - 2 pounds,

Salt of Tartar, - - - - 12 ounces,

Powdered Lime, - - - - 4 ounces,

The soap must be cut in small and very thin slices, put into a crucible with a small quantity of water, and held over a gentle fire, and frequently stirred with a wooden spatula, or a piece of wood of any kind. When it is properly melted, the powdered lime and salt of tartar must then be added, and thoroughly mixed. It must now be taken off the fire, the arsenic added gently and stirred. The camphor must be reduced into a powder, by beating it in a mortar, with the addition of a little spirits of wine. The camphor must then be added, and the composition well mixed with a spatula, while off the fire. It may again be placed on the fire, to assist in making the ingredients incorporate properly, but not much heated, as the camphor will very readily escape. It may now be poured into glazed earthen pots, and allowed to cool, after which a piece of paper should be placed over the top, and afterwards some sheep leather; and they set aside for use. The composition is about the thickness of ordinary flour paste. When it is necessary to use the soap, put as much as will answer the purpose into a preserve pot, and add to it about an equal proportion of water. This is applied to the skin or feathers with a bristle brush.

N.B. it should be kept as close as possible, and used with caution, as it is a deadly poison. The above is the recipe made use of at the Jardin des Plantes, Paris.

Brown's translation of the Muséum's methods meant Bécoeur's arsenical soap became the prime bird skin preservative as the popularity of Brown's text meant that the method was 'widely adopted by commercial, amateur and museum taxidermists' (Rookmaaker *et al* 2006: 154). Brown's manual is considered to have been the leading taxidermy manual in the mid-nineteenth century as it was reprinted unchanged many times with a 'twenty-seventh edition a late as 1876' (Ibid). From the publication of Brown's manual, the vexing question of how to preserve skins was largely forgotten and was only revived towards the end of the nineteenth century when doubts were expressed about the potential health threat posed by arsenical preparations to preparators (Morris 2003). Therefore the most important contribution made by Brown's manual to the development of taxidermy in Britain was largely solving the problem of preservation, the result being that British taxidermists were afforded the opportunity of experimenting with, and therefore advancing, methods in the artistic setting-up of specimens. The next sections will outline developments in the preparation and setting-up of skins.

Setting up a cabinet skin

‘No book description can adequately convey all that should be known. To learn what is necessary the personal instruction of a good teacher, and the smallest modicum of experience, are worth more than any printed course of instruction, however ostensibly complete.’ (Ward 1880: 80)

There are two basic techniques for setting up birds. The first, and the oldest, consists of creating a replacement supporting framework using parts of the bird’s skeletal structure and wire, then filling around this with loose chopped flax, raw cotton or similar material. This method has been described as ‘loose stuffed’ or ‘soft stuffed’ and is usually the method employed to produce cabinet skins for study collections (Morris 2003). The second technique requires making a solid replacement body. Traditionally this meant creating an ovoid mass of coarse stuffing material (such as straw, wood wool or tow) which was then bound with cotton to form a tight body and inserted into the skin. This is known as a ‘bind-up’ technique, though nowadays replacement bodies are often carved out of polyurethane or basal wood. Supporting wires would be fixed into the body and used to create a replacement skeletal structure (these wires would often be joined to any clean bones left in the skin). These types of ‘replacement’ technique would be employed when setting up specimens for display.

The ‘loose stuffed’ technique is usually the first method suggested by manuals to be attempted by the aspiring taxidermist, since it requires the least in the way of technical competence and tools and materials. Birds were also thought to best suit the purpose of the amateur because fresh specimens were easy to procure and, more importantly, were small enough to be worked on at the kitchen table. Montague Browne explains that ‘the reason birds are always selected is because of easiness of treatment for the student’s first lessons in taxidermy, before his teacher allows him to “try his ‘apprentice hand” on the more difficult branches of the art’ (Browne 1878: 125). Peter Summers decided to demonstrate setting up a cabinet skin (the ‘loose-stuffed’ method) on my first visit to his workshop; it was the first method that he had been taught as an apprentice taxidermist, and so he thought it would be the best introduction to the craft. As noted previously, I had sought to learn about the practice of the craft through a set of period instruction manuals, but had found it difficult to gain a sense of the craft as an embodied practice from their formalised accounts. As identified, the instructional text, by formalising an action into a discrete series of steps, fails to account for the synergy between practitioner, tool and material that occurs in actual (taxidermy) practice. As Ingold argues, in actual practice action is not successional (as it is presented by instructional writing) rather, it is processional: ‘every step is a development of the one before and a preparation for the one

following' (Ingold 2006b: 67). That is not to say that taxidermy practice does not have recognisable phases, it is just that these phases are not as sharply demarcated as they are in the instructional texts. Similarly while the instructional texts describe how tools and materials interact they do not convey how these are 'brought into use' by an actual practitioner - hence the reason why I decided to observe a practitioner working in the present day (Ingold 2006b: 73).

To convey a sense of embodied practice of taxidermy then, a sense of the processional must be retained. In what follows below I shall therefore juxtapose sections of instructional text against detailed descriptions of Peter demonstrating the 'loose stuffed' method in order to present a more embodied account of this procedure. I have chosen to present sections of instruction in 'loose stuffed' method from Montague Browne's (1878) text *Practical Taxidermy* because his text retains a sense of the processional nature of the procedure. For example, Browne himself at the outset outlined that his instruction in the setting up of a cabinet skin should be 'thoroughly practical' by design:

'In order that this shall be a thoroughly practical chapter, I will, in my method of working, copy the admirable plan of my old sporting favourite, Col. Hawker, who, when wishing to note down some difficult point, was in the habit of doing with his own hands all things pertaining to the matter at issue, because, as he said, he might not make mistakes when subsequently writing upon knotty subjects intended for his readers consideration. I have therefore, specially procured a starling, as I consider this bird the very best for the amateurs purpose, not only on account of the toughness of the skin, but also because, being a medium sized bird, it presents no difficult points in skinning; and with the bird before me I will minutely instruct my pupil, pointing out each step that has to be taken and each difficulty that is likely to arise' (Browne 1878: 93).

This qualificatory statement communicates that Browne's embodied practice directly informed his instructional writing, rendering it an iterative process. While he noted that he would point out 'each step', suggesting that he will break down the activity of skinning a starling into discrete parts, he also stated that he would 'minutely instruct' his pupil, implying his writing to be not wholly discontinuous or, indeed, disembodied. For example, while he talked his pupil through each step to be made, he retained a sense that each step is a development on the one before and a preparation for the next. For example, he always remained aware how the bird is positioned in relation to the body and how the tools are articulated by the hands: 'Now, keeping the head of the bird towards you, part the feathers away from each side of the breast bone; then with the knife held short in the hand, the point is placed exactly in the centre of the bird... Now turn the bird towards your right, and gently lay hold of the cut edge of the skin...' (Browne 1878: 94). This level of detail conveys a sense of the synergy between

practitioner, tool and material required for the procedure that is largely absent from abstract instructional writing (i.e. where the practitioner is not placed into relation with the tools and materials). However, while Browne's instruction certainly suggested the importance of the practitioner's skill in the development of the procedure by highlighting how it is their hands which guide the work, it stills failed adequately to capture the synergy of practitioner, tool and material that takes place in actual practice. Hence my decision to juxtapose Browne's descriptions with my descriptions of Peter's practice in order to give a fuller account of the 'loose-stuffed' method as an embodied experience.

Loose-stuffed method

Montague Browne instructed that, before the operation begins, 'a skinning knife, scissors, cobbler's crooked awl, a pot of preservative, cotton wool or wadding, some tow and a needle and thread' should be laid out, noting that 'the chief point of difference between the skilled and the unskilled workman is, the former may and often does get the best results with the fewest possible tools, while the other must surround himself with dozens of unnecessary things before he can "do a stroke"' (Browne 1878: 55).

Peter only has a scalpel, a small pair of scissors and a tub of borax immediately ready for use. While Browne (1878: 91) had 'procured a starling', Peter goes to fetch a Redwing from the freezer which he says he has been asked to set up as a cabinet skin (see Fig. 3.8).³⁴

³⁴ A cabinet skin or 'study-skin' is a skin persevered for a scientific collection and therefore only needs to be persevered using the 'loose-stuffed' method as it will remain in storage.



Fig. 3.8 Red-wing specimen, 56.8g

Once the bird has been given time to thaw, Peter works out the rigor mortis by gently warming and articulating all the joints with his hands. When fanning out the wings Peter exposes the distinctive red patches on the undersides, remarking that this is the source of the bird's name (see Fig. 3.9). He notes that it is important to work out the rigor mortis so that the bird can be teased into a soft and malleable state with which to proceed. It is also a good opportunity to inspect the state of the specimen.

All the NMS specimens have been donated to the museum either by zoos or by members of the public and, while this is entirely favourable, it means that the specimens can arrive in varying states of decay and often with injuries. Peter communicates to me that this redwing's skin is in a good state of preservation (he jokes that it was 'freshly frozen') but that its left leg is broken. He states that the broken leg does not matter so much in this case because he is setting it up as a study skin rather than for display (where the leg bones are required). He tells me that many of the birds received by the NMS have been killed by flying into windows or moving cars, and so it is quite common for them to have broken leg or wing bones. Missing feathers are also common, so Peter checks over the bird to



Fig. 3.9



Fig. 3.10

collected, its weight (56.8g), wing measurement (120mm), and sex (this is not immediately obvious so Peter tells me he will check the sexual organs once the body has been removed). Summers then moves back to the bird and plugs its throat with cotton wool (see Fig. 3.10). When asked why this has to be done, Peter reveals that it prevents the bodily fluids from oozing out of the mouth when he turns the bird's head inside-out (otherwise the fluids would spoil the feathers). Skinning can now commence:

'Now, keeping the head of the bird toward you, part the feathers away from each side of the sternum or breast-bone; then with the knife held short in the hand, the point placed exactly in the centre of the bird (calculating from the bill to the tip of the tail), make the first incision just on the right side of the breast bone down to the vent, taking care not to cut so deeply as to expose the intestines.' (Browne 1878: 94)³⁵



Fig. 3.11

³⁵ Browne's text appears in a different font – Perpetua –so as to differentiate from the main body text and normal quotes.

Peter lays the bird in front of him on its back with the head pointing away and tells me that he is parting the lower abdominal feather tract, and then he wets the 'downy' feathers with a little water in order more easily to expose the skin beneath. It is surprising to learn that a bird is not completely covered in feathers but that the feathers run from a number of tracts. Once he has exposed the belly, Peter picks up the scalpel and, while holding the feathers apart, he begins to make a 'dorsal incision' in the middle of the breast bone and slices through the skin, slightly to one side of the abdominal cavity, to just above the birds vent (see Fig. 3.11). At this point Peter states that it is very important to ensure that the abdominal cavity is not pierced (hence why the incision was made slightly to the right) because, if the cavity is punctured, acid bile from the stomach and intestines could be expressed, spoiling both the skin and feathers and thus the specimen. He then sprinkles borax over the incision to absorb any bodily fluids seeping from the incision.

The first incision cut is a critical moment in the implementation of all taxidermy procedures, as one wrong move with the scalpel at this stage can see the specimen entirely ruined. Tim Ingold has described such a moment in the implementing of any task as 'the moment at which rehearsal ends and performance begins' (Ingold 2006b: 68). This is the point at which there is no turning back, as, unlike when drawing, an incision made with a scalpel cannot be rubbed out. Therefore, as Ingold acknowledges, '[t]he skilled practitioner must choose his moment with care, knowing that to set out before one is ready, or alternatively to allow the right moment to pass unnoticed, could jeopardize the whole project' (Ibid). Ingold also notes that the moment of 'setting out' is also marked by a switching of perspective 'from the encompassing view of the umbrella plan to a narrow focus on the initial point of contact between tool and material' (Ibid: 69). Instead of rehearsing the whole procedure in his mind, then, Peter is rather concentrating on the precise details of the emergent cut, although that is not to say he is working successionally from one discrete phase of the procedure to the next. As I have already argued, in practice action is not successional (as it is of presented by instructional writing) rather, it is processional. This means that 'setting out' gives way to 'carrying on' as, although Peter is involved in the immediacy of the incision cut, he is also readying the bird for the next stage in the performance.

For example, while Peter makes the incision cut he is also beginning gently to pull apart the skin with the fingers that he has been using to keep the feathers parted (see Fig. 3.11 again). Once he has cut to the vent, he then turns the scalpel around and, gripping the skin in one hand, uses the blunt end of the scalpel to part the skin from the body by placing it in between

the two and gently levering them apart. He does this on both sides of the incision cut until the leg sockets are exposed. At this point he puts down the scalpel and works the knee joint up out of the socket until it is exposed, whereupon he cuts through the joint using a small pair of scissors (see Fig. 3.12). Peter informs me that the knee joint is only cut through in the case of a study skin as the femur is not needed and can be removed (when mounting an



Fig. 3.12

animal for display the whole leg is stripped of all flesh and kept to form part of the replacement structure). After cutting through the joint he then pushes up the lower leg bone (the metatars) until the ankle is exposed, and cleans it of all flesh and muscle. To do this, he grips the tendons in one hand and severs them with the scalpel in his other hand, and then he pulls them off the bone along with any other flesh. He replaces the cleaned leg back in its 'trouser leg' and repeats the process on the other side.

“Taking up the knife again, carefully work with it towards the tail, and as far round the back as you can get with safety. Now let the bird rest on its head, as it were, with the beak from you, and, placing the fingers with the thumb on the back (which is now underneath), the middle finger on the root of the tail inside, flanked by the first and third fingers keeping down the skin on either side, cautiously insert the knife through the skin of the vent, and cut that free, cutting upwards in a slanting direction; having done this, carefully cut away the root of the tail, at the same time freeing it wherever it sticks; then, when nothing but one bone, that is to say, the last caudal vertebra, holds it, slip the knife underneath and cut with a drawing motion upward. Now advance the fingers of the left hand and seize the bottom part of the loosened body with the right hand, and by pushing with the finger-nails, and occasionally using the knife where the tendons hold the skin, gradually work up the back, turning it round and round, and working very carefully until the wings are arrived at’ (Browne 1878: 97)

Once the shoulder joints are exposed on either side, Peter informs me that the wing bones must be cleaned in much the same manner as were the lower leg bones. At this point he uses the point of his scalpel to dislocate the wing bone (head of the humerus) from the shoulder joint (see Fig. 3.13) and repeats this on the opposite side. Peter then tells me that the wing bones are much easier to access and clean once the skin has been inverted over the head and the body completely detached.



Fig. 3.13

To invert the skin over the skull, Peter first wets the skin around the skull as otherwise the skin can tear. He explains that specimens taken from the freezer often suffer from ‘freezer burn’, a condition that can make the skin very dry and susceptible to tear. Peter instructs that the technique for inverting the skin over the head is to do it evenly so that there is no pressure exerted on any single point. This means peeling the skin over the skull evenly on each side

with either index finger. When the ears are reached (see Fig. 3.14) these are pulled out of their sockets using the fingers and a little borax for grip. Peter then continues to peel back the skin until the eyes are reached, whereupon he places the bird back on the table and begins to cut through the orbital skin with a scalpel (see Fig. 3.15). Here he elaborates that it is important to cut with plenty of

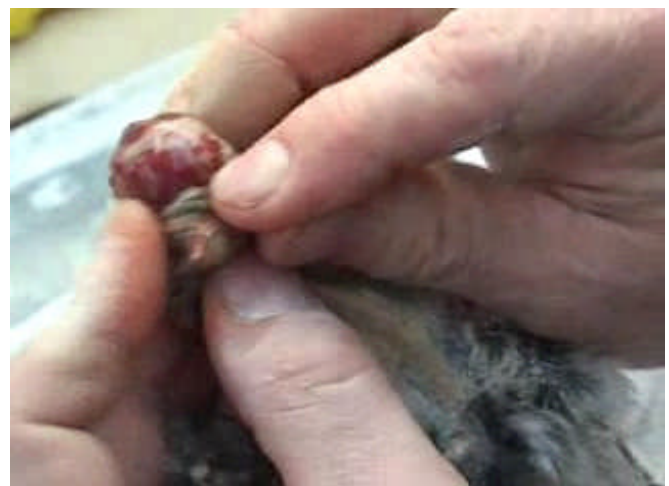


Fig. 3.14

excess rather than cut through the eyelid and ruin the skin as any excess can be removed more easily at a later stage once the skin is fully removed from the body.



Fig. 3.15

Much like Browne instructed above Peter is ‘working *with*’ the instruments and tools at his disposal (Browne 1891: 97). The scalpel in this instance is an extension of Peter’s body, and this observation is in tune with Lucy Suchman’s notion of the ‘amplified body’ (Suchman 1987). Yet according to Suchman’s thesis, tools and technologies are not just extensions of the body, but rather are integrated *into* the body. Michael Callon and John Law explain that in this sense ‘they have become wearable, and what is worn, as Suchman notes, is intertwined with the person who wears it’ (Callon and Law 2004: 9). The scalpel, in effect, has been integrated into Peter’s hand to create an amplified finger – what Thrift elsewhere has described as the ‘human body as tool-being’ (Thrift 2008: 10). This kind of thinking does not presume an initial separation between the user and the used, between subject and object, for which many earlier accounts of skill and tool use have been criticised. The problem according to Ingold is that many of these accounts, like that of Marcel Mauss’s (1934) *Body Techniques*, approach both bodies and tools out of context, as things-in-themselves. Rather, as Ingold argues, it is only when tools and bodies are considered within a field of effective action – i.e. when they are ‘brought into use’ – that they can be understood to work in synergy (Ingold 2006b: 73). Ingold illustrates this point by arguing that the practice of sawing ‘issues as much from the trestle and plank as from the saw, as much from the saw as from the carpenter, as much from the carpenter’s eyes and ears as from his hands, as much from his ears and the hands as from his mind’, concluding that ‘[y]ou only get sawing when all these things, and more, are bound together and work in unison’ (Ibid: 73). It is the synergy between practitioner, tool and material that allows the practice to happen. Of course Ingold is quick to point out that it is the body that is guiding practice:

‘Perhaps it would be better to say that in activity like cutting wood, my hand is not so much used as brought into use, in the sense that it is guided in its movements by the remembered traces of past performance, already inscribed in an accustomed – that is, *usual* – pattern of dexterous activity (Ingold 2000: 352). But if the hand, as it drives the saw, remembers how to move, the saw it grips does not. For *only the body remembers*. Thus in the relation between hand and saw there lies a fundamental asymmetry. The hand can bring itself into use, and in its own practiced movements can tell the story of its life. But the saw relies on the hand for its story to be told. Or more generally, while extra-somatic tools have biographies, the body is both biographer and autobiographer’ (Ingold 2006b: 73)

In this sense Peter’s hands creates a synergy between practitioner, tool (scalpel) and material (bird body), therefore fostering the field of effective action that is practice: ‘concentrated in them are capacities for movement and feeling that have been developed through a life history of past practice’ (Ibid). Yet, to reiterate, the ‘story’ of the practice of taxidermy, while told through Peter’s hands, is still dependent on the joining-up of hand, scalpel and bird body. To paraphrase Ingold, you only get taxidermy when all these things, and more, are bound together and work in unison.

Once the orbital skin has been cut through with a scalpel, Peter then uses the bottom end of the scalpel to lever out the eyes from their sockets. Once out of the socket, he puts down the scalpel and simply pulls the eyes clean from the socket, detaching the optic nerve in the process. He then picks up the bird and continues to peel the skin down to the bill line. He turns the bird over and works the skin off the underside of the tongue and jaw line using his thumbs. He detaches the tongue by picking up the scalpel and sliding the blade between the tongue and the skin, cutting the tongue away from the jaw line. He pulls the tongue out along with the cotton wool plug inserted earlier. He now instructs me that the body can be completely separated from the skin by severing through the neck at the atlas (see Fig. 3.16 A-B). Peter does this by deftly dislocating the spinal column with his thumb and index finger and then pulls it, along with all muscle and flesh, completely clean from the skull. The body has now been completely detached and Peter puts it to the side (he will check the sex of the bird

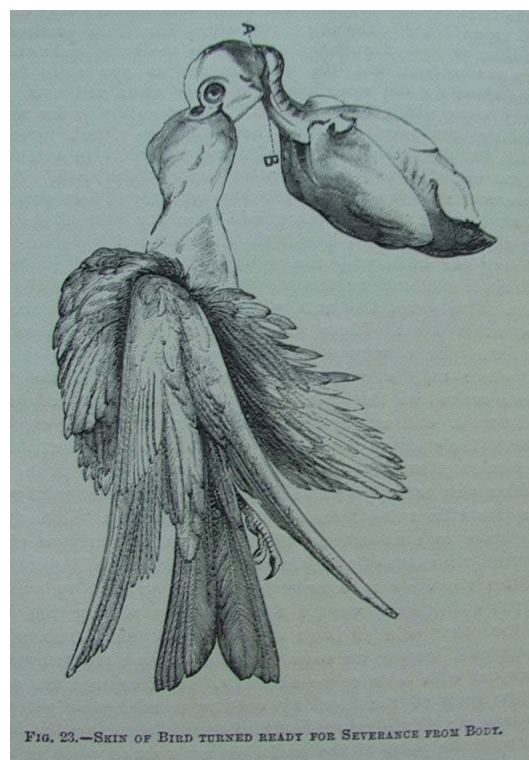


Fig. 3.16
Skin of bird turned ready for severance from body (Browne 1878: 43)

later). Now only the skull and the skin, turned inside-out and attached at the bill line, remain. Peter now moves to remove the brain. To do this he pierces a smallish hole in the skull using the sharp point of his scissors; gripping cotton wool with tweezers he slides it into the skull cavity and cleans out the brain and soft tissue (see Fig. 3.17). Now the skull is clean and Peter turns his attentions to cleaning out the wings.



Fig. 3.17

'I will in this case take the wing on my right. Place the right hand underneath, lift the wing up as far up into the skin as possible, and by holding it tightly in that position with the finger and thumb of the left hand, a ridge of skin becomes visible, running down each side, and framing in, as it were, a little oval shaped piece of flesh, i.e., that lying between the "radius" and "ulna". The bone and the flesh of the wing is now turned towards you. Clean the flesh away from this and then devote attention to the before-named oval piece of flesh. Putting the point of the knife down on the right, scoop away (using the greatest care meanwhile) some small pieces of flesh. This by degrees reveals the top of another little bone, from which all the flesh to be seen must be scraped away; anoint this freely with the preservative, and return it to its normal position. If this process is too tedious, or not quite comprehended by the amateur – i.e., the clearing out the flesh between the radius and ulnae – the smaller bone of the two – the radius may be twisted or cut out entirely, leaving only the larger bone of the two to clear of flesh. Do the same by the other wing...' (Browne 1878: 100).

After the wing-bones have been cleaned of all flesh Peter instructs me that before the skin can be washed all the remaining connective tissue must be removed. Here Peter scrapes away the connective tissue using his thumb nails telling me he is paying particular attention to 'freeing' the feather tracts as any tissue left around them will dry and impede the movement of the feathers. He then cleans the tail stump of any remaining flesh using the scalpel blade. Once the skull, remaining bones and skin have been cleaned of all flesh, muscle and connective tissue, Peter decides that the skin can now be washed in a pastosol bath (pastosol is an industrial soap). He then fills the sink a quarter full with water, noting that the bath should consist of five parts water one part pastosol and that the water should be just warmer than tepid. Peter immerses the skin in the water and, ensuing that it is 'fully wetted', he works the

skin back over the skull so that the bird skin is back to ‘outside-out’. Peter then leaves the bird to soak for a while so that the pastosol can be given time to remove any grease or dirt from the skin and feathers (see Fig. 3.18).



Fig. 3.18

After a time he removes the bird from the bath and gives it a gentle squeeze in the direction that the feathers lie (he informs me that it is important to keep the feathers in the ‘natural alignment’) to remove excess water. He empties the pastosol bath and refills the sink with clean cold water and places the skin back in. He thoroughly rinses the skin in the cold water bath and squeezes the skin dry in the same fashion when he removes it. Next he places the skin on a bed of paper towels that he had prepared while the skin was soaking, and pats the skin dry with another set of towels (see Fig. 3.19).

To dry the skin and feathers, Peter instructs me that the skin needs to be shaken in a bag of magnesium carbonate. He places the bird in the pre-prepared bag which is a quarter full of magnesium carbonate and ties



Fig. 3.19

the bag shut to create an air pocket. He then shakes the bird around in the magnesium carbonate for about a minute: the feathers and skin should now be almost completely dry. He takes the skin out of the bag and tells me he will blow out the magnesium carbonate using the compressed air gun (see Fig. 3.20): a hairdryer can also be used for this purpose. However the most important thing to ensure when drying, according to Peter, is that the feathers are kept in their natural alignment and therefore to blow *with* rather than against the way the feathers lie. Any feathers that are out of alignment once the skin has been blown dry and free of all

magnesium carbonate can be realigned using tweezers. For this procedure, Peter parts the feather tracts and lifts out any feathers that are not lying in their natural alignment.



Fig. 3.20

Once all the feathers have been realigned, the job turns to preparing the skin as a study specimen or 'cabinet skin'. Peter says that at this point taxidermists working in the nineteenth century would have anointed the inside of the skin in a preservative solution:

'Having skinned a zoological specimen, we require, as a matter of course, to anoint the inside of the skin with some preservative, for the purpose of arresting decomposition and general decay, and also defending it from the ravages of insects for indefinite period.' (Browne 1878: 63)

The use of arsenical soap was widespread by the late nineteenth century, as discussed earlier, and the recipe for Bécœur's arsenical soap was taken to be the main authority on the subject of preservation. By the end of the nineteenth century, though, doubts were being expressed about the health risk posed by its use. Montague's Browne's *Practical Taxidermy* was the first full treatise on the craft of taxidermy since Captain Thomas Brown's *The Taxidermist's Manual*, and he was keen to express his doubts over the effectiveness of arsenical soap:

'Why use a dangerous and inefficient preservative agent, when a harmless preservative, and that quite as good a worker and dryer as arsenic, will suffice? I have invented a soap for which I claim those advantages, and as to its deterrent principle re insects, I am convinced that it is quite as good as the other, for is there any one thing known – compatible with clean looking work – that will prevent the ravages of the maggots in bird's skins? I answer, No! Let me whisper a little fact, and blow the poison theory to the winds: The real secret of success is to case your specimens up as soon as practicable, or to keep them always in full light, not poking them away in obscure corners, which the *Tineidae* and other pests love...' (Browne 1878: 68)

Browne offered his alternative recipe for a non-poisonous preservative:

‘Browne’s (non-poisonous) Preservative Soap’

Whiting or chalk, 2½lb.

Soft soap, 1lb.

Chloride of lime, 2oz.

Tincture of musk, 1oz.

Boil together the whiting and the soap with about a pint of water; then stir in the chloride of lime (previously finely pounded) while the mixture is hot; if this point is not attended to, the mixture will not work smoothly; when nearly cool, stir in the mixture of musk. This will about fill a 6lb. Australian meat tin. Caution: It is not necessary to hold the mouth over the mixture while hot, as chlorine is then rapidly evolved. This mixture has stood the test of work and time, and I therefore confidently bring it to the notice of the public as completely superseding the arsenical paste or soap for small mammals and all birds; indeed, numbers of persons, totally unknown to me, have written to me about its advantages. (Browne 1878: 68)

While borax and synthetic insecticides largely replaced acute poisons in taxidermy in the twentieth century, arsenic was still being used as a preservative agent in some museums till as late as the 1960s (Rookmaaker *et al* 2006). Peter is very much of the opinion, like Browne above, that there is no preservative that can both preserve the skin and ward off insect attack: “there is no magic potion to prevent decay or ward off insects”. He believes that all the taxidermist can do is ensure that all fleshy matter is removed from the skin, that the skin is fully dry and that, as soon as it has been set up, it is stored appropriately. Peter therefore merely sprinkles the skin with a little borax before continuing to set the Redwing skin up as a cabinet skin.

To do this he wraps a little cotton wool around the remaining leg bones (he wets the cotton wool slightly so it will stick to the bone). Then he takes a narrow splint and wraps cotton wool around the tip (again wetting it) to form a blob that will fit into the whole made in the cranium. He inserts the splint into the cranium and then proceeds to fill out the throat, crop, wings and back with cotton wool (he uses tweezers to do this). He turns his attention to filling out the main cavity to replace the actual body that was removed. He tells me that the cotton wool must not be pushed into the skin as the skin will look stretched, rather it must just be placed in. I ask Peter how he knows when the skin has been sufficiently filled, and he states that he is able to tell from the removed body and from the skin itself roughly how much cotton wool is needed. He says that he is very much working from “eye and feel”. Ingold has commented that ‘feeling lies in the coupling of movement and perception that ... is the key to skilled practice’ (Ingold 2006b: 76). Peter for example does not just ‘place’ the cotton wool, he adjusts its position as he is placing it in with the tweezers, sensing that “it feels right there, a

little bit too much there, yes that's right". This form of 'sensory-correction' is the hallmark of skilled practice, according to Ingold, as it depends upon the multisensory coupling of perception and action that is developed through many years of past practice which establishes the understanding, dexterity and control required to work from "eye and feel" (Ibid). This multisensory coupling becomes most apparent when a practitioner is finishing a job, because, much like at the start, they must focus on the finer details of the work. 'Finishing off' is therefore another critical moment in the practice, as Peter must judge the moment when to stop filling the bird, as too little would result in the skin sagging and too much would result in stretching the skin and the skin would look over-stuffed. While it is commonly supposed that an artefact is completed 'when the material outcome precisely matches the maker's initial intension', in practice it is not entirely or solely the image of the end product that governs the phase of finishing off (Ingold 2006b: 69). As I have already highlighted practice is processional in nature, so by the time the finishing phase is reached 'any deviations from the initial plan will have been either accepted or corrected' and therefore any initial umbrella plan for the project has already dimmed in the practitioner's mind. In practice the practitioner's perspective also moves from the umbrella plan to a narrow focus on the precise details of what is to hand – in this case the filling of the skin. Ingold therefore argues that 'the end of the line is approached as an asymptote: the closer I come to it the gentler and more delicate my strokes, and the more my attention is focused on the finishing point, until eventually, the free end comes free in my hand' (Ibid: 70). While Ingold is commenting here on his actions finishing sawing a plank of wood, the same can be said of Peter's practice.

Once Peter is satisfied that he has filled the skin sufficiently, he begins delicately to sew up the main cavity using a fine needle and cotton thread (see Fig. 3.21). He tells me he is using an under stitch technique so the stitching is less visible on the outside of the skin. He makes slight adjustments as he moves from one side of the cut to the other, indicating that he is leaving the stitching loose so that he can pull the skin evenly together without any bumps or capturing any feathers when he reaches the end of the cut (see Fig. 3.22). Peter is again working from eye and feel, adjusting each time he places a stitch on each side and pulling the thread slightly tighter after each stitch to see if he is stitching and moving evenly up the cut. While Peter's movements when stitching are 'in tune', they are not exact repetitions, and this is in line with Henri Lefebvre's understanding of rhythmicity. Rhythmicity for Lefebvre implies, not just repetition but '*differences within repetition*' (Lefebvre 2004: 90);



Fig. 3.21



Fig. 3.22

and it is precisely because no two stitches are the same that Peter's movements can be called rhythmic rather than mechanical. Or, as Ingold has it, 'fluent performance is rhythmic only because imperfections in the system call for continual correction' (Ingold 2006b: 77). Ingold makes this point in order to counter the widespread misapprehension that the training of the body through repetitive movement leads to the progressive loss of concentration. Rather than awareness retreating and movement flowing involuntarily, Ingold argues to the contrary:

'the skilled handling of tools is anything but automatic, but is rather rhythmically responsive to ever changing environmental conditions. In this responsiveness there lies a form of awareness that does not so much retreat as grow in intensity with the fluency of action. This is not the awareness of a mind that holds itself aloof from the messy, hands-on business of work. It is rather immanent in practical, perceptual activity, reaching out into its surroundings along multiple pathways of sensory participation' (Ingold 2006b: 77).

Peter's fluency of performance ensures that, as he pulls the stitching tight, the two sides meet flush thus emphasising the point that the skilled handling of tools is anything but automatic.

'Neatly sew up the skin with fine needle and thread by an under stitch on the edges of the skin, drawing it tight only after two or three stitches; and thus proceed until the bottom is reached, avoiding the common fault of sewing the feathers in with the stitches.' (Browne 1878: 101)

Here we see that Peter's movements are also 'in tune' with that of Browne working over a hundred years previously. By stitching together sections of Browne's instruction with Peter's practice, together my aim has been to show that, while there are slight differences (e.g. Browne sews his skin from top to bottom), their performances are basically 'in rhythm'. Ingold argues that rhythmicity in practice is the result not only of a life-history of past practice but life-histories of past practice: '[e]very use of a tool, in short, is a remembering of how to use it, that at once picks up the strands of past practice and carries them forward into current contexts' (Ingold 2006b: 72). The skilled practitioner, according to Ingold, can therefore be regarded as a storyteller re-enacting the rhythm of a practice that has developed over years of repetition which have been passed on from one practitioner to the next. Yet as already noted, rhythmicity implies not just repetition but differences within repetition as 'imperfections in the system call for continual correction' as a practice develops and is passed on (Ibid: 77). Therefore while there are differences in Browne's and Peter's performances, taking place over a hundred years apart, they can still be said to be 'in tune'. The fact that Peter was an apprentice at the Leister Museum (where Montague Browne worked) for two years, and

learned to preserve skins there, shows that, although they never met, the paths of their practice crossed so that their practice can be said to *resonate*.

After the final double stitch Peter then cuts the splint (which he left a gap for it to stick out of) just shy of the tail feathers. He then picks up the skin and inspects for any feathers out of place, paying particular attention to realigning the wing feathers at the back (see Fig. 3.23). Peter then fashions a ‘poke’ for the skin out of cardboard and places the skin inside it (this ensures that the bird keeps its shape when drying). He then puts the skin on a



Fig. 3.23

drying tray where he says he will leave it for 4-5 days before it goes to the study collection (see Fig. 4.24). Peter then proceeds to clean and replace all of the tools that he has been using: although the present task has been completed, ‘this placement of tools and materials is already part of the formation of the umbrella plan for the next operation. Putting things away in the right places is a way of getting ready. Thus in the use of tools, every ending is a new beginning’ (Ingold 2006b: 70).

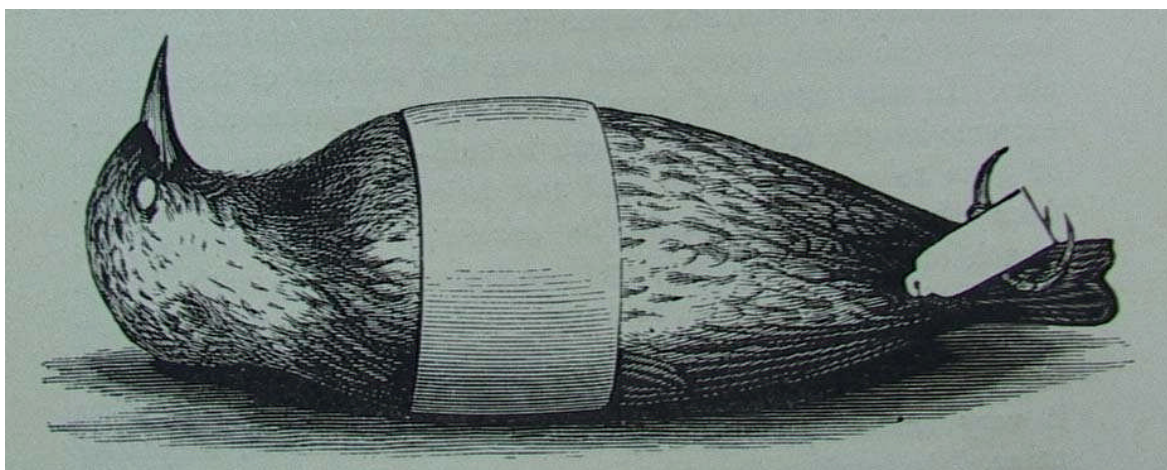


Fig. 3.24 Browne’s starling properly made into a skin with label attached (Browne 1878: 50)

While the setting-up of cabinet skins for scientific collections constituted the work of taxidermists in the eighteenth-century (and still constitute much of the work done by present-day museum taxidermists) as the museum moved from ‘storehouse to showcase’ (Star 1992) in the nineteenth-century the main aim of taxidermy became to reproduce the natural forms of animals for natural history display. The next section will explore this transition and the accompanying innovations it required from the taxidermist.

Taxidermy as emerging artistic practice

“Before decay’s effacing fingers have swept the lines where beauty lingers”
(Browne 1898: 213)

Replacement techniques

After the introduction of Bécoeur’s arsenical soap and the Muséum’s preparation methods to Britain, taxidermists were no longer consumed with the issue of brute preservation. From the mid-nineteenth-century onwards museum taxidermy was technically focused on the advancement of display techniques, and so the attentions of taxidermists turned from preservation to the representation of form (Morris 1993). The loose-stuffed technique was deemed inadequate for this purpose as, no matter how well-stuffed was a specimen, there was no supporting framework for the specimen to be displayed in a representative pose. The technique was therefore reserved for the setting up of study skins only: and, as is shown by the section above this technique changed little in over a century. The alternative technique of making a solid replacement body was recognised as the only method that could represent the correct form of an animal, since the removed body could be modelled. Traditionally this meant creating an ovoid mass of coarse stuffing material (such as straw, wood wool or tow) which was then bound with cotton to form a tight body and inserted into the skin (see Fig. 3.25). Supporting wires would then be fixed into the body and used to create a replacement skeletal structure (these wires would often be be joined to any clean bones left in the skin) (see Fig. 3.26). This is known as the ‘bind-up’ technique.

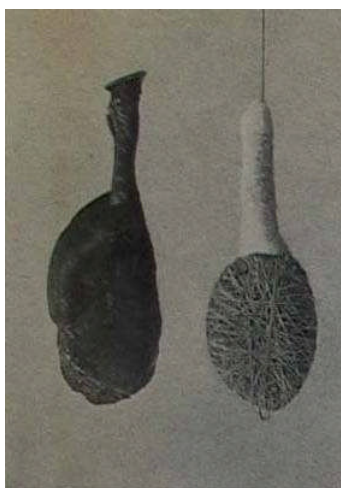


Fig. 3.25 A natural body and artificial one (Rowley 1925:77)

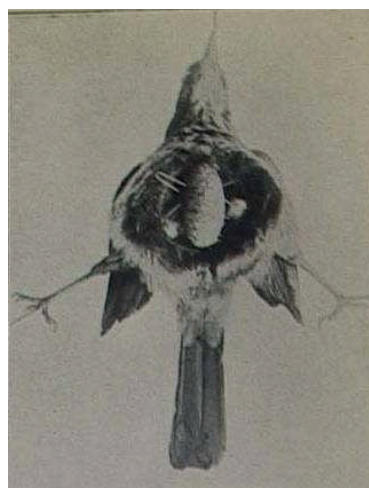


Fig. 3.26 Coupling the legs to the body (Rowley 1925: 77)

However, this method often resulted in ‘over-padded, barrel-chested birds’ often with ‘stretched necks’ (Morris 2003: 243). You can see from Fig. 4.25 that, although this bind-up bird body was made in the late nineteenth century, it still fails accurately to reflect the size and shape of the actual bird body (particularly the breast portion) and the elongated neck portion would have ensured a stretched neck. The problem, according to Browne (1878: 15), was that taxidermists working in the early half of the nineteenth century, what he terms as ‘the old wooden school of taxidermy’, merely attempted to produce a representative form for the purpose of classificatory displays which resulted in ‘stiff, gaunt, erect, and angular’ specimens. Farber records, for example, that the ornithological collections on display at the British Museum in the early part of the nineteenth century ‘totally failed to simulate birds in their natural states’ (Farber 1977: 555). This was largely due to the fact that for preparators working at that time simply preserving the bird for others to see was a notable success.

Expectations were raised, though, after the Great Exhibition in 1851. Pat Morris explains that the Great Exhibition was ‘catalytic’ in the development of more realistic representations of animals in taxidermy as the exhibition offered practitioners from across Europe the opportunity of exhibiting their very finest work (Morris 1993: 244). Montague Browne, in the prefatory remarks of his 1878 manual, acknowledges that before the Great Exhibition French and German taxidermists were considered to be far more skilled in the artistic setting up of animals, with their methods being well in advance of those practised in Britain. The display of their more technically ambitious and artistically accomplished mounts duly ‘gave considerable impetus for the more correct and artistic delineation of animals’ in Britain (Browne 1878: 15). There were also several British taxidermists who exhibited, most notably John Hancock of the Natural History Museum of Newcastle upon Tyne, whose specimens were also very accomplished in terms of their composition and execution. A notable ornithologist and falconer, Hancock sought to impart his knowledge and understanding of bird behaviour into his mounts by depicting them ‘in action’ (Morris 2003: 245). The centre piece of Hancock’s exhibition was a gyrfalcon which he depicted ‘grappling with a heron’ among a mass of modelled lily pads, and another gyrfalcon was presented, this time depicted pulling at its prey, a red grouse. Hancock’s exhibited specimens were therefore far superior to most of the British taxidermy on display, and one of the official Exhibition judges went so far as to comment that Hancock’s specimens ‘... will go far towards raising the art of taxidermy to a level with other arts which have hitherto held higher pretensions’ (Anon. 1851, in Morris 1993: 245). The realism and drama achieved by both the French and German taxidermists, and by Hancock, emphasised the craft’s potential beyond its recognised practical value as a preservation

technique (for the amassing of study collections) to British practitioners and, more importantly, raised the expectations of the general public.

Demand for more engaging and dynamic displays after the Great Exhibition saw the natural history museum's function change from scientific storehouse to public showcase (Star 1992, Poliquin 2008). The rigid representative forms that were made by the 'old wooden school of taxidermy' were therefore in need of replacement as action poses were expected (Browne 1878: 15). The job of the taxidermist was no longer simply about preserving the dead, as the aim became 'to reproduce the forms, attitudes and expression of animals as they appear in life' (Davie 1894: ii). The Leicester Museum, although outside of London, was particularly innovative in terms of its natural history display in this period and this was largely down to head taxidermist Montague Browne's innovations in modelling techniques. Instead of the old method of adapting the 'loosed-stuffed' method for display (i.e. the 'bind-up'), Browne would model a body using the skeleton or a replacement wood and metal structure as a skeletal base on to which he would model flesh and muscles using clay. This worked not only to give greater realism in the representation of animal form, but also opened up the possibility of articulating animals in more dynamic poses. Browne nonetheless cautioned that his developed modelling techniques required a thorough knowledge of anatomy as well as animal behaviour, and he even reserved a separate chapter of his 1878 *Practical Taxidermy* manual to explain the processes of modelling to be learned, 'to avoid, at the outset, confusing the learner by asking him to attempt too much' (Browne 1878: 151). He set out the basis upon which a competent practitioner can proceed in becoming what he termed a 'zoological artist':

'First, then, let him take lessons in drawing, pinning himself steadily to copying pictures by the best masters of zoological subjects... let him copy animals from nature; and if he lives near London, so much the better, there is the "Zoo" for him to study in. Indeed it is a marvel to me that, with the museums and the Zoological gardens surrounding them, so few London taxidermists attain even a respectable proficiency in the correct delineation of animal forms. The pupil being well grounded in drawing, will have observed many points in animal anatomy not hitherto suspected by him, and will naturally wish to know the why and wherefore of the swellings and depressions occurring in his subjects. To this end he must study a little simple anatomy of bones and muscles – their objects and meaning in different animals. The last stage is the reproduction, by modelling in clay of the various parts of animals, the head of course in the instance of large mammals, being looked upon as the chief *motif* in composition. To do all this requires time and considerable perseverance.' (Browne 1878: 151-2)

While Peter Summers never described himself as a ‘zoological artist’, he echoes Browne’s sentiments when explaining that, while it is important to gain an appreciation of animals in life through observation, it is just as important for the taxidermist to develop an appreciation of their anatomical composition. He articulates this idea most keenly whilst skinning a hawfinch:

P: This is what I call a heavy-duty bird... because it’s so powerful [talking about the Hawfinch].



Fig. 3.27

M: When do you think you gain a greater understanding of the bird and its movement, when you’re watching it...



Fig. 3.28

P: No, when you’re actually skinning it like this... well you can see from the fact that it has this massive bill and big strong pectoral muscles that although it’s small it’s still a powerful bird... I mean you see that in life but it really comes through when you get under the skin so to speak...

Here Peter conveys that a taxidermist is required to have both an intimate knowledge of the animal in life (i.e. familiarity with its characteristics and behaviour) but also in death (i.e. its material/anatomical composition) if they are to reproduce it faithfully when mounting. This point is also made by Browne in his 1898 follow-up to *Practical Taxidermy* (1878), *Artistic and Scientific Taxidermy and Modelling*. Here he argued that study of ‘the normal movements of the articulations of the skeleton and the *ligaments* that control them should receive the most careful consideration’, and that ‘no opportunity should be lost to studying such matters using animal cadavers’ (Browne 1898: 9). Browne therefore emphasised, much like Peter does above, that an understanding of an animal’s movement and postures can be more readily developed by studying ‘comparative morphology’ using cadavers (Ibid). Browne still cautioned that the practitioner remember ‘there are possible movements that the skeletons, when cleaned and dried, is capable of making, which, in life, become impossible from the operation of muscles and tendons’. Thus what was also needed here induced a full and thorough knowledge of ‘muscles extended; muscles contracted; muscles at rest; contours formed by normal deposit of adipose tissue, contours formed by parts of the skeleton that are merely subcutaneous; contours formed by the presence of glands of all kinds, of sesamoidal bones, cartilages, and every other structure that may in anyway affect the normal contour and thus postures of an animal’ (Browne 1898: 9). Peter also states that the foreshortening and ‘stiffening’ of muscles in death must always be remembered when studying an animal’s material composition.

Peter’s great skill as a taxidermist is underlined when he makes replacement body parts when setting-up specimens. While many contemporary taxidermists use ready-made manikins, Peter insists, like Browne, on making his own replacement parts so that he can more faithfully reproduce the unique form of the once living animal from which the skin is taken. To do so, Peter uses discarded body parts as referents from which he then makes accurate replacement parts. He models replacement bodies using traditional binding techniques (see Browne 1898 pages 183-4) or by carving forms out of basal wood for birds and small mammals (see Browne 1898 pages 184-185) and for larger mammals he employs more elaborate casting and modelling techniques (see Browne 1898 pages 128-140), – all these processes, although with slight adjustments, closely emulate Browne’s explanations. When working on a making a replacement body out of basal wood for a rather large eagle owl³⁶ Peter demonstrates that, far from discarding the body, he would use it a vital referent for making the replacement body:

³⁶ ‘Igor’ was a female eagle owl that had been donated by a zoo and Peter informed me that many animals kept in captivity had a lot of deposited subcutaneous fat as they did not get the same amount of exercise as wild specimens.

P: Now in life the bird it has a curved back... it has a curved back like so [bends his own back to mimic the position]... now when you take the body out of a bird and put it on the deck it straightens up [he straightens up again emphasise the point]... you've got to take into consideration the foreshortening of the back... I usually just lift the pelvis up a bit and mark on where the last digit of the vertebrae is...



Fig. 3.29

M: How do you know what its natural body shape would have been?



Fig. 3.30

P: It's understanding the curvature of the muscles [indicates to pectoral muscles and lifts them up off the body to show their naturally curved position] ...



Fig. 3.31

... and experience I suppose... this is not a very good example of showing the anatomy... apart from round its shoulders because it's all fat...

M: Are you going to keep the fat in the eventual mount, or make it slimmer?

P: No I want to utilise... I want to recreate the weight of this bird and a lot of the weight of this bird is not just in its structure but in the subcutaneous fat.



Fig. 3.32

M: So you're recreating this individual bird not just one to represent the species?

P: Yeah, that's right.

Peter also points out how 'sag' in death must be taken into account when constructing an accurate replacement body, and what is also emphasised is his involvement with the individuality of a specimen. Taxidermy has often been criticised for transforming the individual animal into an example specimen standing in for a whole species: 'each animal becomes an example, a type, a token, rather than a unique individual' (Marvin 2006: 163). Peter's attempts to re-create the 'weight' of this particular eagle owl demonstrate his desire as

a craftsman to reproduce faithfully the unique form of this particular eagle owl, rather than merely reproduce the body shape of a 'standard' eagle owl.

Peter is keen to stress that his decision not to use standardised manikin models stems from his belief that there is “no such thing as a standard”, and that each specimen must be measured so that the replacement body comfortably fits in the skin rather than make a skin fit over a manikin which may be too big or small. Montague Browne, writing over a century before Peter, similarly stressed that the removed body must always be used, where possible, as a reference to make accurate replacement parts. He also described in *Artistic and Scientific Taxidermy and Modelling* (1898) how, in order to measure the removed body accurately, ‘sag’ in death must be accounted for and that, to compensate, the lungs may be inflated in certain cases: ‘... the lungs may be inflated, in the case of small mammals with the mouth, but in a larger one it is best to fix a length of india-rubber tubing to the pipe and inflate with bellows’ (Browne 1898: 128). Following this, and again echoing Peter’s actions, Browne advised that the body to be measured should not be placed flat on the counter, as this has ‘the obvious disadvantage of presenting a flat surface, such that would appear on a basso-relievo, the body being flat, with no curves on the upper and under surface’ (Ibid).

Peter articulates this point again when carving a replacement body for another redwing specimen. Peter marks the shape of the body onto a piece of balsa wood using the body itself rather than measurements. Instead of letting the body flatten against the wood, he lifts up the pectoral muscles of the specimen (as these do not lie flat to the body in life) before marking out the size of the ‘dorsal view’ onto the wood (Fig. 3.33). Browne, instructing on the setting up of a pigeon, similarly reminded his readers to remember that ‘the body is not quite so flat upon the breast in life’ (Browne 1898: 186). Peter demonstrates again that he is compensating for the body’s loss of ‘natural form’ as, when marking out the length of the ‘ventral view’ (Fig. 3.34), he lifts up the tail end to account for the curve of the back and the same for the neck (like with the eagle owl above) (Ibid: 187). Peter then roughly carves out the marked shape using a cutting-saw before carving out the body shape in more detail using a scalpel blade (Figs 3.35 & 3.36). What is remarkable about this procedure is that Peter never once measured the body using measuring callipers; rather Peter again confesses that he prefers to work from “eye and feel”.

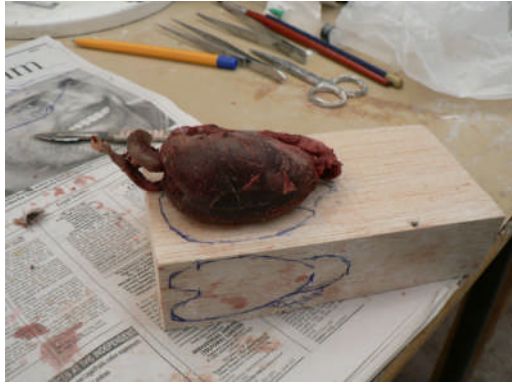


Fig. 3.33 'Dorsal view'



Fig. 3.34 'Ventral view'



Fig. 3.35 'Carving body with cutting-saw'



Fig. 3.36 'Roughly carved body'

Peter's ability to carve an almost exact replica body by working from "eye and feel" alone demonstrates one of the hallmarks of skilled practice – the intimate coupling of perception and action. The essence of skilled practice, according to Ingold, lies in the craftsperson's ability for "sensory correction", that is their ability to adjust their movements/actions to a task as it unfolds (Ingold 2006b 76). A fluent performance for Ingold has to be 'felt', and 'feeling' lies in the coupling of movement and perception. Thus, while Peter carves the balsa wood body with the scalpel, he is constantly referring visually back to the removed body, and 'feel' with the scalpel if he is producing the right shape, making continual subtle adjustments with the depth and force of the blade to shave off the right amount. This observation also re-emphasises the point made earlier that 'the skilled handling of tools is anything but automatic' (Ingold 2006b: 77).

Reassembly – reanimation

Once a replacement body has been made, the next stage in the setting-up of a specimen for display is to fit the skin over the replacement body and thus begin the reassembly. Put crudely

the process of taxidermy is one of ‘dismemberment and rearticulation’ (Desmond 2002: 161). However, as Browne in the preface to his 1878 manual (*Practical Taxidermy*) stressed, taxidermy requires more than just the rearticulation of form:

‘it is quite true that this art – which has for its end aim the better delineation of character – is not teachable unless the pupil is well grounded in the anatomy, and also is a clever draftsman and modeller – in fine, an artist! – with all an artist’s perception of beauty of line and of form.’ (Browne 1878: 151)

Here Browne conveyed that, to remove a skin from a body and rearrange it in ‘life-like’ form, it takes more than just the accurate representation of form through the making of accurate replacement parts, since a sense of the animal’s ‘character’ must also be imputed into the mount through artistic practices of setting-up. Furthermore, by the time Browne was writing his second book *Artistic and Scientific Taxidermy and Modelling* in 1898, the process of reassembly was becoming one of ‘reanimation’, as a chief goal for aspiring ‘artisan’ taxidermists (once they had mastered the basics of skinning and making replacement bodies) was to translate back into the skin the ‘essence’ of the once living creature they wished to represent (Star 1992: 262). The impetus for this shift from purely scientific representation to artistic modelling and delineation of character was influenced in large part by an innovative ‘new school’ of American museum taxidermy.

American museum taxidermy is generally considered to be the most innovative in terms of taxidermy methods for museum display towards the end of the nineteenth century (Haraway 1989; Star 1992; Shell 2004). Much like in Britain, development in methods coincided with the increased demand for more dynamic natural history displays. Susan Leigh Star explains how demand for dynamic displays meant that taxidermists were being employed in record numbers by large museums and institutions of natural history to develop and advance display techniques (Star 1992). With larger budgets and teams of employed practitioners, American taxidermy came to be recognised as being at the cutting-edge of museum taxidermy design and construction. For example, John Rowley, chief of the Department of Taxidermy at the American Museum of Natural History, New York, had ample time and a large budget to produce the finest of work which he alluded to in the preface of his 1898 manual *The Art of Taxidermy*:

‘Some of the methods described in the following pages may seem to involve considerable time and expense. Let it be said, in answer to this, “if a thing is worth doing, it is worth doing well”. I should advise the preparator to consider, before starting to mount a specimen for exhibition, whether or not the material in hand warrants it; and should he decide in favour of preparing the specimen – which will doubtless happen if he be imbued with the proper degree of energy and

enthusiasm – then let him give the specimen all the time it demands. When we consider that an experienced modeller may take months to prepare one model, why should an ambitious taxidermist feel at all discouraged at the expenditure of a few weeks upon a large specimen?’ (Rowley 1898: VI)

This passage demonstrates that Rowley and the other taxidermists at the ‘American Museum’ were used to working with the finest available tools, materials and specimens, and also with having ample time to produce the finest mounts. Rowley also had some of the best taxidermists in the country working for him, including Carl Akeley, who is considered by many to have been the finest taxidermist working at that time. At the museum under Rowley, Akeley ‘worked out his manikin method, clay modelling, plaster casting and vegetation modelling techniques’ to produce large realistic dioramas of animals in their native habitats (Haraway 1989: 39). The invention of the diorama has largely been attributed to Akeley and the other taxidermists working at the American Museum, as they were the first taxidermists to present representations of animal groups in their reconstructed natural habitats³⁷ (see Haraway 1989; Star 1992; Desmond 2002; Shell 2004). Although designed and built by teams of people, each with their own specialism (this included landscape and ground-work artists), the dioramas were held together by Akeley’s ruling artistic vision, who saw the diorama as ‘a “recreation” of nature based on the principles of organic form’ (Ibid: 40). Taxidermy, to Akeley and the American Museum of Natural History, was an attempt, not just to arrest processes of decay, but to suspend time itself and present an unblemished vision of nature in perfection (Haraway 1989: 42).

As such, Akeley and his cohorts were committed to modelling ‘life-like’ representations of nature. This guiding philosophy went far beyond the mere representation of form, as it required, according to Oliver Davie (a taxidermist who had worked with Akeley at the American Museum), that ‘every detail of the body be perfectly wrought’ (Davie 1883: 67). To achieve this end, Akeley insisted that where possible exact replica bodies be made by making papier mache casts from the original skinned cadavers. To do this the skinned body (in this instance a tiger³⁸) with inflated lungs would be laid out on a supporting board in the required attitude. To achieve this, the carcass would be propped and separated between the rib cage to

³⁷ Montague Browne explains that British displays, although posing animal together and depicting some kind of naturalistic behaviour, did not go as far as the ‘American Museum’ did to set them within a representation of their ‘natural habitat’ (Browne 1898). Swedish museums, as Karen Wonders demonstrates, were however developing diorama displays on a similarly large scale at the same time (see Wonders 1993, 2003)

³⁸ The tiger called ‘Tippoo’ was bought by the museum from Bostock and Wombwell’s travelling menagerie in 1885 for a ‘nominal sum’ after it had been killed by another tiger with which it shared a cage (Browne 1896: 122).

re-produce the lost curves, and then the legs would be separated and propped into position in a similar fashion so that the carcass would be 'fixed' in the desired attitude (see Fig. 3.37).³⁹

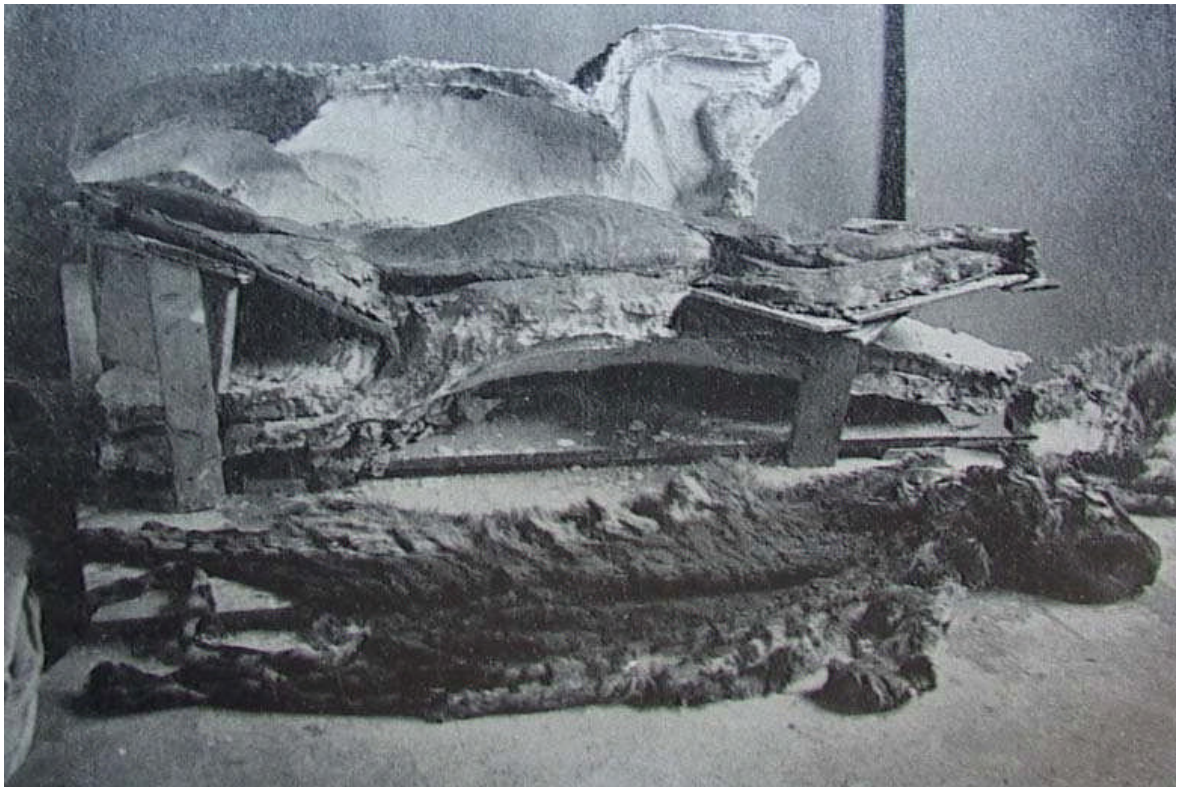


Fig. 3.37
'Casting from the body of a tiger in Plaster of Paris' (Browne 1896: 131)

The propped body would then be covered by a thickness of two inches in plaster and left overnight to dry. The next morning the cast would be carefully peeled off the body and the process would be repeated for the other side. Four separate inside limb-moulds would also be made.

³⁹ Browne states that the arrangement of the tiger's carcass and the blocking of the supports took two of his workmen nearly a day (Browne 1898: 129).

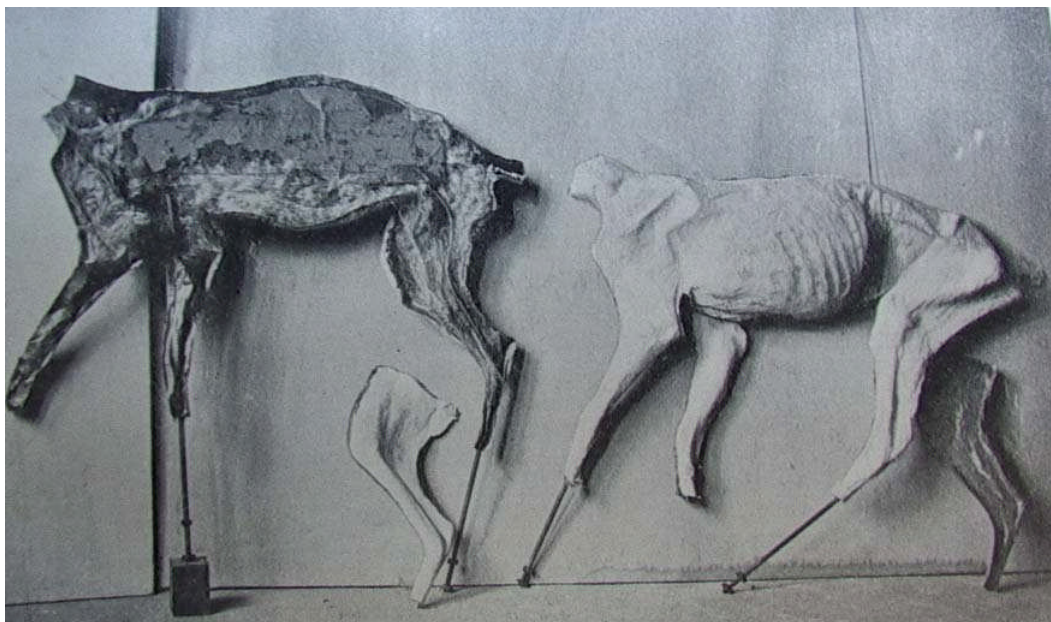


Fig. 3.38
'Half models (in paper mache) of a tiger's body' (Browne 1896: 135)

These moulds would then be coated in a mixture of lard and linseed oil in equal parts before being pasted with papier mache (see Fig. 3.38). These would be left to dry for a day before being carefully lifted out so as to come away in one piece. The separate pieces would be pieced together (the joins being smoothed over with more papier mache) before which supporting wires would have been inserted into the leg portions (see Fig. 3.39). The result was be a model 'with every muscle and all the contours beautifully moulded' (Browne: 1898: 132).⁴⁰

⁴⁰ The taxidermists at the American Museum are attributed with improving the standard of mammal taxidermy through their innovative use of manikins and elaborate dioramas. The proficiency of mammal taxidermy had lagged behind avian mounts well into the nineteenth century as mammals with their short hair and obvious musculature were significantly more difficult to prepare. By comparison any deformities in mounted birds could be hidden by the feathers. Early mammal taxidermy involved building animals up from the barest internal armature by stuffing skins with straw, paper, tow, or some other soft material. Early taxidermied mammals still on display in natural history museums are often cracked, the split skin revealing the creatures' straw underpinnings. Certainly skins were bulked up, but the method only allowed the most rudimentary suggestion of muscles and tension. The worst problem was how skins tightened as they dried. Any hollows or wrinkles created to mimic natural skin undulations became flat and taut like a drum. This shrinking was particularly a problem with thin skinned animals such as lions or antelopes: shaggy fur or woolly coats hide innumerable problems. But even with hairy beasts, such early methods of "stuffing" could never achieve a true sense of anatomical correctness and vigour.

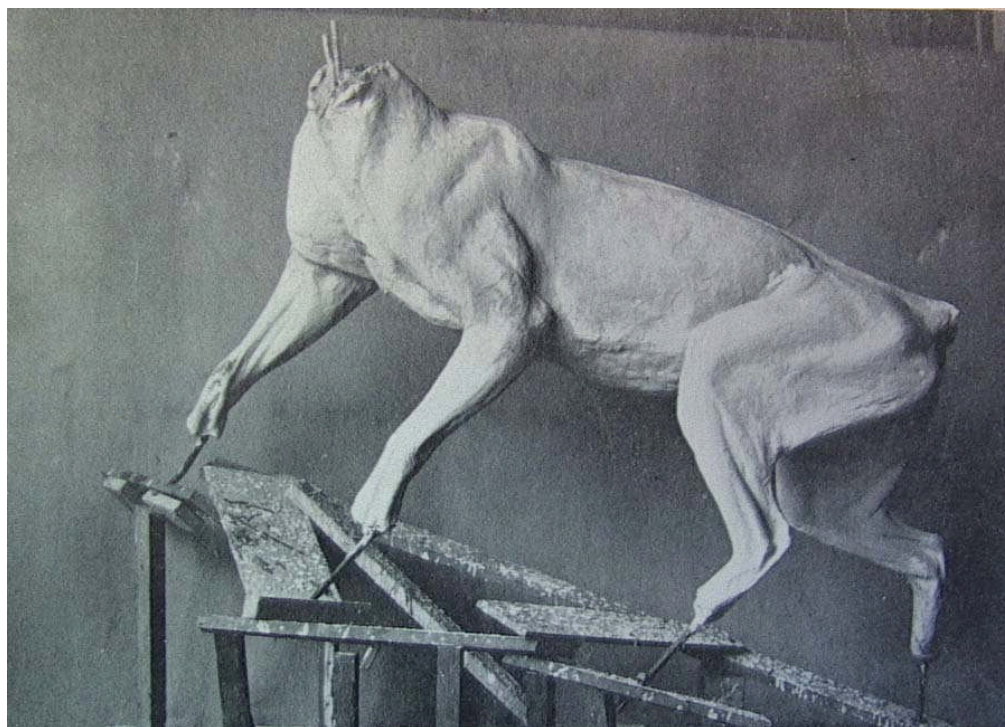


Fig. 3.39
'Model in paper of the headless body of a tiger' (Browne 1896: 137)

Akeley's philosophy of perfectionism was taken to its extreme when in 1926 he arranged the 'African Hall Expedition of the American Museum of Natural History' (Akeley 1929). Akeley, sponsored by the likes of Theodore Roosevelt, travelled to Kenya in order to 'procure' the finest and freshest specimens for his conceived taxidermy master-piece 'African Hall' (see Fig. 3.41). In making the habitat groups for 'African Hall', Akeley sought to re-create and preserve for all time the 'last vanishing wild of Africa' (Osborne, writing the forward of Akeley 1929). The irony of this was that it required the death of several hundred animals. Furthermore, although Akeley feared that the gorilla would be driven to extinction, it did not stop him killing 'every ape they had seen since arriving' as the gorilla group was to be the centre-piece of the hall and therefore only 'perfect specimens' would do (Haraway 1989: 33). Akeley, or more likely his party attendants⁴¹, then set about skinning and making death masks (see Fig. 3.40) and casts of the bodies chosen to be specimens for the 'African Hall' groups whilst still in the field. This ensured that they had light-weight accurate casts of the original bodies and faces that were easy to transport back to the museum. The 'death masks' were considered to be especially important for the taxidermist, and therefore Akeley's vision, because, 'if the face and eyes be poorly finished, the chief beauty of the specimen is lacking: the life expression is gone' (Davie 1894: 67).⁴²

⁴¹ The skinning of a large animal in the field could employ 50 attendants for several hours (Haraway 1989: 39).

⁴² Of course, attempting to realise the 'life expression' from a death mask is another great irony of taxidermy.

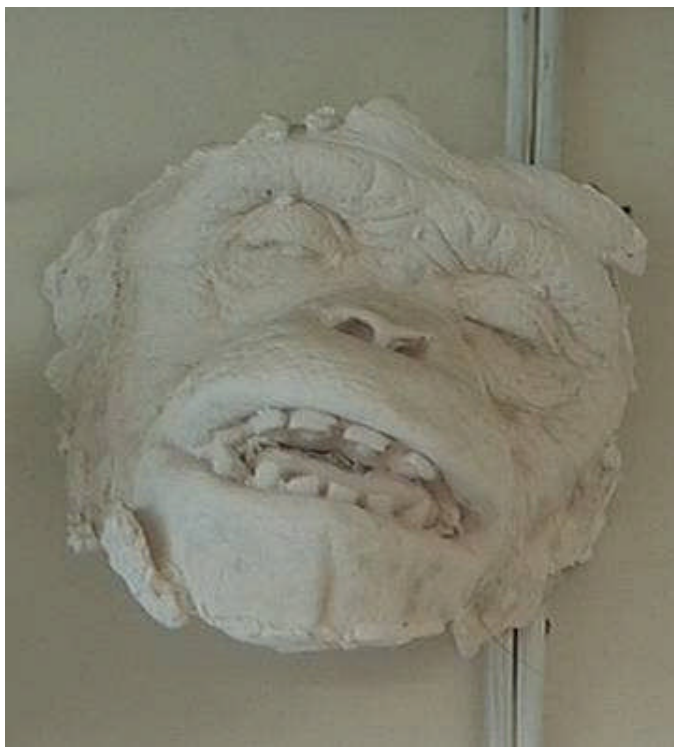


Fig. 3.40 A death mask on the wall of Peter's workshop

Thus with preservation accomplished, the task of 're-creation' began. Over forty men of various specialisms (ranging from anatomists to carpenters, leaf modellers to background artists) were employed to re-create in minute detail Akeley's designs. However, although Akeley's vision of a fixed harmonious African wild was achieved through the diorama displays, they also inadvertently initiated the taxidermists' decline (in America at least). As Haraway so aptly put, it Akeley's taxidermy was an organised craft for elucidating an 'unambiguous experience of organic perfection' and once this was achieved it had 'completed its job' (Haraway 1989: 38). Once the dioramas had been completed in the large institutions, it meant that, the taxidermists and associated crafts people were out of jobs. Star explains that while taxidermy had always oscillated between art and science throughout the nineteenth century, the emerging theoretical commitment to artistic-realism in the early twentieth century meant that it was ultimately delegitimated as a tool of science, which worked to diminish the status of the taxidermist still further (Star 1992: 281, see also Wonders 1993).⁴³ Moreover, an increasingly conservation-conscious museum public was unsettled by the craft's association with killing practices, and began to question the legitimacy of even having taxidermy on display in museums. Thus displays intended to be unambiguous became instead broadly polysemic. For example, as Haraway has argued, Akeley's habitat groups rather than

⁴³ Star recognises that this was symptomatic of a much larger phenomenon happening at the time: 'in some ways modern science can be seen as the push to erase individual, craft skill from the scientific workplace, to ensure that no idiosyncratic local, tacit, or personal knowledge leaks into the product' (Star 1992: 275). This point will be returned to in the conclusion.

presenting ‘peepholes into the jungle’ as Akeley intended, instead ‘literally lock[ed] in stone one historical moment’s way of seeing’, reflecting the ‘Teddy Bear patriarchy’ of early twentieth-century United States (Haraway 1989: 21, 42). Taxidermists were thus accused with supplying the public ‘with a neat world devoid of smells, and toil, of commercialism and dirty politics’ and that, consequently, taxidermy had ‘cleaned up the mess of colonialism, patriarchy and violence against nature’ (Star 1992: 281).



Fig. 3.41 Gorilla diorama from Akeley’s African Hall

This may be the story of American museum taxidermy, however my own follows that of British museum taxidermy and the fate of the British taxidermist was quite different as the next section will detail.

The taxidermist as bricoleur

While, as Browne noted, British taxidermists were advancing techniques to achieve ‘the more correct and artistic delineation of animals’ from the mid-late nineteenth-century, the philosophy of unambiguous perfectionism that guided American taxidermy was regarded as overly ambitious for British practitioners (Browne 1898: 15). Browne confessed in his 1896 manual that the ideal of perfectionism was rarely achieved in practice in Britain, even in his own museum:

‘One word of caution is necessary: in these pages will frequently appear references to work executed in the Leicester Museum; it must not be supposed, however, that all is excellent or approaching perfection, for there is a great quantity of taxidermic work which is very defective, and the want of courage is often regretted which allowed these old and ill-mounted specimens to be retained, and to be patched up instead of burned; fortunately, however, as fresh specimens are procured, they replace those which are unsatisfactory.’ (Browne 1898: 18)

Unlike the newer American Museums, many British museums had stock piles of old (often badly ‘stuffed’) dilapidated specimens dating back to the seventeenth century which, for scientific and curatorial reasons, were difficult to dispose of.⁴⁴ British museums, when sourcing replacement specimens were also hugely dependent on donations of skins and whole cadavers from scientific and trophy collectors and zoos and menageries (Morris 1993). Moreover, they did not have the budgets to arrange exclusive ‘collection expeditions’ like the American museums, sponsored by wealthy donors. Thus, even when replacements were sourced, they most commonly arrived in the form of preserved skins (though sometimes with the accompanying skull and some other skeletal parts) and were often in dubious states of repair and preservation. This meant that not only was there no prospect of casting the original cadaver, the taxidermist would also have very little to go on when recreating the anatomical composition and muscular parts. Browne revealed in his aptly named *Practical Taxidermy* (1876: 167) that the ‘mounting of skins from “flat”, when no body or skeleton is forthcoming’, can only be ‘practiced by the masters of the art, who know by experience the various positions assumed by their subjects when in a state of Nature’.

To mount a skin from flat, the first problem to overcome, according to Browne, was to thin and soften the skin into a malleable state as, when sent from abroad by collectors, they often arrived in a state of ‘hardened leather’ (Browne 1878: 200). Browne noted that bird skins were usually quite easily ‘relaxed’ by immersing them in warm water and soaking for a time (Ibid). Larger mammal skins were more time-consuming, however, and required that the skins be soaked for twenty-four hours several times over in a vat of liquid (‘for everyone one gallon of water add one pound alum and one pound salt’) the skins being removed at the end of each twenty-four hour interval to be scraped of all hard upper flesh and dried in blood ‘which locks up as it were the true skin, and which must be got at before the pelt is to become at all flexible’ (Ibid: 194). Browne advised that for particularly leathery hides, like the sun-dried skins of tigers and leopards sent from India, it would be ‘necessary to fix them over a sloping board or on the edge of a table, and to use a spoke-shave or currier’s thinning knife, to thin them down- perhaps an eighth of an inch all over – then tear up the fibre with a scraper’ (Ibid – see Fig. 3.42).

⁴⁴ The Director of the Natural History Museum, London commented in 1881 that “I cannot refrain from saying a word upon the sadly-neglected art of taxidermy, which continues to fill the cases of most of our museums with wretched and repulsive caricatures of mammals and birds, out of all natural proportions, shrunken here and bloated there, and in attitudes absolutely impossible for the creatures to have assumed while alive.” (quoted by Poliquin 2008: 124).

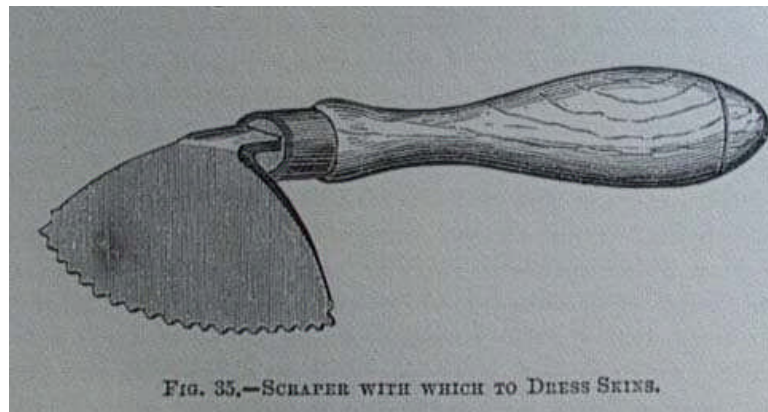


Fig. 3.42 'Scraper with which to dress skins' (Browne 1876: 164)

If skins were still not malleable by this point, Browne confided that preparators would often have to 'knead lard into the skins by the medium of their feet and hands' to soften further the skin and, as he himself acknowledged, this was 'not a clean operation' (Ibid: 195). Once the skin had been relaxed, its size would then determine the size of the replacement model. Browne explained that he would shape the skin in the position required for the mount on brown paper laid out on his studio floor, and then trace the shape out in red chalk. The tracing would then be used as a guide when re-creating the body. As there was no body to make a cast from the taxidermist needed to draw on their experience of setting-up other similar specimens to 'guesstimate' the size of the required replacement body (Ibid: 168). Four leg wires – bent to proper shape – attached to a vertical centreboard of wood made up the basic structure (see Fig. 3.43). Two additional rods supported the skull and another for the tail. This basic structure was wrapped tightly with thinly shaved strands of wood, known as excelsior, and bound with twine until it perfectly resembled the creature in every possible undulation and arch. To make up thick muscles in the legs, a bunch of excelsior was bound in place with twine. Smaller protuberances and muscles were made with soft, long fibre tow. The process was slow, meticulous, and required the constant critical assessment of a naturalist's eye and comparison with the skin. Attention to the most minute of details was imperative. Browne noted that Achilles tendons could even be made with a twisted wire attached as the heel and wrapped with tow. The modelled body was then be covered in a coating of clay before the skin was applied, making sure pressed on to fit the undulations of the modelled body perfectly, and sewn up.



Fig. 3.43 'Lion mounted from the "flat"
 Showing position of 'body board' and leg irons, &c, but without false ribs' (Browne 1876: 169)

This process, as Browne outlined in the quote above, demanded that the taxidermist have great experience of the anatomical composition of the species being set-up, as well as its attitudes in life, if they were to achieve a decent representation. Ingold (2006b: 79) argues that the essence of skill 'comes to lie in the improvisational ability of [the] practitioner to disassemble the constructions of a technology'. Following Ingold, the essence of skilled taxidermy could therefore be said to reside in a practitioner's ability to break-down, and to manipulate, the processes of taxidermy to suit their purposes. This links with Samuel Wheeler's remarks on practices and rule making. He states that 'practices cannot stand in need of guidance by rules generally, because the understanding of rules rests on practices' (Wheeler 2000: 209). Here Wheeler acknowledges that any rules or guidance for practice have emerged directly from practice but, more importantly, that *in* practice things may not go according to plan and so 'rules' need to be malleable. Thus, much like Ingold, Wheeler argues that skilled practice lies in a practitioner's ability to improvise and 'bend' the rules when difficulties emerge in the execution of any task. Browne, for example, confided that his improvisational abilities were most tested when he was required to mount from flat an animal of which he had no experience as a living creature (Browne 1878: 19).

As British museum taxidermy was beset with difficulties, the guiding ethos of the British taxidermist was therefore more like ‘make-do and improvise’ rather than that of the perfectionism of American taxidermists. Peter certainly embodies this philosophy, as I witnessed his magic touch mend broken wing-bones, salvage ‘slipping’ skin (that is, decaying) and soften the most leathery of skins, and often with the most basic of tools and materials. In the intervening years between Browne’s practice at the Leicester Museum in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century and Peter’s practice from the late 1960’s onwards in various British museums the situation for the British museum taxidermist have not dramatically changed: curators are still loath to get rid of old collections and for those mounts on display there often remains a ‘make-do and mend’ mentality as finding replacements is often a difficult task (Poliquin 2008). Although ring-fenced grants from the Carnegie Trust in the 1960’s and 1970’s for the training of ‘in-house’ taxidermists, and for the up-grading of displays, has improved the quality of museum taxidermy in Britain, taxidermists are still creatively constrained by the quality of the ‘materials’ with which they are provided to work with. For example, the NMS quite rightly only source their specimens through ethical means and thus are dependent on donations from the public (in the form of found dead animals) and recognised institutions like zoos and animal sanctuaries. Just like with Browne, Peter would not be able to pre-empt what specimens he would receive or indeed what state of preservation they would be in. I observed that the specimens with which Peter had to work were often in poor states of preservation and did not always come as whole cadavers, or even with the expected appendages like the skull or skeletal frame. Even when they did come as whole cadavers they would be put straight into the freezer to prevent further decay; thus, when Peter came to choose a specimen from the freezer it was a ‘lottery’ as to the quality of the mount he would have to prepare.⁴⁵ Peter’s ability to save ‘slipping’ (decaying) skins and then, for want of a better word, to ‘re-animate’ them, allowing them to appear as a semblance of the former living animal from which they were taken, underlines his great skill as a taxidermist and is worth documenting.

Resurrecting or rehabilitating the dead?

The ‘rehabilitation’ process, as Peter calls it, begins once the specimen (in this case a sparrowhawk) has had time to thaw after being in the freezer, whereupon the rigor-mortis is worked-out so that the specimen is teased into a malleable working state (see Fig. 3.44).

⁴⁵ All whole specimens sent to the NMS were frozen (at -30 degrees to kill all bacteria and parasites) until the taxidermists were free to skin and preserve them. The specimens were frozen in separate plastic bags and a note would be inserted detailing any information that went with them.



Fig. 3.44

This also affords Peter the opportunity of inspecting the specimen for broken bones and tears in the skin, which he will mentally note and repair at a later stage. At this point the role of the taxidermist is not that far removed from that of a pathologist as they must establish the cause of death. In this instance, Peter indicates that the sparrow-hawk has obviously been killed by a blow to the head (probably caused by flying into a window⁴⁶) as the left eye is full of blood. Peter remarks that, when setting-up a specimen for display, it is important to inject the bird's eyes with water to their natural pressure so that they can then be measured and then replaced with accurate replacement glass eyes later on in the procedure (see Fig. 3.45).⁴⁷



Fig. 3.45

The next job before skinning the specimen is to wet the skin as it has often dried-out after being in the freezer – a condition known in the trade as 'freezer burn'. Peter informs me that it is vitally important to wet the skin throughout the procedure of skinning and setting-up,

⁴⁶ Peter informs me that many bird deaths are caused by them flying into windows or car wind-screens and so an impact to the head is an injury that he sees commonly in the specimens that the NMS receive.

⁴⁷ The eyes are measured from the front corner of the eye to the back corner of the eye and then the front corner of the eye to the tip of the beak – so that the eye is placed exactly right.

otherwise the skin is prone to tear and thus could be ruined by too many stitching jobs. Also if the skin is beginning to ‘slip’ (that is decay), action must be taken to ‘fix’ the skin using borax or another preservative to stop any loss of feathers (or fur depending on the animal being worked). The cadaver is then skinned (following the procedure outlined earlier in the chapter) and then the skin is washed. Washing the skin also affords the opportunity of inspecting the skin for any tears which can then be stitched once the skin has been dried. The replacement body and neck portion is then reproduced (again following the procedures outlined earlier) and then the surviving leg and wing bones are wound in tow to replace the removed muscle and sinew. Before they are wound with tow, the leg and wing bones are strengthened by arranging thin wire down the length of them so they can be attached to the balsa-wood body and then rearticulated when the specimen is mounted into the required display position.

If the specimen has any broken bones, as in the case of a white-crested laughing thrush (WCLT) on which Peter worked, these must be mended. Peter indicates that the tibia bone of the WCLT had been cleanly broken and so the repair job would be a relatively straight forward procedure. First, Peter injects the foot with water so that it could be articulated as in its dry state it is basically fixed in position (see Fig. 3.46).



Fig. 3.46

He then fed a thin wire through the bottom of the foot out through the ankle and up into the tibia to fit the two pieces back together again (see Figs 3.47 & 3.48).



Fig. 3.47



Fig. 3.48

This again highlights how Peter is subtly responsive to ‘the ever-changing conditions of the task [of taxidermy] as it unfolds’ (Ingold 2006b: 75). The threat of things going awry in a task can never be fully warded off in a craft practice like taxidermy, according to Ingold. Of course, there are ways to reduce risk but, as with any emergent task, the result is never a foregone conclusion. Ingold explains that the ‘workman of risk’, rather than following a continuous automatic journey, is more like the ‘wayfarer who travels from place to place, sustaining himself both perceptually and materially through a continual engagement with the field of practice’ (Ibid). Thus rather than following ‘algorithms of practice’ (Mitcham 1978: 252) as would a machine operative who works largely within a pre-determined system, the craftsperson depends on their improvisational abilities to respond to the ever-changing conditions of the task as it unfolds. Peter displays just such improvisational ability with the mending of the tibia, for instance, as he was always ready to make any necessary adjustments and thus displayed the ability to ‘change course’ if things went awry.

Once all the wing and leg bones have been tackled, the next job is to fit the replacement body and neck portion back into the skull. The neck portion (which has a mass of tow at the end) is fitted into the skull, the inside of which has been coated in clay, and then any gaps left are filled in with more clay and the body is thus reattached. The outside of the skull is coated in a thin layer of clay to replace flesh and muscle, and eye sockets are also filled a little with clay and the glass eyes (selected to match accurately the measurements taken earlier) are then embedded back into the sockets (at this point Peter informs me it is critical to ensure the socket is not too full with clay otherwise the eyes will protrude too far out of the eyelids). The next job is to work the skin back over the skull. This is a critical moment in taxidermy as it marks the point at which the ‘animal’ (in this case a barn-owl) starts to re-emerge (see Fig. 3.49 ‘barn owl series’).

Fig. 3.49 'Barn owl series'





Fig. 3.50 'Kingfisher' © Andrea Roe

Turning the skin back over the skull can be considered a critical moment in the process of taxidermy since it is the point at which the formless skin begin to 'take shape' as a recognisable bird. An interesting change happens, for example, when Peter begins to arrange the skin around the head and opens the eyelids to play around with the positioning of the glass eyes in the sockets – the bird starts to transform into a believable live animal (see Fig 3.50). Many taxidermists in the period manuals I referred to also underlined this stage as a critical juncture: as, for example, Oliver Davie writing in the late nineteenth-century explains, 'if the face and eyes be poorly finished, the chief beauty of the specimen is lacking: *the life expression is gone*' (Davie 1894: 67). Similarly Browne noted his preference for French glass eyes over German-made ones as the former offered a more realistic 'liquid-looking' eye and, when 'well set in the orbit', a 'staring wooden expression will be avoided' (Browne 1896: 193). This

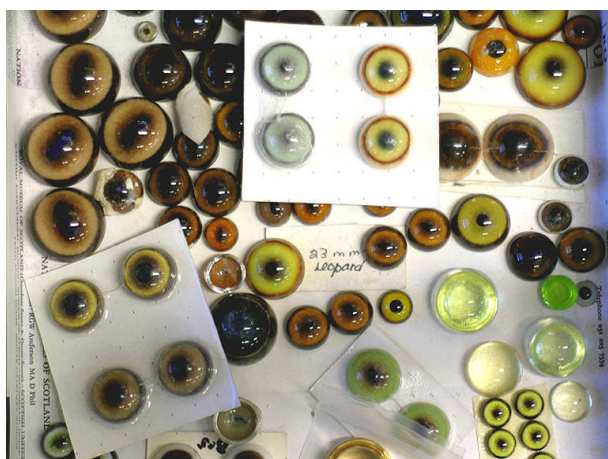


Fig. 3.51 'Liquid looking eyes' © Andrea Roe

highlights another paradox in taxidermy that the positioning of the glass eyes (which are entirely artificial) is perceived to be the point at which the creature is brought to life. Yet, as I came to realise from talking to Peter and observing him at work this idea of 'resurrecting the dead' is not as straightforward as many critiques of taxidermy (e.g. Haraway 1989) have made out. Rather than a

Messianic resurrection of the dead, the taxidermist (well Peter at least) is aware of their limitations in the arts of 're-creation' and, indeed, also the limits of the materials that they have at their disposal to do so.

Becoming animal

Once Peter is happy with the positioning of the eyes, he then fixes the legs to the balsa-wood body and then fill the neck and body out with the desired amount of tow before sewing it up. Peter communicates to me that his favourite part of the process of taxidermy is when this technical part is out of the way and he can concentrating on the composition of the mount, which allows him to express his interpretive sensibilities. Peter conveys this to me when he had finished carving a replacement body for an eagle owl and started to talk through what you need to think about when deciding how to compose a mount:

P: it's the angle of the neck [uses his arm and hand to imitate bird neck and head]...



Fig. 3.52

the angle of the head... the curvature of the neck [tilts his arm to mimic the movement]...



Fig. 3.53

is it looking left [mimics movement with his own head]... is it looking right [tilts head right]...or is it looking up [tilts head upwards]



Fig. 3.54

thinking about how you position the bird is the first satisfying part of the process... everything before that is just technical and anyone can do that ... its interpreting the jizz of the bird and making it do what you want it to do ... that's what I enjoy.

Here Peter articulates that it is deciding how to articulate, indeed to pose the specimen that he finds the most engaging part in the process. Peter expresses that, when deciding what position to mount a specimen, he would refer to his experience of observing bird behaviour in the wild, maybe referencing photographs in order to interpret, and to instill the 'jizz' of the bird into the mount.⁴⁸ 'Jizz' is an interesting concept, and, as Helen Macdonald (2002) explains, the

⁴⁸ Peter, an avid naturalist all his life, began observing birds as a young boy and it was through this fascination with bird behaviour that he decided to become a taxidermist. He told me that when out bird-watching he would come across dead birds and wanted to preserve them to start a study collection. With no manuals or taxidermists to consult, he began skinning and preserving birds by trial and error.

idea originates from bird-twitchers who would use the word to describe the ‘essence’ of a particular bird species. A twitcher’s ability to recognise birds by their jizz would be seen as a sign of their expertise as it demands identifying a bird without depending upon the use of any defining features/characteristics:

‘as a rule, it is characteristics, the tout ensemble of the subject ... something definite yet indescribable, something which instantly registers recognition in the brain, yet how or what is seen remains unspecified. It is its jizz.’ (Macdonald 2002: 71)

However, for the taxidermist, as Peter tells me, it is not enough to recognise ‘jizz’, since he or she must be able to interpret it and then embody this quality in their mounts. I would argue that in order to do so the taxidermist must internalise this essence and in a sense ‘become animal’. Peter displays this ability to me when he was working on the mounting of the WCLT:



Fig. 3.55

P: It’s still not dynamic enough yet ... I still want to ... it’s not doing this enough [mimics the position he wants the bird to be in by twisting his body and neck to his left]...

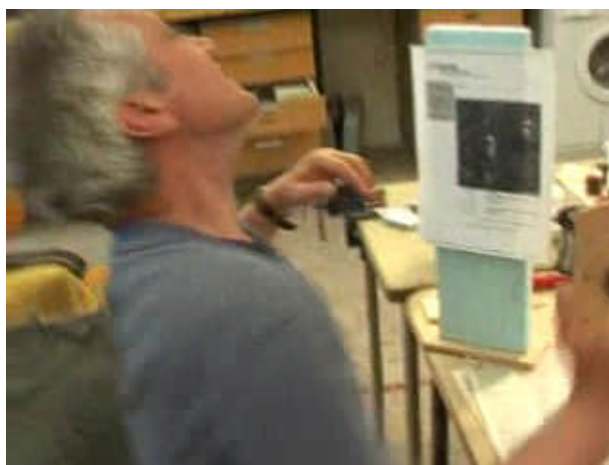


Fig. 3.56

It's almost there ... but it still ... it wants this [twists the bird in the same manner that he twisted his own body] ...



Fig. 3.57

It's stating to get a bit of an attitude look to it...

M: What gives a bird an attitude?

P: It's the stance you know, the particular stance...

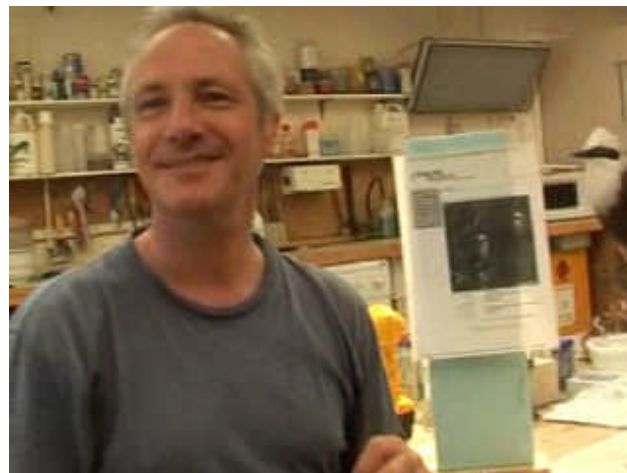


Fig. 3.58

M: Is that why you always choose a stance that has some movement to it?

P: Yeah I much prefer a suggestion of movement ... that it's about to move or take flight... I mean you can read this picture [indicate to reference picture he is working from]



Fig. 3.59

and I've translated it into that [indicates to mount]...



Fig. 3.60

And it's sitting there [mimics perching]...



Fig. 3.61

but its doing this [mimics twisting movement to the left]...



Fig. 3.62

Here Peter conveys that to capture a sense of dynamism in his mount he refers to his reference photograph, and seeks to internalise the movement in his own body, sensing how the bird would move. The concept of ‘becoming animal’ put forward by Deleuze and Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987), which presents and enables a sort of post-modern un-humaning of the human, is a process of dispensing with the human subject’s identities and subjectivities. I would argue that when Peter is ‘becoming animal’, he is not so much dispensing with his human identities and subjectivities, but is rather enabling a creative encounter/dialogue between the human (with its bodily shapes and affordances) and the animal when he attempts to impute the jizz of an animal into his mounts. Peter quite often throughout the taxidermic process, refers to his own body or acts out a movement to express a certain idea for a mount composition or even to even show a muscle worked. He also constantly rearranges the feathers into their natural alignment throughout the process, mimicking exactly what a bird does when preening.

However while taxidermy is a quest for ‘liveness’ – to impute life back into the dead – this is not to suggest that most contemporary, and indeed historic, British taxidermy does not constitute a Messianic resurrection of the animal in order to produce an ‘unambiguous experience of organic perfection’ as with the American taxidermists working in the early-twentieth century (Haraway 1989: 38). While the notion of ‘jizz’ may suggest that Peter is attempting to capture the ‘essence’ of the particular species, he acknowledges himself that he cannot bring the dead bird, to which the skin once belonged, back to life. Rather, he is merely trying to impart back into the skin his interpretation of that animal’s jizz, his ‘becoming

animal'. Furthermore, Peter's ability to 'become animal' and to impute something of this into his finished mounts, is exceptional in both historic and contemporary British taxidermy practice when the 'materials' craftsmen had to work with were often in poor states of preservation, and where taxidermists have sometimes had little experience of the specimens upon which they were working as living creatures (therefore they had no experience of their 'jizz'). While Peter's ability to rehabilitate decaying skins and rearrange them to produce life-like forms (sometimes uncannily so) marks him out as an exceptionally skilled taxidermist, even he cannot escape the fact that his finished specimens are stilled representations of the animals that he has attempted to revive. Thus 'liveliness' is rather to be found in the process of taxidermy, in the *doing*; when the taxidermist works at and on the limits of life and death, time and history and movement and stasis. As many have commentated, the thing about taxidermy is its stillness; yet, as I found when watching Peter at work, it was when witnessing *practice* that both the manuals and the specimens came alive. Thus the taxidermist's desire to revive and reanimate can be argued to be, to invoke Derrida, *sous rature* 'under erasure' – the idea that what is being attempted is impossible yet still feels essential (Derrida 1976). I would like to argue in the concluding section of this chapter that my ambition to recover and revive past biogeographies of taxidermy practice is not so far removed from the guiding principles of the taxidermist, and thus will argue that there is also both creative and emancipatory force to be drawn from working 'under erasure' in my continuing historical recovery work in the following chapters.

Conclusions: on falling short of reviving the dead

As stated, my aim in this chapter has been to find a means to retrieve and document the development of the craft practices of taxidermy. To achieve this, I decided to undertake an ethnoarchaeological investigation of past taxidermy practices and processes through the excavation period taxidermy manuals. To 'enliven' these, and thereby satisfy the 'ethno' prefix, I decided to observe a practicing taxidermist. This helped me not only to understand and visualise the descriptions of practice presented by the manuals, but also offered a strategy for presenting the skilful embodiments of the taxidermist and the sensate aspects of taxidermy practice that the manuals inevitably failed to communicate. Thus, by putting myself in the position of learner or apprentice to Peter Summers of the NMS, it enabled me to examine and present 'the ways in which certain sets of practices can achieve temporal duration and spatial extension' (Griffin and Evans 2008: 12). In juxtaposing descriptions of practice from the manuals with accounts of Peter's practice, I therefore sought to document the development of

British museum taxidermy whilst also shedding light on the embodied and intangible aspects of the practices which drove such developments. However, my aim is not simply to stitch time and space neatly back together again, rather, it was to ‘trace out the threads and follow their convolutions’ to explore the possibility of doing ‘more-than-representational’ histories (Pile 2002: 116) As Philo and Laurier argue, ethnoarchaeological investigations should treat the people (dead or alive) being consulted in the research process as ‘*serious* experts’ (Laurier and Philo 2004: 432). They state that such consultations can make certain problems, ‘what we might call theoretical problems’, particularly clear and so theory in these terms can be something that emerges through these consultations (Ibid). For example, my ‘consultations’ with Peter and the taxidermists in the manuals highlighted certain problems with my theoretical project on which it is worth elaborating.

In the last section I noted that my desire to excavate and ‘enliven’ the descriptions of developments in taxidermy practice provided by the manuals was not far removed from the guiding philosophy of the taxidermist – i.e. to impute life back into the dead. However, a paradox emerges when attempting to retrieve and present non-representational aspects of the past, as there is an apparent contrast between non-representational theory as an ethics for harnessing life and history as the study of the dead. Put like this it would seem a ‘non-representational history’ would have to commit itself, as does the taxidermist, to resurrecting the dead. However, as I have argued, rather than be paralysed by the impossibility of retrieving non-representational historical geographies of taxidermy practice, I have chosen rather to ‘simultaneously work through the limits of representation and the dynamics of what is beyond’ (Rycoft 2007: 629; Lorimer 2005). By this I mean accepting that there are limits to what can be recovered and recuperated when excavating forms of the non-representational from the past since the historical researcher is necessarily rooted in representational analyses of linguistic and symbolic forms of expression; and why I prefer the idea of doing ‘more-than-representational’ historical geographies (Lorimer 2005). This aside, there is still something to be said for attempting the impossible, to attempt to retrieve the dynamics of what lies beyond historical representations of past practice. This is why I chose to observe a practicing taxidermist as it enables me to witness the unfolding of taxidermy practice as it *happens*, and therefore to present descriptions of unfolding, almost real-time practice in my analysis that are infused with a certain fidelity to what happens *in* practice (Latham 2003: 1903). While Paul Harrison’s argument that social and historical researchers will forever ‘fall short’ in their attempts to describe and re-present the ‘eventful, creative, excessive and distinctly uncertain realms of action’ is valid (Harrison 2002: 487), Laurier and Philo have countered, that rather than accepting this as an insurmountable impasse, or ‘*aporia*’, researchers must instead busy

themselves with deciding and doing what *is* possible (Laurier and Philo 2006). This way even if impassable are reached in the retrieval and documentation of (past) events and phenomena, the commitment still remains at least to attempt it. For example, my re-presentations of Peter's practice will inevitably failed to fully describe/disclose the realm of practice, as craftwork work establishes a realm of skill and knowledge perhaps beyond human verbal and visual capacities to explain. While some may find it ironic that my observations of peter's practice depended a lot on his words, I still felt I needed to supplement these descriptions with still images taken from my video footage as both Peter's and my own words fell short of describing what was really going on.

Inevitably, then, my descriptions of the practice of taxidermy will have fallen short of both 'witnessing' the immediacy of the practice as it unfolds in the present and also retrieving the vitality of the practice as it unfolded in the past. However the crux here is not to be paralysed by the thought of reaching aporias, rather it is to accept the limitations of what can be retrieved and presented and thus get as *close* as one can to what is being attempted – in my case 'witnessing' the development of British museum taxidermy practice through the juxtaposition of descriptions of practice in period manuals with descriptions of taxidermy practice as it unfolds in the present. For example, my stitching together of passages describing Browne setting up a cabinet skin in the late-nineteenth century with my descriptions of Peter doing the same act in the present conveyed that their taxidermy practices, although separated by both time and space, could be shown to *resonate*. While I am alive to the dangers of making claims beyond the immediate empirical contexts with which I have worked, I would also argue that my analysis has shown that certain practices can achieve temporal duration and spatial extension, and thus that past practices of taxidermy can be retrieved by observing a taxidermist in the present. Again, I would like to emphasise that here that it was not my intention to present Peter's body a source for ontological truths. Rather, as previously stated, I saw Peter's body as an 'archival vector' of past practice (Griffin and Evans 2008). This way I hope to have avoided elevating Peter's body to 'some primordial distinction', and indeed figuring his body-practices as somehow transcendental (Thrift 2008: 10). Rather, as Thrift has argued, I hope to have shown that not only are bodies (both Peter's and by association those of the taxidermists in the manuals) anchored in particular times and places, but they are also both 'biologically wired' and 'culturally sedimented' which prescribe possible actions and practices (Thrift 2000c: 36). Thus, I feel justified in following Ingold's claim that a skilled practitioner engaging in practice 'picks the strands of past practice and carries them forward into current contexts', and so by observing them at work one can in effect also witness past practice (Ingold 2006b: 72).

To summarise, then, accepting and asserting that you are attempting the impossible need not be read entirely negatively. Rather, as I stated previously, I would argue that there is creative and emancipatory force to be drawn from working, to invoke Derrida, *sous rature* ‘under erasure’ – the idea that what is being attempted is impossible yet still feels essential (Derrida 1976). Just like the taxidermist can never fully revive the dead animal skins with which they work, I will inevitably fall short of resurrecting the pasts of taxidermy practice that will be the focus in the following chapters. Yet, by placing the idea of reviving those pasts ‘under erasure’ I seek both to attempt it and to acknowledge its impossibility at the same time. Just as Peter is aware of the limits of his ‘materials’ and the crafts of mimetic reproduction at his disposal, I must be aware of the limitations of the historical source materials that I have at my disposal for excavating forms of the non-representational. However, while historical research is necessarily rooted in representational analyses, I would argue there are possible strategies for excavating ‘more-than-representational’ historical geographies of taxidermy practice. Therefore, rather than allow a kind of petrification to set in, much like the taxidermist, I propose to work *at* and *on* the limits of life and death, time and history, movement and stasis in my recovery work in the following two chapters, ‘Site’ and ‘Movement’. While there will be limits to what can be retrieved and recuperated in these chapters, I would not want to let possibilities for enlivening my historical narration pass and therefore allow past ‘biogeographies’ of taxidermy practice to be ultimately irretrievable. For example, at the time of my visits, Peter was the only full-time museum taxidermist working in Scotland and has since retired. Thus, the opportunity of observing and documenting his practice not only enabled me to enliven my account of the historical development of museum taxidermy but also to bear witness to what may well be a dying craft (this issue will be returned to in the conclusion). I consider it to have been a great privilege to have witnessed Peter’s practice, as in many ways it was exceptional. For example, I hope to have conveyed that there is something beautiful if not poetic about his passion for rehabilitating and transforming skins to appear alive. Taxidermy as a practice has often been cast as macabre and gruesome (Haraway 1989; Star 1992; Desmond 2002) and, while I recognise there are many problematic aspects to the practice (and these will be explored in the following chapters), I am glad that I have been able to show that when practiced well it can be a rather magical process to witness.



Fig. 3.63 Peter's Magic Touch © Andrea Roe

The next chapter aims to recover and revive the 'biogeographies' of two taxidermists working in the past: George Sim (1835-1908), Charles Kirk (1872-1922). Sim and Kirk had commercial firms and it is from salvaged remainders of these workshops (and from my experience of observing Peter at work) that I aim to 'flesh-out' their biogeographies. Here I adopt the working style of the (taxidermist) bricoleur to 'make-do' with the materials that I have managed to recover and rehabilitate in order to present fleeting glimpses of what the biogeographies of these taxidermists were once like 'in life'.

Site

‘When the workplace, the loom, the cloth itself
 Have all evaporated
 We ought to discover footprints in the damp earth’
 (from *Things Seen*, Philippe Jaccottet 1994[1983]: 49).

This chapter experiments in the recuperation of the historical-geographical particulars of two Scottish taxidermists and their working spaces and working practice. In doing so the chapter seeks to develop the possibilities of a supple approach to life-writing/life-studies whilst also engaging with a range of methodological issues associated with the study and historical recuperation of past lives and places. The chapter is constructed so as to allow me to work through a number of conceptual-methodological arguments by making site ‘visits’ to the places of work of the taxidermists. In this way I seek to ascertain what can be conceivably said of, or inferred from, those things that remain to mark the taxidermist’s working practice, rather than prescribing outcomes in advance.

Introductory: on valuing the ‘unmarked’

‘...it requires a consideration of the politics of what Phelan (1993) calls the ‘unmarked’, that, is, an attempt to find, value, and retain what is not marked as ‘here’, yet palpably still reverberates; invisible dust still singing, still dancing’.
 (Thrift 2000a: 214)

How do you attempt to value and recuperate the ‘unmarked’? This is the question Nigel Thrift proposes in his 2000 paper *Afterwords*. The question has both personal and academic significance for Thrift, as in one sense it is an attempt to deal with the loss of his father and in

another it is a strategy employed to open up space for the consideration of a style of thinking he calls non-representationalist. While the majority of the paper is devoted to outlining a non-representational style of working, and how this is linked to other developments in the social sciences and humanities which attempt to deal with ‘the notion and motion of performance’, it is Thrift’s prefatory remarks which are of pressing concern here (Thrift 2000a: 213). These remarks are concerned with personal loss and his desire – yet also conflicting reluctance – to ‘disclose and value his legacy’ (ibid). Thrift confides that he feels a need to mark the event of his father’s death by writing about it, yet is equally unsure that writing is the best medium through which to retain value in a life which has passed. Thrift’s hesitancy stems from a concern to avoid putting his father’s life ‘in order through text’ and thereby take over his father’s being ‘by colonising his traces’ (Ibid). Nothing his father did was ever written down and while he states he would at one time have seen this as a problem, now, however, he rather feels the priority is to ‘find a form of writing that can disclose and value his legacy – the somatic currency of body stances he passed on, the small sayings and large generousities, and, in general, his stance to the world – in such a way as to make it less important for him to be written’ (Ibid). To do so Thrift argues it requires ‘a consideration of the politics of what Peggy Phelan (1993) calls the ‘unmarked’, that is, an attempt to find, value, and retain what is not marked as ‘here’, yet palpably still reverberates; that invisible dust still singing, still dancing’. (Thrift 2000a: 214). This, of course, is a way of flagging up the importance of a non-representational style of working which aims to attend to embodied practices existing prior to reflexive or cognitive thought. However, while non-representational work is able to value the ‘unmarked’ of the present – by presenting rather than representing the undisclosed and sometimes undisclosable nature of the everyday – it often fails fully to communicate how one might value and recuperate the ‘unmarked’ of the past.

In the previous chapter I demonstrated how the somatic body practices of taxidermists working in the nineteenth-century were able to achieve temporal duration and spatial extension through the medium of taxidermy manuals and museum apprentice schemes. In this sense, like non-representational styles of work, I was seeking to counter ‘the still-prevalent tendency to consider life from the point of view of individual agents who generate action by instead weaving a poetic of the common *practices and skills* which produce people, selves, and worlds’ (Thrift 2000a: 216). In one sense this was an attempt to escape human-centred understandings of embodied practice and instead connect with the impersonal forces and flows of the world and thus re-affirm ‘life’ (or the ‘bio’) as ‘a mutant, undisciplined creativity that is worked out through the properties of existence’ (Amin and Thrift 2002: 437). Yet at the same time, I was keen to avoid presenting the body and body-practices as somehow

transcendental (something for which non-representational styles of work have been criticised: e.g. see Gagen 2004; Thein 2005, Saldanha 2005, 2006; Cresswell 2006, Tolia-Kelly 2006) by acknowledging that body-practices are anchored in particular times and places, and that bodies themselves are both 'biologically wired' and 'culturally sedimented' (Thrift 2000c: 36). In this sense, then, my analysis was not just an attempt to present a poetic of the common practices and skills of taxidermy as they play out in the present (by observing and describing Peter's practice), it was also an attempt to more explicitly excavate the historical developments in taxidermy craft practice that made these body-practices possible. My concern in *this* chapter, though, is to recover and revive the 'unmarked' lifeworlds of two taxidermists working in the past: George Sim (1835-1908), and Charles Kirk (1872-1922). I can say that they remain largely 'unmarked' as very little has been written about the taxidermists or, indeed, the lifeworlds they once constructed. Thus the question of how you value and recuperate the 'unmarked' and indeed 'undocumented' dimensions of the past has particular pertinence for this recovery project. While Thrift was largely mobilising Phelan's politics of the 'unmarked' to make an argument for valuing practices in and of themselves (the central tenet of the NRT project) in *Afterwords*, it is my intention in this chapter to mobilise another politics of the 'unmarked' considering how one might retrieve and revive the lifeworlds of two taxidermists who worked in the past. This said, I do still wish to counter 'the still-prevalent tendency to consider life from the point of view of individual agents' (Thrift 2000a: 216); thus, rather than try to narrate each of the taxidermist's biographies, I intend to recover and present what I shall come to term as their spectral biogeographies.

Although Thrift's 2000 paper does not provide an explicit account of how one might retrieve and disclose a life which has passed, he offers a few tantalising suggestions in conclusion. Taking the example of a *Malangan* (Kuchler 1988, 1992), the ritual carving used in northern New Ireland to take things on after death, he suggests ways of retaining value in the 'unmarked'. The Malangan is an object carved by members of the northern New Ireland community during a 'mortuary ceremony' to mark the passing of a recently deceased person of importance in the community. Carvings made into the object during the ceremony are said to symbolise 'a dense and never-ending network of past and future relationships' between members of the community and the deceased person. The carved motifs are supposed to both index and sustain these relationships (even if only for the duration of the ceremony) (Thrift 2000a: 247). At death the Malangan is believed to indicate that 'the agency of the [deceased] person is in a dispersed state... indexes of their agency abound, but are not concentrated anywhere in particular. The gardens and plantations of deceased, scattered here and there, still in production, their wealth is held by various exchange partners, their houses are still standing,

their wives and husbands are still married to them, and so on...’ (Ibid). Thrift explains that though the person is deceased, their ‘life-force’ still resonates within the landscape and community; thus the Malangan comes to symbolise ‘a kind of body which accumulates, like a charged battery, the potential energy of the deceased dispersed in the lifeworld’ (Ibid). This belief system invokes the notion of the ‘active presence of absent things’ (Valéry, cited in Denning 1996: 116), and I wish to further mobilise this idea, setting the tone for the rest of this chapter.

Thrift, following Gell (1998), argues that people (dead or alive) can be understood as ‘rather ill defined constellations ... which are “not confined to particular spatio-temporal coordinates, but consists of a spread of biographical events and memories of events, and a dispersed category of material objects, traces, and leavings, which can be attributed to a person”’ (Thrift 2000a: 220, quoting Gell 1998: 222). Accordingly, he is then able to argue that when people die it does not necessarily mean that they disappear completely, rather, just as in life, their agency abounds in a dispersed state. Similarly Kevin Hetherington has argued that whatever is being discarded (human or otherwise) continues to live on in a new form and maintain some kind of presence (Hetherington 2004; see also 2007). To understand the agency of the absent, then, Hetherington argues that we have to treat it as the outcome of a process in which distance is created; ‘in which displacement is controlled; in which something is kept present whilst also being lost’ (Callon and Law 2004: 10). Although there is no Malangan for the two taxidermists whose lifeworlds I intend to recover in this chapter, something of their life-forces remains displaced and dispersed in their leftovers; in their tools, products, correspondences, business records, personal effects, pictorial and photographic representations etc relating to their taxidermy practice. It is these remainders which I seek to retrieve and recuperate to tell of their lifeworlds of practice. DeSilvey, following Benjamin’s theory of historical constellations, has pointed out that ‘potential awakenings’ reside in objects and materials that people gather around them and eventually discard in the course of their lives and that encounters with such discarded items can ‘propose empathetic connection with the people who made and handled them’ (DeSilvey 2007a: 413, 417). Yet while the agency of these taxidermists is displaced and dispersed in their leftovers these remainders are also at the same time, in a material sense, diminishing and decaying (Anderson 2004). Thus, while I shall seek to revive the now silent agencies and forgotten histories of Sim and Kirk, and of the workshop sites that they once constructed, I also consider this revival simultaneously ‘under erasure’ (Derrida 1976). To avoid ‘colonising their traces’ (Thrift 2000a: 213) by preserving their remainders and putting their lives in order through text, I seek to develop ‘an engagement with the past that draws part of its force from absence and incompleteness’

(DeSilvey 2006: 330). In what follows then, I seek to craft a form of historiography that is alive the ultimate alterity of past lives (human or otherwise), events, and places, recognising that what remains of them is partial, provisional, incomplete and therefore what is being presented is always already under erasure.

The chapter is constructed so as to allow me to work through a number of conceptual-methodological arguments by making site ‘visits’ to the places of work of the two Scottish taxidermists mentioned. While Thrift (2008: 7) is suspicious of biography as a mode of proceeding, in that it ‘provides a suspect intimacy with the dead’, the Sim archive, presents itself as the perfect opportunity for exploring biography as a medium for disclosing and valuing the legacy of a life in the first section of my analysis – *Life-geographies*. However while the notion of biography has been reworked within recent geographic scholarship, there is still a prevalent tendency in the writing of life-geographies to view life from the point of view of individual agents. I seek to counter this tendency more explicitly in my recuperation of the lifeworlds of practice of Charles Kirk in the second section of my analysis – *Spectral Matters*. Here I seek to differently figure the working of bodies and bodies at work at Kirk’s workshop by tracing how a craft-style, and therefore body-practices, can achieve spatial extension and temporal duration (can be passed on) through a series of apprenticeships. Overall the chapter seeks to develop a more supple approach to life writing/life study, whilst also engaging with a range of conceptual/methodological issues associated with creatively narrating and re-placing life-stories of working practice. The creative challenge of such a project is to ascertain what can be conceivably said of, or inferred from, those things that remain.

Life-geographies

‘A meeting with a curator of special collections’

An ice-bright February morning. I walk the frost-bitten path through Kings College Quad to the door of the ‘special collections’ department of the University of Aberdeen. I wait in the reception until I am called in by the head of collections. Closing the door behind him, he formally introduces himself and indicates I am to sit in the chair in front of his desk as he resumes his usual position behind it. The room is small and rather airless and I suddenly feel like I am at an interview. We sit in silence as he picks up and reads a print-out version of an email I had previously sent him detailing my proposed study-project. Just when I am about to break the silence he looks up and tells me he is ‘concerned’ about my proposed project. He tells me that he has for some time now been working on a biography of George Sim and is alarmed by the close affinities between my intended approach to using the ‘Sim archive’ and his ideas for the biography. Taken aback, I hesitantly try to reassure him that it is not my intention to write a conventional biography and that Sim is only one of a number of Scottish taxidermists that I am interested in researching. Obviously not convinced he asks me what my intentions are for

publication. Flustered, I defensively I tell him that as I have not done the research yet I am hardly in a position to know but, in a bid to placate, inform him if anything were ever to be published out of my research it would most likely appear in an academic journal, surely not the outlet or audience he would be aiming for? This seems to soothe, though he warns it will take me many hours to work through Sim's correspondence records and field-note diaries held in Aberdeen Public Library and by that time he would hopefully have his biography finished. Ignoring this last point, I tell him spending time in a public library on cold wintery days would not be hardship for me, and, sensing that this is the only information he would be willing to part with, I make my excuses to leave. Courteously he gets up from behind his desk and follows me to the door. He makes to shake my hand; a firm crush follows. Taking this as a parting warning I hurriedly make my way back outside and feel instant relief as the icy wind hits my hot cheeks.

Walking the path back through the Quad I am reminded of something I had read earlier in the week: that a will to possession can be 'more ominous... than any oblivion'.

While biography is invariably seen as one of the best forms of writing to disclose and value the legacy of a life, it could also be seen as a medium for, in Thrift's terms, 'colonising traces' as it puts a life in order through text (Thrift 2000a: 213). This said, the notion of biography has been reworked within recent geographic scholarship – and also within non-academic 'life-writing' which is more experimental in format and tone (e.g. see Malcolm 2007; Lichtenstein and Sinclair 1999) – and thus merits further consideration as a possible method for disclosing the past lives and lifeworlds of Sim and Kirk. While there has been a long tradition of biographic scholarship within geography, such work has been criticised on methodological grounds by recent geographical interventions which have sought to 'recast the epistemic underpinnings of past lives' (Gagen *et al* 2007: 6; see also Livingstone 2003; Lorimer 2003a, 2007b; Daniels and Nash 2004; Thomas 2004; Lorimer and Spedding 2005; Matless and Cameron 2007). This recasting follows recent shifts in the practice of biography outside of the discipline (e.g. Isreal 1990; Blunt 1994). For example, feminist scholars like Liz Stanley have critically engaged with the methodology of biography, problematising the conventional 'spotlight' approach taken:

"The spotlight approach to 'modern biography' emphasises the uniqueness of a particular subject, seen in individualised terms rather than as a social self lodged in within a network of others. It casts these other people known and liked and disliked throughout the subject's life into the shadows; and doing so has interpretative importance for the way we understand 'a life', not only as textually related but also interactionally understood. It essentialises the self, rather than focusing on the role of the social process in producing – and changing – what 'a self' consists of' (Stanley cited in Thomas 2004: 500).

Here Stanley takes issue with the traditional approach to modern biography which ‘spotlights’ an individual and measures the value of their life by effectively chronologically listing their individual, usually professional, achievements. Stanley critiques this approach for not only viewing the biographical subject in individualised terms, but because such an approach invariably places too much emphasis on the lives of ‘great men’. Thus not only are the role of supporting figures in a subject’s life downplayed, but so too is the possibility for focusing on lesser known figures or indeed ordinary lives. By employing the metaphor of a kaleidoscope, Stanley undermines the focus of traditional biography by developing a less linear biographical approach, suggesting that when researching a life ‘each time you [should] see something different, composed certainly of the same elements, but in a new configuration’ (Ibid: 499). The metaphor of a kaleidoscope speaks of various fragmentary elements that make up a life: an idea that has resonated with geographers.

Nicola Thomas, in a special issue focused on the use of biography in geography (see Daniels and Nash 2004), argues for an approach to biographical writing that ‘promotes an awareness of the spatial interactions the biographical subject negotiated’ (Thomas 2004: 498).⁴⁹ Her own paper presents a biographical analysis of Mary Curzon, the Vicereine of India (1898-1905), and argues that ‘by placing the biographical subject within their friendship networks, the specificity of biography can be combined with greater engagement with the wider social, cultural, economic, and political contexts in which the subjects lived’ (Ibid). This reorientation of the biographical subject suggests the possibility of employing a biographical approach in order not only to investigate the subject, but also to map out the particular context within which they existed. Locating the biographical subject within a broader contextual tapestry - referring to both the physical fabrics and institutional environment as well as the social, cultural and interpersonal environment - opens out the possibility of exploring the ‘spaces’ of a life (Livingstone 2001). David Livingstone, for example, has argued that ‘according greater sensitivity to the spaces of a life could open up new and revealing ways of taking the measure of a life’ (Ibid: 36).

For Livingstone and other geographers interested in historical geographies of scientific practice, cultivating a new form of geographical biography – ‘life-geographies’ – has become a methodological imperative; ‘one where charting the value of *locational particulars* becomes [the] real *desideratum*’ (Gagen *et al* 2007: 6). Livingstone contends that historical geographers of science can extend the remit of scientific biography, insisting that ‘a greater awareness of the

⁴⁹ The special issue ‘Lifeline: geography and biography’ in the Journal of Historical Geography, edited by Stephen Daniels and Catherine Nash, focused on the relationship between script and space in the making of life histories, both individual and collective.

spaces of selfhood and the places of identity, would enormously enrich our understanding of the mutual making of science and scientist' (Livingstone 2003: 183). Employing Darwin as an example, he suggests that the 'great man'⁵⁰ could be opened out in new and revealing ways through a focus on his various geographical lives: e.g. 'the Beagle Darwin, the Downe Darwin, the public Darwin, the private Darwin, the London Darwin' etc (Ibid). Yet Livingstone is arguing for more than the 'placing' of a life, rather, he is more broadly calling for the placing of scientific practice (see also Livingstone 1995, 1996, 2000, 2003).⁵¹ In *Putting Science in its Place* (2003) Livingstone sets out to explore intimate geographies of scientific practice by offering historical sketches of the sites of science making, ranging from coffee houses and laboratories to national museums and field sites:

'The range of sites within which science has been practiced, in which meaning has been made and remade, and from which scientific knowledge spreads is vast. We can begin to catch something of this diversity if we conjure up a mental picture of some of the disparate places where science is conducted. When we do we are impressed with the vastly different *atmospheres* they exude. The claustrophobic darkness of the alchemist's workshop with its roaring furnace and smelly stills stands in marked contrast to the clinical brightness and flickering screens of the modern medical laboratory. The wide-open, airy spaces of the field contrast sharply with the fusty alcoves of the archive and the stuffed displays of the museum. The controlled exhibits of the botanical and zoological gardens are very different from the diagnostic spaces of the hospital or the asylum. Even to express things in this way, of course, is to run the risk of caricature. Laboratories, gardens, museums, observatories, hospitals, and so on all come in a wide variety of shapes, sizes and configurations. But these stereotypes do have sufficient imaginative currency to convey something of the range of *sensory* experiences that such sites induce with their different sights sounds and smells. Each constitutes a different suite of optical, acoustic, and olfactory spaces.' (Livingstone 2003: 17-18).

⁵⁰ While Livingstone's arguments for the charting the spaces of a life have generally been supported and enacted by historical geographers of science, some have since cautioned that the influence a multitude of 'minor' or 'fringe' figures can be too easily ignored 'in favour of impressive, but often impersonal, tales of {scientific} endeavour' (Lorimer 2003: 200; see also Lorimer and Spedding 2005; Matless and Cameron 2007 and Keighren 2005, 2007).

⁵¹ Seminal works in science studies beginning with Bruno Latour (1987, 1988) and Stephen Shapin (1988, 1998) made a strong argument for 'plac[ing] the view from nowhere' (Shapin 1998: 9). Shapin (1998) neatly highlights the tensions existing between 'transcendentalist conceptions of truth and emerging localist perspectives on the making, meaning and evaluation of scientific knowledge' (Shapin 1998: 5). Shapin, like other science studies scholars (e.g. see James 1989; Ophir and Shapin 1991; Agar and Smith 1998), critiques the idea that Emile Durkheim, among others, espoused; that 'the truths of modern science are independent of any local context' (Durkheim 1972: 88). Shapin, echoing Latour, counters this view by arguing that 'locality and spatial situation need to be attended to in order to understand how scientific knowledge was made, how it secured credibility, how it travelled' (Shapin 1998: 6). Such work in science studies therefore alerted geographers to the possibility of 'placing' the making of scientific knowledge, prompting Livingstone to argue that science should be treated like any other form of knowledge: as 'a cultural formation, embedded in wider networks of social relations and political power, and shaped by the local environments in which its practitioners carry out their tasks' (Livingstone 2002: 236).

Livingstone is interested in exploring the practice of science at the intimate level of the field camp, laboratory or museum to illustrate how practitioners of science are influenced by their spatial settings, as it is within these sites that practitioners ‘absorb the core values, convictions and conventions of their tradition of inquiry’ (Ibid: 19). While the biographical subjects of this chapter were all commercial taxidermists, Livingstone’s arguments for exploring the spaces of a scientist’s life or, rather, the sites where their practice took place are just as applicable to Sim and Kirk. Livingstone himself admits, for example, that science has been communicated and practiced in a variety of popular and commercial arenas and thus the list of places where science has been practiced can be extended to include ‘libraries, lecture theatres, salons, nurseries, observatories, churches, workshops, artist’s studios, mechanics’ institutes, learned societies, stock farms, shipyards, game reserves and so on’ (Ibid: 85). As the previous chapter highlights, museum taxidermy has historically oscillated between scientific and artistic practice, and, as this chapter shall demonstrate, the same is also true of taxidermy practised in commercial workshop settings. Yet rather than limit what follows to recovering the practice of ‘science’ within the taxidermist’s workshops, the aim is to build up a sense of the material, local cultures of these sites so as to explore them as ‘lifeworlds’. The important point, which Livingstone makes, is in recognising that the taxidermist’s workshop sites are, like all other places, *made*:

“They become what they are through the activities that “take place” in them and the human practices that constitute them. In turn these arenas are active in producing the kinds of subjects humans are in those spaces. Space is therefore not dead, inert and fixed; rather, it is lively, shifting, fluid. Space is animated by events. It is always a production. (Livingstone 2003: 85-86)

Site visit 1: the workshop of George Sim



Fig. 4.1 'George Sim, Naturalist, in his workshop, Aberdeen'

This rare portrait (1896) of a taxidermist at work by Danish artist Rudolphe Christen captures the atmospheric and sensory world of a commercial taxidermy workshop in the late nineteenth-century. Livingstone would doubtless consider this an ideal source for exploring 'the mutual making of science and scientist' (Livingstone 2003: 183). The portrait subject is George Sim (1835-1908), a taxidermist-cum-naturalist who owned the then most notable taxidermy and curiosity business in Aberdeen. While Sim's status as a commercial taxidermist

in the relatively isolated position of the North-East of Scotland might undermine the description of his practice there as ‘science’, his associated practices of field-study and collecting ensure that his practice, both within and beyond his workshop, bridged both scientific and commercial life in the nineteenth century. Science at this moment was in the earliest stages of professionalization and those involved in its pursuit were strikingly heterogenous – antiquarians, medical practitioners, natural philosophers, writers, natural historians, and other learned men (and in some instances women) made up a kaleidoscopic community. Furthermore, as Jordanova (2000: 74) explains, ‘many able practitioners [of science] were skilled artisans or tradesmen’, and while their social position and influence were necessarily different to university-educated and financially independent gentlemen, their contribution to science should be considered no less relevant.

So what can we glean about the life-world of a taxidermist-cum-naturalist by closely studying this portrait, depicting the ‘taking-place’ of taxidermy practice in a commercial workshop? Although Sim is the central focus of the painting, seated centrally and “setting-up” what appears to be a heron, the busyness of the scene ensures many other things compete for the viewer’s attention: an elegantly mounted pink-winged flamingo stands proud to the bottom left, in front of a mounted otter awaiting the finishing touches of paint to the ground-work on its stand; a string of avian study-skins have been hung out to dry in front of the centre window; the trophy mounts of a bull and stag line the adjacent interior walls; Sim’s assistant stands right of centre skinning what appears to be some sort of bird in the light of the window; and a menagerie of unidentifiable skins hang from the ceiling. Sim’s work-benches are also cluttered with various tools, preparations and commissions in various states of completion. The mounts awaiting his immediate attention seem to depict the various stages of taxidermy practice; from the intact carcass of a mallard, to a yet-to-be encased fish trophy, to a near-finished glass-domed bird mount. What do these observations of things in the making tell us? First, the great assortment of commissions littering the workshop and the presence of an assistant indicate that Sim’s business must have been a prosperous one. Second, the presence of the sky-light indicates that the workshop is situated in an attic room, suggesting that the actual shop premises is situated downstairs, evidence that the business was successful enough to demand rent of at least two spaces. The variety of commissions on display also indicates the diversity of Sim’s taxidermy practice: covering the preparation of study-skins for cabinet collections, the mounting of fishing and hunting trophies and the more elaborate work involved in the setting up of cased mounts depicting specimens in a ‘natural’ scene. This, in turn, is suggestive of the diverse types of customer that he must have attracted; from naturalist collectors to the ‘sporting set’ to the more decorative demands of wealthy estate owners.

Yet, while this portrait offers a glimpse into the sensory world of a nineteenth-century taxidermy workshop, and is suggestive of the wider cultures in which it was enmeshed, it offers ultimately only a frozen moment, an idealised image of the sitter and scene. Much like the aim of the practice depicted then, the painting works to still life and mortify time. It is Livingstone's thesis that sites are made both through the activities that 'take-place' within them and the human practices that constitute them. Certain parallels might be drawn with Sally Marston's *et al's* plea for a 'site ontology' where sites are conceptualised 'as immanent (self-organising) event-spaces dynamically composed of bodies, doings and sayings [which are] differentiated and differentiating, unfolding singularities that are not only dynamic, but also 'hang together' through the congealments and blockages of force relations' (Marston *et al* 2007: 265). Without fuller engagement with this conceptualisation of a 'site ontology', or indeed the criticisms levelled at it (e.g. Collinge 2006; Escobar 2007), I do think that understanding 'sites' or spaces as *emergent* holds particular appeal for cultural-historical geographers interested in the practices that constituted past places, indeed it clearly aids in resisting predetermining or, after analysis, overdetermining the practices and matter that made up those sites. Extending this approach to explore further Sim's life-world and thus open-out our understanding of the wider practices that co-produced the scene captured in the portrait, it must be interpreted in light of other materials relating to Sim's practices as a commercial taxidermist and amateur natural historian.⁵²

To construct a fuller picture of the mutual making of 'science' and 'scientist' in place, Livingstone insists the recovery must go beyond the intimate practice of science in a specific site to explore other spaces or sites which contribute to this co-production (Livingstone 2003: 183). However, while Livingstone purports to be interested in conveying the sensory and embodied worlds of the sites where science has been practiced, the sweeping historical surveys of the range of sites in which science has been practiced allow only the briefest of sketches of, say, the laboratory, museum or garden, and the human lives and practices that constitute them (E.g. see Livingstone 2003: 17-86). Rather than expressing the atmospheric and material textures of such sites or, indeed, of the bodies and practices that animated them, Livingstone concentrates efforts on conveying how scientific knowledge was legitimated within such sites and thus how such knowledge was authorised to travel between and beyond. Livingstone's work can therefore be characterised as charting geographies of scientific knowledge rather than practice. By way of contrast Lorimer seeks to demonstrate that the application of

⁵² Of course, it is worth noting here that my initial reading of the portrait was heavily informed by my time spent in Peter Summers' workshop at the NMS and thus without this experience I no doubt would not have gleaned so much information.

geographic sensibilities to biographical study can produce ‘multi-sensory biographies’ which emphasise the biographical subject as existing in an ‘interplay of various individuals and agencies, each weaving intricate plot lines in the unfolding drama of past events’ (2003a: 203). Lorimer has further subverted conventional biographical practice in geography by considering the lives of marginal figures in scientific and geographic practice (e.g. see Lorimer 2003a, 2008; Lorimer and Spedding 2005) and by extending the epistemic focus of biography into the non-human realm (Lorimer 2006, 2009). Whilst *Telling small stories* (2003a) of ordinary geographers and geographical practice he cross-cuts the theoretical agenda set by non-representational theorists, to argue that biography can be a mode for narrating ‘lives lived’ rather than merely ‘lives told’. The distinction, as Keighren explains, is between a biographical narrative that emphasises the subjects ‘achievements as a series of taken-for-granted sequential events, and a narrative of practice, which is concerned with the embodied and intimate nature of the life lived’ (Keighren 2007: 50 – quoting Barnes 2001: 410). Thus, while Lorimer is still interested in charting the ‘locational particulars’ of the life lived, he is committed to portraying the ‘spaces of a life’ as being linked and constituted by practices. Thus by considering other spaces of practice that flow into, and, out of Sim’s workshop, it is possible to animate the life-world of a taxidermist-cum-naturalist in the nineteenth-century.

Yet as was discussed in the previous chapter, historical geographers are confronted by a distinct methodological problem when attempting to recuperate aspects of the non-representational from the past: i.e. past performances, practices and lifeworlds are marked by their constitutive *absence*, making them doubly ‘unmarked’ (Phelan 1993). As Gagen *et al* (2007:5) point out ‘the passage of time erodes the ‘presence’ of past performances and we must, by necessity, forgo any claims to the possibility of recovering in fullness realms of lived gesture, touch, and emotion’. Therefore, it is potentially difficult for the historical researcher to follow Thrift’s *Afterword* thesis, since they may be entirely dependant on the textual and representational sources of the archive. Yet as a new wave of creative historical geographers suggest there are ‘many creative ways to engage with existing ‘representational’ sources as conveyors of historical ‘performance’ in its immediacy and evanescence’ (Gagen *et al* 2007: 7; see also Naylor 2002; Lorimer 2003a; Gagen 2004; Merriman 2005; Cant 2006; DeSilvey 2007). Furthermore, as Phelan admits, performances are always in a state of appearing and vanishing and she thereby insists on the possibility of working with their historical remainders, as they may still retain the potential energy of those past events.

Much is therefore contingent on ‘the availability of ‘sources’ which capture (or at least take us closer to) the smells, sounds, sights and feelings of (past) embodied experience’ (Lorimer 2003a: 202). This does not mean conventional archival and representational sources should be

abandoned altogether, as ‘creative engagement with, and imaginative interpretation of’ such sources’ holds much potential for excavating forms of the non-representational (Ibid: 203). For example Adrian Evans (2008) outlines how non-representational theories of practice enabled him to enliven probate inventories of household possessions in a least three ways. Firstly, non-representational theories of practice help to enliven the language content of probate inventories, enabling Evans to view language as something that can embody an immediate sensual coping with the world (language as tool) rather than something that only involves a cold description of the world (language as text) (see pages 49-54). This understanding therefore enabled him to make important links between the commodity descriptions contained within the inventories and embodied consumption practices. Secondly, non-representational theories of practice also help to enliven the objects described in probate inventories, highlighting the importance of considering the relationships and interconnections between different objects and actors (see pages 54-61). While Evans qualifies that on their own it is difficult to gain detailed insights into hands-on consumption practices and rituals through probate inventories, he states that, when read jointly with sources that detail social etiquette and ritual, tentative links between the object descriptions in the inventories and embodied actions, gestures and consumption practices can be made. Finally, Evans relays that non-representational theories of practice offer the means to enliven the spaces described within probate inventories, teasing out the intimate connections between spaces and performances, in turn promoting the view that spaces are active contributors to practices rather than passive back-drops. The understanding that spaces are the emergent outcomes of a myriad of everyday practices make it possible for Evans to use the ostensibly static information about domestic spaces contained within the inventories to shed light on domestic activities and begin to glimpse some elements of the ‘performative ambience/ethos of different living spaces’ (Ibid: 62). Overall, Evans promotes a non-representational approach to the study of historical sources as it can open up ‘new ways of looking at the world and new ways of being attentive to language, thought, identity, objects and spaces, all of which allows us to enliven the contents of historical documents’ (Ibid: 66; for similar see Glennie and Thrift 2004; 2009).

Sim’s portrait can offer insights into his everyday practice as a taxidermist, and on how the workshop space and Sim co-evolved through such practices. However, to show how this space ‘hangs together’ with the other life-spaces of practices, it must not be considered in isolation. Other source materials are required to shed light on Sim’s spaces of practice beyond the workshop. For example, the Sim archive kept at Aberdeen Central Library can be considered alongside the portrait to thicken-up Sim’s lifeworld as taxidermist-cum-naturalist in

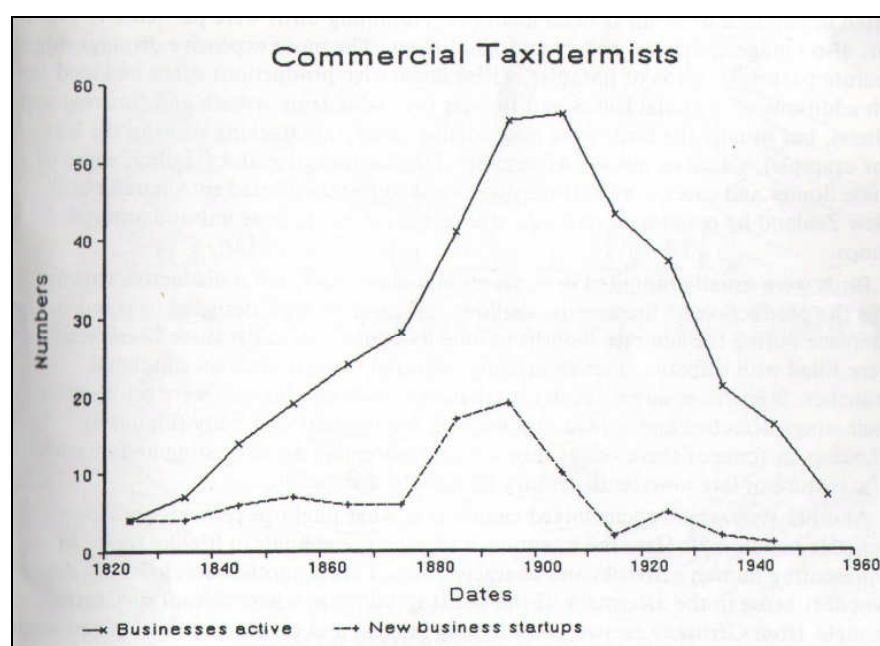
the nineteenth century. The archive comprises a volume of business correspondence, twelve natural history field diaries and a working draft of his later publication *Vertebrate Fauna of Dee* (1903). Together these offer resources for exploring both his commercial and field practice. I have managed to gather a few other remnants – a poster advertising his shop and one of his display cases – relating to Sim’s life as a commercial taxidermist and amateur natural historian based in Aberdeen, that add further colour to my narration of his spaces of practice.

Spaces of practice

Commercial

Sim set up business as a taxidermist in 1862 on Aberdeen’s King Street after receiving training in the craft in London and Edinburgh (Trail 1909).⁵³ While Sim’s earlier work as a journeyman tailor and druggist would no doubt have been a great advantage for his chosen trade, according to an obituary written by Professor Trail (Ibid) it was his passion for nature study that secured his reputation for producing accurate and ‘life-like’ specimens and made a success

⁵³ An analysis of 89 ‘active and new’ commercial taxidermy businesses in Britain between 1825-1955 by Herriot (1968) shows a steady increase in the trade peaking at the turn of the century. While often over 50 taxidermists were listed in large cities at the trades peak, even small towns and villages has their local taxidermist (see also Frost 1987). The graph below depicts the number of active and new taxidermy businesses, 1825-1955 (Morris 1993: 245; Data from Herriott 1968).



of his taxidermy business. His original premises was located at 20 King Street, but the business moved twice to cope with the demands of his expanding business; to 14 King Street and then to a more prominent position on city's the prestigious and centrally located Castlegate (as depicted in the portrait). The Castlegate premises is featured in the "*Industries of Scotland*" listings of 1889 and its description gives a valuable insight into the nature and the running of his business:

"George Sim, Naturalist and Furrier and Antiquarian,

...The premises comprise the extensive ground floor of a lofty three-storeyed building. The establishment has two large windows, well adapted for display and lighting purposes, and very interesting show of specimens of the varied treasures within is at all times exhibited to the passing public. The large interior measures about fifty feet by thirty, and is extremely well and systematically arranged and fitted up. These include a splendid collection of military weapons of all kinds, bearing upon historical incidents familiar to the readers of Scottish story, as well as those of British pre-historic interest; a very curious assortment of clocks of all kinds, as well as watches and articles of antique jewellery of various kinds. In the fine art department Mr. Sim has managed to secure from a variety of sources a very remarkable lot of rare and valuable oil paintings and engravings. As an able and ingenious taxidermist Mr. Sim is now widely known, and his skill in this respect is often engaged by naturalists and collectors of birds and other specimens of the animal and insect world; while his own collection is both large, varied and extremely valuable, and attracts the attention of scientific men generally. He has a splendid collection of furs and preserved fur-bearing animals, while his general assemblage of miscellaneous antiques and curios generally, of all possible kinds, is certainly not excelled by many museums and public collections of pretentious importance. In every way the establishment is one of extreme interest and curiosity to everyone. But Mr. Sim has not formed his interesting collection for amusement or pleasure only. He is constantly adding to, and sending away articles from the whole of his departments, and many other private and public collections are regularly being extended and enhanced by goods supplied by him in the way of business. He is becoming very widely known throughout the country, and his trading connection already extends over the whole of Britain; and his clientele bids fair, in a very short time, to extend to even wider bounds. The whole concern is under his own personal care and attentive supervision."

The listing sketches a vivid scene of the shop floor, its contents and the kinds of patron who would frequent it. While the shop occupied the ground floor, we know from the portrait that Sim's taxidermy workshop was located in the attic rooms of the building to benefit from increased light offered by skylight windows. Another advantage of keeping the workshop private is that potential customers would be spared from any smell emanating. As we learn from the listing, Sim's business dealt not only in commissioning of taxidermy but in fine art, military weapons, antique jewellery and furs and no doubt he would not have wanted to alienate (well-healed) customers by having the workshop directly adjoining the shop.

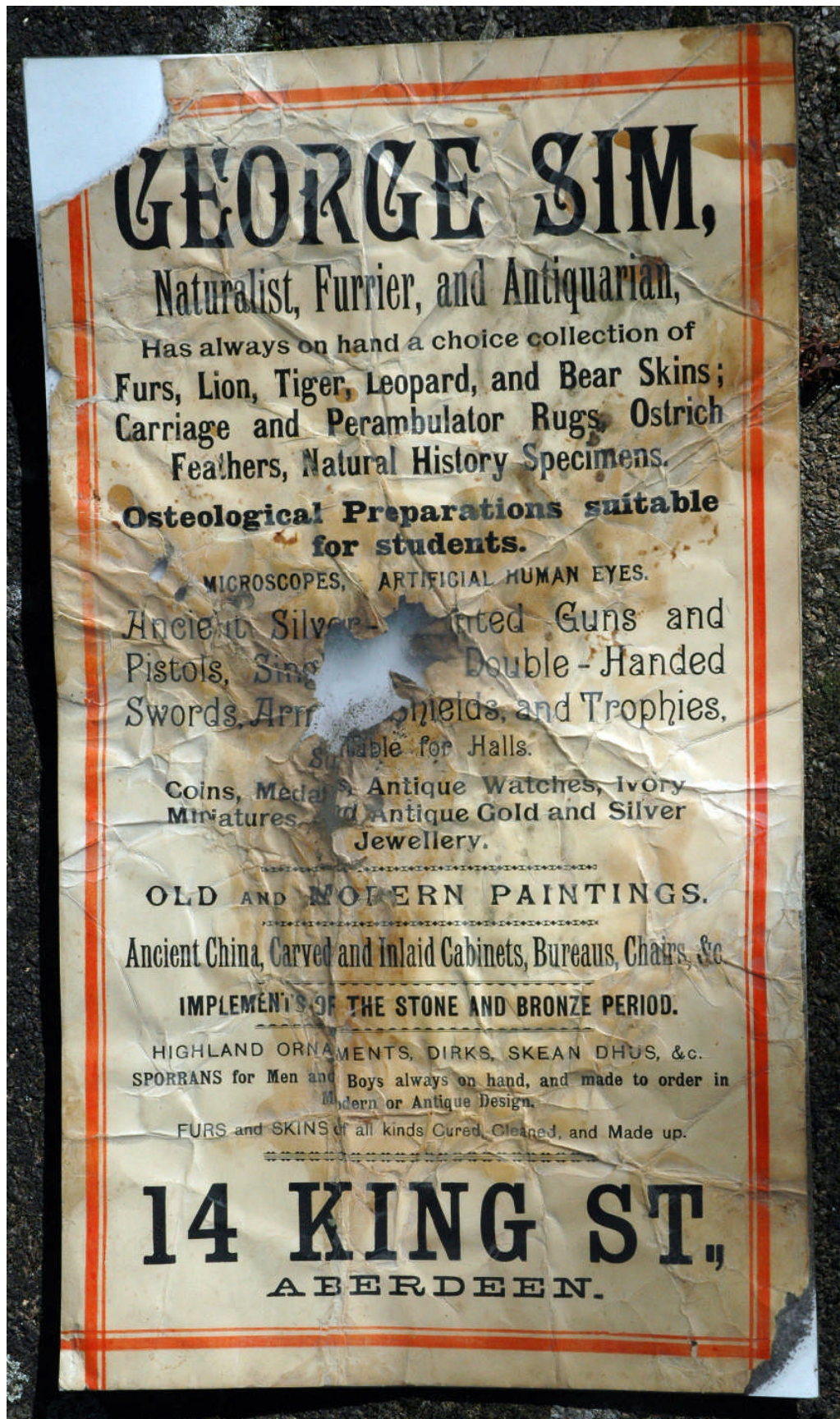


Fig. 4.2 Poster advertising George Sim's taxidermy business, 14 King Street, Aberdeen

A recovered poster advertising Sim's taxidermy and curiosity shop gives an even greater insight into his product range (see Fig. 4.2): from furs, rugs and natural history specimens of

various kinds, to osteological preparations for medical and zoological students (including artificial human eyes), to various forms of antique weaponry, and other collectables. The poster also indicates that George Sim preferred to go by the more respectable and learned titles of naturalist, furrier and antiquarian rather than as simply taxidermist. As the listing details, while Sim's skills as a taxidermist were employed by naturalist collectors, his personal collection was of great repute and thus he must have wanted to emphasise his standing as a man of learning as well as his skills as a craftsman. Although science at that time was not yet fully professionalised and many able practitioners of science were, as Jordanova has argued (2000: 74), skilled artisan and tradesmen, the title of scientist or in this case 'naturalist' was usually reserved for financially independent gentlemen. In order to be taken seriously by the scientific community both as a superior craftsman *and* as a fellow naturalist, Sim may have felt it necessary to downplay his status as a tradesman and instead to fashion and promote himself as a noteworthy naturalist-collector and antiquarian. His shop provided the perfect opportunity to show off his skills as a taxidermist-cum-naturalist but also to display his various other learned interests and expertise. As 'the whole concern was under his own personal care and attentive supervision', it would have allowed Sim to select carefully what was to be displayed so as best to reflect his skills, interests, knowledge, and expertise, and thus manage how he was perceived by those frequenting the shop, and up to a point his reputation beyond. The listing's description of the shop as a museum suggests the premises was seen and experienced as a display space or showroom as well as a site of everyday commerce. As Sim's trading connections extended far beyond the local area, it is likely much of his business was conducted through networks of correspondence (Mayhew 2005). Due to its miscellaneous and intriguing contents the business must have been a curiosity to many in the area and likely frequented as much, if not more, for the dizzying sensory experience it offered as for the conducting of business. This, coupled with the prominent position in the city's Castlegate, will have ensured Sim was a well-established figure in the micro-geographies of city life generally.

While Sim's 'showroom' immersed him in the rhythms and colour of everyday city life, his correspondence and trading connections beyond the city centre ensured a life-world extending beyond his premises and immediate locality. I have already argued that the variety of commissions cluttering the portrait suggest Sim must have possessed diverse customer base. Commissions from naturalist collectors, sportsmen and wealthy estate owners will have kept him busy in his workshop. While Sim's business records no longer exist, one volume of his business correspondence remains in the archive.⁵⁴ Letters detail transactions with regular

⁵⁴ Local library lore has it that one of Sim's daughters threw all records relating to his business and any notes relating to his writing of the Vertebrate Fauna of Dee into the river Dee. It is speculated that she may have been compelled to do so as they evidenced why he was so absent as a father.

customers, including gamekeepers⁵⁵, sportsmen and women of high social-standing. Sim had much custom with Aberdeenshire sporting estate owners. Haddo House, for one, regularly called on his services:

Oct 13th 1873

The Earl of Aberdeen⁵⁶ begs to inform Mr Sim that he forwarding by rail this day, a deer head, and will be much obliged if Mr Sim will get it set up, and also the skin to be cured for a mat. When ready, both should be addressed to the care of Mr Chivas, King St, who will arrange for transportation to Haddo House.

22nd March 1875

Dear Sir,

I have a pair of Indian pheasants, which I would like to have stuffed but before sending them to you, I have been advised to explain to you in what way they have been sent from India. They have the eyes in them, the feet pierced for the wire, and the body stuffed with wadding. They have been in the house for a few months but kept in the box they came in. if you can stuff them I would like to put them on one stand, representing some Indian view. An early reply will favour me.

I remain yours truly,

J. W. Forbes.

These two example letters are indicative of the game patrons and sporting cultures into which Sim's practice was enrolled in. Royal Deeside in Aberdeenshire was, and still is, renowned for its sporting estates, and as a taxidermist based in Aberdeen, he gained much custom from the sporting season. While stag-head mounts provided Sim with a great deal of commissions, especially in the months of September and October, Sim also became accustomed to receiving more 'exotic' specimens like the Indian pheasants mentioned in the second letter from the Haddo estate. As the British Empire rapidly expanded the wealthy aristocracy took advantage

⁵⁵ Morris (1993) has written that the preponderance of birds of prey among nineteenth-century taxidermists' work reflects the practice of gamekeeping, another common countryside practice in Victorian times. Gamekeepers were employed by large estates to kill birds of prey as they were seen as a threat to lucrative gaming stock like grouse and pheasant. Some indication of the carnage is given by the estate records of Glen Garry, which show the killing of 42 Eagles (27 of them white-tailed eagle, *Haliaeetus albicilla*) between the years of 1837-1840, along with 1,754 other birds of prey (Pearsall 1950). While rewards and premiums were offered to gamekeepers by the estate-owners, they also knew that they could sell on the skins of birds of prey to taxidermists, which has led some to criticise the role taxidermists played in encouraging this practice (Nicholson 1926; Sawyer 1987).

⁵⁶ John Campbell Hamilton-Gordon (1847-1934) was the 7th Earl of Aberdeen and 7th Lord Haddo and was the grandson of 4th Earl of Aberdeen George Hamilton-Gordon who served as Prime Minister of the United Kingdom from 1852-1855 (Cannadine 1990).

of the fauna such countries offered, which of course included game (see Lorimer 2000). While these more ‘exotic’ commissions from his customers’ travels abroad may have been unfamiliar to Sim (and were often sent as skins without any accompanying skeletal structure), he, like other taxidermists working at that time, would have had to improvise and use the closest native species – in this case the British pheasant *Phasianus colchicus* – as a reference work for setting-up (Morris 1993).

A chance find of a cased Indian Pheasant by George Sim gives an insight into the quality of work that he was producing (Fig. 4.3).⁵⁷



Fig. 4.3 Golden Pheasant case by George Sim

This case is possibly one of the pair of Indian Pheasants that Sim was commissioned to set up for the Earl of Aberdeen – it may have been Sim did not have a case large enough to house the two together or that one of the pheasant skins had not been well preserved and perished or, of course, it may have been an entirely different commission. No matter, this labelled⁵⁸ case offers the



Fig. 4.4 Sim’s trade label

⁵⁷ The case was found by taxidermy collector Pat Morris.

⁵⁸ While Sim’s trade label is fairly plain, Pat Morris has shown that many taxidermists of that period attached more ornate and interesting labels which give an insight into their commercial practice. In some places where there was insufficient work for a full-time taxidermist, taxidermists often offered other services like picture-framing and hairdressing and these were advertised on their trade labels. Many also ran gunsmiths and fishing tackle businesses, offering the tools with which to collect items for taxidermy. While Sim obviously traded in

rare⁵⁹ opportunity of inspecting Sim's craftsmanship. Commercial taxidermists operating at that time often developed their own distinctive styles, partly in response to the varied requirements of their customers, and thus some taxidermists tended to specialise in the production of certain types of commission. While we know from the portrait that Sim produced trophy mounts and study specimens, he would also have been engaged in setting-up decorative display cases like the Indian Pheasant. In the mid-late nineteenth century there was increasing demand for decorative pieces like this as it was considered highly fashionable to have cases of colourful foreign birds brightening up gloomy Victorian parlours. These decorative cases and 'shades' (glass-dome mounts) would be crammed with a multitude of birds in colourful combination, often with 'a cavalier disregard for ornithological exactitude' as the poses adopted were usually designed to show off the plumage to best effect (Morris 1993: 246). As a naturalist Sim may have been loath to meet the demands of such taste, but, because he could charge considerably more for these cases than he could for the more exact study-specimens required by serious naturalist collectors, it would have made bad business sense for him not to take on these commissions. This said, from the case above it is clear that Sim, while showing off the plumage of the bird to good effect, also presented the bird in an anatomically correct pose. Whether following the instructions of the Earl of Aberdeen or of his own design, he also attempted to present the pheasant in some sort of naturalistic setting. As the previous chapter outlined, by the mid-nineteenth century museum taxidermy was moving away from its ranks of austere yet anatomically accurate identically posed individual specimens to setting up groups of birds in 'habitat groups' where the birds were displayed within a representation of their natural environment. This style was adopted by some commercial taxidermists who would, according to Morris (1993: 246), use either found and dried natural materials or artificial leaves and flowers (available from wreath and funeral suppliers) to present a suggestion of the specimen's natural environment (due to time and monetary constraints these were merely 'suggestions' and not nearly as accurate or elaborate as the museum 'habitat groups' and dioramas).

Sim's decorative style and services as a furrier would have also secured many female customers. Lady Sydney of Laurencekirk – one of Sim's more demanding customers – often called on him to set something up in quite a particular style and design:

other collectables, providing him with an additional income, it is most likely that these merely reflected his sideline interests rather than being an essential boost to his main trade in taxidermy.

⁵⁹ Rare since many examples of Victorian taxidermy have either perished or been destroyed or thrown out. Decorative and trophy taxidermy became especially unfashionable towards the end of the nineteenth-century for its association with the unnecessary killing of animals and because protective legislation was passed to protect certain species considered under-threat (Morris 1993).

4th May 1875

Lady Sydney thinks that one of the pheasants had better be mounted on the dark blue velvet to suit the furniture of her boudoir – (pattern enclosed) and the duck on dark bottle green (lady S would like to see a pattern before it is made up).

Lady Sydney fears now the sketch enclosed by Mr Sim is going to mount the skins on too small a piece of velvet – the measurements of the screen: 19 inches wide and 20 deep.

This letter relates to a fire-screen Lady Sydney had commissioned for her boudoir. Fire screens were apparently popularly requested as they were thought to be a good way to show off a bird's plumage (Morris 1993).⁶⁰ Another common request from female customers was the preservation of colourful and exotic birds to adorn hats. For this reason some taxidermists specialised in the sourcing and setting-up of foreign birds, which they obtained from auction markets or specialist plumage dealers in London and Paris who were supplied by professional collectors situated largely in India, South America and the Far East (see Doughty 1975). While many of the skins were intended for the millinery trade, taxidermists would have also used the markets and dealers to source additional skins for their custom in decorative taxidermy and particularly to meet the demands of the potentially lucrative female market.

While in the main Sim's field diaries detail his wanderings and observations as a naturalist in his local field area, he also occasionally recorded some of his business trips made to Inverness, London and Paris. For example on the 5th of August 1874 Sim was in Paris on business recording his dealings thus:

“Started with a guide about 9a.m. this day almost wholly devoted to business, except when any place of interest came in my way, I visited it, so as to save going over a second time; such as Madeline Church, the Bourse etc. It would have been an impossibility for me to get the people I wanted to see without a guide, as they all in private rooms, some of them three or four flats up, and the one I chiefly wanted, was in the fifth flat reached by a stair as dark as midnight. How strangers manage to find business people in such out-of-the way places I can't imagine. The Bird stuffers are in the same sorts of places. The prizes charged for stuffing are enormous. At one place I went in to ask the price of a Resplendent Trogon that was exposed in the window. They told me it was 70f, and that they paid 25f for stuffing it. They could scarcely believe me when I told

⁶⁰ Morris (1993: 246) explains that the firescreens were popularly requested as they would hide the 'ugliness' of the fireplace when it was not in use in the summer months. Usually these firescreens were filled with displays of small brightly coloured foreign birds on simulated branches. Sometime larger species (particularly owls and herons) were set up with their wings detached and spread as a backing for the flattened body – the designed preferred by Lady Sydney.

them I could do the same work for 6f and said I should come and stay in Paris, and suppose I were to charge 10f, it would be much under the usual charge and that I should soon make a fortune.”

While Sim made regular business trips to Inverness and London to buy skins, this was his first trip to Paris on business (one other trip is recorded). He gives an unusually detailed account, including his sight-seeing and business dealings which otherwise he rarely commented on. Instead of the large markets and auction houses of London, Sim found that most of the millinery and stuffing businesses are located in private rooms. His interest in the Resplendent Trogon (*Pharomachrus mocinno*) – a now extremely rare South American bird – and his admission that he has mounted them in the past both evidence that Sim’s taxidermy practice connected him personally with the massive trade in exotic birds in the nineteenth and early-twentieth century. The Resplendent Trogon along with the Bird of Paradise (*Paradisaea rubra*), with their highly colourful plumage and long tail feathers, were the most sought after birds in the plumage and skin trade for the furnishing of millinery ornaments for women’s wear and decorative taxidermy cases. Doughty (1975) shows the extent of these imports, which were of concern to contemporary conservationists who sought to ban the trade and persuade ladies not to use plumage for their own adornment (see also Evans 1997).⁶¹ Sim’s involvement with the large-scale killing and trading of wild birds might be thought to sit somewhat uncomfortably with his passion for nature study, as his visit to the Jardin des Plantes the following day illustrates:

“Drove to the Jardin des Plantes, in which there are a number of good animals. They are especially good in the Raptores. After having gone over the living animals, I visited the Natural History Museum which is also within the gardens. Although the collection is not so extensive as the British Museum, still, I think it is better in many respects. The specimens, in general, are better mounted, that is the most recent. A few old ones are bad. Everything is under glass except a few of the larger animals. The larger Fishes and Reptiles are mounted, and hang from the roof of the different apartments, back downwards. This is not a good arrangement, as they are all beyond reach of good examination. The birds are all set up and very cleanly kept. There is a room set apart for birds mounted along with their nest; each nest being placed in its natural position, whether on the ground, in trees, rocks, or hung from grass stalks. This is a most interesting room and the first time I have seen the plan carried out... Some of the Fishes are very well prepared, but most of them are done in the old soft plan. Some of the Rays are remarkably well done, others very badly. The collection, as such, beats the British, for neatness and cleanliness.”

Sim was obviously passionate about learning of the natural world, and while he seems oblivious to the fact that his practice as a taxidermist is caught up in its destruction, such

⁶¹ For example, the RSPB’s cause celebre from its establishment in 1890’s was the battle against the plumage trade until it effectively ended in Britain with the 1921 Importation of Plumage (prohibition) Act. The more robust 1925 Wild Birds Protection Act followed to secure the conservation of native species as well (see Evans 1997).

interests were not regarded as contradictory at the time. Moreover museum taxidermy, in comparison to the decorative and trophy taxidermy that would have accounted for the majority of Sim's business, would have been considered less problematic at that time as the collecting and setting-up of *specimens* was legitimised on educational grounds. The arrangement of specimens at the Jardine des Plantes in taxonomic groupings of individually mounted birds on labelled perches allowed for detailed comparisons to be made, and for a naturalist like Sim it would have provided the perfect opportunity to practice comparative morphology (see Farber 1977 for the interplay between the development of British ornithological study and taxidermy).

While Sim does not express any concern that his business personally connects him to the massive trade in skins for personal adornment and domestic design (probably because the success of his business depended on it), he seemingly valued his custom from naturalist collectors over his commissions in decorative taxidermy. Partly this is because the commissions from naturalist collectors permitted him to set-up anatomically accurate specimens and thus put his knowledge in comparative morphology into practice, and also because it allowed him to correspond with respected naturalists. The celebrated Scottish naturalist John A. Harvie-Brown so admired Sim's work in setting-up study skins and specimens that he encouraged him to set up business in Glasgow:

And now I wish to say something about another matter. Supposing you had plenty of work to do in Glasgow, had the support of the Kelvin Grove Museum and Natural History Society, and work to do from at least three of our principle scotch Collectors resident in, or near Glasgow for a commensment – would you be inclined to leave your present business in Aberdeen and come to Glasgow? There is plenty of room in Glasgow for a really good taxidermist and I'll tell you why. Mr MacCulloch is, there is no doubt, a really good workman when he chooses, but he and his son's keep the work entrusted to them beyond all reasonable time and of late they have even refused to take in birds to be made up as cabinet skins. In fact, Mr McC is alone in his profession in Glasgow and thinks himself a little king. He tried to charge Mr Thomson of the Kelvin Grove Museum £10 for stuffing a stag and when told that £3 was what was asked by other workmen he replied "O yes Landseer painted deer and so did ither folk, buy ye would'na pay Landseer just the same as ye would pay ither folk". This shows the conceit of the man. I asked Thomson the other day and he would be able to give you work and I know that there is a general feeling against the Macculloch's now.

I believe that you have a steady, good business in Aberdeen, and that perhaps it would be a great risk to leave it, but that of course would be for yourself to consider. For my own part, I may safely say that I would with pleasure send you all my work to do in the making up of skins or skinning specimens. I never get any birds stuffed...

Of course you will consider this letter private and only for your own perusal. It is intended for no-one else.

Believe me, yours truly,

To have his skills as a taxidermist complemented by Harvie-Brown in this way suggests that Sim was accomplished in his craft. Harvie-Brown's proposal that Sim set up business in Glasgow must have been tempting as the possibility of dealing with prestigious institutions like the Kelvingrove Museum and Glasgow Natural History Society would appeal to a taxidermist wishing also to be taken seriously as a naturalist. This said, as Harvie-Browne indicates, there was no guarantee of this business and Sim had already built up a dependable customer base in Aberdeen. Therefore while Sim would have probably preferred to have been engaged in setting up specimens for natural history display over the large amount of decorative taxidermy commissioned by his Aberdonian customers, the promise of all of Harvie-Browne's work in skinning and setting-up study-skins, for which he would not have been able to charge nearly as much for as the decorative taxidermy, would have hardly been enough of a guarantee for him to relocate to Glasgow. Furthermore, Sim was a committed field naturalist and was extremely connected to his local area through his field researches. As the next section shows, it was most likely this tie that kept him from moving to the city of Glasgow even with the lure of its more active natural history community.

Field

The son of a farm overseer, Sim had acquired a passion for nature study from his days as a young lad spent on the farm in Craigellachie, Aberdeenshire. After setting up his taxidermy business in Aberdeen he began to take his natural history enquiries more seriously and kept a record of his field researches and general observations in field journals (Trail 1909).⁶² Sim gives an almost daily account of his field wanderings and researches in his field journals. Reading these passages conveys a sense of how Sim's researches, and therefore his life outside business hours, 'took place *amidst* the micro-spaces of [his] body *in* landscape' (Lorimer 2003a: 202). If Sim can be considered dedicated to his profession, he can only be described as fanatical in his devotion to his various field researches, since to fit his study around his business hours he often went out rambling in the wee small hours to record and observe nature. For a number of years he paid great attention to fishes and crustaceans; and, as

⁶² The Sim archive at Aberdeen Central Library contains twelve field diaries spanning 1862-1905, meticulously detailing his almost daily field observations and finds.

Professor Trail noted in Sim's obituary, 'few morning were passed without a visit to the sands between the Dee and the Don, or to the boats returned from fishing' (Trail 1909: 131).



Fig 4.5 Map of Aberdeen 1876

The footprints mark out Sim's daily walk along the sands from his house in Constitution Street to Footdee Harbour

As Sim's house and business addresses were not located far from the beach he was able to walk the sands each morning along to the harbour to record things washed up on the beach or in the fishermen's nets (see Fig. 4.5). Sim's fishes and crustacean research takes up much of his journal entries from 1862 to the mid 1880's. Below is a sample of Sim's fish researches from the year 1867. These entries give a flavour of Sim's daily rambles along the sands:

"March 6th

Went to bay at Nigg at 4:30am found nothing of interest... The sun rose beautifully at 6:53am which gave great pleasure as an eclipse was to occur on it at 9:45am. It was seen well.

Picked up a good specimen of Asterias aurantiaca, and another of Solaster papposa, at the Torry boats. They had been brought in on fishermen's lines.

March 10th

4a.m. Fine morning, and the thrush is singing sweetly around my house. 7.30.a.m. Nothing but a few Argentines on the sands. Went to Bay of Nigg. In salmon-fishers boat found a specimen of Hyppolyte varians.

March 16th

4.30 am Went along with Messrs Willis and Gray to the rocks south of the Bay of Nigg. Raised a flock of Golden Plover. Caught two specimens of Galathea squamifera, one of Hyas araneus and several of Ophiocoma rosula, O. bellis and S papposa.

March 31st

Visited the pool immediately south of Girdleness Lighthouse. Found one specimen of the Daisy Star, Five-bearded Rockling and Cottus bubalis, common. Mr Willis found a Pipe Fish.

April 3rd

Arose at 4am and went with Messrs. Willis and Gray to the rocks south of Gridleness Battery. Found some very large Viviparous Blennies, one specimen of Motagu's Sucker; among the low-lying rocks south of the battery found one specimen of Cribella, but altogether this was an unproductive place. Going to pools south of the lighthouse – this is a great stronghold for Coribella – searched along to the fishers but, but found nothing.

Afternoon the same day, went to Cove with Mr. Gray and searched among the pools a little south of Cove, but found nothing. It rained all the time. After waiting some time in a Cove hotel we went south about a mile, and went down a large gully, and among the pools at the foot we found one specimen of Montagu's Sucker several of Cribella, Hyas araneus, and the prettiest specimen of Cottus bubalis. I have yet seen, the belly bright golden yellow, which colour ascended to the lateral line, beautifully spotted with brown in the centre of which was a spot of purest white... All about and south of cove, the pools are very barren, and are not worth the time it takes to search them."

Sim's rambles would invariably take place in the early morning, in order that he could fit his researches around his working hours and inspect the morning catch at the harbour fish market. Sim built up a particularly a good rapport with the fisher folk of Footdee, known locally as "Fitte", a small fishing community located at the mouth of the Dee. He would often call in on the community on his early morning stroll along the sands to see if their nets had brought in anything unusual that would be of interest for his researches:

"It has often been said that Footdee fishermen were very uncivil to those who went about them while they were cleaning their lines. I have not experienced this, indeed quite the opposite, and many of them bring in from the sea whatever they think will be of interest to me. Puppets who go

about the “squares” with an air of superiority and haughty look and speech will, - these the fishers soon sum up, and treat accordingly.”

Here Sim offers a glimpse of his interaction with the community, almost turning his ‘naturalists eye’ on to the local human fauna. The Fittle folk were notoriously unwelcoming to outsiders, but it seems they took no offence to Sim coming in and observing them at work. They may at first have found his presence and interest in their catch slightly odd, yet his sustained and passionate interest must have convinced them that his presence was harmless. Sustaining good relations with the community was important to Sim as they often provided him with interesting new specimens for his fishes and crustacean collection, doubles of which he would preserve and pass on to the British Museum (see Fig. 4.6).

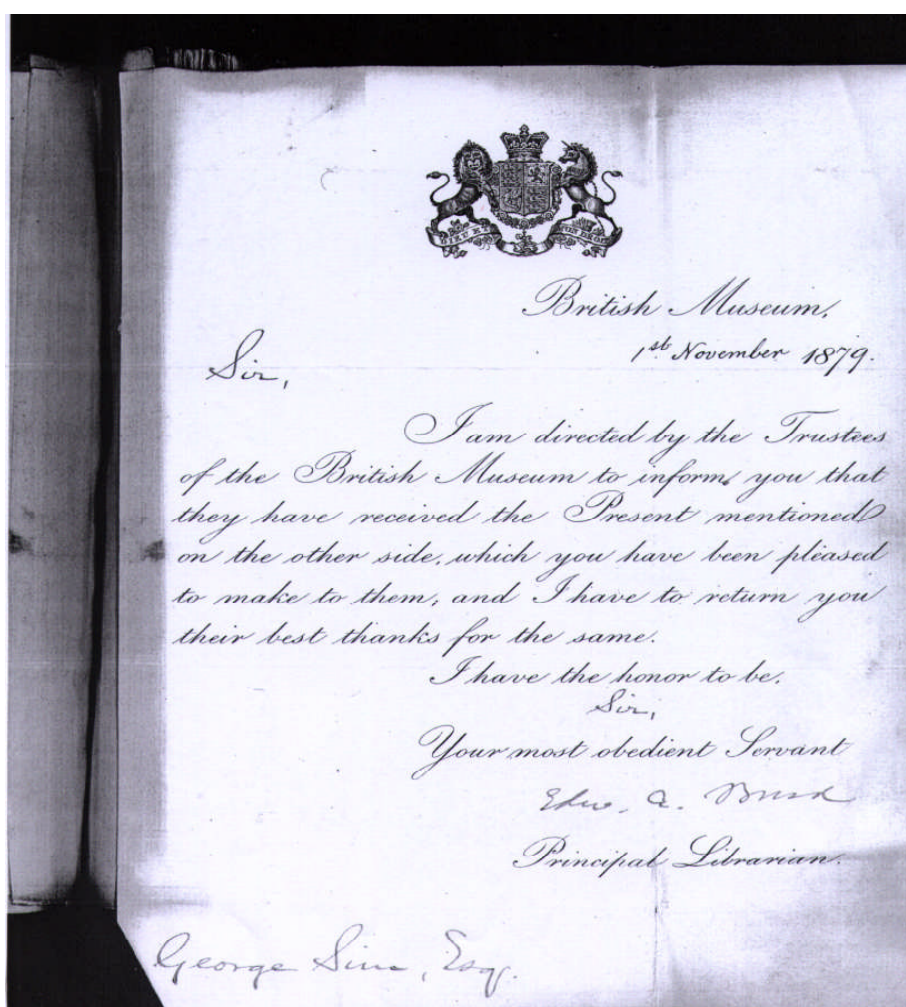


Fig. 4.6 Receipt from the British Museum for two specimens of *Lestrigonus spinidoralis*

Over time Sim became increasingly interested in the community themselves. Possibly influenced by anthropological writings circulating at that time, he often wrote about the community as if they were the focus of his studies. For example, on the 6th of July 1876 he remarked on the superstitions of the fisherfolk:

“5 am. Bought a specimen of the Bib at Footdee. Got some stories from the fishermen which are worthy of note as being fair examples of their superstitions. . .

The first was to the effect that when they find a Cuttlefish upon their lines, care must be taken while removing it lest any of the inky fluid which the fish ejects might get into the eyes of those removing it, because if it did, blindness is the consequence which nothing will cure, so to prevent such an accident, the line on which a Cuttle is hooked is held behind one’s back and shaken until the creature is thrown off.

Second – If a person is stung with the dorsal fin of the Weaver fish, great pain is felt for some time after (this much I know is true) and if it happens while the tide is nearly at the ebb, the pain increases as the tide flows, continuing to do so until it is high water, when again as the tide is again on the ebb, the pain abates. So firmly do they believe this that they get, in some instances almost frantic, seeing that six hours of suffering, that always increasing, is before them. The women are very apt to get wounded by the fish in question while they are fishing for Sand-eels which are used for bait for Haddock.

Third – Should a Lamprey get attached to a boat, it has the power of holding her let the wind blow ever so strong, with the sail set, and the men take the oars, the boat cannot move until the Lamprey is removed.

The man who told me this had proof of it one time him-self. They had got fast, how they did not know, but on taking up the rudder they found a Lamprey attached to it which explained the matter to their entire satisfaction!!

There is no use trying to convince them they are mistaken in these things, and that Pagurus Bernhardus, as they firmly believe, are not young lobsters. They simply say, “How can you who are no fisher, ken better than men that has gone to sea a’ their days?””

This passage is revealing on several levels. It illuminates how Sim found the community’s practices and habits fascinating. Also, although Sim finds their superstitions to be irrational, he realises that he depends on them for his research and must sustain good relations with them and thus desists in questioning belief directly. Yet rather than see the community as merely the suppliers of specimens for his research, he held a genuine interest in and respect for their way of life; as this passage written later the same year indicates:

“August 23rd 7 a.m. On the sands I stood for some time looking at some fisherwomen who were fishing for sand eels, which they do by wading into the sea until nothing is seen but their heads, dragging all the while a long net after them! But instead of getting what they wanted, their net, when they brought it ashore, was filled with young plaice, Gobies and pipe-fish, with only a few eels. ‘Tis astonishing the number of crabs they took out with one hand . . .”

While Sim’s relationship with the Fitte community would have proved invaluable for his ‘fishes’ researches, it was through his anthropological interest in them that he corresponded with Charles Darwin. After having been introduced to the wife of a fisherman friend who had,

what appeared to Sim a case of hereditary Supernumerary mamme, (or third nipple), he thought it best to contact Darwin, believing that it would be of interest for his research:

Oct 18/1879

Charles Darwin Esq.,

Sir, believing that you would be interested in the subjects to which I am about to refer, I take the liberty of writing to you as I think they might strengthen your views on the advance of the higher animals from that of the lower forms; view which appear to me incontrovertible.

... a woman having two teats on her left breast, one being three inches below the other, milk flows freely from both, although she never suckles her child from the lower one. She is a wife of a fisherman of this city with whom I have been in the habit of going to see; thus him knowing my work to hear of anything strange connected with man or other animals, he told me of this peculiarity in his wife. And after some coaxing she consenting to letting me see her breast and proceeding she was very happy in doing.

She tells me that prior to her having children, the two nipples were the same size, but now that she gives suck to her children with the upper, or proper one, only, it has become larger on that account.

She has two daughters in her family the younger of the two has no appearance of the peculiarity. But she cannot say whether the older one has it or no, as she will on no account allow her mother to see her breast, although asked to do so several times. So in the present state we may conclude that the peculiarity is confined to the mother alone, unless indeed, the cause of the daughter's refusal is from having it also.

The fisher folk here are rather superstitious and altogether strange in their ideas, especially as regards to any personal defect, this being this being so, the girl may wish to prevent it being known that she has any such mark, from fear of being talked about or looked upon by her acquaintances with some degree of superstitious dread.

The foregoing being facts, none of the medical gentlemen to whom I have spoken on the subject have ever heard of before. I thought it well to acquaint you of them.

Perhaps you will kindly say the value, (if any) such things are in support of your writings. They appear to be considerable. If I have not made the matter sufficiently plain, I shall be happy to render you any further information on the subject you may desire, if such be within my power. In the meantime,

I remain your obedient servant,

George Sim

Thankfully, Darwin's response stressed that this anatomical peculiarity was quite common to both men and women and that, while he wished Sim 'success in {his} pursuit of Science', he did not

continue to correspond with him and Sim's anthropological interest in the community faded (see Fig. 4.7).

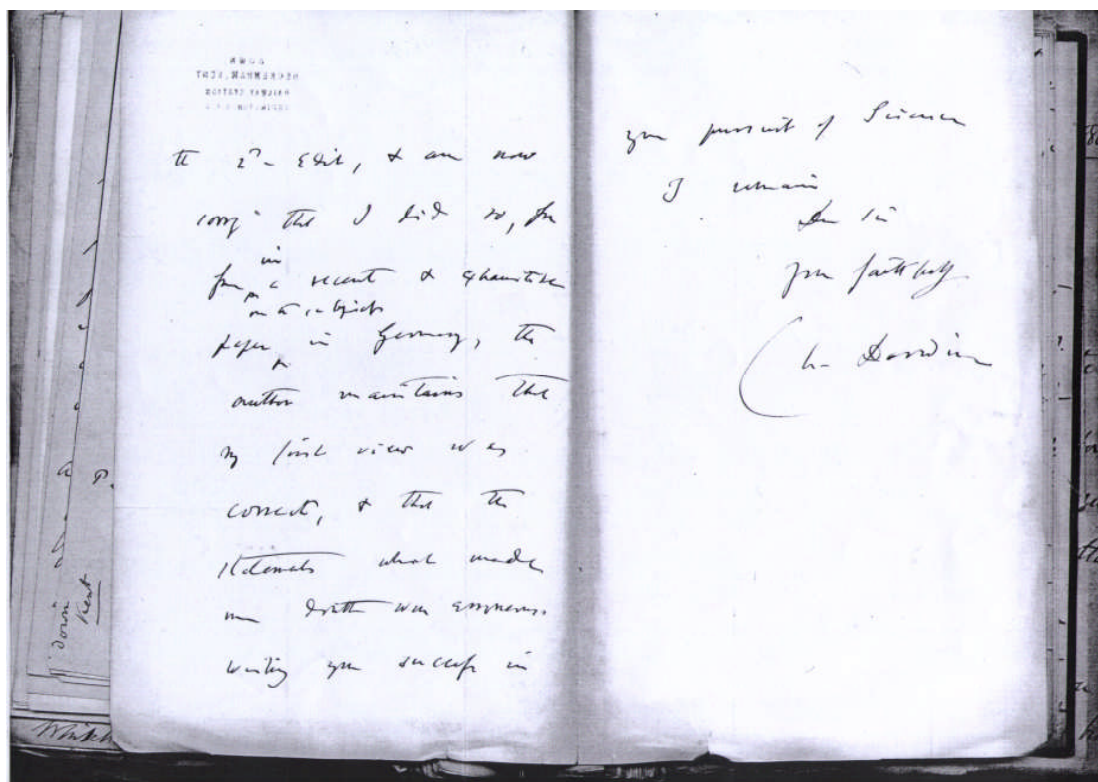


Fig. 4.7 Letter received from Charles Darwin 1879

This correspondence with Darwin further illuminates the wider social geographies of connection and influence within which Sim was embedded through his natural history researches. At that time much of the circulation of scientific knowledge was conducted through correspondence networks, and letter writing was seen as important medium for the exchange and circulation of ideas, theories and results (see Naylor 2005; Mayhew 2005). While there were many learned societies and coffee houses in the capitals that enabled scientists to meet and debate in both Edinburgh and London, a provincial naturalist like Sim was dependent on his correspondence with other higher status and more centrally positioned naturalists as they could corroborate his researches and connect him to these more prestigious scientific communities. Sim's correspondence detail how he exchanged lettersc with many other men of science around the country. The correspondence between Sim and a gentleman by the name of Westwood is illustrative. On April 19th 1873 Sim wrote to J.D. Westwood M.A.T.Ls:

Sir,

Pardon the liberty I take in addressing you, this I do in the hope that you may be good enough to assist me in my present difficulty, and because I know of no one so able to do so. If you will kindly favour me with your opinion I will be ever grateful. And to show that I do not write with any wish to appear other than what I am, by this same post I send a small pamphlet by which you will see I have been for some considerable time engaged in the study of British Crustacea. If you have no time to render your assistance, perhaps you can direct me to some gentleman who has, and, would be willing to do so, as in this part of the country there is no one to refer to.

Westwood's reply on 2nd May 1873:

Dear Sir,

I have to thank you for your notes on the stalk eyed crustacean of the N.E. coast of Scotland – I should have answered you before, but have dangerously ill since the receipt of your letter and am still confined to my room (as I fear I shall be for some time to come) and am thereby prevented from going to the museum to consult my books and specimens. If your two doubtful sessil eyed specimens are Amphipods and time presses it would be well to send your query to C ? Bate Esq., Plymouth.

I will attend your request and look as I can more,

Yours Truly,

J. Westwood.

Correspondences such as this one would have been invaluable since Sim was without formal training. His catalogued correspondence illustrates that he often used his correspondence networks to inform his studies and verify his results and suspicions. Relations were all one-sided, however. Indeed as Sim's status as a naturalist grew people began calling on him for information. On 5th of Septmeber 1879 H. J. Buchanan contacted Sim, understanding him to have expertise on the fishes of the north-east coast:

Sir,

I am at present engaged in collecting materials for a short paper on the distribution of the lesser JSM in Scotland. Mr Harvie-Brown informed me that you are the likely person to know of any occurrences on the eastern coast or elsewhere, and it is on this account that I venture to trouble you with this letter. I would be greatly obliged for any information as to its occurrence, especially of its breeding.

Appologising for thus troubling you,

H. J. Buchanan

Dear Sir,

I am exceedingly obliged for yours of the 15th, which contains valuable information from a coast with which I am totally unacquainted.

These letters demonstrate how Sim's status as a naturalist became recognised and appreciated in wider scientific circles. His intimate local knowledge was highly valued commodity, especially for those, like Buchanan, involved in cataloguing species as part of larger national projects. Sim's connection with the British Museum (through the supply of specimens) and his commendation by the celebrated naturalist Harvie-Browne (who by that point had commissioned Sim to write the 'Dee' volume of his *Vertebrate Fauna Series of Scotland*) demonstrate how he had come to be recognised as an authority in his field.

However, as the correspondence with Buchanan suggests, Sim's abilities as a naturalist were only legitimated through his association with more notable figures like Harvie-Browne. Science in the nineteenth-century, and natural history in particular, was predominantly seen as the preserve of the gentleman and leisured classes, and research has suggested that the cultures of science in that period were 'defined by the hegemonic ideal of the gentleman amateur' (Bergman 1974: 39).⁶³ While the scientific community's so called 'republic of letters' purported to be a democratic forum for the exchange of ideas and debate, it actually worked to reproduce social norms and hierarchies (Mayhew 2005). Sim's correspondences with other naturalists did give him access to wider debates and conversations, however, through the letter writing conventions of the day, they also worked to undermine his social mobility. Sim extended his correspondences on recommendation by Harvie-Brown, which inevitably meant that he was understood to be a more junior figure. So, while in some ways Sim's networks of correspondence helped him to negotiate scientific hierarchies, they also worked to reassert Sim's status as a provincial naturalist.

This situation is most acutely articulated in Sim's correspondence with Harvie-Browne. An archive of letters from Sim to Harvie-Browne housed in the Harvie-Browne archive at the Royal Scottish Museum in Edinburgh detail the evolving dynamic first between pupil and

⁶³ Much scholarship has concentrated on exploring this ideal and its imprint on the conduct, practice, reception and development of science (e.g. see Bergman 1975; Cooter and Pumfrey 1994; Endersby 2001; Desmond 2001; Lorimer and Spedding 2005).

mentor and then author and publisher. Harvie-Brown first became aware of Sim through his sporting contacts and initiated correspondence with him. Sim would have been a valuable contact for Harvie-Brown, as the former's researches and his work as a taxidermist meant he had an intimate appreciation for the faunal distribution of the Aberdeenshire area.⁶⁴ Their initial relationship was one of mentor-pupil, with Harvie-Brown lending Sim with reading materials and advice. The relationship was reciprocal, however, as Harvie-Brown requested information, mining Sim's considerable knowledge of his local area. This was the nature of their relationship for over a decade: Harvie-Brown as gentleman scholar and Sim as a purveyor, albeit a fine one, of 'field' data and craft knowledge. However when Harvie-Brown commissioned Sim to write the Dee section of his much anticipated *Vertebrate Fauna* series for Scotland, it suggested a growing equality between the two, brought about through their mutual appreciation of natural knowledge. This dissipated as Sim lost his autonomy as a fellow naturalist, becoming answerable to Harvie-Brown as publisher of the series. This shift worked to reaffirm their original social positions, increasing tensions between them. A quarrel over the suitability of Sim's MS for the series illustrates the relationship at breaking point. On the 30th August 1902 Sim expressed his increasing frustration with Harvie-Brown's insistence that the M.S. must be in line with the other volumes in the series:

"Regarding the Dee M.S. you say that it is not in line with the other volumes. But you do not say what is wrong. The question however, that arises in my mind is, why should it be in line? Is it intended that the volumes should be like a regiment of soldiers, with every button, belt and buckle of the same pattern with no individuality to appear among them? I understand you to mean it is the publisher who is making the objections."

HB has obviously voiced concern over the suitability of Sim's MS in relation to the rest of the series. Clearly defensive of his completed M.S., Sim argues against the suggested changes:

"I do not wish the description writing to be 'cooked' up to look better than I am capable of doing, except in the matter of spelling, which of course is essential. In short it must not be made to appear as if I am better than is really the case... it is the work of an uneducated person and must not be presented as something else."

Here, Sim stresses that the book should reflect that he wrote it and is uneasy about making it conform to fit the style of the series, which highlights the inherent differences in social status between the two. While Sim is clearly unashamed of his uneducated status and does not mind that his writing style may reflect that fact, Harvie-Brown has clearly expressed concern over the quality of Sim's writing, possibly suggesting that someone else be employed to re-draft it so that it conforms more with the scholarly conventions of the day and therefore with the

⁶⁴ Sim's work as a taxidermist would have ensured he was in the perfect position to keep a handle on the species of fauna in the area if anything rare had been observed (or more likely shot).

series as a whole. Harvie-Browne continues to insist that Sim's M.S. should match the rest of his series, for, although Sim is the author of the 'Dee' volume Harvie-Browne is lead author for the series and would not want the 'Dee' volume, to reflect badly on him and the other volumes in the series. Sim's final say on the matter on the 6th September 1902 illustrates his determination to hold on to his authorship of the book, even if it ultimately means withdrawing from the series altogether:

"The best way out of this difficulty is for you to return me the whole M.S. and the negatives, and I will repay you the £25 you gave towards the expenses of the latter; with the provision that you are in no way to use the numerous notes you showed me you had taken from my M.S. when it was first in your hands. So please return it at once and your cash will be returned thereafter."

Sim could be regarded obstinant for removing his book from such a prestigious series over a quarrel concerning 'fit' with the rest of the series. However, the suggestion by Harvie-Browne that someone else might re-write portions of the book must have struck a nerve with Sim as it suggested his writing was not in keeping with the standard expected. He may have also been worried that he would have had to relinquish his authorship of the book if someone else was employed to redraft it. By removing his volume from the series, instead of complying with the changes suggested by Harvie-Browne, Sim ensured that he retained control over authorship and over all the material that he had spent over thirty years of field research collecting. If he had consented to the book being re-drafted by either Harvie-Browne or some other, his efforts may not have been properly recognised by the wider scientific community. Even though it must have been a difficult decision to withdraw his volume from the series, Sim hence retained control over his volume and research.

Sim went on to publish his *Vertebrate Fauna of Dee* locally of his own accord, while Harvie-Browne forever had one piece of his "faunal-series" of Scotland missing. Thus, while his book was no longer associated with the series and therefore may not have gained such a wide readership, Sim was the recognised author and it was published in the manner he felt fitting. Sim's withdrawal from the series could also be understood to underscore his ultimate commitment to the local. Forsaking his involvement in a national project like the *Vertebrate Fauna* series demonstrates how Sim wanted to retain control over how his local field area was represented and understood by others. While his research would have benefitted from the validation to be gained from association with Harvie-Browne's series, Sim was obviously loath to let anyone less intimately involved with researching the Dee faunal area take credit for his work. Retaining authorship of his work was more important to Sim than any association with a prestigious national project. This move conveys a sense of how the scientific conventions and ideals of the nineteenth-century were resisted and negotiated at the local level by Sim.

While he could be understood to be striving to emulate the ideal of the gentleman-amateur (Desmond 2001) by attempting to correspond with the scientific elite of the time and publishing his researches, he also in many ways resisted and ultimately rejected this ideal. Sim was after all a practicing commercial taxidermist, a role that would always limit his ability to be recognised as a ‘gentleman scientist’.

However, rather than this being wholly restrictive, his business trips to buy skins afforded him the opportunity to visit natural history collections of pretentious importance like the Jardin des Plantes, Paris and the British Museum, London. It was while on a business trip to London that Sim was even offered employment on a visit to the British Museum:

*“Called upon Dr Günther at the British Museum. Found him a nice, pleasant man. In our conversation he asked what was my occupation. On informing him he asked if I had taken to it for the love of it, or as a trade? Informing that I had taken it up for the love of Natural history, he at once said that such people as I were much required in London, and asked if I would come to the Metropolis, and work for the Museum. This I declined, even although he told me the pay would be between £300 and £400 a year. I then presented him with a specimen of my new Crustacean, *Lestrigonus spinidorsalis* for the collection, and expressed himself greatly pleased at receiving it.”*

This invitation of work at the British Museum may have tempted Sim, as, unlike Harvie-Browne’s previous offer, the work would be well paid with a position at *the* centre for British natural history research. That Sim declined the position offered suggests he was settled and content with his position as an Aberdeen-based taxidermist-cum-naturalist. While the taxidermy he would be required to produce at the museum would have demanded much more in the way of anatomical and behavioural accuracy than his customers in Aberdeen, had he taken up the position, Sim would have only ever been known as a taxidermist, assistant to the curators at the museum carrying out the actual research. Being in central London he would not have been well placed to continue his own researches. By running his own business the North-East of Scotland, Sim, by comparison, was able to combine his craft as a taxidermist with his natural history researches, which would have been much more difficult had he been more centrally located in either Glasgow or London. Yet more than this, he was able to let his field-acquired natural knowledge inform his practice as a taxidermist whilst also using his business as a way to pursue his natural history interests and connect with wider, more established cultures of natural history enquiry. Thus, rather than figuring his commercial and field interests as distinct practices, they were very much – to borrow a biological term – symbiotic. Moreover, it was only because Sim resisted the temptations to move to more central and scientifically connected locations that he was able to retain a relative amount of autonomy over how he practiced his craft and undertook his researches.

Returning to the painting of Sim at work, it could in some senses be viewed as an image symbolic of the limits that Sim's social position as a craftsman placed upon his aspirations as a naturalist. Hemmed in by a multitude of unfinished commissions, it is difficult to comprehend how Sim managed to combine the demands of a successful business with his passion for nature study. However, while Sim was ultimately bound by the labours of his workshop, his craft brought him into contact with, and thus enabled him to contribute to, wider cultures of natural history practice whilst at the same time maintaining and developing his own personal natural history researches in and around his local area. By opening out this biographical enquiry to consider the 'other' spaces of practice that both permeated into, and, out of, the workshop site, the aim is to build up a more nuanced picture of Sim's life-world as a taxidermist-cum-naturalist in the nineteenth-century. While the main intention is to present Sim as an 'ill-defined constellation' not confined to particular spatio-temporal coordinates, like his workshop site, but rather consisting of a spread of biographical events and happenings that could be presented through the accumulation of a dispersed category of material objects, traces and leavings relating to his life (Thrift 2000: 220), the decision taken to order Sim's life into 'spaces of practice' arguably serves to separate his life into the distinct spheres of 'commercial' and 'field', thus still simplifying and containerising his traces. This problem can largely be attributed to the biographical approach taken to the presentation of a person's remainders.

While Thrift is suspicious of biography as a mode of proceeding, arguing that it 'provides a suspect intimacy with the dead', Sim's archive, presents opportunities for exploring biography as a medium to disclose and value the legacy of a life. Charting the *locational particulars* of a life is of interest to this chapter's project of recuperating the past lifeworlds of taxidermists as it suggested I could begin to explore them from the intimate level of their workshops and therefore 'place' their practice.⁶⁵ However, while the notion of biography, has recast the epistemic underpinnings for recovering past lives (Livingstone 2003; Lorimer 2003a/b; Keighren 2008), in some senses it has merely replaced the ordering of a life through individual achievements, with the ordering of a life through the spaces, sites and/or institutions with which the person lived and was associated. Thus while attention to the locational particulars of a life can show how locations shape the identity of a person and, moreover, that the agency of that person is dispersed and fragmented, it still acts as a way of colonising the traces of an

⁶⁵ Practice is therefore anchored in particular space-times.

individual life, albeit in altered form (Thrift 2000a: 213). The notion of more explicitly recovering the 'biogeography' – my conceptualisation developed in the *Animal/Object* – of the taxidermist's workshop offers a way of circumventing an ordering of the taxidermist's life by their individual achievements or locational particulars, by instead refocusing on exploring the intimate 'lifeworld' (of the workshops) they practiced within. Here the focus is less on chronologically or spatially ordering individual lives and practices, and rather becomes about building up a sense of the intimate fabric the taxidermist was enmeshed within. This in effect decentres a focus on the human (biographical) subject so that other agencies (human and other-than-human) and matters (material and ephemeral) can be attended to. If Lorimer notes that, 'time quickly erodes multisensual realms' (2003a: 202), the sources recovered relating to Sim's life show that historical sources can be evocative of multisensual practices and spaces. However the still prevalent trend in the writing of life-geographies to view life from the point of view of individual agents manages to decentre the focus from concentrating on building up a sense of multisensual realms of past practice to instead ordering a life, and the archival material relating to it, into distinct categories. Taking measure of a life in this way, as the analysis highlighted, created the false impression that Sim's commercial and field practices were in some way distinct when in fact they were intimately entangled. By refocusing on recovering the biogeography of the remaining taxidermist's workshop, the taxidermist's individual life is no longer the main focus, experimenting with recuperating their workshop as a past site of practice is.

While Livingstone is interested in exploring the 'spaces of a life' and 'sites' of practice, in the main, notions of space and time have not been radically rethought by such work. 'Space' has merely taken the place of 'time' as the narratological device by which past lives and events are ordered and measured. By comparison Lorimer, as recent interventions attest (Lorimer 2006, 2007b, 2009, Foster and Lorimer 2007), is more interested in using biography as a medium for narrating the entwined lives of humans and animals as they play out in the 'lifeworlds of landscape' (Lorimer 2006: 517). Here Lorimer is less interested in narrating geographically inflected biographical accounts of individual lives lived (even if that individuals' agency is expressed as distributed and provisional) - and more concerned with retrieving and expressing 'biogeographies': entangled 'lifeworlds' or 'life'-geographies where 'life' or, rather, the 'bio' accommodates both human and other-than-human agencies. In an attempt to reanimate the 'lived culture' of the Cairngorm reindeer herd, for example, Lorimer develops a restorative ethnography of 'lived acts and inhabited places' by 'keeping company' with the present reindeer herd and herders so as to find a means to retell the relics and artefacts left behind by those in the past (Lorimer 2006: 512). Through his companionship with the herd and herders

Lorimer is able to witness how a past landscape can ‘take shape as oral tradition, as embodied knowledge, or through shared personhood’, allowing him to argue that as such landscapes can be creatively re-told ‘as a distribution of stories and dramatic episodes, or as repertoires of lived practices’ (Lorimer 2006: 515). While Lorimer aligns himself with ANT-inflected hybrid biogeographies for their efforts in decentring the human subject (e.g. see Whatmore 2002; Pile *et al* 2004; Greenhough and Roe 2006), he is also quick to distinguish his form of biogeography from such accounts:

‘Forging connective accounts of the human and non-human clearly matters, but what surprises is the sometimes anaemic quality of what results: paradoxically, nonhuman agency continues to be elusive having been decentred by the extractive effect of analytical theory. Herding up human and animals memories – achieved here by revisiting unfashionable and unlikely rural pasts – might offer some ethnographic leads for centring the human and nonhuman as lively, wilful, and sensible agents in the lifeworlds of landscape’ (Lorimer 2006: 517)

Here Lorimer voices his concerns with the ‘smear of equivalence’ (Lorimer 2005), or what Thrift has elsewhere called a ‘flattening cohabitation of all things’ (Thrift 2000: 215), which seems to characterise these ‘new’ biogeographies of entangled nature-cultures. In contrast to the flat relational world of networks and hybrids espoused by Whatmore, Lorimer is more concerned with developing a ‘geopoetics of landscape’ which, according to John Wylie, is about ‘working explicitly with expressive vocabularies and grammars in order creatively and critically to knit biographies, events, visions, and topographies into landscape’ (Wylie 2006: 533; for similar see also Lingis 1998; Matless *et al* 2005). To recuperate and revive the ‘lifeworld’ of the workshop of our second taxidermist, Charles Kirk, it would make sense at this point to re-engage with similar topographically inflected reconceptualisations of place as they offer important conceptual framings for understanding his workshop sites as a former *biogeographies*.

Lorimer himself notes that renewed ‘efforts to tilt (at) landscape reveal how, by different arrangements of theoretical, methodological and geographical argument, such an entity can said to be phenomenally and materially present’ (Lorimer 2008: 5; for such efforts see Rose and Wylie 2006; Lorimer 2006; Rose 2006; Scott 2006; Wylie 2006a/b). Reworkings of the concepts of landscape and place offered by Rose and Wylie (2006) can be understood as a reaction against the topological conceptions of space forwarded by vitalist non-representational biophilosophies (e.g. Thrift 2000; Dewsbury 2002; Marston *et al* 2004) and by ‘new’ biogeographies of entangled nature-cultures (e.g. Whatmore 2002, Pile *et al* 2004; Greenhough and Roe 2006). While Wylie and Rose acknowledge that these topological conceptions of space have profitably critiqued and supplanted hidebound and static notions of

space ('in terms of territory, boundedness, area, scale, and so on' (Wylie and Rose 2006: 476)) by 'thinking space relationally' (Massey 2004: 5), they also warn that the 'topological imagination' is ontologically flattening as it has 'no middle terms of synthetics' leaving 'a surface without relief, contour, or morphology' (Wylie and Rose 2006: 477). To counter the flattening tendencies of topological accounts of space, they argue that notions of landscape, or the topographical⁶⁶, can remerge to reanimate the missing matter of topological geographies. This argument tallies with my reworked notion of biogeography where not only the vital nexus of the 'bio' and the 'geo' are recognised but where the 'graphy' – the texture/tone of those earth-life nexuses is also emphasised. As I want to reanimate the remaining workshop site of Charles Kirk & Co., to explore the site as a former *biogeography*, it is therefore crucial to understand not only the site as being co-fabricated (made) through bodily practices (the topological) but also to attend to the 'fabric' or texture (the topographical) of the site.

However, while the material or textural qualities of place have been reaffirmed by recent writings reintroducing topographical imaginaries, many of these accounts equate landscape/matter/the topographical with presence. This is problematic for my proposed recovery of the biogeography of the second workshop because the site no longer exists, (or at least it does not exist in its original state). Yet, as outlined in the literature review, my reworked notion of *biogeography* draws on a conception of matter which is not entirely dependant on ideas of permanence or presence. It was my contention that understanding the matter of landscapes, places, and sites as 'not-yet' (Anderson 2004: 752) would help to suggest the tensions and ambiguities between presence and absence that exist when attempting to revive the pasts of place. In the next section I therefore aim to work creatively and critically at the threshold of presence/absence when attempting to recuperate the practice of Charles Kirk & Co at 156 Sauchihall Street, Glasgow. To do so, a more in depth engagement with literatures that recognise the tensions between absence/presence arising when considering places, sites and landscapes is required.

⁶⁶ A similar claim can be made within vitalist non-representational biophilosophies, however, especially if mobilising Deleuze and Guattari's "rhizomes", which as an organic metaphor, talk of varying "thicknesses" or "intensities". It is this move that enables Maston et al (2005) to claim they are not proposing a flat network ontology.

Spectral Matters

'A visit to Britain's foremost collector of taxidermy'

I woke with hesitancy, momentarily unsure of my surroundings. The curtains were drawn but I could still make out the shadowy presence of several avian figures perched along the length of the bay-window-sill to the right of my bed. Although encased in glass, their petrified silhouettes were a disturbing sight to comprehend whilst waking up in a darkened room. Registering that I was not on the set of a Hitchcock thriller but at the home of Britain's foremost taxidermy collector, I hurriedly got out of bed and set about getting dressed remembering that I was expected at breakfast.

I was told I could take as long as I liked to work through the A-Z archive of British taxidermists housed in the collector's study. I had been shown the study on the grand tour I had been given the previous evening and while I was keen to get started on the archive (it comprised over forty box-files) it was thrilling to be left alone to take in the room itself. The study was akin to a 17th century cabinet of curiosity as almost all available wall and shelf space was given over to the display of taxidermy mounts, zoological specimens and related miscellaneous artefacts. On one wall a huge case containing a riotous display of iridescent Humming birds fought for attention with a gigantic mantled moose-head complete with hat and tobacco-pipe. Below them, salvaged period museum display cases housed various bird specimens including, according to its label, an extinct "Great Auk". On top of them a lamp with an elephant-foot base sat amongst several ornamental taxidermy glass-domes, one of which I recognised as containing two artistically arranged Resplendent Trogons – the choice of fashionable Victorian ladies. A tiger head mount took centre-stage on the opposite wall over several wall-mounted cases of birds of prey. Most bizarrely of all an example of a kitten born with two heads was encased in a glass-shade on the collector's desk and next to the desk an arm-chair covered in a leopard-skin rug cushioned a plaster-cast bust of Darwin's head. While I could have spent all day inspecting the weird and wonderful sights on offer I also had a lot of reading to do so turned my attentions to the forty box files... if they didn't contain any information relating to Scottish taxidermists then nothing would. ...

That night, after unearthing some useful information and noting down promising leads to follow up, the collector informed me he had a treat to show me. He took me back into the guest room where I was staying and stood beside a large cabinet that was covered by a sheet. Although it was positioned facing the guest bed I had not really noticed it the night before. Like a magician he removed the sheet with a flourish to reveal a scene depicting a funeral taking place. This was a particularly odd funeral as the coffin bearers and those making up the rest of funeral cortege were all small birds. The collector told me it was the much coveted "Who killed cock-robin" exhibit from the now extant Walter Potter's museum of anthropomorphic taxidermy which he had recently bid for and won at auction. While I feigned delight, I could not fathom why someone would want to have a depiction of a funeral made up of stuffed birds dressed in human costumes on display in their home. Excitedly he went on to show me that at a press of a button the whole scene could be lit up by a series of fairy lights. Disturbingly the actual grave where the coffin was about to be lowered, which I had not noticed previously, was now illuminated. The whole thing just gave me the creeps. ...

After the collector had said goodnight and I was left alone in the room again I had horrible thought that while I lay in bed that night the exhibit, although covered over again, might suddenly illuminate of its own accord and the little birds might flutter into life and attempt to

escape their unnatural setting, only to hit vainly and repeatedly against the glass... it would be another wakeful night.

Both topological and topographical accounts of space/landscape could be argued to be vivifying landscape as a material presence, even if that presence is now being evoked as atmospheric or elemental (e.g. see Clarke 2005; Ingold 2005, 2006a, 2008; Whatmore 2006; Rose 2006; Wylie 2006). Those writing in a vitalist Deleuzian-Bersonian vein, for example, express landscape as a matter of force, energy and process, and thus present landscape as being animated through its continual becoming (e.g. Whatmore 2002; Marston et al 2005, Pile et al 2004). While such accounts have done much to re-stress the dynamic materiality of landscape, its 'entanglements' (Pile *et al* 2004), these topological accounts of space have been accused of presenting 'a curiously flat and depthless picture' of the world, one 'where there is much amusement and surprise but little mystery or depth' (Rose and Wylie 2006: 477). Rose and Wylie critique such connectivist ontologies as their 'presumption of incessant relatedness' overlooks issues of distance and alterity, which makes it very difficult to conceive of landscape as being constituted by presences *and* absences (Ibid: 475). Moreover, more traditional topographical accounts of landscape, like Tim Ingold's phenomenological accounts of landscape in terms of human dwelling or being-in-the-world, similarly conjure landscape as an evolving co-presence (Ingold 1993; 1995; 2001). While Ingold's articulation of a 'dwelling perspective' has offered some geographers a way of re-emphasising the sensuous, tactile and experiential aspects of specific sites and landscapes (e.g. see Cloke and Jones 2001; DeSilvey 2003; Lorimer 2006), the central role placed upon bodily presence (landscape as emerging through a co-constitution of self and landscape) in landscape phenomenology means that landscape is again understood through an ontology of co-presence.⁶⁷ Even accounts which have sought to re-embed notions of distance and alterity within conceptions of landscape (e.g. Rose 2006) still conjure landscape as a 'movement towards presence' (Wylie Forthcoming). For example, Rose (2006: 538) argues that landscape can be understood as 'an imagination of, and movement towards, presence'. While Rose is careful to insist upon the aporetic nature of this landscape-presence, as a characteristically Derridean 'impossible possibility' (Ibid: 542), it remains a 'dream' none-the-less and landscape is thus expressed as 'a building up to presence' (Wylie Forthcoming).

⁶⁷ Paul Harrison offers a reassessment of the concept of dwelling, however, through a twofold consideration of how the concept can be 'assembled, orientated and organised' differently through the writings of Heidegger and Levinas (Harrison 2007b: 625). Where Heidegger organises and articulates the concept around an enclosed figure 'being-at-home-in-the-world' ('dwelling as enclosure; dwelling as a limitation'), for Levinas dwelling gains its significance from a constitutive openness to the incoming of the other ('or an openness to the unfinished nature of the event of space') (Harrison 2007b: 642).

In order to offer an account of matter and place (or in this case Kirk's workshop) couched more explicitly in terms of absence, distance and displacement it requires, according to John Wylie, rethinking the 'there' according to spectral logic (Wylie 2007: 172). In attempting to recuperate and revive Kirk's workshop I shall draw on a Derridean (1994) inspired spectral logic, since such a logic displaces 'received understandings of the constitution of space and time, presence and absence' and thus, in this sense, it can be understood 'as a riposte to phenomenologies of being-in-the-world' (Ibid: 172). While the ambition of recent scholarship has been to write landscapes via a language of connection and co-presence, tropes of absence, distance and non-connection always disrupt and haunt such accounts. Wylie argues that accordingly the 'taking-place' of place is constituted 'not so much by dwelling but by haunting' (Ibid). A spectral logic therefore not only demands that both subjectivity and place are rethought but, importantly for my purposes, the spectral above all confounds settled orders of past and present:

'Spectrality effects in place, and differentially in different placings, an unsettling complication of the linear sequence of past, present and future. For Derrida we lack a nuanced sense of history and memory 'as long as [we rely] on a general temporality or an historical temporality made up of successive linking of presents identical to themselves and contemporary with themselves' (Derrida 1994: 70). However 'if there is something like spectrality, there are reasons to doubt this reassuring order of presents' (Ibid 39). The spectral not only displaces place and self through the freight of ghostly memories; it works to displace the present from itself. As 'that which secretly unhinges it', spectrality ensures the 'non-contemporaneity with itself of the living present' (Ibid: xix). Pasts and futures, even if they are no longer; even if they are not yet, still haunt the present, and are, in a supplemental relationship to it, *always coming back*. (Wylie 2007: 172)

Pasts and futures, then, according to Wylie's spectral politics, bear supplementary relation to the present. This challenges any conception of temporal linearity because spectral logic presents 'spaces and times as folded, allowing distant presences, events, people and things to become rather more intimate' (Maddern and Adey 2008: 291). For example, although the workshop sites are no longer, traces of them and the taxidermists who once inhabited them remain to haunt the present, and, as noted in the introduction, it is these revenant remainders which I seek to recuperate to tell of the workshop sites as former, or rather, *spectral* biogeographies. Yet, as Hetherington argues, in order to understand and recuperate the agency of the absent it must be treated as the outcome 'of a process in which distance is created; in which displacement is controlled; in which something is kept present whilst also being lost' (Callon and Law 2004: 10). Thus whilst the agency of the taxidermists and their firms and places of work can be argued to be displaced and dispersed in leftovers, these remainders are

also at the same time diminishing and decaying (Anderson 2004). Thus a paradox again emerges in my wanting to recuperate and revive the dead or, more specifically in this case, in wanting to harness the agency of the absent to make present what has passed. Yet as Maddern and Adey, argue even though invoking the spectral ‘has the capacity to awaken previously inanimate worlds with affective intensity, spectral relations must be able to invoke a sense of lessening, slowing, lingering, deadening, vulnerability, loss of hope, boredom and withdrawal’ (Maddern and Adey 2008: 293). Whilst much emphasis has been placed on reanimating bodies, things and places by recent geographical projects, studies of the spectro-geographical⁶⁸ – the hidden politics/agencies that haunt spaces in intimate and complex ways – can, according to Maddren and Adey, continue to animate silenced agencies and forgotten voices, histories and geographies whilst at the same time not moving ‘*too far* in arousing the world’ (Ibid: 293; for examples see in particular Cameron 2008 and McEwan 2008). Spectral geographies therefore feed into, yet also problematise vitalist geographies of the ‘more-than-representational’ by insisting that geographers must be careful not to forget ‘the lifeless geographies of the broken, the static and the already passed’ (Maddren and Adey 2008: 293).

⁶⁸ The term ‘spectro-geographies’ was chosen by the editors, Jo Maddern and Peter Adey in a special issue of Cultural Geographies of the same title as a deliberate reference to Derrida’s spectro-politics (Derrida 1994). The papers in the special issue (Cameron 2008; Edensor 2008; Holloway and Kneale 2008; Maddern 2008; Matless 2008) seek to add depth to understandings of the spatial frameworks and process through which Derrida’s spectro-politics might operate.

Site visit 2: Charles Kirk's & Co., 156 Sauchiehall Street, Glasgow

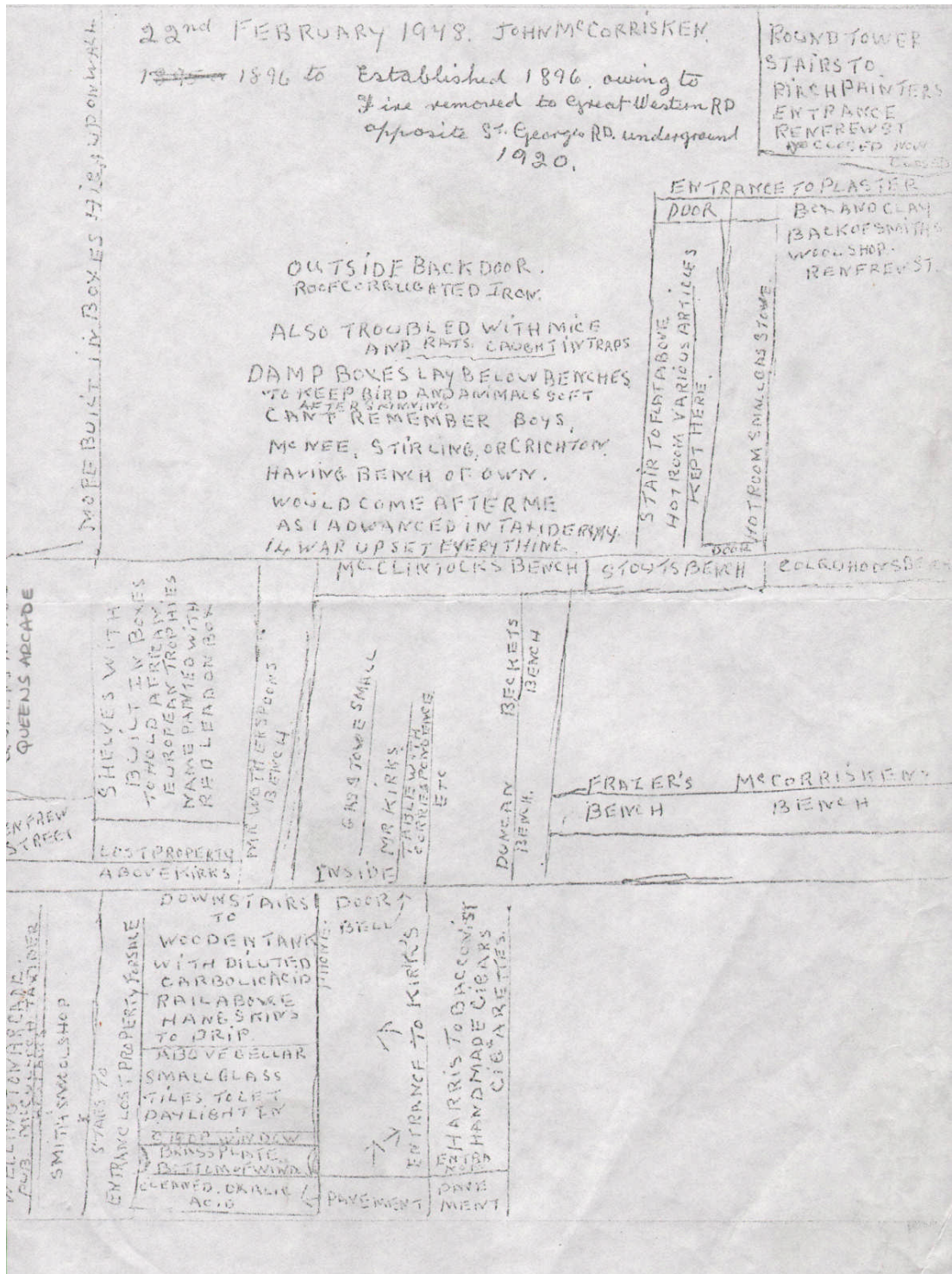


Fig. 4.8 Sketched floor-plan of Charles Kirk and Co. 156 Sauchiehall Street, Glasgow

Sketched by John McCorrisken 22nd February 1948

‘What is a place? Perhaps haunting is a pre-requisite to place. That is, a place takes place through a spectral event of displacing. There is place if there is a *dislocation*, or sudden uncertainty regarding location in space and time, uncertainty regarding even the reliability of these measurants; in other words if there is a disturbing irruption of doubt or memory, a confounding of past, present and presence all witnessed by a troubled, stricken figure, a figure haunted by this very process.’ (Wylie 2007: 180-1).

Whilst unpacking boxes containing a collection of period taxidermy manuals lent to me by an ex-taxidermist of the Kelvingrove Museum, Glasgow, I came across a slim folder marked ‘Kirk’s’. Knowing Kirk’s to have been a taxidermy firm based in Glasgow I was excited to find a floor-plan for the premises of the Sauchiehall Street workshop inside (see Fig. 4.8). The floor plan had apparently been drafted by an ex-employee of the firm John McCorrisken on 22nd February 1948.⁶⁹ Although the writing was faded, I was able to make out most of what had been written and marked down. Once deciphered, the plan offers intimate details not just about the layout of the Sauchiehall Street shop but of the organisation of the employees and equipment (and therefore their taxidermy practice).

After close inspection the plan discloses that the Sauchiehall Street shop - ‘*established in 1896*’ - was spread over three levels; the main street-level floor where all the workbenches and employees were organised, a smaller basement level where the tanning and drying equipment was kept, and a second floor used for storage purposes. Focusing on the main shop floor, layout suggests that the premises would be more accurately described as a workshop. While the owner’s desk is situated to meet any incoming trade from the street outside, the rest of the space is largely dedicated to the employees’ workbenches. Furthermore, McCorrisken’s note that Mr Kirk’s table dealt with correspondence - ‘*Mr Kirk’s table with correspondence etc.*’ - suggests that most of the firm’s trade was probably initiated through correspondence rather than by customers frequenting the shop, which presumably meant that the shop floor could be used predominantly as a work-space rather than for displaying stock and merchandise. The fact that the premises had a ‘*door bell*’ further suggests that it was not frequented by customers particularly often and thus predominantly functioned as a workshop. The number of workbenches surrounding Kirk’s table suggests that the firm was a successful taxidermy practice attracting considerable custom. Each of the eight work-benches was assigned to a different staff member; from left, Mr Wotherspoon, McClintock, Stout, Colquhoun, McCorrisken, Frazer, Becket and Duncan. The main craftsmen were assisted by three ‘*boys*’: McNee, Stirling and Crichton (McCorrisken notes that he cannot remember them having a bench of their

⁶⁹ I found out later that John McCorrisken would often visit Dick Hendry and the other taxidermists at the Kelvingrove and reminisce about his time spent there and Dick encouraged him to record details about the workshop and its employees in the form of a floor plan.

own). In addition to Kirk, the main floor housed twelve employees in total suggesting a hive of activity. This, taken with sights, sounds and smells associated with taxidermy practice – *‘damp boxes lay below benches to keep bird and animals soft after skinning’*, *‘troubled with rats and mice’*, would have ensured anyone frequenting the premises would have been met with an overwhelming sensory experience.

The downstairs basement houses a *‘wooden tank with carbolic acid’* and a *‘rail above to hang skins to drip’*, indicating that the firm was equipped to deal with the soaking and tanning of large animal skins on site. Above Kirk’s (see to the left of Mr Wotherspoon’s bench) lost property was stored along with *‘shelves with built in boxes to hold African, European trophies’*, indicating that the firm must have dealt in the setting-up trophy heads, business that would have been largely conducted by correspondence. To the back of the property on the street floor level there is *‘a hot room’* with a small gas stove, presumably where skins and finished mounts were stored to dry. The flat above the hot room was used to store *‘various articles’*. Taken overall, the floor plan suggests that Kirk’s was equipped to deal with all aspects of taxidermy practice on site; from skinning and tanning to mounting and drying. Going by the number of workmen employed it was also successful enough to deal with a large amount of commissions at any one time. McCorrisken’s note that the boys McNee, Stirling and Crichton *‘would have come after me as I advanced in taxidermy’* suggests that the firm also had an apprentice scheme, further implying that it was a well-established business. However, his following note that the *‘14 war upset everything’* underscores that the floor plan, as set down by McCorrisken on 22nd February 1948, records the layout of the firm and workmen sometime before 1914, after which presumably some of the men were sent off to fight in WW1, upsetting the dynamic of the site. We also learn from McCorrisken’s notes that the site was then completely devastated by a fire in 1920 - *‘owing to a fire removed to Great Western Road opposite St George RD Underground 1920’*.

On examining McCorrisken’s spidery schematic of the floor-plan for the first time I was struck by the possibility that it could well be all that was left to mark the firm’s existence, a precious yet sketchy record of its layout, inhabitants, fittings and fixtures. Yet the folder also contained a photocopy of a postcard which appeared to depict a staff photo (see Fig. 4.9) on one side with more notes written by McCorrisken on the other (see Fig. 4.10), rather faint but decipherable. They reveal that the photograph was taken in 1911 and record the names of the staff photographed on the front. With a bit of effort it is possible to work out which names correspond to the staff members photographed: Mr Arthur Becket stands with his arms folded on the left; the four sitting on stools are from left Mr W. Mactintoch, Mr David Wotherspoon, Mr James Frazer and John McCorrisken; Mr George Stout of the Fair Isle stands at the back between Wotherspoon and Frazer; McNee is the boy sitting to the left of

Monkey and the boy to the right is unknown. The photograph was taken by H. Duncan. McCorrisken also records that Becket started at 156 Sauchihall Street in 1896 when Kirk opened the firm after being trained at Rowland Ward's, London, and reveals what became of some of the men pictured: *'Wotherspoon after Mr Kirk died was employed at Edinburgh Museum', 'Becket and McLintock later employed by Glasgow Art Galleries'*. Sadly he also documents that Stout, Duncan and Ludovic Colquhon (*'not in photograph was partner of Kirk's'*) were all *'killed 14 war'*, which explains why he wrote on the floor plan that the *'14 war upset everything'*. Returning to the floor plan with the knowledge that the three men who sat at *'Duncan's bench'*, *'Stout's bench'* and *'Colquhon's Bench'* had all tragically perished in WW1 gives the sketch an added poignancy, marking these three men's presence at the firm before their lives were cut short. Thus whilst Duncan and Colquhon were not documented in the photograph, at least the places all three men occupied in the workshop were, making the floor-plan seem an even more precious record.



Fig. 4.9 Photograph of Kirk's staff 1911

From left: Mr Arthur Becket stands with his arms folded; the four sitting on stools are from left Mr W. Mactintosh, Mr David Wotherspoon, Mr James Frazer and John McCorrisken; Mr George Stout of the Fair Isle stands at the back between Wotherspoon and Frazer; McNee is the boy sitting to the left of Monkey and the boy to the right is unknown

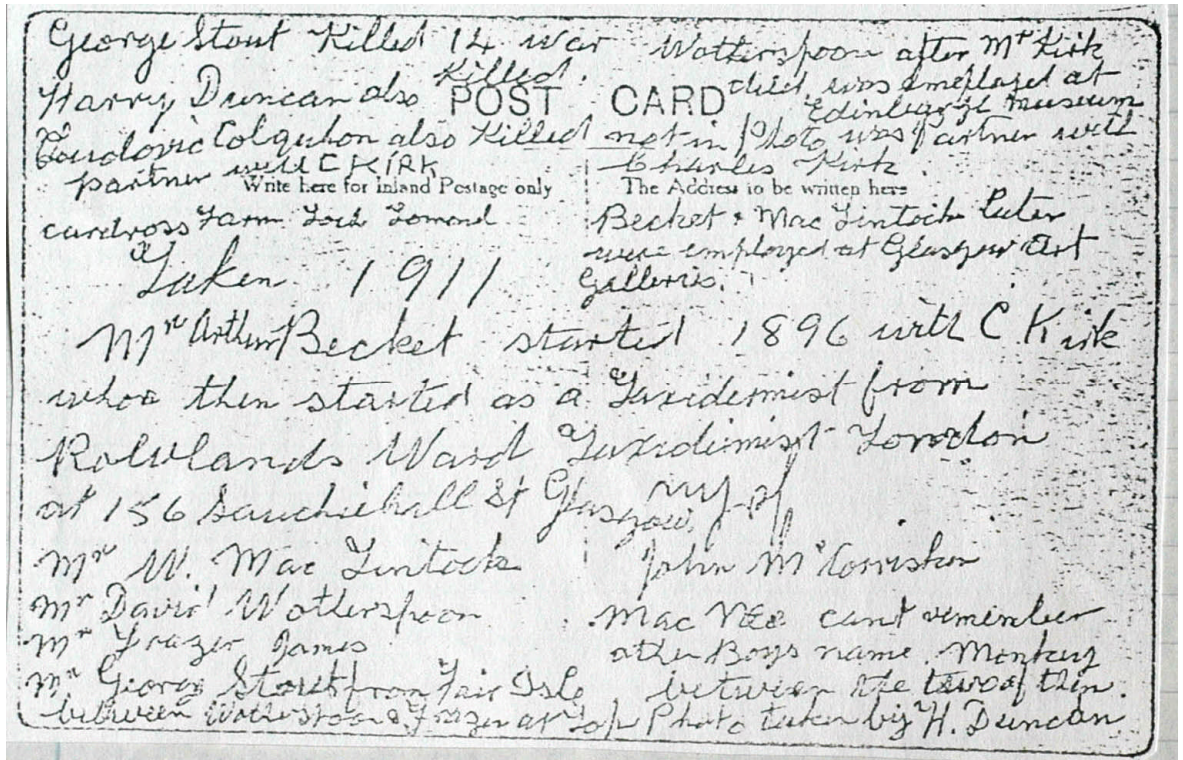


Fig. 4.10 Photocopied post card with details about Kirk's staff

While I was moved by McCorriskien's commemoration of the three men who had lost their lives in the war, at the same time I was keenly aware that McCorriskien had roughly drafted the floor-plan of the workshop from memory in 1948 long after the firm's workforce had been ravaged by the war and the place itself had been devastated in a fire. Thus any aspirations of recuperating the site were put in doubt due to my uncertainty regarding the reliability of McCorriskien's documentation of the firm: would it be possible to recuperate a sense of the place from a subjective and partial floor-plan that had been sketched twenty years after the Sauchiehall Street firm had ceased to exist? Yet for Wylie such 'oblique and moving enlacings of space and time are the very stuff of spectral geographies, geographies in which place appears, when it does, as a sudden and displacing *punctum* of pasts and place.' (Wylie 2007: 181-2).

While an engagement with spectral matters is yet in its infancy within geography (though see Pile 2004, 2005; Edensor 2005; Gelder and Jacobs 1999; Delyser 1999; Dixon 2007), since the publication of Derrida's (1994) *Spectres of Marx* there has been increasing awareness among academics of a 'spectralized amnesiac modernity with its delusional totalising systems' (Luckhurst 2002: 546).⁷⁰ However since Derrida introduced his form of 'spectro-politics' the

⁷⁰ Derrida's work can be seen as a direct challenge to 'endist' historical writers like Francis Fukuyama, as he argues that such sentiments are merely 'ideological confidence tricks' which play a central role in the suppression of political opposition by those in power. Derrida presents a challenge to 'endist' assumptions by showing 'how not just one, but plural, spectres of Marx (plural since Marxism, Derrida argues, is open to

spectre has been used widely in academic thought ‘without full examination of its theoretical consequences’ (Maddren and Adey 2008: 292; see also Luckhurst 2002). Jo Maddern and Peter Adey’s special issue ‘Spectro-geographies’ counters this tendency by offering a more fulsome examination of ‘the *spatial frameworks and processes*’ through which Derrida’s spectro-politics might operate (Ibid: 291). Maddern and Adey, and the other contributors, view the spectral not just as a mere metaphorical or allegorical device but as a politics that can help people ‘comes to terms with the erosion of an over-determined, sure-footing of certainty’ (Ibid: 292). For many of the papers in the special issue (see particularly Holloway and Kneale 2008; Edensor 2008; Maddren 2008), writing spectral geographies can be read as an attempt to ‘understand the kaleidoscopic modes of experiencing uncanny agencies, unforeseen events and a morphology of almost there-ness’ (Maddren and Adey 2008: 293).

Although an emerging cluster of cultural and historical geographers are employing motifs of haunting, phantasmagoria and the spectral to unsettle traditional conceptions of temporality and spatiality (see for example Till 2005; DeLyser 1999; Edensor 2005, McEwan 2008), Wylie argues that that ‘as well as exploring forms and fabrics of spectrality, spectral geographies should themselves be spectral’ (Wylie 2007: 185). Spectrality, for Wylie, is ‘an irreducible condition that demands new, themselves haunted ways of writing about place, memory and self’ (Wylie 2007: 173). Wylie contends that such a form of experimental historiography is manifest in the ‘spectral writings’ of the German born author W. G. Sebald, noting that Sebald’s ‘scholastic quasi-fiction’ has already been promoted as ‘a new form of historiography, ‘a meditation on the very idea of doing history’’ (Wylie 2007: 173 quoting Jackson 2001). Jessica Dubow is in agreement here, explaining that the fragmented and disjointed tableaux created by Sebald’s wheeling narratives oppose the naturalisation of chronology and instead ‘expose chronology’s primary intent to steadily drain discord, to eliminate, through theoretical meditation, the jarring particularities of history’ (2007: 827). His writings therefore promote a dialectical historiography which interrupts the identification of history with the temporality of historicism and the result, according to Dubow, is ‘a form of history writing concerned not just with what survives of what can peaceably be redeemed from the past but that which forces on us the radical differentials of time and identity’ (Ibid: 832). Furthermore, and importantly for geographers, Wylie argues that, through Sebald’s ‘sustained meditations upon

interpretation and revision in response to changing cultural conditions) continue to haunt the ‘endist’ paradigm of western liberal democracy which has ‘triumphed’ over communism (and by implication, over Marxism too)’ (Maddern and Adey 2008: 291). Derrida’s ‘hauntology’ therefore unpicks how there is neither a beginning nor an end to history, and Marxism shows through a myriad of examples, that the supposed triumph of capitalist liberal democracy ‘has never been so critical, fragile, threatened, even in certain regards catastrophic, and in sum bereaved’ (Derrida 1994: 68). Derrida has argued that this ‘deconstructive understanding of history’ can be accomplished by the radical work of returning to the repressed, rejected, and expelled elements of historical memory and recycling these lingering voices, genres, and histories’ (Derrida 1989: 821).

relationships between place, memory and subjectivity’, his writing ‘becomes a sort of metaphysics of place’, thus exemplifying how spectral geographies of self, place, travel and remembrance can be *written*.⁷¹

Wylie further champions Sebald’s work for its ‘radical openness to the slippages and complicities of testimony and fiction’ (Ibid: 184). For example, Sebald uses a strange admixture of imagined life stories and quasi-autobiographical narratives in *The Emigrants* (1996), *The Rings of Saturn* (1999), *Vertigo* (1999), and, most pointedly, in *Austerlitz* (2001), to comment obliquely on the crisis of Europe’s amnesiac cultural memory. In these quasi-fictive testimonies he presents both the narrator, and other characters happened upon, as ‘enigmas without resolution’ (Foster 2004: 16). He does this in order to question the humanist commonplace about the restorative power of memory, as the ambiguous epigraph of the first section of *The Emigrants* suggests: ‘and the last remnants memory destroys’ (1996: x). The recognition in Sebald’s novels that testimony and fiction are always strangely and irrevocably entwined together prompts Wylie to argue that his writing helps to highlight ‘the impossibility and even moral inadequacy, the mendacity, of writings that purport simply to document truth empirically and factually’ (Wylie 2007: 184). Furthermore, Dubow explains that Sebald’s collective works seem to suggest that what is dangerous about the act of remembrance ‘is not that it provokes the ghosts of the previously forgotten or the dead. Rather, the risk lies precisely in admitting the past to present cognition – a will to possession ‘more ominous’, as Benjamin puts it, ‘than any oblivion’ (Dubow 2007: 831). However Sebald’s brave refusal of the redemptive power of remembrance also opens him up to the critique of having a melancholic fixation on loss. Susan Sontag has remarked that Sebald’s writing was that of a ‘mind in mourning’, an existential lament for lost worlds and selves (Sontag 2000: 3-4). Although never expressly articulated, Sebald’s works can be understood as a lament over Germany’s willed forgetting of the horrors of Nazism, provoking Martin Swales to comment that Sebald’s output could be thought of collectively as *trauerarbeit*, a ‘work of mourning’ (Wylie 2007: 185 quoting Swales 2003). Yet, as Wylie argues (see also Dubow 2007: 830), forgetting or absorption can come to play a recuperative role in Sebald’s texts:

‘Sebald’s texts and images avoid all presumptuous and clichéd emotional closure in constituting a mourning without end. Mourning as a state of being that is fragmenting and wandering that stays faithful to place, self and memory precisely

⁷¹ Wylie’s own writing could similarly be considered as a sort of ‘metaphysics of place’ as his narratives attempt to offer affectual, creative and experiential accounts of the enlacings and distanciations of self and landscape (see Wylie 2002, 2005, 2006, 2006b).

by testifying to their spectrality, their taking-place in a slipping-away and a dislocation. As Derrida writes, ‘the faithful one is someone who is in mourning ... mourning itself is affirmation.’ (Wylie 2007: 185, quoting Derrida 1994: 151, 143)

While Sebald certainly offers directions and suggestions for ‘practising the spectral’, acknowledging the slippages and complicities of testimony and fiction, writing as a ‘mind in mourning’ can be considered an extremely problematic position for an academic geographer working historically to take. Whilst as Lorimer has noted, ‘claims to having only partial, provisional and incomplete knowledge can afford the research an allure and shroud of mystique’ (in press), he also admits that acknowledging absences or gaps in the historical record could be seen by some to be ‘a dereliction of the historian’s duty’ (Lorimer in press). Furthermore, for those geographers who have experimented with forms of spectral or ghost writing, narratives can, according to Lorimer, ‘end up too soupy, saddled with sentimentality, or fated to haunt any subject with the idea of loss’ (Lorimer 2008: 182; see for example Jones 2005; Pearson 2006; Wylie Forthcoming; Lorimer Unpublished). Is there, as Griffen and Evans have questioned, little option for the cultural-historical geographer but to write objective geographies from the historical record short of turning to ‘potentially interesting but historiographically facile, largely artistic re-imaginings of the past?’ (Griffin and Evans 2008). However, I advise that a balance can be struck between holding on to and letting go of the past. For example, Wylie acknowledges how other geographers have recognised ‘the constitutive role that ghosts, margins, memories, phantasms and disorderings of various kinds play in the affectivity of urban experience, the politics of memory and the performance of historical identities’, without having to limit themselves to the production of imaginative fictions (Wylie 2007: 184). Yet at the same time Wylie, through his analysis of Sebald’s writings, underscores that the assumed distinction between objective geographies and imaginative fictions is more blurred than is usually conceded. Sebald’s writings therefore help to highlight that any form of writing or historical record is always haunted by the spectre of fiction, and that any attempt to engage with the past should reflect this haunting. This said, rather than write as a ‘mind in mourning’ for the lost world and selves of Kirk’s of 156 Sauchihall Street, I shall follow Wylie’s suggestion and work within a more explicitly Derridean inspired ‘hauntology... that reveals the shaping of place through haunting rather than dwelling, that dislocates past and present, memory and visibility, through forms of documentary experimentation’ (Wylie 2007: 185). Therefore, rather than taking the form of a quasi-fictive narrative, my recuperation of Kirk’s as a past site of practice shall make creative use of other recovered sources relating to the firm’s earlier working existence. Unlike Sebald, Derrida’s form of ‘hauntology’ or spectro-politics does not entirely reject the redemptive powers of remembrance or historical recovery (Maddren and Adey 2008: 292). Where Sebald

refuses the notion that the past is recoverable, Derrida takes the more practical view that the present can only be unsettled, and therefore shown to be haunted, by ‘returning to the repressed, rejected, and expelled elements of historical memory and recycling these lingering voices, genres, and histories’ (Derrida 1989: 821). However, while I shall attempt to recuperate and revive silenced agencies and forgotten histories of Kirk’s workshop in what follows, I shall also place this revival, again to invoke Derrida, *sous rature* ‘under erasure’ (Derrida 1976). By doing so, I seek to communicate that while being compelled to recuperate the site as a place of practice, I also acknowledge the impossibility of this aim, and thus not move ‘*too far* in arousing the world’ (Maddern and Adey 2008: 293).

Place taking-shape

Kirk’s of 156 Sauchihall Street first appeared to me through a confounding of past, present, presence and absence whilst attempting to decipher the floor-plan and post-card produced and left by John McCorriskien. While I want to stay faithful to the site’s ‘taking-place’ in a ‘slipping away and dislocation’, I also want to add to these ghostly remains to build up a sense of the site in practice (Wylie 2007: 185). While the relatively traditional and detailed archival, predominantly textual, material recovered relating to George Sim lent itself to the more conventional biographical approach taken in the last section, the recovered material relating to Kirk and his Sauchihall Street practice is much more partial and fragmentary, demanding a different approach. Rather than see partiality as an obstacle to historical recovery, I, like other creative historical researchers (see for example Pile 2002; Till 2005; Edensor 2005, 2008; Delyser 1999; DeSilvey 2007, 2008; Lorimer 2003b, 2006), shall ‘draw force from absence and incompleteness’ through the amassing of these fragmentary remains (DeSilvey 2006: 330). As noted in the previous chapter, the archive and archival practice have been creatively rethought to the extent that researchers are now purposefully assembling and rehabilitating diffuse historical fragments to form unorthodox archives (e.g. see Cameron 1997; Buchli and Lucas 2001; Lorimer and MacDonald 2002; Neville and Villeneuve 2002; Tolia-Kelly 2004; Edensor 2005a/b, 2008; Till 2005; DeSilvey 2006, 2007a, 2007b, 2007c; Lorimer 2003b, 2006, 2008). The deliberate accumulation of historical remainders to form unconventional archives has been described by Lorimer (in press) as a form of ‘make-do’ method. Lorimer asserts that ‘making-do’ must be understood as an adaptive mode of inquiry where ‘the massing of remainders, redundant objects, fragments and discarded substances dating from the past

offers a renewable resource for the undertaking of historical research' (Ibid).⁷² Such a mode of enquiry is therefore alive to the alterity of past lives (human or otherwise), events and places recognising that what remains of them is always going to be partial, provisional, incomplete and, therefore, that what is being presented is always already under erasure. This route into a possible recovery of the site was thus a dead-end.⁷³

So what remains to mark the bodies and practice that once animated the site? While McCorrisken's floor plan marks the positions the employees occupied in the workshop, the 1911 photograph only documents some of the firm's employees. Strangely Kirk, the owner, seems most spectral of all as he was not captured in the photograph and, unlike some of the other employees, McCorrisken wrote very little additional information about Kirk. All that McCorrisken had noted on the back of the postcard was that Kirk had opened the firm in 1896 after being trained at Rowland Ward's, London. Yet it is not my intention to write Kirk's biography⁷⁴, to take possession of him by putting his life in order through text; rather, I seek to disclose the somatic currency of the body-practices that he must have learnt while apprenticed at Ward's and will have passed on to those working for him at his Sauchihall Street shop. In the previous chapter I was able to demonstrate how the body-practices of taxidermists working in the nineteenth-century were achieved temporal duration and spatial extension through the medium of taxidermy manuals and museum apprentice schemes. In this sense, like non-representational styles of work, I was trying to counter 'the still-prevalent tendency to consider life from the point of view of individual agents who generate action by instead weaving a poetic of the common *practices and skills* which produce people, selves, and worlds' (Thrift 2000a: 216). In one sense this was an attempt to escape human-centred understandings of embodied practice and instead connect with the impersonal forces and flows of the world and thus re-affirm 'life' (or the 'bio') as 'a mutant, undisciplined creativity that is worked out through the properties of existence' (Amin and Thrift 2002: 437). Yet at the same time, I was keen to avoid presenting the body and body-practices as somehow

⁷² Lorimer notes that this form of 'make-do' historiography is in part inspired by the work of experimental archaeologists-cum-anthropologists who are 'expert in the gleaning of fragments' (Lorimer in press). By reworking longer histories of technique their 'modern-era salvage operations' offer geographers creative and practical ways of engaging with the past in all its bewildering ambiguity (e.g. see Pearson and Shanks 2001; Wilkie 2006; Neville and Villeneuve 2002).

⁷³ This is not always the case though. Lorimer has commented that a curiosity to discover "what the place might have been like?" is commonly felt by the historian, pushing many to pay a visit in person to that place. As Lorimer argues 'spending time where others did so in the past might forge new kinds of connection, and throw out new leads; even perhaps attempting to shadow, in practice, just a little of what was once laboured over or enjoyed at leisure' (Lorimer In press).

⁷⁴ Besides, there is very little traditional biographical information relating to Kirk. The most comprehensive source of information about his life comes in the form of a pamphlet put together by Norman Tait produced in collaboration with the Kelvingrove Museum Kirk on the Craig: Charles Kirk's Photography on Ailsa Craig 1896-1922, but even this has limited information about Kirk himself as it mainly reproduces the photographs of wild birds Kirk took whilst on expeditions with friends on Ailsa Craig.

transcendental (something for which non-representational styles of work have been criticised: e.g. see Gagen 2004; Thein 2005, Saldanha 2005, 2006; Cresswell 2006, Tolia-Kelly 2006) by acknowledging that body-practices are anchored in particular times and places, and that bodies themselves are both 'biologically wired' and 'culturally sedimented' (Thrift 2000c: 36). As Kirk was apprenticed at Rowland Ward's it is worth detailing Ward's practice as it may help to shed light on how Kirk and his apprentices practised taxidermy at the Sauchihall Street firm. Unlike the one-man operations that characterised taxidermy practice when George Sim was practicing in the mid to late nineteenth century, larger taxidermy firms emerged at the start of the twentieth that had identifiable styles of practice due to in-house apprentice schemes. Working with an understanding of practices as 'material bodied of work or styles that have gained enough stability over time, through, for example, the establishment of corporeal routines and specialized devices, to reproduce themselves', I seek to trace the passing-on of a craft style from Ward's workshop to Kirk's in the following section.

'The Jungle'

The Ward family had a major impact on the development of taxidermy as a craft practice in Britain. Henry Ward, father of Rowland, a notable companion to Audubon on many of his collecting trips, made a name for himself as a leading taxidermist at the time of the 1851 Great Exhibition whilst working under one of the leading British taxidermists, Thomas Mutlow Williams (Morris 2003b: 9). In 1857, doubtless aware of the expanding commercial potential of taxidermy, Henry opened his own commercial taxidermy operation just off London's fashionable Cavandish Square. While it took on commissions for museums, it was largely in the business of setting up sporting trophies. Henry had established the company recognising the increasing demand for the setting up of 'souvenir' trophies due to the increase in foreign sporting trips generated by the expansion of the British Empire. Henry Ward had two sons, Edwin and Rowland, who both trained in their father's taxidermy studios and who themselves became taxidermists of some repute. They also both established businesses of their own, Edwin in the 1860's and Rowland in 1870. For a time, there were three Ward taxidermy firms operating in London's West End simultaneously. Apart from causing a degree of confusion among customers, Morris notes, in his study of the Ward business empire, that 'there appeared to be a degree of animosity between Rowland and Edwin', presumably over whose business was most successful (Morris 2003b: 12).⁷⁵ The competition was resolved, however,

⁷⁵ Morris's record of Rowland Ward's life and business Rowland Ward: Taxidermist to the World (2003) is an attempt by Morris to preserve for posterity the work and creative output of Rowland Ward Ltd. (1878-1983) 'as a tribute to him and those who worked for him' (Morris 2003b: 6). The book is based on what Morris was

when Edwin, a year after their father's death in 1878, emigrated to America. Rowland was then the only esteemed 'Ward' still in business, giving him space to develop what became London's leading taxidermy firm, affectionately known as 'The Jungle', 166/167 Piccadilly, London (Ibid: 27).⁷⁶

Rowland Ward, having trained at his father's firm, believed firmly that taxidermy could be advanced to an art form. In the preface to his publication (1884) *The Sportsman's Handbook to Collecting, Preserving and Setting-up Trophies and Specimens* he presented his case:

'It is only in comparatively recent times that taxidermy has been elevated to claim any real art position. What has been gained for it has not been achieved by mere skill, but by extended and more accurate observation of nature in its living forms – of the behaviour and habitats of animals, not simply examination of their carcasses, or what remained of those. Such observation, carefully and correctly recorded, is invaluable to the naturalist who seeks, by the preservation unimpaired of the natural features of an animal, to use the verisimilitude so obtained as an aid to art illustration. The material means for such a result are indeed important; but something more may be done with a prepared group of animals, or a single specimen, than preservation for the identification of details in anatomy or outward appearance. Its value to the student may be preserved and increased by displaying its beauty truthfully to life, while the beauty is recognised for its own sake by even the unscientific. This is the cause I advocate, and the end I have in view.' (Ward 1884: Preface).

able to salvage relating to the firm's existence over the course of twenty years research, from publications, museum archives, private collections, the remains of Rowland Ward's own scrapbooks and from interviews with former employees of Rowland Ward Ltd. Arthur Manning is noted as being a particularly instructive ex-employee and interviewee. Morris's record is therefore an invaluable resource as it gathers together memories, ephemera and surviving photographs that would otherwise be lost or dispersed. Unlike many other taxidermy firms that have disappeared without a trace, swept aside by changing fashions and social attitudes, Morris's record ensures that the work and history of Ward's & Co, at least, does not meet the same fate.

⁷⁶ Morris (200b3: 9) notes that the Ward's of London are often confused with the American, Henry Augustus Ward of Rochester, New York. The latter was also a major taxidermist and became a prominent international natural history museum supplier, but was not directly related to the Ward's of London.



Fig. 4.11 Signed portrait photo of Rowland Ward which was printed in his *Sportsman's Handbook*

Ward was evidently of a mind that fine taxidermy could only be achieved through thorough knowledge not only of the anatomy of the animal to be mounted but also through extensive study of the animal in life, to be achieved through observational drawing or modelling. Ward, as the portrait photograph suggests (see Fig. 4.11), was keen to promote himself as an accomplished artist and sculptor, to the extent of claiming in his autobiography, *A Naturalist's Life Study in the Art of Taxidermy* (1913), to have pioneered the idea of applying a malleable modelling compound over modelled replacement bodies to simulate muscles and folds in the skin (Ibid: 19-20).⁷⁷ His development of this technique, according to Ward, considerably advanced the realism achievable in taxidermy mounts, particularly in short-haired and bare-skinned species in which the surface texture and shape is not hidden under a coat of long fur, allowing details of body shape and folding of the skin to become an important part of the overall impression created by the specimen. To help in this process he also advised his apprentices to study, through observation and drawing, creatures at London zoo in order to experience how live animals moved and behaved. Ward also claimed to be the only

⁷⁷ According to Morris (2003) the method of applying a modelling clay over a replacement modelled body was actually first promoted by German and French craftsmen at the Great Exhibition in 1851.

taxidermist who insisted upon the accurate measurement of all body parts that were going to be removed and re-modelled so that replacements parts were as true to life as possible.

By the time Kirk joined Ward's as an apprentice in 1887 the business had grown considerably in size and 'The Jungle', Piccadilly, mainly functioned as a showroom. Morris explains how the actual taxidermy work of 'Rowland Ward & Co'⁷⁸ was undertaken in workshops off Harley Street which accommodated several modelling rooms and employed a large workforce of professional technicians and apprentices (Morris 2003b).⁷⁹ 'The Rowland Ward business had become a school of taxidermy of sorts, as it took on and trained up technicians in the various skills of the craft. A recovered indenture, dated 1907, details that the Company's enrolled apprentices had to agree to '...diligently attend to the said business and at all times their secrets keep and their lawful commandments willingly obey' and would not 'be absent himself from the company's service, nor do any other work for any other person... without leave of the company, nor do or suffer any damage to be done to the goods monies or other things that shall be delivered or put into his custody or care nor play cards or other unlawful games, nor frequent taverns, but in all things shall and will demean and behave himself towards the Company as a good and faithful apprentice ought' (from Morris 2003b: 40). Morris notes that in exchange the apprentice would learn the trade of taxidermist for five years and be entitled to £5 compensation if the agreement was terminated prematurely (Ibid: 41).

⁷⁸ When Rowland Ward first opened, according to Morris (2003b: 27) he traded briefly under the name 'James Ward', James being his Christian name, before changing it to 'Ward & Co' (in some sort of partnership with a man called Hatchwell, although there is no mention of him in Ward's autobiography) and later as 'J Rowland Ward'. From about 1879 he dropped the J completely and advertised as 'Rowland Ward & Co'. Morris notes that after this point he completely abandoned the name 'James' in connection with his professional life.

⁷⁹ Prior to 1939, Rowland Ward Ltd. had a very strict rule that there would be no photographs taken of any work in progress. The only photographs permitted were of finished work taken officially by the foreman and were intended only for use in the firm's publications. Thus there are no photographs of relating to the period of Kirk's employment.

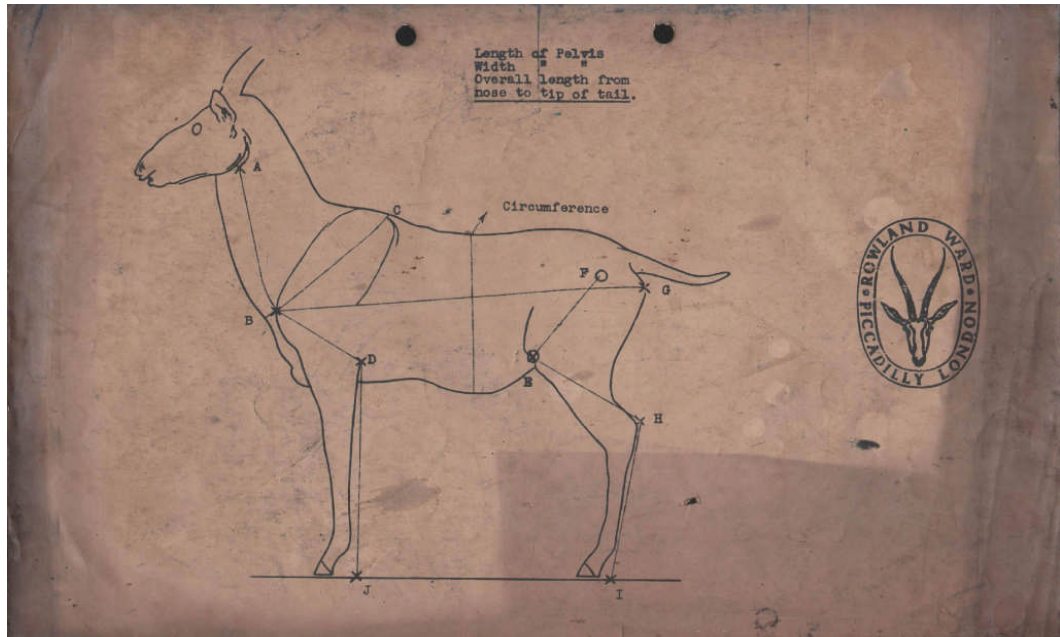


Fig. 4.12 Rowland Ward & Co. standard pattern for an antelope

Ward's establishment was generally considered to produce the finest works of taxidermy during the time of Kirk's apprenticeship and employment at the firm (1887-1894), and this was largely attributed to the Company's distinctive methods in the setting-up of taxidermy models. While Ward's secret modelling compound and insistence that all apprentices study animals in life ensured that his workshops produced particularly life-like mounts, Morris asserts that it was Ward's innovation to encourage apprentices to specialise in an aspect of the craft at which they were particularly adept that really set his business apart. Apprentices could specialise in bird, mammal or trophy and ornamental taxidermy⁸⁰ and then go on, if showing aptitude, to specialise in particularly skilled stages of the taxidermic procedure like modelling and artistic 'finishing' work.⁸¹ Ward's workshops were therefore based on a kind of production line principle which ensured that mounts were produced to a consistently high quality. Ward even developed standard patterns for the measurement of different types of animal to ensure replacement bodies and body-parts made were made accurately (Fig. 4.12 shows the standard pattern for antelope). According to Morris, the standardisation of methods and training was

⁸⁰ Ward's & Co specialised in the production of ornamental bird fire-screens and zoological lamps, which often incorporated full bird mounts or had elephant or rhino feet as the base. Ornamental feet became particularly popular and feet could be made into door-steps, book-ends and even adapted as table-bells.

⁸¹ 'Finishers' would be responsible for the 'finishing touches' done to mounts. This usually consisted of detailed paintwork jobs, bringing life back to all kinds of mammals, reptiles and fish.

employed to guarantee continuity of style and quality across the Rowland Ward range, ensuring the company's reputation as one of the best taxidermy firms in Europe.⁸²



Fig. 4.13 A Ward antelope diorama produced for The Powell-Cotton Museum (est. 1896), Quex Park, Kent.

Embodying and passing on a craft-style

A young Charles Kirk could not have hoped for a more skilled master to learn from when he was apprenticed at Ward's in 1887 at the age of fifteen. However, while Kirk spent almost seven years at Ward's there is little that documents his apprenticeship or employment at the firm. A letter replying to an enquiry made by John McCorrisken to Rowland Ward Ltd. on the 6th October, 1975 confirms that the firm itself had no records relating to Kirk's time at

⁸² By early 1900 Ward's had achieved the ultimate commercial status of being 'Naturalists, by appointment to his Majesty the King' and the name of Rowland Ward & Co had become synonymous with high quality and big game taxidermy. Morris (2003b: 39) states royalty, Maharajahs, rich collectors and major museums like the Natural History Museum, London were regular customers. Furthermore, Ward's Fellowship of the Zoological Society provided access to many influential zoologists and collectors, including Sir Richard Owen, Richard Lydekker and Charles Darwin. According to Morris, Walter Rothschild was a particularly valued customer as he regularly commissioned large mounts for his own personal zoological museum. For example, in 1895 he commissioned a full-mount rhinoceros costing £240, the equivalent of a year's wages for six farm labourers, and a pair of full-sized tigers that cost £150, the price of a two bedroom house (Ibid: 43). Ward's wealthy and influential customers extended beyond Britain to include the likes of the Duc d'Orléans, a member of the former French royal family, who purchased more than 2,500 items from Ward's, amassing a private collection from 1889 onwards that he developed into a museum featuring large habitat groups (Ibid: 37).

Ward's. The letter is contained within a file, also compiled by Dick Hendry⁸³, kept at the Kelvingrove Museum's archives. The file, as well as containing copies of McCorrisken's floor-plan and the photograph and postcard that had sparked my initial interest in Kirk's, also contains the pamphlet *Kirk on the Craig: Charles Kirk's photography on Ailsa Craig 1896-1922* (2005). The pamphlet, was produced by T. Norman Tait in collaboration with the Kelvingrove Museum who hold many of Kirk's original photographs.⁸⁴ As well as reproducing many of Kirk's photographs of wild birds taken on the island, the publication also gives a few biographical details about Kirk (Tait 2005: 5-6). He was born in 1872 in the Newington area of Edinburgh, the second son of James Kirk, a grocer and wine merchant. Some years later the family moved to the Lambeth area of London where, after his compulsory education, Kirk chose to train in the craft of taxidermy and was apprenticed at Rowland Ward and Co. in 1887. After his training in the art of taxidermy at Ward's, Kirk returned to Scotland around 1894 where he started work at a taxidermists in Perth before opening his own taxidermy business on Sauchiehall Street in 1896. According to Tait, it was while in Perth that Kirk started to photograph wild birds. Having trained at Ward's, Kirk would have been encouraged to study nature in its natural state so as to produce life-like taxidermy. Advances in photography also meant that it was becoming an increasingly attractive option over field-drawing as an aid for the studying and recording wildlife at that time (see Henning 2006).

Kirk pursued his hobby with assiduity and obvious success as he was appointed to the committee of Photographic Section of the Perthshire Society of Natural History, and at the opening of the Perth Museum on the 29th of November 1895 he exhibited some of his nature photography to a favourable reception (Tait 2005: 5). Once settled in Glasgow, seabirds became his favourite photographic subject, and it was in this specialism that Tait claims Kirk gained a considerable reputation. By the 1890's Ailsa Craig, an Island in the outer Firth of the Clyde, was readily assessable from Glasgow and Kirk made regular visits to the Island to photograph gannets and other seabirds.

⁸³ This was confirmed by a note signed by Dick Hendry stating that 'John McCorrisken who used to work at Charles Kirk's came in several times to Kelvingrove to have a chat. He supplied the attached information, including the sketch of the set up inside Kirk's workshop. Dick Hendry 28/1/92'.

⁸⁴ These photographs were donated to the museum after Kirk's death in 1922.



Fig. 4.14 Charles Kirk (with camera) on Ailsa Craig with unidentified colleague

(Charles Kirk Collection Kelvingrove Museum – neg no. Z61-26-125)



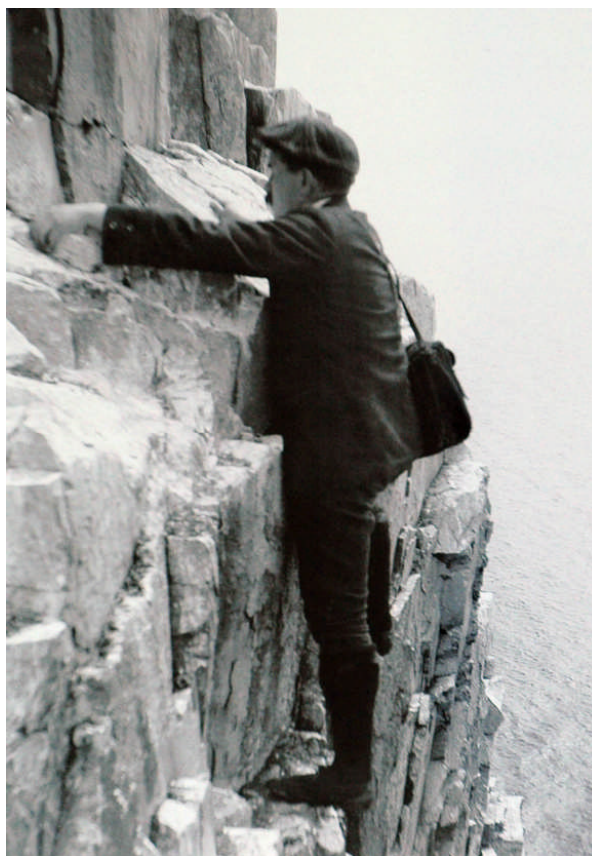
Fig. 4.15 Photograph taken by Charles Kirk whilst on Ailsa Craig.

(Charles Kirk Collection Kelvingrove Museum – neg. no. A2)

Uninhabited apart from the lighthouse keepers, Kirk and his associates caught the ferry across with the quarry-men who worked at the Ailsite quarry.⁸⁵ Rising to 1,110 feet out of the water the steep cliffs on the northern face make an ideal nesting habitat for gannets, puffins and other seabirds, yet a precarious perch for the bird-photographer (see Fig. 4.16). Yet, the challenge of wildlife photography was part of its appeal. The historical association between wildlife photography and trophy hunting, and by extension, taxidermy is well documented (e.g. see Haraway 1989; Ryan 2000; Brower 2005; Henning 2006). Wildlife photography in Europe and North America developed as a kind of field-sport and, as Brower explains, the first attempts at camera hunting were quite literal: using the camera to ‘hunt’ the animal with the resulting photo being viewed as a hunting trophy (Brower 2005: 12). The camera hunting movement popularised the pursuit by arguing that camera hunting required more skill than traditional hunting because the early photographic equipment was so cumbersome it required the hunter having to get within very close range of the animal. Bower reveals that the ‘essence of this sportsmanship was not just marksmanship – being able to hit the target – but woodcraft – the skill of being able to get close to the target undetected, to see without being

⁸⁵ From the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century the Island was quarried for the rare granite Ailsite which was used to make curling stones (Tait 2005).

seen' (Brower 2005: 14). While Kirk's seabirds were located on the cliff-edge rather than the wood, it would have still demanded a great deal of agility, strength and stealth to get close enough to the birds in order to photograph them and without causing a disturbance. While the gun was gradually being replaced by the camera in certain naturalist circles, at the time of Kirk's expeditions to Ailsa Craig Victorian naturalists and sportsmen were still more renowned for zealously collecting bird and animal trophies than for photographing them. The annual seabird slaughter on Ailsa Craig for this purpose was appalling (see Tait 2005: 6). Therefore, despite Kirk's photography being driven by a desire to celebrate Scotland's wildlife, seabirds in particular⁸⁶, the association between wildlife photography and trophy taxidermy at this time meant that Kirk was inevitably caught up, through both his hobby and profession, in the gratuitous spoilage of nature for sport.⁸⁷



**Fig. 4.16 Charles Kirk edging along a cliff ledge on Ailsa Craig.
(Charles Kirk Collection Kelvingrove Museum – neg. no. A)**

⁸⁶ Kirk was commissioned to provide photographs of wild birds for a series of small pocket-sized picture books called Gowans Nature Books. The series, published at the beginning of the twentieth century by Gowans and Gary Ltd (Glasgow and London), was illustrated with black and white photographs, one per page, and printed to a very high standard. The bird books from the series, of which three were illustrated throughout with Kirk's photographs, were titled *Wild Birds at Home*.

⁸⁷ Although Tait (2005) does not concede this, Kirk and his associates were most likely using their expeditions as much for collecting specimens as for photography. Bower (2005) explains that, even though many naturalist-hunters were now using the camera to hunt for their quarry, they often ended up shooting the animal anyway so that they could still have the specimen for their material collections.

Kirk's hobby was not just a sideline, however, as it was also driven by a desire to reach greater perfection in the mounting of birds and other animals back in his taxidermy workshop. Kirk, having been taught by Ward whose philosophy for achieving fine taxidermy was based on gaining an appreciation of animals both in life (behaviour/attitude) as well as in death (anatomy), will have wanted to refine his understanding of animal and bird behaviour through his photography so that he too could recreate their natural attitudes and settings in his taxidermy.⁸⁸ His mentor even recommended the use of photography as an aid for taxidermy in the twentieth century editions of his *Sportsman's Handbook*, arguing that photographs depicting animals in their natural settings could give the taxidermist a reference point from which to work when setting up cases. A surviving bird-diorama made by Kirk's workshop for the Kelvingrove Museum evidences that Kirk's photography certainly influenced the firm's life-like style (see Fig. 4.17).⁸⁹



Fig. 4.17 Diorama made for the Kelvingrove museum by Charles Kirk and Co. now kept in storage.

⁸⁸ Macdonald (2002) has highlighted that the guiding philosophy for birdwatching practice (both with the naked eye and through the lens of a camera) was very similar to the guiding philosophy adopted by skilled taxidermists. Macdonald explains that T. A. Coward's concept of 'jizz' pervaded twentieth-century bird-observing discourse, even after its scientific overhaul in the 30's and 40's, and was used to refer to the immediate, unconscious identification of a bird species. An ability to recognise or capture the 'jizz' of certain bird species (as already noted in *Practive*) depended upon the observer having an intimate familiarity with the particular species, and thus was therefore regarded as a sign of expertise in the bird observer or taxidermist.

⁸⁹ The museum had several cases of birds set up by Kirk's firm, but, after they were dismantled in the 1970's many of the dioramas were broken up and the bird mounts were used in other displays. This is the only full surviving diorama complete with ground-work.

Not only are the birds accurately mounted in natural poses but, again following ‘Wardian’ design, the case also depicts the birds in their natural setting. A great deal of work has gone into the replicating the Bird’s cliff-edge habitat as closely as possible; from the rocks being modelled out of papier mache and painted to look real (they have even been adorned with lichen and bird excrement), to the use of real kelp (dried and painted black) to make the birds’ nests and real moss (dried and painted green) to fill in the rock cracks. This diorama indicates that Kirk must have taught his staff to follow Ward’s methods for producing life-like taxidermy. The diorama looks almost like an exact replica of Kirk’s seabird portraits, suggesting that Kirk was likely encouraging his staff to use his photographs as a means to better appreciate the natural attitudes and settings of the animals which the firm was being commissioned to set up. Tait (2005) reveals that Ludovic Colquhoun, an employee at Kirk’s taxidermy firm, regularly accompanied Kirk on his trips to Ailsa Craig, suggesting that Kirk was attempting to impress upon his staff the importance of nature study for producing life-like quality taxidermy.

While the diorama and Kirk’s visits to Ailsa Craig with employees suggest that he was passing on the style of taxidermy learned at Ward’s to the staff at his own firm, an indenture made between Kirk and McCorrisken, also held in the Kelvingrove file, is even more suggestive. The indenture, dated 1913 (although recognising McCorrisken had actually been at the firm since 1911), is particularly revealing as it shows that Kirk was attempting to replicate Ward’s model for and methods in the practice of taxidermy at his Sauchiehall Street workshops. The indenture states:

‘[John McCorrisken] hereby engages and binds and obliges himself as an apprentice to the said Charles Kirk in the profession of taxidermist, and that for the space of six years... the said apprentice shall faithfully, honestly and diligently serve and obey the said Charles Kirk in his employment, and shall not absent himself without liberty obtained from his said master except in the case of such sickness as disable him from attendance and if he fails in punctual and regular attendance he shall serve two days after the term herein specified for each days absence during that time...

The apprentice binds and obliges himself not to reveal any secrets of, or do anything that will injure his Master’s Business, shall do his utmost to prevent the same, and shall in every other respect conduct himself in a proper and befitting manner over the course of his apprenticeship. And further the said apprentice shall not directly or indirectly carry on for his own behalf any business whatsoever...

On his part the said Charles Kirk binds and obliges himself to teach and instruct his said apprentice in his Art and Craft of taxidermy so far as he may practice the same, and the capacity of his apprentice will admit, and to pay his said apprentice

weekly in the name of wages at the rate of six shillings per week for the first year of his apprenticeship, at the rate of eight shillings per week for the second year, at the rate of ten shillings per week for the third year, at the rate of twelve shillings sixpence per week for the fourth year, at the rate of fifteen shillings per week for the fifth year, and at the rate of sixteen shillings per week for the sixth and last year....’

The indenture is then signed by both Charles Kirk and John McCorrisken and is witnessed by Joseph McCorrisken (John McCorrisken’s father), Ludovic Colqhoun (an employee and associate of Kirk’s) and Charles F Deuholm (unknown to the author). Rough notes compiled by another member of staff at the Kelvingrove also contained within the file note that Kirk had left Ward’s sometime in 1894 and worked as a taxidermist for a time in Perth before moving to Glasgow in 1896 whereupon he established his own taxidermy business at 156 Sauchiehall Street. The Indenture made between Kirk and McCorrisken echoes the one from Ward’s recovered by Morris. In comparable fashion, Kirk expects McCorrisken diligently to attend the firm and to keep the secrets of its practice. McCorrisken, again just like a Ward apprentice, was also expected to conduct himself in a respectable fashion both within and beyond the firm and never do any taxidermy business that did not directly benefit the firm. The similarities drawn between the two Indentures suggest that Kirk was attempting to replicate aspects of Wardian practice, like the apprentice scheme, at his own firm. Morris states in his 2003 study of Rowland Ward’s business that surprisingly few Ward apprentices left the firm to set up on their own. Kirk is therefore a rare example of a Wardian apprentice who broke away from the firm to put in practice the methods and techniques acquired while training at Ward’s into an independent business.

Promotional material relating to Kirk’s practice at Sauchiehall Street, also retained by the Kelvingrove, demonstrates that, although Kirk had left Ward’s, he knew his association with the famous firm could give his own one a competitive edge over existing Glasgow taxidermists. For example, on his correspondence material he freely advertised the fact that he was previously ‘From Rowland Ward (London)’. Rowland Ward’s & Co by this time was a recognised brand synonymous with quality and high society, and Kirk would have wanted to cash in on its reputation for producing premium taxidermy products for the elites of the day. A photocopied Catalogue (1910) of the work done at Kirk’s, also from the Kelvingrove file, further illustrates Kirk’s willingness to promote his association with Ward’s, recognising the considerable cache that his Wardian connection could bring to his own firm. While Kirk’s association with Ward served as a stamp of approval (or mark of excellence) for his firm, like with any business its success depended on the quality of the product.

The Catalogue states that Charles Kirk's of 156 Sauchiehall Street, although much smaller than Ward's in size, undertook all types of work just like Ward's - "The work undertaken – "Everything from the setting of an insect to the modelling of an elephant" – and that the ten photographic reproductions of work completed by the firm were included to prove their ability to produce quality taxidermy (Kirk 1910: front cover). The Catalogue was predominantly aimed at sportsman-collectors because Kirk, an ex-employee of Ward's, would have known these commissions to be especially lucrative. According to the Catalogue the firm specialised in the mounting of 'African Game Animals' (e.g. a mask of an elephant cost £25, a Hippopotamus (mouth open) £8 (mouth closed) £5), the 'Game animals of India, Burma, Malay and Tibet' (e.g. the mask of a Great Indian Rhinoceros cost £5, a Tiger (open mouth) £3 12 shillings 6d (closed mouth) £2 17 shillings 6d), 'American, European and Arctic trophies' (e.g. the mask of a moose cost £3 10 shillings, a Caribou £2 15 shillings), and 'British Trophies' (e.g. the mask of a Stag or Red deer cost £15 shillings). In a further echo of Ward & co's product line, Kirk's also made ornaments out of animal hooves and other miscellaneous animal appendages (e.g. an elephant foot could be made into an umbrella stand or waste-paper basket, and tiger and lion claws could be made into broaches or pendants). The firm also specialised in the 'Setting up of Wild Birds' to cater for ornithological collectors.⁹⁰ The Catalogue qualifies that the prices quoted for the different types of mounts and masks 'are necessarily approximate and apply to average specimens in fair condition' (Kirk 1910: 10). This qualification would have been needed as many of the skins and animal parts sent from abroad were often poorly preserved, making the taxidermist's job of producing a life-like specimen extremely difficult. This said, as the note in the Forward suggests, Kirk's prided itself on producing high-quality taxidermy: "While charges are moderate throughout, the guiding principle in all the work is "not how cheap but how good"; and when prices are compared with those of others they will be found extremely reasonable considering the workmanship and art quality of the completed trophies" (Ibid: 2). Here Kirk was obviously trying to justify why his prices might have been more expensive than competitors by insisting that it was down to the quality of the workmanship that Kirk's of Sauchiehall Street could offer over its competitors.⁹¹ In the Forward to the catalogue Kirk also communicates to future customers that, when using the firm's services 'it should be remembered that the staff are each engaged in a particular branch of the art for which they have been specially trained'. This again highlights that Kirk was following the Rowland Ward model for practising taxidermy by training apprentices and workman in specialist areas of the craft.

⁹⁰ The catalogue also notes (p. 26) that it was also in the business of setting up of bird skins, presumably for study collections, and did 'feather work' for millinery on a commission basis.

⁹¹ Other contemporary taxidermists were McCulloch (Wellington Arcade, Glasgow) and Eggleton (St George Rd, Glasgow). Both of these practices were small one-man businesses.

We know from McCorrisken's floor-plan that, as well as Kirk, about twelve other employees were working at the firm around the time the Catalogue was published. Other recovered notes from another former employee of Kirk's – William Stirling – give a greater insight into how the work was distributed amongst the employees.⁹² Stirling had joined the business in 1920 not long before the Sauchiehall Street workshops were devastated in the disastrous fire of the same year, after which the firm then removed to 56-58 Great Western Road. While Stirling (noted on McCorrisken's floor-plan as one of Kirk's 'Boys') obviously had little experience working in the Sauchiehall Street workshops he worked at the firm for a seven year period (1920-1928 when the business closed) and he reveals details about the type of work done by the firm and the branches of the craft specialised in by the individual workmen. Although he never met them Stirling notes that the staff killed in the 1914 War, Ludovic Colquhoun, Harry Duncan and George Stout, were 'remembered as first class taxidermists'. Of the remaining staff Stirling notes reveal that:

“**David Wotherspoon** (who had recently become a junior partner in the firm) was mainly concerned with fish mounting and casing and with case-work:- Glass cases of varying shapes and sizes in which the specimens were contained amid natural surroundings.

Arthur Becket and **William McLintock** had both joined Chas. Kirk shortly after he had set up business in Glasgow at 156 Sauchiehall Street.

Arthur Becket was excellent at mounting birds and was mainly occupied in doing this but he also mounted many small mammals.

William McLintock was concerned mostly with large mammals, mounted heads etc. including rug heads such as lion, tiger, polar bear and so on.

James Fraser worked on mammals and mounted heads but also did a lot of plume work.

John McCorrisken as and when required worked at all the types of work mentioned.

Michael Donnelly [not on McCorrisken's floor-plan] was mainly employed in skinning and cleaning specimens.”

⁹² The notes of William Stirling, former employee of Charles Kirk and later the Royal Scottish Museum, were lent to the author by Pat Morris. Written sometime about 1990, the original notes had been lent to Morris by Stirling's daughter and Morris then combined these notes with other information he had relating to Kirk's practices. Morris was interested in compiling information about Kirk's firm as Charles Kirk was only one of a few Wardian apprentices that set up a business of their own.

Stirling additionally notes that in general if a workman showed particular aptitude in any one aspect of the work, it naturally followed that they would be given a lot of that work to do and thus would end up a specialist in that particular type of work. This again is a strong indication that Kirk observed Rowland Ward's professional model of practicing taxidermy. From his time spent at Ward's, Kirk learned that in order for a taxidermy business to expand and to cater in the setting up of different types of taxidermy, including large mammals, work would had to be distributed between employees. If employees were specialists in particular types of taxidermy (e.g. trophy or large mammal) or at particular parts of the process (e.g. skinning and cleaning or the making of cases) it meant that the firm would work much more efficiently and therefore increase production and product output. From Stirling's notes it is clear that Kirk was attempting a kind of production line approach, since he had Donnelly skinning and cleaning specimens, then had different workmen working on the various types of taxidermy in which the firm specialised – Becket specialised in bird taxidermy, McLintock in large mammal and trophy work, Fraser also in mammals and mounted heads (as this comprised much of the firm's work) but also plume and millinery work, Wotherspoon in fish mounting, and McCorrisken, the only jack-of-all-trades, worked on all types of taxidermy (perhaps he assisted those involved in the most demanding work like large mammal and trophy work) – and then finally he had Wotherspoon also doing all the case-work (e.g. making the false habitat settings) and constructing the glass presentation cases.⁹³ Kirk's therefore became a highly profitable business, the most successful in Scotland, according to Stirling. In comparison with other contemporary Scottish taxidermists, which were small one-man operations specialising only in one or two types of taxidermy, the firm was able to offer an expanded product range whilst also achieving a more efficient service.

Stirling's notes also give further details about the kind of work in which the firm was engaged. Aside from the straight-forward mounting of birds and small mammals for local museums and private collectors, there was a continual flow of what Stirling calls 'Trophy work'. This comprised the mounting of heads to hang on walls, and those of deer and antelope formed a large part of this type of work. Morris (2003b) explains that at Ward's the setting up of horned mammals similarly made up the majority of the trophy work, as Sportsmen of the period were competing with each other to obtain specimens with record sized horns.⁹⁴

⁹³ Pat Morris told the author that many of Kirk's cases were built to the Ward pattern and are almost indistinguishable.

⁹⁴ This competition was in part manufactured by Rowland Ward himself through the publication of his book *Records of Big Game* (1892 first edition). Morris (2003b: 137) explains that the book was produced as a reference work for sportsmen-collectors (and as a boost to Ward's business) as it formally recorded the biggest specimens of the different species shot and preserved from field sport. After the first edition was

Stirling writes that it was commonplace for Kirk's to take delivery of large wooden packing cases, invariably lined with tin as a protection against dermestid beetles, that contained the dried masks, skulls and horns of various specimens of predominantly antelopes but frequently also containing entire skins of lion, leopard and tiger. Stirling explains that the latter were usually intended either to lie on the floor or grace the walls of some stately home. Even for a rug the head would be carefully modelled using the skull as a base, and patrons would often request the specimen was shown with the teeth showing in a typical snarl. On some occasions it was found that, in spite of carefully soldered tin lining, larvae had been sealed in with the contents of the packing cases and had hatched completely, spoiling the skins and masks.



Fig. 4.18 Packing crates (fashioned out of camp supply boxes) used to ship big-game skins and skeletons by Major Powell Cotton. The skins Kirk's and Co. would have received would have arrived similarly.

published in 1892, at least sixteen other editions were published thereafter (the last in 1984), each offering an update on the competition. A typical page of the book would consist of a photograph of the coveted 'specimen' (Ward, a canny publicist, usually made sure this took the form of a finished Ward mount), together with a brief account of the animal's distribution and natural history. A table then gave the maximum dimensions of the largest recorded individuals (measurements of horns, tusks or body dimensions were listed, all taken in the standardised manner promoted by the book and duly verified by independent observers where possible). Morris (Ibid: 138) notes that 'biggest' could be defined in several ways. For example one buffalo could have the widest spread of horns, but they might be quite spindly in appearance, so another record will be for the heaviest horns. While most of the animals recorded were ungulates, the book also included other species such as a walrus, elephants and big cats. The book was therefore a valuable reference for sportsmen as it gave them an updated catalogue of the mammals shot for sport. It also acted to induce competition between sportsmen as the hunter who obtained the biggest specimen was formerly recorded, thus spurring on others to beat the record so they could be celebrated in the next edition. In principle, the bigger the size of the animal the greater skill and bravery it took to obtain; however, it was largely the social cachet associated with achieving a record kill that spurred on sportsmen to continue making big-game sporting trips.

Even when skins arrived unharmed, they still required a lot of work before any setting-up could be done, according to Stirling, as they arrived in a dried-out state and therefore needed to be wetted and softened to made pliable for mounting (see Fig. 4.19).



Fig. 4.19 Folded antelope skin shipped by Major Powell-Cotton for possible use in one of his Dioramas which he had made up by Rowland Ward & Co.

As an aside from the straight-forward trophy-work, the firm was also frequently commissioned to make household items out of animal appendages. Stirling reveals that elephant feet were often made to serve as waste-paper baskets or umbrella stands, and that rhino and hippo feet were similarly treated but finished with silver mountings to be used as tobacco jars or some other container. It was also popular to have deer feet, or as they were then called 'slots', mounted as candle sticks. According to Morris (2003), these types of item were a speciality of Rowland Ward, and so Kirk would have known them to be a lucrative sideline for a taxidermy business as they offered customers the opportunity of having a souvenir from a large mammal that they may have shot which would have been very expensive to send in full from abroad. They hence made use of animal parts (like the deer slots) that would have otherwise been discarded.

While hunting trophies made up the commercial core of Kirk's business, Stirling's notes reveal that in the early days of his apprenticeship a great deal of time was spent preserving and preparing the plumage for millinery or other feminine adornment but also for decorating the

home. He testifies that sometimes the whole bird, except for the legs and feet, would be used for covering a hat (see Fig. 4.20).



Fig. 4.20 The head and half body of a Bird of Paradise (died black) with a fastener so it could be attached to a hat.

Pheasants were a popular choice for this purpose but other common (and therefore easily available) species used whole or in part were blackcock, ducks, grebes, waders, heron and swans. The level of skill required for this type of work was much less than for a whole bird mount as the sections of bird plumage or whole bird were merely required to be shown off to best advantage rather than being accurately modelled, which is why an apprentice like Stirling would have been given this work. Stirling states that all that he was required to do was to skin out the parts of the plumage required, and to free these as much as possible from fat and grease, then rub the skin with a powder preservative which at the time consisted of a mixture of two parts borax and one part white arsenic. The skins were then lightly stuffed with tow and then laid skin side down on a wooden board so that the plumage could be carefully arranged to give the best possible effect. In most cases, Stirling notes that he had to brace the feathers with thin strips of flexible cardboard so as to prevent the feathers from rising or twisting during drying. Stirling was also required to set up many fire-screens made out of bird plumage during his apprenticeship. The bird of choice for this design was usually heron, its charm being, according to Stirling, that its long legs formed the ideal natural support for the

screen. These fire screens were also a Ward specialty, again evidencing that Kirk was attempting to reproduce the Rowland Ward model in miniature at his Glasgow firm.

However, while for the purposes of his apprenticeship Stirling was required to ‘earn his stripes’ by doing lots of the less skilled taxidermy work, he states that he was keen to assist in the preparation of museum mounts and dioramas. The Catalogue states that the products of Kirk’s studio had ‘a reputation for life-like beauty and artistic skill’ and thus their workmanship was in demand by some of Scotland’s premier Museums (Kirk 1910: 2).⁹⁵ Kirk was also keen to advertise the more complex diorama work that the studio could achieve for museums, as diorama work was considered to be the highest accomplishment in taxidermy. One of the photographs in the Catalogue illustrates a seal case set-up by the firm for the Royal Scottish Museum, Edinburgh. Kirk will have chosen to highlight this particular case to demonstrate the firm’s abilities in the setting up of large mammal taxidermy. Seals were also notoriously difficult to set-up as they were hairless, which meant the taxidermist had to sculpt the underlying structure so as to simulate the folds in the blubber. Moreover, if the modelled replacement body was too big for the skin, it would mean that the skin would crack as it was drying, entirely ruining the mount. Getting such a difficult subject matter right was therefore evidence of the firm’s ability to produce life-like quality taxidermy. Kirk (Ibid: 31) even reproduced the Royal Scottish Museum’s letter of appreciation on receipt of the case to highlight how highly regarded was the firm’s workmanship:

“I must really congratulate you on the seal case. It is marvellously good and I have never seen anything of the kind to equal it.

I could not have believed it possible to produce anything so true to nature. It is beyond criticism, from the smallest stone on the beach to the grand old male seal that surmounts the highest rock, and it is a monument to your skill as a taxidermist and an artist.

W. Eagle Clarke. (Curator)”

Stirling would have been keen to get involved in the more complex and artistic work required for dioramas such as this as it represented the culmination of a taxidermist’s craft skills. Not

⁹⁵ Charles Kirk on his correspondence letters even advertised the firm as taxidermist to ‘the Royal Scottish Museum; the Glasgow, Paisley, Perth, Bute, Wick and Hunterian Museums’.

only was the workman required to set up the animal mounts as accurately and artistically as possible, but they also had to represent faithfully the specimens in a reproduction of their natural habitat. For an apprentice like Stirling, assisting in the production of diorama work would also have meant that he could work on the more exotic animal species that the firm regularly received from Bostock's Glasgow city menagerie.⁹⁶ Stirling reveals in his notes on the firm's history that Kirk had a verbal agreement with Mr Bostock that, if any of his zoo animals died or were put down, then Kirk would get first refusal on the carcass. Kirk would notify the Kelvingrove of any fresh specimens received from Bostock to see if they wanted them to be set up for display. The Kelvingrove archives hold several letters addressed from Kirk to the Museum detailing this business. For example on 14th May 1902 Kirk wrote to the museum to inquire whether they would be interested in a tiger that he had bought from Bostock:⁹⁷

“Dear Sir,

Received a good male tiger from Bostock on Saturday; with instructions to try and dispose of it. Unfortunately it is a male, but a fairly old tiger.

Mr Bostock asks £10 for it. You have a male tiger for stuffing just now, but I thought you might be glad to get the skeleton. Kindly let me know at once if possible as animal is getting “rather high”.

Yours truly,

Charles Kirk”

The constant flow of exotic specimens and skins coming from Bostock's to Kirk's would have fascinated an apprentice like Stirling as it would have offered him the opportunity of inspecting up close, and from the inside out, species that he may have only seen behind bars before. However, by the time Stirling was apprenticed at the firm in 1920, this business had inevitably slowed as the spending power of the Kelvingrove and other Scottish Museums was curtailed by the lack of public funds available after the First World War. There was thus less demand for expensive large mammal specimens and diorama displays. Also after the fire of

⁹⁶ Bostock originally had a travelling menagerie – Bostock and Wombwell's Travelling Menagerie – that toured the length and breadth of country from 1885-1897. Bostock then decided to establish The Scottish Zoo on New City Road, Cowcaddens, Glasgow (1897-1909). This zoo then became Glasgow Zoo in 1909. A record of the menagerie and zoo's history is recorded in Mr E. H. Bostock's auto-biography *Menageries, Circuses and Theatres* (1927).

⁹⁷ Kelvingrove Museum Nat. Hist. Corresp. 1902. No. 464 Kirk Charles. Offering to sell tiger.

1920 and the firm's transfer to the less central location of 56 Great Western Road, there was a general decline in work orders of all kinds due to a worsening of the general economy. Stirling explains that the firm was also rocked by the death of Charles Kirk in 1922 and although David Wotherspoon took over the business and kept it going for some years, the continued decline in work orders forced him to downsize again and move to a much smaller establishment at 18 Gibson Street in 1926.⁹⁸ The downsizing was not enough to save the firm, however, as the poor state of the economy combined with the fact that taxidermy was becoming increasingly unfashionable due to changing social attitudes towards the use and display of dead animal skins meant that even the firm's once lucrative trade in trophy mounts and millinery work was diminishing. The firm, still known as Charles Kirk and Co., was forced to close its doors for good in 1928.

Stirling, having joined Kirk's at fifteen years of age in 1920, had by the time the firm closed severed his apprenticeship, set out for seven years (six years apprenticeship and one year as an improver), in full. Stirling states in his notes that, like McCorrisken, his Indenture with Charles Kirk was legally binding with conditions and wages set out for seven years. Although this indenture could not be recovered, a letter, dated 19th January 1921, from Kirk to Stirling's mother offering Stirling an apprenticeship, which was kept by Stirling's daughter, was lent to the author:

Dear Mrs Stirling,

Please excuse delay in writing you regarding Willie's proposed apprenticeship; the term for this trade is six years, and as I already mentioned to Willie it will be committed from the time when I took him into the workshop – viz June 1st 1920.

In pre-war days apprentices started at 6 shillings weekly for the first year and 18 shillings for sixth year, but I have considered the increased rate of journeymen's wages now prevailing, and have drawn up a new scale as follows, 1st year 15 shillings weekly, 2nd year 18 shillings weekly, 3rd year 22 shillings weekly, 4th year 30 shillings weekly, 5th year 35 shillings weekly, 6th and last year 40 shillings weekly. There is always a possibility of a fall in wages in course of a year or so, and thought at first of drawing up a scale by which the apprentices would receive a stated percentage of the prevailing journeyman's wage, but on second thoughts I felt this arrangement would be too indefinite and unsatisfactory.

I am very pleased with the promise Willie shows of making an efficient workman, and if he has a real liking and interest in the work there is little to fear of him getting on.

⁹⁸ Charles Kirk died of an asthma attack, an illness from which he had long suffered, and must have been aggravated by his working environment.

Should you approve of these suggestions I will arrange to have the indentures drawn up and submit them to you before signing.

With kind regards and trusting you are well.

Yours Truly,

Charles Kirk

By the 1920's Ward and Co. had stopped offering apprenticeships in taxidermy, and so Stirling states in his notes that he was most likely the last bound apprentice in the craft of taxidermy in Britain.⁹⁹ And so not only does the closing of Charles Kirk's and Co. signal the end of the business, it also marks the end of taxidermy as an organised trade.

After Kirk's closure in 1928, Stirling was employed as a taxidermist and conservator at the Royal Scottish Museum, Edinburgh. Whilst here Stirling added to the bird gallery for which Kirk's had already supplied several dioramas. Still working in the 'Kirk style', it is hard to tell, just by looking, which dioramas were set up by Kirk's and which were made by Stirling.¹⁰⁰ We also know from McCorricken's notes that Arthur Becket and William McLintock went to work at the Kelvingrove Museum ('Glasgow Art Galleries') after Kirk's closed, so the work completed by these men and by the firm itself, which can still be seen on display at the Kelvingrove and the RMS, offer a lasting legacy of the taxidermy practice of Charles Kirk and Co. Peter Summers (formerly of the RSM) and Dick Hendry (formerly of the Kelvingrove) also informed the author that, although defunct, the firm still continued to influence the practice of taxidermy at these Scottish institutions well into latter half of the twentieth century as many of the in-house taxidermists at the museum were given training in aspects of the craft by Kirk's former employees. The work on display produced by Charles Kirk and Co. was also considered to be the gold standard to aspire to by trainee museum taxidermists like Summers and Hendry when they first joined the museums. Thus, although initially there seemed to have been little to document the firm's existence, tracing the development of a craft style through apprenticeship schemes has made it possible not only to offer glimpses of the bodies and

⁹⁹ By the 1920's even Ward's, which still received a great deal of trophy work, had had to cut back on staff; and having most of the key roles in the craft filled by accomplished taxidermists who had been in-house trained meant that there was little need for new apprentices.

¹⁰⁰ Peter Summers, also formally of the RSM (now NMS), worked with Willie Stirling for a time at the museum before he retired. Even for someone as skilled as Peter, it was difficult to distinguish between the ones made by Kirk's and the ones made by Stirling as we walked around the bird gallery together.

practice that once animated Charles Kirk's of 156 Sauchiehall Street, Glasgow, but to intimate how their body-practices exerted an influence beyond Kirk's workshop.

Craft under erasure

Deleuze and Guattari describe the analysis of practices as 'looking for phantoms' (Deleuze and Guattari 1986). In looking for the phantoms of Charles Kirk's of 156 Sauchiehall Street, Glasgow, it is perhaps ironic that it was by focusing on recovering the practice of the firm that the site started to emerge or, rather, return. Rather than attempt a recuperation of the site through the telling of Charles Kirk's biography, I sought to figure differently the working of bodies and bodies at work in Kirk's workshop by tracing how a craft style, and therefore body-practices, can achieve spatial extension and temporal duration (can be passed on) through a series of apprenticeships. Non-representational theory promotes the understanding of practices as 'material bodies of work or styles that have gained enough stability over time, through, for example, the establishment of corporeal routines and specialised devices, to reproduce themselves' (Thrift 2008: 8). Following this logic, practices are not 'the properties of actors but of the practices themselves', and thus why I decided to trace the development of Kirk's craft style to shed light on the practice at Kirk's workshop (Ibid). Tracing Kirk's apprenticeship at Ward's & Co. and then how he passed on that style of working to his apprentices at his own firm, enabled me to offer glimpses of the work done at Kirk's of 156 Sauchiehall Street. Of course, this approach was partly demanded by the ephemeral and fragmentary nature of the remainders that recorded the firm's existence. Yet, rather than see partiality as an obstacle to historical recovery, I sought to draw force from absence and incompleteness by amassing and rehabilitating those diffuse remainders that I had managed to recover. This was partly inspired by Lorimer's (in press) insistence that redundant materials and objects relating to the past can, when used imaginatively, offer a renewable resource for the telling of unfashionable or forgotten pasts. While this form of ad-hoc archiving can lead to feelings of disorientation, this can be read as an allegory of archival work more generally: 'as sometimes melancholic, often vertiginous and always incomplete' (Foster 2004: 12). By 'making-do' with what remained to tell of the firm's existence, it meant, that unlike many other taxidermy firms that have disappeared without a trace, swept aside by changing fashions and social attitudes, Kirk's would not meet the same fate. However, while I sought to recuperate and revive silenced agencies and forgotten histories of Kirk's of 156 Sauchiehall Street, I also placed this revival 'under erasure' (Derrida 1976). By doing so, I sought to communicate that, whilst being compelled to recuperate the site as a place of past practice, I

also wanted to acknowledge the impossibility of this aim, and thus stay true to a ‘spectro-politics’ and not move ‘*too far* in arousing the world’ (Maddern and Adey 2008: 293).

While much emphasis has been placed on reanimating bodies, things and places by recent geographical projects, Maddern and Adey have argued that studies of the spectro-geographical – the hidden politics/agencies that haunt spaces in intimate and complex ways – can help to problematise vitalist geographies of the ‘more-than-representational’ by insisting geographers not forget ‘the lifeless geographies of the broken, the static and the already passed’ (Maddern and Adey 2008: 293). Thus while I sought to offer glimpses of the bodies and practice that once animated Kirk’s workshop, I also wanted to move away from the idea that this past place could be simply accessed or reanimated through the reclamation and presentation of its historical remainders. Rather, by tracing, in the present, the passing on of a craft style by bodies as they moved through past places and times, I wanted to follow a spectral logic and present space and time as folded, ‘allowing distant presences, events, people and things to become rather more intimate’ (Maddern and Adey 2008: 291). For Derrida, we lack a nuanced sense of history and memory ‘as long as [we rely] on a general temporality or an historical temporality made up of successive linking of presents identical to themselves and contemporary with themselves’ (Derrida 1994: 70). By building up a narrative that moved between places, pasts and presents, I sought to disrupt this reassuring conception of temporal linearity and thus subvert received notions of space and time as distinct planes or axes. Yet rather than place the existence of Charles Kirk and Co. wholly in doubt by testifying to its spectrality, its ‘taking-place in a slipping away and a dislocation’ (Wylie 2007: 185), I was in fact trying build up a picture of the work done at the site whilst staying faithful to the ultimate alterity of the bodies, practice and matter that once animated Kirk’s workshop. Thus, while I wanted to preserve something of the site’s history and the legacy of the men who worked there, I also wanted to avoid forcing their remains to fit within a more traditional biographical narrative.

This said, as I hope to have shown by charting Sim’s life-geography, the application of geographic sensibilities to biographical study can produce multi-sensual biographies that emphasise the biographical subject as existing within multisensual realms of practice. Furthermore the Sim archive, and the fact that he ran what was ostensibly a one-man operation in a relatively isolated (i.e. from other forms of taxidermy and natural history practice) location necessitated that a more traditional biographical approach be taken to the recuperation of his lifeworlds of working practice. The fact that Sim’s practice was so solitary meant that unlike with Kirk, Sim did not pass on his practice and thus the proverbial buck stopped with him, making it impossible to find traces of his craft style’s temporal duration or

spatial extension (a more general craft problem that will be returned to in the conclusion). The take home point of this chapter then, is that the creative challenge of historical life-study/recovery (in what ever form it takes) is to ascertain what can conceivably said from, those things that remain. Thus it is the leftovers that must guide the analysis/narration rather than making them fit within a prescribed theoretical/methodological orientation.

While it might be considered distasteful to mark the passing of two taxidermy workshops which were imbricated in the mass slaughter of animals, at the same time the craft of practitioners like Kirk and his apprentices who practiced taxidermy to reproduce, from their observations, the life-like beauty of nature in its natural state is worth marking. Valuing Geogre Sim's and Charles Kirk and his apprentices' passion for the craft they practiced and their philosophy that skilled workmanship and thus a quality product takes investment in time and people to achieve is something which resonates with present concerns to work with 'practices of slowness' to counter our increasingly 'frenetic future-orientated capitalist world' (Thrift 2000b: 35 – this idea will be returned to in the conclusion). Furthermore, probing misplaced pasts to ascertain what might remain for the present can help to shift away from 'a melancholic culture that views the historical as little more than the traumatic' (Foster 2004: 22). Thus, rather than viewing the biogeographies of Sim and Kirk as something which has passed or been swept aside, their lingering traces now have a reopened future, existing to be reworked and rechanneled.

The next chapter takes up and develops this idea of reworking and rechanneling historical fragments by focusing on recovering the biogeographies of a set of mounted tiger heads.

Movement

‘... as practices lose their place in a historical form of life, they may leave abandoned wreckage behind them which can then take on new life, generating new hybrids or simply leavings which still have resonance. Take the example of things. These may have been vital parts of particular networks of practice, only to fall out of use as these networks metamorphose. Consequently their meanings may become hollowed out but may still retain a presence as enigmatic signifiers (Santer 2006). Or they may find other uses in other networks. Or they may linger on as denaturalized reminders of past events and practices, purposely memorialized in various ways or simply present as ruins, as melancholy rem(a)inders. In other words, they have a potent afterlife.’ (Thrift 2008: 8-9).

This chapter considers the movements of a group of mounted tiger heads and the related ‘mobile practices’ which brought them into being. Taxidermy skills were crucial to the colonial trafficking that made dead animals mobile and ensured their long-term preservation in entirely alien environments. The Hopetoun tigers, being trophies of colonial enterprise, therefore present themselves as a ‘case-study’ for recovering the tangle of beings, practices and places involved in the making and mobilising of colonial taxidermy specimens. As such it is productive to think about the tiger heads as being comprised from an assemblage of movements, in the past and the present. While the chapter will chart the biogeographies that went into the making and movement of a particular group of taxidermy mounts their telling will not take the form of a linear ‘commodity story’ or ‘object biography’ where commodities are understood as inert/passive (e.g. Jackson 2002; Hill 2006, 2007; Alberti 2005). Following Ingold (2007), I consider the specimens as active assemblages of movements, materials and practices which brought them into existence (and thus also seek to scramble their integrity as symbols of human conquest over animated nature). Furthermore, I shall show how an attention to the deteriorating materials of taxidermy specimens not only reveals something of the secrets of their assembly, but exposes the clever artifices and ambiguities of representation. Thus as substances and specimens start to unravel, so do the biogeographical stories of their making, showing up tangles of beings, practices and places. The chapter concludes by demonstrating how the Hopetoun mounts are an embodied record of the lived

acts and inhabited places of their making, and, that through their excavation an attempt can be made at “fleshing out” the biogeographies that brought them into being.

The chapter begins by with an appraisal of the tiger heads and, drawing on recent work that argues that we must see beyond the representational surface of things, I develop methodology which incorporates specimen artefacts as object-based archive. The Hopetoun tigers then form the pivot from which a series of excursions in search of other resources to tell of the biogeographies of the mounts making will be made; first to the ‘killing fields’ and second to ‘the factory’.

Memento mori: the Hopetoun tigers

“Much has been written on the hollowness of souvenirs, their intrinsic sadness and the ultimate futility of collecting things in an effort to remember places and events. Perhaps none is more poignant than that which is plucked from ‘nature’, that thing that once was living and is now dead or redundant – a shadow of what it once was in life...” (Snaebjörnsdóttir and Wilson 2006: 14).



Fig. 5.1 Four of the Hopetoun tigers, the “tiger room”, Hopetoun House, South Queensferry, Edinburgh.

On first encounter, the eight tiger heads that line the walls of the “tiger room” of Hopetoun House could easily be dismissed as merely the hollow souvenirs of imperial adventure.¹⁰¹ The tigers, mounted in typical big-game trophy style – the taxidermised head is mantled to a wooden heraldic shield – are arranged in a classic tableau: the heads, grouped in fours and evenly spaced, mirroring each other on adjacent walls (see Fig. 5.1). As such they can be said to embody ‘an archetype of British aristocratic adventuring’ (Snaebjörnsdóttir and Wilson 2006: 16). Visitors to the “tiger room” are led to interpret them as the relics and trophies of colonial enterprise, a practice and a past with which many are now uncomfortable and hence little contemplative time seems spent in their company. In recent work exploring nineteenth-century spaces of consumption, Kevin Hetherington observes that all acts of arrangement and ordering reflect an attempt ‘to take possession of things’ in order to give them ‘stable and ordered significance’ (Hetherington 2007: 148). In this sense, following Hetherington’s thesis, the display of collected artefacts can be understood as a form of disposal, as it creates a ‘stop or pause in the biography of an artefact’ whereby the meanings of things are displaced to tell stories about the collector or owner and the social relations that they inhabit (Ibid 177). The places where such things are displayed often become dead spaces, according to Hetherington, as they promote a ‘static or ossified sense of history’ by ‘mummifying’ the subjectivity of things (Ibid: 175). Here Hetherington echoes Benjamin’s and Maleuvre’s arguments before him by comparing display spaces, like the museum, arcade or interior, to mausoleums, concluding that ‘lived history’ disappears in such spaces because artefacts are removed from ‘the uncertain flow of time’ (Ibid 177-8). The Hopetoun tigers’ representation as trophies could therefore be understood as an attempt at taking possession, to singularise their meaning and significance, and to put them ‘in place’ historically. Similarly, the “tiger room” could be understood as a tomb which embalms the polysemy of the heads and the tigers’ as the ultimate expression of ‘still life’. However, as Hetherington himself admits, this sense of order and stillness ‘is rarely achieved in practice (Hetherington 2007: 176). Consequently he argues that disposal should be understood as an active process rather than as an ossifying one, as what is disposed of through processes of ordering and ‘singularisation’ (i.e. an artefact’s polysemy) remains as an absent-presence (Ibid). Hetherington concludes that in this sense disposal is about ‘the mobilisation of absence’ (Hetherington 2006: 168).

Following Hetherington, it is my intention in this chapter to mobilise the ‘absent-presences’ of the tiger heads – such as the craft skills, industrialised processing and indigenous labour involved in their making – in order to expose the clever artifice and ambiguity of the tigers’

¹⁰¹ Hopetoun House South Queensferry, Edinburgh is the family seat of the Linlithgow’s. The 2nd Marquis was Viceroy and Governor General of India from 1936-43. Though still privately owned by the Linlithgow family, is open to the public.

representation as trophy souvenirs. While the ‘shock[ing] physicality’ of encountering such exotic creatures in a Scottish stately home is certainly tamed somewhat by their careful arrangement and style of mounting, the materials and craft of their making ensures that the heads’ subjectivity resists full “containment” (Broglia 2005). The craft of taxidermy, a practice defined by James Ryan as ‘the representation of residues of animals to produce an illusion of live presence’, ensures that taxidermy specimens, whether presented as natural history objects in the museum setting or as sporting trophies in domestic settings, retain excessive sensual and semiotic effects (Ryan 1997: 114). Artists Brydis Snaebjörnsdóttir and Mark Wilson have commented that a taxidermy specimen challenges easy definition, classification and therefore representational clarity because it ‘is simultaneously representative of itself as an object but also of itself as a former living animal’ (Snaebjörnsdóttir and Wilson quoted in Baker 2006: 152). Crucially, the use of actual animal skin (and often other matter originating with the animal) combined with the taxidermic crafts of mimetic reproduction ensure that a taxidermy specimen’s transformation from live embodied animal to static representational prop is always indexed and, as such, taxidermy objects will always appear as ‘something other than an object enframed by human desires’ (Broglia 2005). Therefore, although attempts can be made to direct our understandings of and responses to taxidermy, specimen animals retain both aesthetic and ontological ambiguity. The art historian Steve Baker has similarly argued, for example, that taxidermy specimens are necessarily provocative objects in that they are ‘trace-bearing objects and those traces are the remnants of a prior life, a ‘real’ life’ (Baker 2006: 152-3). This ‘real’ life remains as a shadowy presence that haunts and disrupts any attempts to contain or stabilise representations of taxidermy. Yet it is not my intention to recover a sense of the Hopetoun tigers’ prior ‘real’ lives since the majority of taxidermy specimens, to quote Garry Marvin, ‘do not begin to have a recoverable history until their final fatal encounter with humans’ (Marvin 2006: 157). Rather, it is my concern in this chapter to attempt a recovery of their ‘afterlives’¹⁰² - what I shall come to term the biogeographies of their making and mobilisation (Ibid 157-8).

Following the conventions of historical scholarship my initial impulse was to locate a historical-curatorial record for the tiger heads to tell of the people, practices and places involved in their making. Yet the seeming absence of any such record after a variety of enquires, led me to question whether such a recovery would be possible.¹⁰³ However through

¹⁰² Marvin uses the term ‘afterlife’ to describe the ‘specific, individual, cultural life’ of a taxidermy specimen once after its point of death (Marvin 2006: 157-158)

¹⁰³ Unlike other museum and collected objects very few examples of taxidermy come with a provenance record, a situation highlighted at the Museum and Galleries History Groups’ (MGHG) specially organised conference ‘Lost, Stolen or Strayed’ which dealt with this issue.

my knowledge of the practice of taxidermy a recovery of the tigers' afterlives was still conceivable as I knew from past experience that taxidermy specimens' physical forms can bear traces, and contain evidence, of the lived acts of their making. For Walter Benjamin it is only when one breaks with 'the vision-as-semblance' that critical practice can begin; thus when reappraising the Hopetoun tigers, the absence of conventional documentary evidence became



less of an obstacle to progress than was first imagined. The historical geographies of their making were, on closer inspection, bound into the mounts' representational and solid forms. Studied up close, the tigers' facial features began to expose the secrets of their assembly: The gloss black paint around the eyes, on the gums and in the nostrils stood out against the dulled and dusty fur, papier maché was exposed by balding patches of skin on the dried and cracking ears, a seam of stitching that ran from the middle of the lower lip down the centre of the neck could be made out on most, and the painted pink tongues inside their gaping mouths may have been glossy but were certainly not moist. Viewed collectively, I noticed the heads were all mounted on the same dark wooden "heraldic" shields and that the faces were fixed with the same doleful open-mouthed expression. This led to further speculations: had they been made by the same craftsman, or if not that, then at least by the same method of manufacture? As the tigers' physical fabric started to unravel, the story of their making began to suggest itself and I realised that, through close scrutiny, and my knowledge of the craft of taxidermy, I could use the mounts and the materials of which they are made up of, as evidence, or alternatively non-textual resources, for recovering the biogeographies of their making.

Artefact as Archive

My own efforts fall within an emerging body of work which considers the extents of evidence in historical geography. For example, a recent vein of creative historical research has reconsidered 'the limits and location of any set of materials determined as "archive"' (Lorimer In press). Within this body of work, researchers have highlighted that material encounters and material entities can be rich resources for historical recovery (Kurtz 2001; Till 2001; DeSilvey 2006, 2007b; Featherstone 2004; Hill 2006a, 2006b, 2007; Lorimer 2006; Yusoff 2008). In order to expose the secrets of the tigers' assembly and utilise their physical forms to help

unravel the story of their making, it is apposite to engage with recent work on material culture that does not construe artefacts as stable entities with durable physical forms and therefore as 'fixed in value and potential' (Colloredo-Mansfeld 2003: 246). The social anthropologist Tim Ingold observes that, 'despite the best efforts of curators and conservationists, no object lasts forever' - a rudimentary fact which he argues much of the commentary on studies of material culture has tidily dismissed (Ingold 2007: 10). While a growing multidisciplinary literature has begun to challenge the presumption of object durability, Ingold's appeal '*to take materials seriously*' is worthy of closer inspection, since his ontological arguments hold considerable appeal for an historical geographer attempting to use material entities as sources of historical recovery (Ibid: 14).

Ingold seeks to reverse the emphasis in current studies of material culture on the 'materiality' of objects as against the properties of materials. His criticisms centre on literature from anthropology and archaeology dealing with the subject of *materiality* (e.g. Godlier 1986; Miller 1998; Toren 1999; Graves-Brown 2000), which he proposes has very little to say about the *materials* out of which objects/things/artefacts are made: 'their engagements are not with the tangible stuff of craftsmen and manufacturers but with the abstract ruminations of philosophers and theorists' (Ibid: 2). For Ingold, the concept of materiality, a concept which he feels has never been adequately defined, 'has become a real obstacle to sensible enquiry into materials, their transformations and affordances' (Ibid: 3). While I would agree that it is an ambiguous concept at best, my quarrel is not so much with the concept of materiality *per se* (especially its use and development in geography¹⁰⁴), rather with how the concept's development in material culture studies has led to an overwhelming focus on 'finished' objects and their use and circulation rather than on their manufacture or, indeed, de-manufacture.

¹⁰⁴ The 'materialist turn' in geography (Anderson and Tolia-Kelly 2004; Whatmore 2006) has led to three major clusterings of work according to Anderson and Wylie's (2008: 1) review: first a vibrant material-cultures literature focusing on meaningful practices of use and encounters with objects and environments (e.g. Edensor 2005; DeSilvey 2006; Hill 2007), second a swath of writing concerned with the varied intertwined materialities of nature, science, and technology (e.g. Whatmore 2002, 2006; Greenhough and Roe 2006; Anderson et al 2007; Bingham and Hinchcliffe 2008) and third a cluster which broadly convokes materiality around the spatialities of the lived body, practice, touch, emotion and affect (e.g. Hetherington 2003; McCormack 2003; Bondi et al 2005; Wylie 2005, 2006; Saldanha 2006; Colls 2007). Having identified these fast accumulating 'material geographies' literatures, Anderson and Wylie (2008) reappraise the general problematic, that is the notion of materiality. They critique early calls to 'rematerialise' human geography (e.g. Jackson 2000; Philo 2000) for invoking a rhetoric of physicality and groundedness. However, as the three themes show, materiality in geography is in fact being used to signify matter as excessive. For Anderson and Wylie the importance of the concept of materiality is that it offers a principle of multiplication, i.e. 'materiality is never apprehensible in just one state, nor is it inert or static' (Ibid: 15). Building on these developments they go on to offer a 'more complex and positive decree that materiality is always already scored across states (solid, liquid, gaseous) and elements (air, fire, water, earth)' and as such 'as variously turbulent, interrogative, and excessive, materiality is perpetually beyond itself' (Ibid: 15). This reworking of materiality enables the qualities and properties of matter to be thought of as 'emergent phenomena that take place in different states/elements, with qualities of excess and friction' (ibid). In this way Anderson and Wylie's conceptualisation of materiality has strong parallels with Ingold's plea to restore material entities within his conception of the 'lifeworld' (Ingold 2006a, 2007).

It is for this reason that I support Ingold's assertion that attention must be redirected away from 'the world of solid objects envisaged by material culture theorists' and instead refocus on the materials and processes out of which objects, artefacts and organisms are made (Ibid: 11). The problem is if it is the objects themselves that capture attention, and not the materials out of which they are made, that fact that these materials forever threaten the meaning and physicality of material entities with 'dissolution or even 'dematerialisation'' ends up being overlooked. Fellow anthropologist Rudi Colloredo-Mansfeld has similarly critiqued how scholars in material culture studies too easily identify social significance with physical permanence, bemoaning how the focus 'on the social life of things (and value) has long since squeezed out consideration of their social death' (Colloredo-Mansfeld 2003: 464). The axiom "things have social lives", which sprang from the work of Appadurai (1986) and which underpins a great deal of the literature within material culture studies, is also problematic for Ingold. Its '*fetishist* logic' infers that material things are only important in terms of the roles they play in the constitution of (human) social relations. Ingold asserts that the inverted fetishist logic of material culture studies can be reversed, however. Bringing things to life, according to Ingold, is not a matter a sprinkling of them with "magical agency dust", but is rather to view things and artefacts as 'in life' (Ingold 2006a: 10). Here Ingold makes a case for restoring material entities within his conception of the 'life world' where animacy 'is not a property of persons imaginatively projected onto things', but is rather 'the dynamic, transformative potential of the entire field of relations within which beings of all kinds, more or less person-like or thing-like, continually and reciprocally bring one another into existence' (Ibid: 10). Ingold's form of relational ontology, where materials are viewed as active constituents in a 'world-in-formation', therefore offers an understanding of the artefact as 'process' whereby material entities can be understood as active assemblages of the movements, materials and/or practices which brought them into existence (Ibid: 12).

Ingold's corrective to material culture studies therefore offers specific advantages to my research efforts with the Hopetoun tigers. It is Ingold's contention that material culture studies' overt focus on processes of consumption has meant that much work has also tended to focus on the present to the exclusion of the past or future. Such presentism, according to Ingold, means that the materials out of which such things are made – which also come to threaten their composition and meaning – are masked by the focus on the solid form of the objects that they fabricate. Accordingly, by viewing the tiger mounts as active assemblages of the materials, practices and movements that brought them into existence, is it possible to circumvent a focus solely on their representation as finished objects in the present day. Furthermore this allows me to refocus on recovering the *biogeographies* of their making and

mobilisation¹⁰⁵: i.e. the entangled life-forces, practices and geographies that brought them into being.

In order to attempt a recovery of the Hopetoun tigers' afterlives and 'flesh-out' the biogeographies of their making, a further requirement is to challenge 'the priority given to the representational surface' (Dubow 2004: 268); the notion that the tigers are 'hollow' must therefore be rejected as such a recovery requires that I 'get under their skins'.¹⁰⁶ Ingold highlights that beneath the skin of form the substances and materials out of which things are made remain active, threatening the very nature of that form (Ingold 2007). Studied up close, as I previously outlined, the Hopetoun tigers, as active assemblages of animal parts, sculptural materials and craftwork, begin to expose the secrets of their assembly, offering themselves as sources for historical recovery and reconstruction in the absence of conventional documentary records. Moreover, DeSilvey has observed that the 'the disarticulation of a cultural artefact [can] lead to the articulation of other histories and geographies' in the present (2006: 329) and, similarly, Edensor argues that the physical destruction of objects 'reveals the artifice through which they are structured to withstand ambiguity' (Edensor 2005: 320). While it was not possible to disarticulate the Hopetoun tigers' to get at their hidden artifice on a return visit, I knew from my observations of taxidermy practice that there are other ways of 'getting under the skin'.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ There are multiple antecedents underpinning the 'new mobilities paradigm' (Sheller and Urry 2006) in social science research that is interested in understanding the world through relations of movement and flux, from Manuel Castell's (1996) 'space of flows' to Zygmunt Bauman's 'liquid modernity' (2000). However, while mobility scholars have increasingly recognised the importance of considering the relational dialectic of mobilities and immobilities, or 'mobilities and moorings' to use Urry's (2003) phrase, such a focus on a dialectic of stasis and movement neglects other registers and modalities which do not fit within the dualisms of mobility and stasis. For example, the tigers' movement from the field to the factory to the 'tiger room' was stilled by periods of relative stasis when the tiger skin was being dried or set aside while other parts of the taxidermic process were being carried out. Also I hope to have shown that the supposed 'stillness' of the static wall mounts is an illusion too. Therefore, in this sense I see their 'mobilisation' as the practices driving their transformation and displacement.

¹⁰⁶ To date, most of the literature on taxidermy has paid attention to the finished form and display of taxidermy specimens and their representational meaning (e.g. Haraway 1989; Wonders 1993, 2003; Desmond 2002; Shell 2004; Poliquin 2008).

¹⁰⁷ My own inquiries into the craft techniques of taxidermy practice and its material culture of trade tools, substances, fabrics and body matter similarly inspire this methodology which incorporates specimen-artefacts as object-based archive. Through observing Peter Summers practice, I came to understand taxidermy specimens as evidential assemblages of animal parts, sculptural materials and craftwork. Knowledge of the practice of taxidermy is therefore helpful in the recovery of specimen histories where documentary evidence is slim or non-existent, like that of the Hopetoun tigers (see Practice).



Fig. 5.2 'Exposing the secrets of assembly'

Peering into the mouths of the tigers, for example, I could make out they had similarly designed artificial tongues (see Fig. 5.2). Unlike many other taxidermy mounts, that I had encountered, these tongues were particularly distinctive as they were shaped in an ark and had prominent papillae (a feature characteristic of wild big cats but unusual in taxidermy big-cat mounts). This, combined with the fact that the heads were all mounted on the same large black shields and wore a similar doleful opened-mouthed expression, convinced me they must have gone through the same taxidermy firm. The mounts also bore the traces of recent restoration so, after consulting their restorator, I was told that the black shields, open-mouthed expressions and unusually detailed tongues were signature styles of the van Ingen taxidermy firm in Mysore, India, and that the order numbers on the back of the shields confirmed they had been mounted there. This, taken together with the knowledge that the second Marquis of Linlithgow served as the Viceroy and Governor General of India from 1936-43 and definitely 'dispatched' at least two of the tigers (they bore his initials) in the infamous killing fields of Kaladungi,¹⁰⁸ meant that the story of their making began to unravel.

¹⁰⁸ The town of Kaladungi, situated in the Nainital district of the Indian state of Uttarakhand, was home to Jim Corbett, infamous hunter of 'man-eating' tiger, and in the forests surrounding the town tiger-hunting took place on a grand scale (see Green 2006).

From this starting point, knowing who shot them and where, and also the factory in which they were assembled, the task turns to uncovering other sources which could take us closer to the lived experience of these events and places. This highlights my efforts to assemble a make-shift archive of sorts. While the ‘archival impulse’ in contemporary societies might describe ‘only the stagnation and stiltedness of the remainders of lived experience’ (Dados 2009: 4), there has been a ‘radical reconfiguration of the archival impulse’ (Ibid: 8) in recent academic and artistic work which, rather than being about an urge to excavate already organised and administered documents and collections, is about *constructing* unorthodox archives from elements deemed unworthy of entry into conventional history (see also Foster 2004). Rather than a reinstitution of the archive as ‘the warehouse of tradition’ that puts things in place and keeps them there, such efforts have sought to extend, disaggregate and distribute the once centred version of the archive and so have found greater licence to salvage, assemble and rehabilitate diverse forms of historical remainders (e.g. see for example Benjamin 1999; Buchli and Lucas 2001; Lorimer and MacDonald 2002; Neville and Villeneuve 2002; Edensor 2005; DeSilvey 2006, 2007a, 2007b, 2007c). While this reconfiguration of archival practice was touched upon in the last chapter, it is important to outline further this move away from the traditional static sense of the archive to the more active process of *archiving*, as such developments, as will be outlined in the following section, offer particular resources to a researcher interested in recuperating the biogeographies involved in the making and mobilisation of a group of mounted tiger heads.

Archiving out-of-doors

Central to Jacques Derrida’s account of the spectre is the observation that spirits from the past return (are conjured up or remembered) when people are of the view that the world around them is ‘out of joint’ (Rapaport 2005: 417). This was the situation Benjamin found himself in when living in Paris in the 1930’s and may explain, according to Herman Rapaport, the importance that phantasmagoria plays in his *Arcades Project*. While impossible to categorise, Benjamin’s unfinished, though recently translated (Benjamin 1999), *Arcades Project* takes up and adapts the photomontage form which he so admired to develop a form of literary montage as his notes on the project suggest:¹⁰⁹

‘Method of this work: literary montage: I have nothing to say only to show. I shall purloin no valuables, appropriate no ingenious formulations. But the rags, the

¹⁰⁹ Benjamin greatly admired montage techniques used in the arts and photography, particularly in the work of the photographer John Heartfield (for more on this see McRobbie 1992: 157).

refuse – these I will not inventory but allow, in the only way possible, to come into their own: by making use of them’ (Benjamin quoted in Buck-Morss 1989: 73).

Benjamin justified his use of such an artistic method by pointing to the presence of the ‘montage effect’ already in existence in the cities through ‘the ‘piling up’ and layering of neon and advertising which in turn become part of the architecture, and part of the visual experience of urbanism’ (McRobbie 1992: 159). Although this disorder would have not been immediately apparent to Parisian citizens who would have presumed Paris to be a coherent life-world, Benjamin’s gathering and loose groupings of pictures and texts ‘imperceptibly conjure up spectres from the past’ to unsettle any presumed coherency’ (Rapaport 2005: 420). By unearthing and assembling the detritus and refuse of Paris, the past as loss and degradation is not occluded but revealed through, the rag-picking work of cultural recycling.¹¹⁰ Thus Benjamin, much in the same way as Derrida after him, uses the appearance of spectres to indicate that the socio-ontological order of the present is far more fragile than may first appear. Moreover, Benjamin’s montage method is also a mark of his outright rejection of the standard conventions of the empirical historian. Rapaport explains that Benjamin ‘understood that [the] historical phantasy of the empirical historian was characterised by a sense of ending or closure which, of course, served to objectify and reify history’, and thus the *Arcades* could be read as violating this ‘principle of closure or belonging by suggesting [that] the ‘end’ of what we call nineteenth-century Paris never quite arrives’ (Rapaport 2005: 430-1). Through his constellations of texts and images Benjamin was presenting a non linear understanding of history, one which corresponded with the definition of history offered by his colleague Bolch: ‘a polyrhythmic and multi-spatial entity, with enough unmastered and yet by no means revealed corners’ (Bolch quoted in McRobbie 1992: 161). The task for Benjamin, then, was to ‘unravel the meanings of the discarded items lying in these dusty corners’ (Ibid).

For a new wave of creative historical researchers in geography foraging in dusty out-of-the-way corners has also become a compulsion. The dustier the better it seems, as the sweeping away of cobwebs seems to authenticate the labours involved in revealing and mining forgotten or repressed pasts. Yet for Lorimer dust is more than just an authenticating ingredient:

‘dust represents an invitation to speak up imaginatively for the archives existence as site as much as source, and for those social contexts orbiting steadfast consultation of documentary content. To do so, is to assert a version of archival hermeneutics extending beyond print culture and the written word, to include the

¹¹⁰ Intriguingly it was Benjamin’s ‘let the things speak’ formulation that Adorno found most to critique in Benjamin’s work. It raises huge epistemological questions, and indeed on challenging the politics of what is an academic, e.g. can they be just collectors of rags and bones? Does the sum add up to more than the parts? These issues shall be dealt with later in the chapter and more explicitly in the thesis conclusion.

context, encounters and events that constitute research practice. By implication, it is to seek out possible methodological means to evoke more of archival life: as a particular kind of place where complex subjectivities, and working relations, are created through the act of researching the past. And – pushing further still – it is to reconsider the limits and location of any set of materials determined as “archive”. Figured expansively, archives can exceed the darkened catacomb and civically-administered collection, and be sought out in physical landscapes, or still less likely sorts of locale.’ (Lorimer in press).

Here Lorimer articulates the archive as an actual place exceeding traditional conceptions of civic repository and archiving as an active process that is not only about preservation but also the construction of pasts. Where experiences of the archive and archiving once only imbued the writing of historical research in geography in a trickle down fashion, now researchers are more willing explicitly to narrate archival practice (e.g. see Rose 2000, 2002; Yusoff 2007) and even go so far as to let those experiences lead and frame the narration and presentation of historical geographies. This in turn has encouraged some researchers to emerge from the shadows, to accept and evidence their presence as a creative and catalyzing element in the construction and creation of these pasts (e.g. Pearson and Shanks 2001; Jones 2005; DeSilvey 2006, 2007b). While Lorimer has previously steered clear of any “see me” sort of enterprise’, he has recently reflected on his adoption and development of a ‘foraging sort of field method’ in what is ostensibly the most comprehensive critical review of historical method in geography to date (see Lorimer in press).¹¹¹ While he has elsewhere observed that ‘trust in empirics and the tangible is habituated among historical-cultural geographers’ (Lorimer 2006: 515), in this review he explains that a growing number of researchers – himself included – have been turned on to the possibilities of assemblage (i.e. the construction of archives) as motif and method. While Benjamin’s working style of the bricoleur has offered inspiration to a number of geographers seeking to critically reflect upon and work with absence and incompleteness, Lorimer explains his form of ‘make-do’ method (outlined in the last chapter) was inspired by a couple he had met while researching the lived culture of a reindeer herd (see Lorimer 2006). Lorimer explains that transferring the ‘make-and-mend’ philosophy of the reindeer herders onto his academic practice, where ‘making-do’ in an academic sense came to be understood as ‘a creative form of cultural recycling that aims, wherever possible, to tread lightly and respectfully’ and that as such ‘[c]ultural by-products, junk, ephemera and leftovers become a treasure trove and staple resource’ to the researcher (Lorimer in press).

¹¹¹ “They seek him here, they seek him there”... Lorimer himself is not prone to bouts of introspection in his published work and, as a result, he emerges more as a shadowy, sometimes frustratingly elusive, presence (e.g. see Lorimer 2006, 2009). Yet this can also be seen as a deliberate strategy to suggest himself as archive; as a trace of archives visited, made, forgotten.

As outlined in the previous chapter the purposeful assemblage and rehabilitation of diffuse historical remains to form unconventional archives appeals to the historical researcher struggling to come to terms with elusive and fragmentary pasts, as crafting a different kind of engagement with the past by ‘making-do’ offers a way of demonstrating ‘mastery over site, scale or period is *not* the ultimate objective’ (Ibid). Importantly for my purposes in this chapter, the work of cultural recycling has offered a particular resource to researchers engaged in recuperating the pasts of place or site. For example, rag-picking the leftovers of an abandoned Montana Homestead offered Caitlin DeSilvey creative resources for activating a process of cultural remembrance (e.g. see DeSilvey 2006; 2007; for similar site specific historical research, see Cameron 1997; Lorimer and MacDonald 2002). Drawing on Benjamin’s theory of historical constellations, DeSilvey assembled and juxtaposed redundant objects and discarded materials from the site in a bid to recuperate ‘obsolete networks of use and affinity’, whilst at the same time acknowledging that these temporary arrangements of deteriorating materials offered only fleeting glimpses of the homestead’s pasts (DeSilvey 2007a: 401). In attempting to salvage meaning from waste things, the histories and connections offered by DeSilvey’s constellations are as indirect and incomplete as her sources: ‘intertwined histories of colonialism, racism, resource exploitation and gender politics are glimpsed only in shards of evidence’ (Ibid: 420). Yet, by making do with the materials she had to hand she was able to uncover fragmentary histories which might have been obscured through more direct historical recovery methods, allowing her to present the complexity of the ‘entangled material memories’ of the homestead (Ibid). While DeSilvey acknowledges that bringing these histories into legibility requires ‘a process of manipulation, description and displacement’ on the part of the researcher, she argues that it is when ‘working in the grain of these things, [that] it may be possible to follow an ‘associative path of correspondences’ to a place where the past comes ‘alive – in all its bewildering ambiguity’ (DeSilvey 2007a: 414, quoting Gordon 1997)

Tim Edensor has similarly attempted to work within the grain of material things to express the elusive nature of the pasts that haunt sites of industrial ruin (see Edensor 2005a, 2008). However, unlike DeSilvey, he made a conscious effort to resist recovering anything of the sites’ particular pasts. While bits of stories suggested themselves amidst the rubble and ruin, Edensor viewed this inarticulacy not as an impediment to historical reconstruction but rather as ‘an opportunity to construct narratives that are not contained by form or convention’ (Edensor 2005a 846). Rather than attempting to reconstruct the deteriorating sites’ specific histories, then, Edensor sought to engage with their immediacy as affective material domains in order to carve out narratives that celebrated ‘the real impossibility of narrating and

remembering the pasts of place' (Ibid). While Edensor's argument to resist historical reconstruction recognises the alterity of the past and the inherent difficulties associated with historical recovery, his ethic for confronting the past – as 'tactile, imaginative and involuntary' – could be read as an invitation to fabulate (Ibid: 847). Yet Edensor invests his makeshift stories of ruin with critical potential, arguing that they help to refute that the past is wholly recoverable or 'shot through with explanation' (Benjamin 1973: 89). For Edensor, the 'objects, spaces and traces found in ruins highlight the mystery and radical otherness of the past, a past which can haunt the fixed memories of place proffered by the powerful' (Edensor 2005: 846).¹¹²

However, while, as the last chapter demonstrated, there is something to be said for working with a sense of the irretrievability of past places and the lives of others in mind, it is also necessary to recognise the responsibilities on the part of the researchers to rehabilitate, carefully and faithfully, the historical remains left. While certain academics have encouraged researchers to remain open to the twists and turns of archival and historic research, 'to trace out the threads and follow their convolutions' (Pile 2002: 116), by the same measure they qualify that there remains an academic commitment to piecing together evidence (in whatever form it takes) of past events so that histories and stories that may be obscured by more dominant forms of historical record remain to be told. While forms of ghost writing, as I hope to have argued in the last chapter, can stay faithful to the spectrality of place and memory by testifying 'to their taking-place in a slipping away and dislocation', they can also be criticised for having a romantic fascination with the idea of loss and for the fact that these types of narratives are often themselves haunted by the spectre of fiction (Wylie 2007: 185). However, Maddern and Adey (2008: 293) argue that spectrality can also open our eyes to 'a sense of *obduracy* and the persistence of presences that somehow remain'. For example although Edensor in his study of entropic industrial ruins shows how the city 'endlessly moves on', he also demonstrates, much like Benjamin, that it 'leaves behind traces of its previous form, social life, inhabitants, politics, ways of thinking and being, and modes of experience' (Edensor 2008: 315). Maddern and Adey therefore argue that spectro-geographies can help to question current trends in geography that seek to 'enliven the world into immaterial practices and processes' by remembering and highlighting 'the still, the stubborn and the static geographies of obdurate elements, immobilities and fixities' (Maddern and Adey 2008: 293).

¹¹² By comparison there is a leftist tradition in geography of recovering the "real" 'truths' of past places, by rendering them 'articulable' through the folk-memories/oral testimonies of the powerless (e.g. see Kearns and Philo 1993)

While I have highlighted that the Hopetoun tigers will eventually turn to dust, I have also shown that, when encountered, their present (well preserved and restored) material presence is difficult to ignore and also offers a starting point for the recovery of their afterlives (i.e. my close inspection of the mounts offered some clues as to how they came-into-being). However, in order to recuperate the biogeographies of their making, it requires assembling a makeshift archive of sorts. In what follows below I adopt DeSilvey's constellatory method of assembling whatever there is to hand 'in the hope that their sum will add up to more than the parts' (Lorimer in press). Bringing what may seem, at first, to be unconnected materials into correspondence still requires processes of 'manipulation, description, displacement', and thus highlights my presence as a researcher in the recovery of the Hopetoun tigers afterlives (416). Yet, as DeSilvey and Lorimer have shown, the purposeful assemblage and rehabilitation of diffuse historical remains to form unorthodox archives can hold both serious creative and political potential. Not only do such assemblages insist upon 'more imaginative styles of composition and expression', they can also assist in 'the recovery and construction of an opposing view to challenge, and sometimes undermine, received wisdom about the events surrounding past geographies and histories' (Lorimer in press). In what remains, therefore, I appeal for a little creative licence to bring together a variety of sources which might capture something of the lifeworlds of 'the field' and 'the factory' that the Hopetoun tigers would have once inhabited, albeit in different states of liveliness. I have chosen to focus on recuperating the loosely defined sites of 'the field' and 'the factory' rather than attempt to chart the journey or 'biography'¹¹³ of a particular tiger from wild embodied creature to static wall mount, as such an inherently linear approach could overlook the complex tangle of beings and matter that made up the events occurring within these sites and could also miss that the sites where these events took place were themselves 'in life' (Ingold 2006a: 10). Here I follow Ingold's relational ontology where the earth, or 'lifeworld', is not conceived as an 'inert substratum over which living things propel themselves about like counters on a board or actors on a stage', but rather is understood to be in perpetual flux, 'coming-into-being' through its continual generation (Ibid: 9). Understanding these sites or, rather, lifeworlds as emergent holds particular appeal

¹¹³ Recent academic work from various fields has attempted to reinvigorate the notion of object biographies. However, while 'things' are said to have biographies (e.g. Kopytoff 1986; Gosden and Marshall 1999), they have largely been used in academic research to help tell stories about the people who collected them or the institutions that encased them: 'we are looking from the standpoint of the object but, we are looking at *people*' (Alberti 2005: 561; see also Hoskins 1999; Barringer and Fynn 1998; Gosden and Knowles 2001; Hill 2006a, 2006b). Furthermore, while the biographies of material entities have been traced to uncover and explore the complex colonial relations involved in their collection and/or circulation (e.g. Barringer and Flynn 1998; Gosden and Knowles 2001; Hill 2006a, 2006b), the objects used by the authors were mostly part of large museum collection with detailed records about their provenance and collection. Thus, they tend to use the objects' histories to highlight how the museums were complicit in the colonial project rather than for the recovery of the complex practices and events involved in their manufacture and movement. Similarly, nor am I attempting to trace the 'commodity story' of the tigers, as commodities within this literature are generally understood as inert/passive (e.g. Jackson 2002; Cook 2004, 2006).

for a historical researcher interested in the biogeographical character of these past places, since it aids in resisting predetermining or, after analysis, overdetermining the contents that made up these sites and therefore the sites themselves. Also, by building up a sense of the lifeworlds of ‘the field’ and ‘the factory’ while also attempting to reconstruct some of the more intimate details of the Hopetoun tigers’ journey within, between and beyond them, I hope to avoid both “flattening” or “deadening” the historical biogeographies in which the transformation of the tigers took place.¹¹⁴

The following section explores the ‘killing fields’ of the British Raj that the tigers would have been captured within. The section begins with a brief discussion of the cultural politics of sport and tiger hunting in the Raj. It then moves on to explore how Scotland – and figures like the Marquis of Linlithgow – became embroiled in such a culture. The Duke of Sutherland’s photographic travelogues Shikar-hunting then offer a surrogate resource for exploring the Marquis’s point of view *in* the shikar field.

Killing Fields

Tiger tales of the Raj

“The tiger does not pursue her prey. Instead, tail swishing, she wanders casually through her territory, sometimes visiting familiar haunts where she expects to see her favourite meals – sambar (the largest Asiatic deer, weighing 270kg and standing 1.5m at the shoulder) and chital (a white spotted deer), as well as more difficult dinners, including wild boar, crocodile, and the great water buffalo. She meanders seemingly at random until she locates a suitable victim. Her initial tactic is to circle around the animal at a distance to locate a direct path through any cover. Thick-cushioned paw pads naturally muffle the tiger’s tread, but to ensure an absolutely silent approach she places her hind paws directly in the pug marks of her front ones. Adopting a crouching position she moves stealthily forward, all the while making lightning calculations of the speed, height and direction of the spring needed to land on the back of her prey, near its neck. Having confirmed her prey’s precise position, she slowly raises her body, and tail erect, magnificent claws unsheathed from heavy, velvet pads, charges, leaps into the air, and landing

¹¹⁴ It is worth underlining at this point that the most massive movements made by the tigers – their passage across oceans and continents – remain in the background in what follows. Although efforts were made to uncover sources to tell of these larger networks/circuitries of colonial hunting and taxidermy, they are merely hinted at here as the task of dredging such information from port archives was beyond the scope of the thesis. While this arguably means the chapter becomes more site-based, the point is to follow the movements of the tigers within those lifeworlds it has been possible to recover sources for. This also stays true to my aim of emphasising that the movements and transformation of the tigers took place ‘in life’ (Ingold 2006a).

on her prey's back, makes a single, often decisive, bite on the neck, places one paw on the animal's face and another on its shoulder and uses all of her massive strength to force it to the ground. The main neck joints are crushed and compression of the spinal cord kills in a mere 35-90 seconds.' (Green 2006: 25-26)

While certain elements of tiger behaviour, like their supreme ability to ambush prey, have been observed and recorded, '... it may be that her real history, her *natural* history, will forever remain unknowable' (Green 2006:23). Brought unwillingly into constant contact with humans first through their mass slaughter at the hands of trophy hunters, then through their habitat being reduced to fragmented pockets¹¹⁵ surrounded by ever encroaching farmland and human development and finally now through their containment in managed reserves, tigers have acquired an entirely *unnatural* history and patterns of behaviour, according to conservationist Susie Green.¹¹⁶ Green explains that, until the advent of the British Raj, tigers came into contact with humans relatively rarely and had little need to poach cattle as their then abundant forest habitat offered plentiful prey. However, when the upper echelons of the Raj enacted their 'campaign of extinction' against the tiger, it instigated a two hundred year conflict between the tiger and humankind which has left the former hovering on the brink of extinction.

When the British Crown assumed direct control of India to form the new British Raj in 1858, they also stepped up their activities in developing field sports in the region.¹¹⁷ Although big-game hunting was an already well developed pastime of the British living in the regions of Bengal and Bihar under 'Company rule', it became an important tool for fostering diplomatic relations between the British ruling elite and Indian civilians after the Indian Rebellion of 1857 (Morris 2006). The British were keen to promote themselves as the 'protectors' of the native Indian population, and, understanding rural populations to be increasingly under threat of attack by tigers, as their farm land was increasingly encroaching into tiger territories, the Raj initiated a campaign to subdue the tiger and, by extension, native populations. Through works of fiction and various other forms of propaganda, the Raj went about building up the reputation of the tiger as 'man-eater' and themselves as 'heroic saviours' (Green 2006: 72). For example, books like *The Jungle Book* (Kipling 1907), *Tiger Slayer by Order* (Gouldsbury 1915) and *The Man-Eaters of Kumaon* (Corbett 1944) all portrayed the tiger in typical 'Raj-style' as a 'man-

¹¹⁵ The tiger's natural forest territories in India have been denuded of cover for commercial timber or turned into grazing and arable land (Green 2006: 22).

¹¹⁶ Green, a specialist in human-animal communication, has made numerous visits to India and elsewhere in order to study tigers in the wild.

¹¹⁷ Morris (2006) notes that big game hunting was already a well developed pastime of the British living in India under 'Company rule in India'. Company rule in India (sometimes, Company Raj) refers to the rule or dominion of the British East India Company on the Indian subcontinent which commenced in 1765. The rule lasted until 1858, when, following the events of the Indian Rebellion of 1857, the British government assumed the task of directly administering India consequent to the Government of India Act 1858.

killer' and tribal and rural peoples as impotent against its blood lust. The British hunters depicted in such books and many other similar works,¹¹⁸ charged with the elimination of troublesome 'man-eaters', were by contrast cast as the brave slayers of a dangerous and predatory beast. Jim Corbett, the author of *The Man-Eaters of Kumaon* and one of the Raj's chief tiger-slaughterers between the late-nineteenth to mid-twentieth century, manipulated the tiger's reputation so expertly in his swashbuckling, reputedly real-life, tales recounting his killing of tigers that 'he excited a generation of impressionable children in England and India, who longed to duel with the baneful striped predator' (Green 2006: 73).¹¹⁹ Furthermore as Corbett enjoyed the patronage of the Marquis of Linlithgow, the Viceroy of India who wrote the forward to his book, his designation of the tiger as man-eater prevailed in the popular imagination.

By the time Linlithgow had taken over as Viceroy and Governor General in 1936, tiger hunting was tightly interwoven into colonial rule and practice. While it was promoted as providing a necessary service to rural communities that were being 'terrorised' by 'man-eaters', it also worked as a way to legitimize the Raj's and the Indian nobility's sport.¹²⁰ To maintain their relative autonomy from colonial rule yet still show deference, it was the norm for Maharajah's and Indian princes to provide the upper echelons of the British Raj and their distinguished guests with lavish hospitality which traditionally included field sports like tiger hunting. Morris (2006: 9) explains that the local army and royal household could all be deployed on the instruction of their masters to provide whatever was needed to ensure good sport for the Raj and their visitors. This form of hunting hospitality became known as 'shikar' and while traditionally it referred to all game, shikar-hunting became synonymous with tiger-hunting as the tiger was the most coveted quarry (Morris 2006: 9).¹²¹ Morris notes that this form of hospitality reached its peak in terms of social cachet and level of activity in the early

¹¹⁸ The bravado associated with tiger killing led many other hunters to write-up their own memoirs of the field and Morris (2006: 11) lists several.

¹¹⁹ Green states that *The Man-Eaters of Kumaon* (1944) was even adopted as a text-book in some Indian schools.

¹²⁰ While the massive expansion of agriculture under colonial rule had brought rural populations and tigers into increasing contact, the number of humans killed by tigers during this period was most likely hugely exaggerated. For example, Green notes that 'death by tiger was seen as the perfect cover for the settling of all too human scores' (Green 2006: 74). Man-eaters can therefore be considered an entirely human design as not only were humans brought into conflict with tigers through their colonisation of tiger territory, the big-game hunters were also killing off much of the tiger's natural prey, including the nilgai (a large Indian antelope), forcing the tigers to seek out prey. Furthermore Corbett (1944) himself conceded that so-called *man-eaters* were usually old or injured tigers that were too weak to hunt for their natural prey – hardly the awesome adversaries he recounted.

¹²¹ While Morris (2006: 11) argues that the term 'shikar' epitomised fair tactics and respect for the quarry among the British, Green (2006) explains that the hunting of tigers for the British took place from the safety of elephant backs while hordes of beaters from the royal household would flush out the tigers from the savannah grasses. Far from showing respect for the tigers the 'hunters' also shot them while they were mating and actively sought them out when they were resting in their cave lairs. In some instances tigers were even trapped and baited to ensure the distinguished guests had 'good sport'.

1920's after the Prince of Wales (later king Edward the 8th) visited the Indian sub-continent and enjoyed extensive big-game shooting, bagging himself numerous shikar (tiger) trophies in the process; a tangible record of his travels and triumphs.

As Viceroy, the Marquis of Linlithgow would have recognised shikar-hunting not only to be an important tool for cementing diplomatic relations between the British Raj and the Indian nobility, but also as an important form of hospitality that the British Raj could offer visiting nobility from across Europe and Asia. Lord Linlithgow and his many VIPs were frequent guests on the hunting trips organised by His Highness the Maharajah of Nepal during the period of his Viceroyship for example. Smythies (1942) describes in detail the eight trips made by the Maharajah of Nepal and his guests in the period of 1933-1940. In a total of about 28 weeks in the field, the Maharajah and his distinguished guests shot no fewer than 386 tigers on the pretext of removing dangerous animals from the proximity of villages. However, they also shot 88 panthers, 53 rhinos, 22 bears and two Asiatic lions, without counting the deer and other 'lesser' animals shot during the trips. These large-scale hunting operations described in shikar accounts like Smythies', denote how shikar-hunting was fast becoming an important socio-economic industry that provided rural communities with a source of additional employment to agriculture. In the period of Linlithgow's Viceroyship shikar-hunting was also promoted as an attractive part of the social and recreational opportunities that were associated with service in India. Morris (2006: 9) outlines that The India Office, as part of a big recruitment drive, was actively promoting the idea that field sports were widely available and also accessible to anyone in India, not just wealthy elites as was the situation in Britain. This increased demand for field sport meant that a growing number of independent shikar operators were able to take advantage of this expanding market, which had previously been confined to the ruling classes and their servants.

While on one level the opening up of the opportunities associated with shikar-hunting could be understood as democratising, it meant that the tiger, whose existence was already severely compromised, had 'nowhere to go' (Green 2006: 22). The intensified pressure on tiger populations thanks to shikar-hunting becoming a general recreational pursuit,¹²² combined with their natural habitat being increasingly turned into agricultural land or denuded of cover through commercial forestry, meant that the tiger was living in a state of constant tension. According to Green, the tiger's behaviour 'inevitably had to change to deal with the utterly unnatural situation she found herself in' (Ibid: 22). Although tigers had been observed hunting diurnally before the presence of the Raj in India, shikar hunters maintained that the tiger was

¹²² Army officers were entitled to two months leave each year, too short a time to go home to Britain so their leave was taken locally and usually some time was allocated to shikar-hunting.

entirely nocturnal. Green states that this behavioural change was the result of the tigers developing a fear of humans who hunted during the day and because under conditions where prey was becoming scarce (also through human hunting), hunting at night gave the tigers an advantage. The Hopetoun tigers would have therefore never enjoyed a ‘natural’ history as, confined to smaller and smaller pockets of forest and grassland where it was increasingly difficult to hide and stay camouflaged from the shikar-hunters, tigers were turning not only nocturnal but aggressive and solitary. Furthermore, as Green explains (Ibid: 21), the forests of Bengal and Bihar were now harbouring large numbers of tigers wounded through the misadventure of over-zealous amateur hunters: ‘tigers with their jaws fractured, slowly starving to death; tigers with bullets embedded in their flesh creating poisonous and gangrenous wounds; tigers with lacerated paws’ were commonplace, explaining their increasingly aggressive behaviour towards humans.¹²³ The Hopetoun tigers could have easily been in a tormented, debilitated or half-starved state before they were despatched by Lord Linlithgow or one of his guests; not exactly the awesome adversaries Linlithgow and his cronies would have depicted. It is not my concern to uncover the Hopetoun tigers’ natural or, rather, ‘unnatural’ living history as, to quote Marvin again, taxidermy mounts ‘do not begin to have a recoverable history until their final fatal encounter with humans’ (Marvin 2006: 157). Rather, as stated, it is my concern to recover the biogeographies of their making and mobilisation, which requires first recuperating the lifeworld of the shikar field where the Hopetoun tigers would have been tracked, flushed out and shot. While it has been possible to offer a partial back-story of that lifeworld, with its collision between Linlithgow and the Hopetoun tigers, the aim now is to shed light on the event and site of that encounter.

It is no longer possible to witness the embodied acts that went into the killing of a tiger for a trophy mount. This ought to come as some relief, but, absence means that other sources need to be recovered which might take us closer to the complexities of such killing practices and the places where they took place (Animal Studies Group 2006). While the Hopetoun tigers have little other than their skins to index that they were once embodied tigers that became enrolled in such practices by their killing, I would like to suggest that it is possible to use photographs which, although not documenting the Hopetoun tigers’ capture, at least capture something of that ‘event’. As previously noted, Hopetoun House offered little other than the tiger mounts themselves to document the event of their killing by the Viceroy, but a collection of photographs from another Scottish aristocratic family are instructive. Before using these

¹²³ Corbett (1944), after slaying the infamous ‘man-eater’ of Champawat, who allegedly killed 200 people, reported that the creature had become so aggressive because she had sustained a gun shot wound in the jaw. Corbett detailed in his book that upper and lower canine teeth of the right side of her mouth were broken, the upper in half and the lower down to the bone, which would have prevented her from killing her natural prey.

photographs to illuminate the bodies and practices that made up the shikari field where the tigers were slayed, it is nonetheless helpful to provide some contextual information about the collection of photographs first.

Sportsman as empire builder



Fig. 5.3 The fairy-tale turrets of Dunrobin Castle coming into view from the approach road from Golspie to the South.

The fairy-tale turrets of Dunrobin castle (see Fig. 5.3), hitherto screened from view by a dense canopy of trees, announce the castle's situation on the approach coastal path from the nearby village of Golspie to the south. When reached, and in full view, the French-styled baronial castle appears entirely out-of-place on in a landscape settled by modest granite cottages. The castle is the family seat of the Sutherlands. The extravagant and alien character of the building serves as an awkward reminder of the imperial hierarchies and practices in which the Scottish Highlands remain deeply entangled. Lorimer explains that if big-game hunting is understood to be an integral component of the culture of imperialism, 'then the Scottish Highlands were inextricably, and complexly, bound up within its racial and geographical hierarchies' (Lorimer 2000: 416). Not only did many of the titled colonial administrators own Scottish estates but the elite field sport of deer-stalking offered by many of these managed estates drew the Scottish Highlands to the service of imperialism. In his essay *The sportsman as empire builder*, Hugh Gunn, a Sutherland-born imperial administrator, put forth the argument that the Highland estates, also known as 'deer forests', offered the perfect practice-ground for those

wishing to take advantage of the spoils from colonial territories: '[t]he chase of the red deer had much to do with the spirit which stimulated the explorer and pioneer... for whenever the exploration and the opportunity of the hunter have been combined, from the polar regions to the heart of the tropics, the sporting Briton has never failed to play a foremost part' (Lorimer 2000: 414, quoting Gunn 1925: 138).

As big-game hunting played an important role in the running of many colonial administrations, in that it often served both recreational and diplomatic purposes, those wishing to make a name for themselves on the colonial frontier were expected to have earned their hunting stripes and '[d]eerstalking was felt to perfect the fieldcraft of those with sights trained on the wildlife jungle or high veldt' (Ibid). Yet for those, like the Marquis of Linlithgow, expected to take on a senior role in colonial administrations, experience in estate management was also viewed as a valuable asset. Lorimer goes as far to argue that the management of deer parks on Highland estates enabled the informal imposition of an unmistakably colonial administration in miniature:

"The smooth running of the estate required the measured humanization of colonized others who could be placed in a hierarchy of necessities alongside the prey itself. Workers and animals were expected to fall in line, their place and relative importance prescribed according to the events of the day, the season or the whims of the sportsman' (Lorimer 2000: 416).

For example, the fifth Duke of Sutherland – 'Geordie' Gower – was expected to acquire the necessary skills required for the running of his father's expansive estates in Alberta and British Columbia, for which he would be responsible after his father's death, managing and stalking the deer moors of the family estate on the North East coast of Scotland.¹²⁴ The mounted stag heads that line the walls of the entrance and staircase of Dunrobin castle indicate its use as one of the largest hunting lodges in Scotland, making it a recognised 'stopping-off point on the grand tour of many a peripatetic sportsman' (Lorimer 2000: 414). The future Duke as empire-builder in-training was also encouraged to 'broaden [his] outlook with foreign travel', and in his first three years after leaving school was sent on the imperial grand tour, visiting areas of East Africa, Ceylon and India. An integral part of the imperial adventurer's experience

¹²⁴ Before his death in 1913 the 4th Duke of Sutherland had spent much of his Dukedom taking advantage of the land boom in Canada, buying up large areas of undeveloped land in Alberta and British Columbia. The Duke bought thousands of acres with the view to encouraging some of the more 'promising young highlanders to emigrate' (Gower 1957: 58). After spending great sums of money on the land and implementing an administration, the 'Sutherland Canadian Lands Company' (S.C.L.C) proved far from successful, as it became apparent that the Duke's plans had been 'over-optimistic' to say the least (Ibid). Much of the land was unproductive and many of the settlers encouraged to move by the Duke were unable to make a success of their new situation. When the fifth Duke took over the S.C.L.C administration after his father's death 'to cut their losses' he began sell off the greater part of the land piece by piece 'for the best price they could get' (Ibid: 59).

was big-game hunting and the Duke's time spent stalking deer on the moors of his family estate would have prepared him for the challenge of the colonial field (Gower 1957: 58). In his autobiography *Looking Back* (1957), he recounts the thrill of shooting his first lion, elephant and tiger and that although his trips to Africa, Ceylon and India were brief it gave him 'a love of big-game hunting greater even than my love for deerstalking' (Ibid: 60).



Fig. 5.4 The Duke's 'Natural History' Museum in the grounds of Dunrobin Castle, Golspie, Sutherland.

As the walls of his purpose built 'natural history' museum in the grounds of Dunrobin attest (see Fig. 5.4), this new found passion led him to embark upon many further big-game expeditions over the next thirty years or so. The Duke's honeymoon with his bride Eileen even took the form of a big-game hunting expedition in Kenya. The couple set sail for East Africa in their private yacht from its moorings directly in front of the castle accompanied by Duncan McRae, one of the estate's stalkers who was apparently a 'crack shot' and 'wily sportsman' (Ibid: 67). Spending over a month hunting in Kenya, their '*safari*' consisted of 'nearly two hundred native porters, skimmers, gun-bearers, cooks and boy attendants... and three or four couples of hounds, especially trained to give tongue for only a lion or leopard' (Ibid – see Fig. 5.5). Between them Eileen and Geordie managed to shoot thirteen lions and six leopards during their month long trip in Kenya (two of the leopards were set-up as rugs to adorn the Duke's study).



Fig 5.5

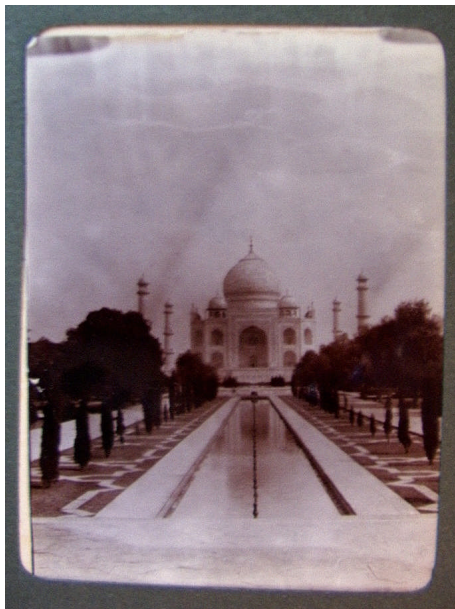


Fig. 5.6

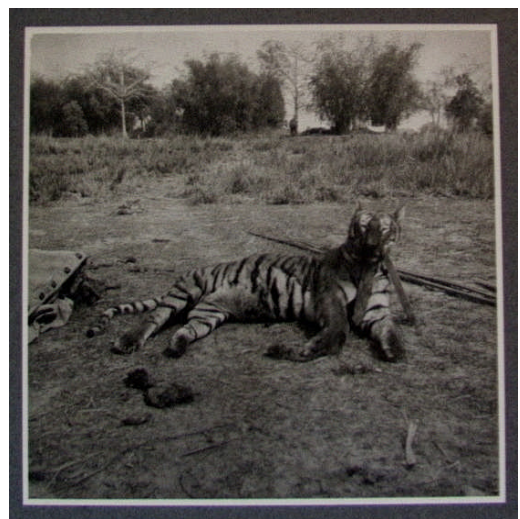


Fig. 5.7



Fig. 5.8

It was on this trip that the couple started to document their travels photographically; a practice that would become an integrated part of their field sport. After their successful expedition to Kenya, and recognising that Eileen was ‘an enthusiastic sportswoman’, Geordie decided that the couple would, wherever possible, spend part of each winter abroad yachting and big-game hunting in Africa or India.¹²⁵ A set of twelve photo albums, still kept at Dunrobin castle, document these trips that span a period of 30 years from 1912-1942. Sitting somewhere between family holiday snapshots and safari travelogues, the photographs inside variously capture the Duke and Duchess at leisure (see Fig. 5.8), the tourist sites they visited on time out from the field (see Fig 5.6) and their imperial haul (see Fig 5.7). It is those photographs documenting their shikari field expeditions which are obviously of most concern here, specifically the two albums of photographs recording the couple’s visits to and big-game expeditions in India in 1932 and India and Nepal in 1934. On the first of these trips the couple travelled on the invitation of the then Viceroy, Lord Halifax, and stayed for several days at the Viceroy’s home in Delhi before going on an extended hunting expedition in the reserve of the Maharajah of Travancore, a reserve usually placed at the disposal of the Viceroy. On the second trip they again enjoyed the shikar hospitality of the Viceroy and then, on the invitation of the Prime Minister of Nepal, went on another tiger shoot in the Terai, where as guests of the British Envoy they made their ‘headquarters’ in Kathmandu (Gower 1957: 185). Aside from predictable staged commemorative photos of victorious hunter and ‘bagged’ prey, the series of photographs documenting these expeditions depict some of the less well recorded aspects of shikar hunting. Thus, although these photographs do not record the capture of the Hopetoun tigers, they can shed light on the practices that would have gone into the ensnarement, killing and preservation.

On photography

While acknowledging that photography is by its nature ‘tendentious’ and that photographs are taken to serve particular interests and present particular ‘ways-of-seeing’, I would argue that the Sutherland’s shikar photographs can still give vital insights into the lived experience of the events depicted (Rose 2000). The traditional assumption is that photography is an inert form of visual representation that ‘freezes and captures discreet moments in time and space’ (Lisle

¹²⁵ While the first world war brought a hiatus to their travels they resumed their annual foreign travels with the return of peace.

2009: 3). Susan Sontag, for example, in her essay *On Photography* (1971), famously argues that photography enables a particular *touristification* of the world, in that cameras help ‘convert the world into a department store or museum-without-walls in which every subject is depreciated into an article of consumption, promoted as an item for aesthetic appreciation’ (Sontag 1971: 110). Here Sontag compares photography to a form of collection, and, as argued previously, the act of collecting often transfigures the value of things through various forms of ‘possession, display, ordering and arrangement’ (Hetherington 2007: 133). Following this thesis, it could be argued that photographs facilitate the transformation of whatever has been captured by the frame into a static singularised story only meaningful to the specific individuals involved in its production and display, and in this way Sontag argues that photographs have the capacity to make reality ‘stand still’ (Sontag 1971: 163). However, while the intention behind why the individual photographs were taken by the Sutherlands and the logic behind their arrangement in the albums is largely unknowable, the photographs exceed singularity of meaning or personal narrative.

Rather than accepting photographs as essentially static, as might Sontag,¹²⁶ Debbie Lisle (2009: 3) argues that photographs exceed the traditional assumption that they are static and inert representations. It is Lisle’s view there is mobility inherent in the photograph, and this has an important antecedent at the level of production. For example, the Sutherlands carried their *portable* camera with them into the field and it was their movement prior to clicking the camera’s shutter that shaped and determined the photograph’s content. While many other commentators have compared the action of clicking the camera’s shutter to that of a gun¹²⁷, Lisle makes the point that the action of clicking the camera’s shutter is never an isolated moment: ‘rather, it is punctured by all the previous clicks and moments leading up to it’ (Lisle 2009: 3). Just like the photographer’s contact sheet or computer file exemplified by Lisle, then, the Sutherlands shikar albums operate as a ‘visual travelogue of discrete moments that bleed into one another’, therefore resisting stasis or inertia.

¹²⁶ While Sontag addresses photography’s constitutive and rather complex relationship with reality she cannot overcome the ‘insolent, poignant stasis of each photograph’, and therefore essentially conceives photographs as static and inert representations (Sontag 1971: 111-112).

¹²⁷ The close association between the camera and the gun was acknowledged in the previous chapter, where the camera-hunting movement saw the incorporation of the camera into the hunt. The association of cameras and guns lingers in the vocabulary surrounding photography today. For example, Sontag describes photographing a living subject as a kind of ‘soft murder’ (1971: 15). This view is also echoed by Barthes in his book *Camera Lucida* where he compares the camera’s ability to freeze a particular moment or scene to a form of death, in that the photograph ‘embalms’ the living (1981: 14). These arguments also lead Henning to compare photography with taxidermy as both are ‘technologies of preservation [that] deal in the frozen moment’ (Henning 2006: 138). Yet just like I have argued about taxidermy, Barthes recognises the fact the photograph is not a static entity: ‘not only does it commonly have the fate of paper (perishable), but even if it is attached to more lasting supports, it is still mortal: like a living organism, it is born on the level of the sprouting silver grains, it flourishes a moment, then ages ... Attacked by light, by humidity, it fades, weakens, vanishes...’ (Ibid: 93). Therefore, for me in this sense, just like a taxidermy mount, a photograph is never still.

This sentiment is echoed by the critic Gilberto Perez when commenting on the ‘stillness’ of Eugène Atget’s photographs of Paris:

‘A photograph begins with the mobility, or at least potential mobility, of the world’s materials, of the things reproduced from reality, and turns that into a still image. More readily than in a painting, we see things in a photograph, even statues, as being on the point of movement, for these things belong to the world of flux from which the image has been extracted’ (Gilberto Perez’s on Eugène Atget’s photographs of Paris 1983: 328)

Here Perez repeats the traditional view that while the point of origin of a photograph is potential mobility, that mobility is vanquished when turned into a still image. Yet Perez also hints that, much like with taxidermy, something of that potential mobility is *still* indexed in the photograph itself as often the subject matter is depicted as being on the point of movement. Lisle goes one step further than this to argue that all photographs, no matter what they depict, are saturated with ‘the potential mobility of the world’s materials’ and so in this sense are never still; ‘indeed, the world of flux out of which the image is extracted *includes* the image itself, and in this sense, an image can never be isolated from the world in which it was derived from’ (Lisle 2009: 4). Following this Lisle argues that a photograph should be read counter-intuitively, ‘not as an arrest of movement or a freezing of time, but as a collection of signs that is always potentially mobile’ (ibid). This mobility also resides, according to Lisle, in the photograph’s ability to bring the past and present together, as, although whatever has been depicted may no longer exist, the photograph evidences that the depicted subject *did* exist at a previous time and place. This argument is in tune with Benjamin’s concept of the dialectic image where ‘what has been comes together with the now’ to constitute what Benjamin calls ‘dialectics at standstill’ (Benjamin 1999: N3.1; 463). Yet rather than read Benjamin’s concept of standstill, like Theodore Adorno does (see Adorno 1997: 227-42), as turning the world to stone, Lisle reads Benjamin’s conception of stillness in general as ‘something fizzing and pulsating with “political electricity”’ (Lisle 2009: 2-3, Quoting Buck-Morss 1997: 219). For Lisle, then, photographs, just like the dialectic image, are charged with an ‘affective punch’ that is fizzing with political electricity.

Lisle’s point is that we have mistakenly understood the act of looking as a static behaviour. Indeed the affective punch of the photograph, according to Lisle, is not a frozen moment – it does not bring the viewer to a ‘standstill’ – rather ‘it reveals the fizzing, vibrant mobilities that transmit the picture to us, and us to the picture’ (Lisle 2009: 6). While many commentators have discussed the emotional response that photographs induce, Lisle underscores the point that the punch carried by a photograph ‘is as physical as it is metaphorical or visual’ and that ‘it is precisely in the act of perception, where the emotional and the affective fuse, that

photography's assumed stillness is powerfully subverted' (Ibid: 5). Consider one of the photographs taken by the Sutherlands while out on a shikar hunt (see Fig. 5.9). The photograph depicts the assembly of a shikar hunt on the point of 'flushing' – that is the point in the hunt when the guests and hunt-attendants (on elephant back) position themselves in a horizontal line in order to charge forward in unison through the savannah grass to flush out any tigers so a clear shot can be taken.¹²⁸



Fig. 5.9

Lisle argues that even if a photograph fails to move us emotionally, it certainly moves us physically, even though we may not be aware of it. For example, the line of elephants draws the viewer in, making them scrutinise the photograph more closely as the elephants and their cargo are difficult to make out because they are partly hidden/camouflaged by the tall grasses and black and white tones of the photograph. Immediately, the photograph demands the common physical responses required for perception: 'the movement of the optic nerve, the dilation of the pupil, the squint of the eyelid, the craning of the neck to see up close' (Lisle 2009: 5). Moreover, Lisle's characterisation of the act of looking as a kind of 'subject-object-world assemblage', suggests that the multiple lines of sight at work in the photograph indicate

¹²⁸ It was usual practice to begin a shikar hunt through this practice of 'flushing'. Green (2006) explains that groups of 10-30 elephants would set-up as depicted in the photograph and set off in a line to sweep the grasses in order to flush out their prized quarry.

‘multiple – and mobile – relationalities’ (Ibid: 6).¹²⁹ Primarily, there is the photographer’s (either Geordie or Eileen’s) line of sight that extends through the camera’s viewfinder and into the formal elements of the photograph, and, while as viewers we cannot see the photographer, their presence ‘fills – and indeed constitutes – the photograph’ (Ibid). Indeed, we put ourselves in their line of sight, becoming aware that the photographer is also most likely sitting atop an elephant that is part of the cavalcade, which acts to bring us into the world that the photograph depicts. Secondly, the photograph’s demand is channelled through the line of sight of the elephants and their human drivers. While they do not return the gaze of the photographer (and by extension the viewer), as mostly all are forward looking, they direct the viewer to the foreground of grasses which hold their attention, provoking the viewer to engage in the act of scanning the grasses to see if anything is lurking there. Therefore the viewer is brought into contact with both the photographer and the ‘world of flux’ depicted by the photograph, and in this way the photograph brings the past and present together ‘in a flash’ (Benjamin 1999: 462). The affective punch of this photograph, therefore, is in recognising that something is about to happen – the cavalcade is on the brink of moving forward – and that sense of tension is transferred to the viewer.

However, this is not to say that the photograph simply transmits the viewer into the situated world of flux, rather it sets in motion ‘feelings of absence in the present (i.e. “it is not there”) and present imaginings of the past (i.e. “but it has been there”)’ (Lisle 2009: 4). Therefore the function of a photograph cannot be simply reversed from freezing a moment in time to animating a moment in time, rather a photograph initiates ‘an awakening to the strange rays of a past light that is, at the same time, enlivening to the present’ (Dubow 2004: 269; paraphrasing Benjamin 1999). In this way, if we break with the view that the photograph presents a ‘vision-as-semblance’ and instead pay close attention to its affective intensities, it becomes possible to recover ‘contingencies the gaze edits out’ (Dubow 2004: 268). If we reject the photograph’s static message by challenging the priority given to the representational surface (i.e. the ‘totality of the legible field’) of the image and operate through a different mode of encounter open to the affective, emotional and representational demands of

¹²⁹ Here Lisle extends agency to the photograph by arguing that it is the photograph itself that shapes the emotive and affective experience of the viewer: i.e. it is the image that demands something of the viewer rather than the other way round. She bases this understanding on Deleuze’s dispersed account of agency in the act of perception: ‘For Deleuze, a work of art – for our purposes, a photograph, - is not an inert or still document, but rather a ‘block of sensations’ (Deleuze 2003). It is not a finished object produced by an autonomous viewer; rather, it is a combination of precepts (initial perceptions) and affects (physical intensities) that passes through all subjects at the point of visual perception. This kind of relational encounter with an image not only deconstructs Modernity’s foundational distinction between the subject and the object, it also opens up an affective connection between all subjects engaged in the act of looking; in this case, the photographer, the subjects and objects within the photograph and the viewer’ (Lisle 2009: 5). It is therefore Lisle’s contention that taking account of the affective level of perception (i.e. the pre-interpretive moment when images reach out to grab us) changes our traditional understanding of how photograph ‘moves’ us.

photography, ‘hidden lattices of meaning may be rudely and radically illuminated’, which can in turn help to animate my present concerns (Ibid: 268).¹³⁰ For example, in recognising that photographs often operate through multiple lines of sight and indeed that the photograph is transmitted to the viewer through the photographer’s line of sight, photographs like the one below can help to ‘reframe the colonial figure in its space-based experience’ (Dubow 2000).



Fig. 5.10

Dubow argues that many postcolonial critics have failed to highlight the ‘lived and affective’ aspects of experience under colonial conditions as the colonial scopic regime is understood to be a ‘view *on* the world’ as opposed to a ‘point of view *in* it’ (Ibid). Dubow outlines how the colonial subject has been figured as ‘an eye which gazes from a periphery of its own creation’ (Pratt 1992: 60): ‘an eye which registers all that is encountered in a curious combination of passivity, foresight and self-possession’ (Dubow 2000: 91). In a similar way, Homi Bhabha has argued how ‘the *surveillance* of colonial power [must be understood] as functioning in relation to the regime of the scopic drive’ (Bhabha 1983: 28).¹³¹ Take the picture above (see Fig. 5.10); through this mode of thought, it could be interpreted as a ‘view *on* the world’, an elevated eye

¹³⁰ While I have had particular reasons for choosing all the photographs used throughout my thesis, I have done so knowing that photographs exceed singularity of meaning or personal narrative and, also that those people reading this thesis will have different affective, emotional and representational responses to them.

¹³¹ One could say that postcolonial arguments like Pratt and Bhabha’s are directed against what Foucault calls ‘the empire of the gaze’ (Foucault 1973: 39). Foucault’s concept of the panopticon has also offered such critics an easy, if loose, metaphor to explain the logic of surveillance inherent to colonial regimes.

which seeks to take possession of what it surveys. The photo suggests that the photograph has been taken from the elevated position of a houdah (the baskets that functioned as shooting platforms for shikar guests). While this was designed to afford freedom for the shoot (in allowing the passengers to stand upright) it also could be argued to maintain the hierarchical positions of a shikar hunt which are also captured by the surveying eye: the ruling elite are given highest status in the elevated houdahs, which keeps them separate from the drivers and attendants who sit directly on the elephants, which are reigned for control.

However, it is Dubow's contention that such interpretations of the colonial scopic regime as a disengaged 'view *on* the world', no matter how progressive their critical intent, end up reproducing rather than subverting the very dominant visual regime which they aim to counter. The problem encountered by Dubow is that colonial critics, intent on analysing the power-ridden effects of the disengaged colonial eye and the displaced colonial body, tend to 'seal off the performance of space and the material means of sensing' (2000: 92). For Dubow, it is important to consider the 'lived reciprocity of subject and space' in colonial contexts so that the colonial figure is understood as an 'embedded and embodied being' rather than disengaged and displaced (Ibid: 93). In this way, she moves beyond the static politics of representation that has characterised much postcolonial critique, and offers instead an understanding of the colonial figure as a corporeal being: 'a sensate body who alongside discursive accretions must also be seen to live *in* place and *through* perception', which in turn suggests 'that the scenes and stories in the pages of empire need not only be understood as cultural enactments, or as significations that conflate with the operations of ideology. Rather, and lower down the epistemic ladder, the objects of empire can be seen to contain the bodies, the experiences, the perceptions that are their process and presence' (Ibid: 89). This claim, taken with Lisle's argument to extend agency to the photograph and the objects/subjects it depicts, implies that the Sutherland's photographs, as 'objects of empire', can be used to offer a point of view *in* a shikar hunt.



Fig. 5.11

In order successfully to track tiger, the shikari field outfit was required to be make-shift and mobile as female Bengal tigers can occupy ranges of 10-51 sq km and male tigers occupy much larger ranges of 19-151 sq km.¹³² Furthermore as the tiger's natural habitat was being seriously reduced at the time of the Sutherland's shikar expeditions, tigers were often retreating into less accessible pockets of forest and grassland and this too, combined with the daily movement of tigers (Bengal tigers can cover up to 30km a day), meant that a shikar expedition would usually consist of several days tracking and camping (see Fig. 5.11). Numerous elephants (the Sutherlands had at least sixteen) were therefore employed to not only to transport the shikar party and attendants on the long distances that were covered during the hunt but also so that all the camping equipment could be taken with them so that they could track tiger with freedom of movement rather than being tied to a base-camp (see Fig 5.12).

¹³² Male tigers have intrasexual territories: i.e. they overlap with the ranges of several females, so that they can breed with more than one female at a time (Green 2006).



Fig. 5.12

The Duke in the pages of *Looking Back*, relays that the shikar hunts arranged by the Viceroy and the Prime Minister of Nepal for him and Eileen were all ‘beautifully organised’, and that their parties consisted of all the necessary equipment and attendants: elephants and drivers, additional attendants for beating, skinning and servicing the camps, tents and all relevant camping equipment and supplies, guns and ammunition and skinning knives and preservative salts (see Gower 1957: 185). He also notes that, while he preferred to stalk on foot ‘after the style of Scottish deer-stalking’, he found the style of shikar hunting on elephant back to be ‘tremendous sport’ (Ibid: 185; 186). While the houdah was designed to act as an elevated shooting platform, it also provided a more comfortable and suitable carriage for the long periods of trekking that would have had to be endured while tracking (see 5.13).



Fig. 5.13

This said, the occupants would not have been immune to the bumps and undulations that come with riding on an elephant's back. Thus, rather than being disengaged from their immediate surroundings, trekking over uneven ground on elephant back would have been a highly embodied experience even in the elevated houdah (in fact the occupants' experience of the elephants movements would be exaggerated and more jarring because they would be in a less stable position than those sitting directly on the elephant's back). As the picture above suggests the houdahs also allowed for social interaction to occur between the occupants of the different baskets even if they were travelling in the customary 'one after another' fashion, since they are open topped. Also, although the houdah would have hidden the driver from view there would have been a level of interaction between the shikar guests and their attendants, especially when discussing the route/direction of the hunt with the ground trackers and beaters and when they rode side-by-side when 'flushing'. For most colonial hunters, as the hunting trips were usually arranged for them and only lasted at most for about ten days at a time, it was not long enough for them to attune with landscape and prey and so were dependent on the skills and senses of the local trackers and hunt attendants.¹³³ Tracking tiger (just like with Ceylonese elephant hunting) demanded a vast range of embodied skills: tigers could be tracked by 'sight by attending to disturbed vegetation, [paw]prints and dung, but these visual methods had to work in conjunction with a constant attention to wind and sound. Remaining down wind and unheard by the [tiger] preventing the animals fleeing and allowed the tracker to hear the animal and smell [the scent of male tigers who spray their territory]' (Lorimer and Whatmore 2009: 10).

Yet the purpose of the trekking was not to provide a jolly ride for the party guest, and as the Duke admits, measures were taken to ensure the party was not endlessly trekking and that the hunt was successful: '[b]ullocks would be fastened out in different parts of the jungle each night, and at dawn the following morning a *shikari* would gallop on a pony round these bullocks to see if any of them had been killed by tigers during the night. If the news was good, if a bullock or two had been killed, we would set off with our elephants immediately after breakfast and proceed to drive out the tigers from the thick grass or jungle in which they were lying up after their meals' (Ibid: 186).¹³⁴ As noted above, the procedure for driving or 'flushing' out the tigers consisted of positioning the elephants in a horizontal line (ensuring that the

¹³³ Lorimer and Whatmore (2009: 10) state, in their attempt to recover the past embodied elephant-hunting experience of Samuel Baker, that, like most colonial hunters, Baker had to rely on the skills and senses of local trackers: 'elephant hunting thus involved a multicultural and multi-sensory geography where the visual was often secondary and embodied skill, [and] attunement to the landscape and local culture and languages became vitally important'.

¹³⁴ Green (2006: 21) relates that this practice of baiting bullocks was a common part of shikari practice and that tigers were even killed 'while sleeping and while mating, while eating and while stalking' and that 'foetuses were taken from the still warm bodies of their mothers to increase bag numbers'.

shooters were evenly spaced along the line to increase the area of ground covered by each shooter) and then sweeping forward through the grass in unison (to avoid anyone elephant straying forward and being caught in the line of sight) to flush out any tigers that might be chanced upon. A small army of beaters often walked in front of the elephant line and when a tiger was spotted by one of the party members (usually from the elevated position of the houdah and with the benefit of binoculars) the beaters would then work together to herd the tiger into a clearing so a clear shot could be taken. From this point it was up to those poised in the houdahs, rifles cocked, to fire an accurate shot.

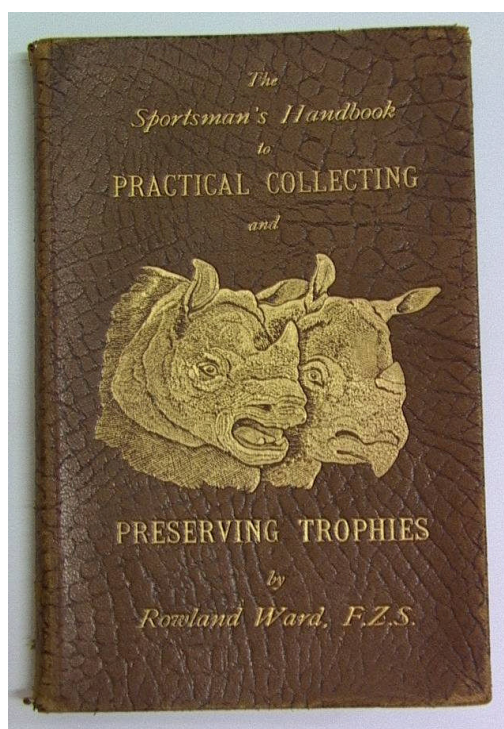


Fig. 5.14 Rowland Ward's (1894) *The Sportsman's Handbook*

As any self-respecting sportsman and owner of Ward's *The Sportsman's Handbook to Practical Collecting and Preserving Trophies* (1894) would know, an accurate shot was crucial for securing the perfect specimen for mounting, the ultimate goal of the shikar-hunter (see Fig. 5.14).¹³⁵

Ward instructs sportsmen (and women) that in order to secure a good quality mask and pelt

¹³⁵ Ward's book was recognised to be the manual to address all the big-game sportsman's needs from choice of gun to skinning and preservation methods. It also offered a detailed code of sportsmanship for big-game hunters as Ward gave prescriptions on best practice in the field. For example, Ward prescribed that animals should be killed quickly, cleanly and without cruelty (though this was more in the interest of securing a undamaged pelt rather than for the animal's sake), wounded animals should be followed up and 'despatched'; hunters should have a detailed knowledge of their quarry's anatomy, behaviour and ecology to warrant killing it and the hunt should have an element of risk and the animal some chance of escape. Contemporary and historical geographical work on hunting emphasises the importance of human-animal respect and reciprocity in hunting practice. In the British context, such reciprocity is defined in the shifting codes of 'sportsmanship', which prescribe acceptable behaviour (e.g. see Marvin 2003, 2007, Matless et al 2005). Ward's book also contains an appendix - 'Hunting fields of the World' - that listed all the game that a sportsman could expect to shoot in 'the principal regions of the world which can be resorted to for big game' (Ward 1894: 96).

for a trophy, firstly gun choice is crucial. He advises against the use of large bore gun rifles ‘as the large hole the bullet makes is very detrimental to the skin’ (Ward 1894: 5). Ward recommends that ‘the 8 bore, in good hands is all-sufficient for elephant, rhinoceros, buffalo, or gaur’ and that an Express rifle in his judgement is ‘suitable to all soft-skinned game’ (Ibid). The temper (hardness) of the bullet and quantum of the charge are also of import, as the bullet should not pass through the game creating another hole in the pelt. For this reason hollow bullets should be avoided as it ‘breaks up into films of lead and disperses when it strikes the hard muscles and bones of the animal’ (Ibid: 6). The bullet should instead be solid and in the case of pure lead, rather than splinter and ruin the pelt, Ward instructs that it will ‘on impact assume a mushroom form, lacerating its course, but not passing out of the body’ and therefore recommends the use of a bullet made of solid hardened metal (Ibid). Ward offers some qualification, even with the right gun and ammunition the sportsman still requires ‘a knowledge of what experience and investigation has taught us of how to best achieve our end; *how and where it is best to strike the game in a vital part*’. In terms of the *Felidae* Ward instructs that the best place to hit is the brain or the heart (see Fig. 5.15):

‘now with the tiger as well lion, the brain is about the size of an apple, and small in comparison to the bony structure; the brain-pan is located about three or four inches to the rear of the eye (vide diagram). The heart is also indicated, and when the animal is broadside on, it can be pierced by a shot behind the shoulder. When he is charging direct towards you, the best shot to deliver is a little right or left of the head, straight through the shoulder; by this you may perhaps pierce the heart, or possibly fracture the spinal cord; the bullet may traverse the body lengthwise with paralysing effect, or it will – which is most important – shatter the shoulder-bone and prevent his deadly spring’ (Ibid: 10)

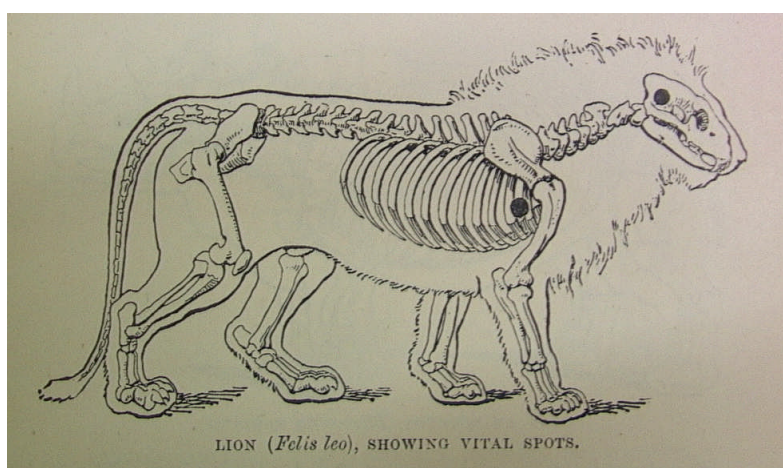


Fig. 5.15 ‘Lion (*Felis leo*), showing Vital Spots’ (taken from Ward 1894: 8)

The Duke, who was known to carry his copy of Ward's handbook into the field, relates that hitting a moving tiger in a vital spot could be a challenging business even for a sportsman of his experience:¹³⁶

‘As the tiger generally rushes out with a roar one needed to be very quick and accurate in shooting him as, pushed by the beaters, he glided through the gaps in the long grass. He had to be hit in a vital spot, or else he would disappear again, merely wounded; whereupon we would be faced with having to track him down a second time.’ (Gower 1957: 186)



Fig. 5.16

Here the Duke explains that in practice, even with beaters guiding the tiger into the gaps in the grass, delivering a fatal shot first time was not always achieved and the tiger, although wounded, could escape. While the Duke does not directly admit to failing to miss a vital spot and then having to track the tiger down to finish the job, he does suggest that he witnessed this happening (see Fig. 5.16). While suggesting that the visceral thrill of encountering a tiger could unsteady the trained sight and primed body of an experienced sportsman and that therefore the shikar-hunters had to work *with* the lively agencies of their quarry, the admission is also suggestive of the embodied experience of the tiger. Lorimer and Whatmore (2008) have discussed how difficult it is to witness and evoke the embodied experience of animals that are being hunted, and, as I have already noted it is not my intention or, rather, condescension to attempt to ‘become’ tiger. However, Ward's description above of how a bullet lacerates the skin and muscle and, in the case of a hollow bullet, can splinter on impact, eviscerating muscle and shattering bone, gives an insight into the pain tigers' must have suffered if the first shot

¹³⁶ It should be noted here that Ward's authoritative tone is deceptive as he had very little experience of big-game hunts due to him suffering to bouts of ill health that prevented him from travelling (Morris 2003). He does inform the reader that his recommendations have been informed by ‘that most accomplished sportsman, Mr. F. C. Selous, whose exploits among great game are perhaps unequalled’ (Ward 1884: 3).

failed to kill outright. For a tiger in this situation being hunted down a second time must have been not only a painful but terrifying experience. Also, as noted previously, it was not uncommon to come across tigers that bore the wounds of past encounters so instead of an instant and clean death, tigers often suffered protracted ones as those that did escape were often left tormented, debilitated, half starved and dying of gangrenous wounds.¹³⁷

It is Lorimer and Whatmore's view that attending to the intercorporeal attachments and crossings between hunted and hunting bodies can help to flesh out the colonial visions of the so-called 'seeing men' (Pratt 1992) of empire. As already suggested, this 'view from nowhere' removes the observer from 'the messy, transgressive and often dangerous materialities of the colonial encounter and reinforce[s] the colonial illusion of supremacy over both local people and nature' (Lorimer and Whatmore 2008: 5). Similarly, Heidi Scott contends that by reconnecting colonial visions with the embodied and affective aspects of colonial experience space is opened up to consider not only the corporeal and non-representational but non-human agency as well (Scott 2006: 481). By focusing on the intricacies of everyday experience in colonial Peru, Scott has been able to provide an insight into how landscapes there were not only 'lived-in' but 'woven and contested' by both human and non-human agents (Ibid: 487). These grounded accounts of colonial vision show how it is possible to appreciate not only the lived and embodied desires of the colonising subject, but also, by utilizing more dispersed accounts of agency and mobility, how it is possible to empower and mobilise the abject and the objectified.

¹³⁷ According to Morris, the word 'shikar', which was largely attributed to tiger hunting, became both a code of conduct and way of life for the Raj administration and became understood as an ethical spirit of good sporting behaviour shared by the British and Indians alike. Although Morris notes that 'Shikar' came to epitomise fair tactics and respect for the quarry and that 'every effort was made to follow up and kill wounded animals', a collection of over 50 tiger skulls showing evidence of serious gunshot wounds through the clumsy use of firearms kept at the regional Museum of Natural History, Bhopal (they had originally been collected by the Van Ingen taxidermy firm, Mysore) testify that this code of conduct was not always adhered to (Morris 2006: 12). Furthermore, although colonial game laws were introduced in the mid nineteenth century (these ensured that while the British Raj was in charge that most hunting was done in Government controlled forest blocks and permits to shoot were issued to a tightly regulated system) after independence in 1947 local people, who had previously lived in fear of breaking game laws took control of their forests once again. While independence was a great day for the Indian people, it was, as Green (2006: 21) states, a 'terrible one for the tiger'. During the Raj although the slaughter was massive it was mainly confined to the ruling classes. This once exclusive activity was thus seized upon by the Indian people as a democratising one, and wholesale extermination began: 'amateur hunters, shikar operators (who ran tiger hunting as a package holiday), professional poachers and farmers all joined in. If that were not enough, large scale hunting campaigns were organised, nets were spread, pits were dug, traps were laid, forests were burned. From well over 100,000 in 1600, around 50,000 in 1900, tiger numbers were reduced to less than 2,500 in 1970' (Ibid).



Fig. 5.17

The photograph above (see Fig. 5.17) depicts the shikar party inspecting their freshly shot tiger. Although the native attendants would have ensured it was safe for the Shakari guests to dismount (usually with the help of ladders) from their elephants to inspect the kill, encountering such a large tiger up close (particularly in the first couple of instances) would have been a visceral thrill.¹³⁸ The tigers' reputation as a 'man-eater' would have been deeply embedded in the psyche of the shikari guests and, although dead, would have been an awesome sight to contemplate first hand and to engage with physically. Moreover, a tiger the size of the one captured by the Sutherland party above would have been an overwhelming presence even when lying limp on the grass. Handling a tiger carcass could also be an alarming experience as, when moving the head or body, air left in the lungs or stomach could be expelled through the mouth sounding like a muffled roar.¹³⁹ The hunters pictured have picked up and gathered around the head as head-size (measured from nose to base of skull for 'basal length' and width across the 'zigomatic arches') was what mattered when assessing how the

¹³⁸ Lisle, through her study of a photograph of an abject Japanese POW taken by military photographer American Sergeant Paul Dorsey, argues that although such photographs, if read representationally, 'reinforce feelings of triumph, conquest, and justice that circulated America's post-war victory culture', in refusing conventional understandings of photography as a still visual art by redistributing both agency and mobility to the photograph, one, can empower and mobilise the tortured, the abject and the objectified. She raises interesting questions like 'are documentary and artistic photographs more likely to reach out and prick us?' and 'what is the most appropriate or ethical response to pictures of another's suffering?' and 'what do we do after we have looked at photographs?' (Lisle 2009: 4). Butler in her exploration of Abu Graib images, highlights that Sontag has denounced the photograph 'precisely because it enrages without directing the rage, and so excites our moral sentiments at the same time that it confirms our political paralysis' (Butler 2007: 966). However, Lisle, argues that if we use more dispersed accounts of agency and mobility when reading and interpreting photographs we can put them to use to work through the political paralysis that Sontag identifies.

¹³⁹ This happened to a taxidermist known to the author who, on transit after picking up a pair of lion carcasses from a zoo was alarmed when he started hearing dull roars coming from the back of his transit van. Panic-stricken and thinking the lions were still alive, he pulled over to the side of the road and with his heart in his mouth he opened the back door to find them still dead – the motion of the car had just caused them to expel air from their bellies.

kill compared to the Records of Big Game.¹⁴⁰ The photograph also shows that when at ground level, the shikari guests would have intermingled with and more closely engaged with the trackers, beaters and porters. After inspecting the kill, the shikari guests would have given instructions to the attendants on how they wanted the pelt to be skinned and preserved and the attendants in return would decide and instruct on whether it was best to skin the tiger where it had fallen or to take it to a more shaded area where they could set up camp. Thus, although it could look like the colonial guests were in control of the situation, reciprocity was at work here. Moreover, although the guests were probably made to feel like they were in charge of the hunt, the expedition from trekking, to hunt, to camp would have operated as a well oiled machine led by and maintained by the shikar attendants.

It is difficult to ascertain exactly how the practices and passions of the shikari guests (and by extension the Raj) were received by those under shikar employment. While colonial hunters sought to be respected and admired by subordinate social classes (and races), Lorimer and Whatmore (2008: 14) found that in the case of colonial elephant hunting in Ceylon, ‘unlike the lower-class gillies and servants that underpinned British hunting society, the local villagers who were employed as porters, gun bearers and trackers had little familiarity with the ritualised excess of the Hunt’, and that ‘the complexity and arcane rituals of sportsmanship and the bloody character of the elephant hunt would have seemed excessive, confusing and occasionally both amusing and terrifying’. However, the Sutherland photographs, along with the knowledge that shikari field expeditions were well established and routinised by the time of their (and by extension those of the Marquis of Linlithgow’s) hunts, suggest that shikari attendants may have been ambivalent to and even bored by their guests’ thrills and fancies. They would have also been much more accustomed to encountering tigers (as they were the ones who often tracked them on foot and encountered them most closely in both embodied and disembodied states), and like the Ceylonese attendants from Lorimer and Whatmore’s study, they would have developed their own ‘ceremonial and [largely] utilitarian modes of engaging’ with tigers (Ibid).

While Ward’s manual instructs that:

¹⁴⁰ As noted in the previous chapter (see note 46 of ‘Site’) competition for the biggest specimen was in part manufactured by Rowland Ward himself through the publication of his book *Records of Big Game* (1892 first edition). While most of the animals recorded were ungulates, the book also included other species such a walrus, elephants and big cats. The Van Ingen taxidermy firm in Mysore (who specialised in setting up shikari tiger trophies) also added to this competition; on their advertising leaflets, they speculated about the record tiger and frequently updated their leaflets to record who held the record for the largest specimen of tiger killed.

‘It is generally far better to attend to the preserving of your own specimens, than to trust to native agents or servants; if you are compelled to trust to them at all, never sanction the use of lime in the materials they employ, even in small constituent’ (Ward 1884: 21)

In the shikar field, at least, the task of skinning was almost always reserved for the shikari attendants. The shikar guests may have directed the attendants on how they wanted the pelt and mask to be skinned, but, the high status guests on a Sutherland hunt would have never dirtied their hands stripping the skin from the body. Often the tiger would be skinned on the spot where it fell; however, as with the photograph below, if the ground was not suitable (i.e. it was too exposed¹⁴¹) the tiger would be transported to a shaded area.



Fig. 5.18

As the photograph (see Fig. 5.18) demonstrates, the dead weight of a freshly shot tiger demanded the force of several attendants to lift it from below (the body stretched on a ladder) as well as a make-shift pulley device hoisting it from above to get it on to the back of a kneeling elephant so that it could be transported to be skinned. The photograph also affirms that the tiger, in its dead state, was passed over to the charge of the attendants. Although one of the shikar hunters is overseeing the operation, the attendants would be directly handling the body from this point on – in fact it would be perfectly possible that the shikari guest who shot the tiger would not handle it again until it was delivered to them as a head mount or rug, and even then their staff would have been in charge of physically displaying/arranging it.

¹⁴¹ As with any form of taxidermy the specimen must be skinned and preserved quickly before the processes of decay take hold. Getting the animal skinned and preserved is especially urgent in hot and humid climates as sunlight, heat and humidity speeds up decomposition of the flesh. Skinning therefore had to happen within a few hours of capture or else the fur would begin to ‘slip’ and the pelt would be ruined (Morris 2006).

Although the Sutherland's photographs, when combined with other sources like Ward's manual and the Duke's autobiography, take us closer to the complex tangle of beings and practices that made up the make-shift dwellings of the shikar field, the Sutherlands did not photograph their kills being skinned. This could be because they thought the content to be too grisly or that these processes did not interest in the same way as did the tracking and killing of tigers. Moreover, the growing animal welfare movement in metropolitan British society, a movement that was increasingly questioning the slaughter of game animals in both Britain and in the colonies, may have induced the hunters to distance themselves from any evidence that could represent the hunt as anything but a necessary and functional practice keeping native populations safe from 'man-eating' tigers.¹⁴² Lorimer and Whatmore (2009) also point out that the killing, skinning and dismemberment of game animals was made more palatable to such audiences by presenting/justifying it as a scientific practice. Ward's manual, for instance, presents the preservation of game as a form of natural history enquiry as he advises that, before 'specimens' are skinned, 'natural history' notes should be taken and recorded on a specimen label:

'Note thereon: - Date; a number; where killed; native names; sex; habitat; habits observed, as to the eye etc.; and peculiarities of colour.' (Ward 1894: 18).

Ward, by following the well-established label format for the collection of natural history specimens, associates the 'collection' of game animals with the practice of collecting animals for museum display and scientific study, in effect legitimating the practice. It is clear from the Duke's autobiography that he too did not want his actions to be regarded as barbaric. He repeatedly contends that he was collecting all his game animals for his 'natural history museum at Dunrobin' (1957: 94).¹⁴³ As Lorimer and Whatmore indicate, the colonial hunt 'was not slaughter if it was conducted by the natural historian for the rational pursuit of knowledge' (Lorimer and Whatmore 2009: 18). Also, by ignoring Ward's advice and leaving the bloody work of skinning and preserving to shikari attendants, the colonial hunter was able personally to protect themselves against the revulsion of such procedures whilst also elevating colonial slaughter above local practice.

¹⁴² The functional dimension of hunting as a biopolitical strategy of the Raj is discussed in Pandian's (2001) essay, 'Predatory care: the imperial hunt in Mughal and British India'.

¹⁴³ In the shikar field the Duke and Duchess shot nine tigers on that first expedition to India in 1932 and ten on their second trip two years later. Lord Linlithgow as Viceroy would have had a much larger tally.



Fig. 5.19 'Skinning a Tiger' (Ward 1984: 38)

Therefore, while Ward's manual offers detailed instruction on how to skin and preserve a tiger and even illustrates this procedure being carried out by disembodied white hands (see Fig. 5.19), it was the indigenous attendants who would have been responsible for carrying out these procedures (see Fig. 5.20).



Fig. 5.20 Attendants skinning a tiger (Morris 2006: 36 - reproduced with permission)

A tiger would be skinned lying down on the ground, often a team of men working together to get the job done before the fur began to 'slip' due to decomposition. The skin would then be stretched on a wooden frame to dry, moving it around during the day to avoid the direct rays to the sun. Drying was safer in the shade because sun-warming accelerates the process of decay within the skin. This causes the epidermis and fur to loosen and come off ('slip'), leaving ugly bare patches (Morris 2006: 36).

After receiving their instructions for preservation, the skinning of a tiger by a group of attendants (often solely employed for this purpose) would take the tiger to a more shaded and secluded area to be skinned so that the guests did not have to witness such unpleasanties and could set out on another hunt. Contrary to Ward's opinion, shikari skimmers would have been well-practised in preserving the masks and skins of tigers so that they could be fashioned into head mounts, rugs or full body mounts. For example the Van Ingen taxidermy firm, the

largest taxidermy firm operating in India and specialists in the setting up of Shikari trophies, had set out instructions for the proper preservation of shikar trophies as they wanted to educate both the shikari attendants (with whom they sometimes had direct contact when the

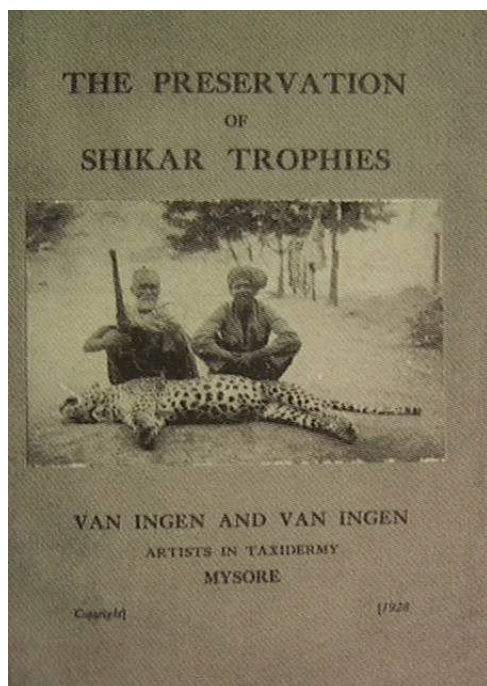


Fig. 5.21

skins were taken to the factory) and the colonial hunters who they felt were being wrongly advised by British sporting manuals like Ward's (Morris 2006). The first 'edition' of their pamphlet *The Preservation of Shikar Trophies* was published in 1921 but unpublished versions of it were in circulation well before this date, according to Morris (2006), the firm's historian, and would have been used by the shikari operators (see Fig. 5.21).¹⁴⁴ The trophies obtained by the shikar guests were valuable items, not just in terms of the time, money and logistics that it took to acquire them, but for the hunters they also often represented 'unforgettable and unrepeatable experiences' and thus the Maharajah's or colonial officers who would have arranged the hunts would have recognised how important it was for the kills of their guests to be treated properly (Ibid: 35).

The Van Ingen publication, which is reproduced in full by Morris (2006), provides not only practical instructions which give a level of detail far superior to Ward's and other British publications, but also makes use of photographs to illustrate some of the procedures.¹⁴⁵ Moreover, as the Van Ingens were essentially 'tiger taxidermists', they were able to offer instructions strictly related to the purpose of preserving shikar trophies and include much more specialised information than those writing from a British perspective. Another reason for producing proper instructions was to protect their reputation as India's number one taxidermist by informing the shikar hunters that, if they wanted a quality trophy, they would need to supply the firm with a quality skin: 'It is essential that skins and masks be in perfect

¹⁴⁴ Morris (2006: 36) notes that the introduction to the 1928 version begins by saying 'these notes were originally compiled in an abridged form, more than twenty years ago', i.e. about 1908.

¹⁴⁵ The pamphlet provides advice that, unlike most of the British manuals, comes directly from the practical experience of the Van Ingens and their shikar attendants in the field. While this publication advises that indigenous attendants can be trusted with the tasks of preservation – i.e. it admits 'coolies' do most of the work – it still advises that they should be closely supervised.

condition if the finished trophies are to be a success. Sportsmen should realise this, as the taxidermist cannot be expected to work wonders' (Morris 2006: 39).¹⁴⁶

When it came to skinning a tiger the first thing they advised was that all incision cuts to be made should be marked out with charcoal before the skinning was carried out (see Fig. 5.22).



Fig. 5.22 Tiger marked ready to be skinned (Morris 2006: 40 - reproduced with permission)

With the carcass laid on its back the Van Ingens instructed that the first incision was made through the chin and carried along the centre of the body to the vent. They indicated that



Fig. 5.23 'Fisting' (Morris 2006: 42)

there is a whorl of hair which runs from the chest along the white belly to the vent which can be followed to ensure that the skin was evenly parted. The incision was then to be carried along from the vent to tip of tail. The Van Ingen's then instructed that similar procedures should be carried out for the fore and hind legs, again following along the middle of the white. Once these main

incisions had been made the booklet then states that the skin can begin to be parted from the

¹⁴⁶ It is interesting to note that the Van Ingen publication refers to their products as trophies instead of natural history specimens. Writing from the Indian context and as big-game trophy specialists there would have been no reason to comply with this pretence kept up by some British taxidermist like Rowland Ward.

body. At this point in the procedure they note that the knife can become redundant as the skin can be removed by a butchering technique known as ‘fisting’. This is where the skinner pulls the skin taught with left hand and, with right fist clenched (and with the help of the knife butt), pushes vigorously on the skin close to the flesh, practically punching the skin off the carcass (see Fig. 5.23). The Van Ingens warned that the ‘mask’ could not be stripped in this manner, however, as the skin around the face was far more delicate. The handbook therefore advised that greater caution should be taken here so that the tiger’s features would remain



Fig. 5.24 Skinning around the eye (Morris 2006: 42)

intact for the mount (and this was especially important if, as with the Hopetoun tigers, it was being made into a head mount). Skinning around the eyes was a particularly delicate procedure as the eyelids had to be kept intact as, when mounted, they would be filled with composition to give them back their natural thickness, thus any repair stitching would be very noticeable, spoiling the mount. Tiger pads also required special attention, according to the Van Ingens, as the claws needed to be removed with the skin and not left on the carcass. They therefore advised that a shaper knife be used for this purpose so the claws could be dug out.

The handbook recommended that once the skin had been completely removed from the carcass, every scrap of fat and flesh was to be removed from the freed pelt as it was not possible for any preservative to ‘strike through the pelt when fat and flesh covers it’ (Morris 2006: 44 quoting the van Ingens’ pamphlet). Bullet holes and any accidental knife cuts were then to be sewn up. They informed that that even large bullet holes could have their edges drawn together and sewn when the skin was ‘fresh and still full of elasticity’ so that unsightly patches could be saved. Any clotted blood that remained on the pelt was also to be removed, otherwise it would be liable to retard the action of the preservative. The Van Ingen’s expressly instructed that the pelt was not to be washed with water, however, as this was ‘the most risky thing to do, for a fresh skin contained nearly 70% of moisture, and the object was to get rid of this as quickly as possible, and not add to it and allow room for bacterial action’ (Morris 2006: 45). Once the fat, flesh and any ‘dirt’ had been removed from the underside of the pelt, the Van Ingen’s instructed that the skin had then to be salted and dried. The skin was to be salted with equal parts of an alum and salt mixture with added Carbohic acid solution to make it

‘pasty’, which was to be spread on the flesh side of the pelt.¹⁴⁷ The skin was then to be pegged out and dried fur side down. The Van Ingen pamphlet advised that skins should never be left to dry in direct sunlight as they could suffer from a phenomenon known as ‘partial burn’, where the pelt becomes hard and transparent and in the course of handling ‘breaks to pieces’ (Morris 2006: 51). Skins once preserved would have then been sent to the taxidermists for mounting and of course they highly recommended their own.

The next section differently figures the working of bodies and bodies at work at the Van Ingen factory.

The Factory

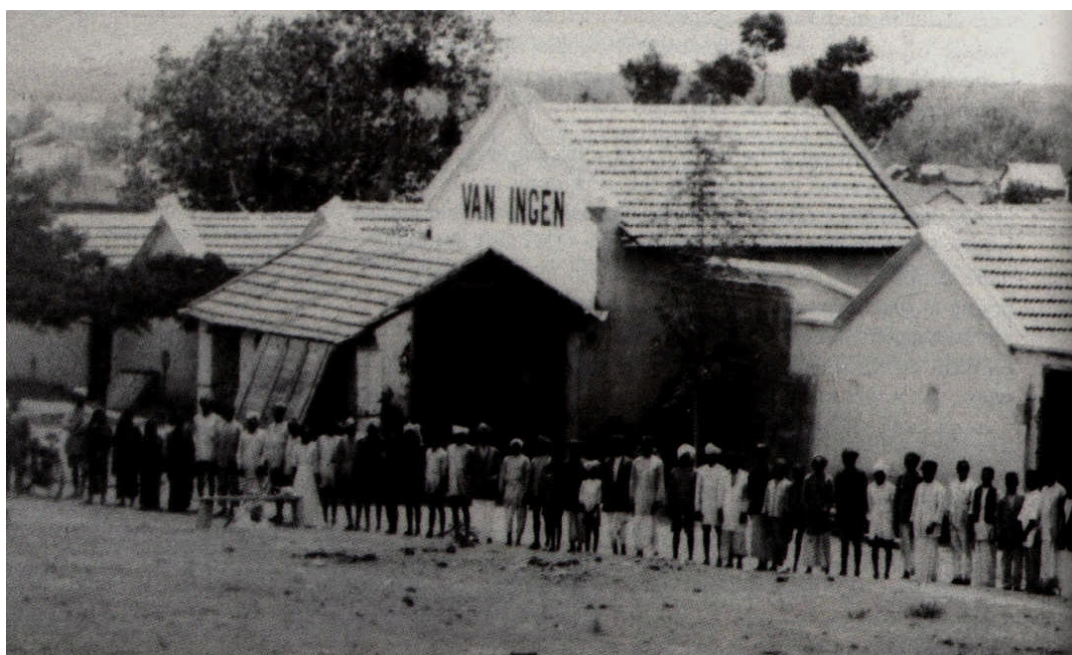


Fig. 5.25 Photo of the Van Ingen taxidermy factory and staff 1920 (Morris 2006:64 – reproduced with permission)¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁷ Alum was combined with salt as according to the Van Ingens as it could ‘strike through the pelt and fix the hair roots very quickly’ (Morris 2006: 55). For a large tiger, they advised that 8lbs. of finely-powdered alum should be mixed with 8 lbs. salt.

¹⁴⁸ The Van Ingen factory was established in Mysore by Eugene Van Ingen and his wife Patti in 1912 and was helped, in large part, by the patronage of the Maharajah of Mysore. When Eugene died in 1928, the business was managed by his widow Patti and three of his sons, de Wet, Botha and Joubert. Patti was, until her death in 1964, actively involved in the day-to-day running of the factory and would make an ‘inspection walk’ every day to ensure all aspects of the works were running smoothly (Morris 2006: 24). She was also responsible for the firm’s finances and apparently kept a strong grip on the business. After she died, de Wet took charge of the factory, assisted by his two brothers. All three were skilled taxidermists, although Joubert had a particular talent as he had been sent to college for several years to train as a sculptor. According to Morris, de Wet was the driving force behind the firm’s success, however, as he made a very effective manager. He supervised every detail to ensure that the Van Ingens were producing the finest shikar trophies in India. Something of a

Once the hunt was over and the tigers had been skinned and salted, their preserved pelts would be sent from the shikari camps, in the case of the Hopetoun tigers at least, to the Van Ingen taxidermy firm in Mysore (see Fig. 5.25).¹⁴⁹ The purpose-built factory which was in business from 1912 to 1995 was, according to Morris, very likely the largest and most sophisticated taxidermy operation ever in existence.¹⁵⁰ Curious to see what, if anything, of the famous factory remained, he paid a visit in 2003. The visit alerted him to the factory's imminent demolition, along with most of the documentary and material evidence of its existence. Salvaging what he could from the abandoned and derelict factory, and from the recollections of the last remaining members of the van Ingen family to have worked there, he presents, in a published volume, a record of the van Ingen taxidermy operation, including its layout, methods of work and arrangement of workers, a sample of promotional materials and product range, and an estimation of the number of animals 'processed' by the firm (Morris 2006). His record also presents a series of photographs of the factory both when it was in operation and in its derelict state.¹⁵¹ Used imaginatively and respectfully his publication can therefore be deployed as a resource to help differently figure the working of bodies and bodies at work at the site.¹⁵²

perfectionist, he was feared by his staff whom he often made repeat jobs if he felt they were not up to the Van Ingen standard.

¹⁴⁹ While Morris notes there were plenty of other taxidermists operating in India, they seem to have been relatively small operations which could not compete with the efficiency and quality of the Van Ingens output. This along with the firm's reputation as 'the tiger taxidermists', ensured that the Van Ingens were therefore the taxidermists of choice to the Shikar hunter (Morris 2006: 14).

¹⁵⁰ Morris (2006: 143), relates that the Van Ingen's large purpose built factory was the only one ever built expressly for taxidermy.

¹⁵¹ Black and white photographs by Morris taken in the factory's derelict state on his first visit in 2003 are utilised throughout this section to offer the reader a spectralised experience of the site. This out-of-joint act of recovery has been made under the recognition that these spaces cannot be simply re-animated through the recovery of the firm's material remains, i.e. there remains a gap between my desire to revive and the impossibility of this desire.

¹⁵² James Duncan's work, presenting a detailed account of the embodied practices of resistance that took place on nineteenth-century Ceylonese coffee plantations, is a comparator for this approach at recovery (Duncan 2002).



Fig. 5.26 Joubert Van Ingen and Pat Morris's wife outside 'the works' in 2003 © Pat Morris

The Van Ingen factory (often referred to as 'the works') was based around seven long sheds lying parallel to each other. The plan below (see Fig. 5.27), drafted by Morris (2006: 2006: 64), illustrates that the sheds were organised along the different stages of the taxidermic process from the pickling and tanning of skins to mounting and finishing.

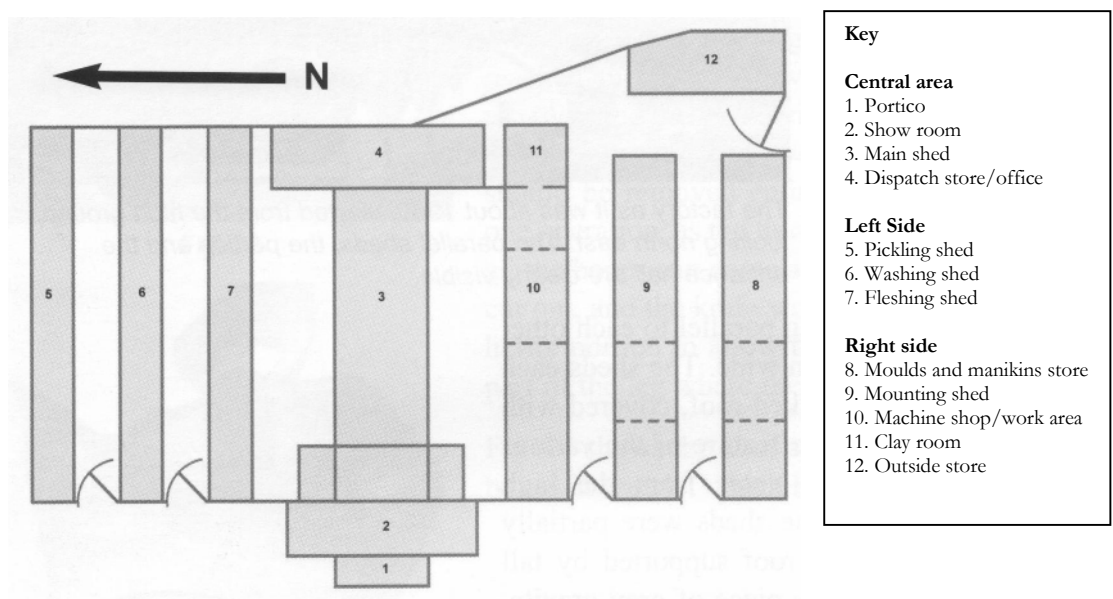


Fig. 5.27 Factory layout and Key (Morris 2006: 64 – reproduced with permission)

The factory was therefore based along the basic assembly line principle.¹⁵³ The assembly line principle had emerged from the industrial ‘disassembly’ lines of the slaughterhouses of Chicago in the late nineteenth-century and, after being popularised by Henry Ford in early twentieth-century, it was reproduced across Western Europe, North America and the colonies (see Gartman 1979). The Van Ingen factory, in many ways following the model of a production line for a slaughterhouse, nonetheless sought, rather than disassembling animal carcasses, to re-assemble them.¹⁵⁴ The re-assembly of a single head mount may have involved direct contributions from at least eight workers, each with their own specific task: skin-scrapers, tanner, manikin-maker, carpenter, eye-painter, modeller, finisher and packer; many of whom would have had assistants. In its heyday, when it was ‘processing’ 4-500 hundred tigers annually, the firm employed up to 150 people. Indirectly, several additional staff would have also played their part, including the supervisory role (and some practical participation) of the van Ingen brothers. According to Morris (Ibid: 99), the day began at 7.30, with a loud clanging noise, made by beating a metal rod against a steel girder. Staff signed on in the morning and again in the afternoon after a lunch break of about one and half hours. The factory was also organised according to the caste system in India. Traditionally, the ‘left side’ was understood as unclean and undesirable, thus it was on the left hand side of the factory that the lower caste workers carried out the messy and most unpleasant work, like the tanning and paring down skins, whereas the more skilled work, like mould-making and modelling, was located on the ‘right hand’ side of the factory.¹⁵⁵ Morris (2006: 71) explains that the lower-caste workers even had their own separate entrance gate to the ‘left side’ of the factory that kept them entirely separate from the rest of the workforce.¹⁵⁶ The spatial arrangement of the factory was therefore determined by ethnic and social judgements of status.

¹⁵³ Before the 20th century, most manufactured products were made individually by hand. A single craftsman or team of craftsmen would create each part of a product. The assembly line principle evolved from these artisanal shops as division of labour and specialisation took place. The meatpacking industry of Chicago is believed to be one of the first industrial assembly lines starting in around 1867. Workers would stand at fixed stations and a pulley system would bring the meat to each worker and they would complete one task. It was thus referred to as the ‘disassembly line’, as animals were butchered as they moved along a conveyor. (see McClellan and Dorn 2006 about the influence of this slaughterhouse practice on the later developments at Ford Motor Company).

¹⁵⁴ For work that explores the historical origins of the slaughterhouse assembly line and the organisation and experience of the workers and the animal carcasses they handled see Smith (2002).

¹⁵⁵ For work that charts the development of caste organisation in Indian industries, see Appadurai (1974). Mark Holmström’s (1976) book *South Indian factory workers: their life their world*, offers a more intimate and up-to-date portrait of the Indian factory worker’s lifeworld which was often prescribed by caste and kinship practices.

¹⁵⁶ Duncan’s (2002) study of Tamil workers on Ceylonese coffee plantations found that the Tamil workers, due to their Hindu beliefs, had many bodily prescriptions and prohibitions associated with practices of caste. Thus, although the Tamil workers were forced to adapt to the highly routinised plantation regime, they cannot be said to have ever fully embodied colonial European Modernism. The Van Ingen factory site can also be understood to be in part shaped by the incorporated histories and bodily orders of the local Mysore population. In this way, although the factory enforced western strategies and technologies of worker



Fig. 5.28 Snake skin with tag (Morris 2006: 73)

Specimens usually arrived at the factory as packages of folded skins,¹⁵⁷ which were then tagged and given an order number (recorded in the Order Book¹⁵⁸) so they could be identified and tracked as they moved through the factory (see Fig. 5.28). At any one time there might be

dozens of specimens in progress through the system and, as some of the items in batches of

work took much longer to process than others, the operation required that it was micro-managed in this way. Tagging also had the dual purpose of monitoring worker performance. Morris explains that each ‘job’ received a corresponding record card which noted who worked on each job and for how long. Each section of the factory then had a foreman who checked and signed off jobs that passed through his area. All work was therefore recorded on the job card from the moment it was received at the factory till it was dispatched. This system hence worked as a form of quality and worker control, a system needed for work that could be both tedious and unpleasant in nature. Morris explains that this system was introduced as the boring nature of some of the jobs, like paring skins, had led to disgruntled employees sabotaging valuable skins by making ‘accidental’ cuts which detracted from the value of the specimens and required costly repair work to be done. Duncan, who has explored practices of domination and resistance in nineteenth-century Ceylonese coffee plantations, argues that European strategies and technologies (like the assembly line and tagging system employed by the Van Ingen’s) were adopted in the colonies as an attempt to produce ‘abstract bodies and space’ (Duncan 2002: 318).¹⁵⁹ The factory site, just like the coffee plantations that Duncan examines, was therefore constructed to be a site of what Henri Lefebvre has termed ‘abstract

organisation and control upon the factory workers the histories and embodiments of caste in turn influenced the design and management of the factory.

¹⁵⁷ Morris (2006: 71) explains that, contrary to expectations, and despite the passage of hundreds of animals through the factory annually, there would have been ‘little or no smell, few flies and little to attract the ubiquitous scavenging kites’. This was because skinning was usually done in the field, meaning the factory only received the treated pelts. Furthermore, as soon as they arrived at the factory, the skins would be immersed in pickle or tanning solution, removing all odours. Even if a tiger was delivered fresh from the surrounding countryside, an occurrence that happened relatively rarely according to Morris, it would have been skinned somewhere in the surrounding open land and the entrails and unwanted meat would be swiftly buried. Thus, unlike the slaughterhouses on which the factory design was based, it would have never had to deal with blood.

¹⁵⁸ The basic foundation of the record keeping system were the ‘Order Books’ which recorded the arrival of specimens, client details and any special requests. The record cards for each job were then used to trace the jobs as they moved in and out of the various sections of the works. Morris (2006: 103) explains that this extraordinary detailed cross-referencing system was applied meticulously for decades and was essential to ensure that no specimens were lost in the production line or muddled up with those belonging to other customers.

¹⁵⁹ British South Asian and the Dutch East Indies colonies in the nineteenth century can therefore be understood as laboratories of modernity, according to Duncan (2002).

space: the commodification and bureaucratisation of everyday life' (Ibid).¹⁶⁰ As an ideal, the construction of abstract space requires the construction of 'abstract bodies' or 'docile bodies' to conform to it. Duncan explains that abstract bodies are 'bodies that are made docile, useful, disciplined, rational, normalised and controlled sexually; such bodies are seen as economic resources to be protected and utilised to capacity' (Ibid). Yet, as Duncan finds with the plantation workers, colonial attempts to produce rationalised bodies were often negotiated and resisted on-the-ground, as the Van Ingen worker's attempts at sabotage demonstrate.¹⁶¹ However, according to Morris (2006: 73) the Van Ingens' introduction of the strict 'tagging' monitoring regime ensured that acts of sabotage happened much less frequently¹⁶² and, if they did, the foreman knew exactly who the perpetrator was and they would have been fired immediately.¹⁶³ In this sense the tagging system can be understood, in the Foucauldian (1979) sense, as a micro-technology of surveillance and control and therefore as an extension of colonial European modernism.

All of Lord Linlithgow's van Ingen tiger head mounts in the tiger room would have been tagged before going through the factory, as evidenced by the order numbers stamped on the back of the shields. Some of the order books and indexes of 'job' cards relating to head mounts still exist so it is possible to chart the Hopetoun tigers' movements through the factory almost exactly.¹⁶⁴ Their first port of call was the 'Unclean area', which consisted of the pickling shed, the washing shed and the fleshing shed (Shed no. 5, 6 & 7 on plan).

¹⁶⁰ In *The Production of Space* (1991), although Lefebvre applies the notion of abstract space to capitalism in Europe, Duncan (2002) argues that it was equally a goal in industrial plantations and factories in the colonies. However in this context he argues that the drive to create abstract space must be understood as being cross-cut by race and older forms of pre-capitalist, non-European social relations.

¹⁶¹ Barnett (1997) and McEwan (1998) have rightly suggested that academics have overstressed the 'voice' as a key element of resistance on the part of the subaltern. Furthermore Duncan (2002), in line with Barnett and McEwan suggests that a focus upon practices in understanding resistance could prove more productive following Butler's (1996) argument that the body is a site of 'incorporated history'.

¹⁶² More covert forms of resistance may have continued but as Duncan points out 'trying to discern covert forms of resistance from colonial records is extremely difficult' (Duncan 2002: 319). However, although not possible for this study, it could be possible to interview ex-employees of the firm or their relatives as the factory would still be in 'living memory' of local Mysorians as it only closed for good in 1995.

¹⁶³ As much of the work at the factory carried out by locals was relatively unskilled, it meant that the firm did not have to hesitate in firing a 'difficult' worker. Mysore had a huge labour pool on which to draw.

¹⁶⁴ The order numbers stamped to the back of the Hopetoun shields, suggested it might be possible to track their particular order. Unfortunately through conversations with Morris the author ascertained that the order books that would have recorded the Hopetoun tigers' progression through the factory were badly moth-eaten, and so their specific job cards are lost. Yet it is possible to use the job card corresponding to Morris's personal Van Ingen tiger head mount as they would have followed the same trajectory (see Morris pgs. 103-107).



Fig. 5.29 Pickling tanks in the 'pickling shed' © Pat Morris

The masks or possible whole skins of the Hopetoun tigers would have first been sent to the pickling and washing sheds where the skins have been washed of any grease or 'dirt' (often dried-in blood) and soaked in a bath of alum and salt to ensure lasting preservation (see Fig. 5.29). The skins, once treated but still wet, were then delivered to the fleshing area in next shed. Here up to twenty men would sit crossed-legged on the stone floor scraping skins and cutting away excess meat to reduce the skin thickness as far as possible; this was vital to soften skins enough for mounting purposes. The scraping and paring down of particularly dried out or large skins could take up to several days, with the skins being periodically returned to the washing shed to be wetted. Paring down was arduous work and also blunted knives very quickly. For this reason, each man had a stone block beside them against which they could sharpen their knives. According to Morris, there were constant problems over the theft of such tools and materials and, although bookwork attempted to control this 'leakage', it was a common occurrence.¹⁶⁵ Once the foreman was satisfied a skin was sufficiently pared down it went back to pickling shed for a final 24 hour soaking in a chrome tan solution. Morris explains that tanning chemically alters the skin to prevent decomposition and to allow

¹⁶⁵ Because these workers had to sit in the same place for hours and repeat the same scraping motion over and over again, repetitive stress injuries would have been an occupational hazard. The 'theft' of knives would have therefore offered the opportunity of halting work and gaining a break from the monotony and pain. This suggests the workers at the factory had managed to work out ways of 'resisting' the techniques and methods used to control and monitor them and therefore were not simply passive before the regime of the factory. While many of those writing about resistance seem to valorise it as an organised collective action, Scott (1985) and Katz (2001) suggest that in heavily surveyed forms of work resistance can take more subtle forms, like the van Ingen workers' loss of tools to gain a break.

permanent flexibility by breaking up the collagen fibres responsible for stiffness in normal dried skins. To ensure the tiger skin's malleability for the mounting stage, the skins, once dried, would then have been kneaded to make them supple – kneading was done standing up and using the feet as implements. The treated skins were then transferred to the 'clean' or 'right side' of the factory where they were pinned out and dried.



Fig. 5.30 Outdoor mould store © Pat Morris

If making a head mount, as with the Hoptoun tigers, the next step was to make a manikin head. This was done either by making a mould working from the original skinned head or by using one of the generic moulds housed in the mould store (see Fig. 5.30). According to Morris, the innovation of the van Ingen mould system meant that the factory could process the vast number of tiger head mounts demanded by the excessive 'output' of the shikari hunters, while also achieving a consistent quality that characteristically eluded most other taxidermists of the day.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁶ The Van Ingens were necessarily protective of their technology of mass production. It was not until the firm had closed, and Morris was given access to the factory in its derelict state, that the secret behind the firm's success was unearthed.



Fig. 5.31 Recovered 'snarling' tiger mould and paper mache head © Pat Morris

To make the mould, first a head shape was moulded in clay using the skinned head of a shot tiger as a referent, then a mould was formed around it using fine-grained concrete. After the concrete had set, the clay would be removed and the mould was then ready to make multiple manikins in papier mache, 'each one an exact replica of the clay model' (Morris 2006: 78). This meant that large numbers of head mounts could be produced to a consistent quality with little actual skill required, allowing advantage to be taken of the relatively unskilled and therefore cheap labour of the indigenous population living in Mysore.¹⁶⁷ The system was so successful that more complex moulds were developed. These were made out of several pieces, permitting modelled heads to be given different expressions (see Fig. 5.31). The firm was even able to accommodate anatomical variation; tiger heads came in a range of thirteen sizes, from size one smallest to size thirteen (largest).¹⁶⁸ It was the dedicated task of one worker to match up the skulls accompanying the skins of the tigers with the nearest size of mould. A suitable mould would be selected for a particular job, based on skull measurements or estimates of the animal's size from the skin (note would also be taken as to which expression the customer or patron favoured); and then it would be taken to the bench in the manikin workshop room to be processed (see Fig. 5.32).

¹⁶⁷ This also had the added advantage for the Van Ingens in that they did not have to put resources and time into the training of employees.

¹⁶⁸ According to Joubert there were very few size thirteen tigers, but size five was very popular.



Fig. 5.32 Manikin room © Pat Morris

Several men worked continuously, full time, producing manikins; so, instead of having a mould and manikin made specifically for the Hopetoun tigers, their manikins would have simply been taken off a shelf in the mould store (see Fig. 5.33). Having manikins in store like this would have avoided holding up the taxidermic process, increasing the efficiency of the factory still further. Moreover, manikins were a guarantee of quality when relying on a relatively unskilled labour force, as a manikin-based trophy, unlike a conventional artisanal mount,¹⁶⁹ was assured from the outset regardless of the skill level of the maker. While this consideration would have been important to customers, weight would have been the major consideration when shipping trophies like those of the Sutherlands and Lord Linlithgow. The Van Ingens distinctive use of hollow papier mache manikins¹⁷⁰ meant that van Ingen head

¹⁶⁹ With conventional artisanal taxidermy every mount made would have been different; an individual work of art. Also the maker/craftsman could never be sure how it would turn out until it was finished, and by that point, if there were inconsistencies, it would be too late to alter the product.

¹⁷⁰ Morris (2006: 143) notes that it is unclear where the idea of making papier mache manikins originated. There is a long history, dating back to mid-nineteenth-century, in French and British museums, where this material was used for model making, but, the idea of using this material to create multiple taxidermy manikins came much later. According to Morris, the trade catalogue of F.C. Miles (“Mile High Taxidermy” of Denver, Colorado) claimed he was the first to supply paper forms or manikins for taxidermy and had been doing so since 1900. Paper manikins were certainly in widespread use by American taxidermists by the early twentieth century. In India, Theobalds, another Mysore taxidermist, claimed to have patented the system (see Morris 2006: 144), however they lost a legal dispute with the Van Ingen’s over the issue sometime before the First World War and ceased trading. Thus the Van Ingen’s were among the first to pioneer this method, although Morris is unsure exactly when they started using this technique, but he guesstimates that they were using moulds and papier mache as early as 1908. This was long before many others adopted the method in Europe and were probably the first taxidermists to develop it to such a sophisticated degree (i.e. accommodating anatomical variation and offering different expressions). British commercial taxidermists were curiously slow to adopt the use of manikins. Notably, the market leaders, Rowland Ward Ltd of London (see Chapter 5) ignored the many advantages of manikins and continued to practice with traditional techniques, despite their relative inefficiency (for example, skull cleaning costs time and money and head modelling requires skilled labour at every stage). This was important to the Rowland Ward brand, however, as all their promotional material made a virtue of the fact that every specimen was an individual work of art (Morris 2003). Even when moulds were adopted by the firm in the 1960s their manikins were made of fibreglass for lightness and

mounts were extremely light-weight¹⁷¹, which also meant that the Van Ingens offered the cheapest shikar trophies to ship, in turn explaining why they were *the* tiger taxidermists of choice to the upper echelons of the British Raj and Indian royalty.¹⁷²



Fig. 5.33 Leftover paper mache heads in the manikin store © Pat Morris

Large numbers of moulds were needed to account for the variations in size and pose and thus many different manikins were made of the different sizes, each size in a variety of poses. As Lord Linlithgow had requested, the docile opened mouthed pose (as opposed to the snarling opened-mouthed pose), the excess paper in the manikin would have been cut away to leave an open mouth space and the jaws (sawn from the original skull) would then have been glued in place.¹⁷³ An artificial tongue, made to fit, would then be inserted (bedded in with modelling compound), to be painted later by the finishers. Van Ingen artificial tiger tongues were

durability. Fibreglass would have been less suitable for adoption by Indian taxidermists, according to Morris (2006: 145), as it was an expensive material.

¹⁷¹ Compared to trophies prepared by traditional methods, involving the retention of bones and addition of heavy clay and plaster to replace muscle and flesh, the hollow papier mache manikins used by the Van Ingens would have been dramatically lighter.

¹⁷² The Van Ingens had many high profile customers, of which they made great play in their promotional materials: 'Among our patrons we number: H.E. The Marquis of Linlithgow (Viceroy and Governor-General of India), Lord Wellington, Lord Irwin, Lord Hardinger of Penshurst, Field Marshall Sir Phillip Chetwode, Field Marshal Sir William Birdwood, H.E. Lord Brabourne (Governor of Bombay), H.E. Sir Harry Haig (Governor of United Provinces), H.E. Sir John Anderson (Governor of Bengal), H.E. Sir James Sifton (Governor of Bihar), The Ruling Princes of India'.

¹⁷³ According to Morris (2006: 89) many tigers that came to the factory had damaged or missing teeth. As these did not look good in opened-mouthed trophies the Van Ingen's imported some specially-made porcelain teeth, each stamped with its position in the jaw (e.g. 'c' for canine, 'pm1' for first premolar). They could therefore be substituted for the real thing to present a full set of perfect teeth where necessary.

distinctive in that they were shaped in an ark with prominent papillae raised on the surface.¹⁷⁴ Once the tongue was in place, the whole manikin was then sealed with black varnish to prevent it becoming soggy when the damp skin was reapplied to the surface.

After the manikin had been sealed, it would have then been sent to the mounting shed (see Fig. 5.34) where the surface would be smoothed with sandpaper and any blemishes in the manikin would be filled using modelling compound.

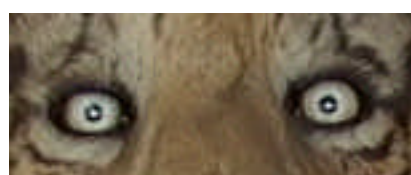
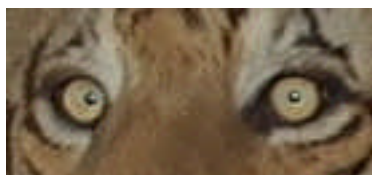


Fig. 5.34 Abandoned 'mounting shed' © Pat Morris

The surface of the manikin would have been sealed again using a varnish before the skin was reapplied. The skins would then have been brought, freshly washed, from the pickle bins (the skin and manikin would have been carefully matched using the tagging system). Two modellers worked on each individual head-mount; one to smear the manikins with a sticky adhesive paste, while the other draped the skin over the manikin and arranged it in place, tucking it deep into any wrinkles or folds that the manikin had been given. The skin, once arranged to fit, would then have been pinned in place and left to dry. The pins would have been removed once the skin had been firmly gripped by the adhesive paste. Modelling compound was used to fill any gaps that existed between the lips and underlying manikin and also to fill out details of the mouth in open-mouthed heads, as in the case of the Hopetoun tigers. At this point dried specimens would be transferred to the finishing shed (no.10). The 'finishers' were the specially trained workers who performed the most skilled tasks in the van

¹⁷⁴ Green (2006: 74) states that tiger tongues have specially adapted with prominent papillae to rasp flesh from the bone.

Ingen taxidermic process like placing and setting the eyes and achieving the fine paint work on the lips, noses and eyelids using specialist enamel paint and finely tipped brushes.¹⁷⁵ Making and preparing the eyes was a particularly important task as they were such a distinctive feature of van Ingen head mounts. Tiger eyes were always made individually, according to Morris (2006: 124) by painting blank eyes that were specially made for the firm in bulk by an East German manufacturer.¹⁷⁶ The basic eyes were of clear glass, with a circular black pupil in the centre. Several men were employed as ‘eye painters’ and it was their job to apply a concentric ring of pale blue around the pupil and then to colour wash the eye, usually yellow, several times to achieve intensity of colour (all the paint was applied to the flat back of the glass eye). The eyes had to be painted as a pair to ensure they matched properly, but at the same time, as Morris points out, they were ‘all different, effectively like a set of fingerprints, unique to each specimen’ (Ibid: 125).



After the eyes had been painted, it was the job of another worker to seal the eye (to prevent the oil based paint lifting off when in contact with the damp clay) and to embed it in a small plug of adhesive modelling compound that would set hard when dry. The painting and positioning of the eyes was overseen by de Wet or Joubert Van Ingen as getting the eyes right was essential for achieving realistic taxidermy. The painted eyes were particularly precious to the Van Ingens and so they were kept in a locked cabinet and yet another logbook was maintained to control their use, with an entry made as each pair of eyes was issued for use. This logbook was kept to keep a check on the theft or loss of these expensive and exclusive items in order to prevent them being used in the products of rival taxidermy firms. After the eyes had been set in place, the finishing touches of paint work would be made to the lips, noses and eyelids and the whiskers re-inserted.¹⁷⁷ The correct execution of these jobs was vital

¹⁷⁵ Morris (2006: 99) notes that many of the specialist workers had worked at the factory for thirty years or more.

¹⁷⁶ Apparently (Morris 2006: 124) this manufacturer had been sent sets of tiger eyes preserved in spirit by the Van Ingen’s as guides to shape and size.

¹⁷⁷ Part of the finishing operation involved replacing the whiskers in tiger heads. These would have been plucked out in the field to avoid theft (according to Morris 2006: 96) as they were especially prized by local people as magical charms. Even within the factory, there was a danger of theft and also of damage during the early treatment of the skin, and so if they had not been removed already they would have been removed when the skins reached the factory. Whiskers were therefore removed, stored and then reunited with their ‘owner’ as part of the final stages of finishing. Insertion of the whiskers was one man’s specialist job; a skilled operation as tiger whiskers are different lengths and need to be inserted to create a correctly positioned array otherwise

for ensuring the quality of the mounts and so they were carried out by the most experienced workers, again under the careful supervision of de Wet or Joubert Van Ingen.

After these final finishing jobs had met the Van Ingens' approval, the finished tiger head mounts would have been sprayed with a dilute suspension of white arsenic¹⁷⁸ and then attached to one of the firm's distinctive black shields.¹⁷⁹ If the customer had so requested, as with two of the Hoptoun Tigers, a data label giving the date and place of the shoot would then have been attached to the front of the shield beneath the head mount. The finished mounts would have then been sent to the dispatch store (see Fig. 5.35) which was always kept locked for security reasons, and only certain trusted members of staff had keys to it.

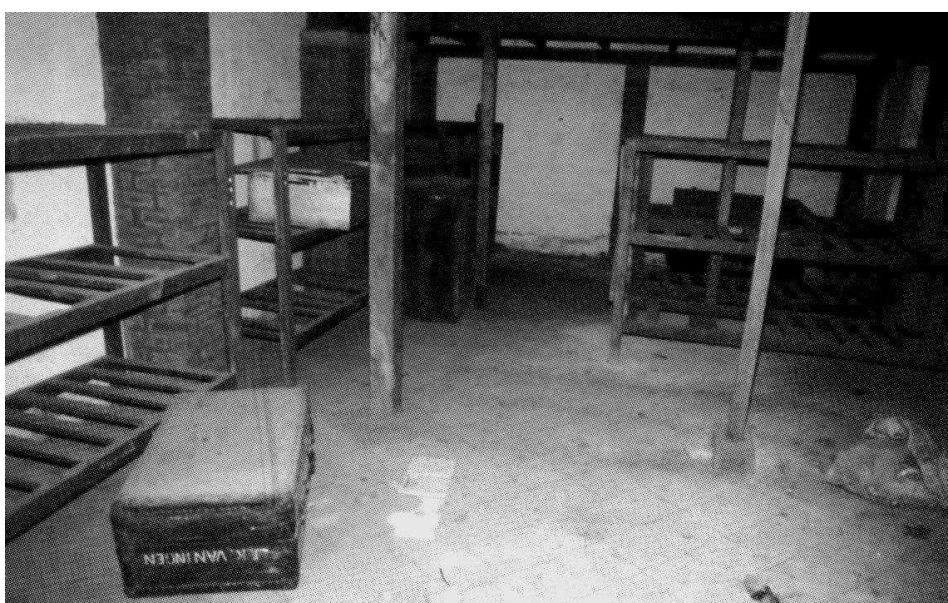


Fig. 5.35 Abandoned 'dispatch store' © Pat Morris

In the dispatch store, mounts would have been first wrapped in sacking and then bound with string before being fitted securely into wooden packing cases. Vulnerable parts were protected using bundles of paper. Two men were employed just for the packing and despatch of specimens. Before the lid was battened down, the contents would have been liberally sprinkled with powdered arsenic. This was to prevent the skins being infested by insects that could, on

the finished head mount would look peculiar. Packets of whiskers were kept as spares, and often boar whiskers (more easily available) were substituted. Despite this careful operation, most Van Ingen tiger and leopard mounts existing today lack their full set of whiskers. On close inspection, the author observed that the Hoptoun tigers hardly had any remaining whiskers.

¹⁷⁸ According to Morris (2006: 91), arsenic was used quite liberally at the factory, both as a skin preservative and as an insecticide in the form of a dilute suspension sprayed onto the fur. Cyanide and DDT were also employed to protect the skins against insect attack. According to Joubert Van Ingen there were 'no problems' with poisoning the men who performed the mixing jobs or handled the skins (Ibid).

¹⁷⁹ They were distinctive because they were much larger than the shields used by other firms and the teak wood was painted black, to allow the tiger's colouring and markings to stand out.

long journeys shut away in the dark for many weeks on board a boat and in dockside warehouses, ravage and entirely ruin the skins of the specimens being shipped. After the arsenic powder had been applied, the packing crate (see Fig. 5.36), once secured, was ready for dispatch.



Fig. 5.36 Van Ingen packing crate still awaiting dispatch © Pat Morris

Before the crates were loaded onto the lorry or small bullock cart that was used to take specimens to the Mysore train station, the last action was for the office, also located in the despatch store, to annotate the main Order Book with a large D (often in red pencil) and the date, to indicate when the order had been finally despatched to its owner. The two date ledgers salvaged by Morris allow for a rough calculation to be made for how long a certain job took. While the time taken to complete a full tiger mount averaged about a year, less demanding head mounts, including the drying time needed, took about three or four months to complete. Therefore, Lord Lithgow's head mounts would have arrived at his residence in New Delhi within fourth months of them being shot. Linlithgow would have retained the crates so that they could be used again at the end of his Viceroyship when the heads would have been sent to be hung at his Hopetoun House residence back in Scotland.

Afterlife

My sketches of 'the field' and 'the factory' are intended to demonstrate how far it is possible, with an inventive use of source materials, to disclose something of biogeographies of the Hopetoun tigers' making. My aim here has not been to 'piece the fragments of space and time

back together’, but rather to ‘trace out the threads and follow their convolutions’ (Pile 2002: 116). Unravelling the threads of the Hopetoun tigers - by developing a methodology which incorporates specimen-artefacts as object-based archive - enabled me to work past their initially assumed inarticulacy (i.e. because they did not have complementary documentary records). Ingold’s (2007) critique of material culture studies assisted in moving beyond any initial fixation with the representational form and presentation of the tiger heads by encouraging a view that the mounts are active assemblages of the materials, practices and movements which brought them into existence. Ingold’s corrective, combined with my own knowledge of the craft techniques of taxidermy practice, and its material culture of trade tools, substances, fabrics and dead matter, convinced me that the mounts’ physical form and underlying fabric could be used as a resource for recovering the biogeographies of their making (i.e. the entangled life-forces, practices and geographies that brought them into existence). Moreover, the use of a partial and distributed archive to build-up a picture of the lifeworlds of ‘the field’ and ‘the factory’ involved in the Hopetoun tigers’ making and mobilisation marks an attempt on my part to acknowledge and work with the elusive character of the past. By making do with what remains and by developing expressive modes of researching, historical narratives can actually draw force from absence and incompleteness as they resist the notion that the past is wholly recoverable or can be fully represented. By the same measure, it is necessary to recognise responsibilities on the part of the researcher carefully and faithfully to rehabilitate the historical remains left. This commitment to piecing together evidence (in whatever form it takes) of past events means that histories like the Hopetoun tigers, which may be obscured by conventional biographical and textual resources, remain to be told.

At first glance the tiger mounts could be dismissed as obsolete relics of practices with which we no longer comfortably associate ourselves. Yet by recuperating the biogeographies of the shikari field and the van Ingen taxidermy factory that the Hopetoun tigers moved through and were transformed within, we expose the decapitated heads as evidence of the much larger forces and practices involved in their making. While Naylor has recently expressed a concern that in expressing the texture of ‘places inhabited and lives lived’, we can lose a sense of ‘the more-than-local’ nature of the world, I hope to have shown that my approach taken to recovering intimate histories and geographies offers a way of folding together detailed sketches of the more intimate lifeworlds through which such specimens moved with broader narratives about the colonial forces and practices which enabled and drove such movements. For example, the approach taken allowed me to demonstrate that by building up a reputation for the tiger as entirely malign, the British Raj in one move ‘elevated their status above that of

natives, made comfortable slaughter from elephant back into heroic duel, legitimised their sport and made forests easier to destroy' (Green 2006: 68). However, while this process indeed elevated their status, I then argued that it would be counter-productive for my intentions to interpret the colonial scopic regime, and therefore the experience of the shikar hunter, as a disengaged 'view *on* the world' (Dubow 2000: 93). More grounded versions of colonial vision forwarded by the likes of Dubow (Ibid) and Lorimer and Whatmore (2008) framed my attempts to present, through the use of a collection of shikari photo-albums, the shikari hunters as embedded and embodied beings and the shikari hunt as a highly visceral experience. These more grounded accounts of colonial experience also enabled not only an appreciation of the lived and embodied desires of the shikari hunters, but, in utilising more dispersed accounts of agency and mobility, they also demonstrated how it was possible to empower and mobilise the shikari attendants and the hunted tigers (in both embodied but particularly in their disembodied states).

Developing strategies to reconnect colonial visions with embodied and affective aspects of colonial experience was similarly important for recuperating the lifeworld of the van Ingen factory. This would have been an unknown world to the Shikari hunters, and may have stayed that way altogether if it were not for Morris's (2006) salvage efforts. Possibly the largest purpose-built taxidermy operation ever, Morris's record of the factory allowed me to differently figure the working of bodies and bodies at work at the site. While the van Ingen workforce were forced to labour under a highly routinised and heavily monitored assembly line regime, the workers were still able, in admittedly subtle ways, to negotiate western strategies of worker organisation and control. Although Lefebvre (1991) applies the notion of 'abstract space' to capitalism in Europe, Duncan (2002) highlights that in industrial plantations and factories in the colonies there was equally a goal to create abstract space and therefore abstract/docile bodies. However, in the colonial context, Duncan qualifies that the notion of abstract space must be understood as being cross-cut by race and older forms of pre-capitalist, non-European social relations. For example, in the case of the van Ingen factory, while the workers' actions and movements were heavily prescribed and controlled through the factory's assembly-line regime, their own bodily prescriptions and prohibitions associated with practices of caste meant that the factory site was in part shaped by the incorporated histories and bodily orders of the local Mysorian population. In this way, although the factory enforced western capitalist strategies and technologies of control upon the factory workers, their incorporated histories in turn influenced the design of the factory and thus the organisation and experience of the workforce. Similarly, the van Ingen family's attempts to create docile bodies was resisted, albeit subtly, by some of the workers through their employment of

strategies to halt the work flow (i.e. the ‘theft’ or breaking of tools ensured that the workers gained a break from the monotony of the repetitive tasks they had to carry out). However, in response the Van Ingens developed more effective monitoring strategies through the use of their innovative tagging system and job card scheme, which made it near impossible for the workers to negotiate or resist as every aspect of their work was being monitored.

However, while the Van Ingen’s adoption of capitalist production methods negatively impacted upon the working conditions of the workforce, it was the secret to the factory’s success and longevity (the factory was in operation from 1912-1995). The factory’s assembly-line organisation and, in particular, its innovative mould and manikin technology enabled the firm to process many hundreds of tigers and other big-game annually, to a consistently high quality that characteristically eluded other taxidermists of the day. Conventional artisanal taxidermy required investment in training and time taken to make the product, and this fact, combined with changing social attitudes towards taxidermy, meant that in Europe at least commercial taxidermy was fast becoming a dying trade by the 1930’s, the time of the Van Ingens heyday. However, the Van Ingen’s use of manikins for head trophies and whole mounts meant they were able to mass produce their products to a consistent high quality without having to invest in developing a highly-skilled labour force, which therefore cut the costs of production and their product range dramatically. At the height of its productivity from the mid-1920s to the late-1930s, the factory employed over 150 people and processed over 400 tigers annually (an average of eight tigers a week), as the order books confirm(see Fig. 5.37) (Morris 2006: 150).

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1936

Month	Tiger	Panther	Bear	Small B. Tiger	Primo ornith	Ant.	Caribou trophy	W. Wolf	Pig	cat	Jack Tach	chint	Apices Sopran	1935 order	1936 order
January	92	79	5	7	6	6	14	1	5	2	10	27	6	144	183
February	52	60	7	8	4	6	22	-	-	8	4	15	3	-	162
March	66	40	7	5	-	6	16	1	2	5	2	12	1	8	136
April	64	44	11	2	5	9	6	-	-	3	11	2	1	-	131
May	97	79	7	9	9	18	8	1	2	2	-	4	1	-	163
June	58	86	15	3	13	17	6	4	2	4	2	4	1	-	128
July	23	41	3	5	1	3	3	4	-	-	1	6	2	-	77
August	17	19	4	-	1	7	11	13	-	3	6	4	-	-	58
September	12	21	3	2	1	2	5	2	-	-	1	4	3	7	46
October	7	17	3	1	1	4	13	4	3	-	1	4	8	1	51
November	18	28	4	5	1	1	1	3	-	-	3	4	4	-	64
December	23	37	15	3	1	1	1	2	-	-	2	9	1	-	103
Total	523	551	84	50	43	80	106	35	14	27	43	95	31	160	1302

Fig. 5.37 Total orders processed in 1936: 1302, including 523 tiger, 551 panther and 84 bear.

According to Morris (Ibid: 143) no other taxidermist of that time could have produced so many to such a high quality. While the Second World War was not the drastic interruption that might be expected, reducing business by less than half, the factory never regained its pre-war level of activity and production began its steady decline from then on, reflecting changing attitudes towards wildlife in India. While work levels remained stable for two decades after the war (thanks in part to India gaining independence and the subsequent democratisation of tiger and other forms of hunting), the business slowly declined from the 1960s onwards as the Indian government put increasing pressure on big-game hunting, finally eliminating it altogether in the late-1980s (see Morris 2006: 150).

However, by this time the damage had already been done to the tiger. The relentless culling of the tiger in the form of hunting or poaching throughout the twentieth century meant that the wild tiger in India, also severely compromised by loss of habitat and prey (see Green 2006), was all but extinct when the Van Ingen factory finally closed down in 1995. While some may wish to forget the history and legacy of shikar hunting and the van Ingen taxidermy operation, it is important to mark such histories as, to quote Benjamin, 'every image of the past that is not recognised by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably' (Benjamin 1992[1940]: 247). For me, the implications of this statement are twofold. First, there are elements of the past that are deemed unworthy of entry into conventional history, and it is the obligation of the radical historian to ensure a place for these elements. And secondly, if the past is allowed to disappear it will take with it a knowledge of the present, because, as Erica Fudge has argued (Fudge 2002: 3), 'the two are inseparable'. An introduction to the artistic work of contemporary film maker Sami van Ingen, grandson of de Wet Van Ingen, helps to impress this point. Although now based in Finland, the legacy of family business and his own childhood in India are often explored in his films.¹⁸⁰ The initial inspiration for his film *Days* (2000), for example, came from a BBC news bulletin that forecast the extinction of the wild tiger in 200 days. The bluntness of this fact, combined with his family's history as tiger taxidermists forced van Ingen to reflect upon this enigmatic species' disappearance. Kennedy (unpublished) gives an accurate synopsis of the film:

Days starts with images of animal skeletons on display, ready for purchase. The camera travels repeatedly down a jungle path. A leopard prances behind a fence. The leopard is the only animal we see, hidden by confinement. A safari through Marajahole National Park turns up nothing. The most striking image in the film is

¹⁸⁰ Although also the great-grandson of Robert Flaherty, the pioneering film-maker of *Nanook of the North*, Sami van Ingen regards his filmmaking as more of a direct lineage from his van Ingen grandfather teaching him photography (see Kennedy Unpublished). The abandoned van Ingen factory makes appearances in two of his films, *Blow* (1998) and *Days* (2000), which van Ingen remembers as a 'place of many bewildering sights and sounds' (ibid).

a leopard skin being rolled up and crushed down by human feet, for easy storage and shipping. The long travelling shot through the jungle that ends the piece is both unnerving and central to the film. The camera is either the eye of the tiger travelling through the bush or a hunter on safari. In either case, the jungle is empty and no animals are seen until we return to the room where animal bones are stacked and labelled.¹⁸¹

In the film, then, big cats are constantly represented, but are never really there. The point van Ingen was trying to impress in *Days* is that the tiger, like many other species, mainly now exists in representations, it being extremely difficult to encounter the ‘real’ thing. Yet as Braun and Castree have argued, ‘what counts as ‘nature’, and our experience of nature (including our bodies), is always historical, related to a configuration of historically specific and representational practices which form the nuts and bolts of our interactions with, and investments in, the world’ (Castree and Braun 1998: 17). Therefore, when returning to the tiger room of Hopetoun House and re-examining the eight tiger head mounts with knowledge that their similar expressions result from standardised industrial moulds, it heightens an awareness that their replicate expressions are an embodied record not only of the drudgery of colonial labour but a species’ (both embodied and disembodied) *unnatural* history.

The next chapter – ***Still Life*** – makes the thesis’ overall conclusions.

¹⁸¹ The filmmaker informed the author that he managed to capture ‘Ahmed’, one of the firms’ last and longest-serving employees, giving a massage treatment with his feet to the leopard (to soften the skin) just before the firm closed down for good in 1995. It would have therefore been one of the last jobs to have been carried out at the works.

Still life

Recap

In this thesis I have worked to recover the practices and biogeographies enrolled in the making of taxidermy specimens and collections. This exercise has countered the predominant trend in academic literature on taxidermy to dwell exclusively on the form and meaning of taxidermy (e.g. see Haraway 1998; Griesemer 1990; Wonders 1993, 2003; Ryan 2000; Shell 2004; Poliquin 2008). In one respect the thesis can be understood as an attempt to chart the rise, decline and revival (to follow) of taxidermy as a craft practice (in its various guises). This aim has also been crosscut with various philosophical, methodological, historical and ethical/political ambitions. Each are worthy of brief review at this point. To take philosophical first, in *Animal/Object* the objective was, following Derrida's insistence that philosophy should address the 'entire field of the living' (Derrida 2001) and Whatmore's insistence that geographers should attend to the 'more-than-human' worlds in which we live (2004, 2006), to present and frame the thesis within an 'onto-story' placing life in all its *multiplicity* and *connectivity* centre-stage. Methodologically, I favoured 'modest' forms of theory/methodology (derived from STS and NRT) where theories/methods are employed as tools working *together* with empirical materials and information to generate new insights, rather than overarching frameworks into which empirical information can be made to fit. Historically, as the discussion in *Practice* demonstrated, contrast emerges between working with an ethics for harnessing life, and historical inquiry as the study of the dead. However, my adoption of a montage or 'assemblage' method (Law 2004) rejects some of the conventions of the empirical historian,¹⁸² enabling me to pioneer novel ways of illuminating the past (i.e. juxtaposing ethnographies of contemporary practice with historical 'how-to-do' taxidermy

¹⁸² While this is to say that, like Benjamin, I understand the historical fantasy of the empirical historian is characterised by a sense of ending or closure which serves to objectify and reify history, and work instead with a non-linear, multi-spatial understanding of history, I still, as my research demonstrates, place value on the archival scholars fidelity to the empirical record and ability to work on difficult and fragmentary sources.

manuals), to work *at* and *on* the limits of life and death, time and history, movement and stasis. Ethically/politically, my research into the cultural-historical geographies of taxidermy has alighted with conceptual, methodological and ethical responsibility most notably on *both* the craft practices of the taxidermist and the embodiment of the ‘dead’ animals necessarily involved. By way of a thesis conclusion I seek to extend my ethical/political ambitions, demonstrating how ‘the past life of craft and craftsmen also suggests ways of using tools, organising bodily movements, thinking about materials that remain alternative, viable proposals about how to conduct life with skill’ (Sennett 2008: 11).

This closing chapter commences with a discussion of the various ways in which my thesis can be considered to be a study of life after death both conceptually and empirically through the three main empirical chapters. This is followed by a more explicit attempt to chart the rise and fall of taxidermy as both a museum and a commercial practice than has already been offered in the empirical chapters. Finally in charting the revival of the crafts of taxidermy through the work of creative arts practitioners the last section of the thesis seeks to re-draw an ethic of apprenticeship as a means for academics to respond more openly to the world.

Life Study

This thesis is aligned with various theoretical currents which have sought to *revitalise* geographical enquiry by drawing on biophilosophies (Whitehead 1978; Bergson 1983; Deleuze 2004) that figure life by its *multiplicity* and *connectivity* rather than the human being at the centre. I have sought to work with and extend a *biogeographical* perspective that attends to the ‘potentialities of all manner of social objects, forces, assemblages through and involved in the co-fabrication of [both past and present] socio-material worlds’ (Whatmore 2006: 604). While I wanted to follow Whatmore and draw on vitalist ontologies to attend to the ways in which lifeworlds are co-fabricated in *practice*, I wanted also to rework the idea of *biogeography* so as to attend to the *fabric* (or texture) of those lifeworlds. This reflects a concern that the topological inflections of vitalism claiming to get at the ‘livingness’ of the world (Whatmore 2006: 203), are in danger of leading to a ‘flattening cohabitation of all things’ (Thrift 2000a: 215) and also of reiterating the world as ‘a flat grid-like surface’ (Whatmore 2002: 147).¹⁸³ I sought to amend Whatmore’s revitalised notion of biogeography by developing a biogeographical perspective

¹⁸³ For example, although Whatmore sought to counter the ‘deadening’ technical inflection of ANT by drawing on the biophilosophical writings of Deleuze and Guattari (1987), preferring their ‘vital topology’ over the ‘flat topology’ of ANT, her fidelity to ANT lent a sense of ‘flatness’ to her empirical accounts to the extent that there were curious indifferences between the different ‘qualities’ and ‘textures’ of the different things enrolled in hybrid geographies she examined (Whatmore 2002)

that attends to the vital nexus of the ‘bio’ and ‘geo’, but also attends to the ‘graphy’ or texture (the topographical¹⁸⁴) of those earth-life entanglements. While amending biogeographical enquiry so that it attends to the ‘fabric of the world’ (Merleau-Ponty 1969: 256), or ‘graphies’ in my case, I have also sought to draw on a conception of matter/the material which was not based on an assumption of plenitude, nor on incessant relatedness, yet was also not dependent on permanence or presence.¹⁸⁵ By working with an understanding of matter as ‘not yet’ (Anderson 2004) I wanted to anchor and re-texture topological accounts of earth-life entanglements while also suggesting the tensions and ambiguities between presence and absence that are inherent to such entanglements. This move away from equating matter with physical permanence was particularly valuable as the overall aim of my thesis was to recover biogeographies of *past* taxidermy practice and so it made sense to work with an account of matter couched more explicitly in terms of absence, distance and displacement.

While the three main empirical chapters *Practice*, *Site* and *Movement* on one level chart the development and decline of both museum and commercial taxidermy (an elaboration on which will follow in due course), they are all also experiments, of one kind or another, in life-study. For example, *Practice* constituted an examination of the life (and death) study of the taxidermist. The decision was taken to focus explicitly on taxidermy as a craft practice in this chapter as, before it would be possible to attempt a recovery of the biogeographies of past taxidermy practice in *Site* and *Movement*, I felt it essential to understand the development taxidermy as an embodied craft practice and its associated unique material culture of trade tools, substances, fabrics and dead matter. Following a broadly non-representational agenda, I put myself in the position of apprentice to taxidermist Peter Summers of the NMS to gain a deeper appreciation for the practice, recognising that the position of learner would be an instructive context in which to enquire into the craft techniques of taxidermy and reflect on how present-day practice relates to representations charting the development of the practice provided in historical ‘how-to-do’ manuals. The decision taken to immerse myself in the lifeworld of a practising taxidermist was in response to the historical manuals’ failure to communicate the realm of tacit knowledge and skill of the taxidermist, nor the sensate material culture of the craft. However, contrast emerged between non-representational theory as an ethics for harnessing life and historical inquiry as the study of the dead. In using my observations of and engagements with present practice to ‘enliven’ the descriptions of past

¹⁸⁴ Topographical because 3-dimensional and a matter of undulating surfaces, rather than ‘topology’, a matter of abstract relative locations, 3-dimensional maybe, but not anchored to ‘stuff’ (the undulations of surfaces) (see Laurier and Philo 1999).

¹⁸⁵ By this I mean not lapse back into traditional topographical imaginings of matter or ‘landscape’ as static or ‘sedentarist’ which sits uneasily with the fluid, heterogeneous, entanglements of topological biogeographies.

practice provided by the manuals, it seemed I would have to commit myself, much like the taxidermist does, to resurrecting the dead.

Yet, as I discovered in my study of Peter's life and death work, taxidermy is not about messianic revival (a common misconception); rather, it is a craft practice committed to making the best of the materials with which the practitioner has to work. I sought to harness this same ethos in my project – to make the best of the materials I had to hand. This meant accepting the limits of what could be retrieved and presented through my juxtaposition of observations of present-day practice and the descriptions of practice provided in period manuals. Although Peter was able to express what he was trying to achieve through his craftwork in both words and movement, and I feel my descriptions of his practice transcend the 'dead denotation' of the period instruction manuals, I still fear my words fall short of depicting the craft techniques of taxidermy practice. Even when electing to substitute the image for the word,¹⁸⁶ unless the reader has witnessed the practice before it may still be difficult to comprehend taxidermy as a *practice*. This deficiency gets at the problem of the 'inarticulacy of craft' that Sennett (2008) articulates, where craftwork establishes a realm of skill and knowledge beyond human verbal and visual capacities to explain. However, paralysis should not result at the thought of reaching aporias, and rather the limitations of what can be retrieved and presented should be accepted. Otherwise a further problem of craftwork emerges, the secrets of a craft practice die when the master dies (Sennett 2008: 78). For this reason, Sennett argues that master craftsmen, the likes of Peter, should be 'pestered to explain themselves, to dredge out the assemblage of clues and moves they have absorbed in silence within' as otherwise the secrets of their craftwork will remain unknowable (Ibid). My own descriptions of Peter's practice may fall short. Meanwhile Peter, one of the last full-time practising taxidermists in Britain, has since retired. Thus my archived video footage comes to constitute an important record of not only a master taxidermist's craft but of a dying craft more generally. This might be where daring to fail can to evince a certain strength; indeed, if one is willing to attempt a certain task even when recognising that it may be impossible – such as that of attempting to re-present practice – it lends a modesty to the work, possibly the fundamental goal of good craftwork.

Failing, then, in this sense, can be an instructive experience, as to work well, according to Sennett, 'every craftsman has to learn from these experiences rather than fight them' (Ibid: 10). Just as a good craftsman must recognise the limitations of the tools and materials at their disposal, therefore, I too sought to temper my recovery of past biogeographies of taxidermy practice in *Site and Movement* by crafting an approach to historical inquiry that worked with

¹⁸⁶ Still images of video footage were utilised to illustrate certain 'decisive moments' in the craft.

absence, incompleteness, mess and failure. This rationale to 'make-do' was in part inspired by Peter's ethics of 'making the best of' the donated specimens with which he had to work, which were often in a poor state of preservation. Just as Peter was aware of the limits of his 'materials', I sought to work with the limitations of the historical source materials that I had at my disposal (many of which were fragmentary and incomplete) for recuperating the pasts of taxidermy practice. In this regard *Site* experimented in the recuperation of the 'lifeworlds' of two taxidermists, notably their working spaces and working practices. In doing so, the chapter sought to develop the possibilities of a supple approach to life-writing/life-studies whilst also engaging with a range of intellectual-conceptual issues (practice; materiality; loss; recovery) associated with the study and historical recuperation of past lives. Working with the recognition that life exceeds individual chronology and that a person exists (both in life and death) as an 'ill defined constellation' consisting 'of a spread of biographical events and memories of events, and a dispersed category of material objects, traces, and leavings' (Thrift 2000a: 220, quoting Gell 1998: 222), the lives of Sim and Kirk were found displaced and dispersed in leftovers (tools, correspondences, personal effects, business records, pictorial and photographic representations). My effort was to retrieve and recuperate these remainders in order to disclose something of the lifeworlds of practice the taxidermists once constructed, and thus creatively narrate and re-place their life-stories of working practice. While Thrift is suspicious of biography as a mode of proceeding, in that it 'provides a suspect intimacy with the dead', George Sim's diaries, correspondence and business records presented themselves as the perfect opportunity for exploring biography as a medium for disclosing and valuing the legacy of a life. However, while the notion of biography has been reworked within recent geographic scholarship, possibly overcoming Thrift's argument that it is a genre for 'colonising traces', there is still a prevalent tendency in the writing of life-geographies to view life from the point of view of individual agents. I sought to counter this tendency in my recuperation of the life worlds of practice of Charles Kirk as rather than do so through the telling of Kirk's biography, I sought to differently figure the working of bodies and bodies at work at Kirk's workshop, tracing how a craft-style, and therefore body-practices, can achieve spatial extension and temporal duration (can be passed on) through a series of apprenticeships. This tied in with my biogeographical perspective which recognises how life exceeds individual chronology and understands practices as 'material bodies of work or styles that have gained enough stability over time, through, for example, the establishment of corporeal routines and specialised devices, to reproduce themselves' (Thrift 2008: 8). Of course, this approach of tracing the passing-on of a craft style through different workshops was partly demanded by the fragmentary nature of the remainders relating to Kirk's biogeographies of practice. Moreover, even though the more detailed documentary remains relating Sim enabled a more

traditional biographical recovery, for both Sim and Kirk I was dealing with archival partiality since we can never properly claim to retain everything of someone. The creative challenge of historical life-study/recovery (in whatever form it takes) is to ascertain what can conceivably be said of, or inferred from, those things that remain.

In *Movement* I sought to extend the epistemic focus of life-study/recovery to the non-human by tracing the ‘afterlives’ of a group of mounted tiger heads. Rather than attempt a recovery of their prior ‘real’ lives, I recovered the biogeographies behind their making and mobilisation, in the process recuperating the entangled natural and cultural practices and geographies involved in their transformation from embodied tigers to static wall mounts. Following my biogeographical perspective, I avoided narrating a singular, linear and, therefore, ‘flat’¹⁸⁷ ‘object biography’ or ‘commodity story’, instead focusing on recovering the lifeworlds of practice involved in the tigers making, specifically in this instance the broadly defined realms of ‘field’ and ‘factory’. Yet again, the challenge of the tigers’ inarticulacy and archival partiality scrambled the possibility of ‘full’ recovery. However, by developing a methodology which incorporated specimen artefacts as an object-based archive and by amassing and rehabilitating diverse historical remainders, forming unorthodox archives that tell of the lifeworlds of practice through which the tigers once moved (in various states of liveliness), I was able to draw force once more from absence and incompleteness. Indeed, in all three experiments in life-study/recovery in *Practice*, *Site* and *Movement*, by ‘making-do’ with what remained, fragmentary sources came to be understood as renewable resources for the telling of unfashionable and overlooked pasts. This commitment to making the best of the materials to hand ensures that the lifeworlds of present (Peter) and past taxidermists (Sim/Kirk), together with the biogeographies involved in the making of individual specimens and collections (the Hopetoun tigers) do not disappear without trace. Therefore while much emphasis has been placed on reanimating bodies, things and places by recent geographical projects, my recuperation of the hidden agencies that haunt the present in intimate and complex ways (like the tiger heads) helps to problematise the vitalist and ‘presentist’ ethos of current trends in geography that seek to ‘enliven the world into immaterial practices and processes’, insisting that geographers return to the repressed, rejected and expelled elements of historical memory (Maddern and Adey 2008: 291). While I sought to offer glimpses of the bodies and practices that once animated past lifeworlds of taxidermy, from Scottish commercial workshops to the colonial hunting field and largest taxidermy factory ever in operation, by recuperating their lingering traces, I also wanted to move away from the idea that these past biogeographies can be simply accessed or reanimated through the reclamation and presentation of their historical

¹⁸⁷ Both ontologically and spatially – i.e. topological.

remainders. This said, through my revival work there is *still* life, as these histories now have reopened futures: their recuperated traces exist to be reworked and rechanneled by others.

Rise, fall and revival of craft

Museum taxidermy practice

While the three main empirical chapters *Practice*, *Site* and *Movement* are in part experiments in life-study/recovery, they also more explicitly chart the development and decline of both museum and commercial taxidermy practice. For example, *Practice*, by combining close studies of period taxidermy manuals produced by museum practitioners and ethnographic observations of a practising museum taxidermist, Peter Summers, traces the development of museum taxidermy from ‘scientific tool’ (Star 1992), to organised practice for elucidating experiences of organic perfection (Haraway 1989), to delegitimated (scientifically that is) institutional display technique. This also charts the changing role of the taxidermist in museums. Taxidermy as a full-time occupation associated with natural history emerged out of the need for trained practitioners in the preservation of study skins, being sent in their thousands to institutions like the Jardin des Plantes and the British Museum from the late eighteenth-century onwards by field naturalists, so that large collections could be amassed for comparative study. From the mid-nineteenth century, with the problems of preservation largely overcome, attention turned to advancing display techniques as the natural history museum turned from ‘storehouse to showcase’ (Star 1992: 269) thanks in part to public demand for more realistic and dynamic displays as featured by innovative taxidermists at the likes of the 1851 Great Exhibition. Yet, while many British taxidermists of this generation (e.g. Browne 1896)¹⁸⁸ were attempting to formalise taxidermy as an integrated natural science profession, as biology institutionalised into its modern form there was no longer the need for this sort of craft skill (except in a ‘behind-the-scenes’ type way) and the taxidermist was therefore cast as a relic of an outmoded quasi-scientific practice and their craft and its products increasingly confined to the spheres of education and conservation.¹⁸⁹ The problem was that, as biology professionalised, ‘laboratories outgrew museums and herbaria as the

¹⁸⁸ Browne, for example, put forward the idea of creating a professional curriculum for aspiring ‘scientific taxidermic artists’ that included study in anatomy, chemistry and comparative morphology.

¹⁸⁹ Kohler (2003) states that in the move towards the ‘labscales’ of modern biology the categorisation, taxonomic ordering and material collection of species was replaced by the study of organisms at the molecular level. This is not to say that these labscales have not produced their own craft skills.

premier places of modern science' (Kholer 2003: 3); and the replication of scientific results in laboratories demanded that no 'idiosyncratic local, tacit, or personal knowledge leaked into the product' (Star 1992: 275). Taxidermy's decline as a fully legitimate scientific occupation can therefore be read as symptomatic of modern science's push to erase individual, craft skill from the scientific workplace (Star 1992: 275).¹⁹⁰

The lasting legacy of the craft's loss of status and their products' marginalisation is that skilled museum taxidermists are now few. The taxidermist's job now comprises the repair and maintenance of existing collections, rather than the creation of new mounts and displays. In some institutions the post of taxidermist has been replaced completely, as the work of making museum dioramas has gone to curators trained in the field of 'museology' and the preservation of study specimens has passed to curators of zoology.¹⁹¹ While the relevance of having 'death on display' (Hauser 1998; Poliquin 2008) has posed difficult questions for museums and scientific collections in an era of interactive display and communication, paradoxically, taxidermy displays remain a source of wonder for many visitors, especially children. Consequently some museums continue to value and update their collections. Moreover, taxidermy has even been made fashionable again by its use in large-scale museum refits such as the Kelvingrove Museum, Glasgow and the National Museum Scotland, Edinburgh. However, with very few taxidermists remaining who possess the necessary skills for the production of accomplished specimens, it may be that this latest revival is short-lived. If the secrets of accomplished taxidermy vanish with the retirement of master craftsmen like Peter Summers, the long-term viable life of the craft is in doubt. Alternatives do exist. As my discussion later will demonstrate taxidermy is a craft skill being revived elsewhere by creative arts practitioners and it is in their hands that the future of the craft arguably rests.

Commercial taxidermy practice

'The commercial taxidermist must make a profit to stay in business, and must sometimes concentrate on production at the expense of quality.' (McCall 1975:1)

¹⁹⁰ Yet as geographical work on historical and contemporary geographies of science has shown scientific knowledge both in the past and presently is generated by a series of place-specific body practices and thus, although science does not admit it idiosyncratic local, tacit, and personal knowledge can leak into the product (e.g. Naylor 2002; Kohler 2003; Livingstone 2003).

¹⁹¹ Where complex taxidermy or modelling work is required, such practitioners would hire in a free-lance taxidermist.

In comparison to the museum taxidermist, to a degree sheltered from changing social attitudes towards taxidermy¹⁹² and in work through the maintenance of scientific study collections, the commercial taxidermist has seen demand for their craft skills steadily diminish where today there are just a handful of full-time commercial taxidermists working in Britain. The situation was very different in the late-nineteenth to early-twentieth-century, when almost every small town in Britain boasted its own commercial taxidermist (Herriot 1968). In this period, as my study of George Sim demonstrated, it was characteristic for taxidermists to work as one-man operations, though sometimes with an assistant, specialising in certain aspects of the trade (i.e. decorative, trophy or natural history). Specialising in certain forms of taxidermy many commercial taxidermists operating at the time developed their own distinctive styles and present-day collectors of taxidermy can often distinguish the work of individual taxidermists in auction salerooms without even looking at their trade labels. While there were some accomplished taxidermists, like Sim, many were self-taught and combined taxidermy work with other services like gun-smithing, picture-framing and hairdressing.¹⁹³ There were no standards governing the practice and thus the quality of work produced throughout the country was inconsistent. Moreover the fact that many of the taxidermists were self-taught and self-employed meant that craft skills were not passed on, putting the long-term viability of the craft in doubt. As Sennett (2008) explains, as with any workshop, if the master dies without passing on the secrets of his craft the craft dies too.

However as my study of Charles Kirk's and Co. evidences, attempts were made to professionalise and organise the craft. A number of larger taxidermy firms emerged at the end of the nineteenth century and at the start of the twentieth, in conjunction with increased demand for decorative and trophy taxidermy, which began to implement apprenticeship schemes. Roland Ward and Co was the biggest of such emerging firms and the Ward workshops became a taxidermy training school of sorts.¹⁹⁴ The firm offered seven-year apprenticeships training apprentices in the various arts of taxidermy from which they could then choose to focus on a particular aspect of the craft where they showed proficiency, and so a division of labour and a degree of specialisation took place. In this way Ward's workshops functioned in the style of a medieval guild, as exemplified by Sennett (2008: 74-77), where the

¹⁹² Taxidermy as an educational product in the museum setting was seen as more legitimate than having it as fashionable product in the domestic setting.

¹⁹³ While it may seem odd to offer hairdressing in combination with taxidermy services, Morris (1993), from his analysis of hundreds of trade labels, states that these were the most common services to be offered by taxidermists in this period.

¹⁹⁴ Other large firms of the time were 'Edward Gerrard and Sons' of Camden, London and 'Peter Spicer and Son's' of Lemington Spa and 'Hutchings and Sons' of Aberystwyth. As they were family firms they did not offer apprenticeship schemes like Ward's did.

craft was passed on by the master (Ward) and journeymen (men who had already served an apprenticeship or were already proficient in the craft) to the apprentices; and so craft authority became incarnate in a three-tiered hierarchy. Ward as ‘master’ would have held the craft authority, and it is clear from *The Sportsman’s Manual* (1894) that he had a clear philosophy for how taxidermy should be studied and practiced. The problem of knowledge transfer beyond the workshop nonetheless emerges under such a system, as ‘in a workshop where the master’s individuality and distinctiveness dominates, tacit knowledge is also likely to dominate’; and thus ‘[o]nce the master dies, all the clues, moves, and insights he or she has gathered into the totality of the work cannot be reconstructed; there’s no way to ask him or her to make the tacit explicit’ (Sennett 2008: 78). According to Sennett the problem with this type of model for knowledge/craft transfer is that apprentices are often expected to absorb the masters’ lessons through osmosis and thus the tacit knowledge of a craft or procedure is left unformulated and uncodified in words. In well-run workshops like Ward’s there was, even so, clearly a balance of tacit and explicit knowledge transfer. While Sennett has argued that the authority of the master ‘derives from seeing what others don’t see, knowing what they don’t know; their authority is manifest in their silence’ (Ibid), it is clear that Ward made attempts to formulate and codify his practice in words through his manual and in bodies through his apprenticeships schemes. While his *Sportsman’s Handbook* offers only basic instructions for the setting up of trophy mounts, and fails to pass on the full tacit knowledge required for skilled craftwork, his standards of practice were embodied by his apprentices. Unless those apprentices went on to open their own workshops, though, the extended authority of the workshop can be ‘frequently short-lived and silent’ (Sennett 2008: 80).

There was at least one break-away firm that followed and passed on the Wardian house-style in the form of Charles Kirk and Co. of Glasgow. “Wardian” practice was therefore given an afterlife. Like Ward, Kirk offered seven-year apprenticeships and his employees were also encouraged to specialise in different aspects of taxidermy craft so that as the firm grew a division of labour did too. It is clear the extent to which Kirk’s journeymen and apprentices embodied the standards of Wardian taxidermy, since even the most expert taxidermy collectors today find it difficult to distinguish between work by Ward and Kirk workshops. This said, a series of unfortunate events – the death of several of his journeymen in WW1, a fire that devastated his workshop at 156 Sauchiehall Street and Kirk’s own premature death from asthma – coupled with changing social attitudes towards taxidermy conspired to devastate both the future of the firm and the possibilities for the passing-on of its house style. After the firm’s closure, some of Kirk’s employees went to work as taxidermists at Scotland’s leading museums, the Kelvingrove and the NMS, thereby continuing Kirk’s, and by extension

Ward's, craft; and yet, essentially after the deaths of both masters, Ward and Kirk, 'a concrete limit [was] placed on the long-term viable life of the workshop[s]' craft practice (Sennett 2008: 74).

While the ultimate demise of Ward and Kirk's firm's can be attributed to taxidermy becoming unfashionable and morally questionable it can also be considered symptomatic of the twentieth-century drive to erase individual craft skill from the capitalist market place (echoing science's drive to do the same). With the advent of mass production, businesses were investing in technologies rather than people, and so any business that was built on a craft skill taking years of training to achieve was inevitably going to struggle. While it might be considered distasteful to mourn the passing of craftwork and workshops which were imbricated in the mass slaughter of animals, at the same time the deep-seated craft of practitioners like Ward and Kirk and their apprentices, all practicing taxidermy to reproduce, from their observations, the life-like beauty of nature in its natural state, is worth marking. Valuing their passion for the craft they practised, including their philosophy that skilled workmanship and thus a quality product takes investment in time and people to achieve, is something which resonates with present concerns to work with 'practices of slowness' to counter our increasingly 'frenetic future-orientated capitalist world' (Thrift 2000c: 35). This observation will be revisited at the close of the conclusion, but for now I wish to make the point that, while recognising that there can be no skilled work without standards, I am in agreement with Sennett that 'it is infinitely preferable that these standards be embodied in a human being than in a lifeless, static code of practice' or, indeed, as the van Ingen case highlights, that craftwork is replaced completely by technologies of mass production (Sennett 2008: 80).

Unlike the workshops of Kirk and Ward, the Van Ingen taxidermy firm in Mysore continued production until the end of the twentieth century. This is attributable to the purpose built factory, designed for the mass production of taxidermy products and the development of innovative time-saving technologies and devices. Of course, the workshop with its division of labour and specialisation was, as Sennett (2008: 84) would point out, merely the 'way station' to the factory. Discussing the evolution of the assembly line through its origins in the auto industry, Sennett writes that 'auto plants combine the assembly line with spaces reserved for small, specialist teams' and consequently the modern auto factory can be thought of as 'an archipelago of workshops' (Ibid: 54). In the same manner, although the Van Ingen factory was based on the 'disassembly' line model of Chicago slaughterhouse factories, it can also be thought of as operating as a series of linked workshops. As the factory plan indicates, unlike the more linear disassembly line of the slaughterhouse, the factory was divided into a series of

sheds, each one dealing with a different stage of production and a team of workers that worked solely on the tasks required for that stage in production. Although the Van Ingens sought to apply western-capitalist forms of production to the factory design, it was in part shaped by the incorporated histories and bodily prescriptions of the local Mysorian workforce; due to the practices of caste the left side of the factory was reserved for the 'unclean' work and thus the lower caste workers. However, the western-inspired technologies of worker surveillance that the Van Ingens employed, like the tagging and log-book systems, were extremely effective in monitoring not only the progress of the work but also for ensuring that workers consistently met expected standards in the expected timescale. Although Mysorian workers subtly negotiated the imposition of capitalist production methods, ultimately it was these methods that governed the working of bodies and bodies at work at the site.

Arguably it was the adoption of capitalist production methods that ensured the success and longevity of the Van Ingen firm for over seventy years. This longevity can be attributed to three main factors. Firstly the assembly-line style design of the factory, allowed a division of labour with workers trained in specific tasks only. In turn, this meant that the Van Ingens were able to take advantage of the relatively unskilled and cheap local Mysorian labour force, keeping labour expenditure low. Secondly, and more specifically, the factories development of innovative mould and manikin technologies made it possible to by-pass time-consuming and skill-dependant processes of modelling bodies and heads from scratch, further cutting the time and cost of production. The Van Ingens' mould technology also enabled the firm to 'process' large numbers of head and full-mounts annually in comparison to the modest output of traditional artisanal taxidermists. Thirdly that the factory was located in Mysore and the majority of its custom came from the wealthiest in Indian and Raj society made it immune from moral and ethical debates over the status of hunting in Europe throughout the twentieth-century.¹⁹⁵ Even with Indian Independence in 1947, the firm continued to do good business since independence allowed new business opportunities hitherto confined to the ruling elites. Only from the 1960's onwards did the firm's business start to decline, due in part to the depletion of tiger populations in India and because the Indian government began to put policies in place to conserve the remnant populations.¹⁹⁶ The Van Ingen factory contributed significantly to the mass slaughter of tigers and other big-game in India, by developing a technology that allowed the processing of over 400 tigers annually. It was therefore complicit in the near extinction of the wild tiger in India.

¹⁹⁵ By comparison, these debates significantly contributed to the decline of British commercial taxidermy.

¹⁹⁶ The decline in tiger populations can in part be attributed to big-game hunting (killing both tigers and their prey) but also to the reduction of habitat for both tigers and their prey due to development (Green 2006).

The Van Ingen factory can also be seen as symptomatic of the drive to erase traces of individual craft skill and, therefore, inconsistency and irregularity from capitalist products. Whereas in the workshop, as has already been argued, individuality and distinctiveness dominate, in the factory the emphasis is on replication and standardisation. The Van Ingens' mould and manikin technologies embody this principle, their use ensuring that a consistent standard could be replicated for each product made by the factory. Unlike traditional artisanal taxidermy where every mount was made differently,¹⁹⁷ the Van Ingen use of 'type-forms'¹⁹⁸ for their taxidermy products meant that they were largely free from inconsistency. This makes Van Ingen products easily identifiable as their replicate 'snarling' or 'open mouthed' expressions are distinctive, but it could be argued that, unlike with artisanal taxidermy, where the maker leaves a personal mark of their presence on the product (i.e. through their personal style or through irregularities), the actual workers involved in the production of Van Ingen taxidermy products remain anonymous. While the whole point of taxidermy is to hide the fact that it has been made in an attempt to create an illusion of animal presence, the maker still leaves traces of their handiwork. While it may be easier to distinguish these traces and attribute them to an individual taxidermist or workshop in the case of artisanal taxidermy, due to irregularities or distinctive styles of craftwork, even those mounts made in factories – such as the Hopetoun tigers – still bare traces of the 'craftwork' that has gone into the making of standardised products. Yet, if irregular work symbolises the free agency of the craftsman, following the Romantic analyst of craft John Ruskin, then the regular marks of craftwork on each of the Hopetoun tigers can be taken to symbolise the pacified agency of Van Ingen workers. Anne Phillips (1998) suggests we ought not belittle such anonymous traces, as part of what she calls 'the politics of presence' they still signal the workers presence in the making of the tiger heads. Sennett argues, in the history of craftsmanship 'maker's marks have usually carried no political message', but the story of the Hopetoun tigers, just like the story of ancient Roman brickwork that Sennett describes, does make a particular connection between craftwork and politics: "“Presence,” in the modern way of thinking seems self-referential, emphasizing the word “I”. Ancient brickwork established presence through small details marking ‘it’: the detail itself. In the lowly Roman craftsman way, anonymity and presence could combine' (Sennett 2008: 135). Anonymity and presence combine on two levels with the

¹⁹⁷ This is because traditional taxidermists make a replacement body from scratch from sculptural materials and using a skinned body as a guide.

¹⁹⁸ The concept of a 'type-form' – where things are made to be replicated through a mould technology – was put forward by Molotch in *Where Stuff Comes From: How Toasters, Toilets, Cars, Computers, and Many Other Things Come to Be as They Are* (2003). Peter Summers informed the author that, in his opinion, the development of manikin or 'type-form' technology in the UK and the US has had a negative impact on the craft of taxidermy. This is because taxidermists training nowadays do not have to learn about animal anatomy and form as they can simply place skins over the manikins without having to build/sculpt a replacement body. Peter feels that the wide-spread use of manikins in modern-day taxidermy is regrettable because taxidermy is now more widely seen and practised as a hobby rather than as an art-form which requires a great deal of skill and ingenuity.

Hopetoun tigers; the stitch marks and brush strokes mark the anonymous presence of the Van Ingen workers, and the tiger skin also importantly marks presence of an always already anonymous tiger. If the Hopetoun tigers' representation as trophy souvenirs marks a desire to take possession, to singularise their meaning and significance, the small details, like the seam of stitch-work, and the tiger skin itself, importantly interrupt any reading of the tiger heads as purely representational since these index the beings and practices enrolled in the trophy mounts' making. While the factory workers and the individual tigers may always remain anonymous perhaps this is more telling of the history of tiger-making and the history of taxidermy more generally: the tigers embody the modern drive to standardise and replicate and thus, in turn, eliminate individuality and inconsistency and, therefore, craftsmanship.

In the closing section of the thesis, I offer an argument to revalue craftwork and craftsmanship both intellectually and practically. There have been various notable attempts to revive the status of craftsmanship and craftwork from John Ruskin, to Thorstein Veblen, to C. Wright Mills, and, most recently, Richard Sennett. In *The Craftsman* (1998: 118), Sennett promotes a positive conception of craftsmanship for the twenty-first century, one acknowledging that 'working with machines rather than fighting with them is the radical, emancipatory challenge'. While he agrees that the romantic view of craftsmanship (as espoused by the likes of Ruskin) has become anachronistic, he argues that craftsmanship still names an 'enduring, basic human impulse; the desire to do a job well for its own sake' (Ibid: 9). Moreover, he believes that the craftsman can serve as an emblem for all people looking for a freer space in which to experiment and make mistakes, which the modern workplace has stifled. Yet craftsmanship, for Sennett, is more than just about technical practice, he considers it a philosophy for living well: the 'craftsman's sustaining habits raise [questions] about how we anchor ourselves in the world' (Ibid: 11). He argues that craftsmanship finds a natural philosophical home with pragmatism as for more than a century this movement has dedicated itself to making philosophical sense of what he calls the 'craft of experience' (Ibid: 288). Thus, although Sennett's book traces the history of craftsmanship as the craft of making physical things, he argues that in the 'philosophical workshop' the craftsman must be turned outwards and apply the lessons inherent in craftwork to human relationships:

'I've stressed the positive, open role routine and practicing play in the work of crafting physical things; so too do people need to practice their relations with one another, learn the skills of anticipation and revision in order to improve these relations' (Ibid: 289).

Yet Sennett also cautions that craftsmanship, both in the practical and philosophical sense, is not to be confused with a desire for perfectionism. Thus just as the craftsman making material

things must learn from failure, anyone seeking to conduct a life with skill must be ‘fallibly attuned to the actual circumstances of life’ (Ibid: 199). This understanding of craftsmanship tempers search for perfectionism as the modern craftsman must work with an awareness that ‘progress is not linear’ and that ‘skill builds by moving irregularly, and sometimes by taking detours’ (Ibid: 238).

Taking my lead from the taxidermist-craftsman, I have similarly been concerned throughout this thesis, as noted above, to work with failure rather than fight it amidst the detour and delay. While my tendency to take ‘the long way round’ springs from an explicitly experimental intent and methodology, making things difficult for myself (for example in attempting to glean insight into past practice) could be seen as the anathema of craftsmanship as simplicity is often seen to represent the goal of good craftwork.¹⁹⁹ Yet, as Sennett underlines, the ability to deal with resistances and difficulties, whether found or made, is an important test for the craftsman and thus ‘the difficult and incomplete should be positive events in our understanding’ of craftsmanship (Ibid). While this means learning to tolerate frustration, the ‘slowness of craft time’, as Sennett (Ibid: 295) puts it, also enables the work of reflection and imagination. This is in tune with Thrift’s ethic of craftsmanship: ‘a means of composition and channelling which involves bringing together discipline and concentration, understanding and inspiration, in order to bring out potential’ (Thrift 2008: 15). For example, the taxidermist craftsman’s ethic of resourcefulness suggested ways for me to use the tools and materials at my disposal so as to get the best out of them. This philosophy to ‘make-do’ enabled me to awaken the potential residing in the residual materials of past taxidermy practice that I had managed to gather, while at the same time retaining a fundamental modesty over what could be gleaned from them.

By way of conclusion to this thesis, I, like Sennett, wish to re-draw an ethic of craftsmanship as an application of good working procedures in academia and to life in general. However, while Sennett is profoundly suspicious of the Ruskinian/Romantic conceptions of craftsmanship which have continued to permeate more recent attempts to resist the advance of industrialisation and neoliberalism, he fails to set out how his more positive conception of craftsmanship, one that works with advances in technology, might be taken up and applied by others. As Bell (2008: 30) indicates in a review of *The Craftsman*, Sennett promotes his conception of craftsmanship as ‘a wise, humane socialism’, yet neglects to define its doctrines.

¹⁹⁹ Simplicity as a goal in craftwork, as Sennett (2008: 225) outlines, is part of the measure of ‘soundness’ in practice. However, difficulties, whether found or made, challenge what has traditionally been measured as ‘soundness’ in practice, since soundness of practice could be measured by one’s ability to respond well to difficulties either found or made as both require toleration of frustration and imagination.

In my view Sennett also fails adequately to overcome two important short-comings of our inherited understanding of craftsmanship. First, although aware of the historical gendering of skill which produced the word *craftsman* and therefore the ethic of ‘craftsmanship’, Sennett is still complicit in perpetuating this still-living myth as he fails to adequately qualify his continued use of these terms or, indeed, come up with viable alternatives. Second, although he stipulates that the advance of technology does not augur the end of skill, by continually looking at the past life of craft and craftsmen he fails to provide viable proposals for conducting a life *with* skill in the twenty-first century. It is with these deficiencies in mind that in the closing section of the thesis I demonstrate what a reworked notion of craftsmanship has to offer. Taking a lead from creative arts practitioners who have revived the craft skills of the taxidermist I aim to show how their understanding and use of craftwork demonstrates how craft can be re-incorporated into academic practice (and beyond) whilst overcoming some of Sennett’s shortcomings.

Taxidermy futures and re-gathering an ethic of apprenticeship

While the position of the taxidermist has been sidelined in museums and all but disappeared from the commercial scene (in the UK at least), there *has* been a revival of the craft practices of the taxidermist by contemporary arts practitioners. Most visible among these is Damien Hirst and his formaldehyde works. Lesser known are Thomas Grunfeld’s *Misfit* series of ‘new’ species compositely created from various animal parts, and a Dutch trio known as the Idiots who transform regular creatures – rabbits, hedgehogs, swans, birds, mice – into the tragic heroes of contemporary fairytales (see Fig. 6.1).²⁰⁰ The collective term, ‘botched taxidermy’, for these types of work has been proposed by Steve Baker (Baker 2000). Baker stipulates that the term is not to be taken too literally, since some of the pieces he reviews did use taxidermy, others presented the imperfectly preserved animal body in other ways. For Baker the point is that all of the artists ‘botched the [animal] body or got it “wrong”, in one way or another’ in contrast to the illusion of life (or animal perfection) attempted by the conventional taxidermist (Baker 2008: 4). Art works produced by the likes of Jordan Baseman (who taught himself basic taxidermy techniques to create a number of striking sculptural works that used the skins of domestic animals that he found as road-kill) were for Baker ‘defining images of the 1990’s that helped us to think through our inevitable contradictory relation to the other-than-human or more-than-human world’ (Ibid: 5).

²⁰⁰ Echoing the use of anthropomorphic taxidermy in the past like at Walter Potter’s Museum.



Fig. 6.1 *Ophelia*, 235 x 80 x 80 cm, materials: taxidermy lion, ceramics / glass in collection, National Museum Oslo, 2005 © The Idiots.

'Botched taxidermy' signals an important development in contemporary art. It helps to bring the animal and the non-human world, which for much of the twentieth century had been seen as undeserving of serious attention, back into critical focus:

'In botching the body, in calling into question the categories and boundaries of the human and the nonhuman, the pure, the perfect, the whole, the beautiful and the proper, they held out the promise of an art, to borrow Adam Phillips' tantalizing words, in which "the idea of human completeness disappears", and whose difficult effect might also offer what he calls "good ways of bearing our incompleteness"' (Baker 2008: 4).

Yet botching, for Baker, is not just a descriptive term. It also offers itself as a practical method for dealing with postmodern incompleteness. According to Baker 'botching' is the perfect working method for the postmodern craftsman 'precisely because of its openness to getting things wrong' (Ibid). At the same time he also qualifies that while the verb 'to botch' usually means 'to go wrong', it can also mean 'sticking or cobbling something together in a make-shift way... with no attempt at perfection but equally with no implication of the thing falling apart' (Baker 2000: 63-64).

In a certain light my assemblage or ‘make-do’ method (in part inspired by the craft practices of the taxidermist) could be considered a form of botching. I have assembled makeshift archives so as to acknowledge and work with absence and incompleteness yet also trust in disparate elements coming together. Moreover, Baker insists that if imperfection and botched form count for anything it is that they render the materials out of which things are made ‘abrasively visible’ (Ibid: 62). I too have attempted to make materials count precisely by not forcing them to fit within a pre-determined narrative, in recognition that ‘materials [themselves can] create knowledge, or at least encourage open and imaginative thought’ (Baker 2000: 61). This said, while the notion of botching has an ethos of playfulness and experimentalism I am concerned that any push for quick results undermines a commitment to the fine detail that good craftwork can require.

Botching as a working method does not present itself as a convincing alternative to craftwork. Craftsmanship, in comparison to botching, places value in learning things slowly, recognising it takes time to develop skilled and thoughtful practice. For example, while I understand that many works of botched taxidermy are less engaged in gaining knowledge and clarity and more in casting their misfit creatures as ‘troubled and troubling animal things’ (Poliquin 2008: 131), as an academic I find this ethic of work equally troubling. Some artists employing and subverting the techniques of taxidermy in ‘botched’ works have only a limited grasp of the craft practices of taxidermy and the motivations of the taxidermist. It is almost too easy to ‘recycle’ or subvert taxidermy to make an urgent statement about the power relations existing between humans and animals, and by extension, to cast the taxidermist as ethically questionable. For example, Angela Singer calls into question the unnecessary violence that humans visit on animals through a series of works attempting to alter both the aesthetic and meaning of the trophy mount, using a process that she calls ‘de-taxidermy’ (Aloi 2008: 10). In one work, entitled *Sore*, she removed the skin from the trophy mount of a deer head, taking it back to its original supporting taxidermic form and added a new ‘flesh’ created by coating and carving blood-red wax (see Fig. 6.2). A committed animal rights activist, Singer explains how her idea for the piece developed out of a conversation she had with the hunter who had shot the trophy, who explained to her that after he skinned the stag, he had sawn off the antlers, and as antlers contain a blood reservoir, when cut the blood spurted forth drenching both the hunter and stag (Singer in conversation with Aloi 2008a). Many of her subsequent ‘de-taxidermised’ trophy mounts similarly relate the aesthetics of the work to the history of the individual animal in a bid to force the viewer to question how and why the animal died. However, while Singer’s and other botched taxidermy works make provocative statements about the exploitation of

non-human living beings by humans, in the push for shock and immediacy complexity can be lost.



Fig. 6.2 *Sore*, 2002-03 recycled taxidermic support, mixed media, 630x480x610mm ©Angela Singer

These criticisms of Singer's and other botched taxidermy works are comparable to my criticism of academic commentaries on taxidermy which tend to focus critique of taxidermy on the representational end-points (e.g. Haraway 1989; Wonders 2003). In both instances it is very easy to utilise taxidermy representations to make particular arguments about human mastery over the natural world, and in so doing offer only simplistic narratives of human-animal relations, and paradoxically to perpetuate the anthropocentrism which is being targeted. By focusing on recovering the practices behind the making of taxidermy representations I have attempted to move away from these representational types of critique, instead drawing out the complex and entangled natural and cultural practices that brought taxidermy specimens and zoological collections into existence. While these efforts are aligned with work in cultural geography seeking to counteract 'deadening effects' (Thrift and Dewsbury 2000) in an active world, such an approach is also inspired by the work of artists, who have thoughtfully incorporated the skills of the taxidermist into their art-works and

practice. A brief consideration of these artists follows, demonstrating how their work has helped re-orientate my understanding of craftsmanship and alerted me to the possibility of engaging in forms of collaborative craft-work as an academic.

Re-drawing an ethic of apprenticeship

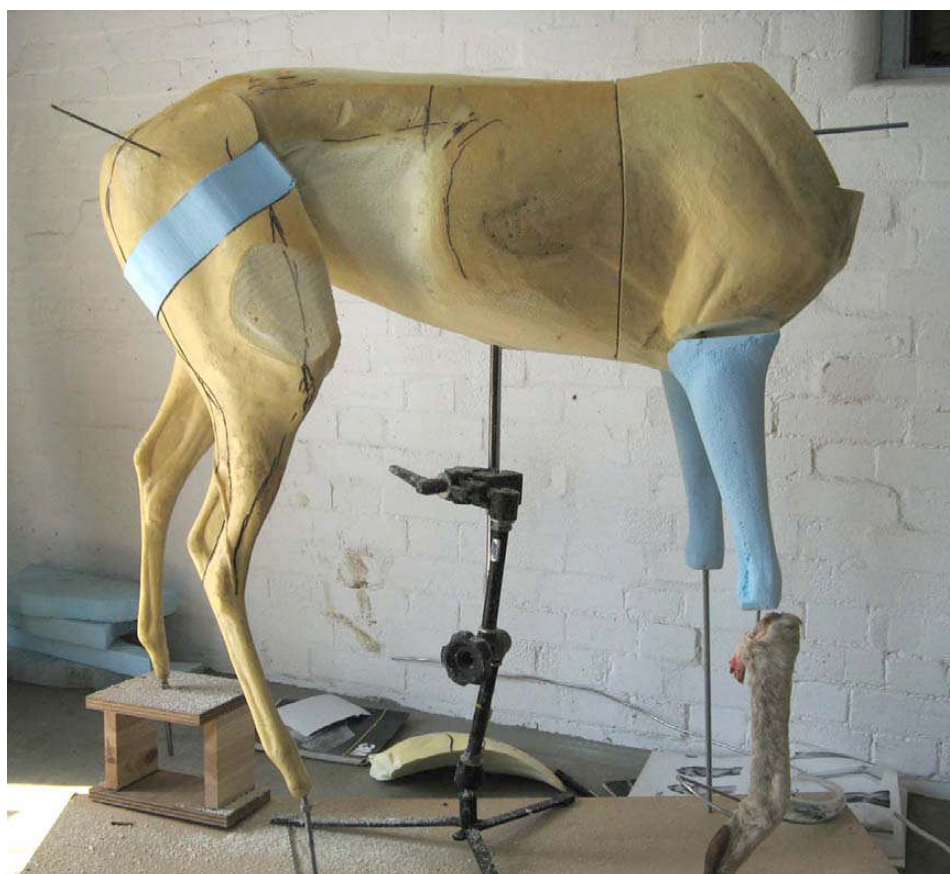


Fig. 6.3 Image from Mayer's studio, work in progress for Charles Harvey, 2008 ©Emily Mayer

The artists Emily Mayer and Andrea Roe differ from those who harness taxidermy in 'botched' work as they have been committed to learn the craft practices of the taxidermist, so they might be incorporated into their own artistic practice. Mayer is often cited as being the real pioneer of taxidermy in contemporary art, training first as a taxidermist before studying sculpture and since developing a revolutionary taxidermy technique known as 'erosion moulding', for which her services have been employed by the likes of Damien Hirst and Charles Harvey (Mayer in conversation with Aloï 2008b: 49). While Mayer has been attributed with rescuing a dying art, inspiring a new wave of contemporary taxidermy *as* art, she insists that it is The Guild of Taxidermists (founded in 1976) – who have done much to raise the profile and standards of taxidermy in the UK. Mayer joined the Guild as a teenager and at annual workshops, providing master-classes in aspects of the craft, she learned from the finest

taxidermists working.²⁰¹ Observing the craft of professionals, she learned that a good taxidermist needs to be an artist *and* naturalist rolled into one. Having mastered the basics, Mayer learned to produce even more realistic, almost hyper-real, taxidermy mounts. Dissatisfied with the shrinkage and discolouration that can occur when tanning skins, she developed her ‘erosion moulding’ technique, which did away with the problems of preserving the skin which had plagued the taxidermist from the craft’s inception:

‘In essence, the animal is set up in the desired position, a mould is made which encapsulates the hair and the animal is allowed to decompose until the hair is released from the skin. The entire carcass including the skin is then removed from the mould and pigmented resins replicating the skin tones are cast into the mould. The moulding material is destroyed and you are left with an exact replica of the animal with real hair ‘growing’ from a resin cast’. (Mayer in conversation with Aloï 2008b: 49)

The resin ‘skins’ produced by this technique appear more lifelike as the colour exists within the material (instead of being painted on) and can be made to appear translucent, and thus the technique is perfect for use on both small rodents and animals like primates with large patches of skin without fur. Hirst commissioned Mayer’s talents to make two ‘rotting’ cow heads for his work *One Thousand Years*, using her erosion moulding technique, producing ‘extraordinarily lifelike results’ (Barkham 2008).²⁰² Mayer developed the technique for her own artwork in which she is primarily interested in producing animals that appear dead or in some way challenge or subvert conventional ideas about taxidermy, and for this to work ‘the animal has to look utterly convincing’ (Aloï 2008b: 49; see Fig. 6.4).

²⁰¹ The Guild of Taxidermists is the only officially recognised organisation actively working with the legislative authorities to secure the future for legitimate taxidermy in the UK. Its members include well established professionals, enthusiastic amateurs and collectors of taxidermy. Over the past 30 years the Guild has raised the profile and standard of UK taxidermy. Their lecture and seminar series works to secure the future of the craft by passing on advice, demonstrating new techniques and disseminating important information with regard to current and future legislation affecting taxidermy. Meetings also provide the opportunity for members to bring along their own work and enter it for competitions, credit judging or just get the opinion of a professional on a beginner's piece of work. Meetings therefore grant the unique opportunity of bringing taxidermists together from all over the UK and overseas (who are usually isolated in the daily practice) to form networks, exchange information and gain valuable knowledge and expertise. The Guild also produce a journal that aims to promote the craft, giving advice on improving practice and making use of modern taxidermy techniques.

²⁰² So lifelike was Mayer’s cast head, that most of the art critics initially presumed the head was an actually decomposing. For example, Guardian art critique Jonathon Jones wrote of Hirst’s grisly masterpiece that it was a work ‘in which a race of flies are born in a white cube inside one half of a long glass tank; in the other half of the tank rests a rotting cow head. To feed on it, the flies have to find their way through specially created openings into that part of their sealed world – which is also where Hirst has placed an insect-o-cutor. In the rush to feed, they are massacred; to live is to die.’ (Jones 2009).



Fig. 6.4 *The Dog's Bollocks*, glass, ceramic, plastic, epoxy resin, hair, specimens in spirit, 36.5 x 55.7 x 22.1 cm © Emily Mayer

Andrea Roe's interest in taxidermy was fostered through her association with the NMS where, after volunteering as a bird preparator cleaning and making up skins for the museum collection and joining the UK Guild of Taxidermists, she secured a Leverhulme Trust sponsored residency to observe and work alongside the taxidermists of the NMS full-time. The residency enabled Roe to explore the correspondences between her artistic practice as a sculptor and the craft practices of the taxidermist.²⁰³ Working alongside taxidermist Peter Summers she gained a deeper appreciation for the skills necessary to successfully separate a skin from a body and rearrange it in lifelike form. Roe, through her time spent working alongside Summers, came to realise just how difficult it is to produce accomplished specimens, as the taxidermist has to marry a deep knowledge of animals both in life and death with sculptural ability. She was also intrigued to find out from observing Peter and from going to Guild workshops that there is no definitive way to prepare a mount, and that 'opinions differ at all stages of the process and each taxidermist spends time developing his own style and technique which identifies his work from another craftsman' (Roe in conversation with Frank 2008: 49). Roe hence initially concerned herself with documenting critical stages in the taxidermy process in order to expose these hidden moments to a wider audience. In a video work entitled *Kingfisher*, for example, by documenting Peter setting up a specimen kingfisher,

²⁰³ At the NMS, the taxidermy section is regarded as one of the best in Europe and the taxidermists produce cutting-edge taxidermy to capture unusual or momentary behaviours that demonstrate particular behaviours or adaptations. This was exemplified recently by the special NMS exhibition *Cats... the ultimate predators*, which attracted more than 40,000 visitors.

the intention was to capture the moment when the bird changes appearance from a formless skin to a recognisable bird: ‘an interesting change happens when the eyes are inserted and the skin is still attached at the beak, goes back over the head. It is this particular moment when the raw material is transformed into a believable live animal and I sought to capture that’ (Ibid: 47; see Fig. 6.5).



Fig. 6.5 *Kingfisher*, kingfisher, dvd, taxidermy: Peter Summers, 2006 © Andrea Roe

Through her residency, Roe also leaned to appreciate the research that went into the construction of both individual taxidermy displays and the NMS’s research collections more widely. At the time of her residency the ‘Natural Sciences’ department (of which the taxidermy workshop is part) were preparing for the exhibition *Cats... the ultimate predators*, and Roe found it fascinating ‘to peer in on a research team where individuals would pool their knowledge, compare photos, watch videos of animal behaviour and argue over artistry and accuracy of pose’, catching ‘cross wind conversations... often rich with species specific detail’ (Ibid: 46). Roe wanted to reveal this behind-the-scenes knowledge to a wider audience in a work produced collaboratively with Peter and Daren Cox (Clock maker at the NMS). Crossing the traditional mimetic crafts of taxidermy with mechanical and electronic design, the team worked to produce *Paddling Gull*, a hybrid of authentic herring gull skin, taxidermy bird body and animatronic legs. The gull demonstrates foot-paddling, an activity particular to birds where they paddle the ground to imitate rain and bring worms to the surface to eat. Roe’s rationale for developing works of ‘animatronic taxidermy’, like *Paddling Gull*, is that they are a

visual and sensory means for revealing usually hidden moments of nature to a museum public. While Roe is interested in making artwork that can function as an interactive exhibit in an educational context (communicating species-specific behaviour) she also wants it to work in a gallery where the gulls' obsessive footstomping could be interpreted quite differently, perhaps as an evocation 'of our essential humanness by bringing together our scientific knowledge of the natural world, mastery of invention, and marvellous ability to invest symbolic meaning in objects and experiences' (Roe in interview with O'Keefe 2007; see Fig. 6.6).



Fig. 6.6 *Padding Gull*, herring gull, motor, Meccano, power supply bird mechanics, Darren Cox, taxidermy, Peter Summers. Photo credit, John K McGregor eca , 2006 © Andrea Roe.

Taxidermy is often cast as macabre and gruesome, and the taxidermist as morally repugnant. In revealing the great skill required to produce accomplished specimens, Mayer and Roe do much to repair the reputation of the craft and the status of the taxidermist in contemporary art, and beyond. While Mayer and Roe similarly use taxidermy to question human-animal relations, they do so with an ethical commitment to both the craft practices of the taxidermist and the dead animals necessarily involved. Taxidermy has suffered at the hands of a reactionary politics and while obviously there are acts associated with the craft which remain morally repugnant, like the slaughter of animals for the purposes of making trophy mounts, Roe's work in particular highlights that there can be something poetic if not beautiful about transforming dead animals to appear alive. As I myself discovered observing Peter and other taxidermists at Guild workshops, the majority working in the UK are, like George Sim and Charles Kirk before them, sincere naturalists seeking to recreate the unique form of the once

living animal as faithfully as possible²⁰⁴ and have a strict ethical policy of only using donated and road-kill specimens.²⁰⁵ Since taxidermists nowadays have to work with donated animals, the guiding principles of the taxidermist are very much of repair and improvisation, rather than the perfectionism striven for in the heyday of illusionistic realism, which has now been so heavily critiqued by academic and artistic commentators alike. I observed Summers' 'magic touch' mend broken wing bones, salvage 'slipping' skin (that is decaying) and soften the most leathery of tanned hides, often with the most basic tools and materials. Sennett has noted that repair 'is a neglected, poorly understood, but all important aspect of technical craftsmanship' (Sennett 2008: 199). Moreover, one's ability to make repairs depends on the practitioner's ability to respond and to improvise when things breakdown or go wrong in some way (see Ingold 2006). The sociologist Douglas Harper believes that making and repairing form a single whole, and that those that can do both possess the 'knowledge that allows them to see beyond the elements of a technique to its overall purpose and coherence' (Harper 1987: 21). Summers' ability to respond to and make repairs marks him out as a master practitioner, since he is able to deviate from the expected sequence of practice while still retaining coherence and overall shape. Yet, as Sennett again points out, repair work is not just the preserve of the master craftsman: rather it forms an important part of the learning process in that, 'put simply, it is by fixing things that we often get to understand how they work' and thus also subvert/improve them (Sennett 2008: 199).

In my opinion, it is at the apprentice stage that the radical potential of repair as a component part of craftwork emerges, given that it is at the level of mastery that the ethical problems of craftsmanship appear. As pointed out already, when immersed in practice the master craftsman is 'subtly responsive to the ever-changing conditions of the task as it unfolds' (Ingold 2006b: 75), but doing so while remaining faithful to the overall coherence of the practice. In this way, repair forms part of the continuum of practice, as making and repairing are both means to an end. However, it is at this level of mastery that craftsmanship from an ethical point of view becomes ambiguous. To illustrate the point Sennett uses the example of the 'beautiful bomb'. In many ways Robert Oppenheimer, can be considered a committed craftsman as 'he pushed his technical skill to the limit to make the best [atom] bomb he could' (Sennett 2008: 11). Yet Oppenheimer's obsessive focus on achieving the best possible end

²⁰⁴ The majority of taxidermists who I spoke to at the Guild workshops that I attended did not agree with using pre-made manikin forms, because any good 'naturalist-taxidermist' should know that there "is no such thing as a standard".

²⁰⁵ Specimens are still mounted by some UK taxidermists that have been shot or killed, but the Guild only supports this activity if it is done strictly within the law. The law now states that every specimen created after 1947 requires paperwork documenting its history and cause of death (even those found as road-kill, etc). It is legal to pick up most animal and bird species that have died naturally in the UK, although there is a list of banned, rare, and endangered species.

result highlights the ethical problem posed by an obsessive immersion in the work itself: namely that in the obsession to get things right, even when coming up against resistances and making adjustments, the craftsman emphasises the overall coherency of their practice rather than questioning it and therefore can also forget to question the ends to which their work might be put. While Sennett concedes that he has no great solution to this problem, he proposes that a partial corrective is ‘to emphasise the connection between means and ends’ (Ibid: 292). The good craftsman in Sennett’s eyes should therefore be asking “why?” as well as ‘how’ about any project’ (Ibid: 11).²⁰⁶ I might further reply that it is the apprentice rather than the craftsman who is better predisposed to question their work and to stay open to making revisions. Furthermore, the figure of the apprentice as opposed to the craftsman, with *his* nostalgic/romantic connotations, is more appropriate for twenty first century life. For example, the apprentice, while referring and deferring to the expertise of others, is more open to taking the wrong turn and to experimenting with methods and technologies (both old and new).²⁰⁷ The apprentice therefore responds openly to the world and others (both human and non-human), and is both inclusive and collaborative. Thus in these final reflections, I wish to re-draw an ethic of apprenticeship over craftsmanship.

When Roe was apprentice to Summers, she states she was aware of the advantage of ‘looking in on the process as an outsider and able to identify areas of interest rather than seeing the process as a means to an end’ (Roe, in conversation with Frank 2008: 47). While the taxidermist is not in the same tortured ethical league as the bomb maker, if a taxidermist reaches the level of mastery where they no longer question why they are doing what they do, it can have damaging consequences both for the longevity of the craft (i.e. they find it difficult to make the tacit explicit) and for the uses to which their products are put (i.e. their focus in on producing accomplished specimens full stop).²⁰⁸ This is where the role of the apprentice

²⁰⁶ For example, in the course of fabricating the bomb Sennett suggests the bomb maker might have asked: ‘What minimum strength of bomb should we make?’ (Ibid: 292). And apparently this question was asked by scientists, like Joseph Rotblat, assisting on the bomb’s fabrication. However, according to Sennett (2008: 292), they were accused of being ‘disruptive and even disloyal to the process’.

²⁰⁷ The notion of an ‘apprentice’ could be considered to still (dialogically) depend upon the existence of a ‘master’ or ‘expert’ of some sort to learn from. However, my point is that even the ‘master’ or ‘expert’ can work with an ethic of apprenticeship since one can never fully master anything as skill is an always evolving phenomenon. For example, although I have described Peter Summers as a ‘master craftsman’ he communicated that he did not see himself as a master of taxidermy as, first and foremost, this was an impossibility (i.e. create the perfect life-like mount), but also because he felt it was important to always stay open to learning new techniques and using new technologies and materials.

²⁰⁸ For example Carl Akeley’s completed visions of fixed harmonious natural worlds in his dioramas at the American Museum, initiated the redundancy of the position of taxidermist in American museums. Akeley articulated taxidermy as an organised craft for elucidating an ‘unambiguous experience of organic perfection’ and once this had been achieved at the American Museum taxidermy had, according to Haraway, ‘completed its job’ (Haraway 1989: 38). Thus Akeley’s quest for mastery at the American Museum inadvertently made the figure of the taxidermist appear redundant.

becomes vitally important, not only as they pester the master to explain (making the tacit explicit) but can also identify problems where for the master there appear to be none. Through their apprenticeships in the craft, Roe and Mayer were able to identify areas that were problematic or could be improved. Their radical repair work involved offering innovative solutions: e.g. Roe's 'animatronic taxidermy' and Mayer's 'erosion moulding' technique, which challenged the presumed coherency of traditional taxidermy. These interventions are in harmony with Ingold's observation that the essence of skill 'has come to lie in the improvisational ability of practitioners to disassemble the constructions of technology and creatively to incorporate the pieces in their own walks of life' (Ingold 2006b: 79).²⁰⁹ To my mind, the emancipatory potential of this type of repair work lies in the practitioner's ability to stay in the position of apprentice, to question and test, improvise and innovate, recognising that, 'repair does not have to mean exact restoration' (Graham and Thrift 2007: 6). Of course, repair work is qualitatively different to 'botching'. Repair denotes a sense of respect borne of knowledge of and appreciation for the coherency of the thing or practice being repaired. Although Roe and Mayer incorporate taxidermy into their own distinct art practices, they still provide a future for the craft by ensuring that secrets of the craft do not die with the last few master practitioners and, by updating aspects of the craft, they make it relevant to present concerns and audiences. Unlike traditional apprentices, and rather than unquestioningly embodying the craft, Roe and Mayer are innovators, an approach some might regard as an artistic feminist ethic.²¹⁰ It is in this regard that I find the notion of 'craftsmanship' espoused by Sennett somewhat deficient. Craftsmanship, not-with-standing the historical gendering of the term, suggests singular, inward endeavour. Now, while Sennett

²⁰⁹ For Ingold (2006b: 78), the advance of technology does not augur the death of skill in modern metropolitan societies: 'As François Sigaut has shown through what he calls the "law of the irreducibility of skills", the [technological] project has been chasing an ever-receding goal. "The entire history of technics", he writes, "might be interpreted as a constantly renewed attempt to build skills into machines by means of algorithms, an attempt constantly foiled because other skills always tend to develop around the new machines" (Sigaut 1994: 446). Or to put it another way, as fast narratives of use are converted by technology into algorithmic structures, those structures are themselves put to use within the ongoing activities of inhabitants, and through the stories of this use they are reincorporated into the field of effective action within which all life is lived'.

²¹⁰ While traditionally taxidermy as a profession has been male-dominated, it has been recently claimed that women – in the form of creative arts practitioners like Mayer and Roe – now represent the majority in passing on of the art of taxidermy. Mayer (ex-chair of the Guild) has been fundamental in easing access for women at these conferences – and there are certainly more women attending, especially often young female art students. Yet the issue of *craftsmanship* emerges again. For example, Mayer being a craft-worker for the Hirst Empire suggests that a hierarchy of artist-as-technician or assistant as opposed to artist-as-conceptual creator is emerging. This points out that artists too are being forced by new consumer capitalism to produce work quickly, and therefore need to draw on expertises of others. Yet, Mayer herself feels that her labours for others have taught her valuable skills: "Maybe without Damien's work, I wouldn't have the luxury of being able to buy new tools and materials, and to experiment. I could never have worked on such a scale. I've learnt a huge amount and got ideas for other things" (Mayer in conversation with Barkham 2008). Furthermore, Louisa Buck, once a jurist for the Turner prize has pointed out that this is less hierarchical than may first appear: "Artists are smart enough to know that other artists make the best technicians and studio assistants, while working in a studio is the best way to learn. You only have to look at art history to see it's also a time-honoured tradition." (Buck in conversation with Patrick Barkham 2008).

argues that the modern craftsman must be turned outwards, he overlooks how feminism both in theory and practice has privileged relational modes of knowing, such as ‘non-hierarchical interaction, mutual learning and empathetic understanding’ (Jones 1997: xv). Moreover the feminist critique of science, in comparison to Romantic notions of craftsmanship,²¹¹ emphasises the idea of reclaiming the power of modern technoscience for emancipatory purposes (e.g. Haraway 1991, 1997). I therefore propose the ethic of ‘craftsmanship’ as proposed by Sennett (2008) (because of its gendered, singular, technophobic and anthropocentric connotations) is supplanted by an ethic of apprenticeship, where notions of craft and repair work are more practical and inclusive in orientation.

A major aim of this thesis has been to re-place trust in the craft practices of the academic. However, times are set against revaluing craft in academia (and the modern workplace more generally). The drive to standardise methods and the demand for quick results by the likes of the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) means there is less space for experimentation, collaboration and reflection in academia, three of the cornerstones of good craftwork.²¹² There are geographers explicitly trying to work against this current. For example, John Wylie and Hayden Lorimer have sought to craft an academic style of writing, what Wylie terms as a ‘geopoetics’ (Wylie 2006: 533), that, in contrast to the increasingly standardised writing expected in journal articles, is about working with explicitly expressive vocabularies and grammars.²¹³ Moreover, emerging non-representational and feminist methodologies in geography, which have pushed the need for creative and inclusive methods, similarly argue that the standardisation of methods is inappropriate (e.g. see Kingdon 2003; McCormack 2003; Parr 2007b).²¹⁴ Also set against an academic culture which places value on individual achievement (e.g. the RAE), there are also those calling for greater emphasis on the value of

²¹¹ Sennett also seems oblivious to the fact that the Romantic notion of craftsmanship has actually been incorporated into the New Capitalism. No longer resistances to capitalism, ‘hand-crafted’ and ‘bespoke’ have come to be marketed as part of an elite culture of consumerism.

²¹² In *The Culture of the New Capitalism* (2006) Sennett criticises this type of short-term thinking and the push for quick results of New Capitalism. Also, the timescale within which a worker can construct a ‘career’ – which originally meant a ‘well-laid road’ through life – has been radically abbreviated, according to Sennett.

²¹³ While I wholeheartedly support such a project, I would like to qualify that Wylie and Lorimer are somewhat protected by a landscape tradition in geography that has long supported more creative forms of ‘nature writing’. Furthermore, this has been a decidedly patriarchal endeavour and so their creative tactics are further bolstered by the fact they are craftsmen.

²¹⁴ Thrift’s (2000b) statement that cultural geography’s biggest weakness is its ‘methodological timidity’ (McCormack 2003: 1993), in the way that its researchers rely on a number of well-rehearsed and predictable qualitative ‘procedures’, and calls for reconsidering and reworking how human and cultural geographers undertake research. While there have always been a number of geographers pushing the boundaries of established conventions, Thrift’s provocation has contributed to an opening of methodological horizons indicated by a willingness on the part of researchers to experiment and innovate, to create insightful methodological hybrids and to reframe of research itself as a ‘creative, performative practice’ (Ibid: 1994).

collaboration both disciplinary, inter-disciplinary and beyond the academy (e.g. see Cook *et al* 2005).

I have attempted to add to this movement in my thesis by adopting the role of apprentice in order to develop and work with a more open conception of academic 'craftwork'. For example, methodologically, I have followed an experimental imperative, in part inspired by more-than-representational and feminist trends in cultural geography, that pushes academics to be prepared to put ourselves and our theories 'at risk' in order to produce methods that openly and creatively respond to our more-than-human, more-than-textual, multisensual world (see Stengers 1997). More specifically, I have developed an historical form of craftwork where the amassing and rehabilitation of historical remainders in various forms (from the body of a practising taxidermist to tools and materials of the past) offer insights into past practice and enables the telling of unfashionable or marginalised pasts. This 'make-do' method also enables me to draw force from absence and incompleteness and bridge the gap that can exist between theory and practice in traditional empirical historical work. More than simply 'make-do', though, my historical recovery work was underpinned by an ethic of resourcefulness where more than being a collector (something for which Adorno criticised Benjamin) I sought to faithfully restore/repair the historical remains at my disposal to construct 'useable histories' for the present (Featherstone 2008).²¹⁵ As I have already discussed, probing a misplaced past to ascertain what might remain for the present (to uncover lessons to be learned) can help to shift away from 'a melancholic culture that views the historical as little more than the traumatic' (Foster 2004: 22). Furthermore, by rehabilitating lingering traces of past taxidermy practice, they now have a re-opened future, existing to be reworked and rechanneled. While researchers like Featherstone (2008) and Lorimer (2009) highlight the importance of mobilising hitherto hidden or overlooked pasts to shed light on or to make a case in the present, many so-called 'counter', 'useable' or 'useful' histories remain confined within the academy and its elite print culture.²¹⁶ In a bid to engage in

²¹⁵ Where postcolonial researchers have shown it is possible to read civil or imperial archives "against the grain" to uncover "counter-histories" (e.g. see Duncan 1999; Craggs 2008), Featherstone has gone one step further to argue that the historically-minded geographer should be constructing 'useable histories' for the present (see Featherstone 2008). Featherstone's notion of 'useable pasts', which is developed in his book charting the making of counter-global networks, is shaped by historians associated with the 'New Left' who have been concerned to construct histories 'from below' (e.g. Thompson 1968) and marks his attempt to 'use the past in explicitly politicized ways' (Featherstone 2008: 9). Here Featherstone attempts to move away from 'tragic' modes of narrating the past (he exemplifies Scott 2004), by more positively framing repressed or subdued pasts as stories and narratives which can be mined to construct relations between pasts, presents and futures. For example, through his own focus on the practices of subaltern political activity, he is more positively able to demonstrate their agency in the making of counter-global networks in the past and, importantly, how they also then continue to shape the present and possible futures.

²¹⁶ However, Lorimer does highlight DeSilvey (2003) as a notable exception as she managed to combine archival research with a form of advocacy when evidence she had uncovered from city council records helped to save an area of allotments threatened by urban development (DeSilvey 2003).

a form of radical repair work, part of the goal of my doctoral thesis has been to renew interest in, and to reassert the value of taxidermy specimens and collections through collaborative exchange with remaining taxidermists, museum curators and creative arts practitioners. Recognising that taxidermy collections pose difficult questions for museums and scientific collections in an era of interactive display and communication, the exhibitions *Blue Antelope* and *Out of Time*, to which I contributed, were the practical outcomes of different investigations by geographers and artists into how interest in zoological specimens and taxidermy collections can be reactivated.

While artists like Roe and Mayer have shown the potential of examining the crafts practices of the taxidermist, arts collaborators Snaebjörnsdóttir and Wilson through their project *Nanoq*²¹⁷: *flatout and bluesome* (2006) have also highlighted the potential of investigating the ‘cultural lives’ of taxidermy specimens to highlight the circumstances of encounters between humans and animals, rather than simply critiquing the representation of animals by humans.

Environmental artist Kate Foster has similarly recognised that taxidermy and zoological specimens can have potent afterlives worth examining and extending. The main current of her ‘BioGeoGraphical’ work is to extract zoological specimens from their museological niches and, on their return, re-present them to offer an expanded repertoire of associations (see www.meansealevel.net). Recognition of mutual interest and the possibility of producing collaborative work between Foster and my self arose out of Foster’s residency in my own department. The cross-disciplinary exhibitions, *Blue Antelope* and *Out of Time*, that Foster curated during her residency, and to which I contributed, sought to emphasise the potential of working intimately with the unique histories of individual specimens to elicit different kinds of knowledge and viewpoints about them beyond the biological sciences. Zoological specimens (and their histories and geographies) inhabit the ‘blurred terrain where nature and culture are not so easily (as if they ever were) distinguished and dichotomised’ (Harrison *et al* 2004: 9), and it was our ambition to communicate this through collaborative and cross disciplinary exchange. The slimmest information on the project *Blue Antelope* must suffice (though full details of both projects appear in the appendix). An art-geography collaboration charting the diverse lives of an extinct antelope, the project took as starting point the incredibly rare skull of the species held in the Hunterian Museum, University of Glasgow. The exhibition and accompanying ‘web archive’ (see www.blueantelope.info) – which enlisted the expertise of museum curators and other geographers – provided new ways for audiences to encounter the few remains of the blue antelope, and offered a digest of knowledge about the animal which

²¹⁷ ‘Nanoq’ is the Inuit word for polar bear and by coincidence ‘Snaebjörnsdóttir’ means ‘snow bears daughter’ in Icelandic.

hitherto had been scattered across discrete museological communities and zoological periodicals (see also Foster and Lorimer 2007; Patchett and Foster 2008). Contributing to projects like *Blue Antelope* enabled me to show not only how specimens have been entangled 'in life' to public audiences but also creatively take part in extending their afterlives.

Commitment to cross-disciplinary work and scientific exchange through the exhibitions, and my research for the thesis as a whole, has given me rich experience of working collaboratively with experts of different training, from taxidermists and museum curators to contemporary arts practitioners, and of fostering links between institutions. This connects back to my commitment as an academic to staying in the position of learner/apprentice so as to more openly respond to the beings and worlds around me. The point is that the onus remains with me to be actively redistributing my expertise beyond engaging with other academic disciplines or research fields to engaging with knowledges, practices and vernaculars beyond the academy. While for the purposes of the thesis, this largely has seen me 'working together' with the non-human and 'slippery' phenomena and materials of taxidermy practice, placing trust too in the expertise of a practicing taxidermist to help guide my study, I have also emphasised the transformative potential of cross-disciplinary efforts to re-present taxidermy specimens and collections (see Patchett and Foster 2008).²¹⁸ While it can take time and effort to build up links and associations beyond an individualised discipline, this has the effect of applying academic craftwork outward, allowing me to communicate my research to audiences with whom I otherwise would never have engaged. This also enabled me to contribute to a community of craft-workers who value taxidermy (both craft and material objects) as a *resource* for telling complex histories of human-animal encounters. Just as practitioners like Roe and Mayer have ensured a future for the ingenious tools, skills and methods for displaying animals naturalistically that taxidermists have developed over the years, collaborative efforts to re-use taxidermy specimens and collections, like *Nanoq* and the ones which I have been involved, also re-assert the contemporary value and significance of natural history collections. Snaebjörnsdóttir, reflecting on another Snaebjörnsdóttir and Wilson work – *Seal* – for which they commissioned and filmed a taxidermist mounting a seal to their exact specifications, notes that it is difficult not to be taken in by 'the supposed capacity of taxidermic specimens, despite their intrinsic imperfection, to represent a glimpse of life having been lived' (Snaebjörnsdóttir 2009: 225). Throughout this thesis, I have been seduced by the taxidermist's promise of offering such glimpses and have even attempted to offer them myself. In one sense, this has been to contribute to a tradition of work that has tried 'to overcome nihilism

²¹⁸ Following an ethic of 'apprenticeship' over 'craftsmanship' enabled me to not only learn from and respond to Peter the 'master' craftsman, but also, importantly, the dead animal bodies that I encountered in his workshop. In this manner an ethic of apprenticeship, unlike craftsmanship, avoids anthropocentrism.

and determine the conditions for an affirmation of life... as a means of celebrating the joyous, even transcendent, confusion of life itself' (Thrift 2008: 15). Yet, I have also cautioned against the dangers inherent in following an ethic celebrating life, as it can overlook the static and the already passed, the repressed and the rejected. Just like the taxidermist, I have inevitably fallen short of reviving the dead, though the process of trying has been life affirming.

Thus, it is as an apprentice of life that every academic should strive to conduct themselves.

Appendix

Taxidermy specimens are contested objects. As such, they occupy increasingly marginal positions in contemporary society. Viewed variously as obsolete relics, historical curios and the source of discomfiting experiences for the visitor, taxidermy exhibits pose difficult questions for museums and collections in an era of interactive display and communication. Part of the goal of my doctoral thesis was to renew interest in, and reassert the value of taxidermy specimens and collections through collaborative exchange with museum practitioners, taxidermists and artists. The appendix offers the opportunity to document and reflect upon my collaboration with the environmental artist Kate Foster and two of its outcomes: a website about an extinct animal and a museum exhibition. Recognition of mutual interest and possibility for shared enquiry between Foster and myself had emerged through Foster's residency in my department. In what follows I document two of our experiments in the revival and repair of zoological specimens and collections. The first repair-work documents our attempts to revitalise the object history of a rare skull of an extinct antelope. Here emancipatory and creative force is drawn from working *sous rature* (Derrida 1976). The second repair-work described presents a temporary exhibition which experimentally inserted cross-disciplinary work into a zoology museum. The series of 'intimate encounters' we set up in the museum sought to make use of and renew interest in the existing exhibitions while also offering transformative critique (Bonnell and Simon 2007). As these efforts were collaborative the narrative voice takes the form of "we".

Repair work 1: the object(ionable) histories of the Blue Antelope

'Preciousness is often defined by rarity. By this criterion, hardly anything in natural history can be more valuable than a scrap of blaauwbock – and blessed be the curator who has one to show' (Gould 1996: 278).

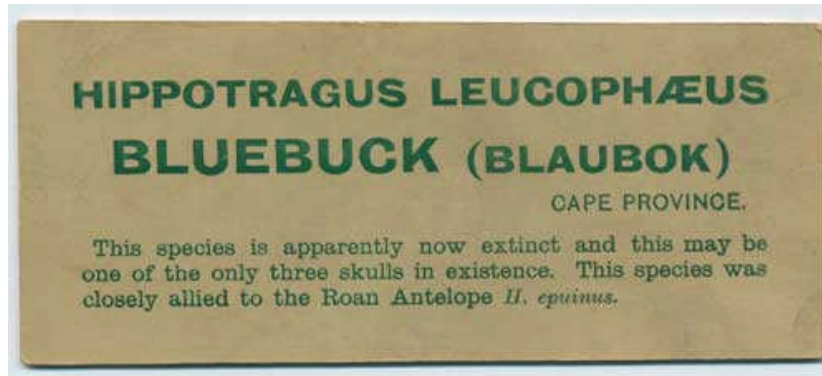


Fig. A.1 Hunterian Zoology Museum Specimen Label, not in current use.
Photograph © Hunterian Museum

Blue Antelope charted the diverse lives of an extinct antelope that formerly lived in South Africa, an animal also known in English as bluebuck. This stemmed from the presence of an exceptionally rare skull of the animal held in the University of Glasgow's Hunterian Museum zoological collection, which despite its significance, had a very slight museum record (see Fig. A.1). The project originated through a Leverhulme Trust funded artist's residency, and (apart from Patchett and Foster) enlisted a cross-disciplinary team which included museum curator Maggie Reilly and geographers Hayden Lorimer (project applicant) and Starr Douglas (researcher). What follows concentrates on how we created a revitalised object history for the 'Glasgow' skull, the aspect of the project Patchett and Foster most closely collaborated on.

Stephen Jay Gould has exclaimed 'blessed be the curator' who has a remnant of the blue antelope. We learned that the Glasgow Hunterian collection had a whole skull – one of only two skulls that are thought to exist. However, to our frustration we also found that there was no 'object history' for the skull – i.e. a record of its provenance and credentials.



Fig. A.2 Blue Antelope skull, Hunterian Zoological Museum
Photograph © Hunterian Museum, taken by R. Stevens 1967

All that the skull had to accompany it were a striking series of photographs of it taken in the 1960s (see Fig. A.2), and the correspondence records of two zoologists who had arranged to view and identify the skull: Dr Robert Broom at some point in the 1930's and Dr Erna Mohr in the 1960s (both identified it as a bluebuck: Broom 1949, Mohr 1967). On the back of one of Mohr's letters to the museum we noticed scribbled notes which, on reading, guesstimated the skull's acquisition to the collection – “*came between 1822-1900*” – and noted other faint details relating to the skull's recorded history in the museum collection. The skull itself however was on loan to the Royal Scottish Museum in Edinburgh where it was displayed alongside other remnants of extinct animals. Yet the only information accompanying the skull behind protective glass was a label stating its species name – *Hippotragus leucophaeus* – and that the species had once populated the Cape Province before being made extinct by 1800 through hunting. Taken overall, this seemed like a remarkably scanty record for such a precious specimen. Our frustration was shared by the curator who pointed out that if the specimen was authentic it was possibly part of the original Hunter collection, making it a doubly rare piece.

The work developed by making use of the other existing remnants of the animal; we sought to offer an expanded repertoire of interpretation and engagement for the bluebuck beyond the immediacy of the “Glasgow” skull and its partial object history. This required reference to zoological and archaeological literature. We found that, perhaps unsurprisingly, all other anatomical and historical remains were held in European zoological collections (Mohr 1967, Rookmaaker 1992). For example, different kinds of analysis gave more or less certainty about its species identity. The skull is definitively of the Hippotragine family, which includes the endangered roan and sable antelopes as well as the blue antelope. Three out of four scientific papers concerning the skull (Broom 1949, Mohr 1967, Groves and Westwood 1995 contra Klein 1974) allocated it to *Hippotragus leucophaeus* (blue antelope) and we learned that expertise in comparative anatomy is now hard to find. Furthermore, comparative DNA analysis that was initiated through the project yielded no result.

Learning about this scientific work did not tease out ‘facts’ about the blue so much as reveal arenas of uncertainty - as cultural geographers and artists, we dwelt on the ambiguity that vexed zoological colleagues, who would regard much of the blue antelope's history as unrecoverable. Regarding the species, historical records dating from the era of exploration of Southern Africa in the eighteenth century; later commentaries gave a most partial history. They were for example far from consistent in explaining the animal's colour (see Cuvier 1827, Renshaw 1904) and very little indeed is known about its behaviour. However, the beauty and

the rarity of the animal was often repeated. To our knowledge all records of the animal while it lived were made by European travellers and colonists. Full details are given on the website described below; in sum blue antelopes were first written about by Europeans in 1719 and were finally killed out by 1800. This was a very short era in the species' lifespan that, alongside people, had colonised the Cape after the last glacial period. A small triangle of land in the Cape formed its last range (Klein 1987, Rookmaaker 1992). Coincidentally this was also the first area to be settled by farmers of Dutch descent.

These excursions into historical record indicated that the Hunterian Museum was not alone in having a scant object history for its blue antelope specimen. Recent academic work from other fields has attempted to reinvigorate the notion of object histories/biographies. However while 'things' are said to have biographies (e.g. Kopytoff 1986; Gosden and Marshall 1999), they have largely been used in academic research to help tell stories about the people who collected them or the institutions that encased them: 'we are looking from the standpoint of the object but, we are looking at *people*' (Alberti 2005: 561; see also Hoskins 1999; Barringer and Fynn 1998; Gosden and Knowles 2001; Hill 2006a, 2006b). By contrast we sought to look at the animal from the standpoint of its fragmentary material remains, complementary to, but separate from, biological enquiry. As Garry Marvin has highlighted the majority of zoological specimens 'do not begin to have a recoverable history until their final fatal encounter with humans' (Marvin 2006: 157). Therefore, as Erica Fudge (2002) has also highlighted, it is difficult to avoid slipping back into anthropocentrism when attempting to recover the histories of such animals because their remainders have been constructed or assembled by humans. Thus before the project had even begun it was already, to invoke Derrida *sous rature* – under erasure (Derrida 1976).

However, we experienced that there is creative and emancipatory force to be drawn from working *sous rature* (the idea that what is being attempted is impossible yet still essential). This idea was most obviously articulated to us when we visited the Blue Antelope specimen in Naturalis, Leiden. Unlike many other taxidermy mounts, the Leiden specimen had a detailed object history that had been pieced together by two curators (Husson and Holthuis 1969) at the Rijksmuseum van Natuurlijke Historie, as Naturalis was formerly known. This paper gives an account of the specimen's 'career' from acquisition to its display and use within the museum; careful sleuthing was required to piece together the specimen's movements between eighteenth century Dutch collections, travelling by canal. This work was largely done in order to disprove Erna Mohr's (1967) suggestion that the Leiden specimen could not be demonstrated to be the one described as 'type' for the species. While we were obviously glad such a detailed record existed for the specimen, we wanted to emphasise the specimen's

importance beyond the annals of zoological science, reversing an inward looking logic into the inventories of museum accessions. We arranged to view the specimen itself to see if it would offer up a different mode of interpretation. We found that staff at Naturalis not only greatly valued the specimen for its zoological status as type specimen of an extinct species with precious few remains, with a clear object history, but also because it was an example of early and outstanding taxidermy.



Fig. A.3 Visit to Blue Antelope specimen at Naturalis, 2006
© RMNH Naturalis / Kate Foster

We considered how to make creative use of the Naturalis specimen's extraordinary situation of representing an entire lost species, as type specimen. Photography had not been invented at the time of the Blue Antelope's demise, meaning that representations made while the species was alive were drawings, though possibly of animals recently shot dead (Le Vaillant, 1796). Our preconceptions about its appearance were therefore oddly-shaped. When we encountered the 'animal' – in the skin if not the flesh – the enlivening effect of bodily presence intensified our desire to revive this long-dead creature.

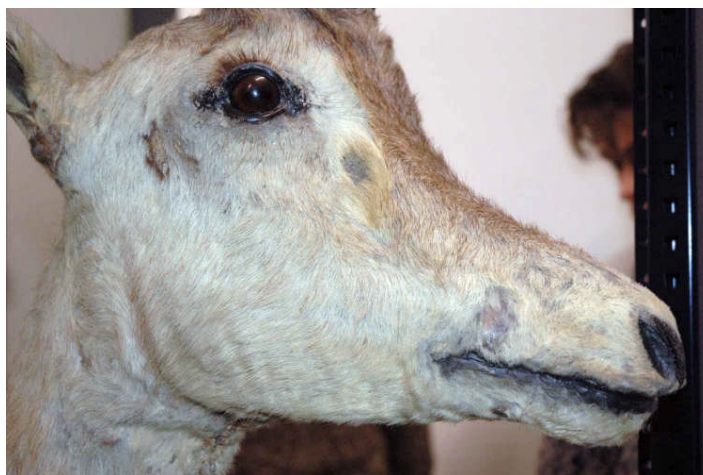


Fig. A.4 Type Specimen of Blue Antelope at Naturalis, The Netherlands
Image © RMNH Naturalis / Kate Foster

Fleeting flashes of liveliness were extinguished by the obvious marks of material manipulation: “pieces gone skew whiff, skin stiffened, seaming scars stretched wide, ageing needlework stood proud and vivid” (Foster and Lorimer 2006).²¹⁹ Recognising that the specimen had been thoroughly “manhandled” illuminated the ultimate alterity of this species’ prior ‘real’ life. Yet rather than view the entropy of the blue antelope mount as a dead-end we considered this “a generative death” (Foster and Lorimer *ibid*). Caitlin DeSilvey (2006: 329) has argued that ‘the disarticulation of a cultural artefact {can} lead to the articulation of other histories’, and we knew (from our observations of taxidermy practice)²²⁰ that the disarticulation of taxidermy specimens can reveal evidence of the lived acts of their making.

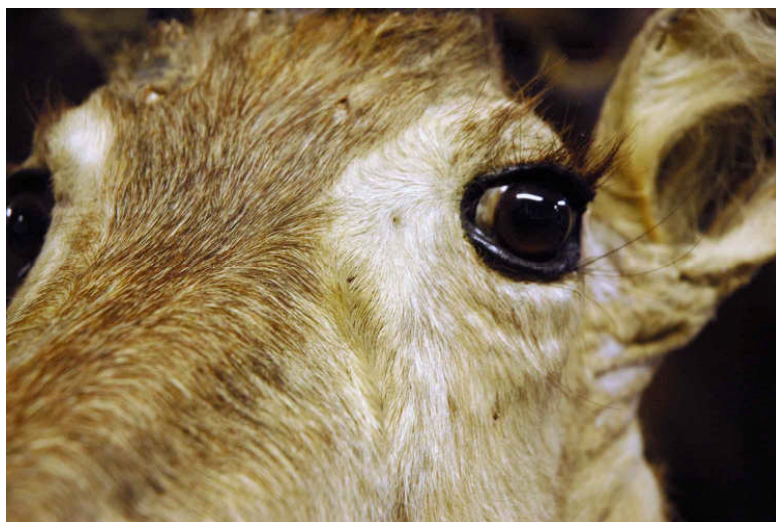
While we could not disarticulate the Leiden specimen to get at its hidden artifice we knew from Husson and Holthuis’ paper that it had been set up by the skilled Dr. Klockner. As we knew from observing Peter Summers’ practice, taxidermy is premised on one’s ability to respond creatively to what is (in the Heideggerian sense) ‘ready-to-hand’, emphasising the importance of improvisation in the process (see Graham and Thrift 2007: 2). This idea of improvisation was even more key at the time the Leiden specimen’s was made; Dr. Klockner would possibly have never seen a living Blue Antelope and would have had to ‘make-do’ with the materials and references that were available to him. We echoed this manner of experimentalism in which the Leiden specimen was brought into being in our revival of the blue antelope. Rather than seeing the specimens as objects in isolation, we sought to re-

²¹⁹ An artist’s book by Foster and Lorimer (2006, unpublished) was entitled “A Geography of Blue”, and Lorimer’s narrative reworks ideas of cultural geographers into creative text which articulate our shared experience. This text accompanies Foster’s drawings from a necessarily brief visit to a second Blue Antelope mount in the Natural History Museum of Vienna.

²²⁰ Foster accompanied Patchett on some of her visits to observe Peter Summers, taxidermist at the NMS, at work.

present them in combination (along with other recovered materials recording something of the blue antelopes' existences) through a form of "web-archive", to move past 'an entirely negative reading of {their} material dislocation and dissociation' (DeSilvey 2006: 318). Using the domain name www.blueantelope.info, the material was organised into the following headings: Viewpoints; The Animal; Afterlife. The website hybridised academic monograph with museum catalogue, employing an artist's licence to make connections with present day circumstances. Notably, the Blue Antelope's former vegetation habitat (renosterveld) is now also endangered (Krug et al. 2004). On a practical note, we found that as the website evolved, lively discussion occurred following direct contact, but rarely via the website – in part because the Blue Antelope has largely been forgotten in South Africa as well as Europe (Klein 1974) – so an interactive element was dropped. It was designed with small images, less energy hungry and usable on the lower bandwidths to be encountered in South Africa. A later study visit showed that online resources in that country were less accessible than expected, certainly outwith major institutions.

The absence of conventional empirical and archival evidence has encouraged a growing number of historical researchers to extend, disaggregate and distribute the once centred version of the archive and so have found greater licence to salvage, assemble and rehabilitate diverse forms of historical record (e.g. see for example Benjamin 1999; Buchli and Lucas 2001; Lorimer and MacDonald 2002; Neville and Villeneuve 2002; Edensor 2005; DeSilvey 2006, 2007, 2008). Furthermore, experimentations in 'artful-inventory' by academics and artists highlight the emancipatory potential of ad-hoc archiving as mode of presentation (DeSilvey 2008: 878; see for example Coles 2001 on Dion; Deller 2005; Snaebjörnsdóttir/Wilson 2006; Foster www.meansealevel.net). Caitlin DeSilvey argues that such creative re-workings of the archive manage to subvert the archive's claim to authenticity and preservation while at the same time holding on to it as 'an imperfect but precious means of accessing {and presenting} a lost past' (DeSilvey 2008: 894).



**Fig. A.5 Head and eyes of mounted specimen in Vienna Natural History Museum
Image © Vienna Natural History Museum / Kate Foster**

Our web-archive on the blue antelope presented something of the animal and its diverse afterlives (and our involvement in their construction) whilst also expressing that these were and will continue to be *sous nature*. Therefore, rather than reinsert the “Glasgow” skull, Leiden specimen and the other remnants into a new form of stable and ordered significance, we sought to draw out their ambiguities. We presented a montage of the animal’s material remnants (in a form of image-bank) along with all the information we had assembled about them individually and collectively, from all possible sources. As a mode of presentation, montage (taken from the French *monter* meaning ‘to mount’) fitted with our desire to reflect the practice of taxidermy in our work in that we wanted to present something of the whole animal using its fragmentary remains whilst at the same time not claiming to authoritatively represent it. Yet as our interpretation of taxidermy practice did not centre on achieving perfection it meant that our ‘re-assembly’ of the blue antelope could be playful and provisional, following the argument that repair work ‘does not have to mean exact restoration’ (Graham and Thrift 2007: 6). In this manner we sought to present fleeting glimpses of blue antelopes’ past lives and the entangled cultural and natural geographies it once and still does inhabit. This was in response to a sense of something missing, wanting more from the ways that the blue antelope was presented by the museums where it was enough to simply have stewardship of specimens.



Fig. A.6 The Blue Antelope specimen at the Natural History Museum in Vienna
Image © Natural History Museum, Vienna /Kate Foster

Once compiled, the web-archive not only provided new ways for people to look at and engage with the few remains left but also offered a compilation and digest of knowledge about the animal which had previously only been scattered across discrete museological communities and zoological periodicals. This is in tune with Suzanne Keene’s recent observation that work on museum collections ‘may address the understanding of objects themselves or it may tackle questions of broader significance, using objects as evidence of history or cultural practices’ (Keene 2005: 45). For us, at least, the steady accumulation of knowledge and the process of re-presentation opened up a dialogic space whereby awkward but more pressing geographical questions could be asked: “By which world should the blue antelope be known? By what territorial arrangement should we place it? And according to whose voice, language, values?” (Lorimer and Foster 2006). What happened to the blue antelope in life and death, and between dates and locations, can spark interest and prick consciences: suggesting stories to be told according to site, situation, circumstance and social relation. We assert that it is productive to think about the blue antelope as being comprised from an assemblage of movements in the past and the present. To do so is to promote a view of zoological specimens as being ‘in life’ (Ingold 2006, 2007). In offering an assemblage of views of the animal in life and death, we aimed to ensure that what we presented remained open to further creative acts of understanding.

One outcome of this project was the instatement of the blue antelope skull in the permanent display of the refurbished Hunterian Museum, the specimen’s most recent physical relocation and elevation in museological status. An opportunity for further generative research presented

itself in the form of a position of artist-in-residency at Stellenbosch University in the Cape of South Africa, close to where the last blue antelopes lived.



Fig. A.7 Soetmelksvlei near Greyton, Cape Province, 2007. This was where Le Vaillant (1796) recorded shooting a Blue Antelope, in the animal's last ranges.
Image © Kate Foster

This further work by Foster emphasises some of the postcolonial complexities surrounding this specimen. The Taxidermy Working Group of the International Committee for museums and collections of natural history suggested that museums should value ‘exotic’ specimens and be inventive in how they are displayed, considering their importance to ‘source’ communities (<http://icom-nathist.de/icom/nh-wk1.htm> as at 5/07). In Cape Province, such an invocation was strongly imbued by *sous rature*. From the outset, we realised that indigenous languages in this area were no longer spoken. It would seem that knowledge even of the former existence of blue antelopes is now scarce, and what exists is concentrated in the realms of academic archaeology and biology. Cultures have been extinguished, and the eradication of Khoi and San people in Southern Africa, who lived alongside the blue antelope is a particularly shameful story (see Skotnes 1996; Skotnes 2007). The only non-European name for the antelope recovered to date is from Lichtenstein (1812), being a “Khoosa” term, *iputhi*. This is not to advocate a specialist ethnozoological study, rather to illustrate complexities of attempts of putting historical zoological specimens to contemporary use. Still, to pursue the possibility that ‘[w]hat starts out as repair may soon become improvements, innovation even growth’ (Graham and Thrift 2007: 6), it was not enough to simply communicate knowledge between different disciplines. Wicomb, a South African novelist living in UK, offers inspiration. She has referred to a need to write in a realist mode, and at the same time not impose order on

reality; “[P]recisely because there isn’t order, there is conflict and that’s not only in the South African situation... I think it’s important to have chaos on the page” (Wicomb/Driver 2001:251). As Foster and Lorimer articulated (2006, unpublished): “Any distinction made between the spheres of the personal and the cartographic is, of course, a fiction. The relative positions of centres and peripheries in the blue antelope’s biography are at once confirmed and unsettled by our collaborative actions of seeing and narrating”.

Repair work 2: an exhibition *Out of Time*

The Hunterian Zoology Museum is embedded within the Environmental and Evolutionary Biology Department of Glasgow University and is open to the public. It also plays an important role in the department’s teaching and learning programmes that ensure the collections are routinely used and added to. The cross-disciplinary exhibition *Out of Time* took place at the Hunterian Zoology Museum in June 2007 as part of the Glasgow Science Festival. This drew on sustained inter-disciplinary relationships that have been building up over time and was a practical outcome of different artistic practices (Foster, Roe, and Brice) and geographic investigations (Patchett and Lorimer) into ways that zoological collections can be reactivated. Each exhibitor teased out an aspect of a specimen’s entanglement with human activity, both present and past. The craft of taxidermy gave a frame for providing information as well as artistic departure.



Fig. A.8 ‘Under construction’ © Merle Patchett

Production was achieved on a shoe-string budget, necessitating the creative use of existing resources and materials and cross-disciplinary knowledge and expertise. However this ‘lo-fi’ approach to production was at risk of disappointing audiences used to exhibitions that make

use of brand-new media and materials from the contemporary global economy. Yet our ‘make-do’ approach to production was important because it allowed us to insert the exhibits quietly into the aesthetic of a Zoology Museum that was last refurbished in the 1970s. Facilitated by curator Maggie Reilly, we concentrated on ensuring both that the inserted pieces offered a new “take”, yet also renewed interest in the existing displays. Reilly, constrained by resource allocations, welcomed the expanded use of the collections and additions to the museum’s display. Reciprocity was at work here: our research fed into Reilly’s knowledge of object histories and her expertise helped us (used to working with academic and arts audiences) tune the exhibits towards a general public. The exhibition was more than an exercise in interpretation, as the artists could work with the tools of their trade: humour, metaphor and irony (Dion 1997). We stated that we were “looking at those fine lines between life and death, nature and culture, the artificial and the real”. But we also consciously created an interdisciplinary space in which to transgress those lines sometimes drawn between fine art and visual communication, geographical and artistic practice, sculpture and taxidermy. The collaborative work suspended criteria imposed from our respective disciplines in favour of a supportive search for shared interests and values. This could only happen through committed voluntary effort – and because it was enjoyable.

Each exhibit showed something taken *Out of Time* in a different way, offering different realities and possibilities of animal lives. Being familiar with the museum, we used it strategically to make juxtapositions and to offer ‘intimate encounters’ within the systematic arrangements (Bonnell and Simon 2007). Bonnell and Simon (2007: 66) describe the notion of an intimate encounter as ‘an exhibition experience which offers visitors the potential for insight that may support new ways of relating with and within the world around them’. Simply put, we wanted the inserted pieces to promote a visitor experience which supported new ways of relating to a zoology museum and its collections. More specifically we wanted to emphasise the potential of working intimately with the unique histories of individual specimens in order to elicit different kinds of knowledge and viewpoints about them. The rationale of acquisition by zoological museums is scientific, but they also acquire cultural value which is often reflected by the institutions through the cultural importance of the collector or more perversely by the increasing rarity of the animal it represents. Some museums are recognising the potential untapped cultural value of their zoological collections. However, in representing them as ‘cautionary tales’, ‘biographic memorabilia’ or as relics from past generations they merely move from presenting them as static props for natural history to re-casting them ossified relics that embody particular historical ways of seeing nature. Our collective aim was to amplify the polysemy of the specimens that we re-presented. Each exhibitor, in their own way, was also

committed to critically engaging with the complex histories of the zoological specimens and collections on display. Contained within the walls of a zoological museum and its collections are pasts and practices that are both ‘inspiring and despairing’ and we wanted to communicate this (Bonnell and Simon 2007: 65). This meant that we each had to step beyond theoretical critique or intervention and ask what it was we wanted to communicate, what exploration did we want to encourage, and what did we want to subvert?

At this point details of exhibits are given.

Intimate encounters: Practical Taxidermy - work Out of Time by Merle Patchett

‘When packing specimens of antelope, etc., for sending home, it is always advisable so far as possible to pack the skins separate from the skulls and horns. It is generally far better to attend to the preserving of your own specimens, than to trust to native agents or servants; if you are compelled to trust to them at all, never sanction the use of lime in the materials they employ, even in small constituent’ (Ward 1884: 21).

Taken “out of time” and context Patchett mused whether period taxidermy manuals could offer insights into the past practice of taxidermy. A range of manuals were presented: Rowland Ward’s (1884) *A Sportsman’s Handbook*, Montague Brown’s (1891) *Practical Taxidermy*, the British Museum’s (1904) *Handbook of Instructions for Collectors*, and John Rowley’s (1925) *Taxidermy and Museum Exhibition*. When presented together and alongside the other exhibits the texts offered a historical frame for both the exhibition and the museum’s taxidermy collections. The range of texts also gave insights into how taxidermy was practiced differently in the past: from trophy collection and preservation, to amateur natural history enquiry, to elaborate museum modelling. Texts like Ward’s *A Sportsman’s Handbook* also made reference to the more problematic legacies of the craft.

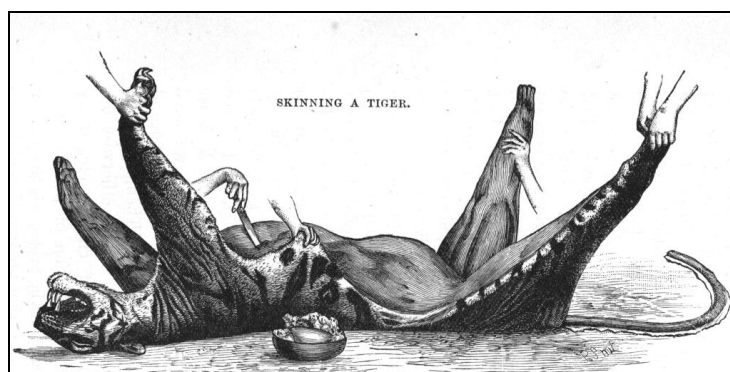


Fig. A.9 Skinning a tiger © Ward 1884

Ward's book was left open at a page which presented a striking image of the tiger being 'stripped'. While the image itself is arresting Patchett was interested in conveying what it failed to show. The set of ghostly disembodied hands, while alluding to the skilled hand-craft required for skinning a carcass, are misleading in terms of exactly whose hands were doing the work. Contrary to Ward's advice above, it was usually indigenous field attendants who actually performed the task of skinning and preserving kills. The image also fails to portray just how difficult it would have been to strip a large mammal like a tiger in the heat and with basic equipment. Speed, dexterity and a strong stomach would have been vital for ensuring the preservation of the coveted skin before the process of decay took hold, and thus large teams of attendants were often employed. A skinning knife was placed alongside the manuals in the display case to add a sense of menace, helping people to imagine the process which had been applied to permanent displays of mounted animals elsewhere in the museum.

Paddling Gull/Kingfisher – work Out of Time by Andrea Roe

Sculptor Andrea Roe had originally introduced Foster and Patchett to Peter Summers taxidermy practice when she was Leverhulme artist-in-residence in 'Department of Natural Sciences' at the National Museum Scotland. The residency enabled her to explore the correspondences between her artistic practice as a sculptor and the craft of taxidermy. She worked alongside in-house taxidermist Summers to gain a deeper appreciation for the great skill it takes to successfully separate a skin from a body and rearrange it in lifelike form. Taxidermy is a practice often thought of as macabre and gruesome, yet Roe, through her time spent working alongside Summers learning the craft, recognised that there is something poetic if not beautiful about transforming dead animals into specimens that appear alive. Roe therefore concerned herself with capturing the critical moments of the process of taxidermy to provide an alternative view point. She presented two of the outcomes of her residency at *Out of Time – Paddling Gull and Kingfisher*.



Fig. A.10 *Paddling Gull* test © Andrea Roe

Paddling Gull was produced in collaboration with Peter Summers and Darren Cox (clock maker at the NMS). Crossing the traditional mimetic crafts of taxidermy with mechanical and electronic design the team worked to produce *Paddling Gull* a hybrid of authentic Herring gull skin, taxidermy bird body and animatronic legs. When exhibited in *Out of Time* the modified herring gull demonstrated foot-paddling: an activity particular to birds where they paddle the ground to imitate rain and bring worms to the surface to eat. The gull was programmed to “perform” every 15mins. Christa O’Keefe commented that ‘there’s something both touching and comical about the frantic tap dance and blank animal look of succumbing to instinct, as well as surreal to see “outdoor” behaviour practised in a bare plexiglass display in an institution filled with dead things” (O’Keefe 2007). Roe’s rationale for creating “little monsters” like *Paddling Gull* is that they are a visual and sensory means for revealing moments of nature that you never see to a museum public. As she stated in an interview ‘it’s rare for a human to be there at the right time. Showing the moment is an attempt to deal with the history by turning it into experience’ (O’Keefe 2007). While *Paddling Gull* attempts to deal with the history of the species it animates, the piece is also an evocation ‘of our essential humanness by brining together our scientific knowledge of the natural world, mastery of invention, and marvellous ability to invest symbolic meaning in objects and experiences’ (O’Keefe 2007).



Fig. A.11 Still from Andrea Roe's film *Kingfisher* © Andrea Roe

Roe also presented *Kingfisher*, a video which depicted Summers' mounting a kingfisher skin. Roe was keen to convey to a wider audience that taxidermy can be a delicate and creative practice. The film also reveals some of the hidden aspect of taxidermy: the great skill it takes to remove a skin from a body and rearrange it in lifelike form, the tenderness with which dead bodies were handled, and the tension between life and death held throughout the process. The film similarly played with the idea of reanimation and again presented the viewer with a memorable sensory experience. Yet Eric Laurier has written that 'magicians warn us off an interest in the mechanics of their tricks that might spoil the thrill of what is dramatically presented to us' (Laurier 2004: 377). Following this idea Roe's revelation that taxidermy specimens are assembled from well practiced techniques could reduce the mystery and ambiguity of the other taxidermy specimens on display. Yet watching Summers' perform his 'tricks' on a kingfisher skin wakens you to the magical moments of skilled taxidermy practice while also offering the viewer a resource from which to wonder about the hidden processes that brought the other specimens to their finished form behind glass.

'BioGeoGraphies' and the "BIOGRAPHY OF A LIE" –work Out of Time by Kate Foster

Kate Foster showed a resume of previous work from the collections, dating from 2002. *BioGeoGraphies* is the main current of her artwork, being a series of interventions in the afterlives of zoological specimens requiring cross-disciplinary and collaborative work. Environmental issues act as points of departure for works that draw out complexity and complicity in polarised issues. In *Disposition* (2003) she explored the ongoing persecution of

birds of prey in the interests of game shooting. The project involved travelling with a museum cabinet skin of a hen harrier to the place where it had been killed in 1921, on the Duke of Westminster's Estate in North West Sutherland. The cabinet skin of a female bird, whose plumage is camouflaged for ground nesting, was laid on a swatch of tweed donated by Westminster Estates. Traditionally, hunters and ghillies wore tweed specifically designed to match the plant cover on individual Highland Estates, thereby improving their own camouflage.



Fig. A.12 'Disposition 2' © Kate Foster / Hunterian Museum 2003

A second component of this *BioGeoGrpahy* of a hen harrier, departed from the source satted on the label: Reay Forest. Foster photographed the hen harrier exactly on the point now marked on maps as Reay Forest. This point is now a spruce plantation where harriers actually cannot nest – and indeed, the term 'deer forest' as used in Scotland is confusing because it refers to open moorland.



Fig. A.13 Photograph entitled 'Disposition 1', Kate Foster 2003
Image © Kate Foster / Hunterian Museum

This reworking of the unique history of the hen harrier specimen relied on its context, and also the background knowledge of its targeted audience, to bring out the various references made in its re-presentation. Apart from *Blue Antelope* (already described), her *BioGeoGraphical* work includes collaborative work with Hayden Lorimer on *Cross-Bills*, and on-going work on a swallow specimen carried on its former migration route to South Africa in a Boeing 747.

Other artwork shown by Foster included a museum specimen sporting some body jewellery made by Foster to rework the history of the Victorian plumage trade, for species almost made extinct through this. The jewellery was inspired by Victorian fashions and the birds' natural history. The title the 'BIOGRAPHY OF A LIE' came from an anonymous pamphlet issued by the RSPB in 2003, fulminating on the hypocrisy of a trade where shopkeepers and their customers collusively labelled real feathers as 'fake', to avoid moral retribution.



Fig. A.14 'egret/chapeau' (modelled by a Hunterian Zoology Museum specimen). From the series 'BIOGRAPHY OF A LIE', Kate Foster, 2002.

Image © Kate Foster / Hunterian Museum Glasgow

Feedback suggested that in combination the exhibits could awaken curiosity and reflection:

“Fascinating range of bookworks – ‘biography of a lie’ really thought provoking – I love the range and ambition. So many thoughts swirling round my mind – made me see and think about the other exhibits in this room in greater depth – makes me want to find out about their stories”

“Great work. Intriguing, funny, thought provoking. And, I had forgotten what a great wee museum this is.”

“It was very interesting it made me think about the other exhibits. I wasn’t fond with the video on how you stuff birds. But it was really amazing a day I’ll never forget.”

An important outcome of both the exhibition and the creation of the web-archive was the consolidation of reciprocal relationships between academics, artists and museum practitioners that had been building up over time. Our collaborative efforts on both *Out of Time* and *Blue Antelope* suspended criteria imposed by our respective disciplines allowing us to invite a zoology museum audience to re-engage with taxidermy both as a practice and as a route of entry into specimens’ unique histories and characteristics in life.

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- The Harvie-Brown collection of correspondence, held at the Library of the Royal Scottish Museum.
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- The Sutherland Photographic Archive, Dunrobin Estates.